

**Acts 20: 28; “The Pastor Taking Heed”, Sermon # 76 in the series –  
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall  
on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022, in the Morning Worship Service.**

We have seen Paul say that he was innocent of the blood of all men in that he declared the whole counsel of God. He told them in his ministry that that he had gone about preaching the Kingdom of God. Now he is going to apply this truth of his own example in ministry, by way of exhortation to the elders of Ephesus in particular. In doing this, he is gives ministers in all generations the truth which he would want them to receive concerning how they can and should be faithful.

He tells them that he wants them to remember certain things. 1<sup>st</sup> of all – To take heed to themselves and to all the flock. And 2<sup>nd</sup> – To remember to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. If a minister will take heed to these things, Paul is saying, he will fulfill his calling, and be of great help to all the people of God.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – A good pastor must remember to take heed to himself and to all the flock over which the Lord has made him a shepherd.**

Verse 28a says – “Therefore take heed to yourself and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers...” Now, I want you to see from Paul’s words here, that it is the Holy Spirit who makes a man an overseer in the church; that is, an elder or a pastor. It is not just a man deciding one day that he wants to become a pastor, and then he goes about to try to find a church that he wants to pastor. Rather he will become a faithful pastor, a pastor who will be useful to Christ, because of the Holy Spirit’s appointing that it be so. It is the Office and work of the Holy Spirit to call a man to a particular work with a particular people. And it is His good work to establish that man in his ministry so that fruit can be born to God through it.

This verse shows us that there is a call to the ministry, and that the Spirit takes into consideration the desires of a man for that good work. And the Spirit knows beforehand the people (that is the church) whom He wants to place him with. The Spirit knows what kind of a work in particular that that man can do for Him, in relation to them, and they in relation to him. The Holy Spirit knows how to raise a man up to this work, and how to sustain him in it, until the work is completed.

It is true that in a pastor’s life there may be many failures to live up to all of the grace and truth which has been revealed to him. But let us remember that the Spirit’s work in relation to every pastor is certain, and it is perfect. And so God’s purpose will be fulfilled while in the man’s mind it may seem incomplete. But the Holy Spirit is the great teacher of all Christians, including pastors. This truth, everyone in the congregation ought to remember. In the midst of wondering whether he is effective in ministry, both the minister himself and the people whom he is ministering to, are learning more about what God expects of them as the years go by. Both pastor and people are continually learning new things, and new ways of how they can glorify God with the life that He gives to them together.

What does a pastor need to take heed to, in relation to himself, first of all? I think that the most important thing is that he know himself. To know yourself is not an easy thing for any Christian. But as a Christian man who wants to be a minister, a man must ask himself – What do I desire to do to glorify God with my life? Do I have a preeminent love for God’s word, and for prayer? Do I see the truth of Psalm 19, that “the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul? A man must ask – Has my soul been truly converted to Christ, converted away from a preeminent love of the world, and converted unto God. A man must ask himself – Has God set me apart to Himself to be a minister?

Has the testimony of the Lord made me wise, the one who is simple? Do the statutes of the Lord rejoice my heart continually? Have my eyes been enlightened to see the beauty and glory of keeping God's commandments, now that my sins have all been forgiven? Do I walk in the fear of the Lord all day long, knowing that His judgments are true, and that they are righteous altogether? Do I desire His word more than gold, yea than much fine gold? Do I consider the words of God's mouth to be sweeter than honey or the honeycomb? Do I know that there is a great reward in keeping them?

Do I understand my own errors, and do I often ask God to cleanse me from secret faults? Do I pray to be kept back from presumptuous sins? Do I ask Him not to let them have dominion over me? Do I want to be blameless before Him, as well as before men? Is my supreme desire to have the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart to be acceptable in His sight? Do I see Him as my strength and My Redeemer? Paul tells us a man must take heed to himself. And if he takes heed to himself, he will then be in a position to be able to take heed to all the flock, the dear people whom the Lord the Holy Spirit has placed him over.

