

Acts 20

Paul's Message to the Elders of Ephesus

- I. 20:1-6 Ministry in Greece and Macedonia
- II. 20:7-12 Ministry in Troas
- III. 20:13-16 Traveling to Miletus
- IV. 20:17-35 Paul's Message
- V. 20:36-38 Paul's Departure

Problem: The concept of Christian ministry has become pathetically deformed. What we see in the ministry today is so different from what we see in the Bible that the biblical model can barely even be recognized within it. How did this happen? Men who were never really motivated by love for Jesus or any desire to serve Him have taken positions in churches, filled pulpits, and even ended up on radio or TV and the internet. So often has this happened that most people's image of a minister, evangelist, or pastor is completely different and far inferior spiritually to what the Bible tells us it should be.

Proposition: The concept of Christian ministry has become so pathetically deformed that we need a biblical checklist to help us identify genuine servants of Jesus Christ and to give those servants a biblical model for their ministry.

Paul's message to the elders of Ephesus, included in Acts 20 gives us that checklist, model or plan.

The chapter begins with a chronicle of Paul's travels. The section we will zero in on begins after that at Acts 20:17.

- I. 20:1-6 Ministry in Greece and Macedonia
 - A. The main point of interest here lies in the fact that Luke begins by speaking of "he" (v.2) and "him" (v.4), but finishes speaking of "us" (v.5) and "we" (v.6). He has rejoined Paul, who left him in Philippi, as we can verify by a similar look at the narrative in Acts 16 & 17.
- II. 20:7-12 Ministry in Troas
 - A. 20:7 *on the first day of the week* These early Christians were already meeting on Sundays rather than on the Sabbath or Saturday. Constantine didn't invent Sunday worship.

Until midnight Paul had a knack for long sermons.
 - B. 20:9-12 Pretty awesome miracle. Besides that, Paul would feel totally at home at our men's or women's retreats: eating, hanging out and talking all night.(v.11)
- III. 20:13-16 Traveling to Miletus
 - A. After his years in Ephesus, Paul knew that he couldn't go back there without staying a long time. Therefore he avoids it and heads straight for Miletus, also on the coast, about 28 miles S of Ephesus.

As we approach this part of Acts 20, forget any ideas of what you think it looks like to be in ministry unless they come straight from the Bible itself. Again, the concept of Christian ministry has become pathetically deformed. It's possible that you yourself have actually bought into false ideas of ministry based on the church you grew up in, the church down the street, or something you once saw on TV.

This message of Paul's happens to be the only one recorded in Acts that is addressed specifically to Christians. Paul is speaking to the elders, the leaders, overseers or pastors in Ephesus, a city he served in for several years. He's speaking to them about ministry.

This is our biblical checklist to help us identify genuine servants of Jesus Christ and to give those servants a biblical model for their ministry. Our checklist zeros in on three main things:

1. Servants of Jesus are committed to sacrificial service.
2. Servants of Jesus are committed to proclaiming the entirety of God's Word.
3. Servants of Jesus are committed to protecting God's people.

IV. 20:17-35 Paul's Message **Read Entire Message**

- 20:17 Again, this message is to the elders – the leaders, overseers or pastors of the church.
 - A. 20:18-19 Servants of Jesus are committed to sacrificial service.
 - i. 20:18 Paul's life was open to his followers.
 - ii. 20:19 Paul was willing to humbly serve.
 - iii. Paul's life was full of trouble, but that never deterred him from his task.
 - Paul didn't invent this philosophy of sacrificial commitment. Jesus did.

Mark 10:45 (NKJV) For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

- B. 20:20-21 Servants of Jesus are committed to proclaiming the entirety of God's Word.
 - i. 20:20 He kept back nothing that was helpful. He taught the whole truth.
 - ii. He taught both publicly (larger groups) and in homes (smaller groups)
 - a) There is a temptation for some Christian speakers to not speak unless you can guarantee a large group – and often a nice, fat paycheck to go with it.
 - b) Jesus taught the multitudes, the small group of disciples, and even one-on-one. Paul seems to have done the same. There's a place for each type of ministry.
 - iii. 20:21 This is a summary of the Gospel, the core message of the Scriptures.
 - a) Repentance toward God.
 - b) Faith toward Jesus.
- C. 20:22-24 Servants of Jesus are committed to sacrificial service.
 - I know we already said this, but Paul is emphasizing it again.

