

Acts 20:17-21

“The Pastoral Heart Of Paul The Apostle”

This particular portion of the book of Acts is unique in that it's the only portion that really gives us a glimpse into the pastoral heart of Paul the Apostle. As you study the book of Acts you'll find Paul the apologist (the defender of the faith), Paul the evangelist as he shares the gospel with the lost around him, but out all the messages recorded in the book of Acts that he gave, this is the only one that's spoken to Christians, this is the only one that reveals Paul the pastor. Paul is typically personified as a very hardcore, driven oriented kind of a guy which is absolutely true, but we don't always get the balance of that by understanding that Paul was also a very tenderhearted, warm individual who cared deeply for the flock of God. When you're reading through the book of 2nd Cor, when you get to ch 11 and you begin to read of all the things that he suffered for the sake of the gospel, shipwrecks, beatings, stoning, tiredness, coldness, hunger, nakedness and on and on it goes. In essence when he gets to the end of the list he dwarfs all those other things in the light of what he says comes upon him *daily*, which was his *deep* concern for all the churches. In other words, all those other things were horrible, but they're nothing compared to the distress, and deep concern that plagues me everyday for the spiritual health and well being of all the churches that he'd planted, built up, and established. Paul had the quintessential pastors heart, he was a true under-shepherd to the sheep (understanding that Jesus Himself is the Chief Shepherd).

And so as we read this portion it's with the understanding that Paul has come to believe that he'll never see these people again, it's his final farewell. and It's a portion of scripture that's well worth studying beyond what we'll be able to peer into and expound upon today. He speaks in terms such as “Shepherd, sheep, and savage wolves.” His message to them is laced with illustrations explanations, and exhortations, he speaks of the *motive* of his ministry, the *manner* of his ministry, and the *message* of his ministry, and he reminds them of the *past*, speaks to them of the *present*, and warns them concerning the *future*.

So you can see that there's much to be gleaned, and any # of angles by which you could approach this text from a solid position, and I'm not going to point out each of those perspectives I just listed for you as we go along, but I wanted you to be aware of the fact that they're there. Perhaps you can take note of them as we go along and they pop out at you, because it's worth looking into, weighing out, and thinking through. This is Pastor Paul's heart towards the flock of God, the examples he wants us to see in himself by the grace of God, certain things he'd have us to emulate and imitate, other things he'd have us to watch out *for* and be warned *of*.

Well, you remember the circumstance he's on route to Jerusalem, wants to be there on the Day of Pentecost, so as they're sailing past Ephesus, he knows he can't venture into the city and still make his desired destination on time, and on as they come to Miletus he sends for the elders of the church and has them come to him so that he might give to them these final instructions, and his final farewell.

Vs17-18

Now when you come across words in the NT like, “elder” or “overseer” or “bishop” or “pastor,” understand that those are all interchangeable, synonymous terms. The word “elder” in the biblical sense of leadership doesn’t always indicate age so much as it does spiritual maturity. There can be a younger man (relatively speaking) that serves as an elder in the body overseeing men significantly older than him. Now there’s obviously an element of respect that’s given to older individuals in general, that’s biblical.

But when we see here that he called for the elders of the church, what this is basically telling us is that he called for the pastors, or the spiritual overseers of the body there in Ephesus, not necessarily older men, though it certainly could’ve been. Now as for the qualifications of an elder you can find those in 1Tim 3, Titus Ch 1.

But one thing that I want you to see here is that Paul called for them in vs 17, in vs 18 we find that they came to him. One of the greatest abilities when it comes to the ministry is simply *availability*. I’m certain that this wasn’t convenient for any of them; they no doubt had jobs, perhaps families, I doubt that they got paid time off or anything else, they had personal obligations and responsibilities, yet when Paul called for them they were available, what does that say to us? That these elders demonstrated that the Kingdom of God had priority in their lives, they weren’t so attached to the things of this world that they weren’t available when it came to matters of the Kingdom. How many people want to serve the Lord on their terms, or as its convenient or doesn’t get in the way of other things they’ve got going on. and I find that so often the people who have a problem because they’re not being used to somehow serve are generally the ones who are unavailable, you have to avail yourself. If you really want to be used by the Lord you can’t really pick and choose your terms, you have to avail yourself. The bible teaches us that God is searching to and fro looking for one to show Himself strong on the behalf of, that one who’s truly available to Him in every sense of the word. These guys were available, and God was using their lives.

