

**Acts 20:33-38 ~ Teacher's Lesson  
Bi-Vocational & Vocational Pastors**

**Introduction:**

**Finish this quote:** "It is more blessed to give than to \_\_\_\_\_."

**Who originally said this?** Jesus.

**Where in the Bible would you normally expect to find the words of Jesus recorded?**

Normally one would expect the sayings of Jesus to be found in one of the four Gospels.

**Amazing:** Were it not for this pastor's conference, we would never know that Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It is recorded nowhere in the Gospel accounts. Paul applied Jesus' words to church leaders. The typical church leader should be in the position of giving financially to the church, not receiving from it.

**Why would Paul remind the Ephesian elders that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Ac 20:35)?** *Rhetorical.* Generally speaking, the elders of a local church are to be in the position of giving gold and silver to the church, not receiving from it.

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**\*\*\*\*A person's last words are often his most significant. What, in Acts 20:33-38, were Paul's final instructions to the Ephesian elders regarding money (20:17)?<sup>1</sup>** Paul expected that the typical elder would be in the position of giving silver and gold to the church, not receiving silver and gold from it.

**1. What fact did Paul state in 20:33-34?** *See 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9.* Paul was not in it for the money! He typically paid his own way.<sup>2</sup> For example:

ESV **2 Thessalonians 3:7 -9** . . . we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.

**2. According to Acts 20:35, everything Paul did with respect to supplying his own needs was designed to show the elders something—what?** *See 1 Timothy 3:3.* It was to show them the importance of giving! Paul expected the elders to follow his example of hard work and to be in the position of giving silver and gold to the church rather than receiving it from the church.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul's intent was never to return, but he evidently did go back to Ephesus later, 1 Timothy 1:3, 3:14 (Kistemaker, 730).

<sup>2</sup> Paul did not solicit money, but if it were offered, he gladly accepted it, quit making tents, and did ministry full time.

**Money & Wolves:** The lure of potential profit is a magnet that has lured false teachers into the church for millennium. For example, Judas was in it for the money; he stole from the common purse and he betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Prosperity preachers are clearly motive by mammon. The large endowments of old main-line denominational churches attract liberal “pastors”. Scripture warns:

ESV **1 Timothy 6:9-11** . . . those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

One qualification to be an elder is that he is:

ESV 1 Timothy 3:3 . . . not a lover of money.

### I Timothy 5:3-6:2

**\*\*\*\*Paul later wrote to Timothy, who was stationed in Ephesus, about the same elders Paul had spoken to in Acts 20. According to 1 Timothy 5:17-18, which Ephesian elders (1:3) were worthy of something called “double honor”?** Those who rule well and work hard at teaching are worthy of double honor.

**Insight:** Not all elders are equally skilled (or motivated) at management and/or teaching.

**In 1 Timothy 5:17, what did Paul mean by “honor” (the Greek word *timé*)? Rhetorical.**

The Greek word *timé* fundamentally means “respect.” However, it is obvious from its usage in several New Testament passages that it can entail giving material support to those who qualify for it.

**3. In 1 Timothy 6:1-2, what did Paul mean by “honor” toward masters (the Greek word *timé*)?** Here it clearly has *nothing* to do with money, and means merely respect.

**4. In 1 Timothy 5:3-8, what did Paul mean by “honor” (the Greek word *timé*) to widows?** See *Mark 7:9-13*. Here it obviously refers to material support.

**Jesus & Honor:** Moses wrote that we are to “honor” our fathers and mothers. Interacting with the Pharisee about this, Jesus made it clear that honor includes material support for parents, *Mark 7:10ff*.

**5. Putting 1 Timothy 5:3-16 (widows) together with 1 Timothy 6:1-2 (slaves), what does it mean to show double honor to qualified elders (5:17-20)?** At the very least it would refer to esteem, but most probably it refers to something above and beyond mere respect: financial support, an “honorarium”.

