

# The Priorities of an Elder

## Acts 20:28-31

### **Acts 20:28–31 (NKJV)**

<sup>28</sup> Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. <sup>29</sup> For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. <sup>31</sup> Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

### **Introduction**

There is little doubt that one of the most important needs of our culture today are solid biblically minded churches. Churches that understand the ministry and the mission it has been given by our Lord. Churches that are committed to sound doctrine, expositional preaching, edifying of the body of Christ and the evangelization of the lost.

But also we need churches that have men who are godly leaders, full of the Holy Spirit and Wisdom. Men who are men and are bold and gracious, teachers and teachable. Weak men who know there need for the power of the Holy Spirit but men who know what they believe and know why they believe it. Men who will persevere when the times are tough and encourage others when times are bad. We need men who lead churches that are gripped by the Gospel and unwilling to compromise. We need men who love their wives and lead their children in the things of God.

Gone are the days that we can tolerate a passive and weak pulpit. Gone are the days that we can have men who have no convictions. We need Brave men who don't run when things get dark.

Churches have always been a reflection of the leadership. Strong biblical leadership produces a strong biblical church. Weak doctrinally unsound leadership produces a weak church that is tossed to and fro and carried about in every wind of doctrine.

Ministry can be one of the most blessed places to be on this planet, but it can be one of the most discouraging and disappointing places too. You can be extremely loved and appreciate and hated and despised by people in the same church. You find yourself at times never wanting to be away from the

ministry God has given you and then there are times when you can't get far enough away from it. The highs and lows a pastor or elder can experience can be mind numbing.

The last few years have been especially challenging for pastoral leadership. In fact, it has been so difficult that some are calling this time "The Great Pastor Resignation"

I read an article this past week, that was sad and but not shocking.

It was about a pastor who had left the ministry all together.

He said,

"This past Sunday, I preached my last sermon as the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Arlington Heights. I have made the decision that I'm not only leaving my post as head of staff, but I'm going to be leaving the pastorate all together. I no longer have a desire to serve as a pastor in the church."

This pastor was among many who left or considered leaving the ministry in the last 3 years. One survey had concluded that 42% of pastors have considered quitting. the top five reasons given are as follows:

- The immense stress of the job: 56%
- I feel lonely and isolated: 43%

- Current political divisions: 38%
- I am unhappy with the effect this role has had on my family: 29%
- I am not optimistic about the future of my church: 29%

“Being a pastor is like being a parent. You can imagine what it’s like to have a child, but until you are in the role, you cannot fully appreciate what it’s like to shoulder the responsibility of caring for a life 24/7. The same is true for being a pastor. You think you know what to expect, but the lived experience is very different from your imaginings of what it will be.”

As a pastor, you are there for all the peaks and the valleys. You are there to celebrate the weddings and the births. You are also there for the sicknesses, tragedies and deaths. I don’t think anyone becomes a pastor not knowing this is what you are signing up for. However, the reality of what this does to you mentally and emotionally is taxing over the long haul.

Irrespective of how I learned their story, I carry that history wherever I go. Whenever I see them, they know that I know intimate details about their lives; details that are rarely shared with others. Since I see these people most every week, that personal information is always at the top of my mind because I will often ask how they are doing. I

want to know if they are struggling or making progress. I want to know if I can offer resources to help.

What you don't realize is that, over time, the accumulation of all that knowledge starts to weigh you down. Your mind is a repository for all sorts of secrets and, if you're human, you feel sympathy and empathy for their suffering. Therefore, beyond just keeping track of all that information, you're aware of the deep hardships and challenges that your congregants cope with day-to-day. Moreover, they look to you for guidance and hope.

<https://www.restorativefaith.org/post/departure-why-i-left-the-church>

I would like to add a couple of more things that I have witnessed in the last few years and other pastors I have talked to have affirmed this.

- Pastors find it very difficult in today's environment to compete. Compete might not be the best word but it communicates what I'm referring to.
- It used to be that the pastor of the local church was the resident theologian and Bible teacher. He had taken the time to get the education and training to preach and teach and to lead the local church. And most of the people in his congregation were dependent on him to teach them the Bible and if there were questions or counseling or direction needed, they often would go to the pastor.

