

2078 - PAUL'S FINAL WORDS - Acts 20:33-38

PRELIMS. Paul is addressing the Ephesian elders at Miletus. He has told them they must look after **their own souls** before they can minister to others, and warned them that wolves will come in, and from among themselves there would arise in the flock who would corrupt them! He commends them to God/His grace/His Word.

COVETOUSNESS

Paul now reminds them again of his **motivation** in his ministry. It is **not silver or gold or apparel** [33] And he denies one of the most **dangerous** and **subtle** sins in the world - the sin of **covetousness**!! There was a **priest** who when speaking of the Confessional Box, said he never heard a person ever confess the sin of covetousness!!

Yet it is the 10th Commandment – stuck, as it were, away at the end of a list of sins – so that just in case you could say, ‘Not guilty’ of all the other sins, God ‘**slays us dead**’ with this sin of the heart! Who can ever **honestly** say ‘Not guilty’ to **desiring** in the **heart** things forbidden? Paul said *covetousness...is **idolatry*** [Col 3:5] All **guilty**!

When a ‘desire’ **constantly** comes into our heart, we are **idolatrous**! We are making that ‘thing’ so important to us that we cannot help thinking about it! We should **only** have **one idol**, and only one thing should constantly **fill** our minds/hearts = The Lord Jesus Christ! In all that we do, we must be **looking** to *Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith* - thus the next verse says **Consider Him** [Heb 12 :2,3]

Coveting is sin! And can **lead** to a greater sin - an **act**! Eve/Adam, **saw** the tree was to be **desired** ; the same with Achan, he saw then, **I coveted/desired** [Jos 7:21] It is wanting something that is either forbidden or ‘beyond’ us in some way (therefore not for us)! Either by law or by means. You can covet a car/house which are **legitimate** things, but they are **above** your means to obtain – which, if allowed, can become an **obsession**! Paul was able to ‘**extinguish**’ his desires.

Whenever the temptation for money, possessions or clothes, came, *silver or gold or apparel* [33] he **refocused** on Jesus. He wrote to those who were harassed *we **fix** our **eyes not** on what is seen, but on what is **unseen*** [2C4:18NIV] meaning the Lord Jesus **Christ**!

That is the **only** way to **avoid** being hooked to an idol! Ie, look at something **better!** It is because we do **not know** the **beauty** and **excellencies** of Christ that we are satisfied with others! Listen to how David coped with these temptations: *In the way of Your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts and fix my eyes on Your ways. I will delight in Your statutes* [Psa 119:14] We must fill the void! **Unless** there is **replacement**, there will be **no deliverance!** So we must all look to Christ who **fills all in all** [E1:23]

Christ can **fill** all our needs! He can fill all the vacuum which has been drained out of us as a result of the Fall. The Fall has **robbed** us of **fulfilment!** That is why there is so much depression around today – people’s lives are **empty** – and the more you try to fill it, the **emptier** life becomes! John **depicts** the Woman of Samaria going away with a symbol - an **empty bucket** left behind! [John 4:28]

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

It was **Gandhi** who said ‘You Xns will need to **practice** what you believe a **lot more** if you want others to believe it is right’! He was interested in Xnity but found the **inconsistency** of Xns a stumbling-block! Paul did **three** things here in connection with practising Xnity: (1) He **provided** his **own upkeep**. Not only could Paul say in all honesty *I have coveted no one’s silver...* but **also** say *You yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities* [35] Xnity puts a **premium** on **work**. It supports work. It encourages work. Jesus said *My Father is working until now, and I am working* [John 5:17] Xnity does **not** encourage **laziness!** We were created **to** work – in the Garden! To **improve** the ‘unfinished’ world which God created for us to have dominion over! We are God’s **vice-roys**, His agents, to **accomplish** His **will** and do the **tasks** he has **entrusted** to us *Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over...* And **repeated** all this to Noah!!

