



Potomac Hills Community Church, PCA

GRACE ORIENTED • CHRIST CENTERED

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The Acts of the Apostles: The Spirit sends the Church with the Gospel Acts 20.1-38 The Gospel of God's Grace

INTRODUCTION: *"What should and should not happen in church"*¹

I get a newsletter from the Pastoral Ministry of Focus on the Family called The Pastor's Weekly Briefing. And it usually highlights noteworthy articles and sometimes it has short notes about interesting things happening in the church at large. I want to share two of those with you this morning.

These are two things I can assure will **not** be happening at Potomac Hills.

1. Abundant Life Christian Center in La Marque, Texas, gave away a new Chrysler PT Cruiser to a woman and a Harley Davidson Sportster to a man at its New Year's Eve service. Those eligible -- parishioners and visitors who attended a service in recent weeks -- had to be at [the New Year's] service to drive them away. "This is an opportunity to give something to someone that will encourage people to come to the house of the Lord," Pastor Walter Hallam said. Members who brought visitors could enter [the contest] twice.

You bring your friends in order to win a car or a motorcycle.

Because wanting them to hear the Gospel isn't a good enough reason.

The Gospel just needs a little marketing help, that's all.

2. St. Francis Episcopal Church, Stamford, Connecticut, is giving Holy Communion to pets and offering them special worship services as part of a new monthly initiative. The Wall Street Journal reports some are welcoming animals into the flock because of a fall in church attendance numbers. And [they] now provide pet-friendly worship services, house calls for sick animals and officiating at pet funerals.

Inquiring minds want to know if the animals tithe.

Is that what the church is all about?

Both of these absurd practices are driven by the need for numbers.

¹ The introduction is adapted from The Pastor's Weekly Briefing, an email newsletter from Focus on the Family, 1/2/04 & 3/26/04; and The 9 Marks of the Church by Mark Dever. You can find a much more detailed explanation of the 9 Marks at www.9Marks.org

Who you are is defined by how many you are.

And so if downgrading the Gospel and making a mockery of the Lord's Supper is what it takes to get more people, then your dreams of Potomac Hills becoming a megachurch are pretty much shot.

People will follow the latest program or teaching in the church just because "it's new" or it satisfies some carnal lust.

And they'll do it without ever asking if it's Biblical.

Mark Dever, the Pastor of Capital Hill Baptist Church in D.C., a Reformed Baptist congregation, has written a book entitled The 9 Marks of the Church, where he lays out what he thinks a Biblical church should look like. You know what he says the most important things are that a Biblical church needs to have?

1. Expository Preaching

This is preaching which expounds what Scripture says in a particular passage, carefully explaining its meaning and applying it to the congregation. It is a commitment to hearing God's Word and to recovering the centrality of God's Word in our worship.

2. Biblical Theology

Paul charges Titus to "teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). Our concern should be not only with how we are taught, but with **what** we are taught. Biblical theology is a commitment to know the God of the Bible as He has revealed Himself in Scripture.

3. Biblical Understanding of the Good News

The Gospel is the heart of Christianity. But the Good News is not that God wants to meet people's felt needs or help them develop a healthier self-image. We have sinfully rebelled against our Creator and Judge. Yet He has graciously sent His Son to die the death we deserved for our sin, and He has credited Christ's acquittal to those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus' death and resurrection. **That** is the good news.

4. Biblical Understanding of Conversion

The spiritual change each person needs is so radical, so near the root of us, that only God can do it. We need God to convert us. Conversion need not be an emotionally heated experience, but it must evidence itself in godly fruit if it is to be what the Bible regards as a true conversion.

5. Biblical Understanding of Evangelism

How someone shares the gospel is closely related to how he understands the gospel. To present it as an additive that gives non-Christians something they naturally want (i.e. joy or peace) [to make their life better] is to present a half-truth, which elicits false conversions. The whole truth is that our deepest need is [new] spiritual life, and that new life only comes by repenting of our sins and believing in

Jesus. We present the gospel openly, and leave the converting to God.

And that's only the first five. And as I was reflecting on these two obviously different models of ministry ... the pets and cars model versus the Bible and Gospel model ... I couldn't help but shake my head.

I mean, what have we come to? Well, apparently, nothing new.

