



Acts 20:25-31 - Elders - Shepherds and Watchmen

By Pastor Mike Clark 03/24/24

Acts 20:25-31 - *²⁵ And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.*

In our passage this morning we have the basics or the priorities of leadership in the Church.

God is not less but more concerned about leadership. In all of God's kingdom, leadership is extremely important.

As you look at the OT, you find that there are many things that show us the importance of leadership.

We could talk about great OT leaders such as Moses, or Samuel, or David, and others. God has always ministered his kingdom through key leaders.

Because of the importance of leadership, God takes a very strong view of inadequate or ineffective leadership.

In chapter 4 of Hosea, in verse 9, God is not only commenting on the sins of Israel, but on the sins of Israel's leaders.

And he says this, "Like people, like priest." Whatever the leaders are, the people will be. "Like people, like priest."

In Isaiah chapter 9, and verses 14 through 16, we find some more indication of God's attitude toward leadership.

Isaiah 9:14-16 - *¹⁴ So the LORD cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch and reed in one day— ¹⁵ the elder and honored man is the head, and the prophet who teaches lies is the tail; ¹⁶ for those who guide this people have been leading them astray, and those who are guided by them are swallowed up.*



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So, it says God's going to just devastate Israel. God's going to knock off all the leaders.

God says He's going to punish the leaders because they have made the people sinful by a failure to lead them into holy patterns.

Jeremiah 5:31 - The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?

In other words, the people are loving the inadequate leadership they're getting.

In Ezekiel, again, another portion of interest to us in looking at God's view of leadership and the important place it plays.

Ezekiel 22:26-28 - ²⁶ Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. ²⁷ Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain. ²⁸ And her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' when the LORD has not spoken.

And so, he indicts the priests, the princes, and the prophets for failure to lead as he would have them.

In Matthew 15:14, Jesus made a comment about leaders. He looked at the leaders of Israel, and He said, "They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

Jesus said, people will follow their leaders. Therefore, God puts a premium on leadership, God sets the standard high for adequate leadership.

And if God set it high, so did Paul, because Paul was a godly man.

Now, there is a sense in which we have to take leadership as it comes in Scripture.

And leadership in Scripture is a two-sided issue. It's an issue of great responsibility and great joy.

It's an issue of great responsibility and great potential for judgment. Good leaders are doubly blessed; bad leaders are doubly chastised.



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Because “to whom much is given, much shall be required.” And that’s a principle that runs right across the board in anything that God is involved in.

For example, in James 3:1 it says, “Not many of you should become teachers my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”

But on the other hand, in 1 Timothy 5:17, it says, “The elders that rule well are worthy of double honor.

So, you have the double honor for the good leader, and the double judgment for the poor leader. Leadership is a tremendous responsibility.

Now, the task of the early apostles was to appoint such leaders in each church.

The apostles would go around appointing leaders; they would raise them up.

Notice it says the elders or pastors, there was always a plurality, it was never a one-man pastor; it’s always a plurality in the Scriptures.

But the elders there, the pastors there, had been trained, disciplined, matured by Paul.

And they had been appointed by Paul. Raised up by the Holy Spirit, Paul became aware of who they were and appointed them to pastor the church at Ephesus.

Paul said to Titus, in Titus 1:5, “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.”

Pastors in each city were to be ordained by the evangelists or the apostles. So, Paul is talking to men that he himself has disciplined.

And he gives them a charge that really is much bigger than just the scene that you see in Acts 20; it’s timeless.

Because what Paul tells these people is just basic stuff to any kind of biblical leadership in the church.

And believe me; if the church is the church of the New Testament, and the church is the church of Jesus Christ, it ought to follow the biblical patterns. Right?



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If the church does not follow biblical patterns at the point of its leadership, it will never follow them at the point of its laity. It just doesn't happen.

Like people, like priests was true in Israel, and it's still true in the Church. Real reform in the Church, real New Testament revitalization and revival must come at the level of leadership.

