

Acts 20:28-38

“The Pastoral Heart Of Paul The Apostle” (Pt 3)
(Watch And Be Warned)

When Paul was speaking to Timothy about how it was that he was to discern the fingerprints of God upon an individual's life as it pertains to spiritual leadership, amongst other things one of the things he said was, “...*not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.*” 1 Tim 3:6 Which is to say that a new believer isn't to be placed into a position of leadership because pride may become a real problem which in the end could destroy that person's life. Now I wish that what that meant was that if you're not a new believer that pride would no longer be a problem, or that you could no longer be deceived, thinking you're something you're not, being led astray and in so doing leading others astray. But unfortunately it would be more accurate to say that even the most solid, mature believers may at times be tempted by pride, or any # of things that could shipwreck their ministry, so how much more those who aren't quite so rooted yet?

So we come to this portion in Acts ch 20 today whereby Paul is exhorting the Ephesian elders to both watch and be warned. Be on guard against the wiles of the wicked one who likes to slither into an assembly where the Word of God is being taught so as to destroy the work of God in both that place, and those people's lives. and So in short he gives them 5 basic tools, or principles whereby they might be effective in the role that God has called them to as overseers in the body of Christ. #1 Have Regard For Yourself, self scrutiny #2 Be Aware Of Others #3 Having Been Warned, Watch, that is be vigilant, don't fall asleep at the wheel, but rather be alert as to your surroundings, don't be ignorant of your enemies devices, stay awake. #4 Stay In The Word and #5 Tend To Other's Well-Being, that is place the priority not on yourself, but on the needs of those around you.

Well, as we've been investigating the Pastoral heart of Paul the apostle here in Acts ch 20 we've noted his *review* of the past, how he encouraged them to perceive him as a prototype. To imitate the model that he'd lived out before them, serving the Lord in all humility, with an openness before people, holding back nothing that's helpful to them and being consistent in both public and private with both the message that you share and the model that you show so that people might see what it means to lead a life that's set apart to Christ in the world today. He *overviewed* the present, speaking to them of his dedication and purposed determination to finish well the course that God had set before him. He didn't count his life dear to himself, but rather to go the distance, to be faithful and follow through with God's plan and purpose for his life was more important than anything and everything else in life *including* his *own* life. and He spoke of his innocence of the blood of all men in making sure that he'd shared with them the whole counsel of God, there wasn't any stone that he left uncovered. Whether it was emotionally gripping, or personally interesting was at best a peripheral issue, what mattered was that entirety of the word of God be invested into the lives of those whom he ministered to. Not just select portions, because all that does is ill equip the saints for the work of the ministry. Paul refused to be guilty of ill equipping the saints so he shared it all.

Now as his time with them is coming to a close having reviewed the past and overviewed the present, now he *previews* the future with them as to what it is that they can expect and how it is that they can overcome the problems that are sure to present themselves.

Vs 28

This is sort of a transitional vs as he shifts the focus from himself and what *has* happened, to them and what *will* happen, *now* Paul is getting personal as it pertains to *their* walk and relationship with God, he's spoken about his, now he's turning the attention to theirs.

He says, "Therefore," (in light of the example that I have modeled for you, because of the care with which I've cared for you, and due to the fact that you may never see me again,) "...take heed to yourselves." This is #1, "Have regard for yourself." That is, keep your life under the magnifying glass of the Word of God, cause self-scrutiny to be of utmost priority in your life. The words "Take heed" come from a Greek word meaning to "pay attention to" or "Be cautious about" or to understand it another way "Beware of yourself." You see he's preparing to warn them of the wolves coming *into* their midst, and even those who'll surface *among* themselves, but 1st he says to, "Beware of the dangers *with in* themselves." and The idea here is that of personal accountability and responsibility before God to lead holy and pure lives. and He's imparting to them the insight that effective ministry/leadership is the result of the overflow of *personal purity* and *inward intimacy* with God. It's not about all that you know, your ability to articulate the Word, power packed programs and demographic design, it's about knowing personally and walking intimately with Jesus. and Out of the overflow of your life centered around Christ will be the key to what God wants to do in your life. John MacArthur writes, "The first priority for anyone involved in spiritual leadership is his own relationship with God. Effective ministry is not mere outward activity; it is the overflow of a rich, deep relationship with God. As John Owen wisely observed, A minister may fill his pews, his communion roll, the mouths of the public, but what that minister is on his knees in secret before God Almighty, that he is and no more." "Take heed to yourselves."

