

TITLE: A MAN WITH GODLY PRIORITIES

TEXT: ACTS 20:17-35

THESIS: To show the highest priority in this life, as demonstrated in Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders.

INTRO: Why isn't the church growing today? Are its members dedicated? Can they compare themselves to Paul in Acts 20:17-35? This is a very emotional moment for Paul. Not only is he saying goodbye to these elders (possibly permanently) and looking ahead to the hardship that awaits him in Jerusalem, he is also concerned about the wellbeing of the Ephesian church. In his farewell address, we see the attitude that each Christian should have about the church and the lost.

I. PAUL'S DEDICATION IN HIS WORK (v. 17-21):

(v. 18) "You know...." He couldn't say this if they didn't know him. But they knew his tireless work there (more than two years teaching & healing –19:8f). But he explains it further in v. 19f, showing what "manner" of person he had been.

A. (v. 19) Serving the Lord (this was his calling -9:16 "I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake.")

1. With all humility of mind – this comes first! Nobody can serve God (or anyone else) when self is first.
2. With many tears (of sadness, joy, & pain) - this was/is an emotional work. What happens in Christianity, positively or negatively, affects the eternal soul. **Rom 12:15** "Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep."
3. With temptations (trial, test -Paul's dedication was tested) by the plots of the Jews (**ch. 14, 16**-Philippi/Thess, **19**-Ephesus)

B. (v. 20-21) Teaching – repentance and faith!

1. All the message: I didn't keep back anything that was profitable to you...I did show you!
2. All the places: Teaching you publicly (gospel meetings, etc.) & house to house (door knocking, etc.). (Paul's mission).
3. All the people: Jews & Greeks! The message of Christ is for all who'll listen. We should give everyone every opportunity

II. PAUL'S DESIRE IN HIS WORK (v. 22-27):

A. (v. 22-24) Paul's desire is to complete his overall mission

1. (v. 22-23) Paul knows what's coming. "I go...bound in the spirit (his spirit)" – not literally bound (purposed, motivated; he doesn't have a choice, even though he's not physically bound and being forced to go). He doesn't know details, except that *literal* bonds & affliction await him! The HS testifies of this in every city (through himself & other prophets –21:11).
2. (v. 24) I don't count my life dear (valuable) to me. If I did, I wouldn't finish my course (I'd fight to live)! Paul wanted to finish his course w/joy! For most of us, our lives are too dear to us (money, possessions) to give them up for the gospel!

B. (v. 25-27) The 'Ephesus' portion of his mission is complete

1. (v. 25) Sadness in leaving brethren - a good sign as to whether or not brethren love each other! Paul didn't know his fate at this time. In **21:13** he was prepared to **die** in Jerusalem. But in **23:11** he is told of his work to be done in Rome. During this Roman imprisonment, he writes that he expects to be released and visit Philippi again (**Phil 1:25-27; 2:24; Phm 22**). (v. 26-27) This sadness, though, was not enough to divert Paul's attention from his work there. You are my witnesses:
 - a. (v. 26) I am pure (clean) from the blood of all (v. 20-21 – I held nothing back; I testified to Jews & Greeks). (cf. **18:6**)
 - b. (v. 27) I have not shunned ("kept back"-v. 20) to declare unto you ALL the counsel (*purpose, will*) of God. This is why he was pure of the blood of all (v. 26). He'd preached everything to everyone in every place (in Ephesus). He was able to say this twice (v. 20 & 27), which shows how important it was. Every preacher should make this his goal. Too many preachers hold back for fear of disagreement or because he isn't knowledgeable enough, etc.

III. PAUL'S DELEGATION OF HIS WORK (v. 28-32):

A. (v. 28) **Feed the flock!** Therefore (because of the necessity of declaring *all* God's will –v. 27), take heed (warning):

1. Elders are overseers (interchangeable terms) of *all* this flock, and are put into this role by the Holy Spirit
2. They were appointed for the purpose of *feeding* the flock (church of God); this is done by teaching (publicly *or* privately)
3. This flock (church) was purchased with His own blood – this church is worth what it cost to purchase it – Christ's blood!

B. (v. 29-31) **Protect the flock!** (v. 29) From grievous (violent, cruel, unsparing –Thayer) wolves that won't spare the flock.

(v. 30) These wolves would even come from among the elders, speaking perverse (distorted, morally corrupted) things. Their purpose is to gain a following (and \$\$)! **2 Pet 2:1f** – "and many shall follow their pernicious ways..."

(v. 31) Watch! I've forewarned you, multiple times (for 3 years), night & day (priority- more important than sleep) with tears (begging; emotional). (**Mt 24:25** – "Behold I have told you before!")

C. (v. 32) **Rely on God's help!** I commend you (commit, present, set before) to God & the word of his grace... The word is able to build you up, and to save you! Always point people to this Standard (the Bible).

IV. PAUL'S DEVOTION TO HIS WORK (v. 33-35):

A. (v. 33) I coveted nobody's money, clothing, etc. (i.e., I've provided for myself)!

B. (v. 34-35) You yourselves know that **my hands** provided for my needs & the needs of those with me (e.g., Silas, Timothy, etc.).

1. Paul was a tentmaker (18:3), and had the ability to support himself. In **1 Cor 9**, he speaks of his right to payment for his preaching, but refuses to accept it, because he didn't want it to negatively affect his work with a new, weak church.
2. (v. 35) Here he says it was an example to them – they also were to support the weak, and remember Christ's words...

CONCLUSION: Paul's love for God, Christ, the church, & his ministry in these things was amazing. It's hard to imagine how anyone (but Christ) could be more dedicated to anything. Why isn't the church growing today? Are we "pure from the blood of all men" (v. 26)? Or do we "count our own lives and possessions too dear unto ourselves, so that we won't finish the course with joy" (v. 24)?