How should a pastor proceed to teach his congregation then? It must be with words that are fitting for every situation, and with righteous deeds and loving care. In Proverbs 25: 11 it says, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." "Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear." This takes the wisdom of the Spirit, to bring forth what is right and what is fitting in the many situations of interactions that a pastor has with the people of his church. The pastor must study what to say and how to say it, both when he would encourage a brother or sister, or in order to wisely rebuke them.

Sometimes it is hard to discern how to proceed with people. But the real thing that will help a pastor to decide how he should proceed is whether or not he can discern whether that the person he is talking to, has an obedient ear. This principle of truth applies to all Christian interaction between all who are called brethren. Does the person that you are talking to have a heart to listen to your Biblical instruction? Have they been made wise with the wisdom that is from above? Then you should be able to proceed to tell them what God expects of them. You should be able to talk to them about how they can render a better obedience to God if they will listen to what you have to say.

James chapter 3, verses 13-18. "Who is wise and understanding among you?" "Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom." "But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth." "This wisdom does not come from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic." "For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there." "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, they peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." "Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

A pastor does love to see the evidence of the fruit of righteousness being sown in peace by those under his care. Sometimes the pastor's counsel is not sought because they believe that he is too young or inexperienced. Perhaps they think that he does not understand their situation of difficulty. But it is God who has placed him there for you. And as such, you ought to avail yourself of his counsel, and pray to have a right attitude to receive what he will tell you even if it goes against your own thoughts and inclination in the matter. Sometimes the truth of a matter takes time to discern. The Spirit has to work in your heart as well as in the pastor's heart.

Paul does teach us about these things in his letters to the churches. He does not leave us in the dark about this subject. He tells his evangelist helper Timothy plainly in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy chapter 4, verses 12 to 16 how he can be a good pastor. "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." "Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." "Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you

by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.” “Mediate on these things, give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.” “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.”

We see here that Timothy was a man who consciously went about to do this; to fulfill the ministry which the Holy Spirit had given to him. He would strive to become a good example of the believer in every way. Paul lists the ways in which he should be a good example. In word; that is, his speech, his conduct, by the love and faith that he exhibited in every situation; in purity he would show himself an example of those who believe. So, a man who is going to be a pastor, or who is a pastor, must work hard at the things which Christ who has called him, has given him to do. He must keep the charge given to him which is to preach the word, and be faithful all of the word of God which has been delivered to him.

He must pay attention to himself and to his teaching. He pays close attention to his own heart relationship with Christ in relation to his teaching. He must pay attention to whether or not he is sincerely trying to keep God’s word in order to do it. He pays close attention to the thoughts of his own heart and mind in the presence of God in prayer and meditation upon God’s word, so that he might strengthen himself in God continually, and so be strong in the Lord and the strength of his mighty power. This is what it means for a man to take heed to himself.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Paul would have the elders at Ephesus to remember to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**

“Take heed,” Paul says to them, “to shepherd the church of God”. How then does a man who is a pastor do this? How should he shepherd the flock? Well, I believe that the Bible indicates to us that He is to study to know God’s people, His sheep, according to their words and their works. Seek in your labors to get to know God’s people, and to interact with them over every issue of righteousness, for Christ’s sake. Do this to obtain the crown of righteousness, which comes to you from the Lord. Don’t simply try to win their approval but the Lord’s approval of your shepherding.

The word shepherd in the original Greek in verse 28 is ποιμαίνο. It actually means to feed. “Take heed to feed the church of God.” The faithful pastor will shepherd the church of God by feeding and caring for them as Christ’s undershepherd. He will constantly be applying the truth of the word of God to their minds and hearts so that they will be spiritually nourished and feed and strengthened by it to do God’s will.

