

Acts 20:13-32 ~ Teacher's Lesson Miletus Pastor's Conference

Review:

Paul was on the last leg of his 3rd missionary journey, sailing along the western coast of Turkey toward Jerusalem.

Geography:

- a) From the mainland city of Troas in NW Turkey Paul went by land to the Turkish port city of Assos, 30 miles SE of Troas. Paul then sailed on the Aegean Sea, down along the coastline of Western Turkey.
- b) From Assos he sailed due south to the island city of Mitylene (a favorite Roman holiday resort).¹
- c) From Mitylene he sailed south to the island of Chios (birthplace of Homer).²
- d) From Chios he sailed southeast, past the mainland port city of Ephesus, to the island of Samos (birthplace of Pythagoras).³
- e) From Samos he sailed to the mainland port city of Miletus in Turkey (30 miles south of Ephesus).

****1. **Paul spent three years in Ephesus (20:32) and had many friends there, yet he bypassed Ephesus (20:13-16). Why?** He was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem and did not want to spend more time in Asia.

******Big Picture: What warning did Paul have for the Ephesian elders (20:17-32)?** The essence of what Paul said was to pay careful attention to both themselves and the church because fierce wolves were coming who could potentially destroy the church.

Church History: Church history could be fairly well summarized by Paul's prediction: over and over again savage wolves from both outside and inside the church have attempted to destroy the church (and sometimes they succeed).

2. Review: Based on 20:17, who was at this Miletus meeting? Paul asked the Ephesian elders to travel 30 miles from Ephesus to Miletus (20:17). No one was there except elders.

3. Why did Paul meet with the elders but not the pastors (20:17)? Unlike today, in the New Testament, every elder was a pastor and every pastor was an elder. There was no difference. They were synonymous terms. In fact, the New Testament only once refers to church leaders as pastors; it usually calls them elders.

¹ *New Bible Dictionary*, 785.

² *ESV Study Bible*, 2129.

³ *Ibid.*, 2129.

Pastor = Elder: It is common today to refer to a full-time elder as a pastor, and to refer to a bi-vocational elder as a pastor. **Joke:** Pastors are paid to be good whereas elders are good for nothing.

No Hierarchy: No matter what you call them, is unbiblical for full-time elders to have hierarchical authority over bi-vocational elders. Furthermore, in the New Testament there is no such thing as a senior or lead pastor.

Plurality: In 20:17, Luke made reference to the elders (plural) of the “the church” (singular). In the New Testament, there is technically no such thing as “the” pastor of one church.⁴

******What can we learn about Paul’s ministry from 20:18b-21?** Paul’s ministry was characterized by: **1)** service to the Lord, **2)** humility, **3)** tears and trials from “the Jews”, **4)** boldness in declaring all that was profitable, **5)** teaching both publically and from house to house,⁵ and **6)** involved evangelism to both Jews and Gentiles.

4. Why did Paul give all this information about himself (20:18b-21)? See *1 Corinthians 11:1, Philipians 4:9*. He obviously offered himself up as an example for them to follow.

ESV **1 Corinthians 11:1** Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

ESV **Philipians 4:9** What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things . . .

Application: *Where are you in this process? Would you offer yourself as an example for others to follow? Are you imitating Paul?*

5. Based on 20:18b-21, what should a church look for when choosing an elder? An elder should be a man who **1)** understands that he is serving the Lord by leading the church,** **2)** should be humble and not puffed up or haughty*, **3)** should minister despite tears and trials, **4)** should not shrink from teaching the church everything that is profitable, and **5)** should be active in evangelism.**

*ESV **1 Timothy 3:6** He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

ESV **2 Timothy 4:5 As for you . . . do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

******Based on 20:22-24, what did Paul expect to happen in Jerusalem?** He expected imprisonment and affliction.

⁴ A small church may only have one person qualified to be an elder. Ideally, however, each church should have a plurality. Perhaps this could be achieved by networking with other churches.

⁵ Kistemaker feels this is “undoubtedly” a reference to house churches, 726.

ESV **Acts 9:15-16** [Speaking to Ananias about Paul, Jesus said:] “. . . he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

Mysterious Ways: God called Paul to do missions, yet did not always shield Paul from persecution. The Lord moves in mysterious ways.

6. What was Paul’s attitude toward preserving his own life (20:24)? Paul’s interest was to fulfill the ministry God had given him, not in preserving his life at any cost. Paul’s attitude was one of Christian maturity. He wanted to please Jesus more than he wanted to live.

Application: Paul’s attitude (20:24) is a mature attitude. *Is 20:24 true of your life? Is that your attitude? Young soldiers are regularly called upon to die for their country; should we not be willing to die for our Lord?*

******7. Based on 20:25-27, why did Paul have a clear conscience about never going back to Ephesus?** See *Ezekiel 33:2-6*. During the two years he was in Ephesus, Paul did not hold back from teaching them the whole council of God.

