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C1123 – July 20, 2011
Foundation Of The Elderate

Last time we dealt with the formation of the diaconate. This week we'll look at the formation of the elderate. This is a course on church leadership. There have been several models of church leadership down through church history. This isn't a course on all the models in church history. There are some lessons in the 3 John series that cover that material. This series is a presentation of the form of church leadership that is most clearly taught in the NT and that would be the Presbyterian or Elder model. This model has a group of elders and a group of deacons and the elders oversee all the aspects of the local church, but in particular the spiritual needs, while the deacons minister in the physical needs department so as to free up the elders to minister to the spiritual needs.

And last time we concluded with some conclusions from Acts 6 so we want to begin by reviewing those conclusions. Acts 6 is the passage that introduces the diaconate. The diaconate actually formed before the elderate. And it did so for one simple reason. The apostles were originally functioning as the elders and so when a church dispute arose over the dispensing of funds to the widows in Jerusalem they very wisely came up with a plan to form a group of men called the diaconate. And we concluded with seven points. First, deacons came into existence before the elders. Later as the church enlarged the apostles appointed elders in all the churches and that will become the norm and standard for the church age. Second, it was the congregation of the disciples that selected the deacons. It was not the elders who did this and it was not every Tom, Dick and Harry on the church roll. It was the disciples, the believers in training, the core group because they were spiritually mature and they knew best who could serve their needs fairly and justly. Third, it was the elders who outlined the procedure and qualifications that the disciples would follow in selecting deacons; men of good reputation, full of the

Spirit, full of wisdom, those are general criteria that the elders outlined. Fourth, it is the elders who put the deacons in charge of the task after prayer and by a special ceremony of laying on of hands. That puts them out in the public so everyone knows who they are, so people can pray for them and so forth. Fifth, the contributions still came in to the apostles but the distribution of funds went out through the deacons. That's something really the elders don't have any business doing. They have a say of course, but their resources are better used elsewhere. Sixth, this allowed the elders to give their time to their number one priority; prayer and teaching of the word. That is so easily neglected, even for good causes, but it must not be. And seventh, the effects were large in the realm of evangelism and discipleship. The Bible is careful to report that because of the formation of the diaconate more people became believers and more believers were being trained as disciples.

Tonight we come to Acts 11, 14 and 20. Acts 20 is the big sandwich so before we go there let's eat a snack over in Acts 11 and Acts 14. Acts 11 the church, which started off Jewish has now taken in Samaritans and Gentiles. It is apparent among the apostles that something new has begun called the church. Probably very few understood much about the Church, probably those most in the know were Saul or Paul and Peter. But a note is made here at the end of the chapter that is important for the formation of the elderate. Verse 29, "And in proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea." So we have the issue of money, contributions being sent from disciples in Antioch down to the brethren in Judea. Verse 30, "And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders." And there's your first use of elders with respect to the Church. It was used before in OT Israel but now we have our first group of elders in the Church. There's nothing here about how they were chosen or any of that. All we know is that as the apostles spend more and more time outside of Jerusalem they decided to appoint some elders. So the elderate first formed in Jerusalem. And now that contributions are coming the apostles handed over collection to the elders. In Acts 4 and 5 they were collected by the apostles. So now the apostles have given up that function of receiving the funds in Jerusalem and they have handed over that responsibility to the men who are taking their place in Jerusalem, the elders. The only other observation is that the apostles did not know anything about apostolic succession. Their successors were not apostles, they were elders. So we conclude that once the apostles died off

there were no more apostles being generated and that the normal leadership is through elders. That's all we can say from Acts 11.

