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**A0931 – August 2, 2009 – Acts 20:17-38 – The Final Charge To  
Ephesian Elders**

Today we come to Acts 20:17. Last week we saw Paul in transition, Paul on his third missionary journey. On the first two missionary journey's he emphasized evangelism and basic training, now in the third missionary journey he emphasizes advanced training. So we have three steps: evangelism, basic training, advanced training. Any group that wishes to continue itself must pass through all three steps. If you evangelize and evangelize and that's all you do then you cannot hold people, you give them nothing to hold on to. If you evangelize and follow up with basic training, very quickly you produce impotent Christians, unable to engage the culture. Only when you evangelize, do basic training and follow up with years of advanced training do you really continue yourself. So Paul on this third missionary journey is emphasizing the third step, advanced training and he does two basic things to advance train. One he begins to write, more and more as Paul nears the end of his ministry he puts down on parchment the word of God. This is necessary to preserve doctrine and maintain an immutable base, something that will not change from generation to generation. A second thing he did was take specific men from specific geographical areas and train them to do as he has done. And that's what we have today in v 17, what this amounts to is an elder meeting where Paul passes the baton so to speak, he gives a parting charge. Now these men have to step up and shepherd the church of God.

Now the NT elder system is the system put into place to govern the church by the NT apostles. The apostles hand things over to elders, they didn't believe in apostolic succession. They were apostles and they led the church but as they died off the governing was put in the hands of elders. And so as the baton is being passed here at Ephesus Paul is saying, I'm leaving and you

elders can't place your trust in me. And by application that principle holds, that Christians ought never to place their trust ultimately in a pastor-teacher, they ought not to place their trust in a Christian organization no matter how ancient that organization may be; the place to put their trust is in God and His word. This is why if you skim down to verse 32 you'll see the key verse of the elder meeting. And that verse says "**And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace.**" In other words, Paul wasn't going to be around to solve problems and a lot of men were just simply coasting, thinking well, if there's any problems, it's easy, no sweat, we just go to Paul and find out what he'd do with it. So they were depending on Paul. Now the kingpin is going to drop out, Paul is gone. And when Paul is gone the young leaders can't look to Paul any longer and they're going to have to say okay, now what do we do.

So the elder meeting is aimed at getting them oriented to the word of God and off the apostle Paul. The apostles will ultimately die, the elders will ultimately die. We see this situation many times in church history; this has always been the tendency. In church history there was the principle known in certain areas as apostolic succession. And the thinking behind apostolic succession was a preservation of dogma within the Church, that dogma could be preserved *if* we follow the men who were the followers of the men who followed the apostles. But astute observers looked at this and said well now, wait a minute; it's not that we're following men that followed the men that followed the apostles, it's rather that we're following the men who are following the teaching of the apostles who wrote the NT word of God. So we can't just simply follow the teaching of other men who followed other men in a big chain that stretches back to the apostles, it's rather a direct link back to the apostolic writings in the NT. There has been in church history times when men have trusted in the chain of men rather than the word of God. And so Paul is deliberately cutting off the chain. I commend you to God and the word of God, that's where you place your trust, not in men, chains of men or organizations.

So this is Paul's farewell address, we can tell from the structure of the address it follows exactly the structure of an OT farewell address. Men like Samuel said farewell to the nation in 1 Sam 12. Moses said farewell in Deut 33 and Jesus Christ said farewell to the eleven apostles in John 14-16, His Upper Room Discourse. And one of the elements of a farewell address is the

final charge, vv 25-35. And Paul's charge is, stick with grace of God, the grace of God in the word of God is absolutely essential to spiritual growth, spiritual advance requires God's grace.

So let's see how it unfolds. In v 17, **From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.** If you recall from last time Paul has bypassed Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem. He's in a hurry. He has a financial contribution to get to Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost. So he skipped Christian fellowship and called only the elders from Ephesus to meet him at Miletus.

Now, the term **elder** in v 17 is the Greek *presbuteros*. It's the word used by the Presbyterian denomination. That denomination is named after their form of church government. They've always held strongly to elder rule. And so it's a good name, it comes right out of the Greek language to express the biblical form of church government. What the word means, essentially, is 'an old man,' so it has the meaning of the word translated here, **elder**, from which we get the word elderly. In the church it referred to the leading men who were spiritually elder, they were spiritually mature, not managers of people, not men who knew how to manipulate; men who knew how to handle the word of God, men who'd had hundreds and thousands of hours of instruction in the word of God and they could articulate truth. Now hold on to that word because these men will be described by a different word in a minute and we'll put it all together.

