

“Paul’s Instruction to the Elders”
Acts 20:13-38
(Preached at Trinity, November 7, 2007)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. At the beginning of this Chapter Paul has left Ephesus and traveled into Macedonia to give final exhortation to the churches before returning to Jerusalem. His visits included Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. After traveling through Macedonia he continued on to Greece. After spending three months in Greece it became too dangerous for him to remain so he returned to Macedonia.
2. After leaving Philippi, Paul arrived at Troas where he spent a week teaching and encouraging these brethren. He remained over the Lord’s Day and joined them in the breaking of bread and fellowship. He also preached long to them instructing them in the Word.
3. Paul was traveling with a number of others. When their time at Troas had ended they left before Paul by ship. Paul’s plan was to travel by land and meet up with them at Assos. After meeting up with them Paul was in a hurry to continue on to Jerusalem so that he would arrive in time for the Day of Pentecost. They made several brief stops in various cities then stopped at Ephesus.
4. Remember, Paul’s interest was to visit churches on his way back to Jerusalem in order to strengthen, encourage, and teach them. While in Ephesus he called the elders together in order to instruct and encourage them.
Acts 20:17 – “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.”
5. Paul’s method was always the same. He taught by word and he also taught by example and He prayed for them.
 - A. Over and over Paul encouraged the church to look to him and follow him.
Philippians 3:17 – “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.”
2 Thessalonians 3:9 – “Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.”
 - B. A leader should be worthy of being followed.
Hebrews 13:7 – “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation.”
To the elders Peter wrote:
1 Peter 5:2-3 – “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; ³ Neither as being lords over *God’s* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”
 - a. **Richard Baxter** – “We must study as hard how to live well as how to preach well.”

- b. **John Calvin** – “The man who wishes to make himself useful in Christ’s service must devote all his energies to maintaining the honour of his ministry.”
6. In this passage Paul calls the elders and teaches them. He knew this would probably be the last time he would see them and he wanted to strengthen them as the leaders of the Church. His method was to remind them of his own leadership, leadership to be followed, and then he instructed them as to their duty as elders of Christ’s church.
- I. Paul’s example before them
- Acts 20:18** – “And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,”
- A. Paul demonstrated he was willing to go to every inconvenience for them – **Verses 19, 22-24**
1. **Verse 19** – Paul was frequently in danger from the Jews – they often sought his life. Yet, this did not prevent Paul from faithfully preaching the Gospel
 2. Paul had the wonderful ability to maintain proper priorities in his life. There are always distractions but Paul maintained a proper focus. He saw himself as a warrior, a soldier.
2 Timothy 2:3-4 – “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴ No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of *this* life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.”
 3. **Verses 22-24** – He was about to go to Jerusalem against the counsel of the brethren. He never knew what the next city would bring but he always expected affliction.
 - a. Paul said, “None of these things move me” – none of the hazards kept Paul from his course.
 - b. He didn’t consider his life too dear to give for the work of Christ. He faithfully kept on course.
Acts 20:24 – “. . .so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”
2 Timothy 4:7 – “I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith.”
 4. Not all of you have been called to the Gospel ministry. But all of you have been called to a life of service to the Lord Jesus Christ. What are you doing for Him? Are you willing to be inconvenienced for Him.
 - a. Paul was driven by his love for Christ.
 - b. He wanted to finish his course with joy – **V.24**
This is a joy that only knowing Christ can bring.
- B. Paul had given himself tirelessly to teach them – **Verses 20, 21, 25-27, 31, 33-34**
1. He taught them publicly and from house to house
 2. He faithfully carried the Gospel to all who would hear pressing God’s demands before them.
Acts 20:21 – “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

3. He taught them the nature of the Kingdom – the authority of Christ, of His rule and reign. Of His Word. He wanted them to know more of Christ.
Acts 20:27 – “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”

C. Paul was pure from the blood of all – **Verse 26**
From the blood of the lost – and from the blood of other believers in the sense that he had carried out his duty to them.

