

Acts Chapter 20

Paul's Visit to Troas and His Farewell to the Saints in Asia

Introduction

Following the uproar in Ephesus (Acts 19), Paul left Asia and spent some time in Macedonia and then three months in Greece (Corinth). Having left Greece, Paul and his companions spent seven days in Troas (in modern day Turkey) where he raised a man from the dead. Paul's goal was to arrive in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. From Miletus he called for the elders of the church in Ephesus and delivered to them a farewell discourse. This passage shines a bright flashlight upon Paul's vibrant ministry in Ephesus. By application, it is helpful to every child of God in understanding true service for Christ and faithful pastoral ministry for the benefit of Christ's sheep.

Acts 20:1-2

Paul was in the process of completing his third missionary journey. Due to the riotous uproar, Paul sent for the disciples in Ephesus and encouraged them in the faith. He then departed into Macedonia where he had been on his second missionary journey. Paul showed by example the importance of a proper farewell. How different it would have been if Paul had simply left without meeting with the brethren and without encouraging them. This shows how endeared these disciples were to Paul (compare Acts 20:37).

We are not told how much time Paul spent in Macedonia, but he made time to give the believers in those places much exhortation and encouragement. The Macedonian churches would include Berea, Thessalonica and Philippi. While in Macedonia he wrote his Second Epistle to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 8:1; 9:2-4). Paul was not in the habit of taking vacations or going on Mediterranean sightseeing tours. Wherever Paul was he was engaged in the Lord's work, meeting the spiritual needs of the disciples. He then went to Greece, that is, to Corinth.

Acts 20:3

While Paul was in Corinth for these three months, he wrote the great Epistle to the Romans. In the purpose and providence of God, Paul would eventually head to Rome, actually arriving there as a prisoner. After this three-month stay in Corinth, Paul was about to board a ship headed for Syria when he discovered that "a plot was formed against him by the Jews" (NASB). This word "plot" is also used in Acts 9:24 and 23:30. Paul, more than once, was the subject of plans by his enemies to harm him. In light of this danger, Paul quickly changed his travel plans. He decided to go to Macedonia and ultimately to Troas (Acts 20:5).

Somehow, in the providence of God, Paul found out about this plot and took measures to avoid the danger. God protects His servants.¹ Even though Paul did not count his life dear unto himself (verse 24) and was willing to die for the cause of Christ, he did not act foolishly and put his life at risk unnecessarily. Paul acted wisely in the Lord's work, always assuming the place of dependence and prayer. He did not act presumptuously, expecting the Lord to miraculously preserve him from all harm and dangers. In this case he wisely avoided the threat to his life. Paul had a desire to depart and be with the Lord, yet he knew that his continued presence on earth was needful for God's people (Phil. 1:23-24).

This delay in his travel plans made it impossible for Paul to arrive in Jerusalem during Passover, but Paul was determined to arrive there in time for Pentecost (v. 16).

Acts 20:4-5

Paul was preceded by these seven helpers who had collected a substantial gift for the saints in Jerusalem. Paul's itinerary was a complex itinerary, coming and going, changing his routes, and confirming churches along the way. In Luke's inspired account the Spirit of God highlights certain points on his trip. These seven coworkers of Paul waited for him at Troas. Troas was a key port city in what is today northwestern Turkey. These men were personally trained by Paul. Two came from Asia, two from Galatia, and three from Macedonia. We read about them elsewhere in the New Testament: Sopater (Romans 16:21), Aristarchus (Col. 4:10), Tychicus (Col. 4:7; Eph. 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:12; Tit. 3:12), Trophimus (Acts 21:29; 2 Tim. 4:20).

Acts 20:6

Paul finally arrived in Troas, having sailed from Philippi after the Passover feast.² The "days of unleavened bread" were part of the Passover observance. Paul once again was joined by Luke who apparently had been in Philippi for many months while Paul was moving across Achaia and Macedonia. Notice the "we" in verse 6, indicating that Luke was a participant in the narrative. The last time we found this "we" pronoun was in Acts 16:16.

They waited seven days so that they could meet with the believers on Sunday, the first day of the week (verse 7). This is one of the clearest statements in the New Testament showing that the early Church remembered the death of the Lord Jesus on the first day of the week. Thus their day of worship was on a Sunday. Compare 1 Corinthians 16:2. The Lord Jesus started this pattern by meeting with the disciples on that first resurrection day (John 20:19), and then again exactly a week later (John 20:26).³

¹One of the most fascinating accounts of God's protection is found in the autobiography of John Paton, missionary to the cannibals in the New Hebrides Islands in the South Pacific. His life was in grave danger on many occasions but God always made a way of escape.

²See Acts Chapter 12, Appendix 1: *The Chronology of the Passover Meal and Associated Feast*.

³"After eight days" (John 20:26) is a Jewish expression that involves inclusive reckoning, so that the first day would be Sunday (the first day of the week) and the eighth day would be

Acts 20:7

The disciples did not come together on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week (Saturday), but they came together on Sunday, the first day of the week, the same day on which Christ rose again from the dead.⁴ The Sabbath day commemorated the completion of creation and was a sacred day for Israel, filled with all kinds of divine guidelines and even threats about what would happen if the Sabbath rules were not obeyed. Sabbath keeping was a major issue in the Gospel accounts. Many times the Lord Jesus was wrongly accused of violating the Sabbath.

Paul said, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days” (Col. 2:16). In other words, we are no longer under Sabbath day restrictions or laws. Sunday is not a “Sabbath” day filled with enforced regulations, guidelines and threats, but it is a day to rejoice and to remember the significance of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The breaking of bread probably included a meal along with the observance of the Lord’s Supper. It was a commemoration event, observing the bread and the wine as symbols of Christ’s body and blood. How often should the blessed ceremony of the Lord’s Supper be kept? The early believers did this “often” (1 Cor. 11:26). At first it seemed to be done “daily” (Acts 2:46). There is no command in the New Testament telling believers how often they should do this, but this passage seems to indicate that the believers in Troas observed the Lord’s Table weekly, on the Lord’s Day (Sunday).

On this occasion Paul preached to these disciples, as he was planning to depart from Troas the following day. It is fascinating to read that Paul continued his speech until midnight. We are not told when he began his speech, but we are told it was a long message (verse 9), possibly for hours. Knowing he had to leave the next day, there were certainly many things he wanted to share with these believers.

Acts 20:8

These many lights (KJV) were lamps or lanterns with all kinds of fumes spreading through the room, consuming the limited amount of oxygen. These oil lamps were like miniature torches, and could have created stuffy conditions causing sleepiness. The believers were meeting together in some kind of an upper room (verse 8), which had even higher lofts (verse 9). The Greek term ‘upper room’ is the same term used in Acts 1:13 where the disciples met in Jerusalem prior to Pentecost.

Acts 20:9

Sunday. In a similar way, the Jews would circumcise the male child on the eighth day, which meant one week after he was born. If born on a Tuesday, he would be circumcised on the following Tuesday. This counts the first Tuesday as day one. In our way of thinking a week is seven days from now, not eight, because we start the count on the following day.

⁴See George Zeller’s study on *The Sabbath and The Lord’s Day*: <https://www.middletonbiblechurch.org/reformed/sabbath.htm> and also George Zeller’s booklet by the same title published by Lighthouse Trails.

