

The Faithful Church, Part 2: A NT Philosophy of Ministry

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on November 8, 2009

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Acts 20:16 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 in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. ¹⁷From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. ¹⁸And 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, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ²² “And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except 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. ²⁵ “And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. ²⁶ “Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. ²⁸ “Be on guard for yourselves and for 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. ²⁹ “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, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. ³² “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ “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.’ ” ³⁶ When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷ And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, ³⁸ grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.

Last week we began to look at some of the marks of a faithful church in this passage, the NT philosophy of ministry:

1. Preeminence of God and His Word (v. 1-7)
2. Priority of the Lord’s Day and Lord’s People (v. 7-16)
3. Pattern of Humble Service with Self-Sacrifice (v. 17-19)
4. Pervasive Gospel Ministry No Matter the Cost (v. 20-24)

²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house,

Acts 20:20 gives Paul’s 20/20 vision in ministry, a clear vision that goes far beyond a church building, a vision for how the gospel of grace (v. 24b) applies to all of life for all God’s people.

This was a *pervasive* ministry in this passage, not just limited to church services; it overflowed to homes during the week. As important as the Lord's Day is for the Lord's people, it's not enough, and those whose spiritual involvement never goes further will fall short of the pattern we see here in the NT that God blessed. We put a lot of importance here on what is taught publicly, enough I hope, but this private aspect of ministry I'm not convinced we have put anywhere near enough importance as the NT does. This is an area I pray God will grow us in, and I am thankful He already has in some ways, but I pray it will continue and increase: discipleship, house-to-house fellowship, visiting, caring, hospitality, counseling, and iron-sharpening relationships and conversations outside these 4 walls.

On the phrase "from house to house," my translation has a footnote that says "or *in the various private homes*." Pervasive ministry begins in the house of God, but it often also effectively takes place in the houses of the people of God, who seek to fulfill Christ's Great Commission "*make disciples ... teaching them*" (which by the way is a command for all disciples of the Lord; we all have a responsibility to do this on some level).

And the gospel of grace is not just a compartment of our life, or a room of our house, it is for every part of our life. To continue the analogy, Paul didn't limit the gospel to a door-to-door evangelism of the unsaved; for the saved he came in and got into their kitchen, bringing the gospel and its implications into their living room, and showed them how it applied where they were living, and every closet and corner of their private life.

In other words, it was a person-on-person ministry, life-on-life ministry that God blessed in Ephesus. Paul's example is recorded for the example of the church as well, as Paul explicitly states. You could call this a "one-another" ministry, life-on-life discipleship, and I certainly desire to be more like Paul in the ministry he describes here, but the reason Paul shares this in this passage is not to highlight how much one minister can do, but so that *they all as a church* can practice this more. One man or even a small team of committed men cannot fulfill the full "one another" aspect of ministry. Wives and single people and young people, all have a ministry part to play in God's grace and gospel purposes.

At the end of v. 24, Paul sums up this section, what it's all about: ... *the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.*

Don't think just of evangelism when you hear that, although we should remember that's one reason we're on this planet still. But the gospel of God's grace is also for equipping believers. Jerry Bridges says we need to tell the gospel to ourselves every day. We need grace every day, not just for eternal life, but for all of life!

A gospel-driven church recognizes the pervasive nature of, and our own perpetual need for ongoing repentance and trusting God more:

²¹*solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Repentance and faith (turning from sin and trusting the Savior) have always been inseparable parts of the gospel message, since the first word of Jesus in the gospel of Mark:

*“the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent and believe in the gospel.**” As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow Me ...” (Mark 1:15)*

A church that is faithful to the Lord’s gospel preaching will talk about sin and our need to repent of it and our need to follow Jesus. Paul talked about repentance *and* faith – he didn’t just talk about forgiveness from sin, he also called them to forsake their sin. It wasn’t just “ask Jesus into your heart” -- he said like Jesus *“repent and believe in the gospel.”* He didn’t just talk about heaven, he talked about hell. He didn’t just emphasize the love of God; he talked about the wrath of God that makes grace truly amazing.