- Well all of this has changed. Too often the pastor is the guy that fills the slot between 11-12 on Sunday morning but he is not the primary teacher. Your congregation can have 100s of teachers now. Every view of Scripture is up for grabs. Our sermons are like Walmart now. You go to the average grocery store and you don't have one salad dressing, you have 50 to choose from. You don't have one cereal or one soft drink, you have a whole aisle of them to choose from.
- So now the average Christian has 1000s of sermons and bible lessons to choose from every week. And not only that,
- you can eat from the best restaurants with the best food every day of the week. So the believer in the pew can listen to the greatest of preachers and the greatest the theologians and go from having steak and lobster every day and then come to Sunday and have cold chicken that's not even from Chick-fil-A because they are closed on Sunday.
- And although I think it is great that we have access to so much valuable teaching from the best of the best that God has given to the church. It can create a very difficult environment for pastors and elders. The church can come Sunday full from the buffet all week, not really interested in what the pastor has to say. In other cases, because of livestream, pastors and ministries can be compared to the ministry down the

road or on the other side of the country and discontent can set in and whining and complaining can rear it's ugly head as the some wonder, "why we are not doing it like so and so church, or if we did it like this pastor it would be better"

- The problem is that this environment is not going to change anytime soon, In fact with livestream it will get worse as some opt out of the local assembly.
- So it is understandable that so many are opting out of ministry altogether, but it is also extremely concerning. What are churches to do if half of the pastor leave.

Along with what I said about the problem of so many teachers speaking into your church that may be solid preachers. You have the flip side of that coin and it is a dark and dirty coin. The same access we have to good and solid teaching has opened a flood gate of bad and erroneous teaching, from rank heresy to so may views on subjects that it leaves the average christian confused as to what to believe.

## 2 Timothy 4:3–4 (NKJV)

<sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for

themselves teachers; <sup>4</sup> and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

This is real problem. A growing problem and it will require more of the leadership and elders in a local church more than ever.

To be aware and capable of refuting that latest error being pumped out is almost overwhelming at times.

You would be surprised of the strange doctrines I have heard from people who have visited this church. Some have been right out bizarre. All learned on YOUTUBE.

So it is a new day..... A different day.

Not the same as it was just a few decades ago, when all you had to worry about was the Christian Bookstore down the street or the late hour TV Preacher on TBN. Now false doctrine is available 24 hrs a day 7 days a week and as a result, most in the average church have a quilted theology. Bits and pieces from all kinds of teachers.... Some good some bad.

Then to add to this, as if this is not enough, the church is at an all time low in discernment. In fact, I would say that the greatest challenge to the church is the lack of discernment. Not so much discerning truth from error, but from truth and almost true.



So this does not require more skill on the part of the elders, but it does require a deeper skill. To be able to accurately handle the Word of Truth is absolutely essential.

And God has given the church pastors/elders to the church for exactly this.

Lets look at a couple of text by way of reminder.

### **Acts 6:1–7 (NKJV)**

**6** Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

<sup>2</sup> Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; <sup>4</sup> but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

<sup>5</sup> And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch,

<sup>6</sup> whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

<sup>7</sup> Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

### **Ephesians 4:11–14 (NKJV)**

<sup>11</sup> And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; <sup>14</sup> that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

### **Lesson:**

The Context

The Command

The Calling

The Concern

The Caution

## The Context

Acts 20:17–20 (NKJV)

<sup>17</sup> From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

Acts 20:16 (NKJV)

<sup>16</sup> For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.

On his way to Jerusalem in a hurry to try to get there by Pentecost, not desirous to go to Ephesus, he stops at Miletus, and calls for the elders to come and meet him.

His desire is to give instruction and a charge to the Elders at the conclusion of his 3 missionary journey.

Who are the Elders

They are the Pastors

A couple of things about the elders.