- i. 20:23-24 Paul's goal was not to gain a large following, but to remain faithful – to finish the race. As he neared his death he knew he had done that. He finished the race.

*2 Timothy 4:6-8 (NKJV) ⁶For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷I have fought the good fight, **I have finished the race**, I have kept the faith. ⁸Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

D. 20:25-27 Servants of Jesus are committed to proclaiming the entirety of God's Word.

- o I know we already said this too, but Paul is emphasizing it again.
- i. 20:25 Preaching the *kingdom of God* – that means Jesus as King and the fact that He is coming again to rule on earth.
- ii. 20:27 *the whole counsel of God* the whole truth, not holding anything back. That happens to be just one reason why we teach the whole Bible.

E. 20:28-32 Servants of Jesus are committed to protecting God's people.

- i. 20:28 *shepherd* or “pastor” Paul is encouraging these leaders to make sure they protect the flock. The flock ultimately belongs to Jesus.

He purchased with His own blood Christ bought us out of slavery to sin and death **with His own blood.**

Revelation 1:5 says that Christ “**loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood**”.

- ii. 20:29-30 If the Lord is our Shepherd and we are His sheep, then we need to be careful of wolves. How do we identify them? Wolves do the opposite of Christ's true servants.
 - a) They don't care about the people *not sparing the flock*
 - b) They don't care about God's Word *speaking perverse or misleading things*
 - c) Their service is not sacrificial but self-centered. They *draw away the disciples after themselves*. There is no commitment to the higher cause of Christ.
- Over the last two millennia a lot of these wolves have been let in and allowed to devour God's sheep, His people. That's why so many actual believers now have zero understanding of God's will or His Word and no concept of what it means to be Christ's servant. That's why most people now consider an “evangelist”, “pastor” or “minister” about as relevant as the guy doing late-night infomercials for a product nobody wants.
- Wolves do not lay down their lives for God's people. They lie around doing nothing until they get hungry and then they eat sheep for dinner.
- Christ's servants need to imitate Him and protect the flock from wolves.

*John 10:11-15 (NKJV) "I am the good shepherd. **The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep [or who is less committed, and probably just doing it for the money], sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.**"*

- iii. 20:31 Self-sacrifice (tears), commitment to God's Word (did not cease warning) and commitment to God's people (warning everyone) all appear in this one verse.
- iv. 20:32 Here Paul is encouraging these elders, overseers, pastors to stay committed to God's Word.
 - a) That word is a word of grace or "unmerited favor".
 - b) Grace = **God's Riches At Christ's Expense** that we receive through faith in Him.
 - c) That word builds us up. Paul later writes to this same group of guys saying:

*Ephesians 4:29 (NKJV) Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary **edification [building up]**, that it may impart **grace** to the hearers.*

- F. 20:33-35 The servants of Jesus are committed to sacrificial service.
 - o This is now the third time Paul is driving this same point home.

V. 20:36-38 Paul's Departure

- A. So off he went and the one thing he seemed to know and the thing that made the people saddest, was that he would never come back to Ephesus.

Conclusion:

The concept of Christian ministry has become pathetically deformed. Thank God He has given us a biblical checklist to help us identify genuine servants of Jesus Christ and to give those servants a biblical model for their ministry. Paul's message to the elders of Ephesus has shown us that checklist, model or plan.

If someone claims to represent Jesus Christ, you are now equipped to assess the truth of that claim. You can hold this ruler up to their life and ministry to see if they are true to that calling, perhaps more of a hireling, or, on the other end of the spectrum, maybe even a savage wolf.

If you want to serve Jesus in ministry, here's what he hopes to see.

1. A commitment to sacrificial service.
2. A commitment to proclaiming the entirety of God's Word.
3. A commitment to protecting God's people.