Look what Paul says to them. He says, (read 18b,c). So we see that he’s going to be speaking to them of his manner of life, but before he speaks of that he’ll share with us his motive in vs 19. But there are 3 more things in this vs (outside of the fact of the elders availability) that I think are worth drawing attention to in regards to Paul’s manner of living.

The 1st thing that grabs me here is those 2 words, “You know,” what does that mean? It means that there was nothing secret about Paul the apostle’s life. There are a lot of people that struggle with the fact that as believers, but then more specifically in the ministry that there has to be a transparency about our lives. People are looking *at* you, and they’re looking *to* you to model for them what it means to be a believer, what an acceptable lifestyle and manner of living is as a believer. You say, “I don’t want people looking to me.” That’s too bad, whether you think it’s right, fair, or anything else, is irrelevant, that doesn’t change the fact, and the fact is, people are watching your life.

That's why we're to seek to lead lives that are blameless, shunning even the appearance of evil or questionable circumstances. Not inviting skepticism or misunderstanding into the equation by the choices we've made in perhaps exercising liberty. Because it really doesn't matter what I want to do, or in some cases even what I'm free to do because it's not about me, I'm no longer my own, I've been bought at a price. The life of the believer is to be one that denies self, dies to self, and places others *above* oneself. Jesus said, "*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*" Matt 16:24-25 If you want to do what you want to do when you want to do it, I suppose that's up to you, but that's not the lifestyle of the disciple of Christ, not truly. The lifestyle of the disciple of Christ is one that places self last, and considers the well being of others 1st. Paul didn't have any area of his life that he considered his own, no one else's business, he said, "You know" in speaking to the Corinthians he said that they were like epistles written in their hearts which were known and read by all men. So 1st of all the lifestyle that he led was common knowledge, they knew it. 2nd he considered it key to be real about who he was from the 1st.

He says that he lived the way he lived from the 1st day. He didn't try to warm up to them, or get in tight with them, on level they could relate, and then slowly let them in on the fact that he was a Christian. I don't know where this idea that we have to 1st kind of camouflage ourselves until people let us in and then let them in on the fact that we're believers came from but it wasn't the bible. Becoming all things to all men doesn't mean we compromise who we are in Christ, Paul said that he was never without law concerning Christ. When you start a new job, or go back to school, or move to another area, it's time for a fresh beginning, how important to let it be established who you are and what your standards and priorities are from the 1st day. Then it's clear and everyone knows, you sort of be a closet Christian and all that does is invite compromise and temptation into your life that otherwise wouldn't be there if it was clear where you stood. So his lifestyle was *common* knowledge, he considered it *key* to make that known from the 1st day, and 3^{rdly} the pattern of his life was *consistent*. He says here that the manner that he lived among them he lived; *always*. He was consistent, he didn't just put on his game face when he knew believers were around, or when they met for bible study, both in private, and in public he was the same guy. and To get a glimpse of those things you might read through 2nd Cor, 1st and 2nd Thess, 2nd Timothy where he speaks about the mannerisms of his ministry in a little more explicit terms than what we get even here. But the bottom line is that he didn't play the part in public and then lower his standards or become a different person in private, he was consistent.

So already in vs 18 we have seen the need to be available *to* the Lord if we really want to be used *by* the Lord. and That of course you need to think about, what does it mean to be available to the Lord, we spoke of prioritizing the kingdom in a practical way regarding other things that we give preference to.

But no doubt it includes our general lifestyle as well, if there's a certain sin that you're hanging on to, refuse to give up and repent of in your life, than you're not going to convince me that you're truly *available* to the Lord. So you see "availability" carries with it multifaceted connotations, and implications, are you prepared to prioritize the Kingdom practically, lay down your life repent of your sin and allow the Holy Spirit to sanctify you personally? We've also noted the fact that not only do we need to avail ourselves, but we need to count the cost and understand that as believers, and all the more so when it comes to ministry that our lives are not our own, but they're open books to be known and read by all. and That in that we need to let it be established initially who we are, and then be true to it and live our lives consistently before others. Paul says, "You know all these things about me."

What he's doing is establishing himself as a pattern, or an illustration, an example that we might imitate. Not an example *instead* of Christ, but an example as he *follows* or *emulates* Christ himself. To the Corinthians he wrote, "*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*" 1 Cor 11:1 Paul's life seems to almost serve as a model as to how the life of Christ can be lived out personally and practically in the life of the everyday person. Paul was a man just like you and me, but he was surrendered to the power of the Holy Spirit in his life who was conforming him more and more into the likeness of Christ. You and I (whether we like it or not) are example to people around us, it's just a matter of whether or not you're a good example, or a bad one. But Paul is causing them to recall the life that he led in their presence that they might in turn lead like lifestyles in the presence of others, modeling Christ to the people around them. and What was his motive for doing what he did, he begins here by sharing what his motive was, and ends by sharing what his motive wasn't, but one of the ways that he modeled Christ was through service, notice.