We may not experience physical persecution like Paul and others suffer, but sometimes could it be because we *don’t* speak the gospel? There is often some cost when faithful to the gospel (it may be a job, popularity or friendship in our day rather than actual bonds/afflictions) but Paul left all consequences and results to God.

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 may have noticed the phrase 3x already “solemnly testify.” Some of your translations just have the word “testify,” but there is a solemn and sacred and serious tone of this word, a word you used for warning someone in a burning building of fire. It’s the same word used in the story of Lazarus and the rich man who died and went to Hades and he pleads from the agony of the flame to heaven: *‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house— for I have five brothers—in order that he may **warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.***’ (Lk 16:27-28)

The word means “warn or charge earnestly,” like in 2 Timothy 4:

¹ ***I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; **reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.** ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. ⁵But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.***

That’s the call to pervasive gospel ministry, no matter the cost

5. Proclaiming God’s Whole Counsel (v. 25-27)

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

Paul believed he would never again see all of them together, and so this is an emotional farewell to these men he loved and had poured his life into and poured his heart out to with passionate preaching. What does he say next on such an emotional occasion as this? It may not be a main concern of modern preachers, but it was Paul's:

²⁶“*Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men ...*

Paul rested at night knowing as he could say in clear conscience in v. 27, he hadn't held back. He always sought to bring God's whole counsel (the full force and full intent of God behind any passage he taught). It was balanced, not just his own hobby horses or favorite passages, but the whole of God's truth, the whole counsel of God, God's full purpose in every Scripture he taught from, without any hesitation or equivocation. That phrase doesn't mean he taught the entire Bible (remember he was only there for 3 years and much of that was evangelism and church-planting, before he could get to church-strengthening) but Paul had not kept back any essential doctrines or hard sayings of Jesus or anything profitable (v. 20). As he taught a passage, he brought God's full purpose to bear on them

He understood, as the end of v. 28 says, that these precious people in the church were bought with the precious blood of the Lord, and his great concern was giving the full gospel to the unsaved, too, so he would not share in blood-guiltiness. Paul preached with blood-earnestness, to blood-bought believers as well, as a dying man to dying men; life and death, heaven and hell issues. He taught as if lives depended upon it, and so must any faithful Elder or shepherd.

Those who go to hell can't say I didn't warn them. Can we say that with Paul in v. 25? Paul wasn't afraid he might offend someone. Never shy to bring up a coming kingdom and that those who don't worship King Jesus on His terms will be excluded from it. If Paul was afraid of anything, he feared NOT telling them this. His fear was being fearful *of man and shrinking back* (v. 20, 27), or holding back what God says for fear of what man says about it or him. One fellow younger preacher who shares Paul's name and Paul's boldness, Paul Washer, preached these words at a big youth event:

‘I stand here today . . . I'm not troubled in my heart about your self-esteem. I'm not troubled in my heart about whether or not you feel good about yourself, whether or not life is turning out like you want it to turn out, or whether or not your checkbook is balanced. There's only one thing that gave me a sleepless night. There's only one thing that troubled me all throughout the morning, and this is this. Within a hundred years, a great majority of people in this building will possibly be in hell. And many who even profess Jesus Christ as Lord will spend an eternity in hell . . . so many people are deceived, and so many youth are deceived, and so many adults are deceived into believing that, because they prayed a prayer one time in their life, they're going to Heaven. And then, when they look around at others who profess to know Christ and see those people also just as worldly as the world, and they compare themselves by themselves, nothing troubles their heart. They think, well, I'm the same as most in my youth group. I watch things I shouldn't watch on television and laugh about the very things that God hates. I wear clothing that is sensual. I talk like the world. I walk like the world. I love the music of the world. I love so much that's in the world, but bless God, I am a Christian. Why am I a Christian? I don't look any different than most of the other people in my church. Why am I a Christian? Because there was a time in my life when I prayed and asked Jesus Christ to come into my heart . . .

