

Series: **The Original Church Planter**

Today's Title: "**Church Leadership**" – part 2

July 30, 2023 – Acts 20:22-27

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**Objective:** To encourage believers trust God and fully commit themselves to Christ and the mission He gave us.

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Next Gen Students – mission trip to Houston & Puerto Rico

***Opening Prayer***

We're working our way through a section of verses – a very emotional passage – where the Apostle Paul is saying 'goodbye' to the elders from Ephesus.

Paul is traveling with others on his church planting team – they are hoping to arrive in Jerusalem in-time to celebrate Pentecost.

**Turn to Acts 20:22-27**

I've titled these 3 sermons (this is part 2) "Church Leadership" – because in this passage we see Paul sharing some of the key things he wants the elders from the church in Ephesus - *to know – to remember – and to practice* – as they lead the church.

It's an emotional time he spends with them.

Paul believes this is the last time they will see him – which is the reason for the tearful exchange in **vs. 37-38**.

Last week – in **vs. 13-21**, we saw 4 principles of church leadership:

1. Equip the church to endure without you. *vs. 13-17*
2. The leader's life must be an example to the church. *vs. 17-18*
3. The leader must be humble and love the people. *vs. 19*

4. The leader must proclaim the Gospel, even when its unpopular or dangerous. vs. 19b-21

But we also realized these 4 principles apply to every Christian – not just those in leadership positions in the local church.

The reason they apply to all of us – is God has commissioned every Christian to live on-mission.

Each believer is an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18, 20) – each of us is sent by the Lord to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19).

We will see the same thing in today’s verses.

I’ve titled this *“Church Leadership”* – but these are things each believer is to apply in their own life.

### **1. Obedience to God in uncertainty and/or danger.** vs. 22-23

It is often taught in churches or Christian circles – that when we obey God, He will care for us – protect us – keep us from harm.

This may be true – but it is far from a universal promise. I do believe there are many times God protects us – and we never even realize we were in danger – or a threat was mounting.

We are His children – He is our loving Heavenly Father. He certainly protects His children.

But His protection is not ‘all the time’ – or in ‘all situations’.

- All we have to do is consider the millions of Christian martyrs over the past 2,000 years.
- All we have to do is read **Acts 7** and the murder of Stephen.
- **Acts 12** – King Herod murders the Apostle James, one of Zebedee’s sons and brother of the Apostle John.

In **Acts 12** Peter is arrested, but God saves him from death, because in God’s plan there was more for Peter to do.

We need to make sure that what we teach about God – about the Christian life – is accurate to what the Bible says.

We can’t teach things we want to be true.

We can’t teach things simply because they make us feel better – or help us see the world and this life in ways we want to see it.

We need to teach the truth.

And we need to obey the truth of God – even when the result of our obedience is uncertain – or we know our obedience will lead to some sort of danger or harassment.

### **Read vs. 22-23**

The Holy Spirit is leading Paul to Jerusalem.

Paul’s not going there only out of his own desire to be there for Pentecost.

Aside from whatever personal motivations or desires he had; he was also “constrained” by the Holy Spirit to go there.

“constrained” – *Greek*: put under obligation, namely, of law, duty, bound or constrained in my spirit, i.e., compelled by my convictions.

Notice the uncertainty of future events.

“...not knowing what will happen to me there...”

How many of us would move forward – would keep moving forward – keep implementing the plan – if we were uncertain about the future?

“...not knowing what will happen...”

Uncertainty is one thing...

What about obeying the Lord – when we know danger will be the result?

“...in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.”

In the Greek, these 2 words are in the plural

(“imprisonment [chains] and afflictions”).

*Uncertainty* – and at the same time *certainty* about suffering.

What he does know – what Paul is certain about - is not good news.

- More persecution.
- More problems.

- More pain.

Yet... he is determined to go to Jerusalem.

Obedience to God in uncertainty and/or danger.

## **2. Give your life to the cause of Christ, not for your own benefit.** vs. 24

This is a crucial principle of leadership.

If you want to be in a position of leadership – to somehow advance yourself or improve your status – please don't pursue a leadership position in the church. Save the church – and yourself – and your family from the pain and difficulty which will no doubt be the result of your leadership.

The world looks at leaders or those in positions of authority – and elevates them above others.

They have power and privilege due to their position.

They often have a different set of rules than the rest of us.

Not so in the church. At least it's not supposed to be that way.

Jesus turned leadership and positions of authority and power on their proverbial heads when He taught the ways of the Kingdom of God.

In God's kingdom, leaders serve.

- *Leaders are last – at the back of the line.*

- *They wash feet.*

*- They are not served – they serve others.*

In God's kingdom / God's economy – leadership and authority are not about power, but about humility, sacrifice, and serving others.

Of course, Jesus is our primary example of this (Mark 10:45; John 13; Philippians 2).

### **Read vs. 24**

“But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself..”

This is a bit of hyperbole by Paul.

Paul's not saying his life is worthless – or that he doesn't care about his life.

He's saying the Gospel – the Gospel ministry is more valuable than his life.

He's prepared to give his life for the “ministry” that he has “...received from the Lord Jesus...”

The primary value of his life is in the ministry and mission God gave him.

He has offered his life as a sacrifice to the cause of Christ.

That's where 'life' has value for Paul – in fulfilling God's call on his life.

**Now... there is wisdom applied here.**

*Paul is not living with reckless abandon – throwing caution to the wind every day.*

As we've seen in a few other passages (Acts 9:23-25, 29-30; 14:5-6; 17:10, 14; 19:30-31; 20:3), there were times when Paul was in immediate danger, and either by his own choice – or through the help of those with him – he was ushered out of the situation.

- *This was done to 'live for another day'.*
- *This was done so he could continue to minister – share the gospel with other cities.*

But Paul didn't live with a focus on his own life – or with a self-preservation mindset.

His life was dedicated to the Lord – to the mission God called him to fulfill – and to those he served.

This is so counter-cultural to our Western, 'self'-focused culture.

To find someone who is dedicated to a cause beyond themselves, or their own self-interest or self-promotion is rare.

***Our default is typically self-preservation and self-advancement.***

We want to protect our life – not give up our life!

There so much we can learn from Paul here – who is following the example of Jesus – who gave His life for our sins.

**Matthew 16:24-26**

Then Jesus told His disciples, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.

25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”

*Here’s another place to apply some wisdom with this principle.*

Giving your life to Christ and to the gospel cause and not living for your own benefit – does not mean you ignore your own spiritual and physical health.

It’s important that you care for yourself – so that you can care for others and serve others.

- If you disregard your own health, you won’t be able to fulfill the mission God has given you!
- If you don’t care for your family – and pour yourself 100% into ministry – you will eventually run into serious problems with your family – and you will be unable to minister or disqualified for ministry.

**vs. 24b** – “...if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

“...finish my course” is a Greek term referring to a racecourse. A racecourse used by runners competing. This Greek word for ‘race’ (*dromos*) is used 3x in the N.T.

(Acts 13:35; 20:24; 2 Timothy 4:7).



Each time Paul uses this term as a metaphor to living the Christian life – faithfully serving – fulfilling the ministry call of God in his life.

Like a runner who finishes the race – doesn't quit – give up – but leans through the finish line – this is the picture Paul is painting about his own ministry.

The end is getting closer – he knows “chains and tribulations” are near – but he will keep on running.

**He will not give up!!**

The uncertainty of the future...

The certainty of difficulty and pain...

Despite these things, he will carry out his ministry to the very end.

### **3. Be faithful to teach “the whole council of God”.** vs. 27

**Read vs. 25-27**

Paul was a faithful leader / teacher / pastor.

He did his job – he shared the truth about Jesus with them – the gospel.

**He fulfilled his duty / obligation.**

But he knew their decision about Jesus – their decision to believe – or to reject what Paul said – was not his responsibility.

He tells them he won't see them again – but he completed the work.

He has told them everything they need to know – in order to believe in Christ – but also how they should lead the church.

- Paul's commission was not simply evangelistic – to share how to become a follower of Christ.
- His commission was also teaching them the truth of Christ.

He taught these men – the elders from the Ephesian church – how to lead.

More than the 'how' – he taught them the kind of men – the kind of leaders and people they ought to be.

**vs. 26** - He was not responsible for their spiritual destiny. This is what the phrase, "...I am innocent of the blood of all of you..."

**NLT** – "I declare today that I have been faithful. If anyone suffers eternal death, it's not my fault..."

It's now up to them – not only to live out their faith – but to help others in the church – to teach them – lead them – according to the truth of Christ.

The reason Paul is so confident – is he says, "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God."

He didn't pick and choose what he taught.

He didn't choose easy truths – or truths he was more inclined toward.

He taught them "the whole counsel of God."

***Apply it...***

1. Our obedience should not depend on our comfort with the future.

Paul obeyed when he didn't know what would happen.

He obeyed when he was certain his obedience would lead to suffering.

2. Be fully committed to the cause of Christ.

The commission Jesus gave us is not optional.

We can't allow other concerns or interests to lessen our commitment to living our faith and sharing Christ with others.

We must be fully committed – not part-time believers – or believers of convenience.

3. Teach and receive all of God's Word.

The Bible is not a buffet where we can pick-and-choose what portion we want on our plate.

It's all inspired by God.

All of it is useful and profitable (2 Timothy 3:16).

*Close in prayer*