Vs 19

So again we see here 3 things right off the bat in this 1st phrase, "Serving the Lord with all humility." #1 We see the model, #2 We have the motive, and #3 We're given the manner.

What was one of the ways that he modeled Christ? Through serving, Jesus said, "... *whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave -- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*" Matt 20:26-28 In John 13 on the eve of His betrayal, after He washed the disciples feet He said, "*I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.*" John 13:15 Phil ch 2, what's the mind of Christ? The mindset that says, "I'm not going to look out for #1 and my own interests, but rather the interests of others." So Paul served, that was one of the ways that Christ, and ministry was modeled through him.

But his motive in ministry wasn't man, it was the Lord, notice he was serving, "The Lord." Now obviously one of the ways that I serve the Lord is in serving others, when Jesus was talking about ministering to the poor, the naked, to the hungry, the thirsty, the prisoner and all; He said, *"I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me."* Matt 25:45 But its critical in your service to people that you make sure to keep it clear in your heart and mind that you're serving the Lord, or else you won't go the distance. Because generally speaking, people are unappreciative, unthankful, and disrespectful. and If my motive is to serve people, than when they stone me, or beat me, or speak ill of me, when I find myself unappreciated, disrespected, or just generally mistreated I'm going to say, "You know what, forget this, I don't need it." and I'm going to give up, and give in. That's why even though ministry involves ministering to *man*, we're serving the *Lord*. Paul told the Colossians, *"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ."* Col 3:23-24 So remember that its from the Lord that you'll receive your reward, not man, the reward of man is often times very disheartening and can be somewhat wounding, so our motive isn't man, it's the Lord. It's the love of Christ that's to constrain us, compel us, and drive us on.

So the model, *service*, the motive, the *Lord*, the manner, all *humility*, we've spoken about availability, this is another big one, *humility*, I've said it often "humility = usability." and This is always going to be the mark of the true minister, not proud or arrogant, a "religious celebrity" and all. But rather humility, lowliness, meek in spirit, why? Because it's the overflow of both seeing and spending time with the Lord. Jesus said that no servant is above his master, no student above his teacher, it's enough if he can even be like him, much less above him. Now if Jesus is our teacher, our master, than we do well to be like Him. Remember what He said, *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."* Matt 11:28-29 It's going to be difficult to model our Master from a proud and haughty position, because Jesus was anything but. Remember the mind of Christ? Others oriented, not self centered and puffed up. and As you study the scriptures the overflow of a life that's encountered holiness is always humility and brokenness. When Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up he said, *"Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."* Isa 6:5 In Dan ch 10 when Daniel saw the vision he said, *"...no strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength."* Dan 10:8 and He speaks there of being there with his face on the ground, just humbled in the presence of holiness. Perhaps you remember when Peter came into a realization of who Jesus was, and we read where, *"...he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!'"* Luke 5:8 So the natural overflow of seeing Jesus in truth, and spending time with Jesus is going to be humility. Paul became a prominent name in Ephesus, but he served the Lord in all humility.

His life was life was earmarked by tears, and trials, and often times by his own countrymen, that's what I was saying so often the ones who turn on you are the ones you're trying to help. That's why you've got to be serving the Lord, because that kind of thing can be discouraging quick. Tough times will visit you in life, and all the more in ministry, but its ours to stay tenderhearted, Paul was a man of tears, he wept with those who wept, we think of him often times as a stern man, and no doubt he stood for the truth uncompromisingly, but not uncompassionately. He told the Philippians, "*For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:*" Phil 3:18 We spoke of Josiah Wednesday evening, how that he was tenderhearted and humble, and God responded to him, was gracious to him and used his life in a radical way. Paul went through tough times, but he remained tender. So he modeled the Lord by serving, also by sharing, he's spoken of his motive, his manner, now he moves into his message.