We've been learning about the Apostle Paul as we've followed him on his missionary journeys in the book of Acts. And he must have learned a lot during his ministry because near the end of his life he wrote to his good friend Timothy, his partner on these trips and whom he left in Ephesus to pastor the church there.

And one of the things he wrote Timothy was this, **2 Timothy 4:3-4**, *"For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear. They will reject the truth and follow strange myths."*

The English Standard Version translates that passage as *"For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."*

So, what does the Apostle tell Timothy he should be doing instead?

He says, essentially, Timothy, you are to be a **Minister of the Word**.

2 Timothy 4:1-2, *"And so I solemnly urge you [charge you] before God and before Christ Jesus—who will someday judge the living and the dead when He appears to set up His Kingdom: **Preach the word of God.** Be persistent, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching."*

And how could Paul say that? Because that's what Paul did.

And we see that, loud and clear, in today's passage, Acts 20.

Well, you've had a few weeks off from me ... and it's good to see you all managed to survive so well. Although I admit ... I was starting to worry ... we've had several surgeries, injuries, broken bones, casts ... it's not looking too good. So I thought, 'man, I'm going to have to preach a really long time so these people can get healthy again.'

And this is the perfect passage for a long sermon, and I warn you, there are grave consequences for those who fall asleep in Acts 20, as you'll see.

Well, we're back in the book of Acts, and we've gotten all the way up to chapter 20. Now, if you remember, and I'm sure you do, the Apostle Paul has gone all over the Mediterranean world. And everywhere he went preaching the Gospel he was met with ridicule and persecution — in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra — where he was stoned, and Derbe

Since coming to Europe, he had suffered a terrible beating in Philippi and

was thrown in jail there, he was rejected and persecuted in Thessalonica and Berea, and in Athens, he gave a brilliant message to the pagan philosophers, but they rejected him. And then he went to Corinth where he had to face false charges, but he stayed there 18 months, possibly because no one was beating him up.

Then he went back to Ephesus, and then on to Jerusalem and Antioch, where he had started. But he had a compelling desire to check on all the churches he had planted and so he went back out again. And this time he went to Ephesus, where his preaching led to a riot. It was all just going so well.

But Paul just couldn't stop. He had to keep going and visiting churches, checking on them, seeing if the people there were growing spiritually, because no matter what happened to him, Paul just couldn't stop ...

20:1-6: LOVING THE CHURCH ²

*“When it was all over, Paul sent for the believers and encouraged them. Then he said good-bye and left for Macedonia. [2] **Along the way, he encouraged the believers in all the towns he passed through.** Then he traveled down to Greece, [3] where he stayed for three months. He was preparing to sail back to Syria when he discovered a plot by some Jews against his life, so he decided to return through Macedonia. [4] Several men were traveling with him. They were Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus; Aris-tar-chus and Secundus, from Thessalonica; Gaius, from Derbe; Timothy; and Tyc-hi-cus and Trophimus, who were from the province of Asia. [5] They went ahead and waited for us at Troas. [6] As soon as the Passover season ended, we boarded a ship at Philippi in Macedonia and five days later arrived in Troas, where we stayed a week.”*

Acts 20, verses 1-6 tell us that after the riot in Ephesus Paul crossed the Aegean to Macedonia, where he encouraged struggling churches, then continued down into Greece, doing the same. His intent was to sail from Corinth to Jerusalem with an offering for the beleaguered mother church, suffering under intense persecution. However, when he learned of a plot to kill him while at sea, he eluded his foes by traveling back up through Macedonia and crossing the Dardanelles to Troas — the city where several years before he had experienced the vision of the man of Macedonia imploring him to “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And so he's worked his way back through Greece and Macedonia, encouraging the churches in all the towns he passed through.

When Paul arrived in Troas, there was a joyous time of reunion because his traveling companions had gone on ahead and were eagerly awaiting his arrival. Luke tells us that among them were Sopater of Berea – a believer from one of

² The exposition of the text is adapted from Preaching the Word: Acts by R. Kent Hughes, pages 269-281; The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Acts 13-28 by John MacArthur, pages 191-231; and Acts: An Expositional Commentary by James Montgomery Boice, pages 335-351.

those towns Paul was persecuted in, Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica – another one of those towns Paul was persecuted in, Gaius of Derbe – a place Paul was forced to flee, Timothy – and Paul found him in Lystra, where he was stoned, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia – places where he just suffered average persecutions. It's really a **remarkable** group of men.