[Paul Washer says that's the greatest heresy in modern Christianity: that if you said the words of a sinner's prayer to ask Jesus to come into your heart, He definitely came in]. You will not find that in any place in Scripture. You will not find that anywhere in Baptist history until about 50 years ago. What you need to know is that salvation is by faith and faith alone in Jesus Christ. And faith alone in Jesus Christ is preceded and followed by repentance . . . a turning away from sin, a hatred for the things that God hates and a love for the things that God loves, a growing in holiness and a desire not to be like Britney Spears, not to be like the world, and not to be like the great majority of American Christians, but to be like Jesus Christ! [audience applauds]. I don't know why you're clapping. I'm talking about you. I didn't come here to get amens. I didn't come here to be applauded. I'm talking about you.'¹

That changed the tone of the meeting pretty quickly! That type of solemn testifying of repentance and faith is not common today. But sinners need to hear the sin message is for you, not others. Many in the world (and the church) would say he was unloving, but he said:

'I'm not trying to be hard for the sake of being hard. Do you realize how *much love it takes* to stand before 5,000 people and tell them that American Christianity is almost totally wrong? Do you know what it's going to cost me to never be asked back again to something like this? To be unpopular? Do you know why you do it? You don't do it because you get paid well. You don't do it because men love you. You do it because you love men and because, more than that, you want to honor God . . . I love you . . . your best friend is the one who tells you the most truth . . . And you need to be more concerned for the glory of God than you are for the attitudes of men. But another thing you need to realize is the person who loves you the most will tell you the most truth . . .'²

Paul the Apostle loved the Ephesians so much, he says in v. 27 "*I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.*" Paul is saying of all the people in the Ephesus church who sat under his faithful preaching, he can sleep at night knowing if they never truly repented and truly trusted the gospel, it's not because he failed to make it clear and plead with them for their souls frequently and fervently. Their blood is not on my head, Paul says in v. 26. That blood language comes from the OT prophet Ezekiel about the watchman whose duty is to warn and if he doesn't, he shares blood-guiltiness in the perishing of the people (Ezekiel 33).

John Newton, most famous for writing the hymn "Amazing Grace," also wrote a hymn on Paul's farewell in this text:

When Paul was parted from his friends It was a weeping day;
But Jesus made them all amends, And wip'd their tears away . . .
But they who heard the word in vain, Though oft and plainly warn'd,
Will tremble, when they meet again The ministers they scorn'd.
On your own heads your blood will fall, If any perish here;
The preachers who have told you all, Shall stand approv'd and clear.
Yet, Lord, to save themselves alone, Is not their utmost view;
Oh! hear their pray'r, thy message own, And save their hearers too.³

Paul could say in v. 27 he didn't hesitate or shrink back from his duty, he declared God's whole counsel, the full purpose of God without waffling, weakening the message or watering it down.

The temptation for a preacher who seeks to follow the text of Scripture verse-by-verse is not the temptation to teach what's not in the text, or to teach something that's wrong on purpose. More often, the temptation is to teach what's there, *but not all of it*, or to use vague or general terms to avoid offense (to "shrink back"). To not apply it as you ought because of so-and-so in the audience.

John Stott said Paul 'shared all possible truth with all possible people in all possible ways. He taught the whole gospel to the whole city with his whole strength. His pastoral example must have been an unflinching inspiration to the Ephesian pastors.'⁴

Paul said back in v. 20 he didn't shrink back from declaring to them anything that was profitable – unlike a foolish parent who may hold back discipline from his child or medicine from his child or what his child really needs because it breaks his heart to do so. That dad or mom may think it's because they love their child so much, but the truth is they love themselves more than their kids, caring more about their own comfort than their child's true needs.

A faithful church, however, proclaims God's full counsel ...

6. Plurality of Godly Elders Shepherding the Flock (v. 28-31)

²⁸ "Be on guard for yourselves and for 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.