Let's turn to Acts 14 and see what we find there. Paul and Barnabas have just about finished their 1st missionary journey, most of it was spent in southern Galatia where they evangelized and then followed up quickly by training the new believers. Always you will see this strategy so mark it down; evangelize first, follow up quickly with training second, make disciples, it's the great commission. These are very important steps to follow and if you don't you're going to crap out. For example, if you just evangelize and then you leave the people then you don't give them anything to hold on to and they get clobbered. But if you evangelize and follow up quickly with training then you produce powerful Christians, Christians able to engage the culture. Notice how the strategy is tucked right in verse 21, "After they had preached the gospel to that city," that's evangelism, step one, "and had made many disciples," that's training, step two, they didn't just leave them, they trained them, then "they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch," what are they doing here? They're returning, they're going back, they'd evangelized and trained, now they're circling back. Why are they circling back? Well training for one, you can never get too much training. Verse 22, "strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." But that's not the only reason, they were learning about these believers. Who's been growing? Who's maturing? Who are the prospective leadership around here? We're not sticking around; we're leaving, so we need to appoint some leadership. Verse 23, "When they had appointed elders for them in every church," and it goes on, but notice that at the time they just had one church per city, that's just the way it was, they weren't dealing with what we're dealing with now, 40 churches in a town with 102 different denominations, it was just one church per city and notice, a plurality of elders were appointed to each church. So we have the principle of plurality of elders in a church. And the other principle we have here is who is doing the appointing? Two apostles. Paul and Barnabas. So the apostles appointed the first elders. And again you want to observe that the two apostles didn't appoint two more apostles in some kind of apostolic succession. There is no apostolic succession of men. That is a creation of the men in Roman Catholicism who lust for power and authority. It has no basis in the word of God. The apostles were not succeeded by other apostles; they were succeeded

by the closed canon of Scripture. That is where the power and authority rests, not in a group of men, not in the elders, in the written word of God. And “having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” That last element is critical, commending them to the Lord. That’s the element we’re going to see tonight in our main passage of Acts 20, turning the elders over to the Lord, you know, letting them go, letting them become their own men. The apostles couldn’t hold their hand forever and solve all their little problems; they had to entrust these men to God and let Him handle them. He’s the one who saved them. So if He saved them then just maybe He can grow them.

So there are some principles we can pick up here and we want to highlight them. One, the apostles appointed the first elders outside Jerusalem and they did so simply because they didn’t have any successors. There aren’t any more apostles being reproduced. But you still need leadership so they appointed elders. The congregations were not involved, you don’t see any of that here or anywhere else in the NT, that’s an invention of men. The apostles appointed them and second, we suppose that since there are no more apostles after these died off elders appoint other elders, that’s the norm. Third, they appointed a plurality of elders in each single church. They didn’t just have one elder and he ran the show and everybody else kissed his big toe. No, they had a group of men. And finally we can say, when a new church plant occurs, you have to train them, yes, you do train them, but then you let them go, you commend them to the Lord and they become an independent local church. Otherwise they become dependent on you

Now let’s turn to Acts 20. Not much was said in Acts 11 and 14, but a lot is said in Acts 20. It’ll be very similar to Acts 14 but it’s going to enlarge on Acts 14 and we’ll get some more principles. Acts 20 is one of the chief passages on elders in the entire NT. Paul is now nearing the end of his ministry, he’s about to die and as he nears death he does something critical - he takes men, strong men and he begins to train them. Paul needs to duplicate himself, he needs to train elders who can take over what he’s been doing. So Paul is passing the baton, so to speak, he’s giving it over to these elders and now these men have to step up and shepherd the church of God. And this is Paul’s parting charge to them, sort of a go-get-em boys speech.

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 these men were just coasting along, thinking well, if there's a problem we'll just go to Paul and he'll solve it. So they were depending on Paul. Now Paul is going to drop out, bye. Now they're going to have to solve the problems.

So the elder meeting is aimed at getting them oriented to what? The only book that solves problems; the word of God. You can't rely on a person; you can't rely on a pastor-teacher. Yet we see people do this over and over in church history; they prop some teacher up and he's the end all and we're not going to do anything until he moves and eventually the whole operation hardens up like concrete and then the teacher dies and the whole operation dies. So learn the lesson, your favorite teacher is going to die. And then what? If you're relying on me or Jerry or Fred then you better get off that ship right now, that ship is going to sink. None of us can hold you up. You can't trust us. Pastor after pastor after pastor has failed and when they failed, boy, let me tell you, everything hits the fan and the whole operation comes to a screeching halt. Thousands and thousands of hours of training goes down the drain and the reason is because the people were putting their trust in the man rather than the message. Never put your trust in a man. Never put your trust in a chain of men. Only put your trust in the word of God. It's the only stable thing. And so Paul in v 32 is deliberately cutting himself off. **I commend you to God and the word of His grace.** So let's see how this charge unfolds

