

## 2070 - CALL to EPHESIAN ELDERS - Acts 20:17-21

PRELIMS. Paul has addressed the Church in Troas - some meeting! **Eutychus** has fallen down and died but is **raised again** by Paul! And they **continue** to **fellowship** into the next day! Paul is on his way back to Jerusalem but has missed the Passover date but hopes to arrive for Pentecost, 50 days later [16]. Paul has decided to **walk** the 20 miles or so to **Miletus**, while the others sail round the coast! Probably to to pray or be alone with God, or meditate!!

**CALLING for the EPHESIAN ELDERS!** When Paul arrived at Miletus, he sent for the elders of the Church at Ephesus to come down to meet him! That would have taken about 3 days by the time a messenger went to inform them. Whatever ‘occupation’ they may have had, they were able to come **immediately!** For some reason, Paul **wanted** to talk to them! The Ephesian church was perhaps the **biggest** church in Asia at the time. It was the first Church that Jesus Christ Himself addressed in the Book of Revelation.

Christ commended the Church in Ephesus for being **faithful** in **testing those who call themselves apostles and are noted found them to be false** [Rev 2:2]. That immediately shows that there is in a Church, a **hierarchical** structure of **authority** and **responsibility!** Jesus commended the elders in Ephs for appointing some sort of ‘examination’ for **testing** the claims of its members! Paul obviously left Eph in the hands of elders who had authority and responsibility. He was obviously **concerned** that they would **know** how to **continue** that responsibility. Thus his calling them to meet with him.

**Why** did Jesus call these elders - because He knew that from among themselves heretics would arise. Heretics come from **within** the Church - they **started off in** the Church and go astray. Yes, there are **wolves** too who **come in** to the church, but heretics come from within the church, *from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them* [30].

Our Lord Jesus had to **preserve** the **truth/doctrine** of those who followed Him. He constantly had to fight against their errors. There were **4 strong Bible-Believing** religions in Jesus day - yes Bible-Believing religions - which **continues** today under **new names** but in

**essence** have the very same errors! We need to study how Jesus handled these errors so that we too avoid falling into their traps.

The **4 religions** (1) the **Essenes** they believed the Bible but had their own **interpretation**. They were **separatists** mostly unmarried men who adopted children from other Jewish families. They believed they preserved the truth. The **Dead Sea Scrolls** have been found in one of their secluded caves in the Qumran area. these men concentrated in studying the bible (old testament). They had no contact with culture or society. **Not** mentioned in NT! (2) The **Pharisees** - they were **traditionalists** and **legalists**. Opposite of the Essenes, they **were** in public life and sought to influence it. They **wanted** to be **noticed** by men. They were the **only** religion that to it all right. More concerned about what their teachers taught about the word rather than the word itself. They emphasised God's sovereignty but neglected His love! (3) The **Zealots!** They were the **political activates** of the day! Least spiritual but most zealous. They were the **Nationalists** - no other nation but Israel. (4) The **Sadducees!** They were the most **powerful** group in society - **all** the High Priests came from the Sadducees. They actually, despite their strong belief in the Bible, were the **ultra liberals** of the day! They did not believe in angels or in the resurrection and things **supernatural!** Although these 4 main-stream religions in Jesus day believed the Bible - they **all rejected Jesus X!** They were **not true believers** - they said no to blessed Jesus! Having lived with and seen and heard all He did - they **refused Him!**

Friends - there are Bible-believing churches today who have all these factions but under other names/guises. There are in the church today, **separatists, traditionalists, activists, liberals**. Just as Jesus Christ and the Apostles had to **preach against** such errors, so must we today! **Why did Paul** send for the elders? Because they **needed** to be reminded that **Satan** goes around seeking new ways to **deceive** Bible-believers and put a twist on things. Friends - it is not the Bible that saves us - it is **Jesus Christ who saves us!** It is the Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that made **atonement** for sin on the Cross. If **your** bible reading has not revealed to you **this Jesus** then pray that it would! Because Jesus Christ **IS** the Word! Listen: *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was **with God** and the Word was **God**.*

