

A Man on the Go

by Warren Wiersbe

Paul's ministry is a model for Christians to follow, emphasizing the importance of a concerned, criticized, and cooperative ministry to the churches at large, one local church, and one individual.

Duration: 34:42

Scripture: Genesis 12:2, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 20:1, Romans 15:2, 1 Corinthians 12:27, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 10:24-25

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the criticisms that the Apostle Paul faced in his ministry. Paul was criticized for constantly moving around, changing his plans, and preaching for too long. However, the speaker argues that these criticisms were unfounded and stemmed from a lack of spiritual appetite. Paul's ministry involved ministering to the churches at large, as well as to individual believers. The speaker emphasizes the importance of identifying with a local church and serving God within that community.

Transcript

One cold February day, here in the city of Chicago, back in 1867, Mr. D.L. Moody stood up in the meeting of the church and announced he was going to England. Now, the church was accustomed to Mr. Moody announcing surprising things. The doctor had said that Mrs. Moody's health would be profited from a change, especially a sea voyage.

But unfortunately Mr. Moody did not take well to the water. And when he arrived in Great Britain in March of 1867, he had been so seasick that he wrote back to a friend, I do not expect to visit this country again. Well, he made six more visits, and of course during those six visits he had tremendous blessing from the Spirit of God.

When I read about the Apostle Paul going back to cities where he had ministered before, I wonder if ever in his heart Satan did not say to him, Why do you want to go back? Go back to Philippi? They whipped you there. They threw you in prison. Go back to Thessalonica? You had a riot.

They threw you out of town and got a court order to keep you away. Go back to Berea? Your enemies followed you there and created trouble. Why go back? But Paul went back.

Paul revisited the cities where he had been before and he ministered to the people. In the verses that we read from Acts 20, we have a slice of Paul's ministry. We have the privilege, as it were, of going back

through the centuries and watching this great man of God at work.

What I would like us to do, because we really need to imitate Paul's ministry, is to notice the three-fold ministry that the Apostle Paul accomplished. It is as though we have three concentric circles. There is a larger circle and then there is a smaller circle and then there is an even smaller circle.

The larger circle, verses 1-5, you find Paul ministering to the churches at large. He is going from city to city and place to place, ministering to the churches at large. Then he comes to Troas in verses 6, 7, and 8, and now he is ministering to one local church.

Then in verses 9-12, we have the Apostle Paul ministering to one individual in one church. I think this is the kind of an example the Lord wants us to follow. I think that I, as your pastor, have a responsibility to the churches at large.

I certainly have a responsibility to my own local church, and certainly I ought to have a ministry to individuals in the local church and not just simply to a gathered congregation. I think this is true of our congregation. I think we have a responsibility to minister to the churches at large.

We have been talking this week about home missions. I think we have a responsibility to minister in our own local church, and certainly we have a responsibility to minister to individuals within this church. So let's look at Paul's threefold ministry.

Let's begin with Paul's ministry to the churches at large. The characteristics of this ministry. What kind of a ministry did the Apostle Paul have to the churches at large? You will notice in your Bible that you don't find much being said about the Church.

There are some 100 or more references to the Church in the New Testament, and almost all of them refer to local congregations. Now there is in the Bible a concept of all of God's people together constituting the body of Christ. Some people call this the Kingdom of God.

Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. So when you're saved, even before you become a member of a local congregation, you're a part of that much bigger group of people made up of all true believers in Jesus Christ who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and belong to the body of Christ. There are scattered congregations all over this world.

Some meet in large auditoriums such as Moody Church, some meet in little storefronts, but they're God's people. And of course you never judge a congregation or evaluate a congregation either by the building or the budget. In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, when Jesus was talking to those churches of Asia Minor, to the church that thought it was rich, Jesus said, you're so poor.

And to the church that thought it was poor, Jesus said, but you are rich. So you never evaluate by what you see, only with the eyes of human sight. I noticed that his ministry to the churches at large was a concerned ministry.

Now what was Paul doing? Paul was concerned about these churches. Paul was concerned about the people of God wherever they were. He was concerned, first of all, to encourage them.

