

Paul and the Ephesian Elders, Part 1 (Acts 20:13-27)^a

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Context

1. Paul on his third missionary journey
2. Retracing much of his route on the second journey
3. Focus is not evangelization in new regions, but rather discipleship: building up the newly established churches
4. Paul gave a message to the brothers in Troas and spent the night in fellowship.
5. Now departing Troas, heading back toward Jerusalem.

Passage (Acts 20:13-27)

[13] 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. **[14]** And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. **[15]** 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. **[16]** 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. **[17]** From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. **[18]** 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, **[19]** serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; **[20]** how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, **[21]** testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. **[22]** And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, **[23]** except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. **[24]** 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. **[25]** And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. **[26]** Therefore I testify to you this day that I [am] innocent of the blood of all [men]. **[27]** For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”¹

Traveling eastward along the coast of “Asia” (modern-day Turkey) toward Jerusalem

1. Troas (modern western Turkey) to Assos to Mitylene to Chios to Samos (bypassing Ephesus) to Trogyllium to Miletus

2. **Miletus: east and slightly north of Patmos — where John would eventually receive Revelation—including portions directed to 7 churches inland from Miletus**
3. **Paul bypassed Ephesus with the goal of reaching Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16)**

Sends to Ephesus for the elders of the church

1. **He didn't have time to go through Ephesus where he had previously taught for several years—no doubt there were many people there he knew and it would have impeded his progress**
2. **He also knew (or suspected) he wouldn't be coming the same way again—yet he had important words of encouragement and warning to impart to the church at Ephesus**
3. **Instead of going to Ephesus, he sends for the elders of the church to meet with him at Miletus**

Church government

1. **Elders is πρεσβυτέρους [presbyterous] from which we get presbyterian**
 - A. “An old man”, and by extension, someone who is experienced, wise
 - B. Used to describe a leader in the community (Mat. 15:2; Acts 11:30; 14:23; etc.)
 - C. Used to describe the office of leadership in the local Christian Church
 - I. “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine” (1Ti. 5:17).
2. **“Elders (plural) of the (singular) church” (Acts 20:17)**
 - A. “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23).
 - B. Paul and Barnabas appointed (plural) elders in every (single) church.
3. **See presentation No. 49, [The Appointment of Elders^c](#), covering Acts 14:23-28 where we discuss the NT model of Church government in greater detail.**

The thrust of Paul's message: his example, his destiny, his warnings

1. **First, His example**
 - A. “You know . . . in what manner I always lived among you” (Acts 20:18)
 - B. “serving the Lord” (Acts 20:19)

C. “with all humility” (Acts 20:19)

D. Faithful under persecution, “with many tears and trials which happened to me” (Acts 20:19)

E. Faithful teaching the whole counsel

I. “Kept back nothing that was helpful” (Acts 20:20)

II. “taught . . . publically, and from house to house” (Acts. 20:20)

III. The simple gospel, to both Jews and Greeks (Hellenists)

a. “Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21)

i. Repentance = **μετάνοια** [*metanoia*], a change of mind

ii. Faith = **πίστις** [*pistis*], trust

b. Repentance and faith — but what about *sola fide*, we are saved by grace through faith alone?

c. Is Paul adding repentance to faith? Must a person repent *first* and *then* exercise faith to be saved . . . a two-step process?

d. The case of the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:30-31)

“And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”” (Acts 16:30–31)

e. John’s evangelistic gospel

i. The most famous evangelistic verse in the Bible (John 3:16)

ii. The very purpose of John’s gospel

“but these [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31)

iii. John emphasizes the role of *belief* more than all the other gospels combined: Matthew (9 verses), Mark (15 verses), Luke (10 verses), John (86 verses!)

iv. Never once mentions **μετάνοια** [*metanoia*], repentance

v. What gives?

f. Two sides of the same coin: a person cannot exercise faith in God without also changing their mind to agree with God’s assessment of reality and their sinful condition and need — this is the role of repentance in salvation

2. **Second, His destiny**

- A. “now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem” (Acts [20:22](#))
- B. “not knowing the things that will happen to me there” (Acts [20:22](#))
- C. The testimony of the Spirit: “chains and tribulations await me” (Acts [20:23](#))

- I. To which the NT prophet Agabus would soon contribute

“ When he had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his [own] hands and feet, and said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver [him] into the hands of the Gentiles.’ ”” (Acts [21:11](#))

- II. Paul’s “fourth missionary Journey,” taken to appeal to Caesar in Rome

- D. He lacks earthly concerns

- I. “None of these things move me” (Acts [20:24](#))
- II. “Nor do I count my life dear to myself” (Acts [20:24](#))

- E. His focus is on heavenly concerns

- I. “so that I may finish my race with joy” (Acts [20:24](#))
- II. “the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus” (Acts [20:24](#))
- III. “to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts [20:24](#))

- F. “I know that you all . . . will see my face no more” (Acts [20:25](#))

- G. “I am innocent of the blood of all [men]” (Acts [20:26](#))

- I. What about Stephen (Acts [7:58-59](#); [8:1](#))?
- II. What about many others?

“9 Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against [them]” (Acts [26:9-10](#))

- III. This is one reason Paul testified of the gospel of the grace of God

- IV. Also: speaking in the sense of God’s warning to earlier prophets

- H. “for I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts [20:27](#))

- I. Paul saw his NT responsibility a similar vein to the OT prophet Ezekiel

“17 Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: 18 When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked [man] shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand” (Eze. [3:17-18](#) cf. [33:6](#))

II. This differs from our role — we are not in the same shoes as Ezekiel or Paul

III. However, there are points of application

a. Paul did “not shun” to declare — why would he say this?

- i. God has called us to deliver both joyous news, but also a message of pending judgment
- ii. Our very existence is a reminder of an unwavering standard by which men will be measured — this produces hostile reactions (thus Paul mentioned “many tears and trials which happened to me”)

b. The whole counsel of God

- i. We are under intense (and growing) pressure to omit the most unpopular portions of God’s truth
- ii. God-ordained use (and limitation) on sexual expression
- iii. God-defined gender roles
- iv. As the culture grows in its hatred of God, we come increasingly into the cross-hairs as impediments to “progress”

c. The need of biblical perspective

- i. “But none of these things move me, nor do I count my life dear” (Acts [20:24](#))
- ii. “So that I may finish my race . . . the ministry which I received . . . to testify to the gospel” (Acts [20:24](#))

3. **Third, His warning - concern for the Churches (Part 2, next time)**

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Endnotes:

1. [NKJV, Acts 20:13-27](#)
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Links Mentioned Above

a - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/71_Acts_20_13-27/index.htm.

b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.

c - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/49_Acts_14_23-28/index.htm.

d - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.