

71. Paul Summarized His Ministry to the Elders of Ephesus

In our last topic, we saw that we want to talk and discuss questions with our physical and spiritual children so that they learn how to answer the questions of others. Paul spent the entire night answering the questions of the Christians in Troas before leaving to begin the trip to Jerusalem. Paul gave us another example of the importance of talking together and discussing questions in the verses we will be discussing today. In this topic, we will see the beginning of the discussion that Paul had with the elders from Ephesus before Paul left them to go to Jerusalem. We will finish the discussion in the next topic

In Acts 20:13-16, we read, “Then we went ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, there intending to take Paul on board; for so he had given orders, intending himself to go on foot. And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. We sailed from there, and the next *day* came opposite Chios. The following *day* we arrived at Samos and stayed at Trogyllium. The next *day* we came to Miletus. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.”

There were probably still other questions that the Christians in Troas wanted to ask Paul. The ship had to travel around a peninsula to get to the next town where it would stop. Since it was only about a 20-mile walk by land, Paul decided that he would walk to Assos instead of taking the longer boat ride. This made it possible for Christians from Troas to walk with him and continue their discussion that had lasted all night. The ship arrived in Assos and Paul met the ship. There, he boarded the ship and the ship stopped at Mitylene, Chios, and Samos, cities on islands along the coast of western Asia. The ship also passed by Trogyllium which was a city on the western coast of Asia between Samos and Miletus. Paul had chosen a ship that did not stop at Ephesus, because he wanted to reach Jerusalem in time for the Day of Pentecost. The ship stopped at Miletus instead.

In Acts 20:17-21, we read, “From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them: ‘You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.’” Miletus was about thirty miles south of Ephesus. The ship was going to be in Miletus for a few days. As a result, Paul sent a messenger to Ephesus and asked the elders of the church in Ephesus to come to Miletus so that he could talk to them one last time.

We see that Paul gave a summary of his ministry in Ephesus as he talked to the elders. First, Paul told how he had served the Lord in Ephesus. He had served the Lord with all humility. Paul later wrote to the church at Philippi and explained what it meant to serve with all humility. The word translated “humility” means *to have a humble opinion of self*. The Greek language did not even have such a word in its vocabulary so this was probably a word created by the Christians.

As a result, Paul explained the meaning of this word in Philippians 2:3, which says, “Let nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” In this verse, the word is translated “lowliness of mind”. Then, Paul pointed out the fact that Christ had given them the example of what this means in Philippians 2:5-8 which says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross.” True humility is willingly taking the form of a bondservant to serve the Lord.

Here, in Acts 20:19, Paul reminded the elders from Ephesus that when he had lived among them that he had served the Lord with all humility. He did this even though it meant that he experienced many tears and trials as a result of the plotting of the Jews. Christ described bondservant leadership when he told the Twelve, in Mark 10:44-45, ““And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”” Bondservant leadership means becoming a slave to all by serving the Lord and everyone that He brings across our path. This is the kind of leadership that Christ calls us to exercise.

Paul explained how he modeled bondservant leadership to the elders in the next two verses. First, he taught them all that was helpful. Acts 20:27 says, “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.” Here, we see that all that is helpful includes the whole counsel of God. We saw in Acts 19:8-10 that Paul explained these things publicly (the whole counsel of God) in the school of Tyrannus during the hot part of the day. Second, Paul modeled what he taught as he took the elders with him as he went from house to house throughout the rest of the day. This gave him the opportunity to model Godly character. It also gave him the opportunity to model ministry skills.

We see that Paul showed them how to share the same message both with the Jews and with the Greeks. That message was repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance toward God is defined in 1 Thessalonians 1:9 where we read, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” People either believe God or they believe Satan and the things that Satan develops for them to serve.

The best illustration of the need for repentance is shown with the first couple in the Bible. God told Adam in Genesis 2:17 that he could eat the fruit of every tree except the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God said that Adam would die the day that he ate of that fruit. In Genesis 3:4, Satan told Eve, “You will not surely die.” Instead of believing God, Adam and Eve believed Satan. Repentance is turning from the sin of unbelief and turning to God. Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ is best defined by 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 which says, “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.” We accept this payment for our sins by the faith that

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God has given to us so that we can believe this message (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Paul went on to tell the elders in Acts 20:22-27, ““And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”” We see, in these verses, that Paul explained what it means to be a bondservant of Jesus Christ.

When we have the attitude of a bondservant, we look beyond the chains or the suffering and even death that might come in our lives. Instead, we look to the glory that will be found when we finish the race. Paul was prepared to experience being imprisoned in chains and suffering other forms of tribulation if that was what the Lord had for him. In fact, he was willing to sacrifice his life if necessary for Christ. His primary concern was to finish the race that the Lord had for him with joy. A few years later, as Paul came to the final days of his life, he said in 2 Timothy 4:7, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” Here, we see that Paul could say he had finished with joy the race the Lord had for him.

Paul realized that he would probably not see the elders from the city of Ephesus again. He fully understood that he might be put to death for his faith. However, he was able to testify to them that he was innocent of the blood of all men. Ezekiel 33:8-9 says, ““When I say to the wicked, “O wicked *man*, you shall surely die!” and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.”” Paul knew that he had been faithful to warn the wicked to turn from their evil and come to the Father through Christ.

Paul could also say that he had shared the whole counsel of God. The word translated “counsel” means *purpose or counsel*. In Acts 22:14-15, Paul said, ““Then he said, “The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.””” Paul had been a faithful witness of all that he had seen and heard. In Ephesus, Paul had taught the elders all that the Lord had taught him so that they now knew what to teach to others. In the same way, we want to teach our physical and spiritual children the whole purpose of God so that they can teach others also. In this way, we will help them become equipped for the ministry that the Lord has for each one of them in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you faithfully explain to your children the whole counsel of God.