The rest of the chapter breaks out into four parts. Verses 18-21 describe a past situation; Paul describes himself as the model of a good elder. Then verses 22-24 deal with the present situation; Paul announces that this is it, you can't rely on me anymore. Verses 25-35 deal with the future situation; the charge in light of Paul's absence, the duties of an elder. And last verses 36-38, a closing prayer of departure. As we go through the details don't lose the forest for the trees. Think what Paul is telling elders about what is central, what is central is not a pastor-teacher, what is central is not the denomination, what is central is not a program, what is central is God and His word. You can't really put your trust in anything else because nothing else is stable. To get stability you must keep God central.

Verse 18, **And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was**

**with you the whole time,”** that **how** is a particle of manner, in other words, you know how I lived among you, you know my lifestyle, and here it is, v 19, the model of an elder, <sup>19</sup>**serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;** <sup>20</sup>**how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house,** <sup>21</sup>**solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.** Now, these men knew Paul’s lifestyle because they’d been with him the whole time.

And verse 19 begins to describe his lifestyle, **serving the Lord with all humility**, the word humility is a compound word *tapeino-suphrenes*—lowliness of mind. Now the Greeks detested lowliness of mind. They frowned upon it. For the Greek the highest good was the exact opposite. The mind of man was so powerful it could project standards. The mind of man was ultimate. And they followed the human minds that best projected what they thought the universe was like; the minds of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Zeno and Epicurus. But Paul rejected the principle that standards come from the mind of man. Paul was a Christian and the highest virtue of a Christian is that my mind is not ultimate, my mind is not the standard but God’s mind is the standard. It doesn’t mean that Paul’s mind wasn’t brilliant. There’s no question this man was one of the most brilliant men to ever walk the planet. It’s simply to say that no matter how brilliant Paul was, he submitted his brilliance to the word of God. And so for every man who holds the office of elder, no matter how brilliant a mind he may have, the word of God is superior to his mind and the elder is to emulate Paul and come under the authority of God in the Scriptures, that’s humility of mind.

The second thing, v 19, he served the Lord **with tears**, now that doesn’t mean Paul was one of these types who fell into pieces at the drop of a hat. These are the kind of tears that are shed by men who seldom weep for things. Tears are something Paul rarely shows us, you won’t find him expressing them in the epistles much; most of what we see of Paul is a very hard, coarse man. But when there was a serious situation we see Paul weep and here when he’s departing from his elders we’ll see him shed tears, men who he was close to and who understood the pains of ministry he showed them his heart. And there’s nothing wrong with this at all. It’s the model.

And finally, v 19, the third thing, **and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews**. He said you know how I faced the trials on my life. He's talking about assassination plots, murderous plots, that's the issue, and so these are not just little tiny tests, these are major trials and he says you saw me face those and you saw how I handled them. Now you go emulate me.

Verse 20 gets into his model teaching ministry, **20how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house**. The word **shrink** means I wasn't timid, I didn't keep back anything from the word of God. V 27 is the parallel, **For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole plan of God**. That's the whole Bible. Paul taught the whole Bible up to that point in history and Paul could say that because how many hours did he teach in Ephesus? 3,120 hours. Plus, we might add, whatever he taught **from house to house**. Paul taught **publicly** in the school of Tyrannus 3,120 hours. On top of that he made personal **house** calls, not just social calls, notice **teaching** calls. When Paul showed up at your house you better be ready for some instruction. And when he taught he didn't hold anything back. Paul was straightforward in his ministry of the word. This is a very hard thing to do as an elder but if you seek to please God and not men you have to do this. Paul said elsewhere that if I sought to please men then I would no longer be a bond-servant of Christ. An elder must learn that it does people no good to skirt the issues. It is a difficult thing to learn because there are many difficult things to say. But if you do not tell people squarely what the truth is they are naturally looking for a way around it and it is not Paul's place or any elders place to give them a way around the word of God. Paul simply declared the whole word of God and said, alright, I've given it to you, it's between you and God.

Then in Acts 20:21 Paul goes on to describe the content of his message and he defines the message as having two parts, and this is very interesting in light of the fact that today it's only the second part that's ever preached in evangelistic services. Notice what he says: **solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ**. Now, I showed you this in two places, Acts 13 to the **Jews** at Pisidian Antioch, that's a model for how Paul approached Jews. Acts 17 to the **Greeks** at Athens, that's a model for how Paul approached pagan Greeks.