How many of us have experienced drowsiness during a preaching service? Have we ever dozed off for a moment or two? This verse is probably convicting for most of us.

Eutychus was a young man sitting in a window, listening to Paul preach on and on into the late hours of the night. The name Eutychus means “fortunate” in Greek, yet what happened to him was quite unfortunate. This young man succumbed to his personal fatigue and fell into a deep sleep. Thayer understands “young man” as describing a man between the age of 24 and 40. The same term is used to describe Saul of Tarsus in Acts 7:58.

Paul was “long preaching” or as we might say, he was a very long-winded speaker. If Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, were to come back and visit us today, would it not be a great privilege and blessing to be able to sit and listen to him speak, even for several hours? “Paul, just keep on speaking. We want to hear more and more! And when you are done, let’s have a question and answer session! We are thrilled to hear the Word of God taught by you.” Hopefully this would be our attitude.

Eutychus, however, fell down from the third loft and was taken up dead. It does not say he was “taken up as though dead,” but that he was “taken up dead.” This means that he really died from this fall. When they picked him up he was dead. The one writing this account was Luke the physician who was qualified to know if someone had actually died. This story started out as very sad, but thankfully it had a good ending!

One can sympathize with the lad. A warm spring evening, a room filled with torches burning up the oxygen supply, a long-winded preacher going into the wee hours of the morning and probably long past the lad’s normal bedtime—all these factors conspired against the youth. He probably had taken refuge in the window to catch a breath of fresh air, fighting his drowsiness. That effort, however, brought disastrous results. He fell asleep, lost his perch, and tumbled from the third story to the ground below. This, of course, was not a laughing matter. The fall evidently killed him. It could only be viewed with humor retrospectively in light of its happy ending because through the apostle, God turned tragedy into joy!⁵

Acts 20:10

Paul interrupted his own Bible message, went down to where Eutychus landed, fell on him, embraced him (wrapped his arms around him) and spoke to all present, “Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him.” In other words, “Stop your commotion! This young man is alive (by the power of God which raised him from the dead).” The expression “his life is in him” was true by virtue of the fact that he was raised back to life by the Apostle; as soon as Paul fell upon the boy, his life was restored and thus Paul could make the pronouncement: “his life is in him.”

The word “trouble” means “to make a noise or uproar” (Thayer). In Bible times, when a person died, there would often be a noisy and tumultuous expression of grief, especially if, as in this case, a person died suddenly and unexpectedly. Paul was able to calm the congregation down by performing a stupendous miracle.

⁵Polhill, J. B., *Acts* (Vol. 26), p. 418), Broadman & Holman Publishers (1992).

Paul's method of raising this young man back to life is similar to what took place hundreds of years earlier in the days of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah "stretched himself upon the child three times" and prayed (1 Kings 17:21). Elisha "lay on the child... and the boy's body grew warm" (2 Kings 4:34-35).

Acts 20:11

Paul continued his communication with these saints and stayed in their company even to the break of day. As we might say today, "He pulled an all-nighter!" The fact that Paul went back up (back upstairs) seems to indicate that Eutychus fell down to a part of the house that was below the "upper room" where they had their meeting. We don't know all the details of the floor plan of this building. This verse also indicates that the breaking of bread took place following Paul's long message. According to F. F Bruce, there was "the eucharistic breaking of the bread" and also a "fellowship meal."⁶

Acts 20:12

Eutychus, who had died, was brought back to life, and the company of believers were greatly comforted. As the Amplified Bible states, "They took the boy [Eutychus] home alive, and were greatly comforted and encouraged." Some refer to this miraculous raising of the dead as a "resuscitation." This indicates that he was brought back to life only to die again on a future day, similar to what happened to Lazarus in John chapter 11. The problem with this "resuscitation" terminology is that today when a person is resuscitated, it means he did not truly die. Those who are really dead cannot be resuscitated. Eutychus, however, *was* truly dead. His experience of being raised back to life is different from a person with a near-death experience (such as nearly drowning) who is resuscitated and starts breathing again.

Being raised back to mortal life is different from the future resurrection of the saints. For example, the dead in Christ who are raised up from the dead at the rapture (1 Thess. 4:16) will be given glorified bodies, never to die again (1 Cor. 15:51-53).

In the Bible there are nine examples of people being raised from the dead:

Three were raised in Old Testament times:

1. Elijah raised the son of the Zarephath widow from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-22).
2. Elisha raised the son of the Shunammite woman from the dead (2 Kings 4:32-35).
3. A man was raised from the dead when his body touched Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13:20-21).

Three were raised by Jesus Christ during our Lord's public ministry:

4. Jesus raised the son of the widow of Nain from the dead (Luke 7:11-15).
5. Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead (Luke 8:41, 42, 49-55).
6. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44).

People were raised by the Apostles:

⁶F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 409.

7. When Christ sent the disciples out to preach, He told them to do four things: “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, **raise the dead**, cast out demons” (Matthew 10:8). We assume that they did what they were told and that some people were raised from the dead, but the Bible does not give specific examples. Since Judas was included in this group that was sent forth (v. 4), it is possible that he too raised someone from the dead.
8. Peter raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36-41).
9. Eutychus was raised from the dead by Paul (Acts 20:9,10).

There were and shall be three **unique cases** of apparent resurrections from the dead:

1. Many saints rose from the dead right after the resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 27:50-53).
2. The two witnesses will be killed and raised back to life (Revelation 11:7-12).
3. The Beast (Antichrist) will be healed of a deadly wound caused by a sword (Rev. 13:3,12,14).⁷

Eutychus, and most others listed here, were brought back to mortal life. Would we want this to happen us? Would we want to die, be brought back to life, only to discover that we must die a second time? This is what Eutychus and Lazarus and others experienced. The graves were split open when Christ died and later, after the resurrection, certain saints came forth from these graves and walked around Jerusalem. Dr. Whitcomb is of the opinion that they also were brought back to mortal life and all eventually died again, though the text in Matthew 27:52-53 does not give too many details. It was a supernatural demonstration by God to the whole world that something spectacular, or of cosmic significance, had happened. When Christ died the whole land was darkened and there was an earthquake. Moreover the veil of the temple was split from top to bottom, something the priests never forgot! It was as if God were saying, “Dear human race, pay attention; God is doing something very special related to the death and resurrection of Christ!”⁸

Saint Eutychus is the father of all who fall asleep in church! Luke probably had a smile on his face when he recorded these events.

Acts 20:13-14

Luke, the writer, is included in the pronoun “we.” Luke and others sailed to Assos, the appointed place where they would pick up Paul. It was a twenty-mile walk from the town of Troas to where Paul was to meet the ship. So after having preached all night long, Paul then went on foot for a

⁷For more detail on these unique cases, see <https://middletownbiblechurch.org/proph/litraised.pdf>

⁸Bible scholars are divided on the nature of this resurrection recorded in Matthew 27. Some believe they were brought back to life in mortal bodies, and others believe they were brought back to life in resurrected bodies. The passage does not specifically answer this question but perhaps gives some clues. Though the graves were opened when Christ died, yet these people did not come forth from the graves until after the resurrection (Matt. 27:52-53; compare 1 Corinthians 15:20). Christ rose again ahead of them. This seems to argue for a permanent resurrection in glorified bodies. Those who rose from the dead, in this case, may have been believers who had died somewhat recently and who could be recognized by family and friends who were still alive in Jerusalem. What an amazing miracle!

twenty-mile hike, perhaps using this alone time to commune with God. The physical stamina of Paul was nearly beyond comprehension. God provided amazing strength for His servant to carry out the ministry which was given to him. God's servants are to honor the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20), and God will provide whatever else is needed. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deut. 33:25).