**6. The elders of 1 Timothy 5 are the same men who heard Paul in Acts 20. How can Acts 20 (elders to supply their own needs) be reconciled with 1 Timothy 5 (double honor)?**

Acts 20 is addressed to elders in general. In general, elders are to be bi-vocational and will thus be in a position of giving monetarily to the church, rather than receiving from it. The exception to this generalization is 1 Timothy 5, written with reference to those elders who not only “rule well” but who also “labor in the word and doctrine” (NKJV). Though all elders are worthy of honor (1Th 5:12-13), some elders are worthy of double honor. This “double” honor is a reference to financial support from the church. And, regardless of how an elder earns income (secular or sacred), he is to give generously to the needy.

ESV **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13** . . . respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

**Big Picture:** Acts 20 is addressed to elders in general: most elders will be bi-vocational and thus be in a position of giving monetarily to the church (rather than receiving from it). The exception to this generalization is 1 Timothy 5:17-18, written with reference to those elders who not only “rule well” but who also “labor in the word and doctrine” (NKJV). Though all elders are worthy of honor (1Th 5:12-13), some elders are worthy of double honor (1 Timothy 5:17). This “double” honor is a reference to financial support from the church.

**1 Corinthians 9:1-14**

\*\*\*\***Based on 1 Corinthians 9:1-7, what “right” did every apostle<sup>3</sup> have?** Apostles had the right to be supported by the church (9:4, 5, 6).

**7. What obvious answer is expected to each of the questions in 9:4-5? (Answer in the form of a sentence).**

**Who is “we”?** It was Paul and Barnabas.

**8. Based on 9:5, who besides the apostles were supported by the church?** The Lord’s brothers, who were not apostles. There is a general principle of support; Paul was not trying to limit to apostles who the church supported.

**9. What can we learn about Paul and Barnabas’ work situation from 9:6?** They were bi-vocational, as Paul said in Acts 20.

**10. What three examples did Paul cite in 9:7 to illustrate his right to financial support?** He cited the examples of a soldier, vine dresser and a shepherd.

**What is the answer to each of the questions in 9:7?**

**Modern Example:** Who works at a job and does not get a paycheck?

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<sup>3</sup> The word apostle is from *apostolos*, “envoy, ambassador, messenger, sent one” (Brown, *NIDNTT*, 126). The verb *apostello* carries the idea of “to send with a particular purpose” (*NBD*, 57-60). It was rendered in the Latin *Vulgate* using the root *missio*, basis for our word “missionary.”

**Application:** *How long would you be able to stay at your job if there was no pay? Don't relegate all ministry to hobby status. In a very real sense it is true that you get what you pay for.*

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\*\*\*\***According to 9:8-12, how does the Law of Moses say the same (Dt 25:4)? Rhetorical.**

**What is the answer to the question in 9:9?** God's greater concern is for people, 9:10a

**11. According to 9:9-10, what is the inspired application of Deuteronomy 25:4 ("not muzzle an ox")?** Apostles had the right to be supported by the church. This is also true of anyone doing significant ministry.

**12. How would you answer the two questions of 9:11-12a?**

**13. Why did Paul ask, "If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you" (1Co 9:11)? What was his purpose in asking this?**

**14. Application: What general principle can be derived from 9:11?** *See Romans 15:26-27.*

ESV **Romans 15:26-27** . . . Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.

**Based on Romans 15:26-27, what do you owe those who give you a spiritual blessing?**

**What additional information are we given about Paul and Barnabas in 9:12b?** *See also 9:15.* Even though they had the right to be supported, they did not exercise their right.

**How might Paul using this right have put an obstacle in the way of the gospel (9:12b)?** It could be claimed that they were in it for the money, not because it was true.

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\*\*\*\***15. What two reasons did Paul offer for the support of apostles in 9:13-14?** *See Deuteronomy 18:1-8, Luke 1:8-10, Numbers 35:1-5, Joshua 21:1-42 (esp. 21:1-3, 41-42), Ecclesiastes 3:13, Matthew 10:9-11, Luke 10:7.* Support for apostles is based on the fact that the Old Testament priests made their livings from temple sacrifices<sup>4</sup>, and because Jesus commanded that evangelists be supported by the church.