In v 17, **From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.** Now if he called the **elders** of the church of Ephesus to meet him then they had obviously already been appointed as elders. So it's clear that Paul appointed elders in every church he founded, and we saw that in Acts 14. Every where Paul went he evangelized and trained the new believers and then appointed elders. Notice, he didn't appoint a single pastor-teacher,

he appointed a group of elders, plural, together they will form a body of teachers at Ephesus. It doesn't mean there can't be a first among equals and that's an expression you want to learn, first among equals. That means that you have a group of elders who each have equal authority, they all hold the office, but one of them is the primary teacher, whoever that man is, he's the first among equals in the teaching department. There's nothing wrong with having a first among equals, what is wrong is having one guy doing all the teaching, all the time. You need to have a few all speaking the same voice. And if you flip back to Acts 13:2 you see very clearly that they had multiple teachers at the church of Antioch, "Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers:" plural, "Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen...and Saul." So notice, while the grammar is a little ambiguous, at least the last two men in this list are teachers and probably all five of them are teachers but the first three were strong with the gift of prophecy. But the point is that there were a plurality of teachers in one congregation and the congregation wasn't bothered by that. The congregations that get bothered by that are having one man syndrome, they're attaching themselves to one man and that is given a stiff warning in 1 Cor 3.

Now come back to Acts 20. Paul didn't have a problem with multiple teachers in a congregation, that is the norm of a healthy church. Now in verse 17 he's on his way to Jerusalem and he's going to pass near Ephesus but he doesn't want to stop at Ephesus. That will delay his trip and he's in a hurry to get to Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost so he sends someone ahead to bring the elders of the church to meet him at **Miletus**. And notice the term **elder** in v 17. It's the Greek *presbuteros*, it's this word that is used by the Presbyterian denomination. That denomination is named after their form of church government, which is Presbyterian or Elder. They have a group of men that represent the body of believers called elders. As for the word, it means "older," like 'an old man,' but refers to men who are spiritually old, not necessarily physically old, they may or may not be physically old, that's not the issue. The issue is their spiritual age, their maturity. We'd say an elder is a man who is well-trained in the word of God, he knows how to exegete it, how to communicate it and how to pray it. So that's the first word for elder, *presbuteros*, and we'll see a second word later on.

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.”** **how** is a particle of manner, he’s saying you know how I lived among you, you know my lifestyle, and he’s putting himself up as the model of an elder, he’s saying I’m an example and I want you to emulate me. This is what an elder should do. And here’s the model, verse 19, **serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.** They knew this was how Paul lived because they’d watched him live. They saw it with their own eyeballs.

So first, the model elder **serves the Lord with all humility.** The word humility is a compound word *tapeino-suphrenes*—it means “lowliness of mind.” And it doesn’t mean stupid. What it means is that the elder rejects the principle that standards come from the mind of man. The Greeks said that the mind of man was so powerful that it could project absolute standards, that the mind of man was ultimate. Paul said that the mind of man is not the standard; the mind of God is the standard. So what Paul is talking about is the proper use of reason. Is reason to be used autonomously by the elder to solve problems or is reason to be used submissively to the Scriptures by the elder? And Paul is saying to all elders that your mind must be subject to the mind of God. His thoughts are always superior to your thoughts and therefore every decision an elder makes should be based on the word of God, that’s humility of mind.

The second thing, model elder, v 19, serving **with tears.** It doesn’t mean Paul was a big cry baby. From the record we have Paul rarely cried; Paul was a very hard, coarse man. So when he cries it’s because of intimacy with people, it shows that he spent time with people and he loved them and it hurt when they had to face painful situations and it’s because of this that Paul shed tears. And when he’s departing from his elders in v 37 they’ll all shed tears because this is the end, they won’t see Paul again in this lifetime so this is farewell. And when an elder serves there is nothing wrong with shedding tears, there’s probably something wrong if he never sheds tears, that would

mean he's not close enough to the people, he doesn't know what they're going through or he doesn't have compassion.

And finally the model elder, v 19, served by **trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews**. He says trials were a service. And he's talking about assassination plots, murderous plots, people trying to kill him. And his point is that this was a service to you because I showed you how to handle trials. I showed you how to face intense pressure in the Christian life and be victorious. And so you learned from me how to handle trials. And fellow believers ought to be able to look at elders as they go through trials and learn from their example.

