

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

UNDER THE EXALTED CHRIST, THE GOSPEL BEGINS TO SPREAD

THE ACTS

† THE BOOK OF ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRIES, Associated

An overview of the Book of Acts, by Given O. Blakely

ACTS 5:31-32

"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Lesson #85

COMMENTARY ON: 20:28-38

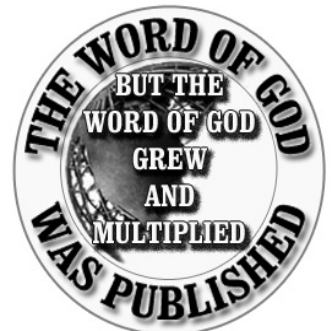
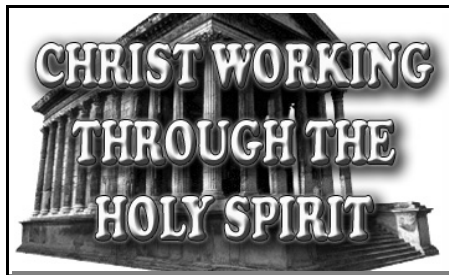
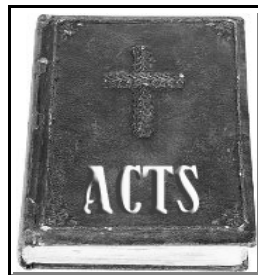
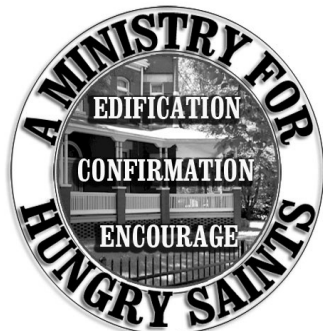
MEETING WITH THE ELDERS OF EPHEBUS, #2

Paul's admonition to the elders is within the context of Divine purpose (Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11), Divine placement in the body (1 Cor 12:18), and the giving of gifts to the church (Eph 4:8-11). What is spelled out to them is not simply a matter of duty, but relates to the purpose God has for the church, and the means through which it is made suitable for a dwelling place for Himself (Eph 2:21). Within the body of Christ, leaders and teachers can only be considered within the framework of God's objective for the church. Such people are not culturing personal careers, or fulfilling their own natural wills. They are serving the purpose of Almighty God, and as soon as this ceases to be done, there really is no place for them within the body of Christ. Thus, Paul speaks with serious tones and a sense of urgency. He affirms that danger is looming on the horizon of time – dark and ominous clouds that contradict what God has revealed to be the purpose for his church. The elders are to be alert, and ready themselves and the people for what is coming.

ACTS 17:26-27

"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."

"... and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

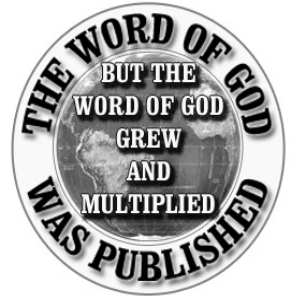


Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Book of Acts

Lesson Number 85



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

TRANSLATION LEGEND: ALT=Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED =Amplified Bible (1965), ASV=American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA=Douay-Rheims (1899), ERV=English Revised Version (1885), ESV=English Stand Version (2001), GNB=Good News (1966), GWN=God's Word (1995), IE=International English (1973), ISV=International Standard Version (1967), JPS=Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV=King James Version (1611), LITV= Literal Translation of the Bible (1976), LIVING=Living Bible (1971), MESSAGE=The Message (1993), MKJV= Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY=Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD=Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB=New American Bible (2002), NASB=New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU=New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version (1984), NJB=New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV=New King James Version (1979), NLT=New Living Translation (1996), NRSV=New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS=J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT=Bishop's New Testament (1595), RSV=Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK=JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster=The Webster Bible (1833), WEYMOUTH=Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS=William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE=Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE=Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT=Young's Literal Translation (1862).

----- **Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification** -----
LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT = Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, LEH = LEH Lexicon, GINGRICH = Gingrich Lexicon

THE INSPIRED RECORD OF HOW THE ENTHRONED CHRIST, BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKED THROUGH HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND GODLY MEN, TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, AND TO BRING EDIFICATION AND STABILITY TO MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.

DISCLAIMER: The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

MEETING WITH THE ELDERS OF EPHESUS, #2

“ 20:28 ” Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ For I know this, that after my ing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. ³² And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. ³³ I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. ³⁴ Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. ³⁵ I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. ³⁶ And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. ³⁷ And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, ³⁸ Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto (Acts 20:28-38)

INTRODUCTION

A SUMMATION OF THE TEXT

Paul's admonition to the elders is within the context of Divine purpose (Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11), Divine placement in the body (1 Cor 12:18), and the giving of gifts to the church (Eph 4:8-11). What is spelled out to them is not simply a matter of duty, but relates to the purpose God has for the church, and the means through which it is made suitable for a

dwelling place for Himself (Eph 2:21). **Within the body of Christ, leaders and teachers can only be considered within the framework of God's objective for the church.** Such people are not culturing personal careers, or fulfilling their own natural wills. They are serving the purpose of Almighty God, and as soon as this ceases to be done, there really is no place for them within the body

of Christ. Thus, Paul speaks with serious tones and a sense of urgency. He affirms that danger is looming on the horizon of time – dark and ominous clouds that contradict what God has revealed to be the purpose for his church. The elders are to be alert, and ready themselves and the people for what is coming. They cannot ignore Paul's solemn warning with impunity. They muse give heed to it.

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THE HEART OF A LEADER

In Paul we have the epitomization of the heart of a true leader. He does not build around himself, but focuses the attention of the people upon spiritually stable things.

- ⇒ Key men taking heed to themselves.
- ⇒ Spiritual leaders taking heed to the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers.
- ⇒ Feeding the church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood.
- ⇒ Warning them of coming encroachments.
- ⇒ Remembering the warnings of holy men.
- ⇒ Reminding them that the grace of God can build them up.
- ⇒ Reminding them that the grace of God can give them an inheritance among those who are sanctified.

⇒ Remembering that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

REVEALED PRIORITY

Notice the priority of the people of Lord in all of these things Paul mentioned to the elders (20:19-38).

- ⇒ *“Serving the Lord”*¹⁹
- ⇒ *“Repentance toward God”*²¹
- ⇒ *“Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”*²¹
- ⇒ *“The Holy Spirit witnesses”*²³
- ⇒ *“The ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus”*²⁴
- ⇒ *“The gospel of the grace of God”*²⁴
- ⇒ *“The kingdom of God”*²⁵
- ⇒ *“All the counsel of God”*²⁷
- ⇒ *“The Holy Spirit hath made you overseers”*²⁸
- ⇒ *“The church of God”*²⁸
- ⇒ *“He hath purchased with His own blood”*²⁸
- ⇒ *“The word of His grace”*³²
- ⇒ *“The words of the Lord Jesus.”*³⁵

Who cannot see the accent of Paul’s words? He speaks with a priority that is scarcely known during our time. There is absolutely no sectarian agenda or denominational emphasis. You become keenly aware of the total absence of involvement in the personal affairs of men. He is not promoting a special work, or sharing his personal needs. In all of this we are beholding how a person who is living for Christ speaks. We are

witnessing the manner of his reasoning, the things that concern him, and his care for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE SAINTS THEMSELVES

It is the saints themselves, the *“household of faith,”* that Paul sets before the elders of Ephesus, as well as their responsibility to it. He does not tell them to be mindful of sinners, or the lost, or status in this world. He does not speak of health and wealth, the realization of personal *“dreams,”* or the expansion of the number of disciples. Such things have the stench of institutionalism upon them.

All of the things of which Paul speaks assume the thoroughness of Christ and our completeness in Him (Col 2:10). **Thus, the solidification of our association with the Lord’s Christ is the stress, from which all valid activity will flow.** The church must be kept in a state of good spiritual health. It must be nourished by alert and insightful leaders.

Anything that endangers the body of Christ, or lends itself to its weakening or confusion, is from the devil, and is to be vigorously opposed, regardless of the one who propagates it. Whatever introduces confusion, robs the people of spiritual understanding, or thrusts them into a state of uncertainty is to be viewed as grave and unsafe.

In the church, absolutely no tolerance is displayed for human opinions that divide, or fleshly perspectives of spiritual realities. **In the body of Christ, people do not have a right to their own opinion concerning something on which the Lord has spoken.** In fact, the warning issued in this text precisely pertains to that kind of thing. Paul warns that things will be spoken that are *“perverse,”* corrupt, and distorted views that were nothing more than lies dressed up human opinions. The

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thing that made them perverse was the injection of human wisdom.

THE ERODING EFFECTS OF FALSITY

Jesus warned His disciples, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt 16:6). Although they did not grasp the significance of what He said, later His disciples were given to see that Jesus was speaking about "the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees" (Matt

to the devil?

The fact that such naive people listen to perverse things with their friends does not diminish the power of the lie. When someone is known to be delivering a false or skewed message, the people of God are directed, "from such withdraw thyself" (1 Tim 1:3-5). These are teachers who "teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words." That is, their fundamental message is not the Gospel,

In view of the means through which humanity fell, it should be apparent that a religious lie, though false to the core, nevertheless has power to subvert, undermine, and weaken the faith of those who hear it.

16:12). Paul warned Timothy that the teaching of certain intruders "will eat as a canker," and will "overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tim 2:17). **In view of the means through which humanity fell, it should be apparent that a religious lie, though false to the core, nevertheless has power to subvert, undermine, and weaken the faith of those who hear it.** This takes place even if the individual is not aware of this inevitable effect. What can be said of those who willingly subject their minds to misrepresentations of the mind and will of the Lord – who, in the name of politeness and tolerance, listen to corruptions of the Word of God as it is spewed from the pulpits of the land like the venom of the "old serpent" himself (Rev 12:9; 20:2). Do such people imagine that they are impervious to the devices of the wicked one? **Are they more equipped to subject themselves to his lies than Eve, who was in a state of absolute moral innocence when she listened**

and their expositions really have nothing to do with the Lord Jesus Christ or the edification of His "brethren."

This tutelage is more than relating a formal sectarian routine. Here we are dealing with spiritual life, not mere human preferences. If men "live by every word of God" (Lk 4:4), then they had better be hearing and responding to that word. If "all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God," and is "profitable" in order that "the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work," then what possible reason can be given for delivering some other message? Lest any be confused on this matter, we are further told that the Scriptures "are able to make" us "wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15). This is not speaking of initial faith, or the commencement of salvation. There is a whole body of spiritual verity that is related to this salvation which is "with

eternal glory" (2 Tim 2:10), and leads to an "eternal inheritance" (Heb 9:15). **While God's word does deal with human conduct and interpersonal relationships, that is not its intended thrust.** If God is not known, and the individual is fundamentally unacquainted with the ways and purpose of Almighty God, nothing else is of any real consequence.

It is not right for professing church leaders to take it upon themselves to assist people in the resolution of their personal difficulties. No such thrust is found in Scripture. *In fact, I do not believe you can find a solitary record of an incident in the Word of God where the everyday difficulties of life are addressed.* **Apart from his life toward God, and His ministry for God, we do not have a single record of the daily life of Jesus Himself.** The same is true of the twelve disciples, Paul, Stephen, Philip, Timothy, and other key individuals in Scripture. There are no "how-to" details of living pertaining to the requirements of domestic, social, or political life. Admonitions pertaining TO such areas are remarkably general – something that cannot be systematized or organized. It has proved to be so confusing to religious sophists that they have developed their own routines and laws, being dependent upon the same.

The words of Paul to the Ephesian elders are an excellent example of these things. **Notice the thrust of what he says to them, and what he considers to be imminent danger.** Ask yourself if this is the kind of thing that is being delivered to the churches today. Ponder why the agenda that dominated Paul's ministry is so little known today. In our culture, the words of our text have a strange sound. That circumstance is most serious.