Now, as we look at this passage, we're going to see not just a word from a man to some people in history, but a word from the Holy Spirit to the Church of Jesus Christ throughout history.

They give us, for all time, God's perspective on the role of the pastor and the elder in the church, who are one and the same.

Now, in Acts 20, Paul closes out his instruction to the Ephesian elders. And he charges them to order their ministry after the priorities that God has set down.

Paul lays out some priorities for the New Testament Church leader. And they were priorities that he didn't talk about only, but that he lived in his own life.

And in verses 17 to 24 he pointed out the four dimensions of the ministry.

First of all, he said the ministry toward God is service to the Lord, to the Church it's teaching, toward the lost its evangelism, and toward myself, it's sacrifice.

Paul says, "I see the ministry in four dimensions: serving God, teaching the church, evangelizing the lost, and sacrificing myself."

Now, having finished that, he wants to concentrate on the Church aspect.

He's given the overall picture, now he zeroes in and says, "Now, I'm going to give you the priorities for teaching the Church, for being effective in the Church."

Point 1 – The Church must not shrink from proclaiming the whole counsel of God.

Acts 20:25 – And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.

Paul had said, "All these things I not only told you, but all those things I showed you. I did that. I served the Lord. I taught the Church. I evangelized the lost. I sacrificed myself."



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“And now, behold” – he says – “I’m leaving now, and you all know that I have gone through preaching the kingdom of God.

Now the kingdom encompasses God’s rule in the sphere of salvation and not just the future reign of Christ.

Paul proclaimed this kingdom, he proclaimed the gospel, the good news that sinners in the realm of Satan, death, and destruction, the kingdom of darkness, could enter the realm of salvation, life, and glory, the kingdom of God’s Son.

And Paul says you’re not going to see me anymore. I’ve given you all the facts regarding the kingdom of God.

Acts 20:26 - Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all.

And what he means by all is all the Jews and Greeks, any class of men. He discharged his responsibility to all: to the Church, to the saved, to the unsaved, Jew and Gentile.”

“You can’t condemn me for being unfaithful,” is what he’s saying. Why? Verse 27,

Acts 20:27 - For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Paul says, “I’ve done my job. I finished it. I did it. I fulfilled it.”

Now, it’s interesting that he makes the statement that he does in verse 26 regarding the fact that he’s innocent of the blood of all men.

You might ask, “Is it true that a leader or a teacher or a pastor is going to be guilty of the blood of certain people? Yes. How so?

Ezekiel talks about this and he was told that he was to speak what God told him. God would give him a message, and he would relay it to Israel. And God said, “You better be faithful in relaying the message.”

Ezekiel 33:8-9 - ⁸ If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. ⁹ But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.



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God says “Ezekiel, if you don’t say the same thing to the wicked man, his blood I’ll require at your hand.”

Now, that doesn’t mean that Ezekiel’s going to be damned; it means Ezekiel’s going to be chastised or disciplined for unfaithful ministry.

And Paul is saying here, “I will not be like that warning in Ezekiel 38.” And I’m sure he had that on his mind. My hands are clean. I am pure from the blood of all men.”

There’s a responsibility for every man of God, and he has to recognize the responsibility that if God has committed a ministry to him, and he doesn’t fulfill it, he’s going to be disciplined for the failure to fulfill it.

But Paul says this, “I saw my ministry for what it was: toward God, toward the Church, toward the lost, toward myself.

And I fulfilled it, and I never failed to declare the whole counsel of God. I did it. Therefore, I release my responsibility.

I can walk out of this place and know that nothing is going to be held against me. I was faithful.

What he’s saying is this, “From now on, men, the responsibility is yours. Make sure that you discharge your ministry in a faithful way, equal to the way I gave you by example.

Leaders have great responsibility. The entire plan and purpose and principle of God is committed to us to be committed to you.

And to fail to do that, to fail to give the whole counsel of God is to fail to release the responsibility God has committed to us.

We’re to teach the whole counsel of God. There’s going to be a serious accountability for a pastor who fails to teach the whole counsel of God.