Why did Paul send for the elders? Because of **pastorally concern!** It was **all** for the **sake of the flock of God!** Not for himself! *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God [28]!*

He started off by asking for **criticism!** **Challenging** them to be **frank** and **open** with him - to **confirm** or **deny** the truth. *You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day [18].* It has to be said that **not many** people would take the **opportunity** to be **critical**. It is one of the hardest, if not the hardest of Xn duties to be **honest** in **criticising** a **friend** especially one in **authority!** To say to 'his face', that he was not doing his job properly was very hard! But Paul **had** such a **relationship** with his flock that he would **not** have asked them unless he thought they would be **honest** be honest!

Note how Paul **defines the ministry!** Several things (1) Its a **service!** *servng the Lord [19]* **Leaders** in the church are supposed to **serve** the church! He doesn't mention **ruling over!** Elders, treasurers, doing the accounts, cleaners, counsellors, visitors are all servants. Office-holders as well as non-office-holders are all servants. A **privilege!** Paul served the **Lord** although it was he dealt with people!

(2) Paul served with a **soft heart!** *with all **humility** and with **tears*** [19] Paul was a **hard** man **by nature** and **nurture!** But **grace** **softened** him! Whereas in the **past** he would **help stone** Xns to death and **persecute** them, no sweat, now he **wept** and **protected** them! He was **soft** in heart when **rebuking** people *I wrote to you out of much **affliction** and **anguish of heart** and with many **tears**, not to cause you **pain** but to let you know the **abundant love** that I have for you [2Cor2:4] For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you **even with tears**, walk as **enemies** of the **cross of Christ** [Phil 3:18].* When people rejected Christ, Paul wept! \*Problem today is so many ministers/Xns do **not weep!** We do **not** realise the enormity of people **dying without Christ!** It **ought** to make us weep if we really believe

(3) Paul was **prepared to suffer** the **consequences** of choosing for Christ! *with **trials** that happened to me through the **plots** of the Jews* [19c] We have seen this week the **hunting** of **terrorists** in **France!** What chance did the terrorists have? Paul was **hunted** like that! They

**summoned him to Jerusalem**—because they were planning an **ambush to kill him on the way** [Acts 25:3] Another time *his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket* [Acts 9:25] *Behold I am going to Jerusalem constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there* [22] Not many are called to suffer **physically** for Christ although some are! Look at Barnabas Aid magazine! **How willing** are you/I?

(4) Paul **preached and taught the truth - no matter how much it hurt him - anywhere!** He would preach the truth in **any place!** In **public** - not behind closed doors - in the **public square!** So essential today! **teaching you in public and from house to house** [20]! Amazes me how many Xns would not preach in the Vatican (if asked!), in Pubs, in Bingo Halls, or (4) to preach and teach **any people!** Paul spoke to **Jews and to Greeks** [21] Paul took **advantage** of every **opportunity to spread** the Word! To ‘bless a house’, to ‘get the child ‘done’ ‘and explain about baptism! To take funeral! Preach in the **House of Commons** and Lords, in **Holyrood** and **Holywood!** What an opportunity to tell the Good News! Paul never missed a chance to let people know about the Lord Jesus! The Church must go to where people are. **Accept every invitation - turn** situations into opportunities for making known the greatness of Jesus Christ.

(5) Paul declared the **heart** of the **Christian Message** = its about **repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ** [21b] The bible is such an **interesting** book that we can be easily **distracted** to study the **non-essentials**, the things that are **not connected** with our **personal salvation** and our **growth in Christ!** Paul focussed on repentance and faith - that is actually the central theme of Scripture!

Not many preachers today talk of **repentance!** Yes, they will talk a lot about faith, but not repentance! We will never truly have faith in Christ until we repent! Jesus said **unless you repent you shall all likewise perish** [Luke 13:3,5] It is **not easy** to preach to people with the **intent** to bring **conviction** of sin and to bring them to **admit/ confess their** precious sin that they roll as a sweet morsel under their tongue! But it **must** be done! Paul found it **hard** for he says *I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable* [20] He would have avoided it if he could - but he **couldn't!**