

## **Acts 20:17-38: Farewell to Ephesus**

20:7-12: Here is an unusual event that Dr. Luke witnessed. Eutychus, a teenage boy, fell out a third story window and died. (GR name means Good Fortune or Lucky) Paul probably prayed and asked God for his life to be restored. The GR word indicates Paul stretched his body over the boy as if to transfer life into the lifeless boy. Even if Paul found a pulse it's still a miracle that the boy walked away with his parents.

The context is a message to church leaders. I must be true to the context and preach this as a message to church leaders first, and then I can apply it to all church members.

### Paul's Personal Example

Paul's example may be considered an example for all Christians.

**Paul's transparent lifestyle** (18-19): *"You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews."* PBill's paraphrase: "You have observed me in many different situations, even assassination attempts, the past three years. My life has been an open book for anyone to read." Paul put himself forward as a role model. 1 Corinthians 4:14: *I urge you, then, be imitators of me.* 11:1: *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.* Do you feel confident to say this? Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't.

**Paul's sensitivity to the Spirit's voice** (20:22-23): *"And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, compelled/bound (GR deo) by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me."* PBill's paraphrase: "The Holy Spirit is telling me I must go to Jerusalem and give testimony." Do you have a close relationship with the Holy Spirit? Are you walking in the Spirit so that you can hear when the Holy Spirit speaks to you?

**Paul faithfulness of his calling** (24): *"But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."* Paul counted the cost of discipleship. When Jesus called him,

He told Paul he would suffer for His sake. Jesus said to Ananias when he was reluctant to help Saul (Acts 9:15-16): *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."* If Jesus called you to serve and showed you how much you would suffer for it, then would you still do it?

**Paul's work ethic** (34-35): *"I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"* Paul worked hard so he would not be a burden and he could give more. Paul had a small business as a tentmaker to support his mission work. He also received free-will offerings from the churches he planted. He resisted the sin of covetousness. The 10th commandment is "You shall not covet your neighbor's house or spouse, or his cars, or his clothes, or his salary, or his bank account, or his IRA, or his status, or anything that is your neighbor's." (Exodus 20:17) I struggle with covetousness. (According to Money magazine, 71% of pastors surveyed said their job is very stressful and they are significantly underpaid. So, imagine what it was like for Paul as a missionary!) But it is more blessed to give to them than to receive, so I also support ministries and missionaries working to fulfill Christ's Great Commission.

### Responsibilities of Church Leaders

Paul used three terms to describe church leaders: elders (presbyteros), overseers (episkopos), and shepherds (poimen). These men were leaders of the house churches in Ephesus. Each leader was probably an overseer for several house churches.

**First**, the Holy Spirit verified their leadership (20:28). *"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has placed you overseers by His design, to care for the church of God, which Christ obtained with his own blood."* (GR word *tithemi* = to set, with design, in a certain arrangement or position) This was not a random placement, but by the HS's design. The overseers were recognized by their knowledge of the word of

God, spiritual maturity, and good works. Acts 6:3-5 lists being full of the Holy Spirit, faith and wisdom. The qualifications for elder/overseer are listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. (Deacons are listed in 3:8-13.) If someone gets into a position of leadership and he/she has not been verified by the HS, then trouble and division happen.

**Second**, they pay careful attention to themselves. *“Pay careful attention to yourselves...”* They maintain their own spiritual growth. They know how to protect their faith. They meditate on the word of God and obey its commands. The first thing most people do in the morning is look at themselves in the mirror; they may not like what they see, but they pay attention to themselves to look better. So, get into the word of God; it is a spiritual mirror (James 1:22-25).

**Third**, they CARE for (shepherd) the church of God. A shepherd takes care of hurt sheep. If he sees a sheep wandering near a cliff, then he rescues it with his hooked staff. If a sheep breaks a leg, then he sets the leg and carries it on his back.

**Fourth**, they PROTECT the flock of God from wolves (29-31). *“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert.”* This assumes a “shepherd” knows what a wolf looks like and how it attacks the sheep. Every sheep must know the word of God, but elders have a greater responsibility to know the word of God and teach it.