TAKE HEED UNTO YOURSELVES AND THE FLOCK

^{20:28a} **Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers . . ."**

Elders are addressed concerning their capacity in the body. They occupy an office for which they are responsible, and they must be reminded of it. It is time for elders to cease directing those who

faithfully preach the word (something that is outside of the circumference of their responsibility), and it is also time for those who know and preach the truth to address the elders. **They are not**

figureheads in the body of Christ, but have certain responsibilities. On one occasion, Paul told Timothy, *“Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren . . . Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses”* (1 Tim 5:1,19). Paul then said, *“Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear”* (1 Tim 5:20). Even though Timothy was relatively young, he did have a grasp of the truth, and was therefore told to *“entreat”* elders politely, as though they were his father. To *“entreat”* is to *“exhort,”*^{NKJV} or *“appeal to,”*^{NASB} and has to do with correction.^{GWN} The word includes the idea of instructing and teaching.^{THAYER} This is precisely what Paul does here, and he does it in solemn tones and with the greatest sobriety.

TAKE HEED UNTO YOURSELVES

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves . . .” Other versions read, *“be on guard for yourselves,”*^{NASB} *“keep watch over yourselves,”*^{NIV} *“give attention to yourselves,”*^{BBE} *“watch out for yourselves,”*^{CJB} *“pay careful attention to yourselves,”*^{ESV} *“and now, beware,”*^{LIVING} *“Take care and be on guard for yourselves.”*^{AMPLIFIED} and *“look after yourselves.”*^{CEV}

The words *“take heed”* are translated from a single Greek word – *προσέχετε*. The lexical meaning of this word is, *“to turn the mind to, attend to, be attentive to a person or thing . . . to attend to oneself, i. e. to give heed to oneself . . . to guard oneself, i. e. to beware,”*^{THAYER} *“watch out for, beware (of), be on guard (against), take care,”*^{FRIEBERG} and *“to be in a continuous state of readiness to learn of any future danger, need, or error, and to respond appropriately - to pay attention to, to keep on the lookout for, to be alert for, to be on one’s guard against.”*^{LOUW-NIDA}

Timothy was apparently an evangelist (2 Tim 4:5), and he also was told: *“Take heed unto thyself”* (1 Tim 4:16). God also told the Israelites, *“Take heed unto yourselves”* (Deut 4:23). The person who sits at the Lord’s table is admonished to *“examine himself”* (1 Cor 11:28). All believers are told, *“examine yourselves”* (2 Cor 13:5). Those in Christ are exhorted to *“take heed lest he also spare not thee”* (Rom 11:21). Those engaged in building the body of Christ are told, *“take heed how he buildeth”* on the foundation (1 Cor 3:10). The person who

thinks he stands is told to *“take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor 10:12). All believers are admonished, *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God”* (Heb 3:12).

Why Is Taking Heed to Self So Important?

As you can see, whether it is the elders, the brethren in general, or the brethren collectively, taking heed, or being in a continual state of readiness and alertness, is necessary. Why is this so? **It is obvious from the religious environment of our time, that professed Christians have not discerned a reason that necessitates this posture.** In fact, that is what has allowed false teachers to enter, and people to believe them.

In reality, our relationship to

perpetuated with little apparent difficulty? Why do masses of professed Christians remain in a state of spiritual infancy and naivete, even though they may have been among that group for a good number of years?

Not only have leaders failed to *“take heed unto themselves,”* much of the teaching that is taking place during their watch is not at all conducive to self-examination. **In fact, it is the teaching itself, seemingly noble motives notwithstanding, that have produced the woefully deficient state in which the nominal church finds itself.**

Contributing to this condition is the fact that the fatal flaw of sectarianism is that the sect takes the place of Christ, and trust is therefore placed in being a part of it instead of

Outside of Christ there are certain distinctions that exist. The only sweeping distinction is one that God Himself imposed upon the human race: Jew and Gentile. Now that Jesus has removed sin and reconciled the world to God, the “middle wall of partition” that divided them has been broken down in Christ Jesus, and no longer exists

God is cultured through a variety of means. The maintenance of our faith is the primary means (2 Cor 13:5; 2 Cor 4:7). There is also the sustentation of hope (Rom 8:24; Heb 3:6). Among these appointed means is the ongoing examination of self, and taking heed to ourselves. This is because faith does not maintain itself. Nor, indeed, is the Lord pledged to keep one’s faith robust, even though it is neglected. While this appears to me to be abundantly clear in Scripture, it seems to me that great and staggering numbers of professing Christians remain ignorant of this fact. This is especially true of elders, who are charged with the care of the church. I do not know how it is possible to account for a *“falling away”* apart from a failure to be vigilant in this matter. **How is it that false teaching has so easily penetrated the professed church?** How can erroneous doctrines be initiated and rapidly

being joined to the Lord. This should not require extended commentary, owing to its apperancy to those of humble heart.

TAKE HEED TO ALL THE FLOCK

“Take heed . . . to all the flock . . .” Other versions read, *“the whole flock,”*^{DOUAY} *“the entire flock,”*^{GWN} *“God’s people,”*^{NLT} *“all the people of God,”*^{IE} *“everyone,”*^{CEV} and *“your congregation.”*^{MESSAGE} The larger percentage of all versions read, *“all the flock.”*

Outside of Christ there are certain distinctions that exist. The only sweeping distinction is one that God Himself imposed upon the human race: Jew and Gentile. Now that Jesus has removed sin and reconciled the world to God, the *“middle wall of partition”* that divided them has been broken down in Christ Jesus, and no longer exists (Gal 3:28; Eph:15). With great pungency the

Spirit reveals, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Gal 3:28). Men have had the audacity to add to these distinctions, shaping their ministries around differentiations that, before God, do not even exist. Now, in addition to the ones stated in Galatians 3:28, men have added “married and unmarried,” “husbands and wives,” “adults and youth,” “educated and uneducated,” “old and young,” “rich and poor,” “black and white,” etc. Not only have these distinctions been imposed upon the church, religious careers, systems of lower and high education, and innumerable volumes of books have been shaped around these distinctions. Let no one be foolish enough to rise to the defense of such professed “ministries,” for they are nothing more than a flagrant contradiction of our text.

Leaders are to take heed to *“all the flock,”* not a portion of it. Just as the same manna sustained all of Israel, whether young or old, married or single,

where such a thing could happen – and this is the day of the *“better thing”* (Heb 11:40).

There are modern-day assemblies in which the burden of teaching and admonition is addressed to married couples with children. There are others where the emphasis is place upon the youth. Still others speak of nothing more than outreach and recruitment. **Yet, above all of the religious noise that is being made about such approaches, a loud voice rings out from the heavenly chambers: “Take heed unto all the flock!”** No person in possession of their faculties can say this word is no longer relevant, or that it has become obsolete, or been forced to give way to a more contemporary emphasis. Should such a person arise and demand that we listen to him, we must refuse to do so, and request that he either submit to the word of the Lord or leave our presence.

These so-called specialized ministries are bleeding off the resources

mountain to hill, they have forgotten their restingplace” (Jer 50:6). **The absence of good shepherds equates to having no shepherds at all.** Here is how the Lord stated the case through Ezekiel: *“The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them”* (Ezek 34:4-6).

Through Jeremiah, the Lord revealed that the false prophets and teachers had actually loosed the hordes of opportunists and evil workers who did remarkable damage to the people of God. *“I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah”* (Jer 23:14). **How is it, in our day, that such a remarkable number of religious opportunists have risen to exploit the Christian community?** What has caused this flood of strange doctrines, erroneous emphases, and distorted representations of God? **It is the brand of religion that has been hawked by the preachers, teachers, and educators, who have conspired together to fulfill their own agenda – an agenda that has been fostered by spiritual blindness.** They have not taught the people in such a manner as promoted spiritual growth; They have glossed sin by attributed immorality to genetic, physiological, and habitual causes. They have not distributed cool and refreshing waters from the depths of the wells of salvation. They have dabbled in culture, strode through the domestic chamber, and feigned real interest in the political climate. **They have neglected the proclamation and exposition of the Gospel in favor of dealing with**

It is thoroughly wrong to have a religious environment in which a twelve-year old can be raised without being conversant with the things of God – as the Master was when He was twelve

or master or servant, so the same spiritual nourishment sustains *“all the flock.”* The only difference is in the amount that is consumed, not in the substance of the spiritual nourishment itself.

It is thoroughly wrong to have a religious environment in which a twelve-year old can be raised without being conversant with the things of God – as the Master was when He was twelve (Lk 2:40-49). No person is capable of justifying an approach to religion that does not permit a child to become *“wise unto salvation,”* as did Timothy (2 Tim 3:15). How can any approach to spiritual culture be right that does not allow for young Samuel and old Eli to be together in the service of the Lord? (1 Sam 2:18-21). I have rarely seen a so-called “church”

that have been given to *“all the flock.”* **By centering on certain people groups, they are neglecting the whole body.** Men who pioneer these views have carved out a convenient career for themselves, but the flock of God has suffered because of what they are doing – notwithstanding their pretentious claims.

Foreshadowed in the False Shepherds of Israel

The damaging effects of false shepherds is confirmed in the nation of Israel. Their defection from the Lord and moral deficiencies are traced to their own prophets and teachers. As it is written, *“My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from*

contemporary issues. They have allowed the world to set the tone and agenda of the church by adopting its passing fads and interests. In so doing, they have produced an environment tailored for opportunists and those who seek to exploit the people of God for personal advantage. They have opened the door for those to whom the door is closed by Christ Himself. They warble like a lovely song-bird that appeals to the people. As the prophet Ezekiel said, *“And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not”* (Ezek 33:32). The people clap and chant when they hear about Jesus coming to gather a glorious church – but they avoid the things that cause the glory. When the religious orators tell them what they ought to be, then add that they themselves are among those who come short of the aim, the people shout and cheer, as though there was some kind of merit in intellectually assenting to the truth, while failing to live it out.

All of this is evidence of that what is required of spiritual leaders is being ignored: *“take heed to all the flock.”* Is there anyone of sound mind who imagines that God Almighty will ignore such insolence among those who claim to represent Him? When has the Lord ever said anything that was of no relevance, or made a requirement that He did not intend for men to fulfill?

THE HOLY SPIRIT MADE YOU OVERSEERS

“ . . . over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers . . . ” Other versions read, *“the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,”* ^{NASB} *“made you bishops,”* ^{ASV} *“given into your care,”* ^{BBE} *“appointed you overseers,”* ^{NAB} *“made you the guardians,”* ^{NJB} *“appointed you as elders,”* ^{NLT} *“holding you responsible as overseers,”* ^{LIVING} *“to guard this flock,”* ^{IE} *“to take the oversight for Him,”* ^{WEYMOUTH}

and *“has appointed you bishops and guardians.”* ^{AMPLIFIED}

In addition to their revealed responsibility, Paul tells the elders of the source of their office. These were not men elected by the people, but positioned by the Holy Spirit of God. No person who cannot be so described can possibly be an elder – whatever else may be said of him. Further, the Holy Spirit did not position them so they could **gradually**

By its very nature, this office cannot be filled by the consensus of the people. They are the ones who require care, and how can such people have the determining word concerning who cares for them? The only circumstance under which their input is valid is if they are hungry and thirsty for righteousness

become overseers, that is what they were when He duly endowed them. He is the administrator of the spiritual gifts, of which the elders, or *“pastors and teachers,”* are one (Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:4,7-11,28).