And in both cases he follows exactly the procedure he mentions here. Step one he preaches **repentance toward God** and step two he preaches **faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ**.

Now, to see this turn very quickly back to Acts 13:17. You'll see that to neither Jews nor Greeks did Paul start with Jesus. Paul started with God, he finished with Jesus. And hardly anyone today recognizes this principle. Verse 17, notice the emphasis as I take you through, watch the subject of the action. "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers." Whose chose them? God chose them. Who made the people great during their stay in Egypt? God made them great. Who led them out with an uplifted arm? God led them out. V 18, who put up with them in the wilderness wanderings? God put up with them. V 19, who destroyed the seven nations at the conquest? God destroyed them. Who distributed the land? God distributed the land. V 20, it goes on, who gave them judges until Samuel the prophet? God gave them judges. Why all this talk about God? Because we've got to get in our minds who God is. So these are little lessons about God, God did this, God did that, God did this and God did that. Who controls history Israel? God controls history. V 21, they asked for a king and what did God do? God gave them Saul. V 22, Saul failed so what did God do? God raised up David to be king. And then logically and finally after we know who and what God is and our minds are all fixed on what God has done and who God is as defined by what He has done then v 23 what has God done? He has brought a Savior to Israel, Jesus. See how he did that? What's Paul doing? He's setting them up. Because if you accept everything God did in vv 17-22 then logically you have to accept what God did in v 23. And that means faith in Jesus. Paul was a very persuasive evangelist.

Now, to see that Paul uses the same basic strategy with Gentiles turn to Acts 17. We'll do the same thing again, this time to Greeks starting in v 24. "The God who made the world and all things in it." Who made all things? God made all things. Who is Lord of heaven and earth? God is Lord of heaven and earth? Who does not dwell in temples made with hands? God doesn't dwell there. V 25. Who isn't served by human hands? God isn't served. Who doesn't need anything? God doesn't need anything. Who gives life and breath to all things? God does. V 26. Who made from one every nation on earth? God made from one. Who determined the climate they live in the geographical boundaries? God did? Who's sovereign? God is. Why is Paul telling them all this? To get crystal clear in their mind who God is. That has got to be

understood. And we could go on and on, just drop down to v 30. Who is declaring that all men everywhere should repent? God is. Repent about what? Who He is. If you've got a fouled up view of who God is then you can never get to an unfouled up view of who Jesus is. In this presentation Paul never even gets to Jesus. You could argue from v 31 that he mentions a Man and that Man is Jesus, but they didn't know that. At the time He was an unnamed Man. So Paul doesn't even get to faith in Jesus. He leaves, v 34 some followed him, he gave them step two, the message of faith in Jesus, they believed.

Now come and read Acts 20:21 again, **solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.** All this verse does is summarize everything we just went through. Paul always went through the two steps, God first, then Jesus. God first, then Jesus. Today, everyone jumps to Jesus. Hold your horses. You don't start with Jesus stories, you start with God stories. Why? Because there's a logical progression to get to Jesus, and you have to follow that progression or when you get to Jesus you get the wrong Jesus. Jesus in the NT is God and man united in one Person without confusion or separation, and we don't know what that means, we haven't got a clue what it means if we don't know who God is and who man is, and the Creator-creature distinction. We've got to know who the Creator is, who the creature is, and after that we'll discuss who Jesus is, because Jesus is God the Creator coming incarnate inside a creature, and that's heavy stuff. And that's why if you look at your Bible, look how many pages are devoted to pre-Jesus; two-thirds of this book is pre-Jesus. Now, doesn't that hint that when the Holy Spirit is going to present Jesus in history there's a little preparation involved? And so Paul isn't writing a new curriculum on how to preach the gospel here, a new four spiritual laws booklet, he's just following the curriculum of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit started with God Paul said, then it's good enough for me. Remember, Paul was *tapeinosuphrenes*, humility of mind, I put myself under the word of God. I don't create new methods. I follow the Holy Spirit's methods.