ESV **Ezekiel 33:2-6** . . . If . . . the people . . . take a man . . . and make him their watchman, and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people, then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head . . . But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them . . . his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.

Expository Teaching: Church leaders are responsible to teach God’s people the whole council of God (20:27). They are not to shrink back from declaring anything that is profitable. The best way for an elder to teach the whole council of God (20:27) is to systematically teach through the Bible in an expository manner (word by word, verse by verse, paragraph by paragraph, chapter by chapter, and book by book). Feeding a church a steady diet of topical teachings is like living off a diet of dessert!

8. What reason did Paul give the elders to pay attention to and continually admonish the flock (20:28-31)? It is because savage wolves were sure to come who would seek to destroy the flock.

9. What is part of an elder’s job description, based on 20:28-31? An elder is **1)** to pay attention to the flock, **2)** to be alert for wolves, and **3)** to continually and passionately (with tears) admonish the church.

10. What synonym for “elders” did Paul use in 20:28? Paul referred to the elders as overseers.⁶ As with the word “pastor”, every elder is an overseer and every overseer is an elder. Furthermore, in the New Testament there was no pyramid of hierarchy.

⁶ The KJV has “bishops”.

Word Study: “overseer” (20:28) is from *episkopos*; *epi* = over and *skopos* = to look (scope). It has the idea of being a guardian.⁷ An elder is someone entrusted with spiritual oversight.

Pastor: Paul told the overseers to “care for” the church; “care for” is from *poimaino*, the verbal form of the noun “pastor” (shepherd). Elder and overseer are synonymous terms; they are to “pastor” (verb) the flock.

Priest: One leadership position absolutely not present in the New Testament is that of priest.

Based on 20:28, who ultimately determines which men serve as elders? It is the Holy Spirit who makes men qualified to serve as overseers.

11. How does the Spirit’s role in elder selection (20:28) fit with 1 Timothy 3:1ff? The Holy Spirit prepares a man to be an elder. It is the church’s duty to recognize such men as elders.

12. What in 20:28 indicates that Paul understood Jesus to be God? Paul made reference to the church of God which He (Jesus) purchased with His own blood: Jehovah-Jireh is also Jehovah-Jesus. Although the Bible clearly teaches the deity of Christ, this may not be the best verse to prove it. The Greek may be understood to say that God the Father purchased the church with the blood of his own (son, Jesus).

13. What in 20:28 indicates who Jesus died for? Jesus shed his blood for “the church”. This is called limited atonement. If Jesus died for all the sins of all people, then everyone would go to heaven (yet the Bible clearly teaches that not everyone will go to heaven). Therefore, everyone except heretics limits the atonement in some way. Either you limit how many people Jesus died for (all the sins of some people) or you limit how many sins Jesus died for (some of the sins⁸ of all people).

******14. Review: What did Paul warn about in 20:29-30?** See *Matthew 7:15*. He warned that savage wolves (spiritually speaking) would attack the church, and that even some elders would turn bad.

ESV Matthew 7:15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Outside the church are wolves such as Nero, Domitian, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, evolutionists, evolutionists, and secularists. Inside the church are wolves in sheep’s clothing, such as Joseph Smith, Charles Taze Russell, Rob Bell, Benny Hinn, Creflo Dollar, Joel Osteen, and theological liberals.

Insight: This does not mean that every church has at least one elder who is a wolf. What it means is that we need to be alert to the fact that from time to time some elders do go bad. There is no shortage men who would qualify as a modern-day Judas.

⁷ Marshall, 352.

⁸ It is commonly said that the one sin Jesus did not die for is the sin of unbelief.

Going back to 20:28, what was Paul's remedy for elders who begin to speak twisted things? His remedy was for them to pay attention to themselves!

a) The elders are to be self policing and must be willing to confront error when it arises within their own ranks. Paul told Timothy:

ESV **1 Timothy 4:16** Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

ESV **1 Timothy 5:19-20** Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.

b) Another way to lessen the likelihood of an elder going bad is to be sure a potential elder truly meets the qualifications for elder listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. For example, one qualification is:

ESV **Titus 1:9** [An elder] must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

c) Another way to squelch potential problems is to focus on teaching the Bible:

ESV **2 Timothy 3:16-4:4** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness . . . I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

15. What remedy did Paul have in 20:31 for the predicted problem of fierce wolves and defecting elders (20:29-30)? See *1 Timothy 4:16, 2 Timothy 3:16-4:4, Titus 1:9.*

d) Paul told them to be alert and to remember how Paul himself constantly admonished people (they obviously were to follow his example).

So What?

16. What can we learn about early church practice from Acts 20? How is it different from modern church practice?

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
- You can hear this lesson being taught at SermonAudio.Com/NTRF.

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