Then verse 20 gets into his model teaching ministry, we've seen his model behavior, now he gives his model of teaching. Verse 20, **how 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. Paul knew there were hard things that had to be said, there are hard situations that had to be confronted. And people don't like to hear the hard things; they don't like to be confronted. That's stepping on people's toes. But Paul knew that toes had to be stepped on because sin is a serious issue, sin destroys. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. And so while it is tempting to shrink back from declaring certain things because you might offend so and so, some big donor, you can't, it's not profitable to anyone. You have to tell the whole truth.

Plus, Paul says, I taught you publicly. Paul taught **publicly** in the school of Tyrannus every day during siesta, about noon to 5 when it was hot, everybody took a break and Paul would go down to the school and teach, five hours a day, which gives you a clear indication of how much content Paul taught. For 2 ½ years Paul taught five hours a day, six days a week. On top of that he made personal **house** calls, not just social calls, notice **teaching** calls. And he didn't call in advance and make an appointment. He just showed up on the doorstep. They had a very different society. They didn't have watches and they didn't have phones, which translated means they were freer than we are, they were more relaxed about people dropping by, they were less concerned with appearance and more concerned with relationships and Paul would make house calls to teach the word of God. And

when he showed up he'd ask "Are you understanding what I'm teaching? What are you having a problem understanding? Do you have questions?"

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.** It bothers some people that repentance and faith are mentioned because they say repentance is not required for salvation, only faith. So some say, well, it's the repentance that is tied up with faith, like L.S. Chafer used to say, and it's true there is a genuine repentance tied up with faith. Every time someone has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ they also repented in the sense that they had a change of mind about Jesus Christ. That is true, but that's not what Paul is saying here. What Paul is saying here is this is my method of witnessing, this is how I evangelized. First I preached repentance toward God and second, if people were positive to that, I preached faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you want an example, Acts 13 is Paul's witness to **Jews**. And Acts 17 is Paul's witness to the **Greeks**. And in both instances he follows exactly the procedure summarized here. Step one he preached **repentance toward God** and step two he preached **faith in our Lord Jesus Christ**.

He doesn't start with Jesus. He starts with God and finishes with Jesus. I don't know why people don't follow this today, actually I do, they lack *tapeino-suphrenes*, they lack humility of mind, they think they have a better way of preaching the gospel than God the Holy Spirit. And that friend is arrogance. In the entire NT we have only two examples of Paul witnessing, one to the Jews and one to the Greeks, and hardly anyone is following them. It's remarkable, absolutely remarkable the level of arrogance. God the Holy Spirit gave us the model for witnessing, preach repentance toward God first and preach faith in our Lord Jesus Christ second. In that order. Don't start with Jesus because if you do you'll end up with the wrong Jesus. Start with God so that when you get to Jesus you have the right Jesus, the Jesus of Scripture.ⁱ And I've given extensive, extensive analysis of how to do this in the sermons of Paul in Acts 13 and Acts 17. And an elder should preach the gospel in this clear manner.

Acts 20:22-24 moves to a second section; the first section was dealing with Paul as the model elder, they could look back and remember how he lived, how he taught and how he preached the gospel. 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 by depending on God the Holy Spirit and His word, not on Paul. Verse 22, **"And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. ²⁴"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 Paul is on a mission to finish his course. He says he's **bound by the Spirit** to get to Jerusalem even though he has no idea what's going to happen to him there, except v 23, **that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city**, Paul you're going to be arrested, Paul you're going to be imprisoned, Paul you're going to be treated pretty 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 and of an elder. So watch. **I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself.** The guy was willing to die for the faith. It's not my life anyway he said. That is a tremendous revelation of Paul's understanding of the gospel. It's not my life to do with it what I want. My life is the Lord's life to do whatever He wants with it. That is what someone who really has a deep knowledge of the gospel has to conclude. I've been purchased and I am not my own. **So that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus.** So he admits that we don't chart our own course, the Lord charts our course, the Lord is sovereign over our lives. We are not forming our own race track here, the Lord forms the track and it's our duty to stay on the track. Later he's going to say, "I have finished the course, I have run the race." He's going to run all the way to the end and he's going to finish the race. That's what the Lord is looking for, Christians who finish the race and in this context its elders,

elders who run the race to the end and finish strong. And all along the way people are going to try to knock you off course, so keep that in mind, this is a long race with lots of obstacles. Then he tells us the course he was given on the Damascus Road, **to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.** Salvation is from beginning to end 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 (Gal 2:21). 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, he got it on the Damascus Road, Acts 9.