This one verse alone deserves more than one sermon, in fact, one of the most famous Puritan books on pastoral ministry, does just that, the entire book applying this verse (*The Reformed Pastor*, by Richard Baxter). But just some brief comments in our brief time:

- Notice who he's talking to (v. 17 "elders of the church").
- Note this is the only title we have recorded of local church leaders in the book of Acts: "Elder" (you never see someone called "senior pastor" or even "pastor" or "arch-bishop" or "cardinal"). They just called the church leaders "elders." Acts 21: ¹⁷ *After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.* ¹⁸ *And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and **all the elders** were present.*
- So all the Elders from the Jerusalem church had Paul join in their meeting just like the Elders of the Ephesus church. The early church leaders were committed men, meeting together, sacrificing time in Acts 20:17 to all travel to meet with Paul in Miletus (requiring them to be away several days total for a mini-"shepherd's-conference" with Paul)
- Notice in Acts 20:28 their task together is to "**shepherd the church of God**" – that's the verb form for the word *pastor*, but in the NT it's not a rank or role different than or above the Elders, it's the team responsibility that *all* Elders have to pastor/shepherd the flock God has entrusted to them; leading, feeding, caring, protecting, watching over, etc.
- There is not one shepherd/pastor/Elder in the local church. Notice singular "church" and plural elders (20:28). That's not a minor grammatical point; there's massive significance in the NT pattern of multiple Elders in every local church.
- Acts 14:23:
*When they had appointed **elders for them in every church**, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

- In Acts 20 (and the NT) there wasn't "a pastor" of the church of Ephesus who was in charge (nowhere in NT do we see a church with a solo elder/pastor, and nowhere do we see an individual referred to as "the pastor" – there is always a plurality of shepherding Elders in each church).
- Some Elders work another full-time job outside the church like Paul did as a tentmaker, but that didn't change his role or give him a different rank / title than other fellow leaders.
- The fact that I as an Elder of this church don't work outside the church and my fellow Elders here have asked me to preach more doesn't change our collective responsibility as Elders to what Paul says we must all do in v. 28. I don't have an extra vote in Elder's meeting, and church decisions are made not by me, but by the Elders as a whole, and they must be unanimous. Unity and the Spirit's leading are so important. We believe in plurality and equality of Elders.
- That doesn't mean all Elders have identical gifting or function (some churches apply that by having a different Elder teach every Sunday, but the NT isn't that specific). It's clear in Acts 15 James was looked to as a leader among leaders and he had a prominent spokesman role in the Jerusalem church (also in book of James). Peter among the original 12 Apostles did much of the public preaching to big groups, but that didn't make him the boss of the others.

1 Peter 5:1-4 ¹ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder ... ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.
- There is a shepherd / pastor who is chief or senior above the Elders, but it wasn't Peter, it was Jesus Christ alone.
- However it's done, it's important that the men who are Elders are shepherding the flock of God and that you look to them all in the same way and pray for them in this task.
- Notice also in v. 28 these Elders are also called "overseers" (or "bishops" in KJV). Those aren't 2 different titles or offices, he's still speaking to all the Elders from v. 17. Elder/overseer are also used interchangeably here and in Titus 1:5-7, and the terms are used with "pastor" in 1 Pet. 5
- Biblically, you could refer to John Rucker or Ron Foltz or Mark Freeman as shepherd / pastor / Elder, as much as you do "Pastor Jerry" or "Pastor Phil" – pastor's just a word that means "shepherd," not any official high clergy rank, we're just guys who the Holy Spirit has called to be shepherds and overseers (i.e., to watch over the flock). I'd like to hear us use the word "shepherd" more, but the one title I'd prefer not to use is the old English word "bishop" (Bishop Ron just sounds a little weird!)
- Notice in v. 28 it's the Holy Spirit who makes these men to be this. A nominating committee or congregational vote doesn't make someone an Elder/Overseer/Shepherd, what we want to do if we bring a name in the future forward for Elder consideration is we want to recognize those the Holy Spirit seems to be already using to serve, as evident to Spirit-filled people.

