

I mentioned last week that beginning with v17, Paul provides parting counsel to the elders of the church in Ephesus. Because he wanted to make it to Jerusalem before Pentecost (that he might evangelize the masses), he goes to Meletus (about 30 miles south of Ephesus) and there calls for the Ephesian elders to come to him.

I. He Exhorts Them (vv28-31)

II. He Commends Them (vv32-35)

III. He Bids Them Farewell (vv36-38)

I. He Exhorts Them (vv28-31)

1. If you remember, last week in beginning to consider Paul's final counsel to the Ephesian elders, that he look back at his past ministry (vv18-21), looked forward to his future suffering (vv22-25), and confirmed his present assurance (vv26-27).
2. Paul now provides a string of exhortations in vv28-31, can be summarized into two—take heed to yourselves and to all the flock.
3. (1) Take heed to yourselves, v28—"Therefore take heed to yourselves"—the Greek word rendered "take heed" literally means "to bring near for the purpose of watching or guarding."
4. To keep a careful eye upon—to focus your attention upon something for the sake of preservation or protection.
5. The first thing Paul exhorts them to do is "to take heed," "to keep watch" or "be on guard" for themselves.
6. They were give careful attention to themselves—to their own hearts, habits, families, and general character.
7. Our Savior used the same word in Luke 21:34 in exhorting His beloved disciples—"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."
8. Not only were they to teach others to be watchful and alert but they were to be watchful and alert too.
9. Think how important it would be for a person to first get into the boat before they can assist others struggling in the water.
10. You're not going to help anyone if you remain struggling in the water too—save yourself and then help others.
11. This is the basic principle—and thus, Paul first exhorts these overseers to first oversee their own souls.
12. No man should ever be given the task of overseeing others who refuses or is unable to oversee himself.
13. John Dick—"The duties of the ministerial office are so various and weighty, the temptations are so great, and the consequences of error and negligence are so fatal, that incessant vigilance is indispensably necessary. It surely concerns those who are the guides of others in religion, to be themselves possessed of a lively faith of the gospel, and to cherish in their own hearts the devotional sentiments which they are daily recommending."
14. (2) Take heed to all the flock, v28—"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."

15. These Ephesian elders were not only to watch over themselves but also "all the flock" or the people of God (he then provides three reasons).
16. (a) Because of who elders are—"take heed to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers."
17. If you remember last week, I mentioned that Paul describes these elders (v17) as overseers (bishops) and pastors.
18. The word "elder" refers to ruling, "overseer" refers to governing, and the verb "to shepherd" refers to feeding.
19. Thus, an "overseer" is responsible for overseeing the overall health of the church and its membership.
20. Notice how Paul put it—"take heed to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers."
21. The phrase "among which" is better translated "over which" (KJV) as it describes the flock as their responsibility.
22. The Holy Spirit has made them overseers over a particular flock of sheep for which they are responsible.
23. (b) Because of who sheep are—"to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."
24. The sheep are "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood"—they belong to Him by price.
25. The term "purchased" brings with it the concept of "redemption"—to deliver something by way of price.
26. It implies a former enslavement—just as the nation of Israel was redeemed from Egypt so, we are redeemed from sin and Satan.
27. But notice the price—"which He purchased with His own blood"—that is, God purchased it with blood.
28. Now, this is a very interesting statement, because strictly speaking, God has no body and thus has no blood.
29. But if you remember, because Christ is one Person with two natures, what is strictly true of the one is often attributes to the other.
30. Thus, while it's true strictly speaking, the blood that Christ shed was the blood of His human nature, it's here ascribed to His divine nature.
31. Why does Paul do this? Well, in the first place to underscore the union of the two natures in one Person, but also, to underscore the value of that blood.
32. Why is it that Christ's blood has such power? But because it is the blood of the GodMan (two natures one person).
33. This is why Christ has made these men overseers—because He has purchased His people with His own blood.
34. They now belong to Him—and because they belong to Him—He desires that they be protected from harm.
35. (c) Because of their enemies—within vv29-30 Paul identifies two sources from their enemies may come.
36. (i) From without, v29—"For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock."

