

A FOND FAREWELL:
Paul's Parting Words to Christian Leaders and Their Flocks
(Acts 20:17ff)

I. WELCOME / TEXT / OPENING PRAYER

A. Welcome

B. Today's Text:

- A bit of background
- The text:

¹⁷ From Miletus Paul sent word to Ephesus, calling for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the very first day I set foot in the province of Asia; ¹⁹ how I served the Lord in all humility and with tears, even amidst the trials I faced because of the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink back from declaring to you anything that was profitable, or from teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ solemnly testifying both to Jews and Greeks about repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus. ²² And now, look: Constrained by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that in every city the Holy Spirit keeps on warning me, saying that chains and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I consider my life to be nothing at all, nor do I hold it dear to myself, as long as I can complete my race and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus: to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. ²⁵ And now, take note of this: I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, ²⁷ for I did not hesitate to declare to you the whole purpose and plan of God. ²⁸ Watch out for yourselves and for the entire flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, with a calling to shepherd the church of God that he purchased with his own blood. ²⁹ For I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ indeed, from among your own number men will rise up, speaking perverse things, trying to draw the disciples away after themselves. ³¹ Therefore keep constant watch, remembering that night and day for three years I did not cease to warn and admonish each one of you with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you the promised inheritance, along with all who have been sanctified. ³³ I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands provided for my own needs, and for the needs of those who were with me. ³⁵ In all these things I showed you that by laboring in this way you are to uphold the weak, and also to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” ³⁶ Now when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷ Then they all began to weep freely; and falling on Paul's neck, they kept kissing him goodbye, ³⁸ sorrowing most of all over the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. Then they began walking with him to the ship.

C. Opening Prayer

II. INTRODUCTION

A. Why I chose this text:

- Our church is in a season of renewal and revision
- The Challenge: We want to be faithful to Scripture, yet also attentive to the concerns of the (wounded) flock
- This text helps us do it: It reveals important truths about *the nature of church government* (plural eldership), but also about *the kind of persons elders need to be* for that government to work as it should!

B. My Approach This Morning:

- I've broken down the text into seven sections
- In each of them, we'll look at what the text teaches about church government, but **ESPECIALLY** at what it teaches about the character, qualifications, and way of life of godly church leaders
- **IMPORTANT NOTE**: This text speaks to us **ALL**, not only because we must choose our leaders, but also because we all, in one way or another, are called to lead (wives, kids, friends, etc.) and display many of these qualities.

III. (17-21) THE LIFESTYLE OF A GODLY LEADER

A. Text: From Miletus Paul sent *word* to Ephesus, calling for the elders of the church.¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the *very* first day I set foot in the province of Asia; ¹⁹ how I served the Lord in all humility and with tears, even amidst *the trials* I faced because of the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink back from declaring to you anything that was profitable, or from teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ solemnly testifying both to Jews and Greeks *about* repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus.

- Who did Paul call? The *elders*, the leaders of the church in Ephesus
- Why did he call them? To say good-bye to beloved friends and co-workers, and to instruct and exhort them in their ministry (e.g., the last words of a father on his death bed to his kids)
- How did he begin this fond farewell? With a review of his way of life as a man and minister of God: *servanthood, humility, tears, endurance amidst trials, fearless teaching, personal involvement with the flock, Gospel-centeredness (evangelism)*
- MP: Paul presents himself as an example to Christian ministers: This is the kind of man we should choose for an elder . . . and aspire to be in our own lives.

IV. THE SUPREME AMBITION OF A GODLY LEADER

A. Text: ²² And now, look: Constrained by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that in every city the Holy Spirit keeps on warning me, saying that chains and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I consider my life to be nothing at all, nor do I hold it dear to myself, as long as I can complete my race and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus: to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

- What is Paul's supreme ambition? To fulfill his calling!
- This was given on the road to Damascus:

¹⁶ But arise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this reason: to appoint you as a servant and a witness, not only of the things you have seen, but also of the things I will yet reveal to you. ¹⁷ And I will deliver you⁸ from the *Jewish* people, and also *from* the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, ¹⁸ to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

- And this was the supreme ambition of his Master, Jesus Christ

⁵² But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.

