

~ Lesson 74 ACTS ~

An Eternal Address in Miletus (part 3)
The Inheritance of the Word

Acts 20:32-38

We are continuing our study in Acts chapter 20, working our way through Paul's final farewell address to the Ephesian elders on the docks of Miletus. This is our third lesson on this intimate sermon, but these words of Paul hold eternal Truths even 2,000 years later as we read them. Today we will be looking at the remainder of chapter 20, verses 32-38, as Paul continues to tell the Ephesian elders to stand on the Word of Truth.

Paul began this address by describing his conduct and manner of life during the three years he was in Ephesus. Reminding them that everywhere he went he preached the Word. In verse 20 he said he held nothing back that was profitable; v.21, he thoroughly testified repentance and faith toward God; v.24 he thoroughly testified the Gospel of grace; v.25 he went about heralding the kingdom of God; and in v.27 he said he declared the whole divine counsel and plan of God throughout all of Asia. Paul is saying these things on the docks of Miletus, knowing that he is bound to go to Jerusalem and not knowing if he will ever see them again. So he commends these elders to shepherd the flock of God, **Acts 20:28**. The shepherd's duties are to lead, feed, and guard the flock and we do this by upholding the Word of God. We lead the flock unto Righteousness with the Truth; we feed the flock with the Truth; and we guard the flock from heresy with the Truth. Paul warns them that savage wolves will be infiltrating into the church trying to destroy the Truth and sway people away from the faith, Acts 20:29-32.

These were the verses we looked at last week. And we saw that even 2,000 years later the enemy is still at work, infiltrating the church to try and sway people from the Truth. This is why Jude tells us we must earnestly contend for the faith, Jude 4. And Paul told Timothy to wage the good warfare and fight the good fight of faith, 1 Timothy 2:18; 6:12. And we do this with the Word of God. Paul tells these Ephesian elders that for three years he staved off the wolves by preaching the Word, but now that he is departing, he is commending them to the same work... to stand for Truth. As we said last week, 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 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.

Paul is departing, not knowing if he will ever see them again so he commends the Ephesian elders to God, into His hands, into His care and keeping. And in doing so, He is commending them to the Word of His grace. God and His Word are equal, John 1:1, and it is by His Word that we are kept from the evil one, **John 17:14-17**. It is the Truth of God that exposes and expels heresy. And it is the Truth of His Word that is the tool, or the ability, the *δύναμαι*, for the shepherd to lead, feed, and guard the flock. Notice what Paul says the Word does... **which (God and the Word of His grace) is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified**. The Word builds us up; gives us an inheritance; and sanctifies our souls. This phrase "to build you up" is *ἐποικοδομέω*, to build upon. His Word builds us upon Christ and His firm foundation, **Eph 2:19-22, 8-10**; Matt 7:24-27. Secondly, His Word gives us an inheritance unto Everlasting Life. God has promised every Christian an eternal inheritance and He has promised this to us through His Word and sealed this promise to us by the Holy Spirit, **Eph 1:13-14**. Notice Paul says this inheritance is something yet future. And the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of that inheritance when our redemption is complete. This happens when we meet our Savior face to face in Glory, **Colossians 3:1-4, 23-24**.

Every Christian will receive the inheritance of everlasting Life with Jesus. But notice that Paul speaks of "the reward of the inheritance." He says this because in addition to Eternal Life is also the opportunity to receive Eternal Glory. Those who are faithful in this life will receive the reward of Eternal Life with Eternal

Glory, **2 Timothy 2:10-12**. How do you get this? You abide in Jesus. The source of our inheritance comes out from Jesus and Him alone, **Romans 8:17**; Isaiah 53:12; Rev 22:12. So this inheritance is not based on works, but rather the condition of our heart toward Him. His rewards are disbursed and given according to our faithfulness to Him. According to our walk of Sanctification which is connected to our faithfulness of living out from Him. Remember Paul said, *“The just shall live out from faith.”* And as we live out from Him and walk as He walks, trusting in Him through this life, His Word works in us Sanctification. Notice how Paul links our inheritance with Sanctification... **which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified**. Our reward of the inheritance is directly tied to our sanctification. His Word sanctifies us and makes us holy, but it is our decision to be faithful to His Word and allow His Word to work through us and refine us. Notice how Peter describes this future inheritance that we will receive, **1 Peter 1:3-9, 13-16, 22-23**. We are sanctified and purified through His Word and as we live out from Him and His Holiness and we walk in Christ-likeness, this begins working in us a proven genuineness, *δοκίμιον*, Prov 17:3; Psalm 26:2; 139:23-24. And it is our proven genuineness, *δοκίμιον*, that will be the bases of our inheritance. This will happen when we are caught away to meet our Lord and we pass through the Bema Seat Judgement. Those who have lived their life for Jesus and built their life on Him, these will be proven genuine, *δοκιμάζω*, and receive the inheritance of Eternal Life with Eternal Glory, **1 Cor 3:12-15; 9:24-27**. Was Paul concerned about being disqualified from salvation? Certainly not! He didn't want to be disqualified from the reward of the inheritance. The reward of becoming the Bride of Christ. There is a prize that we as Christians should be running toward. To become one with Jesus in Glory. To be caught away with Him as His Bride. Paul calls this the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, **Philippians 3:12-14**.