Don't misunderstand; it's not that you are the priority, or that I become my own priority in the sense that I place my needs before another's. It's just the simple fact that unless connected *to* and abiding *in* the vine, than my life will be ill effective in ministering to anyone else. You see if I'm careless about my own salvation, and my own walk with God, than I'm definitely not going to be too concerned about anyone else's. So be aware of the unclean that lurks with in you, take every measure to crucify the flesh that wants to overpower you and destroy your walk with Christ and your witness before others.

You see if you're about the business of helping your bro's and sisters remove the specs in their eyes, you had bettered 1st deal with the logs in your own, that's what Paul is saying here. "Take heed to yourselves" personal holiness is the key, because but for the grace of God we're all about a moment away from succumbing to the flesh. and When I say "personal holiness" let's make it clear that I'm not speaking of outward conformity to a legal standard, Paul had plenty of moral virtue before he was even saved. But he considered it all rubbish compared to that which is true righteousness, the righteousness that comes by faith in Christ, it's that which is inward and of the heart. Then from that it spills over into our everyday practical lives, in Matt 23 Jesus spends extended time making that clear. White washed tombs look good on the outside, but their still full of death on the inside, but if you clean a cup on the inside, it can be used to quench the thirst of kings. It's about being a vessel of honor, we spoke about that Wednesday evening, leading lives set apart to the Lord, coming out from among the profane, leading lives that are pure. From a leadership perspective, the personal comes before the pastoral.

Then he says, "and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers." Of course the flock being a reference to the people of God, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. and We want to draw attention to the fact that it's the Holy Spirit Who makes one an "overseer," which is that word for "bishop" we're talking here about elders, pastoral type positions. It's not a church vote that makes you an overseer, contrary to popular opinion. It's the Holy Spirit who appoints whom He wills.

All man can do is ratify *at best* what it is that God is doing in another man's life, when you begin to observe an individual's life, and you find that he's blameless, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to communicate God's Word, not violent, not given to alcohol, etc. not greedy for money, gentle and all the rest, then you say, "God must be raising this individual up to fill the position of an elder in the body of Christ." Because if I come to you and say, "I'll make you an elder if you quit drinking, be nice, quit bickering with everyone, start being gentle," so on and so forth than we've reverted to that outward conformity thing again rather than an inward intimacy with God. So it's the working of the Holy Spirit in a man's heart and life that raises him up into various areas of leadership in the body.

Now why do we have spiritual authority, elders, overseers and all? Read on, "To shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood." and Notice the sobering call that Paul issues as a reminder as to the sincerity with which we do what we do. He says, "Remember, it's not your church, it's God's church, He purchased it with His own blood." I thought that God was Spirit, and as such wouldn't have blood? That's true, but that's where the mystery of this thing that we call the Trinity enters the equation, who was it that shed His blood that He might pay the price for our redemption? Jesus Christ What does that mean? It means that the 2nd person of the Godhead became a Man, robed Himself in flesh and blood, and poured out His blood to pay the purchase price of our redemption that we might be forgiven of our sin debt.

What is this saying? That Jesus is God. Some choose to see this as saying, “Which He purchased with the blood of His own.” That’s fine to, doesn’t violate the text, but even still, whose church does this vs say it is? “God’s” What did Jesus say? After Peter made that confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus said, *“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”* Matt 16:18

No matter how you slice it the bible is clear that Jesus *is* God in the flesh. and As overseers we’re to shepherd the church. That word shepherd is a comprehensive term which encompasses the entire task of a shepherd. To lead, care for, protect, but most importantly *to feed*. This is the single most important task of the shepherd’s responsibility to his flock, to feed the sheep. Obviously bearing in mind the context of the fact that he’s operating with in the parameters of that personal relationship with God himself, allowing the Love of God to flow into and out through him so as to lovingly tend *to* and look out *after* the sheep, to feed them. What did Jesus say to Peter there on the beach as He was restoring him into the ministry? “Simon son of Jonah, do you love Me? Feed My Lambs; tend My Sheep, Feed My sheep. Shepherd them, make them lie down in the green pastures of My Word, lead them beside still waters, restore souls, lead them in paths of righteousness for My name’s sake.” What did Peter echo as when he wrote his 1st epistle? *“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;”* 1 Peter 5:2-3 Shepherd the flock, feed the sheep, I don’t know why so many Pastor’s refuse to simply teach the Word of God and feed the sheep. It’s the primary priority that Jesus has left us to as it relates to our responsibility to the church, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry.

