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Acts 20:29-38 "Ephesian Elders Meeting" (Part 3 of 3) November 21, 2018

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Acts 20 as we continue our study - in fact, we're going to finish chapter 20 tonight.

The book of Acts is a report, really, from the Holy Spirit through the eyes of Dr. Luke. He documents about thirty years of history as the early church is born on Pentecost. It is a narrative book, which means that most of our learning comes from reading what God wants us to know. It isn't theological in the sense that the epistles are, but yet there is lots to follow and understand. It is a picture of salvation that God wanted to bring to all men through the sacrifice of His Son and to use His people to proclaim His love or to preach the good news; that's God's plan.

One of the glaring lessons from the book of Acts, if you've studied it at all, is the amount of value that God places upon church planting. In other words, the single greatest method by which the church accomplishes its work is by planting churches around the world. It is an instrument that God uses to carry out the great commission. It's the local church that supports the local believer and gives him a vision to serve and to reach out around him. So, it is illustrated in detail in Paul's years on the road - his long, three missionary journeys that he pursued out of his home church in Antioch in Syria. It is the primary focus - these church plants - from chapter 13 to chapter 21; those nine chapters cover nothing but church planting around the world as the gospel was being carried forth.

Paul spent much of his third missionary journey, which is the map that's up. We do have maps for all of the missionary journeys as well as Paul's travel to Rome, which we'll get to in a few chapters. If you don't have a copy of these I think they're instrumental. If you're a person who likes to study God's Word, you need to put this in your Bible. When you get to the book of Acts, pull these out and use them. They're some really good resources, I think, to help us to grow. But much of Paul's third missionary journey was spent in one city - in Ephesus - where he had planted the church. He spent three years there. A couple of years earlier, he had spent a year and a half in Corinth. And so Paul was real big on churches doing well. In fact, Acts 19 gives us some of the highlights of the three years that Paul spent in Ephesus, some of the fruit of the deliverance that came from people that were really involved in the occult, in witchcraft and all. In fact, the idol makers were so

angry at the changes that were brought into the hearts of men that they rioted against Paul, blaming him for their loss of sales. So you can imagine the revival that was taking place there.

In chapter 20, Paul, nearing the end of his third missionary journey (which was roughly from 55-57 A.D.), is slowly working his way back to Jerusalem. That's really where he wants to go. He mentions that he felt the Lord called him to show up there before Pentecost. He had gathered a lot of different Gentile churches and representatives from those churches to gather monies from these fellowships that he been planted to offer it to the poor in Jerusalem - for a couple of reasons. They needed help, and second of all because there was always that division early on between Jewish believers and Gentile ones because that grace issue had to be worked out. And so Paul thought that this would mend some fences as well, and he hoped to be able to get there to be that kind of a witness. When Paul left Ephesus after three years, and there was a riot there that he thought was best to leave, he did go up over into Europe, into Macedonia (as the map, if you have them, will tell you - if you can't see it from where you're sitting, I don't know). But he went around the Aegean, would end up back in Corinth where he stayed three months. He wanted to catch a boat from there to go back towards Jerusalem. It was a boat that typically took Jews to their feast days. There was a plot to kill Paul - to throw him overboard. He found out about it. He went back the way he came, put an extra 600 miles on his feet. But as he came back around, as he headed down the coast, he eventually found himself back near Ephesus, at a place called Miletus, which was their port city. He was still going home, but he thought, "Gosh, I've spent so much time with these guys. It's been three months since I've seen them. This might be the last time I see them." Every place Paul had stopped on the way back, people were telling him not to go, that trouble awaited and lockup awaited and punishment awaited and difficulty. And Paul said, "Well, I gotta go." And people would cry, and he would just say, "Well, don't cry. I gotta go! That's what the Lord showed me." So, in any event, he stops in this city, Miletus - the coast city (it's only 12 miles or so up the Neander River, there, it's still there today) - in Turkey and invited these leaders to come and see him. He wanted to give them one more pep talk, one more, "Let's serve the Lord," wanted to give them one more message.

We mentioned to you, when we began this a couple weeks ago, it is the only recorded sermon of Paul's (in the book of Acts) to believers. All of the rest of the messages are to unbelievers or mostly unbelievers. But this one was taking a bunch

of mature guys that were walking with the Lord, and it gives you a real insight into how Paul viewed church planting, outreach, ministry, overseers, if you will. And we've spent the last couple of weeks in what are really just eighteen verses. It starts in verse 18; it goes to the end of the chapter. And Luke records the whole little sermon for us. So I think it's important because it gives to us God's heart towards men in ministry, what God's view was towards church, church function, church responsibility. He loved these men. He's trained these guys. He spent three years with them. When he left, he gave them keys to the church. "Here, this is now your responsibility." And off he went. And so he had a lot invested in them. But these are the last words of Paul to the elders in Ephesus - about church life and priorities and lifestyle.

