
Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R₂L – Resolved to Live: Living Life Without Regrets (Part 2)

Acts 20:17-21

17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. 18 And when they had come to him, he said to them, “You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the past couple of weeks we have been camped out in Acts 20, looking at the life of Paul as he completes his third missionary journey. Paul has been preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ for some 20 years and through this time we see the hand of God upon him; this Paul, a former blasphemer and persecutor of the church; the one who had despised Christ and who hated Christians and everything they stood for; this Paul whose life had been so miraculously changed; given a heart to know Christ as well as a heart to make Christ known; it is this Paul who said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, **“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”**

Let me impress this upon you! Paul, this former curser of Christianity; this former harasser of the household of faith says to Christians; *imitate me as I imitate Christ*. Paul never acted as though he were some “religious celebrity”, expecting people to serve and honor him. He only wanted to be seen as one serving the Lord with all humility. Paul never sought to be an example in the place or instead of Jesus, but rather an example as he followed Jesus.

And just what are we to imitate, to emulate, to duplicate, to see reproduced in our lives? Not Paul’s former manner of thinking and acting; but the replication of the qualities and characteristics of Christ as seen in Paul. How could this man who was so hostile and violent against God and His church ever live with himself? How could he not have regrets about his former life; regrets that might have crippled him; keeping him from being and accomplishing everything God had for him? Let me come back to that in a moment.

I have been impressing upon you the possibility and indeed the opportunity each of us has of living a life without regret. To be sure, our lives have been riddled with sin. We have all wasted time on things not worthy of our Lord. We have too often settled for less than Christ; a mediocre and half-hearted rather than full and abundant life promised by Christ. What keeps us back from being truly sold out and fully functional for Christ is our past. We live in our past. We define ourselves by our past. We live in our remorse. Perhaps there are things in our youth of which we are ashamed. But are you now in Christ? Perhaps your marriage has not been anything resembling what God has defined it to be. But are you now in Christ? Perhaps your choices in life have been selfish, sinful, and spiritually destructive. But let me ask you, are you now in Christ?

Why do I say, “now in Christ?” Because, beloved, in any man be in Christ, he is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). **“Therefore, there is NOW [in the present] no condemnation [no disapproval; no judgment; no criticism by God] for those who are...[where?] in Christ Jesus** (Romans 8:1). To live a life without regret (or perhaps to say it more accurately – to not live life by or because of your regrets) is not to forget that you were and are a sinner; but rather it is to wonder in the present grace, love and mercy of God that has forgiven you of your sins and to live NOW in the power of God’s lovingkindness to be everything God wants you to be. And do you know what God wants you to be NOW, today? [pause] He wants YOU NOW to be

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conformed to the image, the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29) and He wants YOU NOW to be witnesses of the transforming, life-changing power of the person and gospel of Jesus Christ.

As we come to see in Paul’s farewell address, he did not define himself by his past sins, but rather by the present promises of Christ; that he had been justified by faith; that he has peace with God because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross! To live a life without regret is to say that I am living NOW, this moment for Christ! And I will strive to live every coming moment for Christ. Will I sin? Will I stumble? Will I fail? Yes, but I will confess my sin and then quickly live NOW for Christ; I will pray, I will strive, I will push myself (and push others along with me) to be found in Christ today; right now!

If we would desire to live a life in which regret for the past does not define us or weigh us down, we need to imitate Paul as he imitated Christ. And in our Acts 20 text, we see the things that characterized Paul’s life; we find qualities we can identify and then imitate. Do you take this seriously? Do you believe that by imitating Paul; by putting into practice the things he practiced; by doing the things he did, you can be useful for the kingdom and kept from living by or in regret?

In Acts 20:13-16 we saw in Paul a commitment to the will of God. We noticed the little things he did that demonstrated his resolve to the will of God; of staying behind in Troas a little longer than the rest of the team to encourage the saints; of walking on land rather than taking a ship just so he might speak to more people about Christ; and even of sailing right past his beloved Ephesus, the place he served for over two years and for which he had so deep of an affection because God had laid upon his heart another course; getting to Jerusalem by Pentecost so that he might share the gospel with his own countrymen.

Then, last week, we noted Paul’s second resolve to the Word of God. We see this in verses 17-21. As we work through this farewell speech of Paul, we will find a man who considers himself innocent of the blood of all men (20:26) and determined to fulfill the purpose for which God called him, **“to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God”** (20:24). What is it that we find in verses 17-21 that reveal to us this resolve of Paul to the word of God? We noted that there are six characteristics of Paul found here; three of which we have already examined. The first three means by which Paul revealed his resolve to live by the Word of God, means that we are to imitated are:

A. We must strive to live a transparent life (18).

You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time...

