

**Text:** Ac 20.18-20

**Proposition:** Christian ministry should be imitative rather than innovative: we follow others who followed Christ.

As we get into Paul's message to the Ephesian elders, we find many topics touched on as Paul speaks, each one suggestive of sermons by themselves. We will not turn these eighteen verses into eighteen (or more) sermons, though the temptation certainly is there!

Various commentators outline the message in different ways. Here is the outline I am following:

- I. Paul's Ministry Overview (17-21)
- II. Paul's Present Plans (22-24)
- III. Paul's Ephesian Self-Assessment (25-27)
- IV. Paul's Admonition to the Elders (28-32)
- V. Paul's Personal Integrity (33-35)

Interestingly, Paul does something in the message that we teach young preachers *not* to do — he talks about himself *a lot*!

I used to have a friend who liked to say, "It's not bragging if you can do it!"

I used to think... even if you can do it, it's still bragging.

However, Paul says something on these lines twice in 1 Corinthians:

1 Cor 4.15-16 For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet *you would not have* many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.<sup>16</sup> Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me.

1 Cor 11.1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

There are two grounds for imitation in these passages:

1. Paul is their spiritual father (children imitate their fathers)
2. Paul is an imitator of Christ

This last is the real ground for imitation: your spiritual "fathers" should be people who are sincerely committed to our Lord Jesus Christ, living as much as possible in complete obedience to the Lord, doing his will, living for his glory.

Let's read our passage and consider how Paul opens his heart concerning the way he conducted his own ministry.

Read Ac 20.17-21, text 18-20

What we find Paul revealing in our text is a very personal expression of the way he conducted himself as a minister. His conduct is our example.

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## I. The public proof of Paul's ministry (18)

### A. The idea of *public* ministry

1. Paul's time in Ephesus was extensive (Ac 19.1 through Ac 20.1)
  - a. Acc. to Ac 20.31 the ministry was "three years" (perhaps a rough rounding up)
  - b. Other references indicate at least 2 and a half years
2. Paul declares that the elders *knew all about* his ministry during this time (Ac 20.18)
  - a. Paul conducted his ministry publicly
  - b. Paul's ministry in private mirrored his ministry in public
  - c. Paul was involved with the elders in the public ministry: wording is emphatic — "you yourselves know"
3. They knew how Paul behaved with them for "the whole time"
  - a. Here, the κῠν says, "after what manner I have been with you at all seasons"
  - b. The word "how" here in our version communicates their extensive knowledge of his manner among them

"By using [how] rather than [that], Luke emphasized the manner of his conduct (BHGNT 392)."<sup>1</sup>
  - c. They knew how he conducted himself
    - 1) No doubt no one knew every detail of his ministry

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<sup>1</sup> L. Scott Kellum, *Acts*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2020), 235.

2) Some details (when dealing with individuals, for example) should be *private*

3) But Paul's conduct was public and consistent and *known*

## B. The *value* of public ministry

1. The text doesn't explicitly say that Paul was under attack
  - a. However, in other churches, when Paul left, some attacked his ministry
  - b. Paul does warn later about the rise of attacks and false teachers, within and without (28-32)
  - c. Commentators speculate that some such attacks may be the backdrop to this message
2. A public ministry — a known ministry — is less vulnerable to attack

### Consider 1 Tim 3

<sup>1</sup> Tim 3.2-4 An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,<sup>3</sup> not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.<sup>4</sup> *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity

- a. How much of this requires an active public life?

<sup>1</sup> Tim 3.7 And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

- b. Paul appeals to their public knowledge of his manner of ministry among them — they know how he conducted himself

## II. The selfless manner of Paul's ministry (19)

### A. The attitude of Paul's service

1. The word is "slaving" — acting as a slave
2. The master is Jesus Christ

Everything about Paul's ministry was done for the Lord, in submission and in obedience to the Lord who saved him.

