



PART 1

PAUL IN CHAINS: LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Chapter Four

TAKING CHARGE

A THWARTED ESCAPE ATTEMPT IN THE DARK

In fact, the weather conditions were still so bad that some of the sailors tried secretly to abandon ship. Pretending to work on more anchors at the prow end of the ship, some of them had dropped the dinghy and were planning to use it to slip away from the damaged ship.

It isn't unusual for *passengers* to get nervous in adverse weather, but if you're ever on a ship and the *crew* panics, you're in real trouble. That's exactly what happened here.

Here is Luke's description:

[Acts 27:30-31 \(NASB\)](#)

³⁰ “But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the *ship's* boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow,

³¹ Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, “Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved.”

At this point, Luke's record is filled with subtle ironies. First, notice that the men whom you would most expect to stay with the ship are trying to escape. Obviously, these men weren't the type of devoted sailors who stay at their posts even if it means going down with the ship. They were interested only in saving their own lives, even though that meant abandoning everyone else to certain death.

On the other hand, Paul, the prisoner, is the one trying to stop the escape.

In effect, Paul is now in charge of everyone. He's even commanding the Roman centurion. And the centurion and the soldiers are now taking his direction without question. Luke said when



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Lecture # 15

Paul warned them not to let the crew members escape, “**the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off**” (v. 32).

Acts 27:32 (NASB)

³²“**Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the *ship*’s boat and let it fall away.**”

That must have been a painful moment for Luke, who had “**were scarcely able or with difficulty**” worked to help secure that very same skiff or boat at the start of this ordeal (**v. 16**).

Acts 27:16 (NASB)

¹⁶“**Running under the shelter of a small island called Clauda, we were scarcely able to get the *ship*’s boat under control.**”

The boat or skiff was vitally important. It was normally the only way to get from ship to shore. It was quite literally their only lifeboat. But by now they had more confidence in Paul’s leadership than any lifeboat. They immediately did what he said.

They staked their survival not on a boat that could carry them to shore, but on a man in chains who could carry no one across the water. And once they cut the rope, there was no going back. From here on, Paul was their only hope. **This epitomizes leadership at its supreme level, where people literally entrust their very lives to someone.** It is a life-and-death risk that happens all the time in military combat, police work, and other dangerous duties.

Here’s another amazing irony: Contrast **verse 22** with **verse 31**.

Acts 27:22 (NASB)

²²“**Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but *only* of the ship.**”

Acts 27:31 (NASB)

³¹“**Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, “Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved.”**”

Verse 31 says that unless the sailors stayed in the ship, the centurion and soldiers could not be saved. But according to **verse 22**, Paul had earlier told everyone, “**There will be no loss of life among you, but *only* of the ship.**” That promise, he said, he received from God by way of an angel. It was certain and definitive. There was no reason to doubt God’s veracity, His power, or His sovereignty. God would bring to pass what He had promised.

And yet, Paul did not for one moment imagine that God’s sovereignty nullified human responsibility. He clearly did not assume that if God has decreed the end, it simply doesn’t matter what men do. He didn’t think, *If God wants to save the passengers on this ship, He will save them without my efforts.*

Paul understood that God has not merely decreed the end; He decrees the means as well. And in the normal course of events, God uses ordinary means to accomplish His will. In this case, the means God chose for saving the passengers required the crew to stay on the ship. Without skilled hands when daybreak came, getting to the shore would be virtually impossible

for the remaining passengers. God's sovereignty did not nullify the sailors' responsibility. In fact, God's decree is the very thing that established their responsibility.

Verse 22 of **Acts 27** (“There will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship”) and **verse 31** (“Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved”) **strike the perfect balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility**. There is absolutely no contradiction between these twin truths. Both are true. Not one soul on that ship was going to die. God had decreed it. Yet unless the crew stayed on the ship and brought it aground on the island of Malta, the passengers could not be saved. God had also decreed *that*.

He ordains the means as well as the end, and that is why the truth of human responsibility is established and affirmed by the sovereignty of God. It is not nullified thereby.

So even though Paul was absolutely certain it was God's ultimate purpose to save every soul on board that ship, that knowledge did not prevent him from issuing a warning and directions to Julius, who needed to be diligent to make his rescue certain, by making sure the crew did not abandon ship.

In this is a seventh principle all wise leaders follow: A leader never compromises the absolutes.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #7

A LEADER NEVER COMPROMISES THE ABSOLUTES

When God has spoken, there can be no compromise. It's one thing to compromise on *matters of preference*. It's entirely different to compromise on *matters of principle*.

Compromise is good and necessary in most human relationships. In marriage, for example, couples often have to compromise to handle disagreements on matters of preference and opinion.

In secular government, compromise is sometimes necessary to break executive and legislative logjams.

In business, compromise is often a vital part of closing a deal.

The person who refuses to compromise under any and every circumstance is **obstinate**, **unreasonable**, and **selfish**. That sort of strong-willed inflexibility is sinful and has been the ruin of many relationships and organizations.

But when it comes to matters of principle—moral and ethical foundations, biblical absolutes, the axioms of God's Word, God's clear commands, and the truthfulness of God Himself—**it is never right to compromise**. The true leader understands that and knows where to hold the line.

In this case, Paul was not about to allow human ingenuity to raid the purposes of God. A lesser man might have said, “Okay, let them go. It's not worth the hassle.” But Paul knew the



promise of God was absolute. God would deliver every soul on board. But Paul would not stand by and watch these cowardly men vainly attempt to circumvent the plan and the promise of God. God was going to put Himself on display. He was going to show Himself powerful and mighty. All would be saved from death, and God alone would get the glory and the credit for what He was about to do.

But meanwhile, Paul would see to it that every attempt to thwart God's plan was itself thwarted. And therefore, in this instance, it was Paul's quick and decisive leadership that God used to put a stop to the crew's exodus and ultimately preserve so many lives.

Too many people are **timid** and **fearful** of confrontation in circumstances like these. Not the real leader. Real leaders have a clear understanding of what is absolute and what is negotiable, and they hold the line on the principles that truly matter.

For the spiritual leader, the absolutes are established by the Word of God. A leader who applies all the other principles of leadership can perhaps achieve a measure of pragmatic effectiveness. **But this principle will test your true mettle as a leader.**

No one can be a truly effective spiritual leader unless he understands the essential truth of Scripture and refuses to compromise its absolute authority. This principle applies, I am convinced, not just to pastors and church leaders, but to Christians in any walk of life who desire to be good leaders.

DAYBREAK

Whether those renegade sailors realized it or not, Paul was doing them a great favor. To abandon a ship in the pitch black of midnight, in a hurricane, and try to make it to shore in a dinghy was foolhardy in the extreme. They certainly could not have known what was on the shore, or if there were rocks between them and the shoreline. They were simply in a panic, and they figured their chances of survival were better if they got in trouble in a small dinghy, as opposed to hitting the rocks in that huge, lumbering cargo ship.

Like all good leaders, Paul was alert. He also knew how to follow the chain of command. Rather than trying to handle the crew on his own, he got Julius to order the soldiers to take action. Their action, cutting the ropes and letting the dinghy fall off, assured that the sailors remained on board. It also meant that in the end, everyone would have to swim for shore.