From Assos they sailed to Mitylene, the chief city on the island of Lesbos, in the Aegean Sea.

Acts 20:15

The places mentioned in this verse were islands which were famous in ancient history for various events which took place. Luke was a careful historian. He apparently kept a journal of his travels. We can thank the Lord for the amazing attention Luke gave to historical details as he recorded an accurate record of Paul's journeys. Bible truth is anchored in historical fact and geographical places. It is quite unlike the Book of Mormon where many or most of the place names mentioned are spurious and do not correspond to any place on earth.

Acts 20:16-17

Paul eventually arrived at Miletus. He made a judgment call not to travel to Ephesus which was thirty miles inland. His reason was that he desired to be back in Jerusalem in time for the Feast of Pentecost. Pentecost was an ideal opportunity to present his love gift to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, and to testify of the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. The gift was sacrificially provided mostly by Gentile believers, showing their love for the Jerusalem saints. Paul's plan was to have a meeting in Miletus which would include certain men whom he had trained and taught in Ephesus at the school of Tyrannus. Paul sent a messenger to Ephesus to summon the elders to Miletus. They would meet him at this port city where they could talk and hear Paul give a beautiful summation of his ministry among them.

The term "church" was a corporate name and probably represented numerous house churches. There certainly was not one gigantic building called the church in Ephesus. Believers would often meet in homes, especially in times of persecution, disinheritance and poverty. Even today, in countries like China, believers must meet secretly in homes and not gather together in one magnificent building. It is interesting, however, that Luke refers to the "elders of the church" and not to the elders of the churches. There was one assembly in Ephesus, even if they met in multiple house churches. Indeed, all the believers in any given city constitute the church there locally.

In love and in wisdom, and with deep concern for his disciples, Paul gave a farewell message to the elders of the Ephesian assembly.⁹ "Of all the speeches that Luke recorded in *Acts*, this is the only one delivered to Christians."¹⁰ He thought he would probably never see these dear men again. Moreover, Ephesus was the key city in Asia and this church represented all the churches in that region.

⁹Every mature church in the New Testament had a plurality of elders (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:6; Titus 1:5, Acts 20:17-18). No assembly of a given city ever had just one elder/bishop, and they certainly never presided over multiple churches.

¹⁰Ron Merryman, *Verse by Verse Through Acts*, Vol. III, p. 76.

Acts 20:18

Paul reminded these men of his manner of life or testimony when he was with them. Paul knew that there already was and would be serious opposition and criticism of his life and ministry. Satan and demons were very active. Paul's powerful ministry in Ephesus had confounded the forces of darkness. Paul suffered greatly in this city. He was almost lynched by the mob at the great theater in the uprising instigated by Demetrius the silversmith. So Paul gave an official defense of his ministry, much like he did when he wrote 1 Thessalonians: "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblamably we behaved ourselves among you that believe" (1 Thess. 2:10).

Whether we realize it or not, people are watching us! They are watching how we react, how we say things, how we handle situations (especially money), etc. Everyone who is in the realm of spiritual darkness is, perhaps even subconsciously, looking for some excuse to discredit the servants and disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. May the Lord help us to learn from this and "walk in wisdom toward them that are without (those outside of Christ)"(Col.4:5).

Our testimony needs to be blameless, even as Daniel lived a blameless life; the only thing his enemies could find against him was his faithfulness to pray three times daily (Daniel 6). Church leaders must be blameless (1 Tim. 3:2). Thayer's definition of this term blameless is "not apprehended, that cannot be laid hold of; hence, that cannot be reprehended, not open to censure, irreproachable." Suppose an enemy wants to hit you over the head with an iron frying pan. He needs to grab or lay hold of the handle to do this. Hence, live in such a way that you do not give the enemy any handle to use against you. Paul exemplified this in his ministry and by his blameless life. The Ephesian elders knew how Paul had lived among them from the very first day he arrived.

Acts 20:19

The verb "serving" means to serve as a slave. Every true believer is a servant or slave of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1). He is our Master and our Lord, and He demands our full loyalty and our complete obedience.

"Serving the Lord **with all humility** [lowliness] of mind." We are not to exalt ourselves and reach for high things and high places. The way up is the way down. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6). "Everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:14). The Apostle Paul certainly had a right to be very boastful, in light of all the souls he had won and churches he had planted. Yet, he served with all humility of mind.

The humblest man who ever walked the earth was the One who for three-and-one-half years went everywhere in the Holy Land saying, "I am the Son of God!" "I and the Father are One!" How can someone be humble if he talks like that about himself? Christ was indeed "meek and lowly of heart" (Matthew 11:29). If He were not the Son of God, then He would deserve to be stoned by the Jews for blasphemy. Yet, if He really were the Son of God and refused to say so, then He would not have been humble. He would have been a liar. He was indeed humble and He spoke the truth about Himself.

Likewise, Paul always spoke the truth about himself. He never denied his exalted ministry as an

Apostle of Jesus Christ. He had marvelous privileges from God, yet he spoke about them **truthfully** and therefore humbly!

Humility of mind involves that heart attitude which esteems others better than oneself (Phil. 2:3). It is a mental attitude where the believer does not think of himself more highly than he ought to think (Rom. 12:3). Humility of mind is a mental attitude that one has so as to not consider himself to be something, when he knows that, apart from God and His grace, he is nothing (Gal. 6:3). A spiritual leader with true humility does not lord it over the flock, but lives as an example before God's people (1 Pet. 5:3).

Paul also served the Lord “**with many tears**” (compare 2 Cor. 2:4 and Phil. 3:18). How many of us go around weeping when we have the opportunity to speak the Word of truth? It is generally not acceptable in the Western world for men to go around weeping when they preach and teach the Word. In Bible times people did not have such inhibitions. When they were emotionally touched and moved, tears were the natural result. Our Lord Himself wept at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11) and wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). Paul had many tears as he went from place to place proclaiming the truth of Jesus, being greatly burdened for the lost. We should never fake tears. It is not helpful to try to do something that is not natural. ***Jeremiah was the weeping prophet; Paul was the weeping apostle.*** One of the problems of the modern church is that our eyes have been dry for too long. There is a place in God's service for true heartfelt emotion flowing from a heart of true concern for eternal realities. “The sower is to go forth weeping, bearing precious seed, watering the Word with his tears and prayers. Lost sinners and needy saints ever call for the deepest exercise of soul on the part of the true pastor.”¹¹

Paul also served God by enduring **many trials** (adversities, afflictions, troubles), including serious opposition from Jewish people. Paul's greatest enemies, sad to say, were God's chosen people. “As concerning the gospel,” Paul wrote in Romans, “they (the Jewish people) are enemies for your sakes” (Rom. 11:28). Yet, these same Jews were “beloved for the fathers' sakes, and for this reason Replacement Theology is not valid.”¹² God has a future plan for His people, even though during this present Church age they have been, for the most part, unbelieving and disobedient. Do the Jews deserve to have an exalted place in Christ's kingdom? Certainly not! Yet, before we talk about deserving anything, think about what we deserve! We deserve an eternal hell in the lake of fire. God has made a promise, a commitment to Israel from Genesis chapter 12 and following, certified by several covenants. God has committed Himself with an oath that He will restore that nation some day. They do not deserve anything, and neither do we, but God has a plan that He will accomplish. Paul knew this and he was determined to reach out to the Jews in spite of the fact that they were constantly harassing him and even trying to murder him. Amazing! He kept reaching out to people who were trying to destroy him. Paul loved even his enemies.

