

Acts 20:28-38

"Stay Faithful In The Future"

It was his final farewell. Paul was addressing the pastors/elders/overseers of the Christian community of Ephesus. He'd spent more time w/these people (*planting* the seed of God's word, *watering* the seed of God's word, cultivating growth, discipleship & leadership) than he had anyone else throughout the entirety of his missionary journeys over all the years.

He was headed for Jerusalem, trying to get there on time to be present at the Day of Pentecost. But he stopped off at the seaport in Miletus & called for the elders of the church in Ephesus to walk some 30 miles to come & see him that he might impart some final words to them.

It's an emotionally charged address, (as one might imagine) w/Paul knowing that he will never see them again. But he feels it imperative to impart to them some insight, some understanding, some keys to effective, efficient ministry as he (more or less) passes the baton of the care & well-being of the body of Christ (there in Ephesus) off to them.

Now; *they didn't know* (initially) that Paul was going to inform them that this was the last time they'd ever see him this side of eternity. But as his message progresses it becomes increasingly clear that he's leading up to something big.

He begins by carefully marking out his personal integrity & how he lived his life (*daily*) among them. Why? Because if we want to minister effectively, we've *got to exemplify* personal integrity... How would our knowledge of God's word be if we all studied like you? Would ministry take place if we took our Q's from you? Would we have a place to meet, or would outreach take place if we all gave like you? You see, we're not to coast on the faithfulness of others, we're to exemplify integrity personally. Hey; no one else may know where you serve, God knows. No one else may know if you give, God knows. & It should be in our heart to be found faithful before Him.

Having reminded them of his integrity, Paul moved into the motive, the manner & the message of his ministry. His motive? Serving the Lord. His manner? W/all humility. His message? "Repentance toward God & faith toward our Lord J.C." That all have sinned & fall short of the glory of God. Therefore, all need to repent, turn *from* their sin *toward* God & place their faith in J.C. Trusting the sufficiency of His death/resurrection for the cleansing of their sin, freely justifying them in the sight of God.

These were the things he'd modeled for them in the past. As for his present? (Vs 22-27)

Now. I had a few people ask me about this, “innocent of the blood of all men” comment. Because if you know Paul’s story, you know he had many people murdered (Christians specifically) before he himself came to Christ. How then could he say he was “innocent of the blood of all men”?

2 Things. #1 Let’s remember this, 2 Cor 5:17. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”*¹ Can we all just give God a little bit of praise for the fact that we’re a new creation in Christ? That our sin has been washed away, cast as far as the east is from the west? We serve a God of new beginnings. I’m so glad (as the song goes) that, “I don’t have to carry the weight of who I’ve been, cause I’m forgiven...”

Having said that, this passage really has nothing to do w/that. What he’s saying is that he’s been faithful to share the fullness of the gospel. (The warning of the ramifications of sin, the hope of salvation by grace through faith in J.C., how to know Jesus, how to grow *in* Jesus, all of it, he’s held nothing back.) If they were to choose to not walk w/Jesus, that’s on them, it’s not because he kept something back that would’ve helped them, he’s innocent of that kind of charge. It’s an Ezekiel 33 kind of reference.

So here we go. He’s spoken of his past, informs them of his present & now warns them of the future. To what end? That they might be good, faithful/fruitful overseers of the body.

Vs 28

Can we agree that there’s a lot to unpack in this single sentence? 1st of all; anytime you see the word “therefore” it’s a hinge upon which the door so often opens from a principle into the practical. It signals a, “because of all the things just mentioned” call to action.

Paul is saying, “I’ve drawn to your attention the principles of integrity, of humility, the fact that the message is the same for everybody. I’ve emphasized the fact that this life isn’t our end goal, but our eyes are on eternity & that we’re to hold nothing back but we’re to preach the message fully/completely.” “Therefore...” You see; Paul has demonstrated how he’s taken heed to *himself*, now he exhorts them to take heed to *themselves*.

What does it mean: “take heed to yourself”? It means everything we’ve just highlighted, doesn’t it? Keep yourself in check in all these areas, (integrity, humility, the motive, manner & message of your life/ministry).

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [2 Co 5:17]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Pay attention to the way you're living your life lest you slip or stumble, drift & become disqualified. When he wrote to the Cor. He said this, *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."*²

The godly leader knows that effective ministry stems from the overflow of what is taking place in one's life personally, secretly, intimately between me & God. So take heed to yourself. It's hard to encourage others in the Lord, if you're not cultivating your own walk, your own life w/the Lord 1st.