The word *“overseers”* is translated from the Greek word ἐπισκόπους. The lexical meaning of this word is, “an overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, *any curator, guardian, or superintendent . . . guardian of souls, one who watches over their welfare*” ^{THAYER/LOUW-NIDA}

The means by which this guidance and care are carried out is specified in the next clause. Caring for the flock is the primary matter here – seeing to it that they are properly prepared to face the Lord, as compared to them carrying out the will of the overseer. **Such a person is to see to it that the “all the flock” measures up to Divine expectations,** for if that does not happen, their own future becomes rather gloomy.

By its very nature, this office cannot be filled by the consensus of the

people. They are the ones who require care, and how can such people have the determining word concerning who cares for them? The only circumstance under which their input is valid is if they are hungry and thirsty for righteousness (Matt 5:6), and are actually seeking for honor, glory, and immortality (Rom 2:7). **In such a case, they have a right to demand that their leaders provide the nourishment for which their renewed spirits long.** However, the

choice of who this will be is made by the Holy Spirit. He, and He alone, can *make* a person an overseer, equipping him with what is necessary for that work. **No one should be so naive as to think that the Spirit underwrites the decisions of men.** It is men who are obligated to discern the choices made by the Spirit. This is an example of the Lord placing each member in the body *“as it hath pleased Him”* (1 Cor 12:18).

It also ought to be noted that the care of “all the flock” requires some discernment of what God has purposed for His people. Caring for the flock has to do with them receiving what God has provided, and growing up into the kind of people He describes as His objective. This objective is not defined by world societies and purported experts. If God has not revealed a specific thing to be His objective, it cannot be presented as though He had. No matter what kind of arguments and proofs are presented to justify such a presentation, it simply cannot be true, and it is certainly not to be received as though it was.

FEED THE CHURCH OF GOD!

^{28b} *“ . . . to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased*

with His own blood.”

It is at this point that the manner in which care is administered to

the flock is defined. Let it be clear, it is not by resolving their personal issues, as though they themselves had no access to God – much less, as though they did not have that access “with confidence” (Eph 3:12). **Making business decisions, giving personal advice to those with personal and domestic problems, and the likes, is not an appropriate description of caring for the flock.** This is not a matter of philosophy, but of revelation. God has spoken directly to this issue, and any contradicting answer is simply not allowable, and therefore ought not to be spoken or heard.

TO FEED THE CHURCH OF GOD
 “. . . to feed the church of God . . .”

⇨ “Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock” (Ezek 34:3).

⇨ The shepherds “fed themselves and fed not My flock” (Ezek 34:8).

The care of the Lord’s sheep is summarized in feeding them, for if that is not accomplished, nothing else really matters. In the case of the false shepherds, they took advantage of the flock for their own good, but gave them nothing of substance to eat.

The role of feeding in the matter of caring and shepherding the flock of God

of God” (Heb 13:7a).

⇨ Their “faith” is to be followed (13:7b).

⇨ The outcome of their life of faith is to be favorably considered, and is more specifically defined as “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever” (13:7c).

⇨ They watch for the souls of the people as those who will give an account for their condition (13:17).

Peter fortifies Paul’s words in his admonition to elders. “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:1-3).

The role of elders in the body of Christ is not merely to see to it that the flock is fed, doing it, so to speak, by proxy by hiring someone to do that work. They are to “feed the church of God” themselves, delivering the Word of God to them, and caring for them. **How can a person who is not competent to teach determine who does meet that qualification?** Such a thought is nothing more than an expression of absurdity. That is like saying a man who has never practiced carpentry can be proficient in detecting who really is expert in that craft.

The Nature of Eternal Life Demands This Kind of Ministry

“FEED My lambs . . . FEED my sheep . . . FEED My sheep” (John 21:15-17). “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to FEED the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). “FEED the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind” (1 Pet 5:2).

In his High Priestly prayer to the

The role of feeding in the matter of caring and shepherding the flock of God is also seen in the Psalmist’s description of the Lord being His Shepherd. This is found in the 23rd Psalm.

Other versions read, “to shepherd,”^{NKJV} “to care for,”^{NRSV} “give food to,”^{BBE} “to rule,”^{DOUAY} “tend,”^{NAB} “feed and shepherd,”^{NLT} and shepherd (tend and feed and guide).^{AMPLIFIED}

What does it mean to “feed the church of God.” Most of the standard versions read “feed.” Some read “shepherd,” and others “tend.” There are even some that translate the word “rule.” Does anyone really imagine that this is a general word, leaving the whole matter of its meaning to human opinion?

First, God spoke concerning this activity to Israel when He addressed the matter of false shepherds – those who had inserted themselves into the office. When speaking of their failure He stated it in this way.

⇨ He chided them, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?” (Ezek 34:2).

is also seen in the Psalmist’s description of the Lord being His Shepherd. This is found in the 23rd Psalm.

⇨ Would not “want,” or be without needed resources (23:1).

⇨ Lie down in green pastures (23:2a).

⇨ Lead beside still waters (23:2b).

⇨ Restoreth my soul (23:3a).

⇨ Lead in the paths of righteousness (23:3b).

⇨ Prepare a table before me (23:5a).

⇨ My cup runneth over (23:5b).

These, then, are the proper definitions of a shepherd. Such a one is charged with the feeding, nourishment, and protection of the people of God.

The Lord further defines what this means in the book of Hebrews. There He refers to those who care for the flock.

⇨ They have “spoken to you the word

Father on the eve of His betrayal, Jesus defined the purpose of God, and clearly stated His own role in that objective. *“These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee: As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, THAT HE SHOULD GIVE ETERNAL LIFE to as many as thou hast given Him”* (John 17:1-2).

Here the ultimate matter was the glorification of God Himself. This intended glory would be accomplished through the glorification and consequent ministry of Jesus Himself. **The appointed means through which this would be accomplished was Jesus Christ giving eternal life to those whom the Father had given to Him.**

Although it was certainly involved, the straightening out of the people was not the aim. Delivering them from uncomely habits and tendencies would not fulfill the objective, although that fruit would be found within the real purpose. God did not send Jesus into the world to build successful marriages, or to resolve marital issues. He did not send Him to guarantee His people would have a lot of things belonging to the world, from which Jesus would deliver them (Gal 1:4). THE GIVING OF ETERNAL LIFE WAS THE POINT, and if that was not accomplished, what God intended would not be achieved, and Jesus would be proved disobedient in the whole process. This is precisely why Jesus prayed with such a sense of urgency.

The modern church has managed to hide this appointed agenda from the people. By becoming immersed in the temporal lives of individuals, the attention has been turned from eternity to time, and from heaven to earth. Oh, it all sounds very intelligent, and even has a tone of spirituality about it. But it is off-center, and is failing to prepare the people for two appointments they cannot avoid – death and judgment (Heb 9:27). Eternal life IS the issue. That is what Jesus came to give, and the matter cannot be ignored with impunity. No person is justified in being turned aside to the personal lives of people, at the expense of them coming short of eternal life.

We are not left to speculate about the meaning of *“eternal life.”* Jesus Himself defined it – not to men, but to God the Father. *“And THIS is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent”* (John 17:3). There are two sides to eternal life, and neither of them has to do with life in this world. The first is knowing God, and the second is knowing Jesus Christ, His Son. Apart from these, there is no eternal life.

Knowing God and His Son whom He has sent, involves acquaintance with God, or familiarity with both Him and His Son (Job 22:21). It involves being able to understand His Word, and being inclined to His will. It includes having the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). There is also the matter of having fellowship with Christ – a fellowship into which we have been called (1 Cor 1:9). It also includes knowing the *“good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God”* (Rom 12:2), having His nature

judgment. None of these things are related to intuition, habit, or mindless routine. They all involve thought, discernment, and comprehension.

Feeding the church of God has to do with such things, because it immediately relates to the possession of eternal life. When the people of God are fed, they become spiritually intelligent. It ought to be clear that the agenda of preachers, teachers, prophets, and elders, cannot differ from, or compete with, the appointed objective of Jesus. Yet, when I peruse the religious landscape, I see all manner of agendas that are in sharp conflict with what Jesus is revealed to be doing, rather than in strict harmony with it.

WHICH HE HATH PURCHASED

“... which He hath purchased with His own blood.” Other versions read, *“bought with His own blood,”* ^{NIV} *“obtained with the blood of His own Son,”*

Knowing God and His Son whom He has sent, involves acquaintance with God, or familiarity with both Him and His Son (Job 22:21). It involves being able to understand His Word, and being inclined to His will. It includes having the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). There is also the matter of having fellowship with Christ – a fellowship into which we have been called.

(Heb 3:14; 2 Pet 1:4), and becoming pure as Jesus is pure (1 John 3:3). Those who know God and His Son *“walk in the light as He is in the light”* (1 John 1:7). While others are confused about God and Christ, those who are given eternal life possess *“the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ”* (Col 2:2).

It is precisely this circumstance that requires that the flock of God be fed, nourished, and built up in the most holy faith. Familiarity with God cannot be realized intuitively, or through the realization of worldly abundance. It is something that is accomplished within the domain of cognition, knowledge, or understanding. It also includes the ideas of awareness and

^{NRSV} *“for which He gave His blood,”* ^{BBE} *“which He won for Himself at the cost of His own Son’s blood,”* ^{CJB} *“purchased with the blood of His own,”* ^{DARBY} *“acquired with His own blood,”* ^{GWN} *“He obtained for Himself [buying it and saving it for Himself] with His own blood,”* ^{AMPLIFIED} and *“God himself thought they were worth dying for.”* ^{MESSAGE}

This expression – *“His own blood”* – has provoked a variety of responses. Since the antecedent to the verse is *“the church of God,”* the word *“His”* obviously refers to God. The difficulty is that *“God is not a man,”* and hence has no *“blood.”* Some have actually translated it *“the blood of God,”* which, within a certain framework of thought, does not make sense. Some have addressed the dilemma by translating the

verse, “*the blood of His own Son,*” BBE/NET/NJB/CEV “*His own son’s blood,*” CJB and “*the blood of His Son.*” GNB The difficulty with this interpretation is that this is not how the text reads, either in the original or the English.

However, the difficulty is easily resolved if we take the word “God” to refer to Christ Jesus Himself. This should not be a strange view to anyone, for the Father Himself refers to the Son as “*God.*” As it is written, “*And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O GOD, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom*”(Heb 1:6-8). Again, when Thomas confronted the risen Christ, and was challenged, “*Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into*

my side: and be not faithless, but believing,” he responded, “*My Lord and MY GOD*” (John 20:27-28) – and was not rebuked for doing so. Again, when speaking of the revelation of Christ at His second coming, Paul ascribes to Him the attributes that belong to God. “*Which in His times He shall show, who IS the blessed and ONLY POTENTATE, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; WHO ONLY HATH IMMORTALITY, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen*” (1 Tim 6:15-16). In addition to this, the Father and the Son are “*One*” – as Jesus said in His prayer, “*We are one*” (John 17:22).

THE POINT OF THE TEXT

The point of this text is not a technical argument, but an indisputable fact. The church – “*all of flock*” – belongs to God, not men. It has been purchased as His possession through Christ, and He has given the church to Christ as His

bride-to-be. In view of that circumstance, the work of the elders is **not** to make sure the traditions that distinguish them as a group are maintained. Their role is **not** to ensure that the church contributes to the community in which it is located, or that it participates in key events hosted by that community. It is not that any of these things are wrong of themselves. However, that is not why elders have been placed in the body. They are there to take heed unto themselves and to “*all the flock.*” **Their primary activity is to “feed the church of God,” ensuring that they grow up into Christ in all things, and are no longer children, tossed too and fro by every wind of doctrine** (Eph 4:14-15). The aim is for every member of the body to be a participant when the body is assembled together – for an unassembled body has no real value. The fact that this kind of eldership is not common does not change this requirement. It still exists, and is to be heeded by the people of God. Ignorance of this cannot be justified.