Acts 20:20

Paul kept back nothing that was profitable for the Ephesian saints. Since “all Scripture is profitable” (2 Tim. 3:16), it can be safely said that Paul never kept back any necessary Bible truth from them.

¹¹August Van Ryn, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 236.

¹²On Replacement Theology, see <https://middletownbiblechurch.org/reformed/ReplaTh.pdf>

The verb “kept back” (KJV) means “to draw back, to withdraw, to shrink from declaring.” The same verb is used in Acts 20:27, “For I have not **shunned** [shrank] to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” Paul was going to give to his Ephesian audience any truth that was profitable, needful, or to their advantage. He would not hold back any needed divine instruction.¹³

The implication seems to be that it was hard for Paul to teach certain things in God’s Word. An honest Bible teacher living today would probably admit that there are portions of the Bible that he would rather just skip over. Paul, however, refused to keep back needed truth from his students, ***no matter how hard it would be to teach or no matter how uncomfortable it might be to hear.***

Paul’s teaching was done publicly, not secretly. Where did Paul teach publicly? This instruction took place in the great synagogue of Ephesus for a period of three months (Acts 19:8). After he was thrown out of the synagogue he went to the school of Tyrannus where he taught for two years (Acts 19:9-10). This too was done publicly. We assume that anyone who wanted to come to these teaching sessions would be welcomed to listen to the Apostle Paul teach the whole counsel of God.

Paul supplemented his public ministry (synagogue and school) by going humbly from house to house in private ministry. If there were people hungry to hear the Word of God, Paul was willing to travel to homes and minister in such places.

All the while, Paul was supporting himself, perhaps every morning, by making tents with Aquila and Priscilla and perhaps others (Acts 20:34). He may have taught late in the morning, afternoons and even in the evenings. It was an amazing example of sacrificial ministry during his time in this city. It was hard work, the work of the ministry, and it was a labor of love.

Acts 20:21

Paul bore witness to both Jews and Greeks. The term “Greeks” refers to Gentiles because the majority of Gentiles in this part of the world at that time were Greek-speaking people. What did Paul testify to these people? “**Repentance** toward God, and **faith** toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” These terms mean the same thing from different perspectives. The grammar of this verse indicates that repentance and faith are one. There is one Greek article which governs both, closely linking them together. Literally it reads, “**the** toward God repentance **and** faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is known as the “Granville Sharp Rule” which states, “Two nouns connected by *kai* [the Greek conjunction usually translated “and”], the first with the article and the second without it, are by the article identified as one and the same individual or class.” The grammar indicates that repentance and faith are **two sides of the salvation coin**. It is interesting that in the rare occasions when faith and repentance are both mentioned, it is repentance that is mentioned first (Mark 1:15 being another example).

To be saved a person must repent and to be saved a person must believe. Sometimes in Scripture only the word “repent” is used to describe man’s responsibility in salvation (Luke 13:3,5; Acts

¹³Some Bible truths may be unprofitable to unprepared souls, that is, to those in a low spiritual state of soul. Such are not ready to take them in, and it could cause even more harm than good (compare Hebrews 5:11-14; 1 Cor. 3:1-3). Even our Lord said to His disciples, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). Later, they would be ready (verse 13).

17:30), and far more often only the word “believe” is used (Acts 16:31 and in numerous examples in the Gospel of John). If a person truly repents, then he has believed in Christ. If a person has truly believed on Christ, then he has repented. Repentance presents the negative side, which is seeing ourselves in the sight of a holy God as utterly sinful. Faith presents the positive side, which is receiving what God has provided to solve our sin problem through the merits of Jesus’ blood and His resurrection from the dead.

When the Philippian jailer asked what he must do to be saved (Acts 16:30), Paul did not mention repentance. He told him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31). Yet, genuine faith involves seeing oneself as a sinner who needs a Saviour. No one will receive Christ as Saviour if he does not think he needs a Saviour. In Acts 17:30 repentance only is mentioned, but faith is implied.¹⁴

H. A. Ironside explained repentance as follows:

Very often the real difficulty arises from a misapprehension of the meaning of repentance. There is no salvation without repentance, but it is important to see exactly what is meant by this term. It should not be confused with penitence, which is sorrow for sin; nor with penance, which is an effort to make some satisfaction for sin; nor yet with reformation, which is turning from sin. Repentance is a change of attitude toward sin, toward self, and toward God. The original word (in the Greek Testament) literally means “a change of mind.” This is not a mere intellectual change of viewpoint, however, but a complete reversal of attitude [a complete change of thinking about my sin and God’s gracious provision].

Now test yourself in this way. You once lived in sin and loved it. Do you now desire deliverance from it? You were once self-confident and trusting in your own fancied goodness. Do you now judge yourself as a sinner before God? You once sought to hide from God and rebelled against His authority. Do you now look up to Him, desiring to know Him, and to yield yourself to Him? If you can honestly say yes to these questions, you have repented. Your attitude is altogether different than what it once was.

You confess you are a sinner, unable to cleanse your own soul, and you are willing to be saved in God’s way. This is repentance. And remember, it is not the amount of repentance that counts: it is the fact that you turn from self to God [in your mind and in your thinking] that puts you in the place where His grace avails through Jesus Christ.

Strictly speaking, not one of us has ever repented enough. None of us has realized the enormity of our guilt as God sees it. But when we judge ourselves and trust the Saviour whom He has provided, we are saved through His merits. As recipients of His lovingkindness, repentance will be deepened and will continue day by day, as we learn more and more of His infinite worth and our own unworthiness.¹⁵

¹⁴For a detailed study on *Repentance*, see <https://middletownbiblechurch.org/salvatio/termsrep.htm>

¹⁵H. A. Ironside, *Full Assurance*, pp. 89-90.

Repentance is just the sick man's acknowledgment of his illness. It is simply the sinner recognizing his guilt and confessing his need of deliverance....(repentance) is judging oneself in the presence of God; turning right about-face, turning to God with a sincere, earnest desire to be completely delivered from sin. And when a man takes that attitude toward God and puts his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he finds salvation.¹⁶

C. H. Mackintosh also wrote the following on repentance:

Repentance involves the moral judgment of ourselves under the action of the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the discovery of our utter sinfulness, guilt and ruin, our hopeless bankruptcy, our undone condition. It expresses itself in these glowing words of Isaiah, "Woe is me; I am undone," and in that touching utterance of Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Repentance is an abiding necessity for the sinner, and the deeper it is the better. It is the ploughshare entering the soul and turning up the fallow ground. The ploughshare is not the seed, but the deeper the furrow, the stronger the root. We delight in a deep work of repentance in the soul. We fear there is far too little of it in what is called revival work. Men are so anxious to simplify the gospel and make salvation easy, that they fail to press upon the sinner's conscience the claims of truth and righteousness.