Paul potentially had all sort of skeletons in his closet; thing for which he would be ashamed if made known. But wait, they were made known. Paul’s testimony included declaring from what he had been saved from and then, because he hid nothing, his life was an open book. The Ephesian elders saw the way Paul lived his life, every day. Paul hid nothing. What they saw in Paul, was what they got. They did not find him acting one way at church and another way in the city of Ephesus. His life was transparent. What kind of skeletons are in your closet? Even though Paul had done things in the past that were horrific, everyone knew what he had done and how his life had been changed to live and breathe Christ upon his conversion. It was all out in the open and so there were no skeletons in Paul’s closet. His life was an open book.

To live a life without regret requires and transparent life. If we would live our lives without regret and in accordance with God’s Word...

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B. We must strive to develop a servant’s heart (19).

...serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;

Here we noted that there are no rock stars in God’s kingdom. Jesus Christ is the King of kings, the Lord of Lords. The rest there are but servants, and those who serve God’s way must see themselves as servants. We noted three things required of a true servant of God; humility; tender-heartedness; and perseverance. If we would live our lives without regret, it will come as a result of living out a humble and tender-hearted and persevering life before others. But there is more if we would live our lives without regret and in accordance with God’s Word...

C. We must strive to make known all that is profitable for Christian living (20a).

...how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable

Here we began to see Paul’s passion for the Word of God as Paul determined that his words would be that which encourage and inspire the people of God to know the Word of God that they might do the will of God.

If we would live lives without regret, it will be done in part by the way we speak to others. Our language, vocabulary, the things we say to others, the tone by which we deliver it; the jokes and stories we tell – they will all contribute to our either being fruitful for the kingdom of God; or unfruitful. And an unfruitful Christian, if there is such a thing, would be a Christian full of regrets. We are to make known all that will help a person to know, love and serve Jesus. When we do this, we will be able to live a life without or beyond regret.

With that review, let us look at the final three characteristics of Paul reflecting his resolve to the Word of God; characteristics I am calling you to imitate.

D. We must strive to be involved in biblical teaching (20b).

declaring...and teaching you publicly and from house to house...

This is point D, the fourth of the six characteristics of Paul demonstrating his commitment to the Word of God.

While this is purely coincidence; I would have you notice the reference; the address of this verse. It is Acts 20:20. And like the desire to see clearly, to have 20/20 vision; here we have Paul’s vision for the church; to clearly see the person and work of Jesus Christ. In the first part of the verse we noted Paul’s resolve to hold nothing back from the Word of God; it is all inspired by God; it is all profitable for the believer.

Paul used two words to describe the way he imparted the truth. First, it was **“declarative”** – Paul declared the truth. The word **“declaring”** in our text means to announce in detail; to rehearse before others. Many of us know what it is like to rehearse a speech or a conversation we are going to have with someone. We usually rehearse such things in our heads; sometimes we might do it audibly in private. But Paul rehearsed the truths of Christ before others. How did Paul get better and better in sharing Christ? He was constantly rehearsing the truths before others; and thereby constantly refining and perfecting his communication of those truths.

The other day I needed to update the recording message for our church phone. It’s not my favorite thing to do and I usually try to just make it up once I hear the tone to record. Inevitably, if I do not rehearse what I am going to say, I stumble over the words or say something silly. This last time, I actually had Mardi write out a script for me; one that I read through a couple of times out loud, then made a couple of changes before speaking the perfected recording on the phone. In other words, I rehearsed my lines.

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In Acts 14 we have the account of the first missionary journey of Paul. As it came to a close and the team made its way back to Antioch in Syria, the sending church, look at what is said in verse 27:

When they had arrived [the missionary team] and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

Or as the KJV puts it:

And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

They rehearse, reported, announced in detail the work of God. Let me give you one more example of this word “declaring” or “rehearsing” as it needs to become a part of our lives; in 1 John 1:5 we read this:

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to [rehearse before] you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

That is a good truth to rehearse before others, “that God is light...”As we hear the message of Christ rehearsed before us; we are to then rehearse it before others. This is what Paul did with the Word of God before the Ephesians. Beloved, if we would resolve to live by the Word of God; then we must take time to rehearse it’s truths before others. To articulate what we believe and why we believe it. To recite bible verses and expound on their truths.