1. They were the Elders of Ephesus.
2. They were plural in Number

3. They are all equal in position and authority but differ in function.

1 Timothy 5:17 (NKJV)

<sup>17</sup> Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

4. Elders are not different than pastors, Elders are pastors.

There are 3 words used for the office of Elder

1. Elder

2. Bishop

3. Pastor/ Shepherd

Acts 20:28 (NKJV)

<sup>28</sup> Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to **shepherd** the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

1 Peter 5:1–2 (NKJV)

The **elders** who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ,

and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:  
<sup>2</sup> **Shepherd** the flock of God which is among you,  
 serving as **overseers**, not by compulsion but  
 willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;

## The Context

### The Command

<sup>28</sup> Therefore take heed to yourselves  
 and to all the flock,  
 Acts 20:28 (LSB)

<sup>28</sup> “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the  
 flock,

The First and primary responsibility is to his own life  
 and then to the Flock

### 1 Timothy 1:18–19 (NKJV)

<sup>18</sup> This charge I commit to you, son  
 Timothy,.....wage the good warfare, <sup>19</sup> having faith  
 and a good conscience, which some having  
 rejected, concerning the faith have suffered  
 shipwreck,

1 Timothy 3:2–7 (NKJV)

<sup>2</sup> A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; <sup>3</sup> not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; <sup>4</sup> one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence <sup>5</sup> (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); <sup>6</sup> not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil. <sup>7</sup> Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

#### 1 Timothy 4:12 (NKJV)

<sup>12</sup> Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

#### 1 Timothy 4:16 (NKJV)

<sup>16</sup> 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.

#### 1 Timothy 6:10–14 (NKJV)

<sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

<sup>11</sup> But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. <sup>12</sup> Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. <sup>13</sup> I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and *before* Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, <sup>14</sup> that you keep *this* commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing,

### 1 Timothy 6:20–21 (NKJV)

<sup>20</sup> O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane *and* idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—  
<sup>21</sup> by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith.

Grace *be* with you. Amen.

. 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. (Cited in I. D. E. Thomas, *A Puritan Golden Treasury* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977], 192)

No one is ready to face the pressures and responsibilities of ministry who is not right with God. Those pressures, as well as the demand to set the example, require that leaders constantly be on guard (Mark 13:9; Luke 21:34).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1994). [Acts](#) (Vol. 2, p. 222). Moody Press.

<sup>28</sup> Therefore take heed to yourselves  
**and to all the flock,**

a leader's second priority is the spiritual care of his flock. Positively, that care involves the feeding and leading of **all the flock**. The metaphor of a flock and a shepherd is often used to describe God's relationship to His people. It is an apt one, since



sheep are helpless, timid, dirty, and in need of constant protection and care

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1994). [Acts](#) (Vol. 2, p. 224). Moody Press.

The Context

The Command

## The Calling

<sup>28</sup> Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

among which the **Holy Spirit has made you overseers,**

This is a divine calling. A sovereign calling. It is not by popularity vote of a congregation.

It is not by political maneuvering in the polity of a church.

It is not because a family member was an elder.

It was God who selected the Moses, David and Solomon.

It was Jesus who chose the disciples who eventually became the Apostles.

And is is God who still selects his ministers. If is a Divine Calling.

1 Timothy 1:12–16 (NKJV)

<sup>12</sup> And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, <sup>13</sup> although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. <sup>14</sup> And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

<sup>16</sup> However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

***This calling is identified by 3 things***

**1. The Desire**

## 2. The Devotion

### 3. The Duty.

#### The Desire

1 Timothy 3:1 (NKJV)

This *is* a faithful saying: If a man **desires** the position of a bishop, he **desires** a good work.

#### desires

**ὀρέγω** *orégō*; fut. *oréxō*. Literally, to stretch out especially with the hands, to snatch. In the NT, only in the mid. *orégomai*, to stretch oneself, reach after something, and hence metaphorically meaning to covet, long after, desire, try to gain, be ambitious (in a benign manner) (1 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 11:16). By implication, to indulge in, to love (1 Tim. 6:10).

