

**Acts 20: 33-38; “More Blessed to Give”, Sermon # 78 in the series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on July 31st, 2022, in the Morning Worship Service.**

We have now come to the end of the apostle Paul’s message to the elders of Ephesus. There has been much blessed truth to speak to us about; what it means to follow Christ, and to be His disciple. Paul has given them a review of his ministry to them over the years. He has reminded them of the way that he lived among them. And he calls to mind the main things that he preached; that is, repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. He is now going to conclude his address with an appeal to their consciences concerning the way that he lived before them.

He will tell them also how they ought to live as ministers of God and Christian men. This has application to all of us here today, because Paul had showed them, by his own example, how they should live their life to God, follow and serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and love the brethren. It is my prayer that each of us here will attend to Paul’s words as though we were there with him, so that we will learn more about what it means to be a faithful follower of Christ.

1st of all – Paul tells them that he did not live a life of covetousness but he worked hard.

Verse 33 – “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel.” Very interesting statement. Covetousness is desiring to have what someone else has, without your working for it. It is a selfishly sinful desire which will often lead a person to take actions where they will seek to obtain something which God has forbidden them to have, or He has not chosen to give to them. Paul is saying here that he was not in the ministry for money, or to make a great impression by his personal appearance in terms of the clothes that he wore. He did not desire to be rich, or to ask or teach the people that he preached to, that they ought to give him of their money for his ministering to them.

He knew that covetousness was a sin which he needed to put to death. This is something which you and I should know as well. Listen to how he writes about the sin of covetousness in Colossians chapter 3, verses 1-7 – “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.” “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” “Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.”

So, what kind of desires should a Christian have after they have first been saved? After they have been raised up with Christ, from their death in trespasses and sins, what should their greatest desires be? Well, after they have been made alive together with Christ in the New Birth, they should be living their life seeking the things which are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. So seeking Christ and setting your mind on spiritual riches which Christ gives to you, is, or it should be, the greatest desire of your heart.

You see, don’t you, the great contrast Paul is making here between Christ who is your life, and all the sinful desires which he lists here which we are to put to death. One of those sinful desires is covetousness. Covetousness, as a sin of the mind and flesh that attempts every day to derail all of the good desires that you do have in your heart, to seek Christ and to walk humbly with Him. By fellowship with Him you learn the new way, the good way of righteousness by having and holding communion with Him. Covetousness is a sin which is directly related to the pull of this world, and the real need that you have to seek the Lord for the earthly things that you do need. What is to be done?

In the New American Standard translation verse 5 of Colossians 3 reads this way – Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. So not only do we need to put to death the members of our earthly body, but we need to consider them as dead in the attitude of our mind and heart. Covetousness is being greedy to get more and more money so that you will feel safe and secure, supposedly, in this life. Covetousness is also related to laziness, or not wanting to work for a living, or to work hard enough or diligently enough to provide for your own needs.

This is why some people go to the gambling casino. They want the thrill and earthly pleasure of playing the slots or running the table and winning a large amount of money that they can win without working hard for it. It says here in Colossians 3: 5 that covetous is greed and it is a form of idolatry. This is why, when I drive by the casino I will say to my wife – There’s the idol. There’s the place where greed has become a form of open idolatry. It is something more important to worldly people than worshiping God and seeking Him for every good thing.

Christians, we need to be warned against this sin of covetousness, for even a person who works hard for their living and is diligent in their business can fall into it. They may consider their job more important than spending time with their family, more important than going to church, and more important than spending time with the brethren. They may, because of covetousness, come to think that their having money is their real security in this life rather than seeing God as the strength and security of their life and their portion forever.

Let us ask ourselves this question: Am I content with the things that God has given to me; those things that I have worked hard for, and those things that He wants me to have? Sometimes we can find covetous thoughts in our heart concerning our wanting an easier life, or wanting a better earthly, worldly life. It is a very subtle temptation. In Romans 7, verse 7, when Paul is talking about the relation between the law and sin, he says – “What shall we say then?” “Is the law sin?” “Certainly not!” “On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law.” “For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’” “But sin taking opportunity by the commandment produced in me all manner of evil desire.” “For apart from the law sin was dead.”

And so, as Paul says here, we should not covet silver or gold or anyone’s clothes as if clothes really make the man (it is simply an outward expression of your life, not the inner expression of your real desires to want to live the Christian life to the glory of God. A person can be dressed splendidly but yet have many evil desires going on in his or her heart. Paul was not this way. He worked hard and his own hands provided for his necessities, he says, and those who were with him. He thought of the needs of others; his traveling companions most particularly, and he helped them with their expenses and their necessities. We should have this righteous mindset as well.

2nd – He supported the weak and remembered the word of the Lord Jesus, that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

This goes beyond all that Paul has said so far to the elders of Ephesus. And we should take notice of this saying of the Lord Jesus, as well. For a Christian person may think that it is more blessed to hold on to all that they have worked for, and not give to those who are weak, or those who are in need. They may think that they are wise and righteous to do so, but we see here that it is not the case. It is very important for every Christian to realize that God closely watches what they do with their money and their possessions. The Christian should be the wise steward of everything that God has given to them, everything that He has entrusted to them, and He has purposed that they should have, to serve Him with it.

This is what I think sometimes happens to a Christian in their thinking. They forget that they are called to serve God with everything that they have, everything that they possess. When you stop

and consider that all you have and all that you possess, is something which God gave you, then you ought to understand that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and you will study to do what God would have you to give. On the simplest level, hear what our Lord Jesus says in Matthew 5: 42 – “Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.”

