

## Paul's Profile of a Faithful Minister

Acts 20:13-27

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What is a faithful minister of Jesus Christ called by the Lord to be? A motivational speaker? An entertainer? A CEO of a corporation? A fund raiser? A dreamer of great plans? A builder of cathedrals? No doubt, a faithful minister will wear different hats at time within a church, but it is not the world's model that should frame our understanding of what a faithful minister is, but rather the Word of the Lord alone. Just as the Lord has instituted the ministry, so He alone is the one who can tell us what constitutes a faithful minister, and this He has done in His Word.

The Apostle Paul explains that ministers of Jesus Christ are stewards who have been given spiritual food and gracious provision for the household of God, which they are in their ministry to give to hungry and thirsty souls. But Paul states there is one qualification for every steward who is under the authority of his master: faithfulness to the charge given to him by his master to care for the household (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). The qualification is not eloquence, nor style, nor popularity, but faithfulness.

The question that comes from our text this Lord's Day is this: What was Paul's view of a faithful minister? (1) A Faithful Minister Is a **Servant** of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:13-19); (2) A Faithful Minister Is a **Preacher** of the Whole Counsel of God (Acts 20:20-21); (3) A Faithful Minister Is a **Runner** That Completes the Race (Acts 20:22-24); (4) A Faithful Minister Is a **Watchman** to the Church (Acts 20:25-27).

### I. A Faithful Minister Is a Servant of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:13-19).

A. After that eventful Lord's Day worship service in Troas that extended till dawn the next day, those traveling with Paul (including Luke, "we went before to ship" in Acts 20:13) sailed south ahead of Paul to Assos, where Paul met them. From Assos, they sailed south to Mitylene for a brief layover, and then to the city of Trogyllium on the island of Samos, from where they departed for and arrived at Miletus—a seaport approximately 30 miles from the city of Ephesus.

1. Paul did not visit the Church of Ephesus because he was seeking to arrive in Jerusalem by ship in time for the Feast of Pentecost in order to have the greatest opportunity to evangelize the greatest number of Jews in one place who were coming from many different nations and who would as converts carry the gospel back to their own countries (Acts 20:16). Rather than visiting the Church of Ephesus, Paul sent a notice to the elders of the Church of Ephesus to travel from Ephesus and meet him at Miletus for his farewell speech to them (Acts 20:17).

2. Paul did not expect to see these beloved elders again (Acts 20:25). What was it that was most important to leave with them (many of whom had been converted under his ministry and he ordained over the three years that he ministered in Ephesus, Acts 20:31)? These were the elders that now cared for the flock in Ephesus, and Paul's final words begin with leaving to them a testimony of his own example lived before them as a faithful minister of Jesus Christ (follow me as I have followed Christ, Acts 20:18). There are very few that are born leaders. Most of us have to learn how to be leaders from watching, listening, and emulating those leaders God puts into our lives (whether fathers, older brothers, grandfathers, pastors, elders, and bosses). You are being watched? They are being taught? The only question is what they are learning from you that a leader is?

B. Paul first profile is that a **faithful minister is a servant of Jesus Christ** (Acts 20:19).

1. Dear ones, there is nothing more important than this in the character and commitment of a faithful minister. He is not first and foremost a servant of the Church (though he is that). He has the high and holy calling to be the servant (bond servant) of Jesus Christ. And the seriousness of that calling accompanies the minister wherever he goes (whether shopping, whether in his studies, whether in times of fellowship, whether in family visits, whether in leading his own family, whether in cases of discipline in the church, and whether in standing behind the pulpit to preach as the voice of Jesus Christ). His faithfulness to the Church of Jesus Christ depends entirely upon His faithfulness to Jesus Christ above everything else. A minister or elder does not serve Christ by seeking to please the likes and dislikes of every member (Galatians 1:10). A faithful minister or elder (and a Christian as well) must decide who he will seek to please first and foremost in his life—Christ or man. Though he loves the flock entrusted to him, he is not seeking to win a popularity contest or seeking to win the approval of men. It is not before members of the church that he will stand and give an account at the end of his life, but rather before the Lord Jesus, who called him to be His ambassador. If a minister does not understand whose servant he is above all else, he will be pulled in a hundred different directions and end up pleasing no one (neither the people nor the Lord Jesus).