Let me ask you, how many of you would like to be more effective in sharing Christ with unbelievers? How many of you are a bit fearful in what to say or how to say it? [pause] Yes, join the club. Let me ask you this? How often do you rehearse the truths before and with other believers? Beloved, *we are not truly committed to the Word of God if we are not rehearsing the truths of God.* And if we are remiss in rehearsing the truths of God, we will end up living in and with regret.

So the first way in which Paul imparted truth was “declarative” in nature. Now the second way in which Paul imparted truth was “didactic” in nature (yes, I had to use such a word). Didactic simply means instructive and comes from the Greek verb that’s found here in our text, *didasko*, the imparting of truth; the communicating of truth in an instructive way. Paul was ***“teaching” [instructing; imparting truth in a systematic way]...***

The question may be, “Are all believers to be committed to declaring and teaching; to rehearsing and instructing the truth of God? Didn’t Paul command all the believers to imitate him in 1 Corinthians 11? True, not all will be preachers and pastors; but each of us are to be *communicators* of the truths of God and we can do it by rehearsing truth before others and by teaching truth to others. I need you to seriously ask yourself this question, “Am I a communicator of the truths of God?” This is one of our tasks on this earth.

But where is this truth to be rehearsed and taught? Paul did his declaring and teaching both publically and privately. First, we know Paul taught *publicly*, meaning he spoke about Jesus in public venues; places like the synagogues (19:8) and even in the public school of Tyrannus (19:10). I know it is a seemingly daunting task to unashamedly proclaim Christ in work venues, at

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school, in the park, or wherever we find ourselves. Perhaps we would not be as intimidated if we spent more time imitating Paul by first rehearsing truth. Beloved, Jesus made a convicting statement that I want you all to hear in Luke 9:26. May it be our prayer that this **not** describes us:

For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

We may never proclaim Christ to great audiences like Paul did, but a resolve to live by the Word of God is a resolve to proclaim the word of Christ publicly.

There is a second venue as Paul taught not only publically, but also *from house to house*. Paul was engaging in what we might call “targeted discipleship,” speaking to specific people and educating them in the things of the Lord in their very homes. The implication is that Paul was found in other people’s houses. Don’t miss this as here we find that the early Christians defined hospitality, the opening of their homes to others, as discipleship opportunities. Believers in Christ ought to desire to be in one another’s homes for the purpose of learning something about Jesus and something about how to live for Jesus. How about you, are you found in other believer’s houses so that you might both hear and rehearse the truths of God?

A life of regret will not be found in the statement, “I spoke too much to others concerning Christ and His salvation.” No, regret will be found in the statement, “I spoke too little concerning Christ and His salvation.”

Do you seek out public and private opportunities to teach or make known biblical truth? This was Paul’s vision for the church. And a life that would live without regrets strives for such opportunities. If we would live our lives without regret and in accordance with God’s Word there is a fifth quality of Paul to imitate...

E. We must strive for consistency in sharing Christ to all (kinds of) people (21a).

...solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks

We can often think of just certain times or places as being appropriate for making Christ known. It’s okay to talk about God, Jesus and salvation at church, or when we are going door-to-door inviting people to church, or if someone asks us. But injecting Christ or the precepts of His word in other areas our lives are viewed too often as off limits. We might talk to someone we meet, who tells us he is a Christian, about Christ, but we might rarely think of telling a person about Jesus who is either undeclared in his commitment to Christ or has stated he is not a believer. Paul did not change the topics of his conversation based upon the nature of his audience. He gave the same truth concerning man’s sin and man’s need; of God’s remedy and of Christ sacrifice regardless of who was listening, Jews or Greeks.

To not seek out ways of injecting Christ and the message of His salvation into all areas of our lives and to all people is nothing short of selfishness and heartlessness. It is akin to standing on the street corner, watching the semi-truck barreling down the road at high speed and being unwilling to warn the person standing in the crosswalk of the impending doom. Do you have this sense of compulsion; that you must share Christ because people’s very lives are at stake? If we would imitate Paul, we would pray for this to be developed within us. Listen to what Paul said to the believer’s at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 9:16:

For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

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The word “woe” here speaks of the curse or wrath of God being upon him if he would prove to be unfaithful in declaring the gospel. I want that burden upon my heart; and I want and pray it for you as well; that we would be compelled to preach the gospel to anyone and everyone with whom we have an opportunity.