Vs20

This is another area that's so critical, if it was profitable, he proclaimed it, if it was essential, he explained it to them and equipped them accordingly. and This isn't always easy, because the things that are helpful, or needful, aren't always things that are pleasant to share. Sometimes they can be painful to share, but the wounds of a friend are faithful, there are times when we need to be made aware of things that aren't going to be easy for us to hear, but if it's profitable we need it proclaimed. What this means (and we'll see it again later on in the ch) is that Paul didn't preach and teach feel good topical messages that ensured a large church. He didn't try to appeal to the masses, he spoke the truth in love throughout the totality of the counsel of the Word of God. The bible is clear that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, and Paul proclaimed it. Teaching topicals only can be treacherous, it can be unsafe, because you start with a premise and then look to the scripture for support, but if your premise isn't solid to begin with, you only wind up twisting the scripture to make it say what you want it to say. But if you just teach the word of God from cover to cover you'll cover every topic, you'll allow the Word to develop the premise and then you can demonstrate that it's a solid doctrine, and holds true throughout the totality of God's word with support scripture. But those are 2 totally different approaches, Paul proclaimed it all. How we need to hear it all, not just the stuff that scratches our itching ears.

Notice he proclaimed it both publicly and privately, the message was the same to the individual person as it was to the mass of the public. But he's drawing attention here to the consistent pattern that his life was marked by, it didn't matter, he lived the same life publicly that he did privately, and he taught the same thing publicly that he did privately. Whether he was in the school of Tyrannus, or ministering in a home study, the heart of the message was always the same, the heart of the message that we have to give to the world, and even to the believer is always the same, notice.

Vs21

Not only was the message the same publicly and privately, but it was also the same regardless of social class, or cultural status and background, it didn't matter if you were a Jew, or a Gentile, you got the same message. Why, because we're all human beings, and there's only one race, the human race, and God so loved *the world* that He gave His only begotten Son. and We've said it before the message of the cross is cross cultural, it's cross generational, it crosses every boundary or limitation imposed by man because it deals with heart of man, and the deep need of the heart of every individual is the same. Regardless of where you're at on the social ladder, or what era you lived in, where you're at on the planet, none of that matters when it comes to the cross, the cross levels all that stuff and deals straight with the heart.

The need of every human heart is the forgiveness of sin, and reconciliation to God and the only way that happens for anyone is repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ Believing in the work that He finished on the cross, paying the penalty for your sin, and my sin. He became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. That's the message, repentance towards God. What is repentance? Literally it's a reversal, a change of mind, you're going one direction, (away from God) repent, or *reverse* your direction and your mind frame and turn towards God, repentance towards God. Come into the understanding that God is for you and not against you, that He has thoughts of peace and not evil towards you, to give you a future and a hope. Understand that God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Repent, reverse your mindset, and your direction in life from away from God, to towards God.

with that like a hand in glove place your faith towards Jesus Christ or even "into" as it could be translated, trust in Jesus Christ as the mediator between you and God, the One who is able to reconcile you to God by suffering vicariously in your place that you might stand in His righteousness before God. That you can have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ Who's made peace through the blood of His cross. That's the message, no matter who you are, where you've been, or what you've done, salvation and reconciliation to God always comes the same way, repentance towards God and faith towards Jesus Christ

This is the Pastoral heart of the apostle Paul as he reviews the past with these guys, the motive of his ministry, to serve the Lord, the manner of his ministry, with all humility/ and the message of his ministry, repentance towards God and faith towards Jesus Christ what a solid model for us as we look to lead our lives in a manner that is befitting to Christ in us, that we serve Him in humility, with tenderness of heart regardless of the tough times and trials and that we stay true to the message, repent of your sin, and place your faith in Jesus Christ

Prayer Points: Lord help us to be an accurate reflection of who You are to those whom we're around. That we lead the same life privately that we do publicly, that it would be establish openly who we are and what our standards are. and May we have servants hearts, serving *You* Lord, as we serve others, help us to maintain proper perspective. That our love for you, out of Your love for us would be the compelling, constraining factor in our service. Not the accolades or outward responses of man. Remind us that our reward comes from you that we not grow weary in doing well, and may we never compromise the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified for the sin of the world. The need for repentance towards You, and faith towards Your Son, in Whose name we pray.

Maybe in times past you thought that you'd be alright in the sight of God simply by being a pretty good person, and that God would understand that. The problem is there are no pretty good people, we've all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Oh maybe compared to me you're pretty good, or compared to someone else, but we err when we compare ourselves amongst ourselves because the standard of goodness is Jesus Christ and Unfortunately we all fall radically short of Him, the only way to be accepted in God's sight in repentance towards God, and faith towards Jesus Christ who has loved you and given Himself for you. and If God is dealing with you today and you want to give your heart to Him, that you might be forgiven of your sin, experience salvation, and reconciliation to Him, than now's the time, turn to God, and place your faith in Jesus Christ