



# The Good News

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## *Paul's Directions to the Ephesian Elders*

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**A**s we hope to one day have elders at this congregation, we have discussed from time to time the characteristics and qualifications of elders. One passage that helps us to further our understanding is Paul's directions to the elders of Ephesus in **Acts 20:17-38**. What were the elders of Ephesus to glean from Paul's words, and how can those words help us today?

Heed Paul's example! In **Acts 20:18-26**, Paul discusses the way he lived among the brethren at Ephesus, highlighting certain aspects of that example to show that the elders should follow in his footsteps.

Paul says that he (1) served the Lord with humility. Serving God is obviously very important as an elder, but so is the character of one who is humble in that service. It could be very easy for an elder to think of himself as being very holy and righteous, being puffed up as Paul warns in I Tim. 3:6 due to his position as a shepherd. Tempering one's service to God and to the flock with humility will help him to stay grounded, realizing the responsibility that rests on his shoulders.

Paul says that he (2) endured trials and persecutions, due, in large part, to his insistence and determination to (3) teach the Gospel. As an elder, it is important to set an example for the rest of the flock that suffering for the Gospel's sake is a good thing. Persecution can come from many places, but generally for only one reason: because the righteous deeds or stand in truth by a Christian has revealed evil in the life of someone living outside the Law of Christ. It is imperative for an elder to show that he is willing to endure hardship as a direct result of his being a Christian, as the flock will hopefully follow suit to also endure for the cause of Christ against the evils of the world.

Paul says that he (3) taught the Gospel while in Ephesus. In fact, Paul specifically brings out to the elders that he kept nothing back that was helpful but

taught publicly and house to house. He taught both Jew and Greek, and he taught the whole counsel of God. We know that one of the characteristics that an elder is to possess is being apt to teach. We also know that this should include the ability to use the word of God to "convict those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). As Paul gives the example, elders should be able to teach the whole counsel of God, and not hold anything back, even if the teaching admonishes those in sin. They should be able to talk to others about the Gospel, whether it is in a public way (Bible class, sermons, bulletin articles) or one-on-one. They should also not be favorable to any category of man. As Paul taught "both Jew and Greek" so also should elders not show favor to any age, gender, or ethnicity.

Finally, after Paul addressed the elders, we read how they "wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him." In no way does this mean that elders necessarily need to go around crying and kissing people all of the time, but what it shows is a willingness to express love and emotion without shame. Men can sometimes be closed and uncommunicative regarding their feelings. Yet, here we have an example that emotions, especially ones of love and devotion, should be expressed. The elders of Ephesus were not ashamed of their behavior, and, in practical application, it can help the flock to see the sincerity of the elders when circumstances arise that naturally elicit strong yet appropriate emotions.

While these characteristics are certainly important for elders, these characteristics should also be in each one of us as we seek to serve God. We, too, should (1) serve the Lord with humility, (2) endure trials and persecutions, and (3) be willing to teach the Gospel to anyone that will listen.