They are Jews and Gentiles.

They come from Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece.

Aristarchus and Secundus came from Thessalonica. If their names are descriptive of who they were, a common practice of the time, then Aristarchus is what his name seems to mean in English ... aristocracy ... which means "rule of the best." So Aristarchus is most likely an upper-class ruler of some sort. Now the second name, Secundus, is exactly the opposite. It's a Latin word that mean "number two" and from which we get the word, 'second.' Names like these were frequently given to slaves. In a prosperous household, there would be a number one slave, in charge of all the other slaves. He would be called Primus, or "Number One." Then you would have his understudy, who worked for him and actually carried out many of his responsibilities. He would be called Secundus, "Number Two." And so the church at Thessalonica has sent two men, one from the highest levels of society, and one from the lowest. And they come as brothers.

And they all come from churches that began in the midst of suffering and persecution – a lot of which was suffered by Paul.

And yet here they are, welcoming Paul, representing churches that exist in different far off places, places Paul went and suffered ... and was beaten, and whipped, and thrown in jail, so that **the Gospel** might be **preached** and **heard** and new believers might form a **church** of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul went back and visited those churches, encouraging them because he loved them. And those churches sent men to Paul, to encourage him, because they loved him.

Folks, it's easy to skip over a list of hard to pronounce names, and just move on. But buried in that list of names is a picture of really different people who loved each other because of the Gospel.

And Paul didn't even offer them a car.

And so they gathered together in Troas, and when they did, they worshipped together, and they asked Paul, whom they loved, to bring God's Word to them. And Paul did just that, because he was committed to ...

20:7-12: FEEDING THE CHURCH

*"On the first day of the week, we gathered to observe the Lord's Supper. Paul was preaching; and since he was leaving the next day, **he talked until midnight**. [8] The upstairs room where we met was lighted with many flickering lamps. [9] As **Paul spoke on and on**, a young man named Eutyclus, sitting on the windowsill,*

*became very drowsy. Finally, he sank into a deep sleep and fell three stories to his death below. [10] Paul went down, bent over him, and took him into his arms. "Don't worry," he said, "he's alive!" [11] Then they all went back upstairs and ate the Lord's Supper together. And **Paul continued talking to them until dawn**; then he left. [12] Meanwhile, the young man was taken home unhurt, and everyone was greatly relieved."*

You see ... a long sermon ... and there was healing.

I'm sure that's a perfectly good application for this text.

Troas was the peaceful setting for the remarkable Communion service described in verses 7-12. The people there were all so different – but they were one in Christ! For the next seven days they engaged in ministry as one team, with Paul as their leader. Scriptural sleuths think we can identify the home in which they met that night because Paul in his final letter from jail in Rome, in 2 Timothy 4:13, wrote, *"When you come, be sure to bring the coat I left with Carpus at Troas. Also bring my books, and especially my papers."*

Paul asked Timothy to stop at Troas and pick up the old robe he had forgotten at the home of Carpus. So Acts 20 probably took place in the upper chamber of Carpus' spacious three-story home. This took place on Sunday, the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, the day of the Resurrection — not on the Sabbath. The people came together in the evening for a common meal and the commemoration of the death of Jesus. It was a larger gathering than usual, for Paul's presence, coupled with his intended departure at sunrise, had brought out everyone who was able to attend. The room was packed.

Paul was an experienced communicator and he fed the people from God's Word. And Paul had so much to share he couldn't help speaking for a long time. This was not only his first message to the infant church of Troas, but also probably his last. With the rising of the sun he would be gone to Jerusalem. He couldn't bring himself to conclude his sermon. The Gospel was so rich, so full, so life-changing. Read Ephesians 1, as if it were one sentence, to get a sense of the riches of the Gospel Paul was preaching. There was so much to say.

And besides, **no one was complaining**.

They considered it a privilege ... and the believers there hoped it would never end. [A reasonable inference from the text!]

At the same time, the situation was probably a little uncomfortable. The word for "lamps" in verse 8 is literally "torches." We can easily imagine a stuffy, oppressive atmosphere in that third-story chamber. The Mediterranean heat, the press of the weary, sweating crowd, the smoke from the torches, the lack of oxygen all made for drowsiness. Finally nature asserted itself, verse 9, *"As **Paul spoke on and on**, a young man named Eutychus, sitting on the windowsill, became very*

drowsy. Finally, he sank into a deep sleep and fell three stories to his death below.”