Vs29-30

So #1 Have regard for yourself, understand that your effectiveness will spill out of personal purity and inward intimacy with the Lord. and Be about the business of tending to, that is feeding the sheep, but #2 Be aware of others. Anywhere there’s a nice flock of sheep, savage wolves aren’t far off, who are the wolves? Those who come into the flock, and devour/that is destroy the flock for some sort of personal profit.

Jesus issued us a warning not to be ignorant of these kind of people, He said, *“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”* Matt 10:16 He said, *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.”* Matt 7:15-16 What you won’t know them by is there sight, their smell, or even always by the things they say, the key is what has been the net effect of this person’s presence in our midst, what are the outcroppings of his life? If it’s sheep carcasses strewn everywhere, people being hurt, if not altogether destroyed, than you’ve got a wolf on your hands. Its time to break out the rod and deal with the situation, but sometimes it’s not always the wayward stranger that moves in to town. They’re not always coming *into* the flock, but they’re right there *among* the flock. and I find that these wolves are always the hardest to deal with.

If some guy comes in who's bad news, you just deal with him, but if it happens to be someone who's right there with you, perhaps serving alongside of you, it becomes much more difficult. Because you want to think the best of that person, think there's no way he's out to damage the body, or serve his own agenda, but even Jesus had His Judas, and there are times when someone sours, or perhaps never had the purest of intentions right there in your own ranks. A modern day Diotrefes who loves to have the preeminence (you can read of him in 3rd John). and So they begin to covertly talk trash about the Pastor, or the leadership, talk about what they'd do if they were the Pastor, gather groups of people around them, and then they start their own church down the road, or as it says here, "Speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."

Vs31

#3 Having been warned, watch! He's says, "It's going to happen," Just like Jesus told them who it was that was going to betray Him in advance so that when it happened they might believe, Paul is saying to them in advance, forewarning them that they might watch. That is, be vigilant, awake, watchful, alert, remember when Jesus was there in the garden, He asked the boys to pray, He comes back in an hour and they're all asleep. and He says, "*Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.*" Matt 26:41 Peter said, "*Be sober, be vigilant;(that is watchful and alert) because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*" 1 Peter 5:8 Satan loves to infiltrate the church where the Word of God is being taught, Paul is saying, "Watch out for that, don't be ignorant of your enemies devices, don't fall asleep on your watch. I watched and warned you night and day (in other words be always on your guard, never let it down, day or night) for 3 yrs. Now it's your watch, be alert, and warn others accordingly."

It's been said that the Pastor that only feeds the sheep but never warns the sheep is only fattening them up for the kill. Are we to feed the sheep? Absolutely, but along with that comes the warnings, "Be on the watch for this, don't be ignorant of that." and As you read 2nd Timothy and even Rev ch 2 you find that Paul's concerns were well founded. Timothy was the Pastor in Ephesus, and it didn't take much time for problems to arise, here Paul was trying to prepare them how they might take preventative measures to minimize those problems. Do you realize that from Acts Ch 20 to Rev ch 2 was only about 30 or so yrs!?! and By then they'd already left their 1st love and had some real problems in the church. Paul spent more time there than is recorded in any other place, how quickly we can lose sight of the priority of that 1st love relationship, and all that God has given us in Christ. Watch! Be warned! Remember! and Be ready! But when it's all said and done Paul knows he can't always be there for them, so what can he do?

Vs32

He commends them to God and to the keeping power of the Word of His grace, #4 Stay in the Word. and Really we have a picture here of prayer and the word going hand in hand. He commends them to God in prayer, and encourages them to keep in the Word. Prayer and the Word are a mutually inclusive aspect of your relationship with God.

At the end of the day this all any Pastor can do for flock of God, we're to feed the flock, watch out for and protect the flock from those who want to fleece and feed on the flock, but ultimately we realize that you're the sheep, not of *my* hand, but of *His* hand and all I can do is to commend you to Him. He is able to keep that which has been committed to His trust, to present you faultless before the throne, I can't do that for you, only Jesus Christ can do that and so I commend you to Him and to the word of His grace. God's unmerited favor poured out upon and into your life, programs can't do it, slick marketing campaigns can't do it, good wholesome entertainment can't do it, only the Word of God can build you up. That is edify you, encourage you, increase your faith, wash you by the water therein and assuring you of an inheritance among all those who are sanctified, that is set apart unto Him. and Just a side note but one worth mentioning, I hope you've caught the overwhelming emphasis on the Word of God that Paul has stressed throughout this small passage from vs 18-38. It's so critical that we abide in God's Word, and that His Word abides in us.