Acts 20:22-24 goes on to the second section; the first section was dealing with Paul as the model elder, they could look back and remember how he ministered. In verse 22-24 the second section, Paul's pronouncement that he's no longer going to see them, they're going to be on their own and they're going to have to solve problems all by their lonesome. Verse 22, "**And now,**

**behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, <sup>23</sup>except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. <sup>24</sup>“But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.** You can tell that in the second section, the present, Paul is on a mission to finish his course. He says he’s **bound by the Spirit**. Scholars debate whether that’s his human spirit or the Holy Spirit. But in any case Paul senses a necessity to go to Jerusalem despite the fact that v 23, **every city** along the way **the Holy Spirit testifies**, Paul you’re going to be imprisoned, you’re going to be treated rough. So apparently stationed in one city after another were these guys who had the gift of prophecy and they keep giving Paul the same story. This is the course you’re headed down Paul, it’s a crash course. Paul knows a crash is coming. Now, if you know you’re on a crash course what do you do? You veer off? Paul doesn’t veer off. Paul had come to the point I’m staying the course, I’m finishing the race, I’m not quitting now. And that sets us up for v 24, Paul’s signature verse. Of all the verses this one summarizes the mental attitude of Paul. You want to talk about gutsy. If someone said this and really meant it you might think they were suicidal. Paul’s not but watch. **I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself.** The guy was willing to die for the Lord if need be, but he was not willing to drop out of the race. This guy is not going to get off course, he’s here to finish. And in 2 Tim 4:7 he will say, “I have finished my course.” He will run the race to the end. How did Paul run the race? By keeping the faith, the guy stayed orthodox in theology, he remained true to the gospel of God’s grace. That’s not easy to do. Lots of Christians veer off. Why do you think we can never agree on the role of works in salvation? It’s not easy to stay on course. But Paul did. For Paul the gospel is a gospel of God’s grace and not man’s works. How did Paul express it in Eph 2:8-9, “For by grace have you been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.” Salvation from first to last is a work of God’s grace. You’re not going to work your way to God. If you could work your way then Christ coming and dying on the cross would be irrelevant. So Paul is staying true to that course, it’s a course given him by the Lord Jesus Christ, it’s a course to testify of the gospel of the grace of God, I direct you to his commissioning in Acts 9.



**25“And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. 26“Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.**

Reason given, verse 27, **“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.** Now, you read past that real fast you miss something critical. We have said time and time again in studying the New Testament that is you don't know the OT you miss subtleties. Here is one of those places. Anyone who knows his OT will catch something that has just been said here. People who do not know the OT will just get a vague inference. I refer to verse 26, “I am pure from the blood of all men,” that is an allusion to a very famous OT passage, turn there and we'll see what he's getting at. The passage is Ezekiel 33, so let's look at a few verses there because these men knew it, they caught the allusion, no problem, but we don't so we have to go back. It takes a little longer to read the NT this way but it's a lot more profitable.

“<sup>1</sup>And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, speak to the sons of your people and say to them, ‘If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman, <sup>3</sup>and he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows on the trumpet and warns the people, <sup>4</sup>then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his *own* head. <sup>5</sup>‘He heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning; his blood will be on himself. But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life. <sup>6</sup>‘But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman’s hand.’

Now at the time this principle of the watchman was written, it was at the end, toward 586BC, when God was going to bring Babylon upon the nation to judge them for their sin. The attack of the enemy was ordained by God. We know this from Leviticus 26 plus the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah and so on. So the attack was ordained by God, it was for disciplinary purposes, and there's a man called the watchman, the army is coming and he sounds the trumpet to warn the people. If someone did not pay attention he had brought this destruction down upon himself. But if the watchmen saw the attack coming and didn't blow the trumpet then their blood would be on his hands.

So the watchman is an instrument of what? An instrument of grace. Grace, grace, grace before judgment. Will you respond to this grace? Yes, the judgment of God is coming but He wants to give the people even one last chance, this is why the watchman is put in this position.

Now, what position is Paul in? Paul's the watchman of v 3; he's blowing the trumpet to warn the people. And that's why Paul says in Acts 20 that "I am innocent of the blood of all men." I've blown the trumpet in all Asia, I've warned them. But what did he warn them of? Very simple. When was Ezekiel 33 given in history? When Israel was about to go into the 5<sup>th</sup> degree of discipline, exile. Now what's about to happen in the first century to the nation Israel? The 5<sup>th</sup> degree of discipline is on the horizon, they'd crucified their Messiah. AD70 is right around the corner and therefore those who respond to the gospel of the grace of God will escape that judgment. So Paul has warned and warned and warned like a good watchman and they didn't listen to Paul, they didn't accept the gospel of the grace of God and now Paul says, I'm relieved of all responsibility because I sounded the trumpet and you guys didn't listen so the nation is going down, that's verse 26.