AFTER MY DEPARTING

“²⁹ **For I know this, that after my DEPARTING shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.**” This is one of the most sobering statements concerning the

AFTER MY DEPARTING

“*For I know this, that after my DEPARTING . . .*” Other versions read, “*after my departure,*” NKJV “*after I leave,*” NIV and “*after I have gone.*” NRSV

secondary reference to that, although the details of that occasion were apparently not made known to him at that time. However, here he is specifically referring to the future, and what would take place in his absence.

Is it possible for a single man to make a significant difference in the spiritual condition of people? Indeed it is! Of old time, the preservation of wayward Israel was traceable to a single man – Moses. Israel took the whole land of Canaan under the leadership of a single man – Joshua.

Is it possible for a single man to make a significant difference in the spiritual condition of people? Indeed it is! Of old time, the preservation of wayward Israel was traceable to a single man – Moses (Ex 32:12-14, 30-32). Israel took the whole land of Canaan under the leadership of a single man – Joshua (Josh 1:23). The entire city of Samaria believed because of the preaching of one man – Philip (Acts 8:12). One man – Apollos – “*helped them much which had believed through grace*” (Acts 18:27).

church itself that is found in Scripture. Nothing – absolutely nothing – about the passage is in anyway tolerant or accommodating. It constitutes a solemn warning of things that had not yet occurred – things for which the elders must prepare themselves.

Paul is not speaking directly of his death, but of his departure for Jerusalem, and of the fact that these elders from Ephesus would never see him again. The events that follow will eventually lead to his martyrdom, and I do not doubt that his words have a

Indeed, one person can make a difference! Spiritually insightful men are like a barrier that guards the flock. Where such men are absent, there is a certain vulnerability

that can scarcely be imagined. This very text substantiates that this is the case.

GRIEVOUS WOLVES SHALL ENTER

“... shall grievous wolves enter in among you . . .” Other versions read, “savage wolves,”^{NKJV} “fierce wolves,”^{RSV} “evil wolves,”^{BBE} “ravaging wolves,”^{DOUAY} “vicious wolves,”^{NLT} “cruel wolves,”^{WEYMOUTH} and “ferocious wolves.”^{AMPLIFIED}

This is extraordinarily strong language. **The reason for its strength is that the nature of these spiritual intruders are not at all apparent.** Jesus said such men were “inwardly ravaging wolves,” but appeared “in sheep’s clothing” (Matt 7:15). The scribes and Pharisees were such men, that “outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matt 23:28). Their appearance was meticulously clean. As Jesus said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess” (Matt 23:25).

Those who evaluate such men from an apparent point of view may be impressed by their credentials, the seeming success of their ministry, and their polished manner and acquaintance with the things valued by the world. But all of that is nothing more than a facade, designed to attract those who lack “wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). **Those who naively receive such people are the worst for it.** They will be robbed of such resources as they have, few though they may be.

The word “grievous,” as used in this text, means, “burdensome . . . violent, cruel, unsparing,”^{THAYER} “fierce,”^{FRIEBERG} those who “fix heavy loads that are hard to carry and tie them on people’s backs,”^{LOUW-NIDA} and “fierce, savage.”^{GINGRICH}

This is a spiritual assessment of these “wolves,” who are devouring in nature. **Under their leadership the sheep are not fed, and consequently do not grow up into Christ.** Rather, they are moved to adopt an approach that is burdensome to the sensitive of heart. These men are like rabid dogs who leave the people incapacitated, so that they cannot do the will of the Lord “from the

heart” (Eph 6:6), even though they are provided with many procedures, tips, and outlines for acceptable conduct. What they advocate is not doable because these men require neither faith nor whole-heartedness. Their’s is a religion of procedure so they can capitalize on it. They allow for failure, and even teach

23:19).

⇒ They omit the weightier matters (Matt 23:23).

⇒ They appear beautiful, but are full of all manner of uncleanness (Matt 23:27).

What they advocate is not doable because these men require neither faith nor whole-heartedness. Their’s is a religion of procedure so they can capitalize on it. They allow for failure, and even teach men to expect a long recovery period, and continuous reliance upon their self-conceived routines.

men to expect a long recovery period, and continuous reliance upon their self-conceived routines.

⇒ They are a generation of vipers (Matt 23:32).

⇒ They take away the key of knowledge (Lk 11:52).

JESUS SPEAKS OF FALSE TEACHERS

⇒ Inwardly they are ravaging wolves (Matt 7:15).

⇒ There shall rise false Christs (Matt 24:24).

⇒ They are hypocrites (Matt 15:7).

⇒ They shall show great signs and wonders so powerful that, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect (Matt 24:24b).

⇒ They are blind leaders (Matt 15:14).

⇒ They bind heavy burdens on the people (Matt 23:4).

THE APOSTLES DOCTRINE CONCERNING FALSE TEACHERS

⇒ All their works are done to be seen of men (Matt 23:5).

⇒ They are grievous, or savage wolves (Acts 20:29a)

⇒ They love to occupy the significant places, and to be greeted in public (Matt 23:6-7).

⇒ They will not spare the flock, have no mercy upon them,^{MRD} and do them damage^{BBE} (Acts 20:29b).

⇒ The shut up the kingdom of God against men (Matt 23:13).

⇒ They will speak perverse things (Acts 20:30a).

⇒ They devour widows houses (Matt 23:14).

⇒ They will draw away disciples from Christ to themselves (Acts 20:30b).

⇒ They are pretentious in their prayers (Matt 23:14).

⇒ They cause divisions and offences (Rom 16:17).

⇒ They work diligently to convert people, then make them a child of hell (Matt 23:15).

⇒ They serve not our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 16:18).

⇒ They are “fools and blind” (Matt

16:18).

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| ⇒ They deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom 16:18). | ⇒ They are blasphemers (1 Tim 1:20). | ⇒ <i>made to be taken and destroyed</i> " (2 Pet 2:12a). |
| ⇒ They defile the temple of God (1 Cor 3:14-16). | ⇒ They give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Tim 4:1). | ⇒ They speak evil of things they do not understand (2 Pet 2:12b). |
| ⇒ They preach another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel (2 Cor 11:4). | ⇒ They speak <i>"lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron"</i> (1 Tim 4:2). | ⇒ They have eyes full of adultery and cannot cease from sin (2 Pet 2:14a). |
| ⇒ They are false apostles and deceitful workers (2 Cor 11:13). | ⇒ They <i>"teach otherwise,"</i> not submitting to <i>"wholesome words"</i> (1 Tim 6:3). | ⇒ Their heart is exercised in covetousness (2 Pet 2:14b). |
| ⇒ They are Satan's ministers <i>"transformed as ministers of righteousness"</i> (2 Cor 11:15a). | ⇒ They are <i>"proud, knowing nothing"</i> (1 Tim 6:4). | ⇒ They are <i>"cursed children"</i> (2 Pet 2:14c). |
| ⇒ Their end is destruction (2 Cor 11:15b). | ⇒ They are <i>"men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth"</i> (1 Tim 6:5). | ⇒ They have forsaken the right way (2 Pet 15). |
| ⇒ They are <i>"fools"</i> (2 Cor 11:19). | ⇒ Their word eats as a consuming cancer (2 Tim 2:16-17). | ⇒ They are <i>"wells without water"</i> (2 Pet 2:17a). |
| ⇒ They <i>"bewitch"</i> the people (Gal 3:1). | ⇒ They have erred from the truth (2 Tim 2:18). | ⇒ They are <i>"clouds that are carried with a tempest"</i> (2 Pet 2:17b). |
| ⇒ They zealously affect the people, but not well (Gal 4:17). | ⇒ They are <i>"ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"</i> (2 Tim 3:5). | ⇒ They speak with <i>"great swelling words of vanity"</i> (2 Pet 2:18a). |
| ⇒ They <i>"hinder"</i> the people (Gal 5:7). | ⇒ They are <i>"unruly and vain talkers"</i> (Tit 1:10). | ⇒ They allure through <i>"the lusts of the flesh"</i> (2 Pet 2:18b). |
| ⇒ They are <i>"dogs"</i> (Phil 3:2a). | ⇒ They <i>"subvert whole houses"</i> (Tit 1:11). | ⇒ They promise liberty, yet themselves are <i>"the servants of corruption"</i> (2 Pet 2:19). |
| ⇒ They are <i>"evil workers"</i> (Phil 3:2b). | ⇒ They have <i>"turned from the truth"</i> | ⇒ They <i>"wrest"</i> the Scriptures because they are <i>"unlearned and unstable"</i> (2 Pet 3:16). |
| ⇒ They <i>"beguile"</i> the people with <i>"enticing words"</i> (Col 2:4). | | |

They perpetrate "the traditions of men" and the rudimentary knowledge of the world

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| ⇒ They <i>"spoil"</i> the people with <i>"philosophy and vain deceit"</i> (Col 2:8). | (Tit 1:14). | ⇒ They <i>"seduce"</i> the people (1 John 2:26). |
| ⇒ They perpetrate <i>"the traditions of men"</i> and the rudimentary knowledge of the world (Col 2:8b). | ⇒ They bring in <i>"damnable heresies"</i> (2 Pet 2:1). | ⇒ They are <i>"ungodly men"</i> who are <i>"ordained"</i> unto condemnation (Jude 1:4a). |
| ⇒ They are <i>"not holding the Head"</i> (Col 2:19). | ⇒ They set <i>"pernicious ways"</i> before the people (2 Pet 2:2). | ⇒ They are <i>"ungodly men"</i> (Jude 1:4b). |
| ⇒ They desire to be teachers of the law, yet understand <i>"neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm"</i> (1 Tim 1:7). | ⇒ Through covetousness, they <i>"make merchandise"</i> of the people (2 Pet 2:3). | ⇒ They <i>"turn the grace of God into lasciviousness"</i> (Jude 1:4c). |
| | ⇒ They <i>"walk after the flesh"</i> (2 Pet 2:10). | ⇒ They have <i>"gone the way of Cain"</i> (Jude 1:11a). |
| | ⇒ They are <i>"as natural brute beasts,"</i> | ⇒ They have ran <i>"greedily after the way of Balaam"</i> (Jude 1:11b). |
| | | ⇒ They are <i>"spots"</i> in feasts of charity (Jude 1:12a). |
| | | ⇒ They <i>"feed themselves without fear"</i> |

(Jude 1:12b).

- ⇒ They are “clouds that are without water, carried about of winds” (Jude 1:12c).
- ⇒ They are trees whose fruit withers (Jude 1:12d).
- ⇒ They are trees “without fruit” (Jude 1:12e).
- ⇒ They are trees that are “twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (Jude 1:12f).
- ⇒ They are “raging waves of the sea, foaming out their shame” (Jude 1:13a).
- ⇒ They are “wandering stars, to whom is reserved the darkness forever” (Jude 1:13b).
- ⇒ Their mouth “speaks great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage” (Jude 1:18).

There are eighty-four statements made concerning false prophets. None of them are favorable. None of them are hopeful. All of them are in the context of warning. All of them are certain.

Observation

If this could happen after the consistent, faithful, and thorough ministry of Paul, **what ought we to expect from weak and insipid ministries that do not ground people in the faith, or mature them in Christ Jesus?** How easily can those with a weak faith, who are unlearned and ignorant in the ways of the Lord, be deceived?

The salvation of God equips men with a new heart and spirit, so that, under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit, they can “know all things” (1 John 2:20). They can detect aberrant teaching and abide in Christ (1 John 2:27). There is no valid reason for those in Christ being deceived, or failing to appropriate the knowledge of the truth.

NOT SPARING THE FLOCK

“ . . . not sparing the flock.”