The tenses of the Greek verbs portray poor Eutychus as being gradually overcome despite his struggle to remain awake. The word translated “sleep” is the word from which we derive the English word *hypnosis*. Finally the stifling room and the hypnotic flickering of the torches did their work. Eutychus’ eyes shut, he relaxed, and out he went — headlong to the ground three floors below. The congregation gave a horrified gasp and immediately rushed down the outside stairs to the broken form. Some of them began to wail ... but not for long.

Verse 10 gives the happy ending, *“Paul went down, bent over him, and took him into his arms. “Don't worry,” he said, “he's alive!””*

Paul went down and put his arms around him. — and Eutychus was revived!
It was an amazing miracle!

And **no one** was sleepy now.

Back up to church they went. They celebrated the Lord’s Supper, and then, full of joy, Paul talked with them, probably answering questions, until dawn.

I love Eutychus, first, because he fell asleep on the Apostle Paul, so I don’t feel so bad when someone falls asleep on me (notice, I didn’t say ‘if’ someone falls asleep on me, for it has been known to happen), and, then, because Luke was there to record the whole thing! This is the first record **ever** of someone falling asleep in church. There have been thousands of successors, but Eutychus is the one everyone remembers.

A couple of quick applications ...

- **The Danger of Falling Asleep in Church**

As a pastor I have often been reminded that on any given Sunday there are believers who are in danger of falling asleep in church. I have seen people fall asleep and bump their heads on the pew in front of them. I almost saw one elder fall off the end of the pew into the center aisle. But his wife caught him and yanked him back from endless embarrassment. Which is something that wives do.

I have heard a preacher tell of an elder who fell asleep, and when his wife nudged him during the service, he stood and pronounced the benediction!

I have great sympathy for those who have trouble staying awake in church. Some of us work such busy schedules that when we sit down, it’s the first time we’ve relaxed all week. Others are just victims of medication. Sometimes it’s just so warm. The truth is, some of the best saints have fallen asleep in church. Eutychus was perhaps an enthusiastic new Christian who, though he was tired, wouldn’t miss church for anything. His spirit was willing, but his body was sleepy. Falling asleep in church really doesn’t bother me. It can happen for any number of reasons, good and bad.

What concerns me are the thousands who warm a seat every Sunday with their bodies awake and their souls asleep. Some use the church hour to mentally complete unfinished business. Some people are more awake attending a garage sale than they are when they sit with eyes wide open in church. Innumerable churchgoers appear to be awake but are spiritually asleep.

Some are asleep because they've never been awake. I am familiar with that state because I was once there myself. I attended church, heard God's Word preached, sang the hymns, listened to the prayers — but with no understanding. I was just present where others worshiped. I was on the outside. I was dead to spiritual things. Perhaps you derive some vague comfort from being with religious people and doing Christian things, but inside you understand very little of what's going on. The pity is, it is possible to pass from this life into eternity without recognizing your slumber until it is too late. It is possible to be damned even in the church. As Screwtape, a senior devil, said to his trainee, Wormwood (in the great C. S. Lewis novel The Screwtape Letters), "The safest road to hell is the gradual one — the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts." Have you ever been truly awake?

A second reason some are spiritual asleep is sin. Some people have experienced an awakening and are truly Christians but have slipped into a spiritually comatose state. Sometimes we hear of Christians who have fallen to unimaginable depths although they regularly attended church. Though they seemed to listen, they were spiritually asleep.

Samson is the preeminent example of this in Scripture. He began and ended in the faith but messed up big-time in between. Sin progressively took such hold of him that he was no longer awake to spiritual realities. In fact, his final doze on Delilah's lap was symbolic of his state. **Judges 16:20** tells us, "*When he woke up, he thought, "I will do as before and shake myself free." But he didn't realize the Lord had left him.*" Sin desensitizes us, and soon we fall asleep, even in church. Though externally everything appears fine, sin makes us indifferent and bored with spiritual things.