**Deriv.:** *orgé* (3709), wrath, anger as a state of mind; *orguiá* (3712) a fathom; *órexís* (3715), appetite, lust or concupiscence.

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

#### desires

**ἐπιθυμέω** *epithuméō*; contracted *epithumō*, fut. *epithumēsō*, from *epí* (1909), in, and *thumós* (2372),

the mind. To have the affections directed toward something, to lust, desire, long after. Generally (Luke 17:22; Gal. 5:17; Rev. 9:6). To desire in a good sense (Matt. 13:17; Luke 22:15; 1 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 6:11; 1 Pet. 1:12); as a result of physical needs (Luke 15:16; 16:21); in a bad sense of coveting and lusting after

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

## 1. The Desire

## 2. The Devotion

**He must be fully devoted to Christ in heart, mind and life. He must be a man above reproach. Not a perfect man, but a holy man who is devoted to Christ. This shows in his life and family.**

### 1 Timothy 3:2–7 (NASB95)

- 2 An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,
- 3 not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.
- 4 *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity
- 5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),

- 6 *and* not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.
- 7 And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

1. The Desire

2. The Devotion

### **3. The Duty.**

He must be gifted to teach.

His primary responsibility is to feed the flock, teach the flock and guard the flock with sound doctrine.

It does not mean that he will be the lead teacher or be an elder the teaches all the time, but he must be able to teach the bible when called on to do so, He must be a man who is intimately acquainted with the scripture and knows how to refute false doctrine and error.. He must be a man of discernment.

Elders can be teaching elders or ruling elders but regardless they still must be able to teach.

**1 Timothy 3:2–7 (NASB95)**

- 2 An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, **able to teach**,

**1317. διδακτικός *didaktikós***; fem. *didaktiké*, neut. *didaktikón*, adj. from *didáskō* (1321), to teach. Didactic, able to communicate Christian teaching, apt or skilled in teaching

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

An elder must be a highly skilled teacher, who works hard in his studies and proclamation (cf. 5:17). That is the one qualification that sets him apart from the deacons. Since, as noted below, the primary duty of the overseer is to preach and teach the Word of God, being gifted for that is crucial.

Some may wonder why Paul includes this qualification in the midst of a list of moral qualities. He does so because effective teaching is woven into the moral character of the teacher. What a man is cannot be divorced from what he says. “He that means as he speaks,” writes Richard Baxter, “will surely do as he speaks” (*The Reformed Pastor*, 63).

To preach and teach God’s Word is the primary task of elders (1 Tim. 4:6, 11, 13, 16; 5:17; 2 Tim.

2:15, 24; Titus 2:1). It was for that purpose that they were given to the church (Eph. 4:11–14). While all believers are responsible to pass on the truths they have learned in God’s Word, not all have gifts for preaching and teaching (1 Cor. 12:29). Those who aspire to pastoral duty, however, must be so gifted.

What criteria identify a man as a skilled teacher?

First, as noted above, a skilled teacher must have the gift of teaching. It is not that natural ability that makes one a good teacher; the gift of teaching is the Spirit-given enablement to teach effectively the truths of God’s Word. Timothy had the gift of teaching (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).

Second, a skilled teacher must have a deep understanding of doctrine. “A good servant of Christ Jesus,” Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:6, “[is] constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of ... sound doctrine.” Richard Baxter writes,

He must not be himself a babe in knowledge, that will teach men all those mysterious things which must be known in order to salvation. O what qualifications are necessary for a man who hath such a charge upon him as we have! How many difficulties in divinity to be solved! and these, too, about the fundamental principles of religion! How many obscure texts of Scripture to be expounded!

How many duties to be performed, wherein ourselves and others may miscarry, if in the matter, and manner, and end, we be not well informed! How many sins to be avoided, which, without understanding and foresight, cannot be done! What a number of sly and subtle temptations must we open to our people's eyes, that they may escape them! How many weighty and yet intricate cases of conscience have we almost daily to resolve! And can so much work, and such work as this, be done by raw, unqualified men? (*The Reformed Pastor*, 68–69)

The deeper the reservoir of doctrinal knowledge a man has, the more skilled and applicable will be his teaching.

