

## Lesson 8      23 December, 2018

### Paul Exhorts the Ephesian Elders

#### **Lesson Scope:** Acts 20

*References in brackets refer to Acts 20 unless otherwise specified*

#### **Lesson Focus**

In this lesson we see the apostle Paul's burden for the church. He had left Ephesus after labouring there for more than two years. He travelled through Macedonia and Greece, briefly visiting groups of believers in a number of places. Then he boarded a ship, intending, if possible, to arrive at Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost. Yet he desired to meet with the elders of Ephesus. When the ship came to Miletus, thirty-six miles south of Ephesus, he sent messengers to call for the elders of the church to meet him there.

Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders sets before us much instruction for ministers and other church leaders today. Paul's interest and concern for the members of the church at Ephesus resembles the care a shepherd has for his sheep.

Paul warned the elders about the grievous wolves who posed a danger to the flock. He also mentioned the danger of false teachers arising within the church. Paul clearly showed them their accountability and their need for vigilance.

The "great shepherd of the sheep" calls men to be shepherds of His flock. This calling urges leaders to maintain a humble view of their charge, a keen sense of the threats to the flock, and a solemn awareness of their accountability.

This lesson should not be used as an opportunity to examine the leaders in our congregations to rate their effectiveness but rather to consider the weighty and solemn responsibility they carry. Suggest ways we can aid and support their leaders.

Paul helped the elders at Ephesus to examine their own lives and to understand their accountability for the influence of their teaching and example. However, since most of us are not called to lead the church, you should focus on ways we can support and encourage those in places of leadership. Certainly all of us can and should pray for them.

**Lesson Aim:** To portray the solemn responsibilities vested in the ministry of the church.

**Theme Verse:** **1 Timothy 4:16.** Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

## Lesson Text

### Testifying the Gospel of Grace

Acts 20:17-27

<sup>17</sup> (ESV) Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. <sup>18</sup> And when they came to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, <sup>19</sup> serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; <sup>20</sup> how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, <sup>21</sup> testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, <sup>23</sup> except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, <sup>27</sup> for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

### Taking Heed to All the Flock

Acts 20:28-31

<sup>28</sup> (ESV) Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to

draw away the disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

### **Labouring to Support the Weak**

Acts 20:32-38

<sup>32</sup> (ESV)

And 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. <sup>33</sup> I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. <sup>34</sup> You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. <sup>35</sup> 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.'" <sup>36</sup> And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. <sup>37</sup> And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, <sup>38</sup> being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **Testifying the Gospel of Grace**

1. What attitudes and aptitudes made Paul a faithful shepherd?
2. Why might a leader keep back something that would profit his people?
3. What Bible principles will a leader teach as he declares "all the counsel of God"?

#### **Taking Heed to All the Flock**

4. What danger was posed by "grievous wolves" among the flock?
5. To what areas of church life will vigilant church leaders give specific attention?

### **Labouring to Support the Weak**

6. Why does the Bible teach that a minister should be unsalaried?
7. How can senior ministers prepare younger ones to continue the work?

### **Analysing the Passage**

In the ministerial meeting of Paul and the elders of the church at Ephesus, Paul reviewed his work at Ephesus and then stated what would

likely be his lot in the future. Knowing that they would not see his face again, he solemnly charged them with their responsibility and accountability for the church. Paul sincerely trusted that they would continue the work he had begun.

Paul desired that the elders would follow his example and not neglect to declare all the counsel of God (20:27). He counselled them to take heed to themselves and to all the flock. He knew what a loss it is to the church when leaders fail.

Church leaders are not self-appointed. Paul's ministry was received from the Lord Jesus (20:24). Church leaders are stewards over the Lord's flock, not owners or possessors.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **Testifying the Gospel of Grace**

1. The ministerial team needs to maintain open communication (20:17-18). Healthy communication includes frank sharing of needs and trends developing in the congregation. Ignoring the facts or withholding information will hinder the work. Truthfulness and honesty facilitate progress in church work.
2. Effective service requires serving in humility (20:19). Service done in humility is both effective and God-honouring. Church work is God's work being done through human instrumentality. It is not done for personal recognition or to bring glory to oneself. The song writer penned, "Not I, but Christ be honoured, loved, exalted; / Not I, but Christ, be seen, be known, be heard"
3. The ministry is responsible to share with the churches the message of repentance and faith (20:20-21). They must proclaim the full Gospel. A faithful minister will not teach certain aspects of the message and neglect the rest. He must consistently hold forth the foundational truths of repentance and faith.
4. The ministry need a burden for the church and an openness to Spirit's direction (20:22-23). Faithful leaders apply themselves to the work at hand, moving ahead under the direction of God's Spirit. The destiny of the souls committed to their charge matters to God. This gives focus to a leader's work and helps him focus on what he needs to do.
5. The ministry need to be ready to bear affliction for the sake of the kingdom (20:23-24). A willingness to sacrifice makes service effective.

This includes the sacrifice of personal interests and pursuits to make themselves available to serve their people. They bear the stresses and distresses their work brings without complaining. They do not flinch in the face of unjust criticism.

6. Ministerial accountability requires that they share all the counsel of God (20:25-27). The minister should address all the spiritual needs in the congregation, regardless of the persons involved. He will make Scriptural application to current issues. A loving rebuke is effective where changes are obviously needed.

### **Taking Heed to All the Flock**

7. The ministry need a proper view of the church's position to shepherd the flock effectively (20:28). The flock needs a shepherd who understands what the church is to be and how church members should live. The flock is the purchased possession of God. They need the gentle guidance of a shepherd to become and remain a church that is unspotted and without wrinkle. Every minister needs to understand this.

8. The ministry need to guard their influence and accountability in teaching sound doctrine (20:28-30). Most of us fail to realize the power of our influence and example. It might surprise us to learn who is following our example. Those who guide the flock must exercise carefulness in personal life, maintain close adherence to Biblical truth, and apply the Scriptures in a way that builds on the labours of church leaders in the past.

### **Labouring to Support the Weak**

9. The ministry has the solemn charge of bringing their people to God (20:32). The ministry seek to link their people to God, who is their source of strength. Like Paul, they commend their people to God. After Paul's departure, the Ephesian church continued to have access to the power and grace of God.

10. The ministry need to meet their own financial obligations as they serve the church (20:33-35). This serves several purposes. First, they can be an example to their flock by the way they conduct the business of earning a living. Secondly, they avoid becoming a financial burden to the church. Most importantly, they are free to speak the truth even if it offends someone. Members should sense their duty to assist their ministers and lighten their load.

11. The ministry shares a deep compassion for those they serve (20:36-

38). Tears flow freely in times of grief and loss. The touching farewell scene described in these verses indelibly impressed the mind of each one present. Paul's last prayer with them, though not recorded for us, gave them the courage to carry on their leadership responsibilities with renewed vigour.

### **Important Teachings**

1. The ministerial team needs to maintain open communication (20:17-18).
2. Effective service requires serving in humility (20:19).
3. The ministry is responsible to share with the churches the message of repentance and faith (20:20-21).
4. The ministry need a burden for the church and an openness to Spirit's direction (20:22-23).
5. The ministry need to be ready to bear affliction for the sake of the kingdom (20:23-24).
6. Ministerial accountability requires that they share all the counsel of God (20:25-27).
7. The ministry need a proper view of the church's position to shepherd the flock effectively (20:28).
8. The ministry need to guard their influence and accountability in teaching sound doctrine (20:28-30).
9. The ministry has the solemn charge of bringing their people to God (20:32).
10. The ministry need to meet their own financial obligations as they serve the church (20:33-35).
11. The ministry shares a deep compassion for those they serve (20:36-38).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. What attitudes and aptitudes made Paul a faithful shepherd? He possessed humility of mind. He empathized with the /flock in their struggles while remaining victorious in the temptations he faced personally. He clearly proclaimed a full Gospel, endeavouring to reach each member of the flock through his preaching and by his example. By making church work a higher priority than his own personal safety, he enjoyed a free conscience.

2. Why might a leader keep back something that would profit his people?

Fear of men may influence a leader to avoid the hard sayings of the Bible. A leader may realize that his own life does not measure up to certain ideals, and thus he may remain silent on those matters. A desire for the approval of his people may divert him from being too pointed in his preaching. Satan may tempt a leader to make the narrow way broader in an attempt to increase the size of the membership.

3. What Bible principles will a leader teach as he declares “all the counsel of God”?

“Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (20:21) are basic principles to hold and promote. The faithful leader will not only teach his people things they should believe, but also hold before them the applications of Scripture they should make to their lives. He desires that his congregation be “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:17).

4. What danger was posed by “grievous wolves” among the flock?

Such persons sought their own advantage at the expense of others. For reasons of personal vanity, they aspired to positions of honour so they could have the praise of men. They sought benefits for themselves, caring not for the welfare of the flock. They did not hold faithfully to God’s Word in their speaking or in their living, thus leading their people away from God.

5. To what areas of church life will vigilant church leaders give specific attention?

They will take heed to their own lives to be sure they are leaving a consistent example for their people. They will be alert to the neglected duties or world-ward trends in the church. They will seek to shore up areas of weakness. They will warn against deception.

6. Why does the Bible teach that a minister should be unsalaried?

A salaried minister may allow material interests to influence his message. He will seek to please those who are paying his salary. He may seek a position in a wealthy congregation rather than one where the members are unable to afford to pay him a substantial wage. By being willing to earn his own living, a minister can set a personal example showing how Bible principles apply to the material side of life. He can demonstrate that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

7. How can senior ministers prepare younger ones to continue the work?

They can emphasize the need for teamwork and maintaining strong ties between themselves and with God. A leader is not a super-talented individual who can do the work of ten men, but one with vision who can put ten men to work.

Senior leaders can enable and empower those who succeed them in the work by commending them to God and to His grace (20:32). Paul prayed for the Ephesian elders before his departure from them and, no doubt, continued to hold them to the throne of grace as long as he had breath and opportunity.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

Faithful ministers of the Gospel pray with and for their people. Faithful church members offer prayers of intercession for their leaders. The work of the church should be of greatest importance to us because the church will outlast any other work that we may do in this world.

### **Research Guide**

Read the ordination vow used when ministers are called and ordained to serve in the church. The responsibilities outlined there show the breadth of a leader's work.

2. Read Revelation 2:1-7 to see what the church at Ephesus was like forty years later.