A third reason some are spiritually asleep is familiarity. C. S. Lewis recognized this danger when he warned a friend who was considering the ministry that the constant familiarity with holy matters could dull him to their significance. Lewis summed it up by saying, "None are so unholy as those whose hands are cauterized with holy things."

Some of us who grew up in the church knew all the right words, and when to stand, sit, or kneel. We knew all the hymns (and their parodies). We knew the Doxology before we knew our times tables. We became so familiar with it all that we took it for granted. Church can easily become routine. And some, bored in

church, just go through the motions.

Each of us should make a personal spiritual assessment. If we've never truly been awake, we must ask the God of grace to help us believe. We must confess our sin, declare our faith in Christ, and ask Christ to make us new — and to receive Him as our Savior. Church will then become more alive than we ever imagined.

If we are already children of God and our slumber is due to sin in our lives, we must repent, and turn to Christ, and allow the joy of worshipping Christ to refill us. Those of us who suffer the problem of familiarity must consciously and deliberately participate with all our being in the corporate worship of the church. When we sing, we should shut everything out and sing to God, singing not only with the mouth but with the heart and mind. As others lead in prayer, we should pray along with them — a spiritual concert. When we hear the Scriptures, we must listen, for we are hearing the voice of God. We must listen to God's Word as we would to a love letter, for that is what the Bible is.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer ran a seminary in Nazi Germany that was not approved by the state. He was a critical and intelligent man, but in his preaching classes he always laid down his paper and pencil, opened his Bible, and listened to the students' sermons, no matter how poor they were. He felt that the preaching of God's Word ought to be received as if he were listening to God Himself.

That's how we should listen too.

If we have been born again from our slumber, and if we have confessed our sin, we must consciously, in dependence upon God, wake up to the wonders of worship. Our coming together with other believers should demonstrate that we are alive in Christ! Part of worship is joining with people in the privilege of being awed by God, for Christ is with us! We gather to exalt Christ! And the Scriptures tell us that when Christ is exalted, He will draw all men to Himself.

To Eutychus, and to us, Paul writes, **Ephesians 5:14**, "*Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*" (ESV)

Paul believed that, and he knew that there were still more people and more places that desperately needed to hear that message. And so, true to his word, it was time to leave for Jerusalem. More suffering awaited, but Paul was

20:13-27: COMMITTED TO THE CHURCH

"Paul went by land to Assos, where he had arranged for us to join him, and we went on ahead by ship. [14] He joined us there and we sailed together to Mitylene [mit-uh-lee-nee]. [15] The next day we passed the island of Kios. The following day, we crossed to the island of Samos [say-mos]. And a day later we arrived at Miletus. [16] Paul had decided against stopping at Ephesus this time because he didn't want to spend further time in the province of Asia. He was hurrying to get to Jerusalem, if possible, for the Festival of Pentecost. [17] But when we landed at

Miletus, he sent a message to the elders of the church at Ephesus, asking them to come down to meet him.”

So the Apostle Paul embarked on his long-anticipated return to Jerusalem. Several decades had passed since his leaving, and he wanted to be home with the mother church for Pentecost. He was a passenger on a merchant ship slowly making its way down the Aegean toward the Mediterranean, stopping at various centers of trade. As the Lord would have it, the freighter stopped in Miletus, which was close to Ephesus, a layover that lasted for several days. Though he had not planned on this delay, Paul made use of it and sent word requesting the Ephesian elders to come meet with him for a final meeting.

Paul knew he would **never** see them again.

This brief interlude in Paul’s stormy life provides us with one of the great farewells of Scripture — equal to, if not surpassing, those of Jacob and his sons, Moses and Joshua, and even Jonathan and David. We can draw upon our own experiences to grasp the sadness of this goodbye — pulling up roots to move to a new city, driving around the block a second time to wave one last farewell, traveling along a trail of tears to a new destination. Goodbyes are not only a common experience — they occupy prominent places in history.

If we read these verses with sterile detachment, we deprive ourselves of the life and resulting benefit of the passage. The image called to mind by Paul’s meeting with the Ephesian elders is that of a group of soldiers still soiled by the dust and blood of war, drawing together with their revered general for some final wisdom.

These verses describe four aspects of Paul’s approach to ministry.

