

ACTS 20:17-38

The Apostle Paul was more than a brilliant scholar. The things that he wrote were often difficult to those who read his letters, as Peter testified in 2 Peter 3:15-16.

But more than that Paul was passionate about the churches he planted...not because of any pride in the accomplishment for he knew that while he planted, it was always God that gave the increase according to His own will and pleasure. Paul truly loved those he taught, those he lead as a shepherd leads his sheep. This deep love was seen not only in his strong corrections but even more so in his sacrificial life towards them. He considered them "his children" and his friends, and his brothers and sisters in the LORD.

Paul was also a realist. He knew of the dangers that lurked around every corner. He knew that both the Jews and pagans would come and try to destroy the church...to scatter the sheep as it were. He also knew how easy it would be for "infiltrators" to join the body of Christ, pretending to believe but were lying in wait to pounce. These could be anyone, sheep or false shepherds.

This chapter contains critical teachings for the church as Paul prepares to leave for Jerusalem. The teachings are essential for the pastors and elders but they are also indispensable for the flock!

However, while we read these words, let's not ignore the heart behind them! We can't make the mistake of reading with a critical or even a clinical eye. No, this is a father blessing his children. This is a father deeply concerned with the future blessedness of his sons and daughters; This is a father who is compelled to leave his children because His Father has told him that he must go and complete the task laid out before him.

Let's read a bit that we read last week to keep the context.

(Acts 20:14) And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to **Mitylene**. (15) We sailed from there, and the next *day* came opposite **Chios**. The following *day* we arrived at **Samos** and stayed at **Trogyllium**. The next *day* we came to **Miletus**. (16) For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.

(Acts 20:17) From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

Paul, not wanting to spend time in Asia, decides to send for the elders of the church of Ephesus. Who these men are is unknown.

It is estimated that this was a 30 mile journey and may have taken 1.5 days to reach Miletus.

Why did he call for the elders from this one church?

Luke doesn't say explicitly but perhaps we can glean something from what Paul said to them...

(Acts 20:18) And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, (Acts 20:19) serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; (Acts 20:20) how I kept back nothing that

was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, (Acts 20:21) testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul, tells them about what he did in Asia; He's not boasting! He's teaching! In other epistles he urged his readers to follow his example. So, as he is ready to depart he leaves them with the following advice:

1. Serve the LORD with ALL humility; for as he went through trials and tribulations because of the Jewish and Roman leadership, they too had to humble themselves before the LORD and receive the strength from Him!
2. Teach and Proclaim all that is helpful, all that is edifying, the full Gospel of their LORD and Savior!
3. Do not be ashamed of the Gospel but proclaim it publicly no matter the consequences! Teach house to house if needed!
4. Do not distinguish between Jew or Gentile because God does not, offering repentance and faith to both enabling them to turn to Jesus.

Now, as I read through this list, I believe that these things are not just for them but for all of us! And, without serving the LORD in ALL humility none of the rest are possible.

(Acts 20:22) And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, (Acts 20:23) **except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.**

Everywhere that Paul visited and planted, the Holy Spirit graciously gave gifts, especially prophesy. **But note:** not all prophesy is "positive", declaring happiness and wealth upon the person; No, for the great apostle Paul, what awaits him is shackles, jail and much affliction and anguish!

And, as he said, he was "bound in the Spirit" such that there was no real choice involved; Paul was compelled by the Spirit to be obedient in ALL things, regardless of the outcome; This, I think, is Paul's greatest example to them and us!

(Acts 20:24) But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Philippians 3:7-11 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. (8) Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ (9) and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; (10) that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, (11) if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul isn't saying "IF I may attain to the resurrection of the dead"; He was saying it didn't matter how he would attain it, if by martyrdom or by natural causes or by the rapture...it was all good!

(Acts 20:25) "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God,

will see my face no more.

