

~ Lesson 73 ACTS ~

An Eternal Address in Miletus (part 2)- Shepherd the Flock of God Acts 20:28-32

We are continuing our study in Acts chapter 20 as Paul gives his final farewell address to the Ephesian elders on the docks of Miletus. A small gathering of less than 20 men, but yet the words spoken that day hold eternal Truths that we even 2,000 years later are reading. This address is truly an immortal meeting, an eternal address that has made it into the Divine record of Scripture, and for most of us this meeting holds a special place in the Christian's heart. This heartfelt speech that Luke records is so special because it records Paul's heart to the church. This is the only sermon recorded in Scripture of Paul addressing the church. It is a heartfelt admonition to the Christians in Ephesus, and even to us 2,000 years later of how to live the Christian life and specifically how to stand on His Word.

Last week we left off in verse 27 as Paul was admonishing these elders how to shepherd the flock well. And he does this by reminding them of his conduct and manner of life as he lived with them for three years. He is telling them just as he told the Corinthians... *"Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ."* 1 Corinthians 11:1. That even among the most intense persecution he proved his commitment to finishing the race with joy. Jesus had commended the ministry of the Gospel of the Grace of God into his care and Paul certainly finished his race well, 2 Timothy 4:7-8. Five times in these first 11 verses of Paul's address, he reminds us how he continued to proclaim the good news even among the opposition of the enemy. So by way of review, let's read these first 11 verses again as we continue looking at the remainder of this address... **Acts 20:18-27**. Notice five times in these verses Paul says he proclaimed the gospel...

- Verse 20... How I didn't shrink back from that which was profitable, but proclaimed it to you.
- Verse 21... thoroughly testifying repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ
- Verse 24... thoroughly testifying the Gospel of the Grace of God
- Verse 25... preaching (heralding) the Kingdom of God
- Verse 27... I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel (Divine plan) of God

Now as we continue his address today Paul begins commending them to this charge to preach the Word. Let's read the next section through verse 32, **Acts 20:28-32**. The Word of His Grace and the proclamation of the Truth is the only way to battle heresy and deception. This is his example to the Ephesian elders. Just as he told Timothy, Preach the Word! 2 Timothy 4:2. Notice he begins verse 28 with a therefore... It is now at this point that Paul begins commending the elders to shepherd the flock.

These men of Ephesus had come to Miletus as elders, and they left as overseers and shepherds. Paul uses three Greek words to describe the leadership within the church: Elders- *πρεσβύτερος*; Overseers- *ἐπίσκοπος*; and Shepherds- *ποιμην*. And he tells these elders, the Holy Spirit has commended this leadership to you, therefore shepherd the church of God. The shepherding is the action of the overseer, to lead, feed, and guard the flock of God. Look at verse 28...

20:28) Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you (ἔθετο - placed you) overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

The heart of every believer should be to keep their eyes on Jesus, and the responsibility of the pastor is to keep the bride's focus on Jesus. Shepherd the flock... lead, feed, and guard the flock so that they keep their eyes on Jesus. Remember what Jesus told Martha... *"One thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part."* Luke 10:41. So Paul tells the Ephesian elders to keep the flock's mind toward Jesus. This word "take heed" means to hold your attention toward. As Paul said to the Colossians, "Set your mind on things above where Christ is and not on things on the earth," Col 3:2. This is the duty of the overseer- to shepherd the church of God.

Notice this is God's church, *τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ Θεοῦ*. Why is it God's church? Because we were bought with a price, 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23... with the precious blood of Jesus. Notice this last phrase... **which He purchased with His own blood**. Jesus bought us... He paid the redemptive price for our freedom and

bought our freedom with His own blood, **1 Peter 1:18-19**. It was the blood of the Kinsman Redeemer, Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus Christ, the kinsman to Adam that paid the price for our redemption. This is another reference to the Deity of Jesus. Here Paul is calling Jesus God. He says that God purchased His church with His own blood, *διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος*. Other religions deny the Deity of Jesus by falsely saying that only God the Father is God and Jesus is not God. But does the Father have blood? NO- The Father is a Spirit without flesh and blood, John 4:24, but Jesus, who is God, became a Man, born not from water only, but by water and blood, 1 John 5:6. A flesh and blood man yet without sin. Jesus' blood was perfect. It was the blood of God, but more importantly it was the blood of the Kinsman Redeemer, a kinsman to Adam, a Son of God without blemish who was legally able to redeem us from our debt to sin. Paul, who also wrote the book of Hebrews says this in **Hebrews 9:11-12**. It was God, with His own blood that paid the price for our redemption and as High Priest administers this redemption to all who believe in Him.