You will recall that when the Lord Jesus restored the apostle Peter after his denial of Him three times just as Jesus was being taken away to be falsely tried, found supposedly guilty, and taken away to die on the cross, Jesus said to him three times, one for every denial – Peter do you love Me? Then feed my sheep and tend my lambs. He was speaking of Peter’s shepherding the church of God as an apostle. When Jesus told Peter this, He meant that Peter should undertake in every way to spiritually feed them the word of God.

But Jesus was also intimating to Peter that He knew, that for him to be a good and faithful undershepherd, it would also involve Peter’s protecting the flock, leading and guiding the flock of His Church, according to all good Biblical principles and truth; and guarding it as well. These tasks can be summed up by the word “governing”. The overseer will be securing the flock from enemies, directing and overseeing the various activities of the church such as worship, study of the word, and the good works that the church would do. He would also protect the church from spiritual wolves and hypocrites. What a great work it is.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 5: 17, the apostle Paul tells Timothy: “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.” The word “rule” there in the Greek is προεστῶτες (proestōtes) – The word is from a verb meaning to be over; to preside

over; to have the care of. The word is used with reference to bishops, Titus 1: 5, Titus 1: 7; to an apostle, 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5: 1; and is such a word as would apply to any officers to whom the management and government of the church was entrusted.

And so Peter writes in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5, verses 1-4, about how elders are to rule – “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: shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”

It appears, from the way that Paul has worded it in verse 28 of our text, that the most important part of shepherding the flock of God is remembering that God “purchased the church with His own blood”. This does not mean that either God the Father or the Holy Spirit actually shed blood for the church. It means that our Lord Jesus Christ in His blessed Person, has 2 distinct natures. He is not only fully Man, but He is also fully God.

The Lord Jesus made this purchase of the church, redeeming her unto God, by His sufferings in His humanity. In all of these sufferings that He underwent on our behalf, both before and during the time that He hung on the cross, He did not cease being God. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing our trespasses to us. Both the Father and the Spirit were with our Lord Jesus Christ the Divine Person as He went through these sufferings. The Father and the Spirit being one with Christ did participate in the act of redemption, though neither had blood to shed. It was shed with their entire willing agreement that this was absolutely necessary to satisfy the Justice of the God whom we worship in three Persons.

Therefore, I do not believe that it is right to say that God the Father and God the Spirit had no feelings when the Son was suffering on the cross. Let us say, rather, that there were infinitely great and eternal feelings taking place in God which were all focused on that event of the cross. God did not change or move from what He essentially was and is. God was impassible. And yet all of His great affections for His Son and for sinners were engaged. God’s love and His wrath were both demonstrated simultaneously at the cross. His compassion and His pity for sinners were displayed once and for all time, in the giving of His Son, and in His forsaking Him for that time on the cross.

To say that He was unmoved would be blasphemy. To say that He was moved is an understatement. The sky grew black as night that day when Jesus hung upon the cross. God the Father was turning His face away from His Son when He forsook Him for that time. At the same time He was turning His face toward Him to treat Him as a transgressor in our place. And so, we should understand that in punishing Jesus at the cross, both His love and His wrath were perfectly set forth to the eternal satisfaction of His Justice and Holiness. It was at the cross and by the shedding of Christ’s blood that we who trust in Him were redeemed.

All that was necessary to save us as sinners could now be applied to us, grace being given, according to God the Father’s eternal purpose in Christ. Not one sinner who ever trusts in Jesus will ever perish since He has purchased them with His own blood; that is, with the blood of God’s Son. This is the joyful good news that I proclaim to you today. May we all receive it with a view to each of us proclaiming it ourselves, to people around us. Christ died for His Church. He loved her and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify her and cleanse her, with the washing of water by the word. Let us pray that we will all take heed to ourselves to live in such a way, together as a church, that the Lord will be pleased to make us over into a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that we will be holy and without blemish. Let us all take heed to ourselves and pray and work together promoting the glory of Christ and the furtherance of His kingdom.