2. As a servant of Jesus Christ, Paul calls these elders (who are his children in the faith) to recall how he served among them **“with all humility of mind”**. Because the faithful minister is called to be the servant of the Lord, there is no room in his ministry for a big head that is puffed up with pride at his own gifts and abilities. Paul calls these elders to follow him in being lowly minded, rather than exalting their scholarship, degrees, sermons, size of congregation, or building projects. Pride infects us all, but dear ones, when ministers and elders (or members) don’t even see or don’t care to put it to death, a very big fall is just around the corner (Proverbs 16:18). The whole point of being a servant is that the servant doesn’t take the glory to himself, but directs it to his master (Luke 17:10). Humility is seeing God’s greatness and my littleness; His power and my weakness; His mercy and my lack of mercy; His glory and my shame; His righteousness and my wickedness; His sufficiency and my insufficiency.

3. Here are some questions for self-examination: (1) Do I willingly deprive myself of “rights” in order to serve others, or do I stubbornly cling to them like a security blanket? (2) Am I defensive when corrected and easily offended by the words and actions of others? (3) Am I quick to respond with repentance and sorrow in sin I’ve committed against others? (4) Do I live in competition to receive the approval and applause of men or do I rejoice in the gifts, graces, and honors of others? (5) Do I see myself as expendable if God so wills it, or is there no one who can do the job I do? God hates pride (“a proud look” Proverbs 6:16-17), but loves the humble of heart. Bragging and boasting (even if it is the truth) robs God of His glory. Let others praise you and not yourself (Proverbs 27:2). The minister’s boast is in the cross (Galatians 6:14).

4. Paul was a servant of Jesus Christ **“with many tears, and temptations [trials] which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews”**. Paul’s tears were the result of the many trials he faced from those who hated him and plotted against him (even successfully stirring up mobs to lie about him, to stone him, to beat him, and to imprison him). A faithful minister will face opposition and adversity from those who despise the testimony that he bears for the truth, but he will be driven to tears before the Lord for his persecutors, rather than being filled with vengeance, sinful anger, bitterness, or hatred. The Holy Spirit broke the heart of Paul over the attacks from others (even from those within the Church), and he wept for his enemies before the Lord that they might be brought to repentance. We must not make enemies due to our own sinful pride and unguarded words, but even the sinless Lord Jesus was hated, despised, and ultimately slain by those who became sworn enemies to the truth which He preached (Luke 6:26). Only in heaven will all our tears be wiped away by the Lord (Revelation 21:4).

## II. A Faithful Minister Is a Preacher of the Whole Counsel of God (Acts 20:20-21).

A. Paul declared “all the counsel of God” to these elders as he taught them and taught the Church of Ephesus.

1. Paul is saying here that he withheld nothing from them that God had revealed to him. Paul didn’t tickle the ears of his hearers, telling them what they wanted to hear, but rather he preached to them what they needed to hear by way of faith in Jesus Christ and repentance in turning from sin and growing in hatred of it.

2. It is certainly a temptation that Satan whispers in the ear of the minister: “It is not necessary to address the depravity of man and his corruption—the torment in hell—the continual war we face in the Christian life from the world, the flesh, and the devil—the need for correction in our life—the goodness of God seen even in the massacre in Las Vegas last week—the sins and errors within the Church of Jesus Christ—the judgment of God that is upon this nation due to its hatred for the Lord Jesus and His holy commandments”. Conviction in our lives is not comfortable, but it is necessary if we are to come to Christ and grow in Christ. The faithful minister is called by Jesus Christ “to teach all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20).

B. Whatever is needed and whatever is profitable for the salvation of sinners and for the sanctification of believers must be preached—nothing withheld that is for the profit of the sheep.

1. Is there any of God’s Word that is unprofitable to us (2 Timothy 3:16-17)? Absolutely not! Even the judgments of God upon His enemies and upon His people are for our admonition (1 Corinthians 10:11). Just because the doctrine or application is one you have heard many times before is no reason to act as if you don’t need God’s truth.

2. The primary tasks of the faithful minister are (1) to preach and teach the Word privately and publicly, and (2) to devote himself to prayer for the prosperity of the gospel in the lives of people (Acts 6:4). It is God’s work to draw sinners in faith to Himself and to bring forth fruit in the life of His saints. We as ministers (and you as members) are so susceptible to looking to the results and judging the faithfulness and fruitfulness of the ministry by what we can see. But dear ones, this is to judge the Lord Jesus Christ whose work it is to bring forth fruit in His season. Judge rather whether the seed of God’s Word is being faithfully planted, but let’s leave the results to Him. Begin with yourself. Is the Word of God taking root and growing in my life and my family’s life?