Paul's going to leave Ephesus. There's been a riot in the city. I always get a little bit of encouragement reading chapter 20 verse 1, and after the uproar was ceased, if you wait long enough, the uproars have a

way of ceasing.

Somebody right now may be going through some difficulty. You wait long enough. Trust the Lord.

It'll stop. After the uproar ceased and Paul was sure that the church in Ephesus was in good safekeeping, he's going to leave the people and he embraces them. Now that word can also be translated, he exhorted them or he encouraged them.

I read down in verse 2 that he gave to them much exhortation. It's the word for encouragement. Paul was concerned about encouraging people.

Now I break no confidences when I say this because you know it's true. There are many Christians who never encourage anybody. The only time they speak is when they have something to criticize and I feel sorry for them because one of the greatest ministries in the world is the ministry of encouragement.

I've tried to make a little policy in my life never to write a letter of discouragement. If I have something good to say to somebody, if I have some word of encouragement, I want to put it in black and white so he can keep reading it and reading it and reading it. If it's something critical, I don't write it down.

I try to talk to him personally about it because he may not read it the way I wrote it or when he reads it he may have a headache or his gallbladder may not be functioning and as a consequence that letter might do more harm than good. Paul was concerned about encouraging Christians and Christians need encouragement and Christians need to be an encouragement. He was also concerned about not only encouraging the Christians but involving the Christians.

You've got to read between the lines here. You have to read 1st Corinthians and 2nd Corinthians and Romans. They all fit into this period of time.

You may wonder why Paul had this bodyguard down in verses 4 and 5. Of course Luke joined them in verse 5 and in verse 6 we read the word we. Luke wrote the book of Acts and now Luke is back with Paul again. All this while he's been in Philippi helping get the church started there.

Why did Paul have these men with him? He was taking up an offering. He was taking up a missionary offering from the Gentile churches. He was going down to Jerusalem.

He was going to bring the offering from the Gentile churches to the Jewish people of Jerusalem and Paul was very very careful about money. Whenever he received money from a church he said to that church I want you to appoint a representative to take care of your offering. And so these men were the representatives.

They were the finance committee of the early church and they were traveling together with the offering that they had received to make sure that nobody could say well this fellow Paul the only reason he preaches is to make money. What's he doing? Going from church to church taking up an offering. Paul could say look my hands are clean I'm not even touching this offering.

All these other men are taking care of it. They are the appointed representatives of the churches. Now by this offering Paul was accomplishing two things.

Number one he was involving the church in the lives of other people. The easiest way to kill a church is to make it self-centered. Our money, our building, our program, our ministry.

Now we have to be concerned about these things. The light that shines the farthest is going to shine the brightest at home. But selfishness has a way of killing.

When a church gets in trouble, I want this and I want that, then there creates a problem. Paul was saying to these churches look you can't live isolated existences. You just can't be that independent.

Churches are interdependent. We belong to each other and we need each other and we encourage each other. And Paul was doing his best to involve them in the lives of other people.

I think this is what home and foreign missions is all about. I think this is what it means when we mail to our church family a faith promise card. What we're saying is just simply look get involved.

There are people all across America who aren't going to hear the gospel unless you get involved. There are people who aren't going to have what we want them to have and what God wants them to have unless we get involved. And by the way if you're not involved yet I wonder why.

Not only was he involving them and encouraging them but he was uniting them. Paul could see a cleavage coming between the Jews and the Gentiles. Paul realized that a little bit of a rift was coming and he knew where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

And so as he involved these churches in giving, if you please, to their sister churches in Judea, he was binding their hearts together in Christian love. Uniting them. It was a concerned ministry.

Do you have a concern for Christians everywhere? Paul did. Now I must confess to you as you read between the lines here you discover that not only was it a concerned ministry, it was a criticized ministry. Paul was being criticized.

Now anybody who does anything gets criticized. Heaven help that missionary or that pastor or that church officer who lives to please people. It's impossible.