In the first week (a couple of weeks ago), verses 18, 19, 20 and 21, Paul began by calling them to remember how he lived among them. He used his example, his day and night serving the Lord; how he, from the first day that he showed up, didn't hold anything back. He was helpful, he taught publicly, he taught from house to house, he testified to anyone that would listen about repentance of our sins and turning in faith to Christ. And Paul wanted them to say, "Follow my example." That's really what he said, "Follow my example."

And then last week, from verse 22 down through verse 28, Paul talked to them about the difficulties that he had been facing and even the foreboding kind of word that had come to him from others, and he said, "I'm really not afraid to go and face whatever is waiting for me because I haven't left you in the lurch or somehow cheated you from what God has taught me. In fact," he said, "I gave you the full counsel of God's Word. Every day I stood fast. I ran the race. I testified of God's grace. I was faithful. I don't feel guilty. I don't feel like I've left you in a position where you wouldn't know what to do." But he ended up by saying, in verse 28, to them, "You should take heed to yourself, and then you can take heed to the flock which the Holy Spirit has made you an overseer. Your job is to shepherd the church of God, the church which God has purchased with His own blood." And Paul encouraged them to be selfish in their spiritual life first and then find themselves in a position where they could help others.

Which brings us tonight to verse 29 and to the last portion of this. And there's lots to learn, I think, lots to hear, and there's a lot for us to learn - whether you're in ministry or not - in terms of here's God's heart towards the church and how it should behave itself. Verse 29, Paul goes on, and he said this, "For I know this,

that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.' " Now Paul begins to warn these men of the enemy that they face, and he begins with the pressure from outside the church. Notice he uses the words from without. One of the responsibilities, I think, of any pastor is that they should be well aware of what is blowing around in the world around the church - the cults, the trends, the latest winds of doctrine that are blowing - to deceive. There are a lot of things that tend to latch on to the church that aren't biblical but they're identified with the church. Unfortunately, they usually begin on the West coast. So by the time they get to the East coast, people say, "Ah, we saw that comin'." But we don't. We're right in the middle of it. Right? It tends to start here. But I think any good shepherd would check the fields and the canyons for wolves in hiding before bringing a flock in to graze. And there's a lot of spiritual, I think, opposition that you and I face as Christians that is lurking outside the walls of the church. Here's Paul's description of them - they are "savage wolves." Those are pretty strong words. They are unmerciful, they are unsparing, they want to devour the sheep. And Paul was sure - notice what he said - "I am sure. I know that by the time I leave here," (and Paul was a pretty good warrior for this church) "I know that there will be people trying to get into the church from outside the church that will not spare the flock."

One of Satan's ploys that you always discover in the Scriptures is that wherever God sows wheat, Satan comes to sow tares. Right? And tares, if you've ever seen them - and on our trip to Israel sometimes, when they're in that time of year when the wheat around the Sea of Galilee is growing, tares and wheat are almost indistinguishable when they begin to grow, until they begin to bear fruit. And then tare fruit is very dark; it's black, in fact, in the middle. It's inedible, it's not good for you, whereas the wheat would give you life. They become very clear when they blossom. But until they do, you can't almost tell them apart. And so the Lord uses that illustration, there in Matthew 13:24, about, "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat" (sits them into the church - comes from without and it's planted within). And when the men come and say to the owner, "'Shall we try to pull it up? Where does this come from?' " And the owner says, "'The enemy has done this.' " "'Well, should we try to uproot it?' " "'No, no, no. Because in trying to pull them out, you're probably going to uproot some of the wheat as well. Just let them grow together until the harvest, and then we'll separate them and the tares. The wheat can go into the barn, and the tares can be burned in the fire.' " But the Lord used that as an example of the church's life - that you and I, as God's

people in a local fellowship, are going to be targets for the enemy in seeking to draw you away from the simplicity of the Scriptures that you should learn and feel comfortable in.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, said, " 'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.' " If they came to you in wolves' clothing, you'd never fall for it. The old, "What big teeth you have, grandma," that wouldn't work. So, it is the deception or the looking like a sheep that they use against you to try to weasel into your life and draw you away. It's an interesting picture, though, of the wolf and the sheep. It's a picture of the battle for men's hearts. It's an imagery of the savage nature of the enemy, that he would like to just tear up a sheep. And notice that Paul said to these men, "You take care of yourself, then you take care of the flock. But know this, there are wolves, savage ones, that are longing to get in to destroy God's people." And we've seen it. You know, one of the best ways to identify a wolf is to see what he's eating. Because sheep eat hay, and they eat straw. Wolves eat sheep. So you right away go, "That's a sheep-eater." Right? This guy wants to destroy the people of God. He is a harm. The wolf comes not to feed but to fleece the flock. He comes not to give but to feed himself.