Other versions read, “doing damage to the flock,”^{BBE} “will have no mercy on the flock,”^{MRD} “trying to destroy the flock,”^{IE} and “without mercy for the flock.”^{PHILLIPS}

Examples of “not sparing the flock” are seen in the leaders of Israel during former times. The language through which such leaders were reprimanded is most arresting. “Woe be unto the pastors that **destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!** saith the LORD. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed My people; **Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them:** behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD” (Jer 23:1-2).

Ezekiel is even more harsh in his inspired denunciation of the shepherds of Israel. “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that **do feed themselves!** should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, **ye kill them that are fed:** but ye feed not the flock. **The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye**

or seek after them. Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely because **My flock became a prey, and My flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock;** Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, **I am against the shepherds;** and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them” (Ezek 34:2-10).

Zechariah said, “Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened” (Zech 11:17).

Thus, in these few examples of “not sparing” the flock of God, the following has been mentioned.

- ⇒ They destroyed and scattered the sheep of God’s pasture.

If this could happen after the consistent, faithful, and thorough ministry of Paul, what ought we to expect from weak and insipid ministries that do not ground people in the faith, or mature them in Christ Jesus? How easily can those with a weak faith, who are unlearned and ignorant in the ways of the Lord, be deceived?

healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because **there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search**

- ⇒ They drive them away.
- ⇒ They did not visit them.
- ⇒ They fed themselves.
- ⇒ They killed them that were fed.
- ⇒ They did not feed the flock.
- ⇒ They did not strengthen the diseased.
- ⇒ They did not heal the sick.

- ⇒ They did not bind up the broken.
- ⇒ They did not bring again those who were driven away.
- ⇒ They did not seek those who were lost.
- ⇒ They ruled the sheep with force and cruelty.
- ⇒ The people were left without a shepherd.
- ⇒ They became prey to predators.
- ⇒ They caused the sheep to wander.
- ⇒ The sheep were scattered throughout the earth.

the devices of the wicked one. It is true that during their initial infancy in Christ, the Good Shepherd often carries them, and gently leads them (Isa 40:11), warding off the preying wolves that are prowling in their vicinity. However, there are also duly placed under-shepherds, whose duty is to oversee and feed the flock of God so they are no longer vulnerable to the heralds of corrupt teaching. The protection of the sheep is found within the framework of *“wisdom and spiritual understanding”* (Col 1:9). These are facilitated by feeding them *“the good knowledge of the Lord”* (2 Chron 30:22).

In the text before us, a warning is given concerning those who do damage to the sheep by leaving them in worse shape than they were when God first delivered them from the power of

- ⇒ 03-Exhorting
- ⇒ 04-Ruling
- ⇒ 05-Showing mercy
- ⇒ **1 CORINTHIANS 12:6-10**
 - ⇒ 06-The word of wisdom
 - ⇒ 07-The word of knowledge
 - ⇒ 08-Faith
 - ⇒ 09-Gifts of healing
 - ⇒ 10-Working of miracles
 - ⇒ Prophecy (duplicate)
 - ⇒ 11-Discerning of spirits
 - ⇒ 12-Diversity of tongues (languages)
 - ⇒ 13- Interpretation of tongues
- ⇒ **1 CORINTHIANS 12:28**
 - ⇒ 14-Apostles
 - ⇒ Prophets (duplicate)
 - ⇒ 15-Teachers
 - ⇒ Miracles (duplicate)
 - ⇒ Gifts of healing (duplicate)
 - ⇒ 16-Helps
 - ⇒ 17-Governments
 - ⇒ Diversities of tongues (duplicate)

Some few souls rightly lament the present scattering of the people of God, and the grievous divisions that exist among them. However, we must remember that men have caused these circumstances. Their contrived doctrines have been the instruments of scattering, starving, and making the people vulnerable to the devices of the wicked ones.

Some few souls rightly lament the present scattering of the people of God, and the grievous divisions that exist among them. **However, we must remember that men have caused these circumstances.** Their contrived doctrines have been the instruments of scattering, starving, and making the people vulnerable to the devices of the wicked ones. It is precisely what has been taught that has caused the condition. Rather than nourishing the sheep, and enabling them to be strong, their word had eaten like a malignant cancer, wreaking havoc among those who wear the name of the Lord. It really is not an innocent or tolerable circumstance!

REMEMBER!

Remember, we are speaking of *“The flock of God”* (1 Pet 5:2), or *“God’s heritage”* (1 Pet 5:3). While that may seem to suggest such people are beyond the place of harm, this is not all the case. **As long as the people of God are immature, they are vulnerable to**

darkness, and translated them into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col 1:13). Rather than facilitating their growth *“up into Christ in all things”* (Eph 4:15), they major in life in the very world from which Jesus has delivered them (Gal 1:4). However noble their intentions may appear, they do not mesh with the revealed ministries that have been placed within the church.

The Tragedy of Religious Exploitation

As unpopular as it may be to affirm, **God has not appointed problem-solvers in the body of Christ.** ALL of the spiritual gifts have to do with equipping the saints to grow up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:11-16). Here are some of the gifts God has placed within the church, which is the body of Christ.

- ⇒ **ROMANS 12:3-8**
 - ⇒ 01-Prophecy
 - ⇒ 02-Ministry (service)

- ⇒ **EPHESIANS 4:11-16**
 - ⇒ Apostles (Duplicate)
 - ⇒ Prophets (duplicate)
 - ⇒ 18- Evangelists
 - ⇒ 19-Pastors/Teachers
- ⇒ **1 PETER 4:10-11**
 - ⇒ 20- Speaking
 - ⇒ Minister (serve)-duplicate

While some of these gifts may be construed to be related to problem solving and counseling (word of wisdom, word of knowledge, teachers), none are clearly affirmed to be for that purpose. **That kind of activity is actually fulfilled by personal identity: fellowship with Christ** (1 Cor 1:9), **living by faith** (Heb 10:38), **walking in the Spirit** (Gal 5:16,25), and **drawing near to God to obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need** (Heb 4:16).

The intention of the gifts is clearly stated in Ephesians 4:11-16.

- ⇒ For the perfecting of the saints.
- ⇒ For the work of the ministry.
- ⇒ For the edifying of the body of Christ.

- ⇒ Coming to the unity of the faith.
- ⇒ Coming to the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God.
- ⇒ Collectively coming to be a mature body, with each part effectively projecting their measure of the fulness of Christ.
- ⇒ That we be no more children, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.
- ⇒ That, speaking the truth in love, the saints may grow up into Christ in all things.
- ⇒ That the body of Christ maybe compacted together by he effective ministration of every part.
- ⇒ That the body may increase in the good work of edifying itself in love.

Those professed ministers, preachers, and teachers who are not contributing to the realization of these objectives are doing harm to the people of God – “not sparing the flock.”

The truth of the matter is that too many religious men are capitalizing on the weaknesses of the people professing allegiance to Christ Jesus. **The very existence of their profession suggests that men are not complete in Christ** (Col 2:10). For such men, the domain of religion offers an opportunity for a career, a business, or some work that is closer to this world than the world to come – which is the subject of apostolic exposition (Heb 2:5). This is not at all an innocent situation. **When due care is not given to the flock of God, the future becomes very gloomy.**

These days there is a marked tendency to neglect the people of God. Rather than proving a haven for the people of God, there is actually a focused effort on bringing the world into the church. It has even become popular to refer to churches “without walls,” as though that reflected a heavenly preference for the church. **As noble as it is to have a genuine heart for the conversion of sinners, when the body of Christ assembles, it is not to reach the lost, but to remember Jesus and edify one another** (1 Cor 11:17-20; 14:23,26; Col 3:16; 1 Thess 5:11; Heb 10:24-25).

The influence of the men who teach “perverse” things leads the people away from the emphasis established by God. Therefore, it causes the sheep to become vulnerable to the devices of Satan.

THE ENVIRONMENT FROM WHICH THE PERVERSE SPEAKERS COME

“³⁰ Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”

Paul now warns the elders from Ephesus of impending corruption that would rise in the church. He identifies the source of the corruption, its nature, and the intent that drives it.

OF YOUR OWN SELVES

“Also of your own selves shall men arise . . .” Other versions read: “from among yourselves,”^{NKJV} “even from your own number,”^{NIV} “Some even from your own group,”^{NRSV} “from your own ranks,”^{NJB} and “Even some of you.”^{NLT}

The most dangerous enemies of the church have risen from its own environment! Danger comes from defectors, not mere intruders. Ishmael was in the house with Isaac. Esau was in the womb and the home with Jacob. Joseph’s brothers, who were so aligned against him, were raised in the same house as himself. Judas, noted for his betrayal of the Lord and for being under the dominance of Satan, was

“numbered with” the twelve apostles, partaking of their unique ministry (Acts 1:17). John spoke of some false prophets who “went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us” (1 John 2:19).

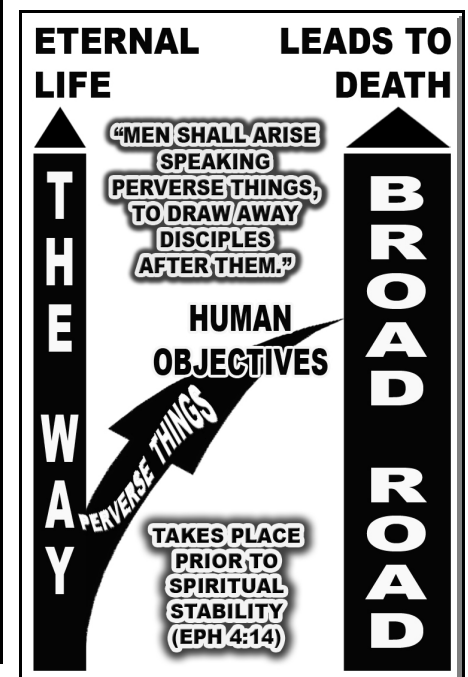
Thus, Paul warns these “elders” that some of their own number would break away from the Lord and the Divine agenda, and would use their position to promote their own cause. In order to do this, they will have to depart from “the apostles doctrine” (Acts 2:42), and develop a unique message that serves their own corrupt interests.

SPEAKING PERVERSE THINGS

“. . . speaking perverse things. . .” Other versions read, “distort the truth,”^{NIV} “distorting the truth,”^{NRSV} “give wrong teaching,”^{BBE} “speaking twisted things,”^{ESV} “perverting the truth,”^{NAB} and “with a travesty of the truth.”^{NJB}

The words “perverse things” are

translated from the single Greek work *διεστραμμένα*, which means “to distort, turn aside . . . to turn aside from the right path, to pervert, corrupt,”^{THAYER} “become misshapen; figuratively pervert, corrupt, distort; passive, of the truth be perverted, be distorted,”^{FRIBERG} “pervert, distort



(crooked, wrong); divert, turn away; mislead, lead astray," ^{UBS} and "to cause someone to believe something that is quite different . 'to cause someone to turn away from a belief, to mislead." ^{LOUW-NIDA}

"Perverse things" are teachings that take men off the narrow way that leads men to life. They are not necessarily perverse in appearance. They may not discard Scriptures, but actually profess to rely upon them. However, they are like a doctrinal caricature that accents the wrong thing, bringing distortion to the understanding.



There is an approach to Scripture that places the accent on the wrong thing. From the most concentrated perspective, the accent of Scripture is God Himself. Technically, the Word of God is the revelation of Himself, His purpose, and His will. Insofar as the implementation of that will, or purpose, is concerned, Jesus Christ is the Subject, for the Scriptures testify, or bear witness, to Him (John 5:39; Rev 19:10). Jesus is presented within the context of God's "eternal purpose" (Eph 3:11), apart from which He has no relevance to mankind. **His birth, life, ministry, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, enthronement, and present rule all relate directly to that purpose.**

"Perverse things" pull men away from that purpose, and thus away from Christ Himself – who relates directly to that purpose. When this diversion takes place, Christ is no longer at the helm of teaching, nor is He its focus. He is thus assigned a secondary role (at the best), which is designed to support what men have presented as the primary objective, doctrines, perspectives, emphases. Now, however, their primary objective reflects nothing more than corrupt human understanding, and tends to accrue to the

ultimate advantage of its perpetrator. Some current doctrinal thrusts that can be properly referred to as "perverse things" include the following. **These all are wrong in the sense of being the emphasis, of thrust, of the teaching.** None of them are wrong of themselves, or are intended to be excluded from sound teaching and doctrine. However, when they become the emphasis, or accentuation of the teaching, Christ is moved from the perceived place of prominence.