Verse 25, for those of you who have been following our treatment of the **kingdom** of God in the Book of Acts, the re-offer of the kingdom to the nation Israel during the apostles ministry. If you take v 25 the preaching of the **kingdom** and v 27, the preaching of the **whole plan of God**, you can see v 26 is in the middle of that sandwich. V 26 says I'm innocent, vv 25 and 27 the outside tells you why he's innocent. And so the preaching of the kingdom is the equivalent of preaching the whole counsel of God. And they both denote teaching the entire historical framework and not just the simple gospel. That's what renders Paul irresponsible. It proves that when Paul spoke he didn't just center on the evangelistic gospel, the death and resurrection of Jesus, he taught the whole word of God. There's a principle tucked away in this that has to do with the Holy Spirit's work on the unregenerate heart. And that is that the Holy Spirit uses all portions of the word of God to bring people to faith in Christ, not just the simple gospel. We don't know where an unbeliever is in his thinking, we don't know his hang-ups, but God the Holy Spirit does, and it may be when we're teaching creation, Gen 1 that his hang-up is dealt with, there's no more barrier to believing the gospel so he believes. It may be the inerrancy of the Bible and they come to realize that somewhere there must be inerrancy, either in the word of God or the word of man, and

once that realization happens, the barrier comes down and there's faith. I don't know your hang-up. But I do know it is a very myopic view of the Holy Spirit to think He only uses certain key terms or passages of the NT to lead people to Christ. Sometimes, what you would perceive as the most unlikely chapter and verse will be the thing that does it. And so that's why I simply teach and teach and teach the word of God, book after book, chapter after chapter. Because like Paul, I don't know what a person needs to hear. But I do know my responsibility is clearly laid out right here. Teach the whole counsel of God. That is the only way for a minister of the gospel to be innocent of the blood of all men. So now if you wonder what is Jeremy doing, why is he going into all this, why teach and teach and teach and teach, now you have your answer. I want to be able to say v 26.

Now the third section, vv 28-35, the final charge to the Ephesian elders. "**Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers**, now that's the second word for the elder; if you do mark in your Bible you might mark the word "elder" in verse 17, that's *presbuteros*, an old man, a mature saint, and the word **overseer** in verse 28, a different word, *episkopos*, which means to look over, to watch over. And here's the proof text of why in the time of the apostles there were no such things as bishops over elders but in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century a hierarchy started where you had the bishops over the elders. There's no biblical evidence for that, that's man's power structure, in the NT elder and overseer refer to the same man. The two words, one has to do with his authority, the other has to do with his duty, but one and the same office.

And the close of v 28 gives the first charge, **Be on guard**, now if you have to be on guard what's the inference? You're not on guard unless there's danger. We'll learn about it momentarily. **Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock**, no one is immune, I don't care if you're an elder, I don't care if you've been an elder 100 years, no one is immune so you have to watch yourself as well as the flock .

Second charge, to do what? **to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood**. So the first thing is **to shepherd**, that word means "to protect." Protection is the most basic function of an elder, to protect the flock. The easiest way to do that is to keep them close, keep them in a herd. The last thing you need is sheep scattered all over the place. And

so you will see that the more often you attend with other sheep under the teaching of the word the closer you are, in a real fellowship sense, real fellowship is around discussion of the word of God, not this other stuff that passes for Christian fellowship. Christian fellowship presupposes doctrine. And this is the age old reason why with some people you just can't get deep fellowship. As long as you disagree doctrinally there will be barriers. So to shepherd well, to herd a flock you have to have consistent Bible teaching and all the sheep have to come in line. As long as you have stray sheep; I disagree with this and I disagree with that, and they're straying all over the place fellowship is hindered. Absence of fellowship is not because we don't have enough programs, absence of biblical fellowship is because we don't have enough doctrinal agreement.

Now, in v 29 Paul begins to reveal that he knows what's coming for these elders; something evil is on the horizon and their protective role is going to be challenged. This is why it is so critical that an elder be well-trained and in training. It's not enough to be well-trained you must also be in training. Why? Simply because Satan is always influencing society in a new direction, and so there are new threats to the flock. So we read, **"I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup>and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. <sup>31</sup>"Therefore be on the alert.** Now, here's the picture, sheep are very weak animals, they are defenseless animals, they can't do anything against a wolf and so when a wolf attacks the lamb can't fight back, it has very little kick, it doesn't have much defense and the wolf will take the lamb by the throat, break the neck and blood will spew out of the jugular and then rip it to pieces, it's a very gory mess, but it's a mess you should envision because that's an exact parallel of what heresy does to you spiritually.

