

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

LII. Paul's Timeless Address To Local Church Leaders

(Acts 20:15-38)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 351. We can thus learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the book of Acts.
- B. Acts 20:15-38 records Paul's final address to the elders of the Church at Ephesus, what serves as a timeless address to all local church leaders. We view the passage for our insight and edification (as follows):

II. Paul's Timeless Address To Local Church Leaders, Acts 20:15-38.

- A. As Paul sailed along the western coast of the Roman province of Asia hurrying toward Jerusalem to be there for the feast of Pentecost, he bypassed Ephesus where there was a large Christian church lest he be delayed in meeting with its believers and thus miss Pentecost, Acts 20:15-16.
- B. Accordingly, when his ship stopped at the port of Miletus, he called for the elders of the church at Ephesus that he might address them the last time in his earthly life, Acts 20:17, 25.
- C. Paul's address reviewed his past ministry at Ephesus (Acts 20:18-21), it described his present situation (Acts 20:22-27) and gave the future responsibilities of the church elders (Acts 20:28-35) as follows (Ibid., p. 413):
 - 1. Paul reviewed his past three-year spiritually exemplary ministry at Ephesus, Acts 20:18-21:
 - a. The apostle reported that throughout his ministry at Ephesus, he had lived a transparent life, Acts 20:18.
 - b. Specifically, Paul had served the Lord with humility, tears and trials from the plots against him by Hebrew unbelievers, not shrinking from declaring to them anything that was profitable, teaching both publicly in the town or house-church-to-house-church on repentance toward God and faith in Christ for salvation, Acts 20:19-21 ESV. (Some think that "house-to-house" refers to pastoral visitation in a local church, but the expression is contrasted with Paul's public ministry, so it "probably refers to house churches," Ibid.)
 - 2. Paul described the present situation, Acts 20:22-27:
 - a. Currently, he was going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Holy Spirit, not knowing what would occur except that the Spirit testified in every city that he would face imprisonment and afflictions, v. 22-23 ESV.
 - b. Yet, Paul did not consider his earthly life as holding any value to himself, but only that he might finish his ministry course that he had received from Christ to testify of the Gospel of God's grace, v. 24 ESV.
 - c. Paul then announced that none of the elders would see his face again, so he testified that he was innocent of the blood of all of his listeners in that he had declared unto them the whole counsel of God, v. 25-27.
 - 3. Accordingly, Paul commissioned the elders of the church on their future responsibilities, Acts 20:28-35:
 - a. He urged the elders to pay close attention to themselves and to the entire church over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers, that they care for the church of God which He had obtained with His own blood on the cross, Acts 20:28 ESV.
 - b. To clarify what they were to watch, Paul predicted that after his departure from this life, fierce wolves would come in among the body, not sparing the flock, and that even from themselves would men arise speaking twisted things to draw away disciples after them into apostasy, Acts 20:29-30 ESV.
 - c. Paul thus called the elders to be alert to this threat, recalling how that for three years he did not cease to admonish everyone with tears to stay aligned with the truth of God, Acts 20:31 ESV.
 - d. The apostle then commended them to God and to the word of His grace which was able to build them up and give them the inheritance among all who are sanctified in Christ, Acts 20:32 ESV.
 - e. Paul closed his appeal by reminding the elders of his own selfless testimony of not coveting anyone's money, but working hard with his own hands opposite what false teachers would do, Acts 20:33-35a.
 - f. His last appeal was to the words of Christ found only here in Scripture, that "It is more blessed to give than to receive," what acts as a directive for all leaders of God's people, Acts 20:35b ESV; Ibid., p. 414.
- D. Upon finishing his address, Paul knelt down on the shore and prayed with the elders, and they wept and gave a farewell greeting, grieving most at his word that they would not again see his face in this life, Acts 20:36-38.

Lesson: *Based on his own selfless testimony and the selfless testimony of Christ Who bought the Church with His blood, Paul called the elders at Ephesus selflessly to care for the doctrinal and spiritual integrity of the church.*

Application: *May we local church leaders selflessly care for the doctrinal and spiritual integrity of the church.*