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<sup>4</sup> Some Old Testament priests worked at the temple only on rotation. That is, their time of service at the temple was limited; compare Luke 1:8-10. While they did live off the sacrifices while on duty, it was not necessarily a permanent career for them. When not working at the temple, they were farmers. Land for the Levites to use was set apart around each of the Levitical cities that were scattered throughout Israel. See Numbers 35:1-5, Joshua 21:1-42.

**Why did Paul put verse 13 into a question format?** There truths were well known. Paul put these facts into question format to effectively drive home an obvious truth and application.

**16. Where do you suppose Jesus intended this money for evangelists (9:14) to come from?** It generally does not simply fall out of the sky. It comes from God's people, the church.

**17. Application: How have you personally obeyed the Lord's command of 9:14?** It takes two to tango! Each believer should give of his means to help support qualified church workers. We share with them in their work when we give. We are to either go or give.

### 1 Corinthians 9 Overview

**What examples were given in 1 Corinthians 9 of those who made their living from the church?** We thus see that at least three groups made their livings from their ministries when Paul wrote this: **1.)** Apostles, **2.)** The Lord's brothers, and **3.)** Evangelists.

**What arguments were given to justify this support?**

- 1.) Human authority (soldier, vineyard keeper, shepherd), 9:7-8a).
- 2.) The Law of Moses (oxen, temple priests), 9:8b-9, 13).
- 3.) Spiritual principle/logic (spiritual seed/material harvest), 9:11.
- 4.) The command of Jesus, 9:14.

**18. Motive: Since Paul did not write this in hope that the Corinthians would give him support (9:12b, 15), then why did he write it?** Amazingly, 1 Corinthians 9 is a parenthetical remark. Paul's main topic began in 1 Corinthians 8 and concerned not being a stumbling block to others (re: food sacrificed to idols, 8:9). Paul's waver of his "right" to full time support (1Co 9) illustrated just how far Paul was willing to go to avoid hindering the gospel (9:12b, 15). Then, in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul continued on with his main topic, concluding with "Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God" (1Co 10:31-32). *Thus, Paul's objective in writing 1 Corinthians 9 was neither to limit nor extend the categories of those who had the "right" to support from the church.* It was merely an illustration. As such, it reveals that Paul had a very liberal approach to supporting church workers ("Is it about oxen that God is concerned?" "If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?").

### So What?

**20. What can be concluded about the idea of ministers who are supported by the church?** **First**, Jesus commanded that those who preach the gospel (evangelists) should make their living from the gospel. **Next**, Paul, in an illustration, applied this same principle to apostles (1Co 9). **Finally**, it was applied to qualified elders (1Ti 5), using the same arguments found in 1 Corinthians 9.

1. The New Testament clearly teaches that apostles and evangelists are to be supported by the church
2. There is no historical pattern in the New Testament either for or against full time elders. It is silent.
3. There is a general command in **Acts 20** for elders to follow Paul's example of supplying their own needs so as to be in a position of giving silver and gold and clothing to the church, rather than receiving from it.
4. All elders are worthy of honor (esteem), **1 Thessalonians 5**.
5. Qualified elders, those who rule and teach well, are worthy of "double honor" (financial support, **1 Timothy 5**).
6. Elders are not to be motivated by the desire for "sordid gain" from their ministry (i.e., not in it for the money), **1 Peter 5**. Peter's warning could also be for the elder to be willing to forgo potentially lucrative business ventures to instead give their time to serving as elders.
7. We need to financially support those who are evangelists, apostles, teachers, and elders, **1 Corinthians 9**.

\*\*\*\* = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
- You can hear this lesson being taught at [SermonAudio.Com/NTRF](http://SermonAudio.Com/NTRF).

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