

## 72. Paul Gave a Warning to the Elders of Ephesus

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn the whole counsel of God so that they will be equipped to serve the Lord in any way that He has for them. We saw that Paul had reminded the elders of the church of Ephesus that he had equipped them to share with others the things that Paul had taught and shown them. He had done this by teaching them the Word and then showing them how to share the Word of God with others in their homes. We want to do the same with our children.

As Paul concluded his time with the elders of the church at Ephesus, he warned them of two different kinds of false teachers that they would face in the future. The first kind of false teacher is mentioned in Acts 20:28-29 where we read, “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.” Before warning about the false teachers, Paul reminded the elders of their responsibility as leaders of the church at Ephesus.

The word translated “take heed” means *to give attention to or to examine*. First, the elders were to examine their own lives. Paul used this word in 1 Timothy 4:13 when he told Timothy, “Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” Here, we see that Timothy was to give attention to reading, exhortation and doctrine. Then, 1 Timothy 4:16 adds, “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” Timothy was to pay attention both to his personal life and to his teaching. Paul told the elders to do the same.

Second, the elders were to pay attention to the flock (the Christians) for whom the Holy Spirit had given them the oversight. The word translated “overseers” is everywhere else translated “bishop”. Here, we see that the elders as a group were the bishops or overseers of the Christians in the church in Ephesus. Peter told the elders in 1 Peter 5:2-4, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” Those who are overseers are to do it willingly. They are not to do it for self-gain and they are to lead by example.

Paul told the elders to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. That is why Paul told the elders here that they were to protect the Christians from false teachers. Paul described false teachers as “savage wolves”. The words translated “savage wolves” means *cruel or greedy men who destroy others*. Here, we see that false teachers are those who try to come into the flock from the outside.

Second, Paul warned them about a second kind of false teacher or self-seeking leader in Acts 20:30-31 where we read, “Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” Here, we see that false teachers and

self-seeking leaders will also arise from within the church. The word translated “perverse things” means *to turn aside from the right path or to pervert or corrupt*. It spoke of those who would twist the truth of the Word of God to reach their own goals.

The goal of these self-seeking leaders is to draw away the disciples after themselves. In 1 Timothy 6:3-5, we read, “If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a *means of gain*. From such withdraw yourself.” Instead of teaching the Word of God, these verses show that such individuals teach their own opinions. Their goal is self-gain.

As a result of the danger of false teachers from outside the church or of self-seeking leaders within the church, Paul told the elders to watch and be alert for such individuals. The word translated “watch” means *to be vigilant and to keep alert*. Here, we see that church leaders are to be constantly alert for those who seek to lead weaker Christians astray. Paul had spent his entire three years in Ephesus warning the Christians about the dangers of being deceived and led astray. The elders were to have that same concern.

Paul concluded his words to the elders from Ephesus by saying in Acts 20:32-35, “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. I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. 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.”” The word translated “commend” means *to entrust or to commit to one’s charge*. Here, we see that Paul now expected the Lord and the Word of God to work through the elders of the church at Ephesus to protect the Christians in that city.

Paul said that the Lord and the Word of God would continue to build them up in their spiritual lives. The word translated “to build up” means *to continue to produce continuing spiritual growth*. Colossians 2:6-7 says, “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” As we continue to walk in Christ, He also causes us to be rooted and built up in Him so that we are established and strengthened in the faith. Paul also reminded the elders in Ephesus that they could look forward to the eternal inheritance that they would receive.

Then, Paul reminded the elders of the example that he had provided for them throughout the three years that he was in the city of Ephesus. Paul said that he had not coveted the silver, the gold or the clothing of any person. That is a great contrast from false teachers and the self-seeking leaders about whom Paul had warned. As we saw in 1 Timothy 6:5, which was quoted above, self-seeking leaders think that godliness is a means of gain. That is why Paul went on to warn in 1 Timothy 6:9-10, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish

and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of *all kinds* of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Here, we see that a love of money will cause people to stray from the true faith, because of their greediness, and then destroy them with many sorrows.

Instead of coveting the silver or gold of others, Paul had worked to provide for his own needs. Acts 18:3 describes another place where Paul said that he worked to meet his own needs as that verse says, “So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.” Later, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:18, “What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.” In this verse in 1 Corinthians, we see that Paul chose to work so that no one could say that he abused his authority in the Gospel. Here, in Acts, we see that in addition to providing for his own needs, Paul also provided for the needs of those who were with him.

Paul had shown the elders in Ephesus by his own example that it is a privilege for Christians to work to supply their own needs as well as to be able to support the weak. The word translated “weak” means *those without strength, the poor, those with physical infirmities or those who are powerless*. The word translated “support” means *to provide help of various kinds to those who are in need*. Paul also reminded the elders of the words of the Lord Jesus, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” This statement is not recorded in any of the Gospels. In fact, this statement is the only direct quote, from the earthly ministry of Christ, that is recorded by a book other than the Gospels. The fact that Paul mentioned it here meant that many of the Christians had quoted this statement as they spoke to others about what Christ had said.

Acts 20:36-38 says, “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.” Here, we see that Paul gave his final farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus. This was a time of sorrow, as well as encouragement because Paul had said that they would probably not see him again on this earth. They knew they would miss his words of encouragement on this earth, but they also knew they would see him again in the presence of the Lord. We see that Paul concluded this time with the elders of Ephesus with a time of prayer before they walked with him to the ship so that he could travel on to Jerusalem.

Just as Paul warned the elders of Ephesus about the dangers of false teachers and self-seeking leaders, we want to warn our physical and spiritual children about the danger of such leaders. We realize that our children will also meet such leaders and we want them to be prepared to recognize and be able to warn weaker Christians about the dangers of such leaders trying to deceive the weaker Christians. May the Lord richly bless you as you prepare your children to protect other Christians from deception.