It's nothing to take lightly. Why?

²⁹ "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

³⁰and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹“Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

Paul didn't just sit in a boardroom making business decisions. He cared and shared his heart, and wept when warning of division or doctrinal error. Elders must first take heed to themselves, to their own hearts and families and lives as well as to each other among the Elders, holding each other accountable as together they keep watch over the souls of others and must give account to God for this (Heb. 13:17, and right after it says that it says “*pray for us*”).

Pray for us, beloved, as we struggle to take heed to the whole flock and want to do better. We aren't perfect men, which is why this is so sobering, so please *pray for your Elders* here rather than taking pot shots at 'em. I know some think you could do it better, but the overseer isn't an enviable role, it's an enormous responsibility. Please forgive us where we have made mistakes and not lived up to this high calling, and *please pray for us* to be more like Paul!

Alexander Strauch sums it up in his book *Biblical Eldership*:

‘These elders are not board elders; they are shepherd elders. As shepherd elders, they are called to guard the flock ... shepherd elders are called to be spiritually alert and to constantly admonish the congregation about the subtle dangers of false teachers and their divisive, false doctrines. Like Paul, Christian elders are to guard the gospel and teach the whole counsel of God. Thus elders must be doctrinally sound leaders who are able to defend and teach the Word. Elders are also obligated to guard “all the flock.” ... Hence Christian elders are required to know and be involved in the personal lives of the people they shepherd. Furthermore, they are to sacrificially care for needy, suffering members of the flock. Like the life of Paul, the life of an elder must be marked by hard work, generosity, and a life of service on behalf of others. Finally, shepherd elders must take their duty seriously because the Holy Spirit Himself has sovereignly placed them in the flock as overseers for the purpose of shepherding God's precious, blood-bought people. Elders, then, are Spirit-placed overseers. The kind of oversight Paul has in mind is shepherding: guarding, feeding, leading, and caring for God's flock. In short ... Christian elders are responsible for the pastoral oversight of the local church.’⁵

Pray for us as we pray about and pursue how we can do this more.

7. Praying, Giving, Loving People Growing in Grace (33-38)

The end of the chapter applies to all of us, not just leaders.

³²“And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³“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.’ ” ³⁶When 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.

The last point could also be its own sermon but notice in closing it was:

- *A Praying Church* (v. 36) – the day this church ceases to pray for this church is the day this church will cease, at least in spiritual blessing. For the church our prayers should ascend, as we’ll sing in our closing hymn, if we can truly say “I love thy church O Lord.” I hope you aren’t missing Application #1 of this sermon: pray for us, pray for each other, pray for the precious church of Jesus Christ.
- *A Giving Church* (v. 35b) – as the Lord Himself said, it’s more blessed to give than to receive. Paul doesn’t use the word “tithe,” which was the OT pattern of giving 10% of your regular resources, crops, etc., and various tithes that supported the temple and its work. Many Christians also give in this pattern a tenth of their income to the Lord, but the biblical understanding is not that just a fraction belongs to the Lord, but that all we have and are is God’s, and it’s a blessed privilege to give, not a burden or legalistic yoke. *2 Corinthians 9:7-8 Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;*
Application #2: Be a giver, sacrificially in faith. Give to the Lord’s work and to help people in need (v. 35a). Don’t limit this to financial giving, in v. 34, Paul gave of his time and he worked hard not just for himself but for others as an example to them (v. 35). Be a giving, generous person, of time, talent, treasure. And be content not covetous (v. 33); don’t pursue treasure on earth, but true treasure in heaven.
- *A Loving Church* (v. 37) - It was even a hugging church! I know men in our culture don’t kiss each other, but real men who love Jesus will love each other and will express their affection and appreciation. Men should lead in love, not leaving that to the wives and women in the church. Jesus was a real man who loved so much He wept at times; so did Paul. A man who doesn’t care or love deeply God’s people is in sin. God’s Word commands all of us to love all of us. Application #3: Demonstrate love in action to someone and pray for God to increase your love and help you see how.
- *A Church Growing in Grace* (v. 32) – our text began with the gospel of grace that must pervade all life, and we end appropriately with grace, because all of life is all of grace.