There are *στέφανος*, stephanos crowns of victory that will be given to those who were faithful in this life. These are the same crowns that the 24 elders are wearing in heaven, Rev 4-5. I believe the 24 elders represent the Bride of Christ; those who were caught up to be with Jesus. The Bible describes three crowns given to the faithful: the crown of Righteousness, **2 Timothy 4:8**; the crown of Life, **James 1:12**; and the crown of Glory, **1 Peter 5:2-4**; and Notice that our crown, this “reward of the inheritance” is tied directly to our love of God and our faithfulness. It's all about the heart. Not about the good works you did, not about me, but about how much you loved Him. And the fire will prove the faithful genuine because it is the endurance of the faithful, those who love Him and serve Him, and stand on His Word faithfully that will receive this full inheritance of Eternal Life with Eternal Glory. Notice how Peter describes the conduct of a shepherd in 1 Peter 5:2... *Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly*. This leads right into Paul's final statement in his eternal address to the Ephesian elders. Paul again refers back to his conduct, making an example of how he didn't peddle the Word of God or covet other people's possessions, but rather was careful to tend the flock of God by supporting them and not being a burden.

20:33-35) ³³ I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴ Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. ³⁵ 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.'

Paul never wanted to be accused of peddling the Word of God for money, 2 Cor 2:17. This is another tell-tale sign to spot a false prophet. One who is a lover of money at heart will corrupt the Gospel to fit his needs. Paul warns of this in 1 Timothy 6:10- *“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness...”* Paul says in the same letter that Bishops and Deacons in the church must not be *“greedy for money,”* 1 Timothy 3:3, 8. And he warns of those who have a love of money and *desire to be rich and fall into temptation*, 1 Timothy 6:9-10. There are many good men who have started in the will of God, but as money and fame grew, they began departing from the faith and began compromising the Gospel. If the pastor loves money, fame, and loves to have the pre-eminence,

like Diotrephes in 3 John... then he might be tempted to preach a compromised Gospel so that the people will keep coming back. He will start to please men rather than God so that he can keep filling his pride. There is nothing wrong with the pastor taking a paycheck from the church. Paul even tells us in 1 Timothy 5:18- *the laborer is worthy of his wages*. But many times, Paul didn't use this right, 1 Cor 9:12-18. This reminds me of what Jesus said about receiving the reward from men or from God, Matt 6:1-4. Very rarely did Paul use this right to receive money from the church for his necessities. He reminds the Ephesian elders, **you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities**. Paul tells them... you yourselves know my conduct. You saw me working with Aquila and Priscilla earning my own wages as a tent maker. Remember, Paul was constantly working as a tent maker to provide for his own needs. We saw this in Corinth, Thessalonica and also Ephesus, Acts 18:2-3; 1 Cor 9:12-18; 2 Cor 11:7; 1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8.

Paul is reminding the Ephesian elders of his example so that they will conduct their lives in the same way, **I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak**. This is the heart of a shepherd; to not be a burden on the flock. And by acting this way, it is also another way to weed out the wolves. A hireling only cares about himself and not the flock, John 10:12-13.

Then Paul quotes the words of Jesus saying, **"It is more blessed to give than to receive."** Great truths spoken here. But an interesting thing to note is that there is no record of Jesus ever saying this, but we know He did because Paul tells us. So its possible that this is something that Jesus told Paul personally or something that just wasn't recorded in the Gospels. Remember John 21:25- *And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.*

This ends Paul's address to the Ephesian elders on the docks of Miletus...

20:36-38) ³⁶ **And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.** ³⁷ **Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him,** ³⁸ **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.**

There was great sorrow in these words because everyone there knew they may never see the Apostle Paul again. This just shows the deep impact and selfless love that Paul had for the brethren. So, they help Paul and the company into the boat and Paul continues his journey to Jerusalem. Paul will eventually have one more opportunity to visit Ephesus before he dies. About 5 years later, 63ad, after Paul is released from prison in Rome, he travels to Ephesus to ordain Timothy as Bishop of Ephesus.

In closing, we have a unique insight into how well these elders did in following the Apostle Paul's admonition to stave off the false teachers in the church. Almost 30 years later, Jesus Himself gives the Ephesian church a review of how they have done. And in this letter he mentions their diligent work to protect the flock from heresy, **Revelation 2:1-3**. The Ephesian elders got an A+ in defending the Truth and battling heresy, but in doing so they became so wrapped up in the work of the Master, they forgot about the Master Himself and they left their first love, , **Revelation 2:4-7**. This is a warning to all of us. No matter what we do or what God has called us to do, don't get distracted with much serving and lose sight of the One whom you are serving. And to him who keeps his focus on Jesus, this one is an overcomer, and he will hear those words, "Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord."