

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor  
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## Acts 20:33-35 “It Is More Blessed to Give”

Intro. Today is World Hunger Day in our church. On this day we focus our attention on the problem of world hunger, and what we should do about it. Hunger is certainly a problem. In the whole world 25,000 people die from starvation every day. About 800 million people are undernourished globally and thus face health problems from malnourishment.

Have you ever been without food for a long time? Few of us have gone without food more than 24 hours except due to sickness. But there are some people who go without food for days. What a terrible thing it is to die of starvation. When deep hunger occurs, the body turns on itself and begins an ugly process of cannibalization to nourish the most essential organs. A person’s own tissues become a source of sustaining energy until the body finally starves to death.

Most of us are far removed from real starvation. Starving people do not normally come up to us and ask for food. Most of the people in our country who do ask for food *seem* to be well nourished. The problem is far worse in other parts of the world, but there is a hunger problem right here in America.

So what should we do about this massive problem? I believe one of the best things you can do is give to our World Hunger Offering. That’s because 100% of what you give will pass through our SBC missionaries to feed the hungry in America and around the world. So I have selected a passage of Scripture which encourages us to give and help the weak. It certainly applies to this issue we are dealing with today.

If we are going to do anything significant about this problem, we first should:

### I. AVOID THE WRONG ATTITUDE TOWARD POSSESSIONS

In v.33 Paul said, “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel.” Here he referred to the last of the 10 commandments. We are not to covet or desire for ourselves what belongs to another person. This includes money, as represented here by silver and gold. We are not to covet clothes. Paul included this because fine apparel was a mark of affluence in his day, and most people only had a few changes of clothing. Today, even Christian people have fallen into the trap of the world, and they feel they just have to have the expensive clothing that so many others seem to have.

Furthermore, in v.33 Paul indicates that he had pure motives concerning money. He did not preach for money. In 2 Cor. 12:14 he said, “I seek not yours, but you.” And in a sense Paul was giving a challenge here. Could anyone accuse him of coveting or financial wrongdoing? This is similar to what the prophet Samuel said in 1 Sam. 12:3-5, “Here I am. Witness against me before the LORD and before His anointed: Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I received any bribe with which to blind my eyes? I will restore it to you.’ And they said, ‘You have not cheated us or oppressed us, nor have you taken anything from any man’s hand.’ Then he said to them, ‘The LORD is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.’ And they answered, ‘He is witness.’” He could say that he was pure. In fact, not being covetous is one of the qualifications for being a pastor (1 Tim. 3:3).

But on the other hand, there were teachers in Paul's day who made merchandise of the souls of men. The same is true today. Religion is big business, especially here in America, and especially among the health and prosperity preachers and teachers. Regarding false teachers, Peter said in 2 Peter 2:3, "By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words...." In fact, some people have become rich from peddling religion. Jim Baker and Robert Tilton are some of the preachers to be exposed for this in the past, and there are contemporary TV preachers that live in luxury.

So the root problem that leads to other sins, including stinginess, is covetousness. Elsewhere, Paul called "the love of money... a root of all kinds of evil..." (1 Tim. 6:10).

What about you? What is your attitude toward money, clothes, and other possessions? Are you greedy when it comes to obtaining *or holding on* to money? When an appeal is made to give to some worthy cause, do you think primarily in terms of the material things you may have to give up? Or do you think more about the good you will do by your giving? Giving is one of the best ways to battle covetousness.

## II. PURSUE A MINISTRY OF WORK

In vv.34-35 Paul said, "Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak...." Notice with me some of the truths we should glean from this verse:

A. We Should Work Hard – Paul says in v.35, "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak...." The word translated "laboring" (*kopiaio*) means "to labor to the point of exhaustion." Paul taught Christians to work hard, and he practiced it himself. As Paul spoke to the Ephesian Elders, he must have lifted his hands to point out the fact that he labored with his hands to earn the money he needed. Paul was an educated man. He was one of the greatest apostles. But he did not consider himself to be above manual labor. Paul earned his own way as a tentmaker (18:3), and worked hard at his trade, being very productive. Though he accepted financial support from established churches, he did not accept support from new and prospective converts. As a missionary he did not want anything to hinder the spread of the gospel, so he was willing to work hard as a tentmaker.