There will be wolves attacking from the outside and wolves in sheep’s clothing inside; that is, a wolf wearing a sheep costume (29-30). They will speak “twisted things.” They will corrupt the truth and teach error. They will draw away immature disciples to follow them.

The historical church has dealt with many wolves in sheep’s clothing. One example is the Arian controversy and the Council of Nicaea and the Nicene Creed. Arius and Athanasius of Alexandria were two Christian theologians from Alexandria, Egypt. Arius was the wolf in a sheep’s costume. Arianism, the heresy of Arius, affirmed that Christ is not divine but a created being. The Council of Nicaea was formed in AD 325 to deal with Arius’ twisted theology. The Council condemned Arius and incorporated the ‘nonscriptural’ word

*homoousios* (“of one substance”) into the Nicene Creed to signify the absolute equality of the Son with the Father.

*“We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being (substance) with the Father by whom all things were made.”*

This ancient “twisted thing” was given new life in the modern Christian cults like Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons. They teach the same Arian error that Jesus Christ is a created being and not fully God.

### Paul’s Word for Preachers

*20:20, 27: I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was beneficial, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 27: For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.*

Paul did not “shrink from declaring.” (GR shrink = keep back, suppress or conceal = *hypostello*). Paul didn’t conceal any profitable truth pertinent to Christian faith and life (2:20). Paul didn’t hold back from declaring the whole counsel or purpose of God (2:27).

Paul did not shrink in FEAR. He had no fear of man. I have sometimes thought to myself (or maybe it was Satan’s whisper in my ear), “If I preach that then I could lose my job.” I think about people who may not like the Word and criticize me later. Proverbs 29:25: *The fear of man is a snare, but the one who trusts in the Lord is protected.* If I’m listening to the “fear of man,” then I’m not listening to the Holy Spirit. I cannot have both voices in my head. I must preach the whole counsel of God with my unique style.

What did Paul NOT keep back from declaring? All the truth in God’s word. Paul specified “repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Repentance is not an easy word to hear nor an easy act to do. Human pride resists it.

Verses 26-27 trouble me: *Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent/guiltless of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.* Paul referred to **Ezekiel 33:1-9**. A pastor

is like Ezekiel's watchman. A pastor blows the trumpet of God's word as a warning. A pastor who faithfully preaches the word of God is innocent of the blood (i.e. eternal damnation) of anyone who does not respond to the trumpet of the Word. If a pastor withholds the truth of God's word, then he will not be innocent; he may share some accountability for a person who dies in his/her sins.

If I shrink back from declaring the whole word of God so you don't hear the truth and it doesn't lead to your repentance, then I may be held accountable for your "blood." If you are driving a car toward a cliff and I know you are and I don't put up a roadblock with a sign "STOP there's a cliff ahead" with flashing lights and you drive off the cliff and die in your sins, then Christ may hold me accountable for your spiritual death. This puts the fear of God in me! Every preacher of the word of God needs to remember this. In order for me to be "innocent of the blood of all" I must not shrink from declaring the truth of God's word to people. "If you don't repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, then you will suffer eternal torment in hell when you die in your sins." (Let the motive for your belief in Christ be fear and love.)

### Jesus' Words

Christ's teaching (35): "It is more blessed to give than to receive." This is not recorded in the gospels. Jesus would have personally said this to Paul. Paul said the Gospel he preached came by revelation from Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-12). This Jesus quote is open to misunderstanding. It doesn't mean the person who receives and depends on gifts (i.e. welfare) is less blessed than those who give to them. It means that if you are in a financial position to give to people who are less fortunate, then give, and do not keep amassing further wealth for yourself. The blessing is not in the giver or receiver; it's the giving. Be a blessing to someone else and God will keep His blessings flowing into your life.

### Application:

1. If you are a church leader, committee leader, then pay attention to Paul's words for church leaders. Make sure you measure up to the qualifications for church leaders (1 Timothy 3 - elders or deacons). Pay attention to your

own spiritual growth. Help care for and protect the sheep. It isn't just the pastor's job. Play your part as a "watchman" against Satan's attacks.

2. Every believer can follow Paul's example: live a transparent lifestyle before God and people, walk in the Spirit's leading, be faithful to your calling, and maintain a good work ethic so you can give to others.
3. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." So build your shoebox for Operation Christmas Child.