- First, **an unshakable commitment to God and His people.**

Starting with verse 18, *“When they arrived he declared, “You know that from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until now [19] I have done the Lord’s work humbly—yes, and with tears. I have endured the trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews.”*

Commitment means different things to different people. Consider the young man who waxed eloquent as he poured out his heart’s devotion in a letter to the girl of his dreams, saying, “My dear, I would climb the highest mountain, swim the widest stream, cross the burning desert, die at the stake for you. P.S. I will see you on Saturday if it doesn’t rain.” Paul was not like that! Totally committed to his fellow believers, he was determined to seek their best “the whole time.” Moreover, he so identified with his people that it hurt. Jumping to verse 31, *“Watch out! Remember the three years I was with you—my constant watch and care over you night and day, and my many tears for you.”*

This was so typical of Paul. His commitment to them was driven by the

conviction that in serving people he was serving God, *“I have done the Lord’s work humbly—yes, and with tears.”*

- **Second, a commitment to sharing God’s Word.**

Starting at verse 20, *“Yet I never shrank from telling you the truth, either publicly or in your homes. [21] I have had one message for Jews and Gentiles alike—the necessity of turning from sin [repentance] and turning to God, and of faith in our Lord Jesus.”*

Sharing God’s Word presupposes **knowing** God’s Word.

Paul was immersed in the Word of God. More than that, he was dauntless in its proclamation, verse 27, *“for I did not shrink from declaring to you **the whole counsel of God.**”* (ESV)

Because he could not be intimidated, he majored on the themes of “repentance toward God and faith in Christ.” Paul did not preach an easy-believism but rather the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation, which results in a changed life. Paul’s ministry was based on the bold proclamation of the whole counsel of God, regardless of the consequences.

- **Third, a commitment to the Gospel.**

Picking up at verse 22, *“And now I am going to Jerusalem, drawn there irresistibly by the Holy Spirit, not knowing what awaits me, [23] except that the Holy Spirit has told me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. [24] **But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about God’s wonderful kindness and love. [NIV - the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.]** [25] And now I know that none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom will ever see me again.”*

Whether or not it was the Lord’s will for Paul to go to Jerusalem, he felt he **had** to go, even though he knew there was going to be trouble that might cost him his life. A commitment to telling others about Christ, a commitment to **testifying to the gospel of God’s grace**, which superseded any self-interest had been the pattern of Paul’s life ever since his Damascus conversion when Christ told Ananias, **Acts 9:16**, *“For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name.”* (ESV)

Hearts began to flame and eyes to gleam as Paul’s comrades-in-arms listened to his passion for the gospel. He finishes by telling them, verse 26, *“Let me say plainly that I have been faithful. No one’s damnation can be blamed on me, [27] for I didn’t shrink from declaring all that God wants for you.”*

This is amazing! Paul had been accused of being a coward, a freeloader, a blatant opportunist and everything in between. And yet he could say, “I am free from the misery of a guilty conscience. Nobody’s blood is on my hands!”

And now that he's explained his commitment to the church, he continues in his ...

20:28-38: TRAINING OF THE CHURCH

- Paul's first command to **be vigilant in ministry.**

Verse 28, "*And now beware! Be sure that you feed and shepherd God's flock—His church, purchased with His blood—over whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders. [29] I know full well that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. [30] Even some of you will distort the truth in order to draw a following. [31] Watch out! Remember the three years I was with you—my constant watch and care over you night and day, and my many tears for you.*"

Ephesus was at that time a strong, healthy church, but Paul gave a much-needed warning. In fact, some thirty-five years later the risen Lord Jesus would, through the Apostle John, tell this very church, **Revelation 2:4-5**, "*But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! Look how far you have fallen from your first love! Turn back to me again and work as you did at first. If you don't, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.*"

Paul recommended a three-pronged vigilance.

First, we must be **on guard for ourselves.** "*And now beware!*"

The NIV says, "*Keep watch over yourselves.*"

The ESV has it, "*Pay careful attention to yourselves.*"

In C. S. Lewis's words, "The true Christian's nostril is to be continually attentive to the inner cesspool." We must never suppose that we have risen above some particular sin or have attained immunity to various temptations but must always be on our guard. And you keep watch over yourselves in two key ways ...

1) "*Be sure that you feed and shepherd God's flock.*" If you want to get fed and be shepherded, then you need to be part of the flock – come to Sunday School, come to worship ... to worship, listen to God's Word and apply it, read it for yourself, get in a small group, be a part of the flock.

