

Paul, A Pattern for Preachers

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: Acts 20:17-35

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If you have a Bible I would like for you to open it to the book of Acts, chapter 20. I'm going to speak today on this subject: "The Apostle Paul: A Pattern for Preachers." God has given in the Word a pattern for preachers and I believe that pattern is Paul the apostle to the Gentiles.

Now, while you are opening your Bible to the 20th chapter of Acts, let me make a few comments. I want you to listen carefully. Religion and churches today are beset with untold problems and confusion. You know that and I know it. There is very little peace, very little joy, very little real saving faith. And the problem is not in the pew.

Many preachers will lead you to believe that the problem with the churches today and the reason God doesn't send revival and all of these other things is a problem with the people. And I don't believe that. I don't believe the problem of today's church is in the Church pew at all. I believe the problem is in the pulpit. The responsibility for our spiritual famine and the prophet said the day will come when there will be a famine in the land, a terrible famine, not of food, grain, oats, barley, but of hearing the Word of God. And this great spiritual famine that we are experiencing today, an ignorance of God, an ignorance of his redemptive mercies in Christ Jesus falls not upon the people, but upon the preachers.

Now, every man who claims to be a preacher of the gospel—and we have, as one fellow said, the woods are full of preachers. We have preachers everywhere. Well, every man that claims to be a preacher of the gospel ought to constantly study the life and ministry of the apostle Paul. He is, indeed, a pattern for preachers.

In the book of 1 Timothy, chapter one, verse 16, Paul said this: "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy that in me Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering for a pattern, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe in him to life everlasting."

Now, if Paul's conversion is a pattern for those who believe, is not his ministry a pattern for those who preach? I believe it is. After all, he is the apostle to the Gentiles. That's what he said. He had been called and sent of God to be the apostle to the Gentiles. That's us. And he was the first missionary evangelist sent forth .

The Holy Spirit said to the Church, "Separate unto me Paul, Paul and Barnabas for the work whereunto I have called them." He was the first missionary evangelist. And then God used this man to write 13 of the 27 books in the New Testament. And he went about establishing churches and ordaining pastors and elders. Yes, sir, Paul is the preacher's pattern.

Now then I want you to look down at Acts 20. I told you to open your Bible to the book of Acts chapter 20. And let's begin reading with verse 17. And we have here a very candid look at the ministry of this man, the apostle Paul. And this look at his ministry is provided by Paul himself in his own words. Now what is the occasion? Well, in the 20th chapter of Acts, Paul is speaking to a meeting of pastors, preachers and elders from Ephesus. He sent to Ephesus and called all the pastors and the preachers and the elders to meet him at a certain place. And Paul is going to speak to this large group of preachers. And Paul had been the human instrument that God used to teach these men the gospel. Paul was the one who taught them the gospel, who first preached the gospel to them. Paul had been their teacher. And this was the last time. Now, this is important. This was the last time that Paul would see these men and the last time that he would preach to them. This is the last time that they would see his face. He had never preached to them again, never preached to them again. He knew it and they knew it. In fact, in verse 25, if you will look there in Acts 20, verse 25, Paul says this. He says, "I know that you, among whom I have preached the gospel, shall see my face no more."

Now doesn't this give a special weight to what he is about to say? Here he is speaking now to a group of preachers, elders, pastors, evangelists, missionaries, men who had heard Paul preach the gospel, men to whom he had been the instructor and teacher of the gospel. And this was the very last time, the last time that they would ever hear the apostle Paul preach.

And in this address, in this message that he delivers to these men Paul literally takes them into his heart. He literally takes them into his secret thoughts about the ministry. Paul, in this message, literally lays bare his motives, his feelings and his fears. Wouldn't it be wonderful if all the preachers in America could be gathered today at this very hour and hear the apostle Paul speak from his heart for the last time before he goes to be martyred for the gospel's sake. He knew that he wouldn't see them again. And he takes them into his secret thoughts, into his heart concerning the ministry, the preaching of the gospel and we could go forth and imitate this pattern, this man whom God used to mightily and so greatly. Let's see what he has to say. I'm interested in this.