- D. We live in a generation of weak Christianity
1. Doctrine is seen as unessential and something that divides the body of Christ – ours is a day of theological illiteracy
 2. If you focus on doctrine many see you as unspiritual. Few today know what it means to press hard toward Christ.
 3. The disciplines of discipleship is almost extinct. Few are striving to mortify the flesh, hungering after righteousness.
 4. There are, sadly, pastors who aid in this weakness
 - a. The pulpit has become weak and ineffectual – gone are the days when Biblical truth thundered from pulpits.
 - b. Worship has been watered down to appeal to the flesh of carnal men – it is all about feeding the emotions – how you feel.
 - c. They make no demands upon believers in fear of being labeled with the charge of legalism.
 - d. Christians are weak because pastors are making them weak
Their hands are covered with blood – sacrificing the body of Christ to satisfy their own plans.
 5. Oh how we need men who labor hard for the souls of their flocks—who tell them what they need to hear. Who preach the Word with all longsuffering and doctrine. We need men who are discharging their duty that their hands might be clean.
Acts 20:26-27 – “I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*. ²⁷ For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”
 6. It isn’t just pastors who are guilty here. Christians are not holding one another accountable
 - a. Few want to invest themselves in the lives of others. The words of our Lord ring loud and clear:
Matthew 24:11-12 – “And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. ¹² And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”
 - b. Where is sacrificial love today?
 - c. Few have pure, clean hands.
Are you praying for one another?
Are you laboring at building close relationships?
Are you watching over one another?
Are you teaching one another?

II. Paul’s instruction to the elders – **Verses 28-30**

- A. They were to take heed to themselves – our first duty
1. This is a great duty for every believer, particularly elders
 2. We must discipline ourselves
 - a. Our flesh is strong

- b. Our heart is deceitful
 - c. Satan is cunning
 - 3. We must be ever vigilant and watchful

1 Corinthians 9:27 – “But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”
 - 4. Matthew Henry – “A preacher of salvation may yet miss it. He may show others the way to heaven, and never get thither himself. To prevent this, Paul took so much pains in subduing and keeping under bodily inclinations, lest by any means he himself, who had preached to others, should yet miss the crown, be disapproved and rejected by his sovereign Judge.”
- B. They were to take heed of the souls of others
 - 1. Pastors have been given oversight over the souls of men

Acts 20:28 – “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers”

Hebrews 13:17 – “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.”
 - 2. So often pastors face anger and rejection when they correct members of their flock. It is very grievous to the pastor, yet their hands are clean but woe to the one who will not hear.
- C. Paul charged them to feed the flock
 - 1. The word here is ποιμαίνω which is the verbal form of the word translated shepherd or pastor. It describes the work of the pastor of feeding his sheep.
 - 2. The true shepherd is concerned about providing excellent nourishment for his flock
 - a. Sheep spend most of their life eating and drinking but they are indiscriminate about what they consume. Their diet has to be carefully guarded by the shepherd. He has to continually lead them to good pastures.
 - b. The best example of a shepherd is Christ

Psalms 23:1 – “The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.”
 - c. The false shepherd is only concerned about his own needs and desires
 - 4. The true shepherd feeds the excellent food of God's Word
 - 5. Pastors must give great attention to the Word of God.

1 Timothy 4:6 – “If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.”

1 Timothy 3:2 – “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach”

1 Peter 5:2 – “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;”

1 Timothy 4:11 – “These things command and teach.”

2 Timothy 4:2 – “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

6. This demands that they maintain a strict regimen of study

Acts 20:32 – “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

7. It also demands seeking to draw his flock nearer and nearer to Christ. This is because the flock is fed best when they are led nearer to the true Shepherd. How are we drawn nearer to the true Shepherd?

a. Through His Word – the pastor must continually press the importance of the Word of God

b. Through prayer – the pastor must stress the importance of drawing nigh to Christ in prayer

c. Through mortification – dying to the flesh

Romans 8:5-6 – “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace.

Romans 13:14 – “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts *thereof*.”

D. The elders were also charged with protecting the flock

1. From false doctrine, false practices, false ideas – wolves are always on the loose seeking to devour the sheep.

2. Some are even pastors

Acts 20:29-30 – “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”

Conclusion:

1. Before Paul concluded he reminded them that a pastor is not laboring for any earthly gain – **Verses 33-35**. A love of money has always characterized false teachers.

2. Paul knew that despite the tireless hours he had spent training the Ephesian elders ultimately the work was all of God.

He concluded his charge to them with prayer – **Verse 36**

3. We have the work of the kingdom before us. It is important work. Each of us have a part. Not all are pastors. Not all are teachers.

A. All of us are required to follow Christ and to follow His under shepherds.

B. All of us are called to labor for the good of our Lord’s kingdom. What are you doing?

4. And we must all recognize how dependent we are upon God.

Acts 20:36 – “And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.”