

Acts 20:13-38

Priorities In NT Leadership

(What were the principle tasks of human leaders in the early church?)

- Spiritual leadership in the church has always been very important. In this passage, Paul teaches by example and precept. While some of the specifics of Paul's example may not apply directly to every leadership situation today, the principles remain important for us.
- See apptoteach.org (Theology file #811) for information on church leadership.

¹³ But we, going ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending from there to take Paul on board; for thus he had arranged it, intending himself to go by land. ¹⁴ And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. ¹⁵ And sailing from there, we arrived the following day opposite Chios; and the next day we crossed over to Samos; and the day following we came to Miletus. ¹⁶ For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

Paul's example

¹⁷ And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of **repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ**. ²² And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry, which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. ²⁵ And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, 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 did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

- The passion and humility of Paul highlight his example in ministry.
- Paul's message, while centered on "the gospel of the grace of God", with the need for turning to God through faith in Christ, it also included "the whole purpose of God."
- His letters give us the content of his teaching.

Paul's exhortation

²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build {you} up and to give {you} the inheritance among all those who

are sanctified. ³³ I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my {own} needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵ In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

- Leaders in the church should be:
 1. **Vulnerable not infallible** – “²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves” Leaders do not have a free pass on temptation and failure. As a matter of fact they face some unique and especially devastating challenges to holy living. With power and position come temptations to pride, privilege, and profit that can destroy ministries and lives.
 2. **Protectors not abusers** – “²⁸ ... and for all the flock” Leaders are to guard the flock as they do their own souls. This means that they must understand human nature and the MO of the devil, the world, and the flesh.
 3. **In-touch not aloof** – “²⁸ ... among which” Human leaders are also sheep and they minister among those who are like them in many ways. They should make sure that others sense this. Leaders should not be aloof or living apart from the flock even though it is tempting to do so in attempts to impress so as to have authority over.
 4. **Ordained by the Spirit not by self** – “²⁸ ... the Holy Spirit has made you” Spiritual leaders are not to be self appointed but ordained by the Spirit. This means that while a personal passion for service is not enough. It must be notarized by the Christian community and especially by existing leaders.
 5. **Protective of not careless with** – “²⁸ ... overseers” The Greek word used here is the term from which we get the word “Episcopal” and is translated “overseer” or “bishop.” The meaning of the term is “to watch over.”
 6. **Servants not masters** – “²⁸ ... to shepherd” Leaders are shepherds not managers, CEOs, ranchers, stock holders, etc. A shepherd in ancient Israel was seldom an owner (more often a steward) with specific responsibilities to
 - a. make sure the flock was well fed,
 - b. make sure the flock was safe,
 - c. tend to the weak and straying individuals.
 7. **Centering their ministry on the church community not the secular community** – “²⁸ ... the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood” The leader's first calling is to minister to the needs of the church. This does not mean that leaders should not set the pace in showing God's love to the world but it does mean that they realize that the best witness to the world is a well cared for and healthy flock.
 8. **Drawing people to Christ not themselves** – “²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.” In attempts to lead others a person can draw attention to themselves thinking that confidence in human leadership is the key to building the Kingdom. Christ is the chief Shepherd and He alone deserves the attention and faith. Healthy churches are built on the cornerstone of Christ.
- We might add additional principles from verses 17-27. Leaders should :
 1. Minister with humility and passion.

2. Teach the grace of God in the whole counsel of God's revealed purpose.

3. Call people to repentance and faith in Christ.

“³⁶ And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷ And they {began} to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, ³⁸ grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they were accompanying him to the ship.”