

**Text:** Acts 20.25-27

**Proposition:** We are innocent when we do not shrink in our gospel witness.

In my study notes, I have outlined Paul's farewell message to the Ephesian elders. Our passage today forms a unit I've called:

### Paul's Ephesian Self-Assessment

After this section, Paul will give his more well-known exhortations to the elders themselves. We aren't quite there yet. Here Paul continues testifying about his own ministry, giving them and us an example of what it means to serve God.

For our message, I am using a different title than my outline point:

### *Are You Innocent?*

I am turning the focus of Paul's remarks away from him and towards us: from exposition to application.

Paul had a long and successful ministry. Of course, the Lord called him to this ministry personally. The Lord's call was no guarantee of success. Consider this fellow named Judas... (the epitome of failure).

Paul is reflective in this address. He looks back at what he has done, and his statements are exemplary for us.

There is a temptation, I think, for the "average Christian," to read these statements with interest but with little application. After all, the "average Christian" isn't called to full-time service like Paul, or like pastors and missionaries today.

I have tried to emphasize that everyone has a missionary responsibility, whether you serve in some secular field or not. Our church is most successful as you live your lives on a mission in our community.

Your responsibilities are different from mine. Nevertheless, you have responsibilities for your testimony and witness.

As we've looked at this message, I've tried to make challenging applications for you, calling you to emulate Paul's heart and activities (within the scope of your own ministry).

In today's selection, Paul will declare himself "innocent of the blood of all men." We will look into what that means, and then ask ourselves the question:

### *Are You Innocent?*

Read Ac 20.22-27, text 25-27

**Proposition:** We are innocent when we do not shrink in our gospel witness.

## I. At the end of the line: the Ephesian ministry is complete (25)

### A. The language of finality

#### 1. The word “I know”

- a. Settled conviction (not knowledge of experience)
- b. Based on revelations of future ministry [from God and prophets]

#### 2. You all

One of my professor’s used to say, “Paul was a Southern Jew...”

- a. Here, he means, “all of you as a group”
- b. He doesn’t mean he would never see any of them again

#### 3. No longer see my face

- a. Lit. “no longer you shall see the face of me you all”
- b. Paul’s ministry intention was to focus now “beyond Rome” – he was heading for Spain

#### 4. A side note: Paul was wrong – he did visit the region again

- a. 1 Tim 1.3: he left Timothy in Ephesus to lead the work there
- b. 1 Tim 3.14, 4.13: he mentions his desire to visit Timothy in Ephesus
- c. 2 Tim 4.13: he mentions having left a cloak and books at Troas
- d. 2 Tim 4.20: he mentions leaving Trophimus sick at Miletus (the very place where he delivered the message of Ac 20)

Nevertheless, as far as Paul knew at the time, he would not return to Ephesus. His ministry there was complete.

### B. The active center of the relationship

1. “Preaching the kingdom” — an unusual term
2. We usually think of “preaching the gospel”

### 3. However, the term occurs several times in Acts

Ac 1.3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

Ac 8.12 But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

Ac 14.22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

Ac 19.8 ¶ And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading *them* about the kingdom of God.

“Paul clearly equated preaching the Gospel of the grace of God with the preaching of the kingdom of God. Once again [cf. 20:22–24] we see that the two terms are used interchangeably [cf. 28:23, 30–31]. ...

“Thus as we survey Paul’s ministry as recorded in the Book of Acts, we see that he was an ambassador of the kingdom of God—but his message was salvation through the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. No reference is made to support the notion that the earthly Davidic kingdom had been established. Rather, the message concerns entrance into a present form of the kingdom of God by faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

## II. In sober self-assessment: the Ephesian ministry blameless (26)

### A. The solemnity of Paul’s statement

- Almost like an oath in court: “therefore I testify in the today day”

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton: Scripture Press Publications, Victor Books, 1990), p. 280

## B. Innocent of blood

### 1. Many commentators refer to Ezek 33.1-6 for this phrase

Ezek 33.1-6 ¶ And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Son of man, speak to the sons of your people and say to them, ‘If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman, <sup>3</sup> and he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows on the trumpet and warns the people, <sup>4</sup> then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his *own* head. <sup>5</sup> ‘He heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning; his blood will be on himself. But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life. <sup>6</sup> ‘But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman’s hand.’

- a. The watchman who sees the sword coming, and gives warning, yet the people do not heed, is not responsible for the loss
- b. The watchman who sees the sword coming but gives NO warning, that watchman bears responsibility for blood

### 2. What this does not mean:

- a. It doesn’t mean that Paul personally witnessed to every living person in Ephesus and its environs
- b. It doesn’t mean that when Paul witnessed, he always preached every aspect of the gospel message

### 3. What does it mean? (How can Paul declare innocence?)

- a. He faithfully preached the message
- b. He saw the danger, he gave the warning

### III. With complete confidence: the Ephesian ministry fully accomplished (27)

A. Paul's reason for confidence: he did not shrink back

1. In this phrase, we have a "double negative"
2. "For I did not shrink back to not announce ... to you"

In the watchman analogy from Ezekiel, the watchman who doesn't blow the trumpet might shrink back in fear as the enemy approaches – try to save himself.

B. Paul's reason for confidence: he proclaimed the full message

1. The words used in this message to describe Paul's message
  - a. Kingdom (25)
  - b. Gospel (24)
  - c. Anything profitable (20)
  - d. Whole counsel (27)

Each of these words themselves suggest various themes in the gospel message.

2. Whole counsel (KJV) vs. Whole purpose (NAU)

a. There are two words for "will" in the NT

Ep 1.11 ¶ also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

- 1) "Counsel" = the same word used in Ac 20.27
- 2) "will" = a common word in the Bible (not so much in Gk lit) often used for the desire or wish of God about something: the will of God
- 3) Counsel implies more the settled plan, the detailed battle campaign, the plan of action

b. Comparing the translations

- 1) KJV uses "counsel" in the sense of God's detailed plans concerning man

2) NAU uses “purpose” with the same idea in mind

3. The contents of the whole counsel

- a. The good news of eternal life
- b. The opportunities presented by faith
- c. The forgiveness of sins
- d. The fact of sin
- e. The fate of sinners (commonly known as hell)
- f. The judgement of God

These are a quick summary, no doubt we could add more I ordered these purposely with the more “positive” aspects first — where do you think the temptation to shrink back might be?

C. The watchman and his message

1. When you witness, the moments of tension center around sin and judgement
2. The temptation is to de-emphasize this aspect of God’s purpose

## Conclusion:

**Proposition:** We are innocent when we do not shrink in our gospel witness.

We sometimes shrink to witness at all. (Easier to get along...)

- There are lots of people who know I’m a pastor, but don’t know my message
- There might be people who know you are a Christian, but...

We sometimes shrink about aspects of the gospel message, don’t we?

Can we say, with Paul, “I am innocent?”