And as I said, the great problems and confusion in the religious world and in churches...and the problem is not in the pew. The problem is in the pulpit. If we had some apostle Paul's, if we had some men like this man preaching today, dedicated, consecrated to the gospel of Jesus Christ what God might do in our day.

Well, the first thing in verses 18 and 19, Paul deals with his manner of life, his manner of life. He says here in verse 18, "From the first day, from the first day that I came into Asia I have served the Lord, I have served the Lord with all humility of mind."

Now, Paul called himself a servant of the Lord, a bond slave. Do you know what a bond slave is? Back in the Old Testament when a man, because of indebtedness or for some reason became a slave, he worked for seven years. He worked for his master seven years. And at the end of that seven years he could go free. His master had to turn him loose. He was free to go. But if he loved his master and loved his master's house and wanted to remain as a servant to this good master then he would go down to the temple and they would bore his ear and he would be from that day a bond slave. A bond slave is held not against his will, but he is a willing, loving, submissive servant. He is there because...he is a slave. He is a servant. He does what his master says. He goes where his master says to go. He lives where his master says to live. He waits upon his master. He is a bond servant. He is a slave. But he is a willing, loving bond servant. And that is what Paul calls himself. He said, "I serve the Lord. I am a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm a bond slave of Jesus Christ."

Now I'll tell you this about a servant. Where a servant lives and what a servant does and with whom a servant labors and what a servant possesses is not in his hands. It is in the hands of his master. And when Paul began this ministry he fell on his face before Christ the Lord and this is what he said, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" That's the first thing about this man, his manner of life. He was a servant, a servant of the Lord, a bond servant of Jesus Christ.

He deals also with his attitude. He says it is his kingdom, "It is my Lord's kingdom. It's my Lord's gospel. It's my Lord's church. I serve not myself. We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord. We're not the servants of men." Paul said, "If I please men I'm not the servant of Christ. We serve not the world for the fashion of this world fadeth away."

I tell you this. Paul discovered this. When we serve Christ best then we serve others best. But in serving him we serve them. "I'm a servant," he said, "of Jesus Christ."

Well, how did Paul serve Christ? Look at verse 19. He said, "I have served him as a bond slave with all humility of heart and mind."

On one occasion he said, "I am not worthy to be called an apostle."

On another occasion he said, "I am less than the least of all the saints."

On another occasion he said, "I am not one whit behind the chief apostle, though I be nothing."

On another occasion he said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief."

Paul was a humble servant. And he said, "I served the Lord with many tears, tears for myself and tears for you."

On one occasion he prayed this way. He prayed...he said, "I could wish that I myself was accursed from Christ for my brethren." He said, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved. I serve the Lord with humility of mind, with many tears for myself and the people and with many trials and temptations." His life was not an easy life.

All right. Look at verse 20 and 21. The second thing he says about his ministry, he shows us his manner of life, a servant of the Lord, a bond slave of Jesus Christ. And then secondly he tells us about his courage and his conviction. He says to the people there, he says, "I have kept back nothing. I have kept back nothing profitable unto you. I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

Now Paul was a man like you and me with certain emotions and feelings and desires. But his fear of the Lord kept him from fearing men. Paul didn't fear men because he feared God. And his love for Christ was greater than his love for himself and his love for his family and his comforts. He loved comforts. He said, "I know how to abound and I know how to be abased." But his love for Christ was greater than his love for personal comfort and ease. And his faith in Christ kept him from compromising the gospel.

He borrowed the words of David and said, "I believe, therefore have I spoken. I believe, therefore I can't compromise what I believe."

In 2 Timothy 3:16, listen to him here. You remember he said, "I kept back nothing profitable unto you, nothing. What I have read in God's Word I have preached to you and have kept back nothing profitable."

Now, in 2 Timothy 3:16 he said, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. All Scripture is profitable for doctrine. Therefore I kept back nothing profitable unto you."

And I ask you this: Is not the true character of God profitable to his Church and his people, God's holiness, God's righteousness, God's justice, God's truth? Is that not profitable? Then why don't we preach it, God's sovereignty, God's infinite glory? Is not the fall and the condition of sinners by nature, is that not profitable?