When I was 18-19 years old, I worked at the Georgia Kraft paper mill during the summers. I was a committed Christian at that time and I believed in working hard at my job. The foreman actually pulled me aside and told me to quit working so hard. I worked hard to make good grades in college and seminary, and I have worked hard as a pastor.

Do you have a strong biblical work ethic? Sure, some can overdo it and become workaholics, but most people are not in danger of that!

Why is it we should work hard in some form of employment?

B. We Should Earn Enough for Your Own Needs - In v.34 Paul said, "these hands have provided for my necessities...." Likewise, in 1 Thess. 4:11-12 Paul told the Christians there that they were to "attend to your own business and work with your hands... so that you may... not be in any need." To be self-supporting should be one goal in life. Then Paul wrote to them again in 2 Thess. 3:12 and said that they were "to work in a quiet fashion and eat their own bread." In other words they were to work and earn enough money to purchase their own food. If you are able-bodied, you should not depend on others for your food and other necessities, but you should work and provide for your own needs, and the needs of your family.

Yet we should not only earn enough for our own needs, but furthermore:

C. We Should Earn Enough to Help Others - In v.34 Paul also said that he worked to provide, “for those who were with me.” Paul not only supported himself, but he supported those who were with him as missionary associates. So he instructs us to earn more than enough for our basic needs, so that we can help others.

This principle is found elsewhere in the Word of God. Gal. 6:2 says, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” At times people will have a significant financial hardship, and they just need some assistance. Think about the thousands of people whose homes were flooded in Texas due to the recent hurricane. Thankfully, our disaster relief teams are there to help with such an unexpected financial loss. Then Eph. 4:28 says, “Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need” (NASB). When a need arises, do you have “something to share”? Or do you earn just barely enough for your own needs? As we ask you to give to our World Hunger Offering, will you have something to share with people around the world who have very little to eat? You may only have the widow’s mite, but God will bless that gift if that is all you can afford.

I believe that some people have a very important ministry in the Lord’s work. God has given them ability to earn *far more* money than they really need. And yet, they do not spend that extra money just on themselves, but they give large amounts of money to the Lord’s work and to help with special needs. Do we have any youth or young adults here who would say to God, “Lord, if you will help me earn a good income, I will give no small portion to support your work and help those in need?”

How can you obtain more income, so you have more to give? First, get a good-paying job if you can. Paul had a skilled trade, and he could earn more money per hour as a tent-maker than the average common laborer. So get a good education, or go to trade school, so you can earn more than just enough to get by. Some can gain extra income by working overtime. Some of our retired folks work a part-time job to get extra income. Others can have a side business to earn extra income. Those who earn extra money so they can help others are to be commended.

This leads to my third point today. Consider:

### III. MAINTAIN A MINISTRY OF GIVING

In v.35 Paul said, “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak....”

A. Leaders Should Set an Example in Giving – In v.35 Paul said, “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak....” “Shown you” is from a compound Greek verb (*hupodeiknumi*) that means “to give an object lesson by deed as well as by word.” The noun form (*hupodeigma*) refers to an example. Paul certainly set an example of hard work and giving to those in need. The best teaching is what is backed up by example. Paul sought to be an example to others in this regard, and those of us who are leaders should do the same.

Jesus also was constantly giving of Himself. He said in Mt. 20:28 that He came “not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.” We should follow the example of Jesus.

B. To Whom We Are to Give – Notice that among those that we are to help financially are “the weak.” Likewise, in 1 Thess. 5:14 Paul also said that we are to “help the weak.” That probably refers to the disabled, who could not earn their own living. It refers to the sick, who could not work

while sick. It can include the elderly, especially widows. It can include children who do not have parents that provide for them.

As we ask you to give to our World Hunger Offering, we are asking you to help the weak. With your gifts you will be helping little weak children. In the Third World even some of the adults are weak from malnutrition. I read a sample of the types of people who will be helped with our World Hunger offering. I can assure you that these funds will help the sick, the children, malnourished mothers and their babies, and the elderly. Our missionaries will not just be giving hand-outs to strong, able-bodied people. We will be helping the weak, just as Paul and Jesus taught.