- ⇨ **THE CONVERSION OF THE LOST.**
- ⇨ **THE MEANS THROUGH WHICH MEN ARE SAVED.**
- ⇨ **THE OPTIMIZATION OF THE MARRIED STATE.**
- ⇨ **THE PROPER REARING OF THE FAMILY.**
- ⇨ **THE HAPPINESS OF THE INDIVIDUAL.**
- ⇨ **GAINING CONTROL OF ONE'S LIFE.**
- ⇨ **FOLLOWING A PRESCRIBED AND EXACT PATTERN IN WORSHIP.**
- ⇨ **THE PUBLIC PRAISE AND WORSHIP OF GOD.**
- ⇨ **THE REALIZATION OF PERSONAL DESIRES AND AMBITIONS.**
- ⇨ **SUCCESS AND DOMINANCE IN THIS WORLD.**
- ⇨ **THE ATTAINMENT OF HEALTH AND WEALTH.**
- ⇨ **THE RELIEF OF THE POOR AND OPPRESSED.**
- ⇨ **DOCTRINES THAT CENTER IN SUCH THINGS AS THE SABBATH, MEATS AND DRINKS, FASTING, FEAST DAYS, ETC.**

None of these matters directly relate to Christ Himself, His return in glory, or preparation for the day of judgment. **They do not depend upon Christ.** They are not fostered by faith, do not require grace, nor are they represented as being administered by the Holy Spirit. As an **emphasis**, they are primarily related to this world and time. **The aforementioned matters are valid only as they are placed within the context of God, Christ, and the revealed "eternal purpose" of God.**

No revealed spiritual gift or aptitude is said to be related to such things. All specialists in such fields must subscribe to disciplines and approaches developed by men. Each person majoring on such things must determine if this is the proper thing to do.

The truth itself will not induce men to develop a teaching that can be described as "perverse things." **No statement or thrust of Scripture will produce a sectarian – not so much as an isolated syllable!** That circumstance is precisely what requires the development of special doctrines that will promote the cause of the one speaking "perverse things."

TO DRAW AWAY DISCIPLES

" . . . to draw away disciples after them." Other versions read, "to entice the disciples to follow them," ^{NRSV} "turning away the disciples after them," ^{BBE} "in order to drag away the talmidim after themselves," ^{CJB} "to lure the disciples into following them," ^{CSB} "to induce the disciples to follow them," ^{NJB} "to draw a following," ^{NLT}

As I have already stated, the Gospel is not conducive to promote a human cause, or to build a personal following. That undeniable circumstance is the reason for these men delivering unique and flawed dogmas – it is the only way they can increase the number of people following them. For example, who is the person willing to affirm that "the Gospel of Christ" would lead a person to be a Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, or member of the Christian Church? What person would dare to allege that "the apostles' doctrine" would make a person a premillennialist, a charismatic, or a Seventh Day Adventist?

When once a preacher or teacher establishes an agenda of his own, or adopts the agenda of another, it is at once essential to have a unique doctrine that promotes that agenda. This is because God's "doctrine" (Deut 32:2) does not promote priorities developed by men. It is only relevant within the context of His revealed purpose.

The Philosophy of Making Disciples

A word is in order concerning the philosophy of making disciples. Precisely what is the reason for Christ's words, "teach all nations," ^{KJV} or "make disciples of all the nations" ^{NKJV} (Matt 28:19). Is it merely to increase the total number of disciples? Surely it does not require any extraordinary degree of intelligence to see that He is not referring to inflating the numbers of denomination "A" or "B." Is His purpose to get more people to recite the "sinner's prayer"? – which phraseology is not even found in Scripture.

First and foremost, it is the Lord's harvest into which the laborers are sent. Thus Jesus admonished His disciples, "Then saith He unto His disciples, *The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest*" (Matt 9:38). Notice that the harvest was ready – "plenteous," or "great" (Lk 10:2). Elsewhere, Jesus saw a great company from the city of the Samaritans approaching Him, and referred to them as being fields that were "white unto harvest" – like ripened grain (John 4:35). **He was describing a people who had been made ready for the Lord** – someone had planted and sowed, and the time for increase had come. **A great multitude of people who are yet in trespasses and sins do not constitute a field that is white unto harvest.** A multitude of such people existed in Asia, yet the Lord, at one point in time, forbade any attempt to reap there (Acts 16:6). The same was true in the region of Bithynia (Acts 16:7). At that time, the fields were white in Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10). Later, the fields were whitened in Asia, and the Lord sent laborers to reap it (Acts 19:26). Another time, when the fields did not look white in Corinth, Jesus appeared to Paul and informed him that it was time to reap, and that he ought to remain in Corinth, guaranteeing him of safety from the Jews,

who often sought his life (Acts 18:9-11).

The modern church has wasted a lot of time and resources attempting to reap where there was no harvest. It has studied maps, and trends, and statistics – none of which drove the spread of the Gospel and the increase of converts in the first century. Of course, there is no comparison in the results, either. This is largely because of insensitivity to the Lord Himself, and a lack of acquaintance with His manners.

Only God can give the increase, and He does not do it through the imaginations and doctrines of men. Genuine seed must have been planted and authentic watering

deliverance from servitude to sin.

In the salvation of God – the "great salvation" – the revelation of participation is not found in what men do NOT do, or what they are attempting to overcome. It is rather found in their fellowship, or participation, in Christ (1 Cor 1:9; Eph 4:15), and their conformity to His image (Rom 8:19); 2 Cor 3:18). **If men do not have what salvation offers, then it is not possible to confirm that they are saved.** That is why all believers are admonished, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor 13:5). That text confirms that

The modern church has wasted a lot of time and resources attempting to reap where there was no harvest. It has studied maps, and trends, and statistics – none of which drove the spread of the Gospel and the increase of converts in the first century.

must have taken place BEFORE God gives the increase. This is not necessarily related to time.

Further the aim of salvation is not merely to bring a cessation to immorality and enslavement to sin. That is involved, to be sure, but it is not at the core of the purpose. Reconciliation to God, or oneness with Him is the revealed objective (Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18-20; Cool 1:20-21). There is also the matter of being a "partaker of Christ" (Heb 3:14), and being "partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4) – i.e. becoming a new creation (2 Cor 6:17; Eph 2:10), and receiving a new man that is "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:24), being "renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him" (Col 3:10). **When men do not "grow up into Christ in all things" (Eph 4:15), there is no point to the remission of sins or**

every professing believer is either accepted or rejected, in or out, a participant of a non-participant – and none of those conditions is to be assumed.

We do not have to inquire into whether or not such noble and revealed objectives are being served by the church at large. The current condition of the professed church belies any profession of being a new creation. The fruit of current church work does not even suggest that the revealed purpose is even known, much less that men have been consciously joined to the purpose itself. **When men say that God is moving them to do this or that, the results will confirm whether their claim to Divine guidance is correct or not.** I do not believe this perspective is common among professing believers. However, it is the truth. It is ever true, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." (Mat 7:20).

WATCH AND REMEMBER

"³¹ Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."

Paul does not simply declare that false teachers will come, letting the

matter drop with a prophecy. He does not suggest that whatever will be, will be, and therefore the elders from Ephesus should not be surprised when what he declares comes to pass. Men often reason in such a manner, but they are neither holy nor inspired men. **When a period of spiritual corruption is foretold, those who hear the word are to see to it they are not caught in the tide of defection.** They are also to be vigilant so those under their care are not put at a disadvantage by such teachers. As I see things, this kind of posture is glaringly absent in today's "church" culture.

them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with Me" (Matt 26:38,40,41; Mk 14:34,37,38).

The "apostles' doctrine" also includes this word, clearly associating it with alertness, vigilance, and taking heed to matters of a most solemn nature.

- ⇨ **SPIRITUAL STABILITY.** "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1 Cor 16:13).
- ⇨ **BEING ALERT IN PRAYERFULNESS.**

⇨ **READINESS FOR THE APPEARING OF THE LORD.** "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" (Rev 16:15).

The intention of Paul's exhortation is clear. A defection from the truth will take place under the leadership and teaching of some wayward church leaders. **The intention of that defection will be to build an organization around men that will promote their cause.** In order for this to occur, "perverse things" must be taught, for the truth itself cannot be employed for such purposes. The elders from Ephesus were to be alert for this intrusion, remaining in a state of constant readiness, lest it take place while they were spiritually asleep.

Elsewhere Paul refers to this defection from the standpoint of the hearers. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" 2 Tim 4:3). This demand by the hearers is the result of embracing the "perverse things" introduced by the teachers of which Paul was warning the elders. Once the erroneous teaching was introduced, it would rapidly spread through the church, corrupting the thinking of the people. **It is the influence of false teaching that has moved professing Christians to demand froth and flesh-pleasing preaching.**

AND REMEMBER

"... and remember..." Other versions read, "remembering," NASB "having in mind," BBE "keeping in memory," DOUAY "always remember," IE and "be mindful." AMPLIFIED

The word "remember" involves the will, as well as some degree of understanding or discernment. It has to do with recollecting, and to keep in memory constantly, not allowing the matter at hand to slip away from the mind. The thing to be remembered is what Paul had said concerning the coming defection of certain leaders, and the introduction of erroneous teaching that would do damage to the flock of God.

When a period of spiritual corruption is foretold, those who hear the word are to see to it they are not caught in the tide of defection. They are also to be vigilant so those under their care are not put at a disadvantage by such teachers. As I see things, this kind of posture is glaringly absent in today's "church" culture.

THEREFORE WATCH

"Therefore watch . . ." Other versions read, "be on the alert," NASB "be on your guard," NIV "keep watch," BBE "be ye vigilant," NAB "Watch out!" NLT "awake," TNT and "be always alert and on your guard." AMPLIFIED

The word "watch" means, "to give strict attention to, be cautious, active; to take heed lest through remission and indolence some destructive calamity suddenly overtake one," THAYER "to keep awake," UBS "give strict attention to, be cautious, active; to take heed lest through remission and indolence some destructive calamity suddenly overtake one," LOUW-NIDA and "to be or become fully awake, to watch." LEH

The word "watch," as used in this text, is mentioned twenty-three times from Matthew through Revelation. Jesus used the word on two critical occasions.

- ⇨ **REGARDING HIS SECOND COMING.** "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matt 24:42; 25:13; Mk 13:34-37; Lk 12:37-39).
- ⇨ **ASKING HIS DISCIPLES TO JOIN HIM IN PRAYING ON THE EVE OF HIS BETRAYAL.** "Then saith He unto

"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col 4:2).

- ⇨ **ALERTNESS TO THE DANGERS ABOUT US.** "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess 5:6).
- ⇨ **BEING KEENLY AWARE OF THE NATURE AND INTENTIONS OF THE DEVIL.** "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet 5:8).
- ⇨ **BEING AWARE OF OUR CONDITION BEFORE THE LORD.** "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God" (Rev 3:2).
- ⇨ **AVOIDING BEING FOUND IN AN UNACCEPTABLE STATE.** "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" (Rev 3:3).

Jesus told His disciples of this phenomenon. *“And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold”*(Matt 24:11-12). He continued, *“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect”*(Matt 24:24).