No doubt salvation is as free as the grace of God can make it. Moreover, it is all of God from first to last. God is its source, Christ its channel, the Holy Spirit its power of application and enjoyment. All this is blessedly true, but we must never forget that man is a responsible being, a guilty sinner commanded to repent and turn to God. It is not that repentance has any saving virtue in it. As well might we assert that the feelings of a drowning man could save him from drowning or that a man could make a fortune by a deed of bankruptcy filed against him. Salvation is wholly of grace; it is of the Lord in its every stage and every aspect. We cannot be too emphatic in the statement of all this, but at the same time we must remember that our blessed Lord and His apostles constantly urged upon men, both Jews and Gentiles, the solemn duty of repentance.¹⁷

Repentance is toward God because He is the One we have sinned against; He is the One we have offended. He is the One to whom we must be reconciled (2 Cor. 5:20).

Faith is toward the Lord Jesus Christ because we must put our faith and trust in Him and in Him alone (John 3:16; 20:31; Acts 16:30-31). He is God's only Saviour.

Acts 20:22-23

Paul did not know what would happen to him when he would reach Jerusalem, but he had received clear warnings from God the Holy Spirit that it would be a very difficult encounter, involving bonds (chains, imprisonment) and afflictions (tribulations, severe trials). These troubles were awaiting him

¹⁶H. A. Ironside, *Luke*, pp. 253-254.

¹⁷See <https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/mackintosh/Shrt/SHORTP10.html#a20>.

in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit did not tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem (in spite of the apparent contradiction in Acts 21:4), but warned him of the afflictions he would face there (Acts 21:11; 23:1; 11). This would be his Gethsemane (see Luke 14:26).

The translations are divided as to whether Paul is referring to being bound in the Holy Spirit (NIV, NASB, NET Bible, etc.) or to being bound in his [human] spirit [NKJB, Holman CSB, etc.). The Greek text does not settle the matter. The Amplified Bible straddles the fence and includes both ideas: “And now, compelled by the Spirit (Holy Spirit) and obligated by my convictions (human spirit), I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.” Though men hold different views, it seems that the Holy Spirit was leading and compelling Paul to go to Jerusalem, while at the same time warning him about the difficulties he would face when there (compare Act 21:11). Paul was not willingly and knowingly acting contrary to the Holy Spirit’s guidance. He was convinced that God wanted him to go to Jerusalem, and he was willing to obey in spite of hardships.

“Paul knew that he would be bound in body at Jerusalem. He already felt himself bound in mind, bound by a sense of obligation, impelled by a feeling of duty.”¹⁸

Acts 20:24

The difficulties he would face would not hinder Paul from running the race and accomplishing the ministry which God had given to him. Even when Paul was first converted, he was told that he must suffer great things for Jesus’ sake (Acts 9:16). Paul speaks of “the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus.” In Galatians 1:1,3 we learn that this apostolic ministry **was not from men nor through man**. This is clear evidence for the absolute deity of our Saviour. It was God who gave Paul this ministry and in this passage the God who gave Paul this ministry is identified as “the Lord Jesus.”

How many of us personally have set a goal to finish the course that God has laid before us? Paul said, “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14). Paul was moving forward; he was not there yet, but he was following and pursuing that goal which God had set before him.

Paul later wrote his last epistle from a dungeon prison where he penned these words, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). He truly did finish his race with joy. Consider how Olympian athletes train, discipline themselves and compete, giving everything they have to possibly win the gold, which is only a temporary prize. Yet, as believers we run the race to obtain a reward at the Bema Seat of Christ for faithfulness to the commission that He has entrusted to us. Finish the course! Set the goal of finishing God’s plan for you! Discipline yourself to achieve that goal, all for the glory of Christ.

Someone might ask, “What’s the use of suffering in order to gain a crown if I end up just casting it down before Jesus?” (see Revelation 4:10). The obvious answer is so that we will have something to present to our Lord. If it is precious to the Lord Jesus, then it should be to us as well.

¹⁸David Thomas, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 342.

Paul was not moved by or upset by the fiery trials awaiting him at Jerusalem. He did not place a high value on his own life, and thus he was willing to surrender and sacrifice his life, if need be, for the sake of the gospel. “But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself” (NASB 1995). He was not overly concerned about self-preservation. He would joyfully run the race and fulfill His God-given mission at any cost. As we know, his life did in fact end in martyrdom in Rome where he was beheaded for the sake of the gospel. His only concern was that Christ might be magnified, whether by life or by death (Phil. 1:20).

“The gospel of the grace of God” is a perfect description of the good news for this present age. The salvation provided for and offered to all men is characterized by grace, God’s amazing kindness to those who deserve none of it (Titus 2:11). The gospel of God’s grace is carefully explained in Paul’s epistles, especially Romans and Galatians. The “gospel of the kingdom” was the good news announced to the Jews when the kingdom was “at hand” (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 4:23; 9:35; 10:7). This gospel was rejected by the Jewish people, and the kingdom was postponed. The gospel of the kingdom will again be proclaimed in the future to all nations when the King’s coming to earth will be at hand (Matt. 24:14). The message contained in the gospel of the grace of God may be summarized in Ephesians 2:8-9.

Acts 20:25

Paul honestly believed that these dear believers would never see his face again. However, see the discussion under Acts 20:38.

A major facet of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus involved “preaching the kingdom of God” (compare Acts 8:12; 19:8). The Bible student needs to be careful here not to jump to wrong conclusions. The doctrine of the kingdom is very involved and must be taught carefully and Biblically. For example, the 13th chapter of Matthew is devoted to the “mysteries of the kingdom.” These were truths which had not been revealed in Old Testament times. These truths were revealed to the disciples to help them understand what would take place in the period of time between the two advents of Christ, in light of the fact that the Jews were in the process of rejecting their King.

To assume, for example, that Paul’s main thrust of his kingdom preaching was to teach some kind of “kingdom now” theology finds no basis in Scripture. We are told here that Paul preached about the kingdom, but we are not told what the content of his teaching was. It must have been in accord with God’s revealed truth about the kingdom, based on Old Testament Scripture which was later further explained and augmented by New Testament revelation.

The reader is referred to two excellent studies on the kingdom: 1) The classic and masterful volume by Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*; 2) The newer work by Andy Woods, *The Future Kingdom*. If one could master the contents of these two volumes he would have good insight into what Biblical preaching of the kingdom should involve.

McClain writes as follows:

The argument advanced by some, that since the apostles throughout the Acts period preached “the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8), therefore the Kingdom must have already been established, is not very good logic. Most of us preach and teach many things in the Christian faith which are not yet realized in

experience. No sensible person would argue that because the apostles continually preached the resurrection of the dead, therefore, it must have already taken place.¹⁹

The book of Acts makes it clear that the kingdom was yet future (Acts 1:6-7; 14:22). Whatever Paul taught regarding the kingdom must be in total harmony with what Paul expounded in the letter to the Ephesians and must not contradict the Church truths and the mystery truths which that epistle sets forth.