B. Three aspects of Paul's service — describe the way he served, his manner, his philosophy of ministry

### 1. Humility

- a. The roots are a combination of, "to make low, to lower" and "mind" or "thought"
- b. The Greeks thought of this as despicable ("groveling")
- c. The Bible values the humility that puts others ahead of self
  - 1) The goals of God are more important than the goals of self
  - 2) The needs of other people are more important than personal needs

### 2. Tears

- a. Here, Paul speaks of compassion, empathy
- b. Paul's ministry of tears a frequent topic
  - 1) The compassionate exhortation of other minds (20.31)
  - 2) The compassionate rebuke of rebellious minds (2 Cor 2.4)
  - 3) The compassionate warnings against enemies of Christ (Phil 3.14)

### 3. Enduring trials (from the Jews)

- a. No mention of this kind of opposition in Ephesus
- b. But mentioned in "Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth."<sup>2</sup>
- c. The opposition was a great burden to the converted Jew who always addressed "the Jew first"

Earlier, I said that these characteristics "describe the way he served, his manner, his philosophy of ministry"

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<sup>2</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 424.

## Where did this attitude come from?

### C. The manner of the Lord's ministry

#### 1. The OT predicted a humble king, the NT gave us that king

Zech 9.9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout *in triumph*, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Mt 21.4-5 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: <sup>5</sup> "SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION, 'BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU, GENTLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY, EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A BEAST OF BURDEN.'"

#### 2. Paul described the mind of Christ as willing to take the lowest part (Phil 2.5-8)

Phil 2.5-8 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

#### 3. Jesus described his own ministry as gentle and humble (Mt 11.29)

Mt 11.29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.

#### 4. Jesus rebuked the pride and arrogance of the Pharisees (Lk 14.11)

Lk 14.11 "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

#### 5. In the dispute over who was greater (on the way to the last supper), Jesus commented on his service (Lk 22.27)

Lk 22.27 "For who is greater, the one who reclines *at the table* or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines *at the table*? But I am among you as the one who serves.

6. And last, at that supper, Jesus took the lowest part, the part of the lowest servant, and washed the others' feet (Jn 13.1-20)

Where did Paul's attitude come from?

1 Cor 11.1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

### III. The consistent boldness of Paul's ministry (20a)

We will just look at the first phrase of verse 20 today.

#### A. Not shrinking back in the preaching

##### 1. The word has various uses

a. In the papyri, one man submits a document where he "swears by the Emperor Nero" that he has kept nothing back on declaring his property tax form<sup>3</sup>

b. Peter withdrew when the Jews from Jerusalem came to Antioch (Gal 2.12)

c. Be hesitant, timid, shy: "Cyrus urges Lysander not to be timid about asking for money"<sup>4</sup>

##### 2. Here it describes Paul's manner in teaching

a. He is not timid

b. He doesn't withdraw, he boldly proclaims

#### B. In a like manner, Jesus fearlessly proclaimed all the Father sent him to say

Jn 7.14-20 ¶ But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and *began to teach*.<sup>15</sup> The Jews then were astonished, saying, "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?"<sup>16</sup> So Jesus answered them and said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me."<sup>17</sup> "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself."<sup>18</sup> "He who speaks from himself

<sup>3</sup> J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930).

<sup>4</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

We can't spend much time on this point, but you can see that as Jesus spoke, so spoke Paul – no shrinking back, as the Father intended for them to speak.

## Conclusion:

**Proposition:** Christian ministry should be imitative rather than innovative: we follow others who followed Christ.

This week I listened to a podcast about Christian leadership. The speaker said a lot of things that were the common things you usually hear when people talk about leadership — *i.e.* a lot of “corporate mumbo-jumbo.”

He said one thing that really made me mad... He said something along the lines of this: “Many churches aren’t looking forward, they are stuck in a model of the fifties, they aren’t addressing the current generation.” [Not a direct quote.]

By “fifties,” I think he meant “nineteen-fifties.”

Overall, I think his attitude was more along the lines of letting the culture lead the church rather than having the church challenge the culture.

Is that boldly proclaiming or shrinking back?

On the idea of being modeled for the fifties — I want to be modeled for the fifties all right. The fifties AD. As we are reading Paul in Ephesus, we are about the year 56 or so.

My goal for ministry is imitative, not innovative. I want to imitate Paul. I want to imitate Jesus. So should you.