So verse 29 describes heresy coming into the church from outside of the church; that has happened on numerous occasions. What we mean by this is an idea spawned by the world system. The big one that has split the church today is evolution. It's spiritual poison. It will make you a weak, anemic Christian. But there are hundreds of new ideas coming from the world system into the church. Elders must know what they are and how to defend against them.

Verse 30 describes heresy coming from within the church. **and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.** Within the professing church you will have heretics. This causes schism, division in the church, and in part this must occur so those who are approved rise to the surface of leadership. What the inside heresy refers to is doctrine deliberately maligned or mistaught. In our day it's the sufficiency of the word of God. Is the word of God really sufficient to solve our problems? Or are there some problems that are too big for the word of God? This goes on and on, I almost see this one weekly. Oh, so and so's got a problem, better send them to the psychiatrist? Who's the psychiatrist? Freud, Skinner, Maslov, not Jesus Christ. Christ and Freud are as opposite as Moses and Pharaoh. Two competing worldviews. Two principles at war. Yet we feed our sheep to Freud? Why don't we direct them Christ? Very simple: we're not really convinced Christ is sufficient. So, do you see what Paul's doing here? He says look, if this heresy is both inside and outside the church, then ultimately you can't put your faith in one man, you can't put your faith in one denomination? There's got to be something bigger, something more stable and that something else is the conclusion in verse 32.

**And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace,** you see the emphasis; guys, there's only one object of your faith and that's God and the word of His grace, you can have heresy from without and within, but keep going back to God and His word, **the word of His grace which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.** The grace of God in the Scriptures is the only basis upon which sound spiritual growth can occur. If you put a man under a system of law he will be crushed by sin. If you put a man under a system of licentiousness he will be enslaved to sin. But if you put him under a system of grace he will be freed, not freed to sin, but free to righteousness.

Verse 33, Paul returns to give himself as an example of one who did not preach the word of God for sordid gain, he was very willing to do manual labor to support himself and others. **"I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. <sup>34</sup>You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. <sup>35</sup>In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'**" And that saying is not

found anywhere in the gospels, it comes from some literature that was passed down by oral tradition called the *Agrapha* or non-written sayings of Jesus Christ. Apparently there was a collection of these that had begun to be collated by this time in the ancient world, we've lost most of them but what's recorded is all that's necessary. The principle, **'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'** Is simply the grace principle, that's all. If God has been gracious to us then we ought to be gracious to others. And that includes working so we can give. He's not saying you have to give, this isn't forced giving, this is voluntary giving on the basis of grace. Grace being that I understand what God has done for me in Christ Jesus and that He didn't have to do that for me, He didn't owe me anything, He could have sent me straight to hell and been perfectly just, but He did do it for me, and therefore it's of mere grace. And so he says I commend you to God and the word of His grace. Now, what's your response to Him?

And finally he concludes with a prayer, v 36, **When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.** <sup>37</sup>**And they *began* to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him,** <sup>38</sup>**grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.** This is real sorrow, these people are people, they have emotions, they're sad to see Paul leave, Paul led many of them to Christ, Paul taught them for three years, but it's not sorrow like those who have no hope. Notice, they are grieving in verse 38 because they're not going to see him personally, but they're not panicking. Oh, what are we going to do when Paul's gone, what are we going to do when Paul's gone, oh, everything's going to go down the drain. No! Because God is still God. If Paul never comes back we still have the word of God. And we'll always have that. The holy canon of Scripture has been preserved. It remains with us today and those who remain true to it are those who are most truly in the apostolic succession, those who receive the apostolic teaching along with the rest of the word of God as the final and sufficient authority in every area of life.

And so we conclude the same place the Reformers of the Protestant Reformation concluded. We're not going to put our trust in Luther or Calvin or any of those men. Those men did not conclude with the saying *sola* Calvin or *sola* Zwingli. The battle cry of those men was *sola Scriptura*. We have to always be going back to the text, back to the word of God, back to the voice of

God. That's our foundation, not men, not organizations, not denominations. The word of God. And always reforming, *semper reformada*, always, always, always, going back to the word, is this what the word of God teaches? What's the word of God saying? And adjusting our theology, not the text.

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