

Excuses for Not Giving

Ecclesiastes 11:3-6; James 1:17

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When you hear of the legitimate needs of others, is there an earnest desire that rises up within you to help meet those needs, as you are able? Or is there rather a whole list of excuses that immediately arise in your mind as to why you cannot open your heart and your hand to those who have legitimate needs?

Dear ones, God knows our hearts. He sees either the generosity and love toward others that abide there or the selfishness and indifference toward others that abide there. The Lord admonishes us through James that faith without works is a dead faith, as it relates to our lack of care for the poor and needy (James 2:15-17). Likewise, the Apostle John challenges us to test the love of God in our lives by our care (or lack thereof) for the poor and needy (1 John 3:16-19).

Dear ones, are you making excuses for why you cannot help those who have a legitimate need, or are you looking for ways in which you can help meet those legitimate needs? A living faith in Jesus Christ and a living love for Jesus Christ are evidenced in the mercy we show to those in need.

There are a number of excuses from our text (in Ecclesiastes 11:3-6) that Solomon anticipates will be offered as to why we cannot give to help supply the legitimate needs of others. These excuses form the main points for the sermon this Lord's Day: (1) My Resources Are My Own (Ecclesiastes 11:3); (2) Many Difficulties Hinder the Giving of My Resources (Ecclesiastes 11:4); and (3) The Resources That I Give Will Bring Me to Lack What I Need (Ecclesiastes 11:5-6).

I. My Resources Are My Own (Ecclesiastes 11:3).

A. Whereas the Spirit of God (speaking through Solomon) had previously given us our duty to give to those who have legitimate needs, and had promised a reward in so doing (in Ecclesiastes 11:1-2), now our inspired Prophet, Solomon, challenges our lack of faith and lack of love by answering hypothetical excuses that people may give for not fulfilling this duty. Solomon, as the Preacher of God's people and as an example to all faithful Preachers, not only instructs us in our duty, but also anticipates the possible responses that might arise in the hearts of his readers, and so seeks to answer the excuses that might be offered.

1. Dear ones, a faithful Preacher does not need to know the heart of each and every member of his congregation in order to minister God's truth faithfully, just as Solomon did not need to know each of us personally to know the excuses that sinful human beings (in general) might raise in objecting to caring for the poor and needy.

2. When the very secrets of your hearts are revealed by the Spirit of God in faithful preaching, you are brought to humbly cast yourselves before the Lord, and to cry out to Him for mercy before whom all things are seen as before the noon day sun. When your very excuses for your sin are revealed by the Spirit of God in faithful preaching, you have no place to hide. You can either turn to Christ and repent of your sinful excuses (seeking His forgiveness), or you can cling to your sinful excuses and ignore the work of God's Spirit within you and await the fatherly anger of God to fall upon you in order to turn you away from your sin.

3. The idols of your heart are revealed by your unwillingness to part with them, even when the Lord shines His illuminating light upon them and mercifully calls you to forsake them so as to avoid His stern discipline.

B. Solomon provides the response to the first hypothetical excuse in the following words (as we find them in Ecclesiastes 11:3): "If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth, and if the

tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.” Solomon asks (in effect) that if the clouds are full of rain which the earth needs and empties that blessed rain upon a needy earth, and if a tree falls to the ground in one direction or the other for the good of the people to be used for warmth or for construction, who do you think you are to withhold your resources from those who are in need? Here is the person who states: “What I have is mine to use as I see fit. No one has a claim upon my resource, except me. Therefore, if I do not give to those who are poor and needy, no wrong is done because it is mine to give or not to give.” I would suggest that we see here two root sins in our lack of love and charity toward others: unbelief and pride.

1. Let us consider, first, unbelief as a root cause of a lack of love and charity toward others. What is it that the selfish do not believe? They do not really believe that all that they have is a free gift given to them by God (1 Corinthians 4:7; James 1:17). Those who are selfish falsely believe that they are owners rather than stewards of God riches to them (consider the parable of the nobleman, who entrusted his riches into the hands of stewards in order to gain a profit on what was given to them, while the owner was gone (Luke 19:12-16). Those who are selfish do not believe that they will give an account before God as to how they have used the resources given to them in order to help even the least of Christ’s brethren (Matthew 25:31-46). Oh, the selfish may profess with their mouths to believe these truths, but their very actions they deny what they profess to believe. Dear ones, do you see evidence of this unbelief in your own life? Do you only profess with your mouth that you are God’s steward to dispense what you have according to His will, or do you also act as though all that you have is God’s free gift to you and that you will one day stand before the Lord in order to give an account of your stewardship?