Heaven help anybody who lives to please a congregation this size. It just can't be done. If we live to please the Lord we're doing well.

And the Bible says when a man's ways please the Lord he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. I hope that also takes care of our friends. Paul's ministry was a criticized ministry.

You see they were criticizing him for running from place to place. Paul's always moving. He's here and he's there.

Look, three months he stays in Greece. What can you get done in three months? Well verse 3 says for three months he abode in Greece. He was in Corinth.

You know what Paul did during those three months he was in Corinth? He wrote his letter to the Romans. Aren't you glad Paul stayed in Corinth for three months and wrote his epistle to the Romans? I've been reading Romans in my daily devotions. I'm glad he wrote it.

You don't judge somebody's ministry by time. You don't say well Paul was in Corinth for three months. What could he get done? He got a lot done.

He wrote Romans. I'd be very happy to who at the end of a whole lifetime have produced something as great as Romans. They criticized him for jumping from place to place.

But you see Paul was concerned about people. And Paul said here's a city where nobody's gone yet. Let's go there.

Here's an area where no one has preached. Let's preach there. When a man's concerned he's going to be criticized.

He jumped from place to place. And they criticized him for changing his plans. One of the cardinal rules of the ministry is thou shalt not change thy plans.

You see Paul had written to the Corinthians and he said I'm going to leave Ephesus, come to Corinth, then go up to Philippi and other parts of Macedonia. Then I'm going to come back to Corinth then take off for Jerusalem. And they said oh we'll get two visits from Paul.

You see the Corinthian Christians were babies and babies always need pampering. And these little baby Christians were saying isn't that wonderful. Paul's going to give us two visits.

Only one visit to Derbe. Only one visit to Philippi. Only one visit to Thessalonica.

Only one visit to Berea. But two visits to Corinth. My heart goes out to those people who bask in the glory of something like that.

Paul had to change his plans. And he left Ephesus and went to Troas. And then from Troas he went to Macedonia.

Then he went to Corinth and he only made one visit. And did they crucify him for this? You change. We can't trust your preaching.

You say one thing and you're going to do another thing. Read 2 Corinthians chapters 1 and 2 and find out what Paul went through. There are in every congregation people who just wait for somebody to make a change or to make a mistake.

Oh we can't trust him. He doesn't know where he's going. He doesn't know what he's doing.

Paul just went right on his way doing the work of God. They criticized him for always moving around. They criticized him for changing his plans.

They criticized him for preaching too long. The Christians met in the evening and Paul kept preaching and I'm sure more than one person said boy this fellow's long-winded. Now fortunately at Moody Church we broadcast our morning service and so we can't be too long-winded.

The person who says he preached too long is really saying I haven't got enough spiritual appetite to take it. When you go to the mission fields to preach if you don't preach for two or three hours they think you've gyped them. We can watch television that long but we can't hear preaching that long.

And of course they criticized him for asking for money. What's Paul doing? He's going from church to church asking for money. All that fellow does is ask for money.

Mr. Moody always said I pray to God that he'll supply what we need and then I have the faith to believe that if I ask people for it God will supply it. Mr. Moody was a great fundraiser. There are buildings in Great Britain today that Mr. Moody built.

He raised the money for it. A pastor ought never to apologize to talk about offerings. Giving is a part of the Christian life.

Paul had a ministry to the churches at large. It was a concerned ministry. It was a criticized ministry.

It was a cooperative ministry. Paul was working together with other people. Now Paul could be very independent when he wanted to be.

Paul said I'm not going to get married. I'm going to be independent. Paul said I'm not going to take offerings for myself.

I'll earn my own way. Paul could be very independent when he wanted to be. But Paul was independent that he might teach people how to be interdependent.

He cooperated with other churches. He got other churches to work together in the things of the Lord. That's what we do in home and foreign missions.

We're cooperating with other churches and sending out missionaries and supporting good works that are winning souls to Jesus Christ. Heaven help that church that thinks it can make it alone. No church can make it alone.

No Christian can make it alone. Paul's ministry to the churches at large. Now before we move into his second ministry, his ministry to one local church, let me drop this into your heart.