⇒ Paul also taught that these false teachers would actually be taught by demons – that their doctrines were spawned, so to speak, in hell. *“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils [demons ^{NKJV}]; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron”*(1 Tim 4:2).

⇒ Peter said they would *“bring in damnable heresies,”* that many would *“follow their pernicious ways,”* and that their teaching would cause men to speak evil of *“the way of truth”*(2 Pet 2:1-2).

⇒ John referred to them *“many antichrists”* who had severed their association with those who spoke the truth (1 John 2:18).

⇒ Jude said they were *“ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ”*(Jude 1:4).

I do not know how a circumstance could be any more serious – unless it be the day of judgment in which these men will stand before God to give an account for their reprehensible manners and doctrines. **The men themselves are not the point, but their contemptible doctrines.** Remember, Peter said they were *“damnable.”* Other versions read, *“destructive,”* ^{NKJV} *“For your destruction,”* ^{BEBE} *“sects of perdition,”* ^{DOUAY} *“disruptive views,”* ^{NJB} *“destructive sects,”* ^{YLT} *“fatal divisions,”* ^{WEYMOUTH} *“harmful lies,”* ^{CEV} and *“perversions of the truth.”* ^{PHILLIPS} **These doctrines would not appear to be so serious – that is why the warnings were issued. If they were very apparent, there would be no need for such exhortations.**

As you can detect from the various versions, there is a marked tendency among modern translators to avoid the obvious harshness of the text. Although the word *“destruction”* is an acceptable technical definition, yet it lacks the potency of the word *“damnation”* – which is an obvious action of God Himself, for no man can *“damn.”* The Greek word from which *“damnable”* is translated is *ἀπόλειαν*. As used here, the lexical meaning of the word is: *“a destroying, utter destruction . . . perishing, ruin . . . the destruction which consists in the loss of eternal life, eternal misery, perdition,”* ^{THAYER} *“(utter) ruin, (complete) loss; as the eternal punishment of the wicked,”* ^{FRIEBERG} *“one bound to be lost or one destined for hell.”* ^{UBS}

Other Scriptural uses of this word are as follows.

⇒ *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the*

⇒ *“And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of **perdition**, but to you of salvation, and that of God”* (Phil 1:28).

⇒ *“Whose end is **destruction**, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things”* (Phil 3:19).

⇒ *“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of **perdition**”* (2 Thess 2:3).

⇒ *“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and **perdition**”*(1 Tim 6:9).

The teachings, or message, of these false teachers, who speak “perverse things,” are of a most serious nature. What they teach actually is leading men into eternal ruination. Just as the Gospel is God’s power unto salvation (Rom 1:16), these “damnable heresies” are one of Satan’s means of drawing people into hell. This is not an opinion, but a matter of written revelation.

*way, that leadeth to **destruction**, and many there be which go in thereat”* (Mat 7:13).

⇒ *“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of **perdition**; that the scripture might be fulfilled”*(John 17:12).

⇒ *“But Peter said unto him, Thy money **perish** with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money”* (Acts 8:20).

⇒ *“What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to **destruction**”* (Rom 9:22).

⇒ *“But we are not of them who draw back unto **perdition**; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul”* (Heb 10:39).

⇒ *“But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and **perdition** of ungodly men”* (2 Pet 3:7),

The teachings, or message, of these false teachers, who speak *“perverse things,”* are of a most serious nature. **What they teach actually is leading men into eternal ruination.** Just as the Gospel is God’s power unto salvation (Rom 1:16), these *“damnable heresies”* are one of Satan’s means of drawing people into hell. This is not an opinion, but is a matter of written revelation.

Now we are living over two thousand years past the time in which Paul spoke these words. The men of which he warned entered long ago, and **now we are in an era in which the Christianity of the masses has been largely shaped by the teaching of false prophets.** Error is so pervasive within the professed church that it is staggering. There is hardly a Scriptural subject that has not been grossly distorted. *“Diverse and strange doctrines”* (Heb 13:9), together with corrupt emphases and an off-centered focus are common. There is no quadrant of the globe where these condition cannot be found. The doctrines of reference have truly eaten as a cancer.

FOR THREE YEARS I WARNED EVERYONE

“ . . . that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one . . . ” Other versions read, *“for three years I did not cease to warn,”*^{NKJV} *“a period of three years I did not cease to admonish,”*^{NASB} *“for three years I never stopped warning,”*^{NIV} and *“I never stopped . . . to admonish and advise and exhort you one by one.”*^{AMPLIFIED}

“ T h r e e years ” was the length of time Paul labored in Ephesus, using it as his base of operation. This is divided into three sections of time – two of them precise, and one general.

I suppose some might have considered this a negative message – but such an imagination only betrays a high level of ignorance. **This was involved in caring for the flock of God – something Paul has admonished the elders of Ephesus to do.** He now adds this word to provide an example of faithfulness in this area. **He steadfastly conducted his ministry among them in the precise frame of spirit, and with the same care, that he now requires of the elders.** This is the manner in which he ministered everywhere, providing an example of how and what to minister (Phil 3:17; 2 Thess 3:9).

<p>Three Months teaching in the synagogue. (Acts 18:8)</p> <hr/> <p>Two years teaching in the school of Tyrannus. (Acts 19:10)</p> <hr/> <p>An indefinite period called “a season.” (Acts 19:22)</p> <hr/> <p>THREE YEARS (Acts 20:31)</p>
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During the pioneer days of our country, there were vast wastelands that had pools of contaminated water. Thoughtful souls who knew the condition of this water would post a warning sign for weary travelers, lest they drunk from that polluted water. **Oh, that men were more faithful to warn the people of God of dangerous teachings that cause men to swerve aside, falling into damnable ways of thinking.**

Here are a few ensamples of erroneous messages that were already being preached near the middle of the first century.

- ⇨ That the resurrection is already past (2 Tim 2:16).
- ⇨ Forbidding to marry (1 Tim 4:3).
- ⇨ Commanding to abstain from meats that God has created (1 Tim 4:3).
- ⇨ Presenting gain as godliness (1 Tim 6:5).
- ⇨ Voluntary humility, or self-abasement, and the worship of angels (Col 2:18).
- ⇨ Another Jesus, another gospel, and another spirit (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6).

When men embrace something that is a lie, it is not harmless. Do not imagine that such poor souls will simply grow out of the delusion. This is not possible, because the delusion itself forces men into a path that ultimately leads to condemnation. Even when it appears that men have read or studied their way out of error, a careful examination will find that their path had been crossed by some faithful soul who gave a word that proved to be a challenge to their way of thinking. I understand that it is necessary to employ godly wisdom, and to show the conflict of the false teaching with the truth of God – **but something must be said.** If what I have just said is not the expression of a proper perception, then how do we account for the faithfulness of Paul in addressing this subject for a period of three years?

NIGHT AND DAY WITH TEARS
“ . . . night and day with tears. ”
Other versions read, *“with weeping,”*^{BBE}

“with tears in my eyes,”^{CJB} *“tears for you,”*^{NLT} *“many tears for you,”*^{LIVING} and *“I often cried over you.”*^{IE}

The very thought of deficiency in the people of God, whether a current circumstance or a potential one, has been the cause of many holy men weeping – and even the Lord Jesus, when He *“dwelt among us.”*

⇨ **JESUS, AT THE UNBELIEF PRESENT WHEN LAZARUS DIED:** *“When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto Him, Lord, come and see. **Jesus wept**”* (John 11:33-35).

⇨ **JESUS OVER JERUSALEM:** *“And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and **wept over it**, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes”* (Luke 19:41-42).

⇨ **JEREMIAH THE PROPHET AT THE CONDITION OF ISRAEL.** *“Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might **weep day and night** for the slain of the daughter of my people!”* (Jer 9:1). *“But if ye will not hear it, **my soul shall weep** in secret places for your pride; and **mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the Lord’s flock is carried away captive**”* (Jer 13:17).

⇨ **ELISHA, WHEN HE KNEW THE EVIL THAT WOULD BE DONE TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL.** *“And he settled his countenance steadfastly, until he was ashamed: **and the man of God wept.** And Hazeel said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child”* (2 Kgs 8:11-12).

⇨ **EZRA, WHEN CONFESSING THE SINS OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL.** *“Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he*

had confessed, **weeping and casting himself down before the house of God**, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore” (Ezra 10:1).

⇒ **NEHEMIAH, UPON HEARING OF THE RUINATION OF JERUSALEM AND THE STATE OF THE PEOPLE.** “And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven” (Neh 1:4).

⇒ **PAUL AT THE CONDITION OF THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH.** “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you” (2 Cor 2:4).

⇒ **PAUL, WHEN CONSIDERING THE PRESENCE OF FALSE TEACHERS.** “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things” (Phil 3:18-19).

⇒ **TIMOTHY DURING HIS LABORS.** “Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy” (2 Tim 1:4).

Today, there is a glaring absence of this kind of concern in the churches, and among their leaders. Erroneous doctrines are abounding in the land – all presented as coming from God. There is a tidal wave of darkness and ignorance that has veiled the revelation of God, all the while pretending to be a new word from the Lord. The religious concerns that are being taught and marketed by this corrupt breed of teachers has little to do with eternity, the condition of men before the Lord, eternal life, or the danger of everlasting destruction. In the name of Christ, men are being immersed into the details of life in this world in a way that causes them to actually ignore eternal matters. Even though, in conversion, God raises us up and causes us to be seated

with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6), **the general emphases of modern Christendom is pulling them back down into the arena out of which they were delivered and raised.**

The consequences have been disastrous. Now, sin is more prominent, human weakness is more prevalent, and spiritual ignorance is at an astounding level – in the professed church! **All of this has happened under the watch of educated, polished, and refined ministers whose primary message is**

There is such a thing as ultimate reality. As used in Scripture, it pertains to what will survive the demise of the world, and remain after death has been swallowed up in victory. Truth cannot be changed or altered. If this were not so, God, Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit could not Themselves be described as “truth.”

questionable, to say the very least. If it is true that “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matt 7:16,20), exactly what are these conditions telling us?

THE TRUTH

The seriousness of false and erroneous teaching is seen in the nature of truth itself.

Defining truth is not as simplistic as it may at first appear. **MCCLINTOCK & STRONG’S CYCLOPEDIA** defines truth in this way: “The foundation of all truth is in truth of being--that truth by which a thing is what it is, by which it has its own nature and properties; and has not merely the appearance, but **reality**, of being. Truth, as predicated of knowledge, is the conformity of our knowledge with the **reality** of the object known; for, as knowledge is the knowledge of something, when a thing is known as it is that knowledge is formally true.”

In other words, truth is reality, or the way things really are. **In Scripture, the way things really are is defined by God. It is His assessment that confirms the reality of a thing.** When it comes to the things of God, or the assessment of things that pertain to life and godliness, exclusive definitions and teaching belong to God

Himself, coming through Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit. With Him, there is no such thing as philosophy, speculation, or opinion. He only speaks what actually IS, and His assessments are the **ONLY** ones that are flawless, perfectly conforming to ultimate reality.

The word “true” – for truth pertains to what is “true” ^{THAYER} – is lexically defined as follows: “that which has not only the name and semblance, but the real nature corresponding to the name,” ^{THAYER} “of words that conform to facts true, correct, dependable; of what conforms to reality genuine, real, true,” ^{FRIEBERG} and

“of words that conform to facts true, correct, dependable; of what conforms to reality genuine, real, true.” ^{LOUW-NIDA}

There is such a thing as ultimate reality. **As used in Scripture, it pertains to what will survive the demise of the world, and remain after death has been swallowed up in victory.** Truth cannot be changed or altered. If this were not so, God, Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit could not Themselves be described as “truth.”

With that in mind, here is how the word of God speaks of “truth.”