C. How We Are to Give – Notice that Paul says that we are to “support” the weak. I do not believe that is the best translation. The word translated “support” (*antilambanomai*) is an interesting word in Greek. It literally gives the image of a heavy object that is to be carried. One person gets on one end, and you come along and pick up the other end and help him carry the load. The person is too weak to carry the load by themselves, so you should offer to help them. So “help” is a better translation. I’m thankful that I had help yesterday moving a piano. I could not have done it by myself! But the point is that when possible, the person should do their part. They should do what they can to take care of their needs. We are to just “help.”

Do you remember the tornado that destroyed many homes on Pocahontas Island? Well, a group of Mennonites offered to help rebuild homes. But they would help a family only if they agreed to certain conditions. First, they had to confess a belief in God. Secondly, they had to help in the rebuilding of their own homes. That Christian group understands this principle that Paul gives here.

D. The Requirement of Giving – Paul says in the middle of v.35, “you must support the weak.” The verb (*dei*) is a strong one. It is a command of God. The church and Christian individual that does not help those in need is living in disobedience to God! Are you obeying this command? Will you give to our World Hunger Offering? Do you give to our Benevolence Offering?

Now what would motivate someone to work hard, earn extra money, and then turn around and give it away? Well Paul tells us in v.35. There we read about:

E. The Blessing of Giving - You know what Christ says about this? According to Paul, Jesus said in the last of v.35, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” This saying of Jesus does not appear in any of the four gospels, but evidently was a part of the oral tradition that had been memorized and passed down. Besides, this basic truth is found in other sayings of Jesus. Jesus said in Mt. 5:7, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” In Luke 14:13-14 Jesus advised his followers to invite the poor and disabled to a feast, “And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you....” So according to Jesus, you will be blessed more in giving, than in receiving.

So what is Jesus saying here? He acknowledges that those who receive are blessed to a degree. I have received many gifts through the years, and I have been blessed by these gifts. But Jesus is saying that the giver is *more blessed*. The greatest blessing does not come in accumulating wealth, but in sharing it. These “gimme-gimme” folks who are always going around with an open hand, hoping you will give them something, are not happy people. Have you noticed that? The happy ones are those who give to others. In fact, Prov. 22:9 says, “He who has a generous eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor.”

There are a number of ways in which the givers will be more blessed. First, those who give for the right reasons will find great joy in giving. There is a deep satisfaction in knowing that you have done what is right, and you have helped someone. 2 Cor. 9:7 says that “God loves a cheerful

giver.” Recent studies have shown that giving money to a good cause makes us feel happier.<sup>1</sup> Second, givers will receive blessings from other people. In Luke 6:38 Jesus said, “Give, and it will be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap...” (NASB). You reap what you sow. If you give to others, you tend to receive from others. You will also receive from the Lord. Prov. 28:27 says, “He who gives to the poor will not lack...” I believe God is behind that promise. Finally, Jesus also spoke of laying up “treasures in heaven” (Mt. 6:20; 19:21; Luke 18:22). Surely one way we do this is by giving. So we are blessed with the hope of a heavenly reward. Do you believe this Word of God enough to practice it?

I remember reading about a man who was quite wealthy. He gave a lot of money to his church and to the building programs of his church. Then the Great Depression set in and the man lost everything he had. He became completely penniless. Someone said to him, “I guess now that you’ve lost it all, you wish you had some of those large sums of money you had given to your church.” The man, who was a wonderful Christian said, “Oh, no, you don’t understand. All I really have left is what I gave to my church because I’ve laid up treasures in heaven for the Lord.”

Conclusion: Would you say that you are among those who are blessed by God, and blessed by the love of others? If so, I am confident that you are giver. I want to challenge you to become a giver, if you haven’t been one. You will be blessed indeed. Give to your World Hunger Offering. Give to our Disaster Relief Offering or Benevolence Offering. I have been a tither and giver just about all of my life, and I can testify that God has indeed blessed me in many ways. Just this past Thursday night Cheryl and I received an unexpected blessing, but we should not have been surprised, for it came from someone we had blessed.

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954); H. Leo Eddleman, *An Exegetical and Practical Commentary on Acts* (Dallas: Books of Life Publishers, 1974); Oliver B. Greene, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 3 (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1968); Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Acts* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1943); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text); Warren W. Wiersbe, “*Be*” *Series: New Testament Volumes 1 and 2: Acts* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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<sup>1</sup> According to a University of British Columbia and Harvard Business School study (*AARP Magazine*, Jan. 2017, p.20).