And that is true not only for pastors but for all Christians. Every Christian has a responsibility of proclaiming the whole counsel, the whole purpose of God.

We’re not to shrink from doing that or to be fearful or ashamed of the gospel. We need to pray for God to give us strength and boldness and courage that we would be faithful.



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We need to worry more about what God thinks than what man thinks. The gospel is naturally offensive, but we need to always keep in mind that apart from the gospel people will go to an eternal hell.

And if we truly care about their soul, we will be more concerned for their salvation than for their rejection of us or mocking us or persecuting us.

Well, Paul then has given us some clear instruction about the importance of leadership and from this reflection on the general ministry, he zeroes in on one dimension.

Paul is going to speak to these leaders. And he gives them five keys to leadership.

These are the priorities, they're so basic but so important.

Point 2 – Pastors must pay careful attention to themselves so they can care for God's Church.

Acts 20:28 - ²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

Elders can never care adequately for others if they neglect the care of their own souls.

You're not ready to minister; you're not ready to endure what is involved in ministry if you're not paying attention.

You're not ready to face the responsibility of ministering unless you're paying careful attention to yourself. This is a basic ingredient in the ministry.

This is HEART WORK! If the heart of the elder is not prepared, holy, nourished, he can't produce that in others.

The first priority of the elder is his OWN relationship with God. Ministry is the OVERFLOW of a rich, deep relationship with God.

Jesus said the same thing -

Mark 13:9 - ⁹ "But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them.



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Jesus says, “You’re going to get persecuted. In order for you to endure that persecution, he says, “Be on your guard.”

In other words, if you’re not being on guard, you’ll never be able to handle what’s going to happen. You won’t be able to handle it. If you’re not spiritually strong, you’re in no position to handle it.

***Luke 21:34** – “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.*

He says, “the day of the Lord is coming, and you better watch yourself so that you’re ready when it happens.” This is self-examination.

Now, directly in reference to New Testament leaders, the apostle Paul expressed this to Timothy.

***1 Timothy 4:16** - Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

Paul exhorts Timothy to examine himself, “Keep a close watch on yourself, Take heed to yourself.” That’s character.

Then he says, “And to teaching or doctrine.” That’s creed. Then he says, “Continue in these things, persist in these things.” That’s conduct. “Watch yourself, take heed to your character, your creed, and your conduct.”

***2 Timothy 2:20-21** - ²⁰ Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. ²¹ Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.*

In other words, he says, “If you have a big house, you’ve got two sets of vessels: the fancy stuff for guests that come in that you really want to have a nice thing for, and the rest of the stuff that we all eat on. And those are the two kinds.

Now, the obvious implication here is that in God’s house there are going to be some vessels that God will really honor, and it’ll be used for the greatest tasks.

You see, there are some vessels God can use, and there are some that He can’t use.



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And he says in the very next verse, “Flee youthful lusts and follow after righteousness.” God uses holy instruments, holy people.

Robert Murray M’Cheyne said, “A holy man is an awesome instrument in the hand of God.” And it’s true.

Paul knew this. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:27, he said, “I run that I may obtain the crown. You know, they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible crown.”

He says, “I fight not as one who shadowboxes, not as one who beats the air.”

And he says, “All the time I do this, I beat my body to bring it into subjection lest I myself, in my own preaching, I should become a castaway or disqualified.”

In other words, the one thing Paul knew was that the day that holiness ceased to be a part of his life, effectiveness also ceased.

We’re only useful to God as long as we live a holy life, as we yield to the Holy Spirit, as there’s purity in our lives. God uses holy instruments. Holiness is the basic commodity in all leadership.

And there’s a second priority of the man of God, the man in the position church of leadership is to feed and lead the flock.

After an elder’s own spiritual care, then comes the care of the flock. I think there are some people who put the care of the flock, in a sense, in front of their own lives.

You know what a pastor’s greatest obligation is? A pastor’s greatest obligation is to make sure his life is right before God, first of all.

Secondly, elders are to carry out their responsibility to the flock.