37. There's going to be men that come into the church claiming to be shepherds who are actually wolves.
38. (ii) From within, v30—"Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."
39. This is perhaps even worse—people from within the church, influenced by wolves, will speak "perverse things."
40. By "perverse things" is meant "false and corrupt teaching"—teaching that distorts the truth of God's word.
41. This is why Christ has given overseers to watch over the flock, because there are those who seek to devour it.

II. He Commends Them (vv32-35)

1. Paul not only exhorts them to duty but he also commends them to God's provision (which we can divide into two – God's word and his example).
2. (1) God's word, v32—"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."
3. Paul points them to "God and the word of His grace"—which means, it tells of us His grace and provides it.
4. (a) It is able to build you up—it's able to strengthen our souls so that we can run the race and fight the war.
5. Where were they to find the strength necessary to watch over themselves and to shepherd the church of God?
6. It's through the word of God grace is communicated to the soul—it's the food and drink that nourishes the soul.
7. And this is because, it's in the word that we hear about Christ, in whom we have all the grace we need.
8. 2Tim.2:1—"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"—grace is found in Christ who is revealed in the word.
9. (b) It is able to give you an inheritance—I understand by this, it's within the word we read about our inheritance.
10. Acts 26:18—"to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."
11. Every person who is turned from darkness to light, Satan to God, receives forgiveness and an inheritance (heaven).
12. But what Paul means back in our text is, it's within the word of His grace that we learn about this inheritance.
13. This is how I understand the phrase "and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."
14. As these Ephesian elders were believers, they already possessed this inheritance, but it was through the word of His grace they were assured of it (and had greater understanding about it).
15. (2) His example (vv33-35)—Paul not only commended them to God's word but also to his pastoral example.
16. (a) He was modest, v33—"I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel"—he was free from the love of money.

17. It was evident that Paul was not greedy for material things—he lives a simple, humble, or modest life.
18. (b) He was diligent, v34—"Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me."
19. This means, he labored with his hands to earn an income, to provide for his (and his friends) necessities.
20. This doesn't deny that pastors can make a living from the gospel, but it simply describes his own practice.
21. Paul wasn't a pastor in the sense that he had charge over a specific church but was an apostle and missionary.
22. Now, if you remember, Paul had a unique connection to the church at Antioch (which may have assisted in his financial needs).
23. But given the circumstances, Paul thought it best to simply labor with his own hands and provide for his own needs.
24. (c) He was generous, v35—"I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"
25. Here Paul explains why he labored with his own hands—not only to provide for himself but for the poor.

III. He Bids Them Farewell (vv36-38)

1. Verses 36-38 are the words of Luke to summarize what happened after his speech—notice two things.
2. (1) He prayed with them, v36—"And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all."
3. He likely gave thanks for God's providence in bringing them together and asked for His blessing to rest upon them.
4. He further prayed to God that they would be enabled, by His grace and for His glory, to fulfill the very exhortations given.
5. (2) They wept for him, v37—"Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship."
6. This is a very beautiful scene—these men obviously had great affection and adoration for the apostle Paul.
7. They were in many ways his spiritual sons, and they expressed deep sorrow at the thought of seeing his face no more.
8. Thus, in the time we have remaining, I want to summarize our passage under the theme of the NT Elder (consider – his calling, character, and responsibility).
9. Observation 1—His calling—here I'm thinking of the phrase, v28—"among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers."
10. In the strictest sense only the Holy Spirit can make a man an overseer—this is a work only God can do.
11. It's true, the church has to recognize a man as an overseer, but only God can make an overseer (pastor).