Acts 20:26-27

What does it mean to be “pure (unstained by guilt, innocent) from the blood of all men”? This is based on what God had told Ezekiel hundreds of years earlier. In Ezekiel 3:18 God said to His prophet: “When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.” This is expanded in Ezekiel 33:1-6. Men need to be warned. Men need to be told the truth. God’s Word must be communicated. The whole counsel of God needs to be declared. If the prophet sounds the warning, and the people refuse to respond to God’s message, then their blood will be upon the people, but the prophet will be pure from the blood of all men. The people bear full responsibility before God for failing to act upon God’s message which had been faithfully delivered to them. If the prophet fails to give the warning and fails to communicate God’s message, then the blood will be upon the prophet for his failure to communicate God’s truth and God’s warnings.

One application of this today involves all those who claim to be ministers of Jesus Christ. How many of them warn people about future judgment and hell for those who reject Jesus Christ? There are a great number of people in pulpits today who do not even believe in hell or eternal punishment. Woe unto them! At the judgment they will bear the more severe judgment (compare James 3:1).

We must not shrink from our responsibilities to herald God’s truth. May we not withdraw ourselves from the seriousness of confrontation with people, in spite of unpleasant consequences that may come our way.²⁰ Jeremiah was a very tender person at heart. He did not enjoy being attacked, nor do most of us. He was about to quit! “Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His Name” (Jer. 20:9). Yet God renewed his assignment and put a fire in his heart to carry out that assignment (Jer. 20:9).

What is the whole counsel of God? It is everything that God has revealed in the only Book He has ever written—the Bible! Paul was to preach it and teach it and warn people about the consequences of not obeying the truth. This shows how seriously Paul took the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus. Disciples were not only to be made but they were also to be taught “all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20).

The verb “shunned” (KJV) means “to draw back, to withdraw, to shrink from declaring.” The same verb was used in Acts 20:20 (“kept back”). The same verb is used in Hebrews 10:38 of the potential

¹⁹Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, pp. 424-426.

²⁰An example of the need to confront gainsayers with the truth is found in Titus 1:9-11.

apostate: “If any man **draw back**, My soul shall have no pleasure in him.” According to Thayer, “all the counsel” means “all the contents of the divine plan,” and such things are revealed on the pages of Holy Scripture.

To illustrate the importance of declaring the whole counsel of God, consider the following from C. H. Mackintosh:

Such is the order of events, as set forth, with all possible clearness, on the pages of inspiration. We have given a brief summary of them in connection with the line of truth on which we have been dwelling — a line, as we are fully aware, by no means popular; but we dare not withhold it on that account. Our business is to declare the whole counsel of God, not to seek popularity. We do not expect the truth of God to be popular in Christendom; so far from this, we have been seeking to prove that just as Israel abandoned the truth which they were responsible to maintain, so the professing church has let slip all those great truths which characterize the Christianity of the New Testament. And we may assure the reader that our one object in pursuing this line of argument is to arouse the hearts of all true Christians to a sense of the value of those truths, and of their responsibility not only to receive them, but to seek a fuller realization and a bolder confession of them. We long to see a band of men raised up, in these closing hours of the church’s earthly history, who shall go forth, in true spiritual power, and proclaim, with unction and energy — the long-forgotten truths of the gospel of God. May God, in His great mercy to His people, raise up such and send them forth. May the Lord Jesus knock louder and louder, at the door, so that many may hear and open to Him, according to the desire of His loving heart, and taste the blessedness of deep personal communion with Himself, while waiting for His coming.²¹

Acts 20:28

The leaders of the assembly, before taking heed to the flock, are to first **take heed to themselves**. Each leader must examine his own heart and life to make sure that there is nothing between his soul and the Saviour. Only then is he in the place to oversee the affairs of the assembly. A man had better **oversee himself** before he aspires to exercise oversight in the house of God. “**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” (1 Tim. 4:16). Consider when there is an emergency in an airplane due to a lack of oxygen. Before you can help anyone else, you must first “save yourself” by putting on the oxygen mask. Only then can you seek to be of help to others. The verb “take heed” means to “beware, be on guard, give attention.” It is used frequently in the New Testament (see Matthew 7:17; 10:17; 16:6 and Luke 20:46).

In this verse, the terms “elder” and “bishop” (overseer) are describing the same local church leader. Paul was speaking to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:17). He told them that the Holy Spirit had made them overseers (compare “bishops” in Phil. 1:1). These men were also told that they were responsible to feed (shepherd, pastor) the church of God (God’s flock, see verse 29). Elders are to

²¹C. H. Mackintosh, *Notes on Deuteronomy*; this quotation is found in his comments under Deuteronomy chapter 6.

watch over the flock as overseers and they are to feed the flock as faithful shepherds.

The Holy Spirit made them overseers or **set them** as overseers. The same verb is used in 1 Corinthians 12:28 speaking of God giving gifted men to the assembly: “And **God hath set** some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers...” Compare Ephesians 4:11. The overseers are gifted men, able and equipped to feed (shepherd, pastor) the flock of God.²² This term “feed” (KJV) means to act as a shepherd, to pastor. It is also used in John 21:16 where the Lord said to Peter, “Feed My sheep” and in 1 Peter 5:2, “Feed [shepherd] the flock of God.” This is the responsibility of Christ’s undershepherds, Christ being the chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). Paul’s farewell to these elders was similar to Christ’s words to Peter in John 21, where Peter was told, “Feed My sheep,” and “Tend to My lambs.” How tragic when so-called spiritual leaders are found **fleeing** God’s flock instead of **feeding** it. Woe unto them!

Consider this part of our verse: “To feed the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood.” The pronouns “He” and “His” refer back to “God.” The Church of God has been purchased with God’s own blood. This is a powerful statement. The New Testament has many statements about the effectiveness and the essential function of the blood of Jesus. We are redeemed through His blood (Eph. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19). We have propitiation through faith in His blood to pay for sins committed beforehand, from Adam and Eve and onward (Rom. 3:25).

Since “God” is the obvious antecedent of these pronouns, this raises a theological question. How can God have blood? God Himself does not have a physical body and does not have blood. “God is a spirit” (John 4:24). The answer, of course, is that God had blood soon after He was conceived in the womb of Mary. That is when God became flesh, and took upon Himself a human nature, including a body with blood in it. This was the reason for the incarnation, so that He could be the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world, and to be able to shed His blood on the cross. The One who shed His blood was God incarnate. God does not have blood, but the God-Man assumed a human body and He did have blood, and He shed that blood for us. His sacrifice was effective and sufficient for all the sins which have ever been committed or ever shall be in the history of the world.²³

Since the blood of God here refers to the blood of Jesus Christ, this verse is one of hundreds which clearly point to the deity of Christ.

²²There is one flock of God, Christ’s flock (John 10:16). The overseers/elders in Ephesus were responsible for the flock of God which was in their city, but the “one flock” was broader than simply the city of Ephesus; it existed worldwide, wherever believers existed. Hence the wording in 1 Peter 5:2, “Shepherd the flock of God **which is among you.**” There was only one flock, yet some of the sheep were located in Ephesus. A pastor is gifted (Eph. 4:11) to feed God’s flock wherever he might be.