What happened in the garden? What happened in our identification with Adam when he rebelled against God? What effect does that have upon men and women today? Is that not profitable? Is not the covenant of grace and mercy profitable? I told you recently that the word covenant is in the Bible 250 times. God talks constantly about the covenant of grace, the new covenant. Is that not profitable? Is not the glorious person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ profitable? Christ our surety, Christ our incarnate God, Christ our representative, Christ our substitute, Christ our sacrifice, our sin offering, our risen justifier, our ascended mediator, our reigning king, is that not profitable? Is not the righteousness of God in Christ profitable? Is not the Spirit's work in regeneration

profitable? Is not the gospel of Christ Jesus profitable? Is not repentance and faith and perseverance profitable?

Paul didn't preach what men wanted to hear. He preached what God commanded him to preach. He said, "And I kept back nothing. I have held back nothing through fear or favor or seeking applause or ambition. I have kept back nothing, nothing profitable unto you."

Do we preach to build churches or to glorify God? Do we preach to increase our...the size of our organizations or do we preach the Word of God boldly and fearlessly?

Oh, we could look into this man's life, couldn't we, a servant not of men, but of God, a bond slave of Jesus Christ, committed, committed to Christ. Whatever the cost, whatever the trial, whatever the trouble, this is the calling and concern of God's faithful servant, his glory, his kingdom, his gospel, his Church, his Son, his testimony. And then with courage and conviction and boldness fearlessly to preach that gospel. Never weary, never tired, be determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. Minister to the hearts of people that their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, to do away with so many ceremonies and rituals and playing games and start preaching Christ.

There is where the trouble is. It is that people won't go to church. If they could hear something they would. If they could hear from God they probably would.

And then notice the third thing in verse 22. Paul then looks to his future. What is the future for such a man? Not much here on this earth. In verse 22 Paul says, "And now I go bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit. Not knowing what shall befall me there. The Holy Ghost revealed to me that prisons and afflictions wait for me, prisons and afflictions, that is what awaits me in Jerusalem. None of these things move me," he said. "None of these things move me. None of these things change my message. Paul was aware that the religious world and especially the leaders of religion opposed his gospel of grace, opposed substitution, effectual substitution in Christ Jesus, opposed justification by faith alone and that he would be hated and persecuted for what he preached.

But these conflicts did not frighten him nor cause him to alter his gospel. He admitted the gospel is the offense of the cross, the offense of the cross. But that didn't change his mind about preaching it. He said, "These things don't move me. The Holy Ghost told me that bonds and affliction and prison and even death awaits me, but that doesn't move me. I do not count my life dear unto myself. It is not my life. It belongs to Christ. My soul is dear to Christ. He loved me and gave himself for me. But success and honor and the comforts of this world are totally unimportant, totally unimportant. I know," he said, "how to be abased and I know how to abound."

The hymn writer put it this way. "Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease while others fought to win that prize and sail through bloody seas?"

And then notice what Paul said here. He said, “Prison and affliction awaits me. But that doesn’t change my mind about the gospel. It doesn’t alter my message because I don’t count my life dear unto myself. I have one ambition. Listen. I plan to finish my course and fulfill my ministry with joy. I started out preaching the gospel of God’s grace and I am closing down with the same message.” That’s what he said.

“I began preaching Christ and him crucified and when I come to the last hour I will be preaching Christ and him crucified. I will testify of the gospel of the grace of God whatever it costs.”

My friends, my friends, do you hear what I am saying? Do you hear what I am reading? If we had in the pulpits of America and on television screens men who were servants not of themselves and their families and the denominations and the world and politics, but men who were servants of God, I mean, willing, loving, bond slaves of Jesus Christ who could serve the Lord with humility of mind and heart who were dedicated to the gospel of God’s grace, 100% sold out, whatever the cost to preach Christ and him crucified, who knew that persecution and heartache and trial awaited them even from religious people, but who could say with the apostle Paul, “These things don’t move me. These things won’t alter my course or my message. I don’t count my life or salary or automobile or home or possessions or my children even dear unto myself. I plan to finish my course and fulfill my ministry and go down preaching Christ and him crucified. Under God I believe God would bless that ministry.

“He that honoureth my son,” God said, “I’ll honor him.”

Quit compromising, making excuses, conforming to this world, trying to sing like the world sings and dress like the world dresses, put on services that the world will appreciate, preaching sermons that make nobody mad. You can’t do it and preach the gospel.