Verse 25, **And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face.**

²⁶Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. Explanation 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 if 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 innocent of the blood of all men,"** that is an allusion to a very famous OT passage in Ezekiel 33. We don't have time to go to it but let me explain.

Verse 25, Paul went around preaching the kingdom, verse 27 Paul went around declaring the whole purpose of God. Then you see verse 26 is sandwiched in between those two verses. Verse 26 he says I'm innocent. Vv 25 and 27 are telling you why he's innocent. Why are you innocent of the blood of all men Paul? Because I went around preaching the kingdom, because I declared to you the whole purpose of God. And so we can conclude that the preaching of the kingdom is the equivalent of preaching the whole counsel of God. Indeed it has been argued that the kingdom is taught on every page of Scripture, that it's the largest theme of the whole Bible. So what it refers to, in our language today, is that Paul taught the entire historical framework, event after event after event that culminates in the cross work of Jesus Christ. See, there's no entering the kingdom apart from the cross work of Jesus Christ. The entrance into the kingdom is through the cross. And Paul is saying that preaching this whole kingdom message renders

me, Paul, irresponsible. And it proves that when Paul spoke he didn't just center on the death and resurrection of Jesus, he taught the whole word of God. And this is a truth every elder needs to know, what will render you innocent of the blood of all men? Preaching the kingdom, declaring the whole counsel of God.

And there's a principle here that every elder should know and it has to do with the Holy Spirit's work on the unregenerate heart. The Holy Spirit does up front work in preparing us to come to faith in Christ. It's not always just the death and resurrection on Easter Sunday that brings people to faith in Christ. God the Holy Spirit uses other sections of Scripture. And if we think about it that makes sense because 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 Daniel, the great prophetic sketch of future world history that a person says, now wait a minute, this book predicted all that? Maybe there's something to this book and so they start studying it. One of the great Egyptologists, David Down came to Christ through hearing a lecture on the Book of Daniel and he's gone on to revise secular Egyptian chronologies to line up with the Scriptures. So you can't just stand up here and preach Jesus died and rose every week and think, I'm innocent of the blood of all men, you're not. Only teaching the whole counsel of God will render you innocent.

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**, and there's our second word for the elder; earlier we said the word "elder" in verse 17, *presbuteros*, was a mature believer, now the word **overseer** here in verse 28, a different word, *episkopos*, which means "to look over, to watch over." And here's the proof that, in the NT, elder and overseer refer to one and the same man. There are two words, one has to do with his maturity, the other has to do with his responsibility, to oversee, but they are one and the same office. There's no outside organization that stands over the elder in the local church, the local church is independent of some greater organization.

And in v 28 he gives the first charge, so here's the elders responsibilities, this is how he oversees the flock. **Be on guard**, now if you have to be on guard what's the inference? There's danger. **Be on guard for yourselves and for**

all the flock, notice Be on guard for two things, first **yourselves**, no one is immune, I don't care who you are. Peter was an apostle and he blew it in Antioch, he denied justification by faith, so no one is immune, you have to watch yourself as well as the flock. Protection is the most basic function of an elder, to protect the flock. It's very difficult to do that today because the winds of false doctrine fill every Christian bookstore. So this is very hard to do, there are lots of influences, and all you can do is teach, teach, teach and you have to study heresies, false doctrine so you can train the flock how to detect false doctrine and refute it.

Second responsibility to the elders, to do what? **to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood**. So the first thing is it's not your church, it's God's church. An elder who thinks it's his church can't shepherd well. Second, **to shepherd** means "to lead, to herd." So to shepherd well, the shepherd has to know where he's going, he has to know how to keep the flock together. So one, he has to consistently teach the Bible and two, he has to constantly herd the whole flock, keep them close to the teaching of the Bible. As long as you have stray sheep; I disagree with this and I disagree with that, and they're straying all over the place you can't go anywhere and the sheep will get picked off left and right. The church... **which He purchased with His own blood**. Remember, if you're an elder, that the Church has been purchased by God, the sheep are His sheep, not yours or mine to manipulate, to oppress, to abuse, they are His sheep **purchased with His own blood**. He paid the ransom price and they are precious.

Then in v 29 he says that their shepherding is going to be challenged out in the field. There are threats. And 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 new directions, and so there are always new threats to the flock. He has to stay on the cutting edge. So verse 29, **I know** this is a prophecy, **I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;** ³⁰**and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.**

³¹**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 bloody mess, but it's a mess you should envision because that's an exact parallel of what heresy does to believers.