²³For a helpful study on the meaning and theological implications of God’s blood, see the article by James Ventilato: https://middletownbiblechurch.org/problemv/Act20_28.pdf. For a study by the same author which speaks at length on the Theanthropic Person of Christ, see <https://www.middletownbiblechurch.org/deithjv/intro.pdf>.

Acts 20:29

“For I know this.” Did God reveal something special to Paul or was he just able to foresee a problem? Sometimes in our ministries we can see before our very eyes certain problems coming.

Notice the warning: “Grievous wolves shall enter in among you.” They will not spare the flock. Of course, these are figures of speech. Believers are described under the metaphor of sheep (John 10:27). The Lord Jesus is the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4), and He has “undershepherds” called pastors. The Bible has much to say about people who are wolves (Jer. 5:6; Ezekiel 22:27; Hab. 1:8). In Matthew 7:15 Jesus told us about false prophets who inwardly are ravening wolves. They are in sheep’s clothing and they look so good, but they are actually vicious wolves. In John 10:12, the Lord spoke of a wolf who hunts sheep that are without a shepherd.

Here in this verse the wolves are false teachers seeking to destroy God’s Church. Happy and blessed is the servant of the Lord who has discernment to see who is a wolf and who is not. Paul honestly spoke of the potential disasters which God’s sheep would face. They would come from without and would enter the assembly, seeking to do harm to God’s people. False teachers have plagued God’s Church in every century of church history.

Acts 20:30

False teachers would even arise from within the assembly. Thus, there would be a major problem from **without** (v. 29), referring to false teachers and false professors outside of the assembly, and there would be a major problem from **within** (v. 30), referring to those within the assembly who would propagate errors (whether true believers or not). Outsiders would come in to try to destroy the flock, but even from among themselves men would arise and speak perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. They would appear to be faithful believers, but in time their true colors would show. They would be traitors to the cause of Christ. Even among the Lord’s twelve disciples, there was Judas, the traitor. While Paul was among them, they were safe and protected from false doctrine, but after Paul departed from Ephesus they would be in danger. The wolves were ready to devour the flock, not sparing any of the sheep.

As you read Paul’s letters to Timothy you will see the fulfillment of these warnings. “Charge some that they teach no other (different, heterodox) doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:3). Paul warned Timothy about these false doctrines which were sweeping through that part of the world. In 2 Timothy 1:15 Paul makes the astounding statement that “all they which are in Asia be turned away from me” (2 Tim. 1:15). This does not mean that these people lost their salvation; it must mean that they did not identify any longer with Paul’s approach to ministry, his distinctive doctrines (Church truths, mystery truths, positional truth, etc.), his dedication to truth, and his way of confronting people who were destroying God’s Word and compromising His Word. Something had happened which broke the original unity and bond of love and commitment that these believers once had.

Paul even warned Timothy and the Ephesian believers of specific individuals who were false teachers or troublemakers: Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20), Phygellus and Hermogenes (2 Tim. 1:15), Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:17), and Alexander (2 Tim. 4:14). Paul, writing to Timothy, also gave general warnings about evil men and false teachers without mentioning names (1 Tim. 1:3-4; 4:1-3; 6:3-5; 6:21; 2 Tim. 3:1-9,13; 4:3-4).

To find out how badly things eventually turned out in Ephesus, read Jesus' letter to the church in Ephesus found in Revelation chapter 2. They still held to the doctrines and they still had high moral standards, but *they had left their first love* (Rev. 2:4). A very serious warning was given to them if they failed to repent and failed to do the first works (Rev. 2:5). These believers were on the verge of final disaster.

Consider Asia today. How many vibrant churches are there in Turkey today? Almost none, and that has been true for hundreds of years in this Muslim dominated area. The light these churches once had has been almost entirely extinguished.

Acts 20:31

Paul urged his friends to “watch.” The term means to stay awake (Matt. 26:38,40,41), and in this passage it means “watch, give strict attention to, be cautious, be vigilant.” They were to watch out for the wolves which Paul had just warned them about.

Paul warned the Ephesians believers again and again, night and day, during the space of three years. His love and burden for the well-being of these people was evidenced by his tears (see verse 19).

To him [Paul] eternal things were so real that, when he saw people turning coldly away from them, it almost broke his heart, and he wept over them; and then as he entered into the homes of God's saints and saw the sorrows that many of them had to endure—bereavement, sickness, penury, and persecution—he was no unsympathetic onlooker. He could weep with those who wept and rejoice with those who rejoiced.²⁴

Paul never stopped admonishing them. He warned them without ceasing. Sometimes people get weary of being warned all the time, until the circumstances change and they look back and say, “Thank you, Lord, for that warning I received years ago. I really needed that.” If a father really loves his child, he will alert him about the dangers he might face.

The person who clearly sees a danger and fails to warn is not exhibiting love, but hatred. Therefore, a failure to warn God's people is due to one of two things: 1) a lack of love 2) a failure to discern dangers. There is a desperate need for warning in our pulpits today. God forbid that we should be timid sentinels. The hands of many pastors are already dripping with blood (Ezek. 33:6; cf. Acts 20:26-27). It is not easy to give warning, but it is necessary. Preventive medicine may not be pleasant but it may save us from the operating table or the grave! God's people need a strong dose of warning now so that they might amend their lives in favor of the Word of God.

Warning is an essential element in indoctrination, and thus in the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:20). To merely teach God's people “positive” truth without giving warnings is to fatten the sheep for the wolves who will not spare the flock. A continuous teaching and warning ministry is essential so that we might present every man mature in Christ Jesus (Col. 1:28). It would be profitable for us to read through the Pastoral Epistles to notice the numerous warnings given to Timothy and Titus. The example of our Lord Jesus is also instructive (Matthew 7:15-20; 16:6-12;

²⁴H. A. Ironside, *Acts*, pp. 489-480.

24:4-5; Luke 12:1,15; compare Paul in Phil. 3:2).

The warnings given must be factual, specific, relevant and personal. Error must be exposed. Unbiblical and slanted ways of thinking must be corrected. Sin must be dealt with. As we are living in perilous times with doctrines of demons on every hand, may God raise up many faithful men who will warn night and day with tears!

And yet, there is danger even in all of this! Warning apart from edification and encouragement and faithful Bible teaching is a disaster! The sheep will die—not from the wolves but from starvation! Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works—exhorting one another and encouraging one another and edifying one another—and so much the more as we see the day approaching (Heb. 10:24-25; Col. 3:16; Eph. 4:29; 1 Thess. 5:14).

Acts 20:32

Paul did not give up on these beloved Ephesians. He was not in total despair because God knows what He is doing, and Paul commended them to the Almighty. Though not all interpreters would agree, the grammatical structure of this sentence appears to be a chiasmus or inverted parallelism. It was God who was able to give them an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. It was the Word of His grace what was able to build them up.