And the reason across America and across the world, in all kinds of Christian ministries, nothing happens is because there are some people in positions, and there’s no holiness in their lives.

Now, notice this. He says, “Take heed to all the flock.” Not just the flock but what? “All the flock.” No favoritism.

And there’s something about sheep that’s characteristic of Christians. Sheep are helpless, timid, dirty, and in need of constant protection and care. That’s us.



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But that's been a historic term that God has used for his people in the OT. In Jeremiah 13:17 and in Zechariah 10:3, God calls Israel the Lord's flock and Jesus said the same thing in the NT.

Luke 12:32 - *"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*

John 10:7-15 - *⁷ So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."*

Hebrews 13:20 - *Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant*

1 Peter 2:25 - *For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

So, we are a flock under the Good Shepherd. And elders have an obligation to shepherd the flock. Elders are basically under-shepherds serving the flock through Christ.

1 Peter 5:2-3 - *Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*

So, pastors are shepherds over a flock assigned to them.

And verse 28 of Acts 20 says it's assigned to us by whom? By the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit sovereignly raises up overseers or pastors or under-shepherds, who are responsible to shepherd their flocks.

Now, you'll notice here that there are two responsibilities that are given to the overseer - to lead and to feed.



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Now the Greek word for care, which can also be translated shepherd, is *poimainō*, which means to do all that is involved in shepherding. It means to pastor.

To pastor is to care for the flock, to discipline, to bind up their wounds, to exercise authority over them, to guide them in the right path.

Everything and anything that could fall into the category of shepherding is included in *poimainō*.

But the heart of shepherding is to feed. Because what the shepherd does most is to get the sheep to the place where they can feed.

Now, just to give you an illustration of the importance of feeding in relation to everything the pastor does, I want to draw your attention to John 21.

Jesus is getting Peter confirmed into the ministry. And He asked him three times if he loves Him. Remember?

And three times Peter confirms that he loves Him. And three times Jesus says this, "Feed My lambs." "Feed My sheep." "Feed My sheep."

One of those times, the middle time, he uses *poimainō*. Pastor them; do all that is needed.

The first time and third time he uses the word *boskō*, not *poimainō*. *Boskō* means simply to feed them. Nothing more.

Well, if two out of the three are feed them, that kind of lets us know what the priority is: to feed them.

Feed the flock of God. And in most cases, *poimainō* is even translated that way because that's obviously the emphasis.

Yes, it includes the areas of care and discipline and authority and other things, but primarily it's feeding.

I can't conceive of a shepherd who doesn't feed his sheep. I don't understand that at all.

I mean what are you doing, just leading them around from desert to desert? Or you just leave them in the same desert all the time.



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No – Pastors are to feed and lead.

Some of you have attended churches where you weren't being fed. I was one of them.

And you wanted to be fed so that led you to search for a church that feeds the sheep.

And that's why many of you ended up at Highlands, because we firmly believe in feeding the sheep, going deep into the Scriptures, expositing the Scriptures, going through entire books of the Bible verse by verse.

So feeding is of extreme importance. But leading is important, too. What do we mean by leading? - Ruling.

The elders that rule well are worthy of double honor. What does that mean? It means selecting the direction of the church.

The sheep didn't decide which field they'd go to next. The sheep didn't decide where they'd build the fold.

The sheep just followed the shepherd. God has committed the leadership of the church into the hands of the elders and the pastors.

And it says there we are overseers or bishops. That simply means those in authority.

The shepherd rules and leads, and the flock is in subjection. Now, we're not leading by dictating and dominating and lording it over you, but as examples. Right?

Now, in Hebrews 13:17, we have just a wonderful verse that expresses the relationship between the elders and the people. Listen, "Obey your leaders and submit to them."

It brings great joy to pastors when the people are submitted to the elders.

Do you know why? Listen, "For they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account."

I wonder how many pastors in most churches know that verse. And if they do, do they understand the ramifications.



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When I stop to think about the fact that I have to give an account to God Himself for how I care for God's flock, that may change the way I care for the flock.