### **III. A Faithful Minister Is a Runner That Completes the Race (Acts 20:22-24).**

A. Whether Paul was preaching, teaching, fleeing persecutors, enduring the hatred and violence of adversaries, ministering in love to the flock of Jesus Christ, or exercising Church discipline, he understood all that God had appointed for him to faithfully do and to faithfully endure was a race that he was running. And the one goal that kept him going was finishing that race—not quitting because of hardships, not dropping out because of weariness, not being distracted by worldly pleasures, and not being overcome by fleshly desires to please himself.

B. Paul informed his beloved elders with whom he had spent so much time and who loved him as a father in the faith that the Spirit of God had been bearing witness through gifted saints in other churches that bonds (imprisonment) and afflictions (weighty burdens that bring pressure on the soul and the body) await him. This speaks of what God had ordained for Paul once he arrived in Jerusalem (Acts 21-28). It was not times of fun that awaited Paul. It was not times of rest and peace or basking in the sun, but it was bonds and afflictions that awaited him.

1. But does that deter a faithful minister? Absolutely not! Why? Paul is not first and foremost concerned about what will happen to him by way of trials, afflictions, suffering, or even death. Paul

is first and foremost devoted with all that is in him to finishing the race and not letting distractions or fears keep him from finishing what Jesus had given to him in the course before him.

2. And not only to finish the course out of duty and faithfulness to the Lord Jesus, but to finish the course “with joy”. Dear ones, you can only finish the course Jesus has set before you with joy, when Jesus is your life and your reason for living. When Jesus is your joy and when your joy and contentment is not based upon your wealth, your health, your popularity, your worldly successes, or your pleasures, there is nothing that can rob you of your joy; for your joy does not come from your husband, wife, parents, or children. Your joy is found in the Lord Jesus who has already run the race and is waiting at the finish line for you to wipe away all tears, to take away all temptation and sin, to remove all pain and suffering, and to grant to you everlasting life and joy in uninterrupted fellowship with God and with the saints forevermore. Dear ones, I don’t know what is the course in the race the Lord Jesus has appointed for you, but He grants more than sufficient grace to finish the race to all He has saved (2 Timothy 4:6-8). All that I must endure now by way of suffering from others and weakness in my own flesh in the race set before me will be worth it. I will not think that what I have forsaken and endured in this Christian race was not worth it. Let us not be distracted; but let us keep the eye of faith on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-2).

#### **IV. A Faithful Minister Is a Watchman to the Church (Acts 20:25-27).**

A. This is such a tender farewell speech to these dear elders. Paul informs them that he knows this will be the last time they will see his face this side of the glory of heaven (Acts 20:25). How this must have torn their hearts to hear their beloved father in the faith utter these parting words to them.

B. Paul as a faithful watchman over the city of God (the Church of Jesus Christ) had not only preached and taught them, but had also warned them of the enemies that would seek to destroy them—the world, the flesh, and the devil (Acts 20:26-27).

1. Dear ones, preaching is not only nourishing by way of instructing God’s people in faithfulness to believe and walk in the truth (the gospel, the commandments, the doctrine, worship, government revealed in the Word), but is also warning the church about its enemies from within and from without—warning of the dire consequences to laziness, to procrastination, to unbelief, to hardness of heart and stubbornness, to subtlety of temptation, to the forbidden fruit of compromise (a little here, a little there, until not only is the head of the snake in the tent but the whole body).

2. Paul records (literally, he testifies as a witness) to them that he has stood as it were on the walls of Zion and has blown the trumpet to warn them of these enemies as a watchman (as did Ezekiel in Ezekiel 33:7-9). Paul testifies that he is pure from the blood, guilt, and consequences of their decisions. Ministers who do not declare the whole counsel of God and neglect to preach the hard truths and warnings from God’s Word because they do not want to offend the wealthy supporter, or the popular and influential elder, or offend all those who fill the pew each week, Paul implies that there is blood on their hands for which they will answer to the Lord (and there is blood on your hands as well for not receiving the truth and warnings from the Lord). This is serious business—it is life and death. Thus, know that when this minister steps on your toes in what he teaches and preaches, it is because he wants to be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ in running the race set before him and who only wants to see you receive all that is profitable that we may stand together in joy before the Lord on the final day.

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