So Paul says to these elders, "Be on the lookout. Be careful. Watch out!" When Timothy would come to this church a few years down the road (Paul would send him here to pastor this Ephesian church), he would write to him in two letters; but the first one was really advice to a young pastor - he was, maybe, forty years old when he took the pastorate there. And he said to him in chapter 4:1, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be receiving with thanksgiving." And he goes on and on, and he begins to lay out these folks that are traveling the country, that were attacking even the Ephesian church, coming with doctrines that were not biblical at all; but they were stealing from the church not only the grace of God and the peace of God but good instruction. He ends in that letter to Timothy by saying (verse 6), "If you instruct the brethren in these things," (if you warn them about these things), "you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed." "Tell them the truth. Let them be strong. Give them things where they can stand on their own two feet. A good shepherd will warn the flock about false teachers,

seducing spirits, doctrines of demons. And they always are floating around the church door.

We have seen over the years, and the church has been here for thirty-three years, we have watched people leave the church here from time to time, caught up in very bizarre and yet very new kinds of movements (not good movements), new gospels they say. I'm glad that there hasn't been too many. But if you're at all in tune with what's going on, there's some pretty strange stuff being taught in the name of the Lord. And if you don't know your Bible, you can get caught up pretty easily in the emotions and in the goosebumps and the music and, "Oh, I want to be a part of that." But if you just look at the doctrine, you go, "Wait a minute! It's not God-honoring at all!"

And so we're in this battle. Right? And the way we head it off is we try to teach you the whole Bible - simply, honestly, word for word, chapter by chapter, book by book. It ought to be something we can stand behind. But there is always this twisting and this turning. I believe that we haven't lost so many folks to that because we have a bunch of very godly elders here who are men of the Word, who are rightfully able to divide it, and I think that protects us.

But the early church was blitzed by tare sowers. If you read Peter's letter (and he wrote it a bit later), chapter 2 of 2 Peter, he devotes an entire chapter to nothing more than to be careful of and to identify false teachers. We've had an awful lot of false teachers blow through our country, grabbing up thousands of people in their wake. But it's a battle for the truth.

Forty years from when you're reading this (forward in history), the Ephesian church would still be around. Jesus will write to the seven churches in the book of Revelation 2 and 3, and He will say of this church that they are doing many things well, but they have left their first love, that they have gotten away from what had driven them, what used to motivate them - the love of God. They've gotten away from that. They don't have that anymore. That's the big falling away. But if you continue to read through Revelation 2 and 3, the Smyrna church was in big trouble. He calls some of the people in the Smyrna church, "You belong to the synagogue of Satan" - to the church, who's become infested with these false doctrines. The Pergamos church (in chapter 2:14) was struggling. They have the Balaam doctrine, and they're hanging on to that - many people caught up in immorality in the church, and they were being lectured by the Lord. "Come back to the reality of the truth,

or you're going to find yourself without a light to walk in at all." The Thyatira church (in chapter 2:20) was heading downhill really quickly. And if you go and read some of the things that the Lord talks about, that "you have a woman named Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, who's seducing the church, and people are following her teaching," man, that was just 100 A.D. That's only fifty years down the road now; this wasn't so far away. I mean, like I said, we've been here thirty-three years. Imagine just ten more years, and that's where we're at. How horrible would that be.

So all of these young Asia Minor churches were under attack from the wolves of hell, and Paul, with a heart for the people, says to these men, "Be careful. The battle is inevitable. It's going to have to be fought by the shepherds who know the Word of God, and they're going to have to be able to defend it." In fact, Paul will say the same thing down in verse 31, "Remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears." This is happening, and we should be ready for it. We can talk about it in a minute, about naming names and pointing to specific ministries. Paul says, first of all, that they come from without.

Second of all, verse 30, he says this, " 'Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things,' " (and here's their motivation) " 'to draw away the disciples after themselves.' " More than one false prophet has gotten their start in the body of Christ. More than one false prophet has gotten a foothold in a church and then began to draw people after themselves - using their position, their influence, their friendships. And it was like that in Ephesus as well. Look, Paul had founded this church. He had established it. He had trained its leaders. He would eventually send Timothy here. Later, John the apostle would be the pastor of the church in Ephesus. This was a big church and a huge influence and one that you could look to. But from the day that it began to rise up, there were people already in the church (and Paul will mention some of them) who came out of this fellowship longing only to have an agenda that would gather people to themselves. They're wolves, but they're wolves from within. There're wolves from without, and then there're wolves from within.