2. Let us consider, secondly, pride as a root cause of a lack of love and charity toward others. Pride is that sin that takes all credit to oneself for the resources, abilities, and gifts that one has, rather than humbly acknowledging and willingly behaving as one who gives God all of the glory for all that he/she has. Dear ones, every sip of water, every crumb of bread, every breath you take, every beat of the heart, every second of rest/sleep, or everything that make this life more comfortable is the undeserved and free gift to us, who are utterly unworthy of the least blessing.

a. It is our sinful nature to desire the glory, and not to share it with anyone—let alone to share it with God. It is our corrupt nature to withhold from others, who have legitimate needs, because we want to spend it upon our own mere pleasures. It is our proud nature to give to others from a motive of wanting others to know or see what we have given, so as to receive their applause (Matthew 6:1-4). This is a false humility and, therefore, pride as well.

b. Find your place of service to the needy where in God’s providence you happen to be (as a tree that has fallen to the south or to the north in God’s providence). You can always excuse yourself from helping those in need by thinking that if God had given you this talent or that talent (like this person or that person), or if you had fallen to the north instead of to the south, you would then be able to help those in need. However, dear ones, if you only have one talent (Matthew 25:14-30), will you make excuse that it is only one talent and not use it for the glory of God? Are you ashamed to use even that one gift given to you by God to minister to others? If so, that is sinful pride.

c. God created you and saved you in order to glorify Himself through you. Therefore, offer everything to Christ as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for all the benefits of His salvation. After all, we are like clouds filled with rain by our God to quench the thirst of the needy, and we are like trees that have been made to grow by our God and to fall in the direction He chooses in order to warm and benefit others. Let us go forth and empty ourselves (like clouds) upon a dry and needy land of people in order to glorify our Savior. Look about you in your neighborhood or in the church. There are many legitimate needs. You may not have much that you can do to financially help others, but you can prepare a meal, clean the house, watch the children, and pray for those in need, but beyond that there are ways in which you can put legs, hands, or mouths to your faith by using what God has given to you to help those in need (and

especially those who are the least as it were among Christ's brethren).

II. Many Difficulties Hinder the Giving of My Resources (Ecclesiastes 11:4).

A. Solomon now directs our attention to another person making excuses for why he/she cannot give to those who have legitimate needs. In this case, one is always looking at the various things that might happen in the future that prevent him/her presently from freely giving to show the love of Christ to those in need. As Solomon says (in Ecclesiastes 11:4), this kind of person excuses himself because he "observeth the wind" or "regardeth the clouds."

1. In other words, this person always seems to find some trial or burden in his own life that hinders him from taking any action to sow his seed or to reap his harvest. This person excuses himself by saying, "It is not a fit time to give to those who have a legitimate need because of the potential hardships I might face in the future. I just need more time to take care of this problem, trial, or burden that is bearing down upon me before I sow my seed in helping others. I cannot see straight to help others in need, while I am so desperately in need myself. I mean, what happens if I go out to sow my seed in the field and the wind comes and blows it all away. What will I do then?"

2. But what ends up happening for such a selfish person is that he/she makes sure that there is never a good time to show charity to a brother or sister who has a genuine need. It is always inconvenient for this kind of person to break his/her routine to help those in need.

B. What is the root behind this sinful excuse? I would suggest it is greed. One never finds a fit time to reach out to others in need, because one cares too much for his/her own comforts, his/her own schedule, his/her own budget, or his/her own security. To help those in need will mean this person has to make such changes in his/her life, or to his/her schedule, or to what he/she is comfortable with as a normal part of life. To help others in need will mean this person has to step outside of his/her comfort zone to do something different. To help others in need will mean that this person has to reorganize his/her priorities in how money is spent. For such a person, this is just a very big burden and hassle. It is just easier for this person to ignore the cry of others for help and to leave things in his/her life the way they are. I submit that this is greed.

1. The Prophet Haggai (in Haggai 1:2) heard the same kinds of excuses from God's people (namely, the time is not right to build the Temple of God since we returned from captivity). The Word of the Lord to God's people makes no such allowances for their excuses (Haggai 1:3-4). God says (in effect) that you have time and money for yourself and your homes, but not for God's house or God's ministry.

