

Taking the Gospel Abroad

Paul: Past And Future

Acts 20:17-25

From Miletus Paul called the elders of the church in Ephesus to join him. When they had come to him he said, “You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul had a clear conscience about the past. He had served God with humility and he allowed no trial or hardship to keep him from teaching the gospel and calling men from their sins. Paul could sleep well at night. He was serving God, not the world. Why should he fear anything of this life, even death? Those who serve God completely have nothing to fear. Life is short. What is physical discomfort and suffering compared to eternal bliss? Paul understood and his total allegiance had been to God. Of that he was certain. He was not ashamed of his past.

But Paul was not as certain of his future. He went on, “And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more.”

Uncertain though he was of exactly what his future held, he was not concerned. Why? Because of his past. His allegiance was,

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and had been, to Christ and His cause. Because of that he was unconcerned about the future. The fact is, Paul did go to Jerusalem, and there he was bound as a prisoner and afflicted as the Spirit told him he would be.

I have no doubt, Paul's example is given for us to follow. If we, like he, go about solemnly testifying of the gospel of the grace of God, we will have no reason to fear anyone or anything, especially death. At the end of our lives, we will be able to say as Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:7,8, "I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

Paul's Innocence

Acts 20:26, 27

As Paul spoke with the elders from Ephesus, he made this bold statement about himself, "Therefore, I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men." Remember, before Paul became a Christian he had been responsible for the death of Christians. He had been zealous in the persecution and imprisonment of Christians and stood in support of those in Acts 7 who stoned to death Stephen, the first martyr for the cause of Christ. How could Paul honestly say he was innocent of the blood of all men?

It's really simple. When Paul became a Christian he was told by Annanias, "And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." Wash away your sins, Paul. Paul was immediately baptized into Jesus Christ and his past sins were all forgiven. You know, you too can have the same forgiveness. Believe on Jesus, repent of your past sins, and be baptized into Jesus Christ as Paul was and all past sins will be

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washed away. Yes, I said, “All.” It makes no difference what you may have done. God will forgive it all.

Repentance and baptism do not earn for you forgiveness. There is no way you can work off your sins. God saves you by His grace. It is a gift. Your obedience in repentance and baptism are simply your submission to His commands. It is the beginning of a life of faithfulness in which you are saying to God, “You are the Lord of my life. I will do what you say, because your commands are not too difficult and doing them is for my spiritual good.”

There is another reason Paul could speak so boldly of his innocence. He gives it in verse 27. Listen. “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.” Paul was not shy about the gospel of Christ. Not in telling others about it when they needed to hear it. If any of them failed to obey what he taught them, he was not guilty of their blood in a spiritual sense. Not only was Paul not shy about telling others the gospel; he was not shy about obeying it himself. If we do as Paul, we too can confidently say, “I am innocent of the blood of all men.”

The Church Of God

Acts 20:28

Paul had been speaking to elders of the church in Ephesus. After affirming his innocence regarding the spiritual blood of all men, he turned his comments to the incalculable value of the Lord’s church. Listen, please. “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” Here we have several important characteristics of the church worth noticing.

First, it was purchased by the blood of Christ. Some believe they can be pleasing to God while having little or no regard for His church. That’s impossible! Do you think God cares nothing for

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it? He purchased it with His own blood shed on the cross of Calvary. It's of great value to Him! And so it should be to us.

Second, it is the church of God. He owns it. He bought it. Men have no right to change its organization, its teaching, and its work whenever they feel moved to do so. It is not theirs to change. Men had better leave alone what belongs to God.

Third, it is to be governed by men appointed by the Holy Spirit. No man has the right to place himself in a position of rule over God's church. No group of men have the right to elect the leader of their choice over the church of God. The Holy Spirit makes those appointments. He has given the qualifications for overseers in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Men who do not meet those qualifications have no right taking the oversight of God's people.

Fourth, God's church is a flock to be shepherded. Christ is the Chief Shepherd, according to Peter in 1 Peter 5:4, and He has given overseers as under-shepherds. Their job is to feed the flock on the word of God. And they do more than just feed. As dutiful shepherds, they tend to all the spiritual needs of the flock, watching for the salvation of their souls.

Finally, God's flock must be guarded. In the next verse, verse 29, Paul warned of savage wolves that would come into the flock, not sparing the sheep. Overseers are given by the Holy Spirit for the express purpose of guarding the flock, keeping it safe from false teachers for the coming of the Lord.

Isn't it wonderful that God so cares for His church that He has not left it unattended? He has provided shepherds to keep it safe from enemies and spiritual starvation. But, it's no wonder. It is His flock. He purchased it with His own blood and, having paid such a price, He will not see it destroyed.