⁵³ Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" – Mt. 26

- To Note: Calling and Heavenly Vision give a man the courage to die!
- Example of MLK, Egyptian brothers on the beach
- App: Choose an elder with calling and courage!

V. (25-27) THE COURAGE OF A GOLDY LEADER

A. Text: ²⁵ And now, take note of this: I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all.¹¹ ²⁷ For I did not hesitate to declare to you the whole purpose and plan of God.

- Paul feels the weight of his accountability to God: (I am innocent . . .)

¹⁷ Obey your leaders, and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would not be profitable for you. – Heb. 14

- And for this reason, he finds the courage to declare, fearlessly, the whole counsel of God
- Question: Would Paul's teaching be welcome in most evangelical churches today (HSL)?
- App: What kind of elder do you want: Someone who tells you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; or someone who tickles your ears?

VI. (28-31) THE PASTORAL AWARENESS, WISDOM, AND LOVE OF A GODLY LEADER

A. Text: ²⁸ Watch out for yourselves and for the entire flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, *with a calling* to shepherd the church of God that he purchased with his own blood. ²⁹ *For* I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ indeed, from among your own number men will rise up, speaking perverse things, *trying* to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹ Therefore keep constant watch, remembering that night and day for three years I did not cease to warn and admonish each one *of you* with tears.

- To note: Elder = Overseer = Shepherd (Pastor)
- Though not a pastor himself, Paul has a pastor's heart
- He has a pastor's AWARENESS of his calling: *He is a custodian of the blood-bought flock of the Son of God!* (HSL)
- He has a pastor's WISDOM
 - 1) He sees the dangers of life in a fallen world (and the sheep's corresponding need of shepherds) (Rev. 12)
 - 2) He sees what's coming! (savage wolves, even in the eldership)
- He has a pastor's LOVE
 - 1) So, with tears, he exhorts (to watchfulness)
 - b2 So, with diligence, he trains (new leaders)
- Application: Job Description of Elders AND Members: Watchfulness and Discernment! (e.g. Puddleglum)

VII. (32) THE SUPREME CONFIDENCE OF A GODLY LEADER

A. Text: ³² And now I command you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you the *promised* inheritance, together with all who have been sanctified.

- He is confident in the Person, Power, and Presence of God (prayer) (Song: Joyful, Joyful!)
- He is confident in Word of God (HSL)
- He is confident in the Word of God's GRACE! (e.g. Katy Perry)
- App: Choose leaders who have the same confidence, and who call you to these simple, powerful realities

VIII. (33-35) THE GOOD EXAMPLE OF A GODLY LEADER

A. Text: ³³ I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands provided for my *own* needs, and for the needs of those who were with me. ³⁵ In all *these* things I showed you that by laboring in this way you are to uphold the weak, and *also* to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

- Godly leaders present themselves to the flock for imitation (scary!)
- They guard against greed
- They pay attention to appearances
- They are generous and self-sacrificing
- They have a special concern for the weak and the poor

IX. (36-38) THE SWEET REWARD OF A GODLY LEADER

A. Text: ³⁶Now when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷Then they all began to weep freely; and falling on Paul's neck, they kept kissing him *goodbye*, ³⁸sorrowing most of all over the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they began walking with him to the ship.

- This was a pretty austere speech, and yet they all wept over his departure. Why?
- Answer: They loved him, he loved them, and they all knew it!
- Why such love?
- Answer: TIME TOGETHER: living, laboring, learning, fighting, suffering, enduring, triumphing, rejoicing, hoping, and more
- TIME TOGETHER IN THE LORD = THE SOIL FROM WHICH ALONE THE FRAGRANT FLOWER OF LOVE WILL GROW. AND THIS IS THE CHRISTIAN LEADER'S SWEETEST REWARD!

X. CONCLUSION (HSL)