2. It is greed and an unwillingness to make necessary sacrifices of ourselves that lead us to make such excuses as to why we cannot fulfill our duty to reach out to those who have legitimate needs. Perhaps it is not a financial need, but is rather a need due to a physical affliction, due to the loss of a loved one, due to persecution in suffering for the truth, or due to a discouragement that has come into one's life.

3. If due to your greed and unwillingness to step outside of your comfort zone you are simply making excuses for why you cannot help others, the Lord declares that He will cause what you have to be unprofitable to you (Haggai 1:5-6). Dear ones, if you are constantly looking at the wind that might blow, you will never cast your seed into the field where there is a need. If you are constantly looking at the clouds that might bring forth rain, you will never go forth and bring in your harvest. What this person focuses on is not so much the needs of others, but rather his/her own needs, or what it will cost him/her. If you want a breath of fresh air from the anxiety of your own needs, find others to help who are more needy than you. Sometimes it is amazing just how small our needs really are after ministering to those who have much greater needs. We will stop complaining about the new pair of shoes we need when we minister to those who have no feet upon which to put shoes.

4. Where, dear ones, would you be if the Lord Jesus had not considered your desperate and needy condition, but had made excuses why He couldn't come to save you because of what it would cost

Him? You would be lost and condemned to eternal hell. The Lord Jesus knew what it would cost Him in order to rescue the helpless and the hopeless sinner. However, His everlasting love for unworthy sinners (chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world) sent Him to suffer torment from man and wrath from His Father as no man has ever suffered. Dear ones, let it be your daily prayer that God would remove all greed from you and make you those who sacrifice your lives for one another.

III. The Resources That I Give Will Bring Me to Lack What I Need (Ecclesiastes 11:5-6).

A. Finally, Solomon addresses the one who excuses himself from bearing the burdens of the needy by saying in effect, “If I give what I have to others, how can I be sure that I will have what I need or what my family needs? How will the Lord provide for me or my family if I make such sacrifices to help others who are in need?” Here in Ecclesiastes 11:5-6, Solomon says (in effect), “God in His most wise and holy providence will surely care for you, just as He has made your spirit and your body, and has provided for both while you were yet in your mother’s womb, and He will by that same most wise and most holy providence care for your spirit and your body now that you are outside your mother’s womb. You will have all that you need. Fulfill your duty today (whether you are in the morning or youth of your life, or whether you are in the evening or advanced years of your life). Don’t wait to sow your seed tomorrow. Sow it today (whether in the morning of your life or in the evening of your life) in showing charity to those in need—trust in the Lord to provide for all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

B. What is the root sin that leads you to make this excuse (namely, if you give what you have to help those in need, you will lack yourself)? The root sin that leads to this excuse is fear: fear of circumstances outside your control, fear of the future, fear or of the unknown. You might think to yourself, “If I give this money now to help a poor brother or sister, or to provide for the ongoing ministry of the church, I may find myself in a position later on in which I will not be able to meet my own needs.” So instead of sowing your seed, you are paralyzed by the fear of the wind blowing the seed away and having nothing to show for it later.

1. Dear ones, do such fears chain and shackle you today? Such fear is not of God, but is of the devil; for we read in 2 Timothy 1:7: “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” You fear future and unknown circumstances that may come upon you and allow that fear to keep you from fulfilling your present duties of charity, because you do not understand (as we all ought) the love of God for you as His own beloved children: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18). For as you grow in understanding God’s everlasting love for undeserving sinners (like you and me), you are able to cast all your cares upon Him, knowing that He cares for you and loves you infinitely and loves us eternally (Romans 5:8-9). How could the Lord show you to a greater degree how much He loves you than in giving His only begotten Son to suffer His infinite wrath upon the cross for unworthy sinners who will trust Him (Romans 8:32)?

2. You are growing in love as you learn to dispel all fear of future and unknown consequences, when you are not only able to read the following passage of Scripture, but are also enabled by God’s grace to cling to it by faith and to live it out in your life (Romans 8:35-39). Dear ones, God has promised that you will not go without anything that you need to honor and glorify Him in this life, and He has made these promises to you, not because you were/are worthy of such promises, but because He loves you more than you will ever fully understand (even with an eternity to contemplate the height, the depth, the width, and the breadth of God’s amazing love for unworthy sinners chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, Ephesians 1:4). Listen in closing to the comforting words of the Lord Jesus Christ as they are found in Luke 12:22-32.

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