Vs33-35

Perhaps you recall a couple weeks ago when I told you that he begins with what his motive in ministry was, and ends with what his motive in ministry was not. and He draws attention again to the fact that his motive was not for personal profit of any kind. "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel."

No doubt holding up his hands he reminded them of the fact that his own hands provided not only for himself, but also for his ministry team. Now both Jesus, and Paul made it clear that it's right for the minister of God to be supported by the people of God, but Paul rarely to never usurped that right. He didn't want even the slightest room for accusation towards the ministry God had committed to his trust. and He's again pointing to the example he's been among them that they might in turn serve in like manner in his absence, that is #5 Tend to the well-being of others. and What he's saying is, "Boys, the ministry isn't about getting, it's about giving." It's not about what I can get *from* you, but rather what I can give *to* you, that's ministry. Why because at the root of it all isn't what you can do for God, but what God has done for you in Christ Jesus in reconciling you to Himself. Is there human responsibility? You bet, but watch out for the one who's always stressing what *you* need to be doing for God as opposed to what it is that *God* has already done for you. God so loved the world He *gave* His only begotten Son.

Jesus said, "It's more blessed to give than to receive." Now we don't have this recorded in the gospels, but that shouldn't stumble you John told us that if everything Jesus ever said and done was written down not even the whole world could contain the books. But He's left for us the word that we need, all that pertains to life and godliness He's given us in His word, if we need it, He's made sure to leave it.

This is something He's left for us, of course the gospels record all kinds of things similar to this with respect to ministering and giving freely, not always scratching the back of those who'll be able to scratch yours back, but ministering to those who can't repay, *then* He said, "You'll be blessed." This is really the beatitude of beatitudes in that on the sermon on the Mt Jesus tells us how to be blessed but here He tells us how to be *more* blessed. and It's that reflection of the heart of God in giving, support those, and looking after those who aren't always able to look after themselves, supporting the weak. Surely the entire mission and ministry of Jesus demonstrated exactly this as He came and gave of Himself, taking care of those (namely you and me) who could do nothing for ourselves nor never repay Him for what He's done for us.

So the whole idea here is, "Show Jesus to the people, in the way you live, in the word you give, publicly, privately, not being a burden, but a blessing to others." Now again mark the ministry who uses this as a catch phrase that you might give *to them*. That's a perversion of the text, he's saying that a true ministry will give *to you* not be all about you giving *to them*. Is it biblical to bring your tithe to the storehouse? You bet, that's the Lord's not yours anyway, but steer clear of the ministry that seeks to make merchandise of you, is always seeking to drain you, telling you it's more blessed to give than to receive and all that. Remember the emphasis here is on the ministry or the minister giving, the leadership of the body tending to the needs of the people, not the other way around.

Vs36-37

Paul was a man of prayer, and you can just see this group of guys kneeling in a circle there on the beach as Paul poured his heart out 1 last time in their presence in prayer for them. and I'm sure it was an emotional upheaval of a moment as they were confronted with the fact that they'd never see Paul again on this side of eternity. Paul was as serious as they came when it came to the ministry, but he was a warm huge heart of man who loved the people of God and they knew it, the quintessential pastoral heart of Paul the apostle.

Perhaps for you ministry is the last thing on your mind, you don't even know Jesus, you've never given your heart to Christ. God loves you, gave His Son *for* you, that by believing on Him you'll never perish but have everlasting life. He shed His blood for the remission/forgiveness of your sin. You can be made brand new today, all you have to do is say "Yes" to Jesus, let Him come into your heart and into your life, He'll cast your sin as far as the east is from the west and everlasting life will be yours today.

Prayer Points: God help us to be those who look for opportunity to give rather than trying to figure out what we can get out of the deal. That we would place the needs of others above our own, and learn what it means to love and to serve one another even as You have loved us and given Yourself for us. Help us to hunger after Your Word, to be watchful and alert to our enemies devices, that we might discern and not be ignorant of the wiles of the wicked one, and God may we take heed to ourselves. Not being deceived to the fact that not only is there danger *around* us, and maybe even *among* us, but perhaps the greatest danger lies with *in* us, that we would take heed to ourselves, crucifying the flesh and maintaining our 1st love relationship with You, help us to not only draw near to You but to *stay* near to You.