There's no place I'd rather preach than the Moody Church. As long as you're willing to take it, I am willing to give it. But I feel I have an obligation to the churches at large.

I thank God for our radio ministry that week by week brings in mail where pastors and missionaries write and say thanks for the encouragement. And I appreciate the privilege that you give me from time to time of ministering in other places. I would much rather be home.

I don't enjoy going other places. I would much rather be here. I don't enjoy being away from my family.

But I feel it's an obligation and I thank the Lord you give me the privilege of sharing with other churches and with other pastors. And I have learned in the years of my ministry that when you give, it always comes back. So if ever I am gone, don't let your first reaction be, oh, is he away? Let your first reaction be, dear God, may our pastor be a blessing to somebody else.

Because I'll guarantee the blessing will come right back to you. Paul's ministry secondly to one local church. He came to Troas and Paul was in a hurry to get down to Jerusalem, but he stayed for a week and he stayed for a week that he might have fellowship in the church at Troas.

Now he had helped to start this church. These were people Paul had won to Jesus Christ. Paul got into this local church and he ministered in a local church.

Now allow me to say this with kindness. There are some people who do not identify with one local church. They say, quote, I belong to the body of Christ and because I belong to the body of Christ, I don't have to be identified with a local church, unquote.

And so I ask these dear people, when does the body of Christ meet? When was the last time the body of Christ had the Lord's supper or baptized anybody? How many missionaries has the body of Christ sent out this last two weeks? You see, the body of Christ is something that God sees. I belong to the body of Christ, but I also belong to a local body. What would you think of a man who would go up and down the streets and say, I am for the American family, I believe in the American family, but his own children go without food and clothing and shelter.

You see, if you believe in the church collectively, you will identify with a church locally and you will go to work for God. That's what Paul's saying to us here. Paul charried as busy as he was in Troas to minister in a local church.

Now, what do you find in this local church? Well, the Lord's day and the Lord's people and the Lord's supper and the Lord's message. They waited for the Lord's day. Now they could have met any night they wanted to.

They could have had a Tuesday night Bible conference, but they waited until the Lord's day, the first day of the week. A lady stopped me at a conference recently where I had been teaching Galatians and she disagreed with me. People have a right to disagree with me because I learned this way.

And I had been talking about the fact that we are not under law, we are under grace. And therefore we don't observe days and months and years. And she came and she said, my mother told me that when you find the word Sunday in your Bible, then you can worship on Sunday.

And I said, well, I respect your mother, but when you find the word Trinity in the Bible, then you can believe in the Trinity. It's just not there. The doctrine is there, but not the word.

I said, Christians worshipped on the first day of the week. And so I explained to her, I said, now here's the Sabbath day and here's the Lord's day. The Sabbath day was the last day of the week.

Work, work, work, then you rest. That's salvation by works. Here's the Lord's day, the first day of the week.

You come and meet the Lord and then you work. I said, the Sabbath day was given to the Jewish nation as a mark of their belonging to God. The Lord's day is given to the church.

The Sabbath day belongs to the old creation. The Lord worked for six days. Then he rested.

The Lord's day belongs to the new creation that we belong to in Jesus Christ. The Lord's day is the day of resurrection. And in the new Testament, Christians assembled on the Lord's day.

That doesn't stop us from having a Wednesday meeting or a Tuesday meeting, but it does mean that there's a very special meaning attached to the first day of the week. You know, when you assemble with God's people on the first day of the week, you're giving witness that Jesus is alive. When you pick up your Bible and walk out of your house and your unsaved neighbors peek over the comics and say, oh, there they go to church.

You are saying to them, we believe that Jesus is alive. Who's going to get together and worship a dead God? They met on the Lord's day, which was the day of resurrection, the first day of the week. I hope that we will never get to the place where we neglect or ignore the Lord's day.

There are many things we can do all week long that really shouldn't be done on the Lord's day. You can do these any other time. The Lord's day is not a legalistic day of bondage.