Notice, next of all, Paul’s comfort and consolation, verse 25. His ministry drawing to a close, prison and death awaiting him, leaving his friends to go among the enemies of the gospel knowing that he would see their faces no more, Paul finds much comfort in this fact. Listen to him. “I have preached the gospel of the grace of God. I have fully testified of the grace of God. I am free, free, free from the blood of all men who have heard me preach. I am free from the blood.”

Can you say that?

“I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. I have kept back nothing profitable unto you. I have not compromised the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ and his precious blood. No, sir. Not for an office, not for a raise, not for a position, not for a handshake, not for an applause, not for a pat on the back, not for any man living.”

Can you say that? If you can’t, you need to do some changing or some resigning.

And Paul said, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Fear has not moved me. Ambition has not influenced me. Comforts have not swayed me and money has not interested me." He says, "I coveted no man's silver or gold."

What a declaration. What a declaration. And yet why should it be out of the ordinary? I ask you that. Why should we have to turn back so many years to find that kind of dedication? Why should we have to go back 2000 years to find a preacher with that kind of courage?

That's what's wrong with the pew. It's the pulpit. And men who love God will back that preacher and support that preacher and hold up his hands like they did Moses of old.

And then he sounds a warning in closing, verse 28. And he says to these preachers around him here as he bids them farewell. He says, "Take heed to yourselves. Take heed to yourselves. Examine your faith. Examine your motives. Examine your ministry. Take heed to yourselves and to your doctrine for in so doing you will save yourself and them that hear you. Take heed to yourself. Take heed to your flock over which God, the Holy Ghost, hath made you an overseer. They are the fruit of your ministry."

What is the fruit of a man's ministry? His people, his converts, his followers, those whom he teaches, those to whom he preaches. They asked our Lord one day. They said, "What is this doctrine you are preaching?"

He said, "Ask them that heard me. They will tell you what I am preaching."

If you want to find out what a preacher is preaching don't ask him, ask his membership. They will tell you what he is preaching.

He said, "Take heed to yourself and take heed to your flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers and feed the Church of God which he purchased with his own blood."

Feed them? Feed them? He's not talking about having dinners and suppers and celebrations. He's talking about feeding them the Word of God, feeding them the Word of God, all the counsel of God, being faithful to the preaching of the Word of God, verse by verse, line upon line, precept upon precept. Preach the Word. And after you have preached it, preach it again. And after you have preached it, then preach it again. Be instant in season, out of season. There is no season for preaching Christ. Every season is open season when it is accepted or unaccepted when it is received or rejected when it is loved or hated. My job is to preach it. My job is to preach it.

"I know this," he said, "after I leave grievous wolves," wolves in sheep's clothing our Lord called them, "will come in not sparing the flock, hucksters, merchandisers of souls, false preachers who care only for themselves and their programs and their progress, their popularity and their possessions and the applause of men.

Also he said, "Of your own selves shall men rise up speaking perverse things and leading disciples after themselves."

What would a man want with a disciple? John the Baptist pointed to Christ and said, "Behold the Lamb of God. Follow him."

And then Paul makes his recommendation. He said, as he closed this message, "I commend you to God. I commend you to God. I commend you to God and I commend you to his Word."

That's the only refuge. There is assurance there. There is safety there. There is hope there. There is encouragement there. There is faith there, God's precious Word.

Now, here you have it. Here you have it. Paul, the pattern of preachers. The servants of the Lord are humble men, neither proud nor pretentious nor ambitious because they are servants.

You see, they are bond slaves and they are not looking for anything better. They are content with Christ. And his servants are studious men. They learn the Word. They study the Word and they preach it boldly. They are bold to declare the glorious gospel of his saving grace. And his servants do not seek the honor of men or the world. They are dedicated to fulfilling their ministry whatever the cost. And these servants of the Lord find their comfort and joy in doing the will of their God and exalting his dear Son. And they point men to Christ. He is the Savior.

Now, I have this message on a cassette tape. It is called "Paul, the Pattern of Preachers." Also one I'll bring next week on the righteousness of God. If you want it, send two dollars donation. That's what it costs to prepare them. We'll send it to you by return mail. Until next week may the Lord bless you.