Let me go back to that letter that Paul wrote to Timothy (1 Timothy) that you have in your Bible. This is what Paul wrote about that, in chapter 1:3 of 1 Timothy, "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia - remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.

Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm." One letter later (in chapter 2:15 of 2 Timothy), "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.' " One chapter later (2 Timothy 3:5), "..... having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was. But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love and perseverance." He says this to Timothy (1 Timothy 1:18), "This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck," (and then he names again) "of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme." Those are some pretty harsh words - to the same church and now the leader that Paul has left there. And he warns Timothy, very clearly and very succinctly, "Take care of the flock. There are people in the flock who are there for the wrong reasons, teaching the wrong thing. They're ruining people's lives, and you, as a shepherd, have to take care of the sheep."

Now let me point out a couple of things to you. Sometimes people say, or we get letters saying, "Hey, have you talked about this guy in the pulpit?" or, "Have you mentioned this guy?" And I, to be honest with you, used to do that, and I don't do it anymore, and the reason is I let God do that. I think the best way I can protect you from false doctrine is teach you the right doctrine. We also don't bring up the Book of Mormon, to teach that to you, so that you'll be ready when it comes up. You'll just know the Bible, and everything else will look very clear. Hold your Bible

in one hand, and everything else can fall before it. Right? So that's our first approach. Second of all, Paul's mentioning of names is always done in the context of a local fellowship. They didn't have guys that were known the world over, as we have today. But there are folks in churches that were just despicable and horrible and caused great suffering. And so Paul, when he dealt with that church or that region (like we just read), will mention by name folks who have a reputation for being those kinds of folks and troublesome in the church. And so he was willing to take that stand. He taught the Scriptures more than anything. But he called upon Timothy to fight the battle spiritually for the hearts of the people, that they wouldn't go astray. He'll point out specific error. He calls on the local body. I was thinking the other day - just a couple of days ago, we hit the anniversary of the Jonestown disaster. You remember that? Some of you probably do. Jim Jones came from a fundamental church. He grew up in a Sunday school, with a Sunday school teacher. And he went to Guyana. And Jonestown - you remember he led the People's Temple. And on November 18, 1978, he led 909 people to drink cyanide and kill themselves; and out of those 909 people, 304 of them were children. This was a loony guy. It would have been good for someone to stand up and go, "That Jim Jones is a nutcase!" But no one knew until it happened. So, is it unloving to mention people by name? We had a guy a couple years ago write a book about how he decided there was no hell in the Bible, and I mention him by name because he's a fairly well-known guy around the Calvary (Chapels), and his book was out there, and he was on Fox pumpin' it and a couple of other places. So I just, one day, said, "This guy's a knucklehead" because I don't want you to buy into that. The Bible talks more about hell than heaven. So the warnings are there. But I try to stay away from individualizing unless it's local. If it's local, we'll deal with it. If it's national, it's a little bit tougher than we can tackle because we don't have enough personal information, nor do you have enough relationship with these folks for it to matter to you. But, look, there's a lot of merchandising and misleading of the church. And God is interested. He purchased it with His own blood; that's what we read. It's a valuable commodity. You are valuable to the Lord. My fear should be, as a pastor, whatever I say to you better be right because you belong to God. Ultimately. Right? You're His property. You're His kids. You're His people. So God forbid that I mislead you.

But Paul, when he spoke, he spoke from personal, firsthand knowledge, and he spoke in the context of there being someone there that could do something about it. When Jude wrote his little letter (the short one towards the end of your Bible), he said to those he was writing to, "I wanted to write to you about our

common salvation, and I want you to earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" (verses 3-4). You've got to contend for the faith. So, we have a responsibility to contend for the gospel - each one of us - with whoever we speak to. But when it comes to the oversight of the churches, I think our best strategy is to teach the truth. If you know the truth, man, the lie looks pretty obvious. So that's, I think You're best equipped when you hear somebody go, "Well, that's not in the Bible, that's not right." How do you know that? Because you know God's Word. Right? And you have God's Spirit. And then you're safe. But be careful just not jumpin' on every bandwagon. I should just tell you it's also the reason I don't do very much political stuff. And unfortunately we just had an election, and we had a lot of people write, "Hey, are you gonna mention this guy or this candidate?" And no, I won't do it because he's not Jesus, or she's not Jesus; so they're liable to mess up, and then I'll look like an idiot. "Yeah, I supported that idiot. If I'd only known" I don't know. I just know Jesus needs to be preached, and if enough people walk with the Lord, we'll have the right leadership and oversight because God blesses a people and a nation whose God is the LORD (Psalm 33:12). So you can preach your political candidates, and I'll preach my Savior and Lord, and He'll have a greater effect, I think, in the long run. Plus you don't really care what I think about that anyway, and you shouldn't.