12. This means, a church doesn't make a man an overseer, but it merely recognizes what God has already made.
13. Brethren, overseers are gifts that Christ, by His Spirit, gives to specific local churches or congregations.
14. Thus, every overseer has certain sheep entrusted to his care, and for which he will give account to Christ.
15. Observation 2—His character—here I am thinking about the stress that Paul places upon their personal piety.
16. Thus, it's for this reason, the first exhortation he gives them is to take heed or watch over themselves.
17. Furthermore, he reminds them of his own example, with the inference being, they are to duplicate it.
18. It's for this reason, when Paul describes the qualifications of elders in 1Timothy 3 and Titus 1, he places the stress on character.
19. This is why elders are taken from the people with whom they have been living for some time (because they can vouch for his character).
20. And so, I want to digress for a few minutes and answer the question—why the stress on personal piety (on personal religion, purity, and holiness)?
21. (a) It keeps them from being lazy—that is, a healthy heart enables a man to remain diligent and hardworking.
22. This is why, in the first place, an overseer must first take heed of himself that he will diligently take heed of the flock.
23. (b) It renders them a proper example—thus, they not only preach with their words but teach with their works.
24. They preach with their words through sermons and they teach with their works through a life of humility.
25. Thus, they preach about repentance toward God and faith toward Christ and exhibit repentance and faith.
26. 1Tim.4:12—"Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity."
27. This is also found in the qualifications of an elder (1Tim.3; Tit.1), which are merely generic Christian virtues.
28. In other words, everything an overseer "must be" every Christian "ought to be"—in other words, an overseer is merely a mature Christian.
29. (c) It enables them to interpret Scripture—there's a necessary and mysterious connection between the man and message.
30. The manner in which we approach the Scripture matters—we can't harbor sin and expect the Lord's blessing.
31. 1Tim.4:16—"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."
32. Whatever this text means brethren, it suggests the closest possible tie between the man and the message.
33. I think of it like this—as a soldier keeps his power dry, a woodsman keeps his axe sharp, a preacher has to keep his heart pure.
34. Thus, to the degree we allow our hearts to grow cold and dull, the more acceptable we become to error and lies.

35. Our ability to discern the truth of holy Scripture is necessarily related to the present condition of our heart.
36. Ps.66:18—"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" 1Pet.3:7—"Husbands, dwell with your wives with understanding...that your prayers may not be hindered."
37. Brethren, if we think we can harbor iniquity in our hearts and mistreat our wives, and yet hear from God through Scripture, we've deceived ourselves.
38. (d) It allows them to relate to the experiences of others—by this I mean, it enables them to counsel others about heart and life struggles.
39. I get a phone call every few days from one of you asking me—"Pastor, I need help in fighting this particular temptation, or help on loving my wife, or assistance in being faithful and productive in my Bible reading.
40. How am I to give you good advice on these issues, if I'm not daily keeping my heart healthy with regards to these issues.
41. When you call me and ask for counsel on how to fight various temptations how can I respond if I'm not fighting various temptations.
42. (e) It keeps them from a crippling conscious—that is, a conscious unable to speak freely about various sins (vv26-27).
43. Observation 3—His responsibility—here I am thinking about the need that exists to protect the flock.
44. Pastors have the responsibility to guard the church from errors that arise from within and from without (this implies several things that I want to end with).
45. (a) Overseers have to know the truth—this is basic and I trust obvious—they must understand the truth.
46. Tit.1:9—" [Elders must hold fast] the faithful word as they have been taught, that they may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."
47. Don't misunderstand what I've said—while stress is placed upon character doctrinal understanding is important.
48. (b) Overseers have to know the times—by this I mean, they must have some knowledge of what's being taught outside of their church.
49. Dear brethren, we live in a time when serious error abounds, and many Christians remain vulnerable.
50. Now, I'm not saying we need to spend half of every Sunday discussing and critiquing contemporary errors.
51. But I am saying, overseers have to have their ear to the pavement in order to protect the flock from serious error (for example, I address errors every week without mentioning them).
52. (c) Overseers have to know their people—this means, they must know what the members of the church believe.
53. They can not allow false doctrine (teaching) to exist within the church without confronting it with truth (this doesn't refer to minor issues we may disagree on).
54. But it refers to core and confessional issues (such as the doctrine of God, the Trinity, the Person and work of Christ).
55. We live in a day when false teachers are easily accessible as each one has his/her own YouTube channel.