It's a day of blessing, a day of fellowship, a day of spiritual resurrection. I don't know about you, even though I have to, I don't have to, I do it because God's called me, but even though I have to preach twice on the Lord's day and teach two other classes, the Lord's day is always a day of spiritual renewal for me. Just being with you and worshipping together and singing together on the Lord's day.

The Lord's people met on the Lord's day, and they met in an upper room. They didn't have church buildings back in those days. Nothing wrong with church buildings as long as you don't think God lives there.

A church building is a tool to be used for witness and worship. It's not a temple where we think God lives. They met in this third story, and I'm glad that they had a lot of light.

You know, the Christians back in those days were accused of being wicked. Oh, they meet in their private little meetings, and they won't let you in, and all sorts of orgies go on. They were accused of eating children and all sorts of abuse.

They had a lot of light. Christians have nothing to hide. Forgive me, it's a prejudice of mine.

I always have a bit of a problem with some of these dark services. They had a lot of light there. They said, come and see.

Here's what's going on. We have nothing to hide. The Lord's people met on the Lord's day, and they had the Lord's supper.

The Lord's supper is a reminder of the death, resurrection, and coming again of Jesus. But here's the way they did it. This is the evening.

Now, Jesus never told us what time to do it. He just said, whenever you do this, do it in remembrance of me. Back in the early church, believers had to meet very early in the morning and very late at night, because in between times they were working.

These slaves couldn't go to their master and say, hey, today's the Lord's day. I'm going to church. They'd kill them.

And so these slaves would get up early in the morning and come to a very early meeting, and then they'd go out and do their work, and they'd come back late at night to a night meeting. And they had what they call a love feast. Everybody would bring a little bit of food, and they would share this food, a potluck.

It was probably the only decent meal some of these people had all week. And then at the close of this love feast, they would just take the bread and the wine, and they would have the Lord's supper. It was a reminder to them that Jesus had died for them.

There's nothing wrong with churches eating. Sometimes we joke about it here at Moody Church, but there's nothing wrong with it. The early church did it.

Every Lord's day they had a potluck dinner, and they would eat together and fellowship together. Then someone would say, now let's remember the Lord. And they would take the bread and the cup and have the Lord's supper.

The Lord's supper is a reminder to us as Christians that we're not our own. We're bought with a price. It's a reminder to us that Jesus is coming again.

This we do till he come. And so today as we observe the Lord's supper, we're looking back to Calvary, looking ahead to the coming of Jesus, and we look within and examine our hearts and cleanse our hearts as we confess our sin to the Lord. And of course, they had the Lord's message.

The early church never got together apart from the word of God. And Paul preached. I don't think I'd have much trouble listening to Paul preach all night.

I might get a little bit tired. I used to fall asleep in chapel at seminary occasionally, but I hope I wouldn't fall asleep listening to Paul preach. I've had people fall asleep listening to me preach.

I heard about a preacher who dreamed that he was preaching and woke up and found out that he was. I hope that never happens to me. We must hurry.

We've seen Paul's ministry to the wider fellowship of the church. We've seen Paul's ministry in a local church. Now let's look at Paul's ministry to an individual.

Paul's preaching the third floor. Eutychus is sitting in the window. There's no glass in the window, just a lattice work.

And he was, I don't doubt he was a slave. The word for young man means anybody from 24 till 40. So you can figure out how old he was.

Nobody really knows, but he was probably a slave who had been working all day and he was tired. Don't criticize Eutychus. He was there.

I would rather have a person there than someplace else. Don't ever be critical of what goes on if you're not there. He was there.

And it's probably a good thing it wasn't a Wednesday night meeting. He wouldn't have been there. When I was being ordained, they asked me, what is the invisible church? And I said, the invisible church is what meets on Wednesday night.

And they didn't like my answer one bit. Here at Moody Church, it's not invisible. We have several hundred people who do come to fellowship with us, but don't criticize Eutychus.

He was there. He was tired. He may have given his better seat to somebody else.

He knew he was tired. So he sat by the window to get some ventilation. Spurgeon used to say next to the wind of the Holy Spirit, the best thing for a meeting is fresh air.