Third, a skilled teacher must have an attitude of humility. To teach the truth with an arrogant attitude would only serve to undermine the very truths being taught. Paul reminded Timothy that “the Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:24–25).

Fourth, a skilled teacher is marked by a life of holiness. Paul exhorted Timothy to “discipline



yourself for the purpose of godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7), and to “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness” (1 Tim. 6:11). He must be credible and live what he teaches. Paul exhorted Timothy to “in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe” (1 Tim. 4:12). The teacher must be the prototype of what he asks his people to be.

Fifth, a skilled teacher must be a diligent student of Scripture. In the familiar passage in 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul writes, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.”

Sixth, a skilled teacher must avoid error. This criterion is closely related to numbers three and five listed above. It is tragic when men, seeking preparation for the ministry, attend a school that doesn’t honor God’s Word. While they may survive with the basics of their faith intact, they will almost invariably lose their convictions. Paul repeatedly warned Timothy to avoid false doctrine (1 Tim. 4:7; 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:16), wise counsel for us as well.

Finally, a skilled teacher must have strong courage and consistent convictions. He must not abandon the truth and shipwreck his faith (cf. 1 Tim. 1:18–19; 4:11, 13). At the close of his ministry, he should be

able to say with Paul, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1995). [1 Timothy](#) (pp. 108–110). Moody Press.

28 Therefore take heed to yourselves  
and to all the flock, among which the  
Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to  
shepherd the church of God which He  
purchased with His own blood.

The motive for such high standards of leadership lies in the fact that **the church** belongs not to men, but to **God** (cf. 1 Pet. 5:2).

It is not our church, it is his church. It is His people, the sheep of His pasture. There is not co-pastoring with Christ, there is not partnership with Christ. There is not person or persons that own this church. ONLY Christ.

We cannot do with it as WE will. We cannot run it the way we want to. We cannot worship that way WE want to. We cannot teach it what we want to. We cannot accept into its membership who we want to.

We don't own it, We don't create it, We don't save it, We don't keep it, We don't preserve it. We don't convict it, We don't forgive it, We don't chose it. We are just made part of by His Sovereign pleasure and according to His divine Will.

**Matthew 16:15–19 (NKJV)**

<sup>15</sup> He said to them, “**But who do you say that I am?**”

<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

<sup>17</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Church leaders have a stewardship over His property and must discharge that stewardship faithfully (cf. 1 Cor. 4:2). Further, the church is the most precious reality on earth, since the ultimate

price was paid for it when the Lord Jesus Christ **purchased it with His own blood** (cf. 1 Pet. 1:18–19). That demands that every leader treat the church as the precious fellowship that it is. God is a spirit and has no body, hence no blood. Yet Paul can say that God as much as purchased the church with His own blood because he “believed so strongly in the deity of Jesus Christ and His essential unity with the Father that [he] hesitated not to speak of His sacrifice on Calvary as a shedding of the blood of God” (G. T. Stokes, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible* [New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1903], 2:419).

The Lord Jesus Christ set the example of loving concern for the church that all leaders must follow. In Ephesians 5:25–27, Paul describes Christ’s sacrificial love for the church:

Christ ... loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1994). [Acts](#) (Vol. 2, p. 225). Moody Press.

## The Context

The Command

The Calling

**The Concern**

<sup>29</sup> For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

Whenever the truth is proclaimed, Satan can be expected to counter it with the lies of false doctrine. It has always been so. Paul's striking description of false teachers as **savage wolves ... not sparing the flock** echoes that of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 7:15; 10:16). Because of the serious danger they pose to the church, the Scriptures condemn false teachers in the strongest language. Peter vividly describes them in 2 Peter 2 as "those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority" (v. 10); "unreasoning animals" (v. 12); "stains and blemishes" (v. 13); "having eyes full of adultery ... having a heart trained in greed ... accursed children" (v. 14); "springs without water ... mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been

reserved” (v. 17); “slaves of corruption” (v. 19); dogs returning to their own vomit and pigs wallowing in the mud (v. 22).