There is a blessing which will come to you from God when you learn to give in this way. Now, you certainly need to be wise in your giving, in relation to what the person will do with what they borrowed from you. You must be wise in stipulating conditions to the loan, or what is being borrowed, so that that person will hopefully not ruin what they have borrowed from you. They will hopefully be able to give it back in good condition. And if you loan it to them, you must entrust the whole matter to God as to whether you will get it back, even though you are being as wise as you can.

I remember that years ago, when I was a young Christian, that I loaned one of my cars to a man who needed a car for a little bit while he was having his own worked on. My car was a stick shift Volkswagen and I let him borrow it, not realizing that he might not know how to work the gears. Well, he drove it for a short time, and then tried to force it into 1st gear, not waiting until he was going at a slower speed, and he jammed the transmission. And there the car sat in a major intersection in Moline. He left it there and walked away. And providentially, a few hours later, I happened to drive by, in my other car, and I saw it sitting there with its lights flashing. The man was not with the car, and so I had to call for a tow truck and have it taken in for repairs which I paid for myself.

This was a good lesson for me to learn about giving. It is indeed more blessed to give than to receive. And as it says in Luke 6: 30 – We should “give to everyone who asks of us.” And, “even from him who takes away our goods we are not to ask them back .” But we also must be wise and instruct those who borrow from us, so that they will learn to be responsible as well, and hopefully return to us the thing that they borrowed. There is a tremendous blessing in giving which Jesus tells us about in Luke 6: 38 – “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom.”

God loves a cheerful giver, and He will not be outgiven by you or by any man. He looks at your mind and your heart. He looks at and your spirit to see whether you are becoming more like Him in His giving, and if you are, He will always give you more yet; more than you have given to help others, He will give back to you, according to His will, His way, and His time. God will bless you the giver, when you give to those who are weak and those in need. Did you give out of compassion, mercy, kindness, or love for that person who is weak; that person who is in need? God sees this and will give to you accordingly. “For He is kind the unthankful and evil.” And therefore, we are to be merciful, just as our Father also is merciful. What a blessing there is in giving, because God sees our hearts in all that we give.

3rd – Paul prayed with them and for all of those whom he ministered to. (verse 36)

Verse 36 says – “And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.” It is a good thing for a Christian minister to pray with those of his church when he knows that he must leave them to go elsewhere to minister. It is good for the pastor to learn to pray with his people over momentous things which are coming in his life which will affect the future of the flock whom he ministers to. In this case, we see the apostle Paul knelt down and prayed with them all. Let’s think for a few moments about Paul’s kneeling in prayer. For the posture that you are in while you are praying conveys certain definite things to God and to the people around you, who you are praying with.

I am sure that the people who Paul was with, also knelt down when he knelt down there to pray. Paul’s kneeling conveyed to them certain things. It conveyed his reverence for God, the greatness of His Being and Purposes, and His watchcare over his life. It showed that Paul was submissive to the

Lord's will in all that was coming, of the difficulties that he would face in Jerusalem. He did not know whether he would live or die, but he knew that for him to live was Christ, and to die was gain. His kneeling conveyed to God and to all who were there with him, His eager desire to fulfill his ministry and do all that God had called him to do. He was submissive to Him, and his posture in prayer indicated that submission.

His kneeling also was instructive to the Christian disciples who knelt with him. They understood Paul's submission to the will of God, and they were agreeing and identifying with Paul in it. They together were all indicating together by kneeling that they would reverently bow to God's leading Paul in this deliberate way, into the dangers which would come to him on account of the truth of the gospel. They were all kneeling to beg of God His blessing upon Paul in what would come to him by his being faithful to the gospel. They were kneeling to beg that God would be with him in all of his preaching and all of his counsel and all of His efforts to promote Christ and His glory, Christ and His kingdom.

Let us not be afraid to kneel or bow down before the Lord, as well, if we find ourselves in difficult or dangerous circumstances. If you are not sure what will come to you or what will befall you in relation to people opposing you, and our efforts to promote the truth, it is good to bow down in prayer before the Lord and to commit everything to His ordering and care. God will receive our prayers and act to lead us and bless according to His will, and His love for us His people. Paul and those with him, I am sure, saw their kneeling as an act of their worshiping God in these unusual circumstances. And if we are in similar circumstances let us remember the words of Psalm 95: 6 – "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." "For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand."

And then lastly – Paul received their affectionate love for him. (verse 37 & 38)

"Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more." "And they accompanied him to the ship." Oh, the love of the brethren for their dear apostle Paul. They expressed their emotions openly, falling on his neck and kissing him. They longed to keep him with them and to receive all that he could give them of God's word. Paul had the revelatory gifts of an apostle, a prophet, and a teacher. But he had also given himself to them. He had communicated to them his very life in giving them the truth. In this, he was very much like Christ. And they loved him for it.

Brethren let us learn to love our church and all the brethren in it. I hope that at times you will express your love for your pastor. Let us not be afraid to express our emotions in doing so, when the occasion presents itself of our losing him; of not having him with us any more to minister to us. Let us not be afraid or ashamed of communicating our love to him openly and freely, knowing that we have been given to each other, just for a time. These expressions of love will glorify God's work in them, and in all of you as well. Let us show forth the greatness of the riches of His grace, in our love for one another.