



The unfolding of your words gives light.

God's Kind of Church

An Exposition of Acts

¹⁷From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church^a. ¹⁸And when they had come to him, he said to them,

“You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time^b, ¹⁹servicing the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me^c through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable^d, and teaching you publicly and from house to house^e, ²¹solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ²²And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. ²⁴But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself^f, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus^g, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God^h.”

^a 20:17 **he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.** Miletus was, at the time, a seacoast town about not far from Ephesus. This shoreline meeting was Paul's way to stay on schedule for Jerusalem as well as meet with the beloved elders from Ephesus.

^b 20:18 **You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time.** Paul's example challenges us to live life in such a way that we are not ashamed to have others tell the truth about us. It is also a testimony of a man who did not waste God's time.

^c 20:19 **servicing the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me.** Paul's days in Ephesus had been marked by tears and trials. He told the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15:32) that he had “fought wild beasts in Ephesus.” He held his suffering up to the Ephesian elders as a pattern for the Christian life.

^d 20:20 **I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable.** The word translated “shrink” was used of taking down sails, a common sight in Miletus. Paul uses it here to call to elders' minds his boldness in communicating what the Ephesians needed to hear. He later used another speaking/sailing metaphor in a letter when he urged the same congregation (Ephesians 5:18) to be “filled” with the Spirit, a word used of full sails.

^e 20:20 **teaching you publicly and from house to house.** Here you see Paul's priorities. This was not door-to-door “soul-winning.” It was discipleship and exhortation in any available venue. God's word is authoritative from the pulpit as well as from the sofa. John Calvin commented on this verse:

Also, disciples and scholars are taught, that if they will be numbered in Christ's flock, they must give place to their pastors, so often as they come unto them; and that they must not refuse private admonitions. For they be rather bears than sheep, who do not vouchsafe to hear the voice of their pastor, unless he be in the pulpit; and cannot abide to be admonished and reprov'd at home, yea, do furiously refuse that necessary duty.

He could have said, “Remember how the people touched me with pieces of fabric and then touched the sick and demon-possessed?” Instead he called to their mind a more powerful ministry. Contrast this house-to-house teaching ministry with his former house-to-house ministry in Acts 8:3.

^f 20:24 **I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself.** This does not mean he had no regard for life. Paul just knew there were some things of greater consequence than his own survival. This is the attitude that has gifted the Church with martyrs.

^g 20:24 **so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus.** Paul was fond of running metaphors. Here he puts himself in a race whose finish line he anticipates but cannot see. See also 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Philipppians 3:12-14 and 2 Timothy 4:7. He looked at his life as something of less value than the task to which God had called him.

^h 20:24 **to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.** Why would Paul have been guilty of anyone's blood? This may be a reference to God's call of Ezekiel (3 and 33) to be a watchman on a wall over the house of Israel. Watchmen fulfilled their mission if they properly

²⁵And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. ²⁶Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men^a. ²⁷For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. ²⁸Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock^b, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers^c, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood^d. ²⁹I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears^e. ³²And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you up* and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes^f. ³⁴You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my *own* needs and to the men who were with me^g. ³⁵In everything

warned the people inside their city. The innocence of the watchman had nothing to do with securing the response of the people—only warning them. Paul considered himself relieved of that responsibility with the Ephesians.

^a 20:25 **I am innocent of the blood of all men.** This was a message to the elders that they were now on their own. They should not depend on Paul. It was also a message to the elders that they were also accountable to preach the whole counsel of God to the flock in Ephesus.

^b 20:28 **Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock.** Paul charged the elders with the task of being watchmen. Notable here is that Paul describes the function of elders using the New Testament words for pastor and bishop. An elder is a bishop is a pastor. The hierarchy of denominationalism was a later invention of man.

Note that the men are to watch themselves as well as the flock. Sometimes it's easier to work with the trouble at someone else's home than your own.

As under-shepherds, elders/bishops/pastors are to watch sheep that do not belong to them. Their responsibility is awesome considering the price Jesus (called God here) paid for this flock called the Church.