True to Paul’s prediction, false teachers did **come in among** the flock at Ephesus and attack it (cf. Rev. 2:2). Even more subtle than the attack of false teachers from outside the church, however, is the defection of those within. Accordingly, Paul warned them that **from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Perverse** is from *diastrephō*, which means “to distort,” or “to twist.” False teachers twist God’s truth for their own perverted ends. **Draw away** is from *apospaō* and could be translated “to drag away” or “to tear away.” If the undershepherds are not vigilant, Paul warns, the wolves will drag their sheep away to devour them.

Tragically, even the Ephesian church, where Paul himself ministered for three years, saw such defections among its leadership. In his letters to Timothy (who was then the pastor of the Ephesian church), Paul condemned the false teachers who had arisen from within the Ephesian congregation (1 Tim. 1:3–7; 2 Tim. 3:1–9), even naming some of them (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:17).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1994). [Acts](#) (Vol. 2, p. 226). Moody Press.

The Context

The Command

The Calling

The Concern

## The Caution

31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

To guard their flocks from attacks from both outside and inside the church, the undershepherds must do two things. First, they must **be on the alert**. Knowing that the savage wolves are awaiting an opening to attack their flocks, they must be vigilant. Charles Jefferson describes the importance of the shepherd's vigilance:

The Eastern shepherd was, first of all, a watchman. He had a watch-tower. It was his business to keep a wide-open eye, constantly searching the horizon for the possible approach of foes. He was bound to be circumspect and attentive. Vigilance was a cardinal virtue. An alert wakefulness was for him a necessity. He could not

indulge in fits of drowsiness, for the foe was always near. Only by his alertness could the enemy be circumvented. There were many kinds of enemies, all of them terrible, each in a different way. At certain seasons of the year there were floods. Streams became quickly swollen and overflowed their banks. Swift action was necessary in order to escape destruction. There were enemies of a more subtle kind—animals, rapacious and treacherous: lions, bears, hyenas, jackals, wolves. There were enemies in the air; huge birds of prey were always soaring aloft ready to swoop down upon a lamb or kid. And then, most dangerous of all, were the human birds and beasts of prey—robbers, bandits, men who made a business of robbing sheepfolds and murdering shepherds. That Eastern world was full of perils. It teemed with forces hostile to the shepherd and his flock. When Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Habakkuk talk about shepherds, they call them watchmen set to warn and save.

Many a minister fails as a pastor because he is not vigilant. He allows his church to be torn to pieces because he is half asleep. He took it for granted that there were no wolves, no birds of prey, no robbers, and while he was drowsing the enemy



arrived. False ideas, destructive interpretations, demoralizing teachings came into his group, and he never knew it. He was interested, perhaps, in literary research; he was absorbed in the discussion contained in the last theological quarterly, and did not know what his young people were reading, or what strange ideas had been lodged in the heads of a group of his leading members. There are errors which are as fierce as wolves and pitiless as hyenas; they tear faith and hope and love to pieces and leave churches, once prosperous, mangled and half dead. (*The Minister as Shepherd* [Hong Kong: Living Books for All, 1980], 41–42, 43–44)

The faithful shepherd must also warn his flock. Paul had done so during his own ministry at Ephesus; he reminds the Ephesian elders of how **night and day for a period of three years he did not cease to admonish each one with tears.** **Admonish** is from *noutheteō*, which refers to giving counsel with a warning involved (cf. Col. 1:28). The pattern of Paul's ministry shows the importance of warning believers about false teachers. He admonished the Ephesians **for a period of three years**, caring for **each one** of the flock (cf. v. 20). So compelled was he to warn them that he hardly had

time for sleep, ministering **night and day** (cf. 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8). Nor was it a mere academic exercise for Paul—he punctuated his warnings **with his tears**. He wept because he knew the terrible consequences when false teachers infiltrate. Only by following Paul’s example can the faithful undershepherd protect Christ’s flock from the savage wolves and diseased sheep who constantly threaten it

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1994). [Acts](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 227–228). Moody Press.