

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-37 A Final Farewell

Someone has said, "Saying goodbye is most painful when you know you will never say hello again." That's how the Ephesian elders must have felt in today's story from the Book of Acts.

Paul's ministry in Ephesus continued for three years. Leaving there, he and his companions traveled through Macedonia and Greece proclaiming the good news and encouraging the disciples. They eventually came to Troas.

The following Sunday Paul met with the disciples there in an upper room. In the gathering was a young man named Eutychus who was sitting in an open window. As Paul taught late into the night, Eutychus fell asleep and tumbled to the ground below. Paul rushed down and found the young man dead. So, he took him in his arms and held him. Then, turning to the people he announced, "Don't be alarmed. He's alive!" God had healed him, and everyone rejoiced at what he had done (Acts 20:7-12).

The next day, Paul set out for Jerusalem. He wanted to be there for Pentecost. He and his missionary party passed through Miletus, a port city about 75 kilometers (45 miles) south of Ephesus. From there Paul sent a message to the elders of the church at Ephesus. He asked them to come and meet with him. When they arrived, Paul spoke from his heart, reminding them of how he had lived among them. "I served the Lord humbly and with tears," he said. "I never failed to proclaim the good news to all people, telling them that they must turn to God, repent of their sins, and put their faith in the Lord Jesus."

He then told them of his plans: "Now, the Spirit is urging me to go to Jerusalem. He has revealed to me that I will suffer pain and imprisonment there. However, I am not moved by such things. My one desire is to finish the race the Lord Jesus has given me. I must complete my work of telling people about God's grace."

Then, turning to look them in the face, he said, "I know that you will never see me again. Therefore, I declare to you, I am innocent of the blood of all people. For not once did I shrink from teaching you the whole will of God."

Paul then charged the elders, "Guard yourselves and the flock of God. Never forget that God purchased them with his own blood, and that the Holy Spirit has appointed you to watch over them. You are to protect them from savage wolves that will come in and try to lead them from the truth."

Now," he said, "I entrust you to the grace of God, and I remind you how I selflessly labored among you. I even worked with my own hands to provide for myself and my fellow workers. I have coveted no man's silver or gold or clothing." He concluded his message by saying, "Remember the words the Lord Jesus said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

When Paul finished speaking, they all knelt down together and prayed. Some of the elders began to cry, for they knew that they would never see Paul's face again. Paul then embraced them all and bid them farewell. Together they walked down to where the ship was waiting (Acts 20:18-38).

Paul's address to the Ephesian elders is his third extended speech in Acts. You may remember that the first one took place in Pisidian Antioch during Paul's first missionary journey. The second occurred in Athens, during his second journey. Now, this third speech takes place in Ephesus during Paul's third and final journey. This speech, however, is different from the first two. The first two were sermons where Paul proclaimed the gospel to the lost. However, in this address to the Ephesian elders, Paul speaks as a brother. In this moving speech, the aging apostle opens his heart. He challenges his friends and colleagues in ministry to continue in the work of the Lord. In it, we sense Paul's love for the believers and his single-minded commitment to Christ and his mission.

From Paul's final instructions to the Ephesian elders, we learn three important lessons about our responsibilities as pastors and church leaders.

First, we learn that, as pastors and elders, we must guard the flock of God. Paul charged the Ephesian elders, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood." We must never forget that the people do not belong to us. They belong to God, and to Christ who purchased them with his own blood. We are simply Christ's under shepherds and caretakers of the flock of God. As such, we must love them and protect them from "savage wolves that will come in ... and will not spare the flock." We must never forget that God will someday judge us on how we cared for his sheep.

Secondly, as Christ's under shepherds, we must faithfully proclaim the gospel to all. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders, "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." Our primary responsibility as ministers of the gospel is to proclaim Jesus to all. We must tell them that he died on the cross for their sins and was raised on the third day. We must further tell them that they must repent of their sins, put their faith in Christ alone for salvation, and follow him. If they will do this, God will forgive them of their sins and give to them eternal life. Woe to that pastor or church leader who fails to preach the gospel.

Finally, as keepers of God's flock, we must teach the people the "whole will of God." Paul told the Ephesian elders, "I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God." Not only must we proclaim the gospel, we must teach all the great truths of Scripture. Jesus commanded his disciples to "go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). He also charged them to "make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20). We do this by systematically teaching the Word of God to the people of God. In doing this, we protect them from savage wolves that will come and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them." Every pastor should ensure that there is systematic teaching of

the Word of God in his or her church—and they should personally oversee and participate in that process.

This lesson is **important** because we learn how pastors should care for the flock of God.

The **main truth** we learn from this lesson is that it is the primary responsibility of pastors and church leaders to proclaim the good news about Christ. They must also guard the flock of God by teaching them the Word of God.

Let's **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. Name three responsibilities of pastors concerning the flock of God?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that pastors are responsible for guarding the flock, faithfully proclaiming the gospel, and the teaching the whole will of God, you answered correctly.
2. What is the primary responsibility of pastors and other ministers?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that their primary responsibility of pastors and church leaders is to faithfully proclaim the gospel of Christ to all, you are right.
3. Why was Paul's farewell to the Ephesians so tearful?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "It was because he had told them they would never see his face again," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it two or three more times or until you can summarize Paul's address to the Ephesians. Memorize the three lessons learned from his address. Then, you should develop a plan to implement into your own ministry, the truths learned in this lesson.