So verse 29 describes heresy coming into the church from outside of the church. What we mean by this is that you have out here the world system an idea that comes into the church. For example, existentialism came into the church through Karl Barth and the new orthodoxy in the 1940's. Barth bought into this worldly idea that your faith is authenticated by an experience, that the word of God becomes true for you through your personal experience of it, and before that it's just the word of man, but it becomes the word of God to you through your faith experience. That my friend is spiritual poison and that is what most Christians think. But no, the word of God is true whether you ever experience it or not. So that's one example of a heresy that all elders need to understand and how to defend against it in order to protect the flock.

Then 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.** So from within the church you will have heretics. This is what largely happened with rationalism that came in through the church by men like Wellhausen and Schleiermacher as liberalism. It split Princeton Seminary in the 1920's. These men were already inside the church and they thought their minds were so great that they could stand above Scripture. And the strategy of this heresy was to redefine all the Christian buzz words in terms of unbelief, that's the name of the game, talk the talk but mean something different with the talk. That way they can say inerrancy but the average person in the pew didn't know they meant something completely different than the old definition. And so the liberals seeped funds from the average churchgoer to fund apostate Christian organizations, they stole seminaries, they destroyed this country. You really have to stay on top of your game.

So, do you see what he's saying? He says look, you elders have to be on top of your game because heresy can come from within, it can come from without, it's dangerous out there, my sheep are in danger. Now are you going to study so you can protect My sheep? Do you love me? Take care of My sheep!

Verse 32, **And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace**, you see Paul is saying I'm gone, I can't take care of you, I can't hold your hand forever, I am on a crash course, therefore, I commend you to who can take care of you, I commend you to God and the word of His grace, which is able to do what? **to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.** See how fantastic this is? He's looking out there and he's saying God and the word of His grace can bring about the spiritual growth here that results in tremendous rewards status. So elders what are we going to do? We're going to teach the word of His grace, we're going to depend upon God to give the kind of increase He wants and bring about the fruit He wants so as to build an inheritance among all the believers here at this church.

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. ³⁴"You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵"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.'**" 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 in the canon is all that's necessary. The principle, **'It is more blessed to give than to receive'** is the principle that hey, it's better to serve than to be served. Count it a blessing that you serve others as an elder. There's tremendous blessing in giving to others.

And finally he concludes with a prayer, v 36, **When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, ³⁸grieving 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 2 ½ 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.

So once again, just as in Acts 6 the emphasis of the elders comes down to the word of God, that is their primary responsibility and then of course, verse 36, prayer, prayer and teaching. Prayer and teaching are central to the elder's responsibilities. So let's conclude with some principals we can take away from the Acts 20 text. First, the apostles appointed the first elders. After that since the apostles died off, they don't have successors, then elders appoint elders. It's not a congregational decision, it's not a denominational decision, it's elders in a local congregation who make the decision. Second, the apostles gave themselves as examples for elders to follow and several examples are given here. One, humility of mind, that means they have a clear grasp of the proper place of reason, under the word of God, not above it or alongside of it, under the word of God, reason in submission. Two, intimacy with the flock, they know them and they go through hard times with them. Three, living examples of how to handle trials. Third, how to preach and teach the word of God, all these deal with those subjects. One, declares hard things that people don't want to hear but need to hear. Two, teaches you publicly and privately, at church and at home. Three, preaches the two-fold witness of repentance toward God first and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ second, that's a clear gospel presentation. Four, teaches the whole counsel of God from Genesis to Revelation, the whole Bible, not just pet portions, not just favorite verses, the whole Bible. Four, has a conscious awareness of his own inability. You can fall into false doctrine and temptation just like anyone else. Watch yourself. Five, has a conscious awareness of the heresies and temptations the flock faces. This takes study and thought. Six, be alert. This is serious business and if you aren't paying attention the flock is going to be scattered by dangerous heresies. And finally, seven, has the mental attitude that his life is not his own but belongs totally to Jesus Christ. And if he dies for the faith, he

dies for the faith. You may be able to pull more out of there but I thought these were pretty plain on the surface.

ⁱ Acts 13:17, 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 the name of that Man. 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 did give them step two, the message of faith in Jesus, they believed in the biblical Jesus.

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