The way we grow, the way we are sanctified, or as v. 32 says, the way we are built up, is by the Word of God’s grace. Without grace we cannot grow or do anything pleasing to God, and without His Word being regularly taken in, we won’t experience His grace regularly that He intends and that He gives through His Word. Application #4: Look to God’s grace daily in His Word of grace. It will only be by God’s grace appropriated that we can be faithful to:

1. Preeminence of God and His Word (v. 1-7)
2. Priority of the Lord’s Day and Lord’s People (v. 7-16)
3. Pattern of Humble Service with Self-Sacrifice (v. 17-19)
4. Pervasive Gospel Ministry No Matter the Cost (v. 20-24)
5. Proclaiming God’s Whole Counsel (v. 25-27)
6. Plurality of Godly Elders Shepherding the Flock (v. 28-31)
7. Praying, Giving, Loving People Growing in Grace (33-38)

May we be faithful to the end to this NT Philosophy of Ministry.

What would our farewell or final words be to those we love? The missionary David Brainerd wrote to his brother John these parting words while on the brink of the grave (summer of 1743) how he had experienced the greater blessedness (happiness) of spending a life *giving rather than receiving*, like the Apostle Paul, and how he experienced living grace and dying grace despite great afflictions.

Dear Brother,

I am now just on the verge of eternity, expecting very speedily to appear in the unseen world. I feel myself no more an inhabitant of earth, and sometimes earnestly long to "depart and be with Christ" [as Paul also said.] I bless God, he has for some years given me an abiding conviction, that it is impossible for any rational creature to enjoy true happiness without being entirely "devoted to him." ... in true spiritual joys the soul rejoices in God for what he is in himself; blesses God for his holiness, sovereignty, power, faithfulness, and all his perfections; adores God that he is what he is ... rejoice in the perfections of God, and in the infinite excellency of the way of salvation by Christ, and in the holy commands of God, which are a transcript of his holy nature; these joys are divine and spiritual. Our joys will stand by us at the hour of death, if we can be then satisfied that we have thus acted above self; and in a disinterested manner, if I may so express it, rejoiced in the glory of the blessed God ...

... Charge my people in the name of their dying minister ... in the name of him who was dead and is alive [charge them in the name of Jesus], to live and walk as becomes the gospel.

... I am fully content [he writes dying in pain from tuberculosis in great afflictions], and can with utmost freedom say, "The will of the Lord be done." ... But "God lives, and blessed be my Rock:" he is the same Almighty Friend: and will, I trust, be your guide and helper, as he has been mine.

And now, my dear brother, "I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and give you inheritance among all them that are sanctified." [Acts 20:32]. May you enjoy the divine presence both in private and public; and may "the arms of your hands be made strong, by the right hand of the mighty God of Jacob!" Which are the passionate desires and prayers of Your affectionate dying brother, David Brainerd.⁶

That's a great encouragement to me to read of how God's grace sustained through excruciating pain and death, not just giving him strength to endure, but contentment, and even joy in God whether by life or death. May we have the same heart devoted to the same God whose same Word can give us the same grace for whatever the future holds. I love you and leave you to God and His Word of grace which is able to build you up, and I hope it already has today and I hope you'll come back tonight to hear how God's grace worked in the life of Ruth and Naomi in their sufferings as well.

¹ <http://media.sermonaudio.com/mediapdf/52906154239.pdf>

² *Ibid.*

³ *Works of John Newton*, Vol. 3, Hymns #28.

⁴ John Stott (1994). *The Message of Acts : The Spirit, the church & the world*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, p. 328.

⁵ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 158-59.

⁶ "The Life and Diary of David Brainerd," Letter 10, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:439.