^c 20:28 **among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.** It was not a denomination or even a church that ordained these men.

^d 20:28 **shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.** Notice that this was God's blood. Notice also that this purchase provided more than a potential that some people would be saved. The atonement actually does something for its intended recipients. Those who were purchased will come into the Church. The particular price Jesus paid for the Church with His blood motivates pastors to spend themselves for that flock.

^e 20:31 **be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.** This shows the passion the teacher of God's word ought to have. The word "admonish" means "warn" or "appeal to the mind." It is more than simply passing on information.

^f 20:33 **I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.** Paul did not take a salary from the church at Ephesus. Scripture teaches that those who labor at preaching the gospel are worthy of a salary (Matthew 10:2-11; Luke 8:1-3; 1 Corinthians 9:3-19; 2 Corinthians 11:7-9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9; 1 Timothy 5:17-18; Galatians 6:6; 3 John 1:5-8). Paul willingly gave up that right at times when it served the needs of a congregation.

^g 20:34 **that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me.** 1 Thessalonians 4:11 says, "make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands." It is hard to accuse a hard worker of being a leech.

I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak^a and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'.^b”

³⁶When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷And they *began* to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, ³⁸grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again^c. And they were accompanying him to the ship.^d

^a 20:35 **by working hard in this manner you must help the weak.** The biblical doctrine of vocation does not teach us to work hard so we can collect more flammable stuff. Paul later told this same congregation (Ephesians 4:28) that the remedy for thievery is working for those in need.

^b 20:35 **It is more blessed to give than to receive.** This new beatitude (see Matthew 5) explains that the Christian work ethic is not to have a self-focus but an other-focus. This saying of Jesus is not mentioned in the Gospels, but John tells us that the world could not contain the books that could be written about Jesus (21:25). Paul was doubtless familiar with more of Jesus' words than the Gospels record.

This is an over-arching principle, but it was given here as a challenge to the elders.

^c 20:38 **grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again.** These men loved Paul. They depended on his instruction and counsel. His absence would leave a big hole in their leadership, but their hearts would simply long for his fellowship.

^d 20:17-38 Marks of the ministry of God's kind of leader:

1. He sees that his a role as a mentor. Paul stopped in Miletus because he loved those men, but he also stopped because he had a responsibility to those men. This is very much like a father giving his son last minute counsel before the younger moves on to another stage of life.
2. He is an example in the way he responds to hard times. Paul had a riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:28-30). God's kind of leaders walk with you through hard times and they serve as an example when they suffer.
3. He courageously tells the truth. Telling the truth was costly for Paul. It is a rare elder who has not made a few enemies by telling the truth.
4. He prioritizes the ministry of the word. The entire three-year ministry of Paul in Ephesus was defined by the clear transformation wrought in lives by the power of the word of God. For the most part, a teaching elder is not working if he is not teaching God's word or preparing to teach it.
5. He does the work of an evangelist. Ephesus had a synagogue population for the start of Paul's ministry there, but the bulk of his work was engaging the worshippers of Diana. Church leaders have a responsibility to engage lost people with the gospel.
6. He puts ministry over comfort. Threats of arrest and violence did not deter Paul from continuing his course. God's kind of leaders know it is often inconvenient to serve Christ.
7. He feels the weight of his responsibility. Paul believed that he was responsible for the soul-care of even the strongest leaders of the Ephesian church. Elders in the church should not live with a frown on their face, but they should recognize the crucial role they play in warning sinners.
8. He does not complain about his compensation. Paul accepted a living from his gospel work, but made tents when that was not offered to him. It is the obligation of the church to care for the needs of vocational elders and the jobs of the elders to content themselves with their wages.
9. He gravitates toward people in need. Paul taught the people to care for those in need. Good leaders, like shepherds, find ways to identify the neediest sheep.
10. He develops close relationships. It is very clear that these men loved Paul. It is sad counsel that instructs pastors to avoid close friendships in the church.

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