Jesus said something similar to His disciples when He said, *"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."*³

When he wrote to Timothy, Paul echoed this same principle when he said, *"Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you."*⁴

Or as we have it here, *"Take heed to yourselves & to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers."* The idea here is, *"Pay attention to yourselves, & pay attention to the people of God. Love them, tend to them, care for them, because the Holy Spirit has made you overseers of them."*

You are where you are because the Holy Spirit has placed you there, be faithful to Him w/the responsibility He's entrusted to you. Be it in your family, where you're at vocationally, or (as we have here) in ministry.

"Shepherd the church of God." Feed & lead your congregation faithfully. Jesus told Peter to *feed* His sheep, to *tend* His lambs. To *protect* them & when necessary *correct* them, it's the responsibility of the shepherd. Again; when Paul was writing to Timothy, he said this, *"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:*

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Co 9:24-27]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Lk 21:34-36]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Ti 4:16]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”*⁵ He said, *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*⁶

Now; if you're like me, when you read things like that you're kind of left thinking, “Man, God's word must be really important!” Why then is it given such little precedence in so many churches today? They may mention a Vs or 3, maybe sprinkle it throughout whatever message they bring... But if I understand this correctly, we're to give God's word the priority! It shapes us, grows & matures us spiritually. What pastor wouldn't want that for the fellowship God's entrusted to them? (We'll see momentarily).

But notice 1st it's “*God's*” church. This church isn't mine, it's God's! *He purchased it*, how? W/His own blood! It's interesting to me how some people claim to love God but they can't stand the church... Can I just tell you, there's nothing of greater value to God upon the face of this earth than His church. The gospel is free; it's anything but cheap. You weren't redeemed w/corruptible things like silver or gold, but w/the precious blood of Christ.

Btw. If Jesus shed His blood to redeem His bride, yet here Paul says that the church was purchased w/God's own blood, what does that say of Jesus? That He is God...

But it creates a beautiful balance in the body. The sheep need to remember that God has appointed, the Holy Spirit has called men to protect, correct, feed & lead them. Simultaneously those men, those shepherds need to remember; the flock belongs not to them, but to God who purchased the church w/His own blood.

Vs 29

You see, the pastor's responsibility doesn't end w/simply feeding & leading, but also protecting the people of God. Not necessarily from physical altercations (though I suppose there might be situations where that would be appropriate). The idea here is that of spiritual deception, those who would deceive & destroy you w/false doctrines.

They're (the words are) “savage wolves”, they don't care about you, their only interest is their own. You can't always tell these people by how they look, it's rarely the guy w/the black cape, the top hat & the handle bar mustache who laughs ominously in the shadows... ☺ Typically you can tell a wolf by what they eat... They eat sheep! They prey on your compassions, take advantage of your convictions & seek to make merchandise of you.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (2 Ti 4:1-2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (2 Ti 3:16-17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Rather than seeking to be there *for* you, they're wanting something *from* you. Often times it's your money. They use godliness as a means of gain, from such w/draw yourself. Peter warned his readers, *"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you (make merchandise of you) with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber."*⁷

Vs 30

So not only will there be danger pressing in from the outside, but there will those who rise up on the inside, who seek to draw the disciples after themselves. This is like a "Judas moment". All of them looking at each other, "From among ourselves? No way, I'd never..." Be careful if a man is always talking about himself, pointing you to himself.

Or (as it says here) "speaking perverse things"... What does that mean? It means he's twisting the truth. Paul ministered in humility, these would speak perversity, bending & twisting the truth so as to draw people after themselves. Some people love the preeminence, to be in the position of superiority, to hold the cards of authority, it's how cults are born...

So the warning; there are those who are dangerous on the outside, deceptions & ulterior motives on the inside.

Vs 31

Here's our word, "therefore" again. Because of what I've just told you, this is how you need to respond... "Watch", don't grow careless. Jesus told His disciples,

Jesus told His disciples to watch & pray! Stay vigilant, stay attentive. Paul tells these men (& by way of application you & me) watch, keep your eyes open, don't go to sleep or grow lethargic spiritually.

It's when the watchman on the watchtower falls asleep, ceases to pay attention, that the enemy slips in & destroys lives. You're on the watchtower. For your family, your ministry, even your own life personally. Watch, stay alert.

Notice Paul calls attention to the fact that for 3 yrs he did this for them. He "did not cease" he stayed vigilant, he warned everyone (night & day), notice "w/tears". It wasn't emotionless militant barking, but heartfelt concern for their spiritual well-being.

