

IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN RECEIVE

Acts 20.17-38

Paul addresses those leading the church in Ephesus. This passage shows us that the terms elder, pastor, and overseer (or bishop) were interchangeable in the early church.

While relatively few serve in the office of pastor-elder in the local church, the principles of Christian leadership apply to many areas of life.

John Maxwell famously asserted that leadership is influence. If this is the case, then everyone leads and everyone can grow in how they influence others.

Paul cites Jesus, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20.35). This proves to be the central theme of Christian leadership.

Christian leaders serve others

Paul reminds the Ephesian elders how he lived among them “serving the Lord” (Acts 20.19). He proceeds to catalogue the hardships he endured for the sake of the church.

It is important to set expectations for leadership. If we think that leadership and influence are about seats of honor, comfort, and working less, we will be disappointed. Paul anticipates suffering (Acts 20.23).

Paul is willing to empty himself so that the ministry is accomplished.

The concept of servant leadership has made its way into the non-Christian lexicon. The difference is that the non-Christian sees that serving others creates results whereas the Christian serves others unto the Lord.

Christians leaders steward the message of the Kingdom

Christians deliver the gospel message. We see how Paul summarizes his ministry. He preached “repentance” and “faith in our Lord Jesus” (Acts 20.21). He proclaimed “the Gospel of God’s grace” and the “Kingdom”. He taught “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20.27).

There is also a charge to steward our lives in such a way that it fits Gospel proclamation. Paul is accountable to God (Acts 20.26-27). He tells the leaders to “pay careful attention to yourselves” (Acts 20.28).

The church belongs to Jesus who died for us (Acts 20.28).

Christian leaders shepherd those in their care

We are under the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus (1 Peter 5.1-5; John 10.1-18; Psalm 23).

Shepherds provide for and protect the sheep (Acts 20.28). Christian leaders use words to feed others with God's Word and defend the church from bad ideas. Once again, there is a call to actively add value to, rather than take from, the community.

In the same way that God's message advances with words, so it is through the twisting of words that troubles come (Acts 20.30). The word "twisted" implies a distortion of the truth rather than a completely different teaching.

We are to "be alert" against any missional drift (Acts 20.31).

Key Point: Christian leading means putting the mission and people first.

Application Questions:

How do Christians "care for the church" (Acts 20.28)?
Identify and discuss a few of Paul's warnings to the Ephesian elders.

What are today's "twisted things" that come into the local church with the potential to lead us astray (Acts 20.30)?

Why do you think this passage mentions tears/crying three times (Acts 20.19, 31, 37)?