The church of God, His flock, is so precious to Him, having been purchased by His own blood and now the care of His church is placed into the hands of appointed elders. Paul then goes on to explain the duties of a shepherd... to lead, feed, and guard from the wolves trying to devour the sheep.

20:29-31) ²⁹ For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹ Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

For three years Paul was the shepherd staving off the wolves and guarding the flock. He led them unto Righteousness, he fed them with Truth, and he guarded them from the savage wolves of Ephesus. Paul refers to these heretics in 1 Corinthians 15:32 calling them the “*beasts of Ephesus*.” In 2 Corinthians he describes the persecution that came from these beasts, **2 Corinthians 1:8-10**.

Jesus warned of wolves in sheep's clothing coming to infiltrate into the church calling them false prophets, Matthew 7:15- “*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves*.” These wolves are deceptive and sneaky. They infiltrate into the flock, into our churches, into our love feasts speaking the Word of God falsely, proclaiming a false doctrine that on the surface seems like it might be ok, but it is really the doctrine of demons. Almost every book of the New Testament warns against heresy. Some examples are **Jude 4, 12; 2 Peter 2:1-3, 13**. The Christian must be on guard against these heresies that try to infiltrate into the church. Heresies that are anti-christ, against God and His Truth, 1 John 2:18-23. The Judaizers were examples of this in the early church. Men trying to persuade Christians to follow the Law and self-righteousness rather than trusting in Jesus, Acts 15:1, 5; Gal 5:1-6; 6; 6:12-13. But along with the heresy of the Judaizers, there was also growing up within the church the heresy of Gnosticism, 1 Timothy 6:20-21; Col 2:8.

Gnosticism came as a result of mixing Jewish thought with Greek mythology. Philo of Alexandria, 20bc-40 ad), a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher who first started introducing these heresies. Then after Jesus came to this earth and the message of Christianity began to spread, men started melding the teachings of Philo with Greek philosophy and intertwining them with Christian ideas. And from this mixture of Judeo-Christian-Greek mythology, Gnosticism was born.

The heresy of Gnosticism focuses on the pride of man, teaching that one could attain to salvation by obtaining a higher knowledge, gnosis, *γνώσις*, of the gods. Gnostics taught this though deception and trickery claiming they were Christians and using Scripture to support their false agenda. They said they followed Christ, they said they believed the Bible, they even said they knew Jesus, but they didn't know my Jesus. These were the “if we sayers” that John spoke of in his first epistle. They said they knew the Truth, but they denied the Truth who is Jesus Christ. They denied Jesus as God, they deny Jesus came in the flesh as the Son of God, who died as the Lamb of God taking on the punishment for sin, and they deny that Jesus was resurrected on the third day and is now seated at the right hand of the Father. They don't believe in the True Jesus.

The Gnostics were taking Paul's doctrine of Christianity and twisting it into lies and heresy. They were confessing a false Jesus just as Paul warned of men coming in preaching another Jesus and a different Gospel, [2 Cor 11:4](#); [Galatians 1:6-8](#). Mormonism was born because a man believed a demon rather than the Word of God and tried to call himself a Christian. Same with Jehovah's Witness. Other examples are Christian Science... Progressive Christianity... Postmodern Christianity... Ecumenism... these false religions preach a false Jesus. All these are pseudo-Christians, false Christians trying to deceive by confessing a false Christ; distorting Truth; trying to get us to doubt God's Word by saying, "Has God really said?" Gen 3:1. The Gnostics created this doubt within the first few centuries when they rewrote the New Testament to fit their own agenda.