One of the best things you can say to **youngsters** today is ‘No one owes you a living. The Government doesn’t, no one does. You must **earn** your own living. You must get up out of bed and do all you can with the gifts God has given you’. Jesus told the **parable** of those who had **talents** - the lesson seems to be: the ones who **used** them

gained **more** as a **gift/reward!** Those who **lazed** about lost what they had and were called **wicked!!** *Paul: *we were **not idle** when we were with you , nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with **toil** and **labour** we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you...even when we were with you we would give you this command: If anyone did not **work** let him **not** eat [2Th 3:7cf]*

(2) Paul **also** provided for *those who were **with me*** [35]! He did not ask people to work for **nothing!** No, not even for preaching the gospel *those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel* [1Co 9:14] Paul not only supported himself, but his **team!** Jesus said *the laborer **deserves his wages*** [L10:7] in the context of preachers travelling around. And then Paul picked that saying up and **repeated** it to Timothy [1Tim 5:18]! Xnity should never ask people to work for nothing – or even to do something a cut-down price – *the labourer **is worthy!*** And we must pay on time! Not delay! Amazes me how many Xns are **reluctant** to pay their debts **on time!** *Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come again, **tomorrow** I will give it' - when you have it with you [Pr3:27,28] the wages of an hired servant shall **not remain** with you all night until the morning [Lev 19:13 + You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns. You shall give him his wages on the **same day**, before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it), lest he cry against you to the LORD, and you be guilty of sin [Deu 24:14]*

(3) Paul also worked to provide for the **needy** *In all things I have **shown** you that by **working hard** in **this** way **we** must **help** the **weak*** [35] How wonderful! Any objective Paul had in gathering funds, was **not** for himself but for the needy! When he asked for funds it was the **famine victims** (in fact if I'm not mistaken he was on his way to deliver those funds to the saints at Jerusalem!)

Paul had a **secret!** Its a secret that many Xns should emulate! The secret of how to make your **funds stretch** - especially in difficult times! *I have **learned the secret** of **facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need*** [Phi4:12] (Note: it takes **time** to learn – there are **no quick remedies** for **disciplined Xn living!!**) In that letter to the Phils, Paul said *you sent me help for my needs once and again.*

*Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that **increases to your credit*** [Phi 4:15] What exactly is Paul saying here? This.....

...is the **secret**: **You are never the loser by giving to the Lord**. On the contrary **you gain!** Listen to **The New Living Translation** of verse 17: *I don't say this because I want a gift from you. What I want is for **you** to **receive** a well-earned reward because of your **kindness***. And it is a good translation. Paul said *remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He himself said 'It is **more blessed to give than to receive**'* [35] It is **not recorded** in writing that Jesus said this, but it was a **well-founded saying** of His! Paul could confidently say to his readers 'You know Jesus said this'! There were many 'popular sayings of Jesus going around which are not recorded in Scripture!

Now - if you're not experiencing this biblical truth *it is more blessed to give than to receive* - there is only **one reason** - you are **not giving - enough to the Lord!** The Cause of X needs **finance right now!**

*So Paul **departed**. Some **lesson to part on!!?** ...*he knelt down and **prayed** with them all!* How lovely - **public prayer!** The **traditional** form of prayer for the Jews was **standing!** Yet here they knelt down in the open quay for prayer - denoting the solemnity of the occasion. *And there was **much weeping** - weeping may not a sign of weakness but strength! Emotion is a natural gift - which of course may be **extreme** and **inordinate** - and can be a sign of real appreciation and love - as no doubt it was here.

Now they **embraced** and **kissed** Paul! Bruce Milne writes 'The Jewish Midrash taught that 'all kissing (in public) is indecent, with three exceptions: the kiss of high office, the kiss of reunion, and the kiss of parting'! Samuel kissed Saul when he had anointed him King over Israel [! Sam 10:1]; the father kissed the Prodigal Son when he returned [Luke 15], and Paul, despite, as some say he was an 'unkissable' man, yet he did it on several occasions when parting!

The Early Church actually stood high and **looked up** in prayer welcoming God into their presence - to stoop down and bend low, they found to be contrary to their understanding of **worshipping** the Almighty God! Grovelling in the dust, to them, was an **insult!** Paul also advocated *lifting holy hands* [1Tim 2:8].