But notice that Paul warns about people coming from the outward and then rising up from the inward, from within. When Jude wrote that little letter about (again) false teachers, he said of their effectiveness, "They are spots in your love feasts" (verse 12). In other words, they're at the picnic with you, they're at communion with you. "They feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water." They promise, but they can't deliver. "They are carried about by the winds." There's no stability in their lives. "They are like late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." So, we definitely need to be on guard against those who would come in. Absalom, David's son, sat at his father's gate for months (2 Samuel 15), chiding his father's leadership and saying to people, "Well, if I was in charge, here's what I would do, but my father apparently doesn't care about you." And he just sat, and he threw it in the people's face, and eventually they joined him in seeking a revolt against David's throne.

Notice here that the weapon used by the false teachers is a perverse speaking - they speak perverse things. The word "perverse," by definition, means to be twisted. Right? So they take the Word of God, and they twist it. It no longer says what it once did. They can kind of make it twist and say whatever they want. They'll use it to suit their own purposes. And Paul said to them, "withdraw yourselves from disciples like this" because their hope is to gather a following. We've had, and we watch carefully for it, people wait outside the doors when people would go into the prayer room or come up to pray and follow them out to their cars to try to invite them to other churches. We've seen that happen here; folks just prey on the new believer or the young saint, and they hang out. That's their strategy. Come in the parking lot. Put little flyers on your car. And if we catch 'em, they're goin' to jail. That's all. It's a reward for being an idiot. You know what I mean? (Laughing) So stay away from our cars. But they'll try to do it. They'll just kind of come, and they'll try to make merchandise of you. And it happens, and they put little tracts on your cars with the weird things. We've had some weird stuff going on. But they usually get a foothold in the church by hanging out with us, making friends. Soon they undermine or it comes out what they really want to do. They get their own little group together. They sanctimoniously leave, usually, with a few disciples. "Oh, come with me. I found a better church. These people are terrible. And I love where I'm at now." Some ruse of complaint, some spiritual declaration that "God is leading us." It's like these "perverse" words that accomplish their purposes. And we've got to be careful. Right? We've got to be on guard that we're not caught up in the enemy's work. And Paul was sure that it was coming - it was coming from without, it was coming from within. We've got to be on guard.

Sometimes overseers desire larger crowds, and we've seen good churches, young churches, turn from declaring God's Word to almost apologizing for it. Removing the Scriptures from the pulpit, speaking words that are more palatable and appealing to the flesh, lowering Bible expectations, setting a low bar. There's a church that we know that is fairly large who has grown, in the last five years, considerably. But here's what they've done. They've brought famous movie star sports personalities and put them in the pulpit. They're not saved, but they're appealing personalities. Everybody wants to see them. "Oh, can you sign my Bible?" Do you even know a Bible? But yet it's been real good in filling the pews, and people get excited, and they all gather together. They'll let people be involved that harbor sin, and the preaching begins to change from the Bible to everything's positive. Who likes to talk about hell and draw a crowd? You want to talk about

blessing and answered prayer and isn't God good. Well, you know the kinds of folks I'm talking about. There're a lot of seeker friendly churches today, a lot of emerging church doctrines - contemporary, fitting-in. They don't declare God's ways anymore. They make room for social outlooks and lifestyles that draw crowds. I have, because I've been around for a long time with pastors and friends that are in ministry, watched men who are in ministry decide that they will bring onto their staff or into their board room businessmen who aren't godly men; but "we like their business acumen, we like their outlook in business." So, the church needs that, you know? But rather than looking for the godly man, they begin to compromise. They value scholarship over anointing, and so they brag about the education of the pastor. They want that issue instead of spiritual qualification. We've seen it before. People gather a group to themselves. They take off on their own. They've got their own unique ideas. But for me, it's just a battle for the heart of the people. You want them to do well. If you don't want to be here, and you want to go somewhere else, I'll give you a list of churches that are good. We're not the only band in town. And if God uses us, great; if He doesn't, I'll be the first guy to hang it up. But you don't want to get deceived. You want to find a place and plug yourself in. And if you're going to do well in a church, you're going to have to put up with the people you don't like and the things you don't appreciate and the folks that aren't on your side and things that didn't go your way. You can find that everywhere.....unless it's your church. And then everyone's going to leave you because they don't like your attitude at all. (Laughing) You know what I'm sayin'?