⁷ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (2 Pe 2:1-3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He's telling them, he's telling you & me that now that he's gone, it's our turn. Take care of our own. Diligently, relentlessly, compassionately.

Vs 32-35

Paul says, "I've done everything I can. I've taught you, watched over you, warned you, protected/corrected you but at the end of it all, I commend (entrust) you to God & to the word of His grace."

Ladies and Gentlemen: this is all we can do. Be it for our families, our ministries, the people we serve. We feed them, warn them & love them, but ultimately we must entrust them to God.

He knew there were difficulties in front of them, so he placed them before God knowing that God (through the word of His grace & the power of His Spirit) is more than able to see them (& to see *you*) through.

It's the word of God, through the grace of God that leads to edification (a building up & strengthening of your inner man) assuring your inheritance among all those who are sanctified. It's not the word of His "law" that does this for you. But the word of His "grace". In other words, it's not about what you do for God. It's about what He's done for you in the Person of J.C., you believing & receiving it by faith.

& Really this is the goal of ministry. Getting you to God (through faith in Jesus) & getting His word into you, that you might grow & be edified & God might be glorified in your life... It's my heart for you that you might fall head over heels in love w/J.C. & find yourself enamored & captivated by His word.

I can say to my kids or to the people to whom I'm ministering, "Read your Bible. Worship. Pray." And they'll do it out of obligation for a day or two. But if they begin to understand the love that God has for them... that they are loved unconditionally, that in Christ, their sin, past, present, and future, is washed away—they will worship and pray, witness and serve not because they've *got* to but because they *get* to. God's law won't do that for me, but God's love will. It's not a burden, it's a blessing. You see, it's about the word of His grace. His grace will sustain you, strengthen you, sanctify you.

Vs 33 Paul reminds them once again; his motive wasn't money. He wasn't in ministry for himself, but for the glory of God to build up & encourage the people of God. Therefore our motive shouldn't be money; but the glory of God. Serving the Lord in humility, not for popularity or position... Covetousness will mess w/your motives.

He says, "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" You won't find these words in any of the gospels. But it shouldn't stumble you to realize that Jesus taught many things that didn't make it into the gospel records. If you've somehow thought that Jesus' only words are written for us, then He spoke for a combined total of what... a few hours? ☺

No; John said (21:25) that the Lord did so many things that if they were all recorded, the libraries of the world couldn't contain them. However, we trust that God has preserved what we need...

The idea here is that we should be more concerned about what we can give *to* the body rather than what we can get *from* the body. & Truly that's true of all of us. That's a good word in our consumer culture.

It's another marker of grace. One fingerprint of being changed by grace will be found in my attitude toward giving rather than getting, & not having a sense of entitlement but desiring to contribute (be it of time, talent &/or treasure).

Vs 36-38

& The scene that runs like a movie in our mind fades to black... I love that he knelt down & prayed w/them all & they all wept freely. This reminds us that for all the hard work Paul had put in, he wasn't a cold dispenser of doctrine. He was a warm kind-hearted man who loved his people & his people loved him...

They'd never see him again this side of eternity. No text message, no FaceTime or Snap Chats. They'd never hear his voice. So they went w/him as far as they could & then like a movie he sailed off never to be seen by them again.

When you get to Rev Ch 2 you discover that Jesus issued a letter to this church some 30-40 yrs later. & They'd done well w/regard to many of these things. They'd worked hard, tested those who claimed to be apostles & found them liars, they'd endured through difficult times & had a love for pure doctrine.

Yet despite all of that, Jesus warned them sternly because they'd left their 1st love. So Jesus said that unless they repented, He'd remove Himself from their midst. In their zeal to fight false doctrine, they'd lost sight of their love for Jesus & for one another.

Listen, be it deceptive doctrine, or loveless religion, the devil really doesn't care which side of the boat you fall out of so long as you're in the water. Stay faithful (not only now) but in the future, keeping pure doctrine & passionate love (for the Lord & for one another) & God will be glorified in your life. Amen? Amen.

Prayer Points:

God, You are so faithful to us. We ask that by Your grace You would strengthen us to remain faithful to You! That we would love You w/all our heart, all our soul & all our strength & love one another as ourselves. Teach us to take heed to ourselves & to those whom You've entrusted to us (be it family/ministry or whatever). Be glorified in our lives.

Maybe for you it's not about remaining faithful, it's about becoming faithful. You've not surrendered to Christ, you've not turned from your sin. Maybe you've been focusing upon what you need to do for God & not stopped to realize it's about trusting in all that He's done for you through the work of the cross. Believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved.