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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study
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Let's Begin

Recall the night Jesus was talking to Nicodemus. To this audience of one, Jesus spoke one of the greatest sermons ever delivered; and before the experience was over, Nicodemus knew what it was to be born again. Jesus was the greatest soul-winner who ever walked on the earth.

The next greatest soul-winner had to be the apostle Paul. Think of the people Paul won to Jesus. When we come to Acts 20, we discover some of the things which made him the soul-winner he was. In fact we're going to find what's in the heart of a soul-winner.

As we explore chapter 20 concerning the heart of a soul-winner, let's follow the outline below:

- I. A Passionate Reaching Out with the Gospel (vv. 1-21)**
- II. A Principled Resolve to Stand on the Gospel (vv. 22-27)**
- III. A Prophetic Reminder of Threats to the Gospel (vv. 28-41)**

I. A Passionate Reaching Out with the Gospel (vv. 1-21)

Acts 20 marks the beginning of Paul's last missionary journey, providing an itinerary of his last trip. Paul had two significant stops. First, he stopped in Troas (v. 5). In Troas a young man named Eutychus, "being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead" (v. 9).

Paul responded immediately with healing for the young man (v. 10), and continued ministering before moving on to Miletus. Miletus marks the second significant stop Luke records (vv. 11-15). While in Miletus, Paul sent a messenger to the Ephesian church requesting the elders come to him (v. 17). Paul's encouraging words to the elders gives us a good sense of Paul's heart concerning evangelism. His exhortation stands as one of the finest, most heartwarming speeches in all literature.

First, note Paul's *manner* in reaching out with the Gospel (vv. 18-19). Constancy is the key. He says, "I have been with you at all seasons" (v. 18). Paul stayed three long and difficult years in Ephesus (1 Co. 16:8-9). Faithfulness is essential to effective Christian service (cp. 1 Cor. 4:2; Rev. 2:10). Contrarily, unfaithfulness is damaging to the faith. Unfaithfulness wrecks homes, destroys businesses, and divides churches. Paul was with them "in all seasons."

Paul not only possessed *constancy* in his manner, he also had *consecration*.

Paul served "with all humility of mind" (v. 19). Paul didn't look upon ministry as a profession, but as servitude. From the

moment of salvation, Paul considered himself bought with a price. He belonged body, soul, and spirit to his heavenly Master.

Reflection Connection

Think for a moment of someone in your personal life who stood with you through difficult times. What impact has their constancy had on your faith? Explain.



Reflection Connection

When you think of the personal characteristic we call "humility," what comes to your mind? Be specific. Name some ways the church can develop an atmosphere of humility in the life of the congregation.

A common slave carries out orders; obeying orders is fundamental to servitude. The servant has no will of his own. Instead, he follows his master's will. Furthermore, the servant possesses a humble attitude as he carries out the master's wishes (cp. Phil. 2:3; 1 Pet. 5:5).

What is humility? Humility is placing ourselves in proper relationship to our Master. Humility is the opposite of *pride*. It's easy to think more highly of self than one ought. Thus, the servant has a deep sense of his own unworthiness.

Second, observe Paul's *method* in reaching out with the Gospel (v. 20). He personally demonstrated how to share the Gospel. Teaching others to share Christ is a non-negotiable in the heart of the soul-winner.

Luke writes, "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house" (v. 20). Paul showed them and he taught them as he went house to house sharing the Gospel.

The best way to touch an unbelieving community is to show them a changed life. Indeed whether it is parents showing their children or men and women showing their co-workers, nothing demonstrates Gospel power like a Gospel-changed life. In addition, one of the purposes of public assemblies is to get the Gospel out. Therefore, Paul did not hesitate to teach them "publicly."

Note:
repentance is not mere remorse.

Third, observe the *message* of Paul's teaching. He was very clear, "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 21). Note: repentance is not mere remorse. In other words, repentance is not simply being sorry one has sinned. Rather, *repentance is turning from sin*; repentance is a change of mind.

Also, once one has turned from sin, one turns to Jesus, *trusting* in Him as Savior and Lord—"faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

II. A Principled Resolve to Stand on the Gospel (vv. 22-27)

The Christian life may not be easy, but it proves to be exciting. Paul's life illustrates the adventure. For him, life was a race, a battle, a sacred trust. Though nothing moved him, he was constantly moving for God.

First, note the *destination* of Paul's life (vv. 22-23). The uncertainty is striking. Luke wrote, "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there" (v. 22). While the uncertainty was real, Paul knew "bonds and afflictions" awaited him (v. 23).

None of us know the details of the future (cp. Prov. 27:1). In fact, it is best we do not know. We could very well be scared to inaction. But in the midst of uncertainty, Paul knew who held the future in His hand. Faith drove the Apostle Paul's life (cp. Job 23:10). Faith bound him in spirit to go to Jerusalem.



Reflection Connection

How willing would you be to go to a particular place knowing fully all awaiting you would be pain and affliction? Do you think your answer is equal to the answer most Christians would give? Why or why not?

Second, note the *dedication* of Paul's life (v. 24). When the Apostle Paul said to the Lord on the Damascus road, "What would you have me do?" he meant it! His strong commitment bound him to an unfinished task "so that I might finish my course with joy" (v. 24). Paul saw his life as a race (cp. 13:25).

Additionally, the race he ran was not a sprint; it was a marathon. A marathon takes stamina, determination, and a willingness to be virtually tortured to finish. God expects no less dedication from us.

Unfortunately, many do not finish the race. One of the saddest passages in all of Scripture concerns a group who walked away from Jesus. John recorded the sad incident, "But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him... From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (6:64, 66).

John Mark forsook Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:13). Also, Demas was among those who forsook the Apostle Paul (2 Tim. 4:10). God's encouragement assists us to run with patience the race before us.

Third, observe the *declaration* of Paul's life (vv. 25-27). Paul was a preacher. In a real sense, all of us are preachers. Not from a pulpit of wood, of course. Instead, we are "heralds," having something to declare about someone else, the Someone else being Jesus Christ. We are His ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20). We go *constantly* (v. 25), *conscientiously* (v. 26), and *courageously* (v. 27).

Paul stood unwaveringly on the Gospel. At no time in our history is the resolve to stand more needed. Our age is an age of accommodation, an era of toleration, and an atmosphere of acceptance of all things unholy. The heart of the soul-winner stands on the Gospel.

III. A Prophetic Reminder of Threats to the Gospel (vv. 28-41)

Before Paul felt comfortable leaving the church—heading to his destiny in Rome—he took time to remind the elders of the threats the Gospel faced. Soul-winners not only know the Gospel well, they know well what is not the Gospel. Thus, Paul became the prophet, exposing the threats the church would face.

Paul's first word was a precaution to the workers — the elders, overseers, pastors. If the leaders themselves were not prepared, the church at large remained vulnerable. Thus Paul said, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (v. 28).

Soul-winners not only know the Gospel well, they know well what is not the Gospel.



Reflection Connection

What do you think the main duty of the pastor to be? Explain.

Paul explicitly noted to the elders how God made them “overseers” to the church. Thus, we easily conclude elders and overseers to be synonymous in the New Testament. In addition, the term “pastor,” which is most common for the church today, is also synonymous with “overseer.”

Observe as well the tender description given to the pastoral role. Paul tells them to treat the church like a flock, overseeing them, feeding them, and protecting them. The elders were to care for them as the church which Christ bought with His own blood. Pastors are delegated an unspeakable responsibility to the church of Jesus Christ. Hence, pastors dare not take their role lightly. Neither should we.

Paul's second word spoke to the peril of the wolves (vv. 29-31). For three years Paul warned them concerning the dangerous wolves ready to attack God's sheep, “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock” (v. 29; cp. v. 31). In fact Jesus Himself warned of wolves dressed as sheep (Matt. 7:15; 10:16; John 10:12).

As an added danger, the sheep were vulnerable both inside and outside the church. Persistent attacks from outside the church come from atheism, materialism, and humanism. This unholy trinity has broadsided the church throughout history. Today atheism, in the form of evolution and secularism, persistently assaults the historic church. The people of God must ever be ready to defend themselves against these deadly assaults. Even more, God's watchmen must remain on the wall ready to protect God's flock at all costs.

While the enemies from outside the church initiate a frontal attack, a more subtle and dangerous aggression comes from inside the church. Enemies from outside are more easily discerned as the church's foes. Many times, however, the inside aggression unfortunately goes undetected. Someone said that the temple of truth cannot be destroyed by woodpeckers from without but by termites within. Wolves who dress in sheep's clothing sit among God's people.

There are two inside enemies which we will identify which threaten the church. The first one is *liberalism*. Liberalism denies the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith. Peter spoke plainly of modern day liberalism, “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Pet. 2:1). The key phrase in Peter's words is, “who privily shall bring in damnable heresies.” Peter uses language which suggests slipping something in through the side door.

At the end of the 19th century, it was common to speak of the “social Gospel.” Advocates of the “social Gospel” believed people would be saved if we could save

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Reflection Connection

Describe the fundamental difference between liberalism and libertinism. Do you think today's church is more vulnerable to liberalism or libertinism? Explain your answer.

society. Emphasis was placed upon doing away with downtown ghettos rather than dealing with fallen, sinful men and women who needed the sin-ghetto expunged from their heart.

During the 20th century, liberalism began to corrode the authority of the Bible. Higher criticism of the Scriptures demoted God's Word to a mixture of truth and error. And the church suffered because of attacks within, which liberalism delivered.

A second enemy within which attacks the church is *libertinism*. Unlike liberalism which perverted *belief*, libertinism perverts *behavior* by lowering the standards of the Christian life. Libertines become like the world in an attempt to reach the world.

Paul's third word concerns a prescription of the Word (v. 32). Paul knew he would be with them no longer (cp. v. 25). A beautiful picture is expressed when Paul laid the church at the feet of Jesus.

The cure for spiritual ailments is the Word of God. The Bible is always the best antidote for error. The Bible *matures* the Christian by building them up, and *assures* the Christian by promising and delivering their inheritance (cp. Eph. 1:14; 1 Pet. 1:4).

Paul loved the Ephesian church; consequently, he could not hold his tears back (vv. 36-37). He was both a warrior and a witness. But here he expresses the simple heart of the pastor who loved his people. Furthermore, Paul displayed his passion as a soul-winner. He stands as the standard for every Christian as we seek to win people to Jesus Christ.

Golden Greek Nugget

Luke describes the message Paul delivered from house to house as "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 20). The Greek term translated "repentance" is "*metanoia*." It literally means a "change of mind." It involves a turning — a turning from sin and a turning to God. Christ began His ministry with a call to repentance (Matt. 4:17), and explicitly cited repentance as a non-negotiable element of spiritual life (Luke 13:3).

Wrap Up

The heart of the soul-winner is characterized by a non-stop reaching out with the Gospel of Jesus. A soul-winner resolves to stand upon the faith once for all given to the saints. In addition, the biblical soul-winner possesses a prophetic mind-set to expose the wolves that threaten the church of Jesus Christ. May the Lord Jesus Christ bestow upon his church fresh power to be soul-winners for Him.