So, he says, "Obey them and submit to them, that they may do it with joy and not with grief."

And, you know, every once in a while, when you do get somebody who won't submit, it's a grieving thing.

Believe me, there's enough grief in ministering, there's enough grief in the anguish of the resistance that you get in the ministry without having grief from the people you're trying to love and feed.

And then he goes on at the end of the verse and says, "And when you do that, it's not even an advantage for you."

1 Peter 5:4 - And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Well, how do you get that crown of glory? "When you have led the flock as an example." There's a crown of glory for the one who's a faithful example.

The flock is to be in subjection. The one who leads is to be the one responsible to God, and if he's faithful, he'll receive the crown of glory.

And so, it's a question of faithfulness toward God. And you know something? When you're an unfaithful elder, an unfaithful pastor, there's a high price to pay.

Did you know that 1 Timothy 5:19 says that you should never receive an accusation against a pastor or an elder unless there's two or three witnesses firsthand?

If you find that it's true, the next verse says, "The elder that sinned is to be rebuked before everybody that others may fear."

Why? That others may learn that we deal with sin and others may have a fear of falling into sin as well.

So, it's a high price to pay. But I'll tell you, it's a great joy when you're faithful to see the blessing of God.

Now something else to notice here. This isn't my church. This isn't our church as elders. Whose church is it? It's God's Church. We're caring for His property.



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This is His Church. Jesus said to Peter three times, “Feed My sheep.” “Feed My sheep.” “Feed My lambs.” They’re not his; they’re not Peter’s. They’re not mine. They’re His.

The end of verse 28, “Which He has obtained or purchased with His own blood.” What is that saying?

That’s saying that that flock of God is so precious, that He paid the supreme price.

And if it’s that precious to Him, it ought to be that precious to pastors. Right? I mean if God would go to the extent of doing that, pastors want to make sure they take care of it.

God Himself, in the form of the Son, shed His blood for the purpose of the Church. “God paid the highest price, the precious blood of Jesus Christ,” Peter says.

Could I treat the church as nothing? Could I use the church? Could I manipulate the church? Can I take advantage of the church? Could I starve the church? – There are so called pastors out there doing these things.

Could I fail to teach the whole counsel of God when this is what He wants and this is what price He paid to gain the church?

And gave it to my care, and I should be unfaithful? It’s a precious flock. You’re a precious commodity. You cost a precious price.

You know, Christ did this. And again, he’s our example.

Ephesians 5:25-27 - ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Just listen to that. Christ loved the Church, gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify it, purify it, present it as a glorious Church, without spot, without wrinkle, without blemish.

If He wants a holy Church, what should we want? A holy Church.

You know, Paul wrote the Corinthians, and I mean he let them have both barrels. He absolutely unloaded on them.



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He unloaded on them for 16 chapters, turned around and wrote them 13 more.

Twenty-nine chapters he spent on them. Now, somebody was probably saying, “You know, that guy’s got something against us. Why us? What’s the hang-up, Paul?”

And this is what he says – 2 Corinthians 11:1, “Would to God that you would bear with me a little in my folly.

Now, I hope you’ll endure what I’m doing.” Why? “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy.”

What do you mean, Paul? “I have espoused or betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

Paul says, “I know one thing. I know that God redeemed you to be a holy church, and that God gave you into my care, and I’m your pastor.

And I’m your under-shepherd. And I’ve got to take care of you. And if God’s will is that you be a holy church, that’s what I want, too. And that’s why I speak to you the way I speak.”

The under-shepherd must have the same attitude that the Great Shepherd has: the purity and the holiness of the Church.

And if the Lord wants someday to present the Church to Himself without spot and without blemish, that’s what I want, too.

And in order to make that happen, I’m going to have to feed, and feed, and feed, and feed the flock the truths of God and lead the flock in the paths of righteousness.

Point 3 – Elders must be watchful for false teachers.

Acts 20:29-31 - ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

It’s not enough for a faithful shepherd to feed and lead his flock, he must also protect it from predators, from false teachers.