- A) I commend you to God
- B) [I commend you] to the word of His grace
- B) which is able to build you up (compare Jude 20)
- A) [Who is able] to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

The “word of His grace” indicates that it is from God’s Word that we learn all about God’s multifaceted grace. The more we study the Scriptures with an open heart, the more we will grow in the understanding of God’s grace (2 Pet. 3:18). It is pure “grace” that gives all believers the absolute certainty of their “inheritance.” This would include all things that we have in Christ who is the Heir of all things, and we are coheirs with Him (Rom. 8:17). This inheritance is by grace and not by works. It is not gained or earned by any sort of super spirituality, but it is the birthright of every child of God (see Acts 26:18).²⁵

The saints, God’s set apart ones, have an inheritance “incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4). “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet [fit] to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12).

Acts 20:33

Paul now wanted to remind them of something which he puts in a footnote, as it were: “I have

²⁵Contrast this inheritance by grace with the teaching of the “free grace movement.” They believe that only faithful, spiritual Christians earn the right to be coheirs with Christ, and that unfaithful Christians fall short of this. This teaching makes the inheritance something earned by works, not something received by grace.

coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel." Obviously Paul had been accused of being greedy and rapacious. The accusations were totally false. It is interesting to compare the words of Samuel centuries earlier (1 Sam. 12:3).

It is sad to think about how many so-called Christian ministries are led by men who desire to enrich themselves at the expense of people of whom they take advantage. Many of these "Christian leaders" live in luxurious multimillion dollar homes as they have preyed upon the wallets and purses of undiscerning people.

Acts 20:34

Paul not only raised money to support himself, but also to help his coworkers. These coworkers with Paul were heading back to Jerusalem laden with gold and silver, that is, carrying the offerings from all these churches. We can understand how Paul could easily be accused of being in it for the money. How we need to be very careful about the way in which money is handled in the local church or in one's own personal life. When men get disqualified from the ministry, it is usually due to sexual sin, the mishandling of money, or pride.

"These hands have ministered to my necessities." Paul did not use other people's monies to support himself and he generously helped others from his own funds. He did not use the fruit of his hands for self-will or fleshly desires, but for necessities.

Acts 20:35

The term "laboring" indicates hard work to the point of weariness and exhaustion.

Supporting the weak [those without strength, powerless] is further expounded by Paul in Ephesians 4:28: "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." Paul practiced what he preached. This was not a Pauline mandate as to how the government is to operate in the redistribution of wealth. Paul's giving was personal, individual, and voluntary, as unto the Lord.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive." We do not find these exact words in the gospel accounts but we find similar statements to them in the gospels. One example would be Luke 6:38, "Give and it shall be given unto you...." Not all of Jesus' statements are found in the four gospels (compare John 21:25). There are statements that our Lord made that were widely known even though they were not recorded in the sacred record of Scripture. God gave us an inspired, inerrant record of all that God wanted to be permanently preserved in written form, but it only contains a very small fraction of all that our Lord taught and said. Yet, this particular proverb, spoken by Jesus, had been passed down verbally by those who heard the Lord, and Paul and his audience were well aware of it. "*Agrapha*" [literally, "not written"] is a term used to describe sayings of Jesus which are not recorded in the four gospels. All that God has recorded in the Holy Scriptures is totally sufficient for our faith and walk (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Holy Spirit, through inspiration, led Luke to record this particular saying of our Lord Jesus, making it now a genuine part of the Holy Scriptures.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive." This truth is perfectly exemplified and embodied in the Person of the Lord Jesus, the Incarnate Divine Giver (Phil. 2:5-8; 2 Cor. 8:9).

Acts 20:36-37

Paul got on his knees and prayed with these brethren. It's a good reminder that when we must bid farewell to fellow believers, it is always appropriate to have a time of prayer. Here is the example of prayer on our knees (see also Acts 9:40; 21:5; Eph. 3:14; Luke 22:41). Elsewhere we have other postures in prayer: standing (Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11,13); face down on the ground (Matt. 26:39, Mark 14:35); not looking up to heaven (Luke 18:13); looking up to heaven (John 17:1; 11:41; Mark 6:41; 7:34); lifting up holy hands (1 Tim. 2:8), etc.

They fell on Paul's neck and kissed him. In our culture we would never do such a thing to our teacher and spiritual leader. Times have changed. We do not normally show such demonstrative forms of expression. Yet, in Paul's day people openly expressed their love in ways that perhaps we would hesitate to do today. This verse shows a blend of love and sorrow—love, because of how much Paul meant to them, and sorrow (weeping) due to the fact that Paul was bidding them farewell. “If saying *goodbye* was such a moving emotional moment, what will it be when we say *hello* in heaven?”²⁶

“Falling on Paul's neck” might sound a bit dangerous, but it means they were embracing him with deep affection. The same expression is used in Luke 15:20 of the repentant prodigal son being embraced by his father. Another example is Joseph with Jacob in Genesis 46:29. Paul had been kneeling in prayer and he was apparently embraced in that same position. It's difficult to fall on someone's neck if they are standing.

Acts 20:38

The elders were **sorrowful**, experiencing intense emotional pain in parting from their beloved spiritual leader. The same Greek word is used of literal pain and torment in Luke 16:24. These elders seemed more occupied with the Lord's servant than with what the Lord's servant divinely revealed to them, especially concerning the approaching ravage of the church (Acts 20:29-31). Such a departure from the truth was actually fulfilled just a few decades later as described by the risen Lord Himself in His letter to the Ephesians (Rev. 2:1-7). While not depreciating their deep affection for the Apostle, we might wish they had been more concerned about the Apostle's serious warnings.

This was, from Paul's perspective, a final farewell. Paul did not think he would see these people again, and they were very dear to his heart. However, we have evidence that Paul showed up here again. In his last letter to Timothy, Paul mentions that he had been released from Rome and went back to this region again because he left Trophimus sick **at Miletus** (2 Tim. 4:20), which is the same place name used in Acts 20:15 and 17. Paul did not know exactly what his future would hold, but at this point he did not think he would ever return to this place. Only God knew the exact details of his future travels, as He does for each of us.

“Farewell Ephesus! Farewell Ephesian pastors and leaders! Farewell Asia! Farewell Greek speaking world!” After this Paul would go to Jerusalem, then head to Rome, that is, to the Western Latin-speaking world. After Rome he was hoping to go to Spain (Rom. 15:24). “It's up to you now

²⁶Ron Merryman, *Verse by Verse Through Acts*, Volume 3, p. 83.

to take care of the sheep and to guard them against the wolves.” They would not have Paul to help them, but they would not need Paul because they had God to take care of them. As their spiritual father under Christ, Paul entrusted them to God Himself and to the Word of His grace. Farewell! Paul would be gone, but the Lord Jesus would be with them even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

With tender care and compassion, they accompanied Paul right to his ship for their final farewell.

* * * * *

In conclusion, consider Albert Barnes’ summary statement regarding Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesian elders:

The discourse [in Acts 20] is one of the most tender, affectionate, and eloquent which is anywhere to be found. It is strikingly descriptive of the apostle’s manner of life while with them; evinces his deep concern for their welfare; is full of tender and kind admonition; expresses the firm purpose of his soul to live to the glory of God, and his expectation to be persecuted still; and is a most affectionate and solemn farewell. No man can read it without being convinced that it came from a heart full of love and kindness; and that it evinces a great and noble purpose to be entirely employed in one great aim and object—the promotion of the glory of God, in the face of danger and of death.²⁷

²⁷Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes*, Acts/Romans, p. 290.