Irenaeus, 120 – 202AD, Bishop of Lyons and a pupil of Polycarp, speaks extensively of these distortions in his five-volume book, "Against Heresies", which details and uncovers the hidden agenda of the Gnostics in that day... *

Book 1- Preface: 1. INASMVCH as certain men have set the truth aside, and bring in lying words and vain genealogies, which, as the apostle says, 2 "minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith," and by means of their craftily-constructed plausibilities draw away the minds of the inexperienced and take them captive, [I have felt constrained, my dear friend, to compose the following treatise in order to expose and counteract their machinations.] These men falsify the oracles of God, and prove themselves evil interpreters of the good word of revelation. They also overthrow the faith of many, by drawing them away, under a pretense of [superior] knowledge,... By means of specious and plausible words, they cunningly allure the simple-minded to inquire into their system; but they nevertheless clumsily destroy them, while they initiate them into their blasphemous and impious opinions...

Book 1- 8:1: In like manner do these persons patch together old wives' fables, and then endeavour, by violently drawing away from their proper connection, words, expressions, and parables whenever found, to adapt the oracles of God to their baseless fictions.

The Gnostics were violently drawing away words... to adapt them to their baseless fictions. They were corrupting the Bible with their false doctrine and rewriting scripture to fit their agenda. This is what Paul is warning the Ephesian elders. And Ephesus became a church that was assaulted by these lies and heresies. Notice Paul's assurance of this [Acts 20:29-31](#) ²⁹ For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

The infiltration of false doctrine from the Judaizers and the Gnostics became so prevalent in Ephesus that about 5 years later in 63ad, Paul appoints Timothy as the Bishop of Ephesus and puts him in charge of expelling this heresy. Paul writes extensively about this in his first letter to Timothy in Ephesus, [1 Timothy 1:3-7; 18-20; 3:16-4:1-7, 11-16; 6:3-5, 20-21](#). The Apostle John also writes to the church in Ephesus about these Gnostic heresies infiltrating the church, 1 John 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9, 18-23, 26; 3:7; 4:1-6.

But the heresy of Gnosticism didn't just stop in the first few centuries. This heresy has even crept into the church today on many different levels. We have seen the corruption of the modern translations of our Bibles. Many people carry around a Bible that was corrupted by the Gnostics and is missing hundreds of words that were originally part of Scripture because they were taken out by the Gnostics. We have seen New Age mysticism creep into the church with the law of attraction. This stems from Gnosticism. Progressive Christianity and the denial that Jesus is THE ONLY WAY, that Christ is in all creation, and one just has to be awakened to the Christ already in them. We are seeing the acceptance and tolerance of sin where homosexuals are being allowed to lead the church and there is no call for repentance.

There are even Gnostic doctrines that are "non-essential" to salvation, but yet they are false doctrines that have been twisted and weaved into the church from Gnostic teaching. The heresy of determinism is an example of this. Determinism teaches that God "determines" all things in life apart from the free will of

* Irenaeus: Against Heresies: Book 1- Preface; 3:6; 6:1-2; 8:1

man, even to the determination of who goes to heaven or hell. This heresy of determinism stemmed from Augustine, a former Gnostic who began teaching Christian doctrine in the 5th century and went against the free will teachings of the early church fathers and as a result his heresies are still in the church today in the form of Calvinism. Unlike the other heresies that have been previously mentioned, Determinists and Calvinists are Christians who love the Lord; however their theology has put up a barrier between their relationship with God in that the Calvinist doesn't truly know if they are born again. Because if you believe that only God can choose you for Salvation, then you will go through life always wondering if you are one of the elect of God. This ought not be so! In fact, John tells us that he wrote First John so that we might know that we have eternal life! 1 John 5:13. Plus, if you think that God determines bad things to happen to you, like a person getting cancer so that you can grow from this trial, this is heresy because how can that person have true Fellowship with God when they think He is causing bad things to happen to them? This heresy destroys the Fellowship of Love we are meant to have with our loving, good God.

Any false heresy is an attack against the Truth. So the way to guard against heresy is to know your Bible and stand for Truth. This is what Paul continues admonishing Timothy in his second and final letter of this life in which he tells Timothy, *Preach the Word!* 2 Timothy 1:8, 13; 2:1-2, 15; 3:12-4:1-5

This is Paul's admonition to the Ephesian elders...

20:32) 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.

This is how we expel heresy... we preach the Word and stand for Truth.

Next week we will continue with the remainder of Paul's address to the Ephesian elders.