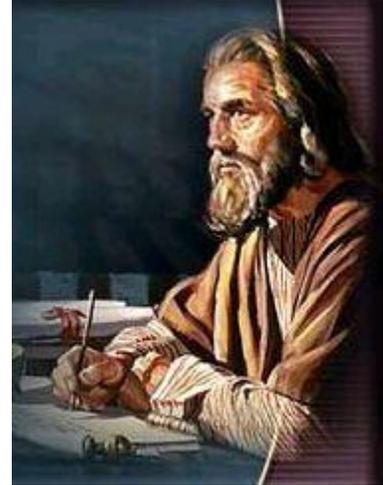


Dear Aebi: *"Are examples ever sufficient authority for us to know what to do?"*

Yes, good or approved examples show us what to do and sometimes how to do it. Obviously, bad examples are to be avoided and approved examples followed. Paul told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:35, "In all things I gave you an example, that so laboring ye ought to help the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." Jesus said this, and Paul urged it, with respect to more things than money. The labor of Paul was to be an example for the Ephesian elders to follow; they, like Paul, were to minister to others rather than have others minister to them--to give rather than to receive. The elders were to follow Paul's example in their giving--of money, yes, but also of strength, of teaching, of energy required to help others. Paul's example in this was based on a principle taught by Jesus, and the Ephesian elders were to consider it authoritative and to follow it as fully as they could.



Paul starts out in his speech to the elders by reminding them of the way he served the Lord while he was in Ephesus (vv. 18-19)--with humility and tears. Then he reminds them of the way he taught--publicly and from house to house, teaching the whole counsel of God, not holding back anything that was profitable but teaching both Jews and Greeks to believe and repent. (We know from Acts 19 that he also taught them to be baptized.) He had so taught that he could say he was innocent of the blood of all men. He had taught them diligently (day and night) and earnestly (with tears, v. 31).

Why did he remind them of all these things? Because in all this he had left them an example to follow. His example was authoritative; they were to follow it as they fed the flock and watched for souls, so that they, too, could be innocent of the blood of all under their influence as they shepherded the flock at Ephesus.

What exactly did the Ephesian elders need to do to follow Paul's example? Certainly they needed to teach God's word. Paul had taught both Jews and Greeks; they needed to do the same. Paul had taught diligently and earnestly; they needed to do the same. Paul had taught all of it, not just a part of it; they needed to do the same. Paul had taught both publicly and privately; the elders needed to do the same. Paul had sacrificed some time, effort, and even money to do this; they needed to do the same. They did not need to imitate Paul's voice inflections or mannerisms, but they did have to follow in principle both what he taught and the way in which he taught it. Hardly anything less will fulfill the requirements of "In all things I gave you an example" [NIV: "In everything I did I showed you..."] They did, and we do, need to follow Paul's example of what and how to teach.

Charles Aebi