This is why Paul, here in verse 21, uses the phrase “**solemnly testifying**”. Paul uses a word here that literally means “to testify through or thoroughly.” There are not details Paul leaves out. There was nothing shallow or partial in Paul’s presentation of Christ. Let us follow his example and seek to tell others as much as we can about Jesus. For again, the danger is never in speaking about Christ too much; the danger is speaking about Christ too little. Beloved, if you can, speak the gospel to any one that moves and breathes. Be consistent in sharing Jesus. Finally, if we would live our lives without regret and in accordance with God’s Word...

F. We must strive to call people to repentance toward God and faith in Jesus (21b).

...testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Anything we tell people about God, the Bible, Jesus, salvation and the like that does not accomplish at least these two things is an incomplete message at best and not the gospel at worst. What are the two things that must be shared? There must be a call to **repentance toward God** and of **faith in our Lord Jesus Christ**.

What is this repentance we are to call people to? The word repentance means “to change one’s mind or purpose.” It speaks of a change of mind that leads to a change of behavior. Biblically, a person is in repentance when he has come to sin his sin as God sees sin (a change of mind concerning his sin) and a turning to God (for forgiveness and grace to live differently). Repentance has been described as “a gracious power, bestowed only on the elect, by which they lay aside the life of sin and busy themselves with righteousness.”¹ I love this, a turning from sin and a busying one’s self with righteousness. Have you repented? Do you call other to do this?

Too often when we share Christ it like learning to shoot a bow and arrow. I remember watching Luke shoot at a balloon when he was given an opportunity. His arrows went all around that balloon, sometimes close, sometimes off the mark, but never striking the balloon. Beloved, we have a purpose in sharing Christ. We have a mark to hit. Paul always wanted to call people to repentance. He wanted people to feel sorrow for their sinful actions and the new found desire to look to God for the strength to do otherwise.

The New Testament knows nothing of a gospel message that lacks a call to repentance. John the Baptist bellowed, “...**bear fruits in keeping with repentance**” (Luke 3:8). Our Lord Jesus Christ began His own ministry with the word, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). Remember what Jesus said in Luke 5:32? He said, “**I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.**” Toward the end of the book of Acts, Paul describes his own message as being one that both Jews and Gentiles “**should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance**” (Acts 26:20). The point is that the calling of people to recognize, feel shame and sorrow for their sin and thus turn to God for salvation and transformation is central to any gospel presentation.

But there was a second call; not only to repentance toward God, but also of faith in Jesus Christ. Here Paul describes what or really to whom sinners are to turn. They turn to God by

¹ Heppe, Heinrich; Reformed Dogmatics, 1978, p. 571

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having faith, trusting in, believing with one’s head, heart and life that Jesus alone did everything necessary for his salvation on the cross.

Paul’s objective in preaching was not to hear people tell him, “Nice sermon, Paul; thanks?” No! Paul wanted to see lives changed by people turning to and trusting in Christ. Nothing else would do. Beloved, this is to be our prayer and goal, seeing people repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I need you to think with me. If you would truly resolve to live by and communicate the Word of God like we see Paul having done here in the book of Acts; if you would truly involve yourself in biblical teaching; if you would seek to consistently share Christ with anyone and everyone; and if you would be determined to call people to repentance and faith; if this became the focus of your life; where would you have time for regret?

You see, the issue is not really that we don’t know what to do. The issue is that we know what we ought to do but we give ourselves excuses for not doing it. Something in my past renders me, a child of God, unfit and unable for service. Beloved, there is no such thing as a child of God who is unfit or unable for service. If you are unfit and unable for service, then you are not a child of God. And as the hymn writer has so aptly put it:

*Let not conscience make you linger;
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him.*

Let us feel our need of Jesus as we resolve to live in the will of God; by the Word of God, to the glory of God. If you aren’t an example of how to live the Christian life, why not? You might say, “Well, because I’m a new Christian.” Then are you a good example of how a new Christian should live? You might say, “Well, my life has been difficult, full of hardships and disappointments.” Then are you an example of how a Christian under trials should live, remembering your Lord Jesus endured much more for you?” You might say, “Well, I am not a very gifted Christian.” Then remember the promise of the Word of God that says, “as each one has a special gift, employ it in serving one another as a good steward of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). The Lord is not seeking excuses, He is seeking results. Be resolved to imitate Paul as he imitated Christ; to live by the will of God (what is just one thing you know from God’s word is His will for you that you can start doing afresh today); and to live according to the Word of God; knowing Jesus better and making Him known.

Soli Deo Gloria

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