So Paul said to these men, "You know it's coming." The doors out there are open, they're free. It's free to get in, free to get out. Right? And everything comes in, and everything blows out. So you've got to be careful to get in the pulpit. There's a little sign in here. It says, "Sir, we would see Jesus." That's what it says right here. "We would see Jesus." It's all that matters, right? You've got to leave here seeing Jesus and loving Him. So, there's the warning.

Second of all, verse 31, Paul says, " 'Therefore' " (because you know this) " 'watch,' " (be on guard) " 'and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.' " Paul was a vigilant pastor. From Jesus' parable of the wheat and tares, we read, once the tares are rooted, they're hard to get out. The best thing you can do is to keep them out before they settle in. So, when Paul wrote his last letter to Timothy - he's going to be killed now, he's going to be beheaded, he knows it - he said to Timothy, "Be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Timothy

4:5). "Just hang in there, buddy. This is not gonna get any easier. But it's gonna be worth it." When Ezekiel wrote to the elders of his day, and the LORD was speaking through Ezekiel, He said (Ezekiel 3:17), "Son of man, I've made you a watchman over the house of Israel. So keep My Word in your mouth, and warn them for Me from that Word." Speak that truth, and protect the people. Watch over them. Take care of them. Paul said, "I want you to watch, and I want you to remember my example, how I modeled for you what to do." You that would be leaders in the church - here's Paul's best advice: practice what you preach. Right? Do the things that you say you should be doing. For example, if you're an usher, and the church has started, I don't want to look out the back there and see you just goofin' around with somebody. If we're worshipping God, you should be worshipping God. You're an usher. Pay attention, man. You should be worshipping with us. If you're a worship leader but you're not up on stage, you ought to be singin' along. You're a worship leader! Practice what you preach because it's the best way to convince people that God is good. If you are a church member, come in on time; not twenty minutes late. Have respect for what is goin' on. Be here, man, or try to be here. Right? See it through. See it through. Be an example to others. If you want to witness to people, here's what you shouldn't do. Put yourself in a picture on Facebook with a beer in front of you. I see it a hundred times. I know you feel free, and look, to be honest with you, I have no problem with you. If you want to drink a beer, do it. Go ahead. I'm sure it's not gonna keep you out of heaven. However, you've got to worry about the people that watch you. That's your responsibility, too. If you can do one without the other I don't think you can. You've got to be careful of your example. And I always cringe, when I see especially if you're in our church. And I'm going on Facebook. "Hey....." (Laughing) Really? And I want to send stuff. In fact, I type all kinds of stuff and then erase. (Laughing) If I ever send, I'm probably gonna be in big kind of trouble. But I type.....my fingers get hurt (Pastor Jack is typing on the pulpit) trying to get the thing in there. Because you shouldn't do that. Practice what you preach. A lot of people in our church that are alcoholics, that have come out of alcoholic lifestyles, that can never drink again, and they shouldn't - you've got to help them to stay there. Not flaunt your freedom. "Ah, look at me." Look, you can have freedom. I'm not your uptight guy. You go ahead. But do it in a way that you don't stumble anybody else. You've got to be sensitive to the weak.

"Look," he said, "watch and remember how I was an example to you." And it was a big deal to Paul. Notice his description, "with tears night and day, I fought this battle." "Night and day" would suggest it's an ongoing one, and "with tears," it

would seem to be not only is there no easy fix, but Paul took this to heart. He then says "warn everyone." The word "warn" is a great word in Greek. It's the word "*nouthesis*," and "*nouthesis*" is a word that means to admonish with firmness and gentleness. It is literally the word that the Bible uses for "to give counsel to those that are weak, to give instruction, to correct behavior." Paul said, "I want you to just warn people with kindness but with firmness, like you're not bending but you're merciful." And Paul knew what it was like to be left in tears by the people he was trying to serve. And he worried about the wolves coming in and destroying people's lives. We had a couple of people - they're gone, what do I care, I'll tell you, I won't tell you who they are - who left maybe six or seven years ago, and they said, "You guys are not very spiritual. You do not practice people being slain in the Spirit, you know, where you lay your hands and somebody falls down." I said, "Yeah, we don't do that here," and, "Well, you should, man. You let the Spirit loose, man, that's what's gonna happen." I go, "I'm not gonna let Him loose then because that shouldn't really happen." And then I tried this. I said, "You know, in the Bible, from what I can tell, everyone that was slain in the Spirit was either defying God or about to die because God, 'Look at Me, you don't mess with Me,' right? So, other than the priests couldn't get off the ground when they were serving in the Temple or in the tabernacle, there is no example for us to follow." And they said, "Well, we're goin' to a place down the street, and they allow that, and we're just so happy." And I said, "Well, then, enjoy yourself. Have a good time with it." But it's such a horrible thing when you see people that get caught up in things that aren't going to help them. I think the most difficult part of pastoring is the people. (Pastor Jack laughs) How's that for insight? (Laughing) If it wasn't for the people, this'd be a great job. But I don't know who I'd talk to. I think the bottom line is the disappointment seeing people do poorly. It is certainly the hardest thing we have to deal with. So, Paul was very interested that these folks do well. To have the truth of God but not warn people is like fattening them for the slaughter. Paul was like a dad to these folks, I think. He didn't want them going astray. They were his kids.