Whether this was directed only to the Ephesians or others is unknown. He knew Jerusalem and Rome were ahead. It had been prophesized that dangers awaited him. And even though in subsequent letters (Philippians, Philemon) he talks of coming again, it was said in a tone of uncertainty.

If this was for the churches in Asia, starting in Ephesus it was a very sad statement indeed. This was a final goodbye to his spiritual children whom he helped birth in the LORD.

Therefore, it would be wise to listen: So, let's listen first and then look at the details:

Acts 20:26-35 **Therefore** I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*. (27) For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. (28) **Therefore** take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (29) For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. (30) Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. (31) **Therefore** watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. (32) "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (33) I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. (34) Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. (35) I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, '**It is more blessed to give than to receive.**' "

(Acts 20:26)

Therefore I testify (strongly as in a court of law)

I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*

(but wasn't he responsible for the death of many persecuted believers?)

Galatians 1:13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to* destroy it.

Commend: to *think well of in common*, that is, *assent to, feel gratified with:* - allow, assent, be pleased, have pleasure.

)

Yes, but what Paul is talking about here is that while he zealously and faithfully proclaimed the Gospel, he was not responsible for those who rejected it and therefore would perish

(Acts 20:27)

For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

The word "shunned" means to either withhold or conceal the counsel of God; it might also be translated "will of God" as the Greek word also means

Acts 20:28)

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock,
among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,
NOT Paul but the Holy Spirit places church leaders
to shepherd the church of God
which He purchased with His own blood.

1 Corinthians 6:20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

(Acts 20:29)

For I know this, that after my departure

savage wolves will come in among you,

The Greek word for “savage” used here is actually “grievous”, or “**burdensome**” even weightier as a **weight** on their shoulders;

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."

Matthew 23:4 For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers.

Galatians 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

The sense here is that he was warning them about the Judaizers who would come in to try to convince them (usually by guilt!) to come back under the Law.

NOT sparing the flock.

John 10:10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

(Acts 20:30)

Also from among yourselves men will rise up,

In the church, men (and women) will come in “disguised” as believers but they will spread their

heresies like the Gnostics did.

speaking perverse things,

What they speak is distortions and misinterpretations of the truths taught by Paul and his elders.

to draw away the disciples after themselves.

They are not interested in their own truth as much as just having the church family abandon their Savior and to follow them because it brings glory (and money, and power) to themselves.

(Acts 20:31)

Therefore watch,
KEEP AWAKE, BE AWARE of the **schemes** of Satan!

1 Corinthians 16:13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.

and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

Psalms 119:136 Rivers of water run down from my eyes, Because *men* do not keep Your law.

Philippians 3:18-19 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: **(19)** whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is their belly*, and *whose glory is* in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.

Colossians 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

(Acts 20:32)

So now, brethren,

I commend you to God and to the word of His grace,

Paul is “releasing” them and committing them into the hands of God

Jude 1:24-25 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present *you* faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, **(25)** To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen

which is able to build you up

Colossians 2:6-7 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, **(7)** rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

1 Peter 1:3-5 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4) to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, (5) who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

(Acts 20:33)

I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.

To covet means to "set your heart on", that is, to lust.

(Acts 20:34)

Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.

(Acts 20:35)

I have shown you in every way,
by laboring like this,
that you must support the weak.

(the weak are those who for whatever reason (widowed, orphaned, disabled) cannot work; they need our support.

And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, '**It is more blessed to give than to receive.**' "

Anyone know where in the Gospels Jesus spoke these words?

It's not; It is assumed that Paul learned this saying from one of the apostles.

(Acts 20:36) And when he had said these things, he knelt down and **prayed with them all.** (Acts 20:37) Then **they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him,** (Acts 20:38) 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.

(Genesis 33:4) But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

(Genesis 45:14) Then he [*Joseph*] fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck.

(Genesis 46:29) So Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; and he presented himself to him, and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while.

(Luke 15:20) "**And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his [*prodigal son's*] neck and kissed him.**

(Acts 20:37) Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him,