In fact, in the church he was pastoring, they had the windows closed up and he came one day with his cane and broke all the windows. Just went around, broke the tops of the windows. And when the dear trustees and elders showed up, they couldn't figure out who had done this.

And he never told them. It's important to have good fresh air in a meeting. But he was sitting there at the window and he was fighting the sleep.

The Greek verbs give us the picture of he's just struggling and all of a sudden it just got to be too much for him. He'd worked hard all that day and he fell out the window. Now we can spiritualize this if you want to.

It's possible to be in church and fall. But Paul did not blame him. In fact, Paul didn't say one word of criticism.

You know who was to fall for Eutychus going to sleep and falling out the window? The people sitting near him. That's right. Some dear elder of that church, some deacon, some Sunday school teacher should have said to his wife, you know, I'm going to keep my eyes on Eutychus.

He's worked hard today and he needs encouragement. And if somebody had just watched him and cared for him. But you know, in a church it's so easy not to watch other people and try to help them.

I wonder if somebody is here today who's just about to take a spill and nobody knows anything about it. Paul didn't criticize the fellow. He ran downstairs and embraced him.

That's personal ministry. You know, it's one thing to preach to a congregation. Anybody can do that.

That's sort of a privilege. It's quite something else when the congregation's gone to put your arms around somebody and help somebody come back to life again. You watch guest speakers or some guest speakers who the minute they're through, they're gone.

They vanish. They haven't got time to talk to people. I trust that God will always give us time to talk to the individual because after all ministry is individual.

Ministry is not collective. It's individual. And if God speaks to hearts, we must be available to talk to people individually.

Now granted there are cranks. There are people who are just pests and cranks. That's all right.

You love them anyway. I'm sure that Paul had pests and cranks, but Paul also found a fellow who needed his help and went down where he was and put his arms around him and became the channel for God's power. Now I want to challenge you right now to do that.

Now be careful who you put your arms around, but be the channel. Be the channel for God's power. There's somebody who needs your love.

There's somebody who needs your encouragement. There's somebody who just needs to feel your heartbeat, and you find that somebody. Oh, if every day of every week we could just go around the city of Chicago and be a blessing to people.

That's what it's all about. And so we wrap it up where we started it. Paul had a great burden to minister.

I hope you have a burden to minister. God may not have called you to be a missionary or a preacher, but he's called you to minister. Everybody has a ministry.

And what God is saying to me, he's saying to you, minister to the church at large. Don't become self-centered. Don't think that Moody Church is the only church in the world.

We have an obligation to others. And let's minister in our local church. Some of you have not identified with a local church.

Why? They did in the New Testament. When somebody got saved in the New Testament, he was baptized and became a part of a local church, and he went to work for God. Well, you say, I belong to the invisible church.

Then ask the invisible church to visit you when you're in the hospital. Ask the invisible church to pray for you when you're going through difficulty. You get the point, don't you? I believe in an invisible church that God can see, but I believe in a visible church that I can see, and I like what I see.

I thank God for you people. Let's minister to the local church. Let's minister to individuals.

Let's just find somebody who needs our encouragement and be a blessing to them. This is the way D. L. Moody lived. He wore himself out doing it, but we're here because he did.

It's the way we ought to live. Now, some of you have never trusted the Savior. We want to minister to you.

Today, you ought to come and give your heart to Christ and become a part of this family that loves each other and that serves the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't know what God is saying to you today, but God is saying to me, preacher, be a blessing. Wherever you go, just be a blessing.

Heavenly Father, make us a blessing. I pray, O God, that you'll help us to be an encouragement to one another. I pray, Father, that you'll help Moody Church to be an encouragement to other churches and to missionaries at home and abroad.

I pray, God, that you'll help us to be a blessing in our own local fellowship and help us to be a blessing to one another individually. Lord, please deliver us from a ministry to crowds that can never take a place of the ministry to individuals. O, don't let us, O God, turn anybody away whom we can love and help.

I pray for those here today who need the Savior, that they might trust Him and go with Him and live for Him. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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