So he says, in verse 32, " '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.' " Paul had given them and shown them all that he knew. He's now going to leave. He doesn't believe he's going to come back. We have no record of him coming back, to be honest with you, although he gets out of jail for a little while down the road here. He's not going to be able to stay to fight the wolves. He's done his best to prepare these men. He realizes it's not going to be

easy, and he says this, "I'm praying for the people, and I'm praying for you." And then he says this, "I'm going to commit you pastors to the care of God the Holy Spirit. I'm going to commit you to Him." No substitute for praying. I thank the Lord for all the prayer meetings we have at the church every week and you that come faithfully to pray. And sometimes there're thirty people that show up to pray and 600 prayer requests. So we know how to ask for prayer. We're very good at that. We also need to learn to pray. So Paul commits himself to pray for them, and then he commits them to God's grace, which I love, "the word of his grace." It's one thing to tell people what they ought to do for the Lord; it is far better to tell people what God has done for them. Because the motivation, then, to do is actual. Right? If you know of God's grace What did Jesus say of Mary Magdalene? "Because she's been forgiven much, therefore she loves much" (Luke 7:47). If you are aware of the grace of God in your life, you're gonna do a lot of things you wouldn't do otherwise. You'll pray, you'll read your Bible, you'll serve others, you'll deny yourself because you're indebted to the Lord's grace. And that's what Paul says here. "I'm going to commit you to God in prayer, and then I'm going to commend you to His grace, and it's able to build you up. You're going to be strong in the work that God has given you to do." So I think once you know God's grace, you go from - a lot of people see spiritual things as "have-tos," "Well, I have to go to church," or, "I have to pray," or, "I should read my Bible." It's a "have-to." When you meet God's grace, you "want to." And then if you stick around there long enough, then you just "get to." Right? You go from "have to" to "want to" to "get to." That make sense? You grow in your motivation. So God's grace will build you up.

Then Paul says this, verse 33, " 'I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.' " That doesn't sound like a modern-day preacher. " 'Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. 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." ' " And I should tell you those are words of Jesus that you'll only read here. We don't have that quote in the gospels. But apparently it was one that they understood. So Paul's view of his ministry was that ministry is not a place to be covetous or seek gain or to get profit. It's a vital issue because, to me, I have this strong feeling because of the way I grew up, I guess, that I hate the churches that are in that position where they're always begging for money or putting pressure on the people. I just figured it this way - if God's paying for everything, He probably can handle it. He probably don't need me being like a skill

for Him. You know? So if you've been here for any length of time, you know we never talk about money. We take offerings on Sunday. We let the Lord handle it. All of our bills have always been paid. If we get to a place where I'd have to start begging you to give because we can't make the bills, I'm just gonna quit because I want God to be God. And He certainly is able to do that, and He has been able to do that through the many years that we've been together. Ministry is no place to be covetous. Hard work is something that God blesses. Profit and gain cannot be a part of the formula for being in ministry at all. This is not a place to get rich; it's not a place to promote yourself; it's not a place to line your pockets. God takes care of the folks that work here. We have maybe twenty-some people that work here, and we want to take care of them as best as we can. We've set up retirement for all of the pastors so if they are here all the years, they'll be able to retire; not just have to scrounge to make ends meet. None of them are gettin' rich. But God has been good to us. And I love Paul's attitude. "I wasn't here for gold or silver or apparel. I worked hard with my life." Paul made tents during the whole time that he was in Ephesus - three years. Didn't take a salary. He worked, and he worked to support him and the people that were with him. His eyes were on the eternal. I guess that's the point I want to make. You know? The happiest man in the world is not the person who has the most but is content with what he has.

I remember hearing a story - let me see if I remember it - a long time ago. It was cute, though. Let me think. I had a stroke, so wait. (Laughing) I'm using it to the best of my ability. Oh, there was a guy that was getting married to this woman, and he bought her this huge diamond. And it was the second largest diamond to the Hope Diamond, and he said, "This is the Rabinowicz diamond." He said, "But it comes with a curse." And she said, "What is that?" And he said, "Mr. Rabinowicz." Okay, I thought it was pretty funny. (Laughing) I liked it. You guys are terrible.