And B) Remember that it's "*His church, purchased with His blood.*"

It's not my church. It's not yours either. This church, these people, belong to Jesus. Keep watch over them too, because Jesus died for them too.

Second, we must be **on guard for outside attacks.**

"vicious wolves will come in among you."

Heretics, cults, secularists, and other spiritual enemies attack healthy churches, not weak and obsolete ones.

Third, we must be **on guard for inside deception.**

"Even some of you will distort the truth in order to draw a following."

Satan loves to subvert from within. Vigilance is ever the price of liberty. We must not develop a fortress mentality, assuming all is well, for enemies are found both outside and inside the flock of God. History proves this to be true.

- And then, Paul tells them to **live their lives by the grace of God.**

"And now I entrust you to God and the word of His grace — His message that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those He has set apart for Himself."

We are to focus on the heart of God's Word, "the word of His grace."

Paul was commending the simple gospel — the doctrine of God's love and undeserved kindness. We must focus on grace! As the song says ...

'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.

Paul finishes in verse 31 by telling them again, **"Watch out!"** Literally, it says, "Keep awake!" You can't be on guard if you're asleep. One Eutychus per message is enough.

- And last, they are to **have a giving attitude.**

Verse 33, *"I have never coveted anyone's money or fine clothing. [34] You know that these hands of mine have worked to pay my own way, and I have even supplied the needs of those who were with me. [35] And I have been a constant example of how you can help the poor by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "*

Notice that Paul's last recorded words to the Ephesian elders were a quotation from Christ, **"It is more blessed to give than to receive."**

This summarizes everything Paul said to his fellow warriors. In a nutshell, their ministry was to be one of giving. Paul gave himself to God and His people. He gave Himself to the ministry of the Word. He gave himself to the Gospel with such intensity that he forgot himself. **"It is more blessed to give than to receive."**

"When he had finished speaking, he knelt and prayed with them. [37] They wept aloud as they embraced him in farewell, [38] sad most of all because he had said that they would never see him again. Then they accompanied him down to the ship."

Paul sailed off to keep giving his life to Christ, showing us how we should approach life and ministry.

Love the church ... which means loving the people in the church.

Feed the church ... which means preaching and hearing the Word of God.

Be Committed to the church ... which means being committed to God, God's people, God's Word, and the Gospel of God's Grace.

Train the church ... which means guarding ourselves, and guarding the church from outside attacks and inside deception.

And finally, **live by grace**, you don't deserve anything, so give what you

have ... there are people in this church this morning that are pretty desperate, there are people in our neighborhoods this morning that are pretty desperate, there are people where you work, where you go to school, where you play ball, where you do **anything** – that are pretty desperate ... give them what you have.

Give them the Good News of God's Grace as it's found in Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4 tells us to speak the truth in love. And that's what you do when you share the Gospel. You see, the Gospel is a blunt package of raw truth about how people are rebellious, lost sinners separated from a holy God wrapped with cords of love about how that holy God loves them and offers forgiveness, acceptance, and eternal life to those who turn from sin to Christ in simple faith.

Or, as Jack Miller used to say, "Cheer up! You're worse than you think ... but God's Grace is greater than you ever imagined."

But remember, you can't give what you don't have.

And so the church today needs to preach the Gospel to itself.

We need to remember Christ, who He is, what He did, what He said ... to us and for us. We need to repent ... we need to repent of our self-sufficiency, we need to repent of our unbelief, we need to repent of trusting in our past spiritual life, and we need to repent because our knowledge of God always exceeds our obedience to God. And then we need to return. Like the prodigals that we all are, we need to come back to Christ.

Paul came to encourage them, and they to encourage him.

And this encouragement came because other people, who took what Paul taught them, the truth of the Scriptures, then taught that to others. These were people who came out of darkness, confusion, depravity, idolatry, immorality, and ignorance, heard the message of the Gospel, and who, **somehow**, received that Gospel by faith and were forever changed.

Such is the grace of Christ received by faith.

The only function of faith is to respond to grace.

Faith takes what grace offers.

No matter who you are, where you're from, or what you have done.

Because someone, *"using the Scriptures, explained to them, "The Messiah you are looking for is Jesus."*

And all who believe it said, "Amen."