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Paul had no doubt that after his departure false teachers would threaten the Ephesian church, as they already had entered the church at Corinth and the churches of Galatia.

Whenever the truth is proclaimed, Satan can be expected to counter it with the lies of false doctrine. It's always been that way.

Whether its cults such as Mormonism or Jehovah's witnesses, or the miracle or prosperity preachers, the danger they pose is great. There are eternal consequences.

Paul's description of false teachers as fierce or savage wolves that don't spare the flock echoes that of Christ.

Matthew 7:15 - ¹⁵ *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."*

Matthew 10:16 - ¹⁶ *"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."*

Because of the serious danger they pose to the church, the Scriptures condemn false teachers in the strongest language.

Peter vividly describes them in 2 Peter 2 as those who indulge in the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority.

They are unreasoning animals, stains and blemishes, having eyes full of adultery, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children, springs without water, mists driven by a storm, slaves of corruption.

And true to Paul's prediction, false teachers did come in among the flock at Ephesus and attack it according to Revelation 2:2.

Even more subtle than the attack of false teachers from outside the church, however, is the defection of those within.

Paul warned them that from among their own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Twisted or some of your translations may say perverse is from the Greek word *diastrepho* and means to distort or twist.



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Peter also says that false teachers twist God's Word to their own destruction.

So false teachers twist, distort and pervert God's truth for their own ends. And in doing so they draw away disciples. You can actually translate draw as drag or tear away.

If the under-shepherds are not vigilant, Paul warns, the wolves will drag their sheep away to devour them.

And there were defections among the leadership in Ephesus where Paul himself ministered for three years.

In his letter to Timothy, who was then the pastor of the Ephesian church, Paul condemned the false teachers who had arisen from within the Ephesian congregation, even naming some of them.

Jude also warned in his letter of the insidious danger of false teachers who arose from within the church.

Jude 3-4 - ³ Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴ For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jude 10-13 - ¹⁰ But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. ¹¹ Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion. ¹² These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; ¹³ wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

To guard their flocks from attacks from both inside and outside the church, pastors must do two things.

First, they must be on the alert. Knowing that the savage wolves are waiting for an opening to attack their flocks, they must be vigilant.



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Secondly, the faithful shepherd must also warn his flock. Paul had done so during his own ministry at Ephesus and he reminds the Ephesian elders of how night and day for a period of three years he didn't cease to admonish them with tears.

Admonish is from the Greek word, *noutheteo*, which is where we get the term *nouthetic* counseling or biblical counseling. It refers to giving counsel and sometimes with a warning.

Colossians 1:28 - *Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.*

The pattern of Paul's ministry shows the importance of warning believers about false teachers.

He admonished the Ephesians for three years, caring for the flock. He was so compelled to warn them that he hardly had time for sleep, ministering day and night.

He did this with the Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 2:9 - *⁹ For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.*

And he did this with tears. He wept because he knew the terrible consequences when false teachers infiltrate.

Only by following Paul's example can the faithful shepherd protect Christ's flock from the savage wolves who constantly threaten it.

Now in closing I want to leave you with ways Christians can help leaders pay careful attention to themselves:

1. PRAY for our holiness & humility

- AND Pray for our orthodoxy – (biblical in our doctrine)

2. Give them TIME to attend to their own souls

- Prayer, study, classes, conferences, retreats, sabbaticals
- Understand their schedule (tell about mine)

3. FOLLOW their example and teaching.

IOW, GROW as a result of their ministry to you!

- Be teachable
- Observe their lives, their leadership, their love



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- **Seek their counsel**

4. Be GRACIOUS toward those that are still growing in holiness and truth

- **Be gracious toward their families.**
- **Don't expect perfection**
- **That's NOT an excuse to sin, But LOVE them in spite of human imperfections (Love covers a multitude of sins)**
- **Don't follow them blindly – be discerning, but not critical**

5. Hold them ACCOUNTABLE to the Word of God

- **Expect them to lead by example and by love**

Those things make for a joyful ministry AND a fruitful ministry!

PRAYER