We try, as a church, to operate as inexpensively as we can. We operate all of our retreats and outreaches simply to break even. We don't want to make \$5; we just don't want to lose it either. We want to be responsible for what we're doing. Our book store, our thrift store make profits; they all go to support the radio that costs hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars a year to be on 400 stations across the country. My wife and I together, I think, have written eighteen books; all of the eighteen books have been signed over to the church. We've never seen a penny, nor do we want to. It was written on church time with support from the church. They've sold because they're on the radio. I wouldn't be able to be selling them on the radio if I was on my own. So it doesn't belong to me; it belongs to the

church. So all of that stuff's been signed over, which means we can hawk it freely because we're not gettin' anything out of it. So buy them all, please! (Laughing) Because the money goes to the radio. It's the way that we're thankful for. So we're not seeing any money. And like I said, seek first the kingdom, and everything else is added to you (Matthew 6:33). All of our bills are paid. We're about to embark on a multi-million dollar project that we're going to be able to pay for in cash. God has been good to us. We pay all of our bills on the tithing of about 30% of the people from the church; 70% of the people don't. They don't tithe on a regular basis, or they're still learning, or they've learned and decided they're not going to do that. But whatever they do, God has a way of providing. And I have no idea what you give. I don't see it. I don't want to see it. If I knew it, I'd be nicer to you if you are a big giver. (Laughing) And I wouldn't be near so nice to just sittin' around doin' nothin'.

So, I love Paul's attitude, and I think it's biblical that way. Let the Lord provide. Don't you think He can provide? He has to be able to. We have to all believe in that. Right? That God is able to provide if we put Him first. So you can't fault Paul the way that he handles money and finances. He says to the Philippians (4:11-12), "I know how to have lots, I know how to have nothing. Just I'm content to know that the Lord's going to take care of me." Unfortunately, the TV evangelists of our days and the fiasco and the constant fund raising efforts paint the picture of a God who's desperately in need of your help. I am truly sorry that that's like that. The God that I serve does not need my help. I need His help. You need His help. He doesn't need your money. He can do without you. He was fine before you came along; He'll be fine when you go. So, that's the God we want to serve, isn't it? Greater than us. Paul said, "I did this. You remember how I lived. Do that the same way." His hope was that this new generation of pastors would not progress in the wrong direction but to stay where they should be an example like Paul had been. "It's more blessed to give than receive." I don't know when Jesus said that, but everyone agreed He did.

Finally, verse 36, "And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 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." Time to leave. Tears and prayers. The church stands on the shore, waving goodbye to Paul. They won't see him again. But I suspect that these elders (and unfortunately we took three weeks to go through eighteen sentences) all went back those 12 miles back to Ephesus

determined to be the kind of believers that Paul wanted them to be. I think I mentioned to you (if I didn't, yeah, I did mention it to you because a couple of us guys talked about it) when our church first started, we had an elders' retreat down in Newport Beach at the Ayers Hotel. We just went away - I think last time I told you that the wives came; my wife told me that they didn't come. So it was just a bunch of guys. And I called Pastor Chuck, and I said, "Could you come talk to a bunch of guys? The church is just getting started." And Chuck said, "Well, I'm speaking in Dallas for the weekend. But I'm flying home Saturday night because I have to teach Sunday morning. I'll stop by on the way home from the Orange County Airport." I said, "Well, that'll be great." I said, "Just come say hello. Acknowledge what the Lord is doin'. They'll just be tickled to meet you and just be blessed." And he said, "All right." So we had dinner at 6:00; 8:00 he was driving home - he had to be at the church at 5:00 in the morning. And he'd been gone all week teaching. He had a suitcase with him. He just came walkin' in, Pastor Chuck, and I introduced him, and he sat on the edge of a little table like this. He opened his Bible, and he spent the next hour going through these eighteen verses with our guys. I still have it on CD. It was the most moving study that I ever heard him teach. It was just Chuck at his best - no notes. As the Lord led. I think all the guys - there's still many of them here - that you ask, they'll tell you it was like the most phenomenal week that we ever had. So, I'm sure that these men went home with their hearts laid open and, "I'm gonna do good. I'm gonna serve the Lord. I'm gonna have the Lord use us." Paul was a great example.

Well, that's Paul's ministry meeting with these men. He's gonna get back on the road. Next week, we're gonna look at the first seventeen verses of chapter 21. You can read ahead. We'll call it "Jerusalem or Bust." We'll make note of that. Shall we pray together?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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