- ⇒ Truth belongs to God – it is “His truth” (Gen 24:27; Psa 57:3; 91:4; 96:13; 98:3; 100:5).
- ⇒ God is “abundant in truth” (Ex 34:6).
- ⇒ God is a “God of truth” (Deut 32:4; Psa 31:5).
- ⇒ God is to be served “in truth” (Josh 24:14; 1 Sam 12:24).
- ⇒ Men are to walk before the Lord “in

<p><i>truth with all of their heart</i>" (1 Kgs 2:4).</p> <p>⇒ Truth is to be spoken "<i>in the heart</i>" (Psa 15:2).</p> <p>⇒ All the paths of the Lord are "<i>truth</i>" (Psa 25:10).</p> <p>⇒ All of God's works are "<i>done in truth</i>" (Psa 33:4).</p> <p>⇒ God desires "<i>truth in the inward parts</i>" (Psa 51:6).</p>	<p>1:18).</p> <p>⇒ Those who "<i>changed the truth</i>" were given up by God to vile affections (Rom 1:25-26).</p> <p>⇒ The judgment of God is "<i>according to truth</i>" (Rom 2:2).</p> <p>⇒ Indignation and wrath are reserved for those who "<i>do not obey the truth</i>" (Rom 2:8).</p> <p>⇒ Truth is to be obeyed, and men are</p>	<p>⇒ Men purify their souls by "<i>obeying the truth through the Spirit</i>" (1 Pet 1:22).</p> <p>⇒ Men are "<i>established</i>" in the truth (2 Pet 1:12).</p> <p>⇒ The way that leads to life is "<i>the way of truth</i>" (2 Pet 2:2).</p> <p>⇒ No lie is "<i>of the truth</i>" (1 John 2:21).</p> <p>⇒ The "<i>Spirit is truth</i>" (1 John 5:6).</p> <p>⇒ The people of God "<i>walk in the truth</i>" (2 John 1:4; 3 John 1:4).</p> <p>⇒ The faithful have a good report "<i>of the truth itself</i>" (3 John 1:12).</p>
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In order to be saved, men must receive "the love of the truth." If they do not, God will send them "strong delusion," and they will be "damned"

<p>⇒ God's salvation is characterized by truth (Psa 69:13).</p> <p>⇒ Jesus Christ is "<i>full of grace and truth</i>" (John 1:14).</p> <p>⇒ "<i>Truth . . . came by Jesus Christ</i>" (John 1:17).</p> <p>⇒ Those who worship God must do so "<i>in truth</i>" (John 4:24).</p> <p>⇒ The truth, when known, "<i>shall make you free</i>" (John 8:32).</p> <p>⇒ Jesus Himself is "<i>the truth</i>" (John 14:6).</p> <p>⇒ The Holy Spirit is "<i>the Spirit of truth</i>" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13).</p> <p>⇒ The Holy Spirit guides "<i>into all truth</i>" (John 16:13).</p> <p>⇒ God sanctifies men "<i>through</i>" His "<i>truth</i>" (John 17:17,19).</p> <p>⇒ God's word "<i>is truth</i>" (John 17:17).</p> <p>⇒ Jesus came to "<i>bear witness unto the truth</i>" (John 18:37).</p> <p>⇒ The wrath of God is revealed against those who hold back the truth (Rom</p>	<p>faulted by God if they do not do so (Gal 3:1; 5:7).</p> <p>⇒ The Gospel of salvation is called "<i>the word of truth</i>" (Eph 1:13).</p> <p>⇒ The truth is to be spoken (Eph 4:15,25).</p> <p>⇒ The "<i>fruit of the Spirit is in all . . . truth</i>" (Eph 5:9).</p> <p>⇒ In order to be saved, men must receive "<i>the love of the truth.</i>" If they do not, God will send them "<i>strong delusion,</i>" and they will be "<i>damned</i>" (2 Thess 2:10-12).</p> <p>⇒ Salvation involves coming "<i>into the knowledge of the truth</i>" (1 Tim 2:4).</p> <p>⇒ The church is "<i>the pillar and ground of the truth</i>" (1 Tim 3:15).</p> <p>⇒ When God gives repentance, there is an acknowledging of the truth (2 Tim 2:25).</p> <p>⇒ God begets His children "<i>with the word of truth</i>" (James 1:18).</p> <p>⇒ Erring from the truth requires that such a person be "<i>converted</i>" (James 5:19).</p>
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Is it possible that permission is given to men to venture into the arena of opinion when addressing the subjects of God, Christ, the Word of truth, the things of God, the salvation of God, or the purpose of God? Has God really given men leniency in such matters, so they can consult with the wisdom of men, promote their own opinions, or allow for varying and contradicting views of something God has revealed?

Who would dare to postulate such folly, and what would be the purpose of doing so? Without lingering on the subject, what about the coming of the Lord? **Within the Christian community there are at least four independent and isolated areas of thought on the subject: Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, Amillennialism, and Preterism.** None of these views can be merged, and none will allow the acceptance of the other views. Whole bodies of theology are incorporated into these contradicting views. **The human opinions concerning these areas of thought include the following.** This is not intended to be a complete listing.

- ⇒ The coming of the Lord itself.
- ⇒ The enthronement and reign of Christ.
- ⇒ The resurrection of the dead.
- ⇒ The day of judgment.

- ⇒ A period of tribulation.
- ⇒ The coming of antichrist.
- ⇒ The matter of rewards.
- ⇒ The visibility of Christ's return.
- ⇒ The separation of the godly from the ungodly.
- ⇒ The conversion of sinners.
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- ⇒ The conversion of the Jews.
- ⇒ The work of the Holy Spirit.
- ⇒ The preaching Gospel of Christ.
- ⇒ The existence of the world.
- ⇒ The prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Daniel, Zechariah, Malachi, Paul, and John – with several others.

It is difficult to conceive of a subject that touches more matters than these – and God has spoken particularly about each one of the above. Further, they are all deal with critical subjects.

In these positions concerning the coming of the Lord, there is a readiness to equate the opinions of men

No person can afford to be wrong about what God has revealed – or, to be more precise, to REMAIN wrong about what God has revealed. This is of particular importance when it comes to views of Christ and the salvation that He has effected.

with the affirmations of God. **Further, there is little consciousness of the seriousness of sifting the Word of the Lord through the maze of human judgment.** Additionally, allowance is made for the saints accepting one of these views to the exclusion of others. Such tolerance is even affirmed to be done with sincerity and a pure heart.

How serious is it to approach the Word of God in such a manner? Is it possible that contradicting representations of the will and way of the Lord are harmonious? Will God really work through a word that is not true – that does not conform to ultimate reality? The real situation is this: **whatever is not left standing after the present heavens and earth have passed away, and death has been swallowed up in victory, cannot possibly have been true** – and that is precisely how men will be forced to think as they stand

before the Judge of all the earth.

No person can afford to be wrong about what God has revealed – or, to be more precise, to REMAIN wrong about what God has revealed. This is of particular importance when it comes to views of Christ and the salvation that He has effected. Those subjects account for the burden of Divine revelation. This is precisely why the saints of God must be fed a proper and beneficial diet. Those leaders who refuse to do this must be expelled now. Unless they repent of their doing, they WILL be expelled at the great separation, just as Paul affirmed (2 Cor 11:15; Phil 3:19). Any other position on this matter is indefensible, and must be forthrightly abandoned.

The highest value must be placed on the truth itself, and whatever does not conform precisely to it is a lie, and is to be so viewed.

COMMENDED TO GOD AND THE WORD OF HIS GRACE

“³² And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

Now that Paul is leaving these brethren, and has duly warned them of the impending defection of some of their own number, what does he desire for them? How do you speak to people after issuing such a solemn warning? The manner of the kingdom and the nature of salvation is revealed in what Paul now says to these leaders.

I COMMEND YOU TO GOD

“And now, brethren, I commend you to God . . .” Other versions read, *“commit you to God,”* ^{NIV} *“give you into the care of God,”* ^{BBE} *“entrusting you to God,”* ^{GWN} *“I commit you to God [I deposit you in His charge, entrusting you to His protection and care],”* ^{AMPLIFIED} *“I am giving you to God,”* ^{IE} *“I commend you to the Lord,”* ^{PHILLIPS} and *“I am turning you over to God.”* ^{MESSAGE}

To *“commend”* is to “place near, or set beside . . . to deposit, to intrust, commit to one’s charge . . . to be cared for . . . to commend one to another for protection, safety, etc.” ^{THAYER}

There are several critical matters that are assumed when someone

is commended to the Lord.

- ⇒ That the Lord is capable of taking care of the people involved.
- ⇒ That the people being commended to the Lord are themselves committed to Him.
- ⇒ That the one doing the commending is familiar with the Lord, and has some understanding of what the Lord is doing.
- ⇒ That there are hostile influences and forces that transcend the natural abilities of the ones being commended to the Lord.

- ⇒ That there is some worthy objective for which the people being commended to the Lord are being prepared.
- ⇒ That in the absence of the one doing the commending, the people involved will be subjected to some form of increased hostility.
- ⇒ That the presence of the one doing the commending gave the believers certain advantages they did not have while he was **not** in their presence.

While this is not the place to develop these thoughts, the mentioning of them will be apparent to those with spiritual understanding. **Even in his absence, Paul was thinking of the flock, and took care of it by commending the people to the Lord Himself, knowing full well that He cares for the righteous** (1 Pet 5:7), and is “able” to keep them from falling, and present them faultless before His presence with exceeding joy (Jude 1:24-25).

I COMMEND YOU TO THE WORD OF HIS GRACE

“. . . and to the word of His grace . . .” Other versions read, “the message of His grace,”^{NRSV} “the message of His love and kindness,”^{CJB} “His message that tells how kind He is,”^{GWN} “that gracious word of His,”^{NAB} “His wonderful words,”^{LIVING} “the message of God’s gracious love,”^{IE} “the message of His favor,”^{WILLIAMS} “the Word of His grace [to the commands and counsels and promises of His unmerited favor],”^{AMPLIFIED} “the message about His great kindness,”^{CEV} and “the saying of His grace.”^{INTERLINEAR}

The term “word” is taken from the Greek word *λόγος*, which means, “those things which are put together in thought, as of those which, having been thought i. e. gathered together in the mind, are expressed in words,”^{THAYER} and a word “that embodies a conception or idea . . . the sayings of God . . . doctrine, teaching . . . a narrative . . . the thing spoken of or talked about,”^{GINGRICH} Men use the term in this way when they say, “This is my **word** to you,” or “Do you have a **word** for us?”

The “word of His grace” is what

God has said about His grace – it is the Divine teaching, or doctrine, concerning the grace of God – the message of what His grace has accomplished, what it does and what it brings to the believer.

It is interesting that Paul does not commend them to the word of God’s requirements – even though there is such a word. However, **commandments do not go as far as grace, nor do they contain the resources made available through grace.** The commandments of God are to be obeyed, to be sure, and woe to that person who disdains them, or withholds them from the people. However, they have more to do with the outer court than with the holy of holies. They are more related to the approach to God than the fellowship of Jesus. They are **not** the appointed means through which we become “*partakers of the Divine nature.*” That sharing is through God’s “*precious promises,*” which are the expression of His grace, and through which resources are acquired that assist us in being conformed to the image of God’s Son (Rom 8:29; 2 Pet 1:4).



The “word of His grace” is the message concerning His “*precious promises,*” the blessings that come “*down from above,*” and all the things that meet our “*need,*” as defined by the Lord.

Associations of Grace

This “*grace*” is associated with things relating to the fulfillment of God’s purpose in His people. Here is a partial listing of the matters revealed in Scripture to be directly related to the grace of God.

⇒ The experience of being **justified**

(Rom 3:24).

- ⇒ **Salvation** by faith (Rom 4:16).
- ⇒ **Access** by faith (Rom 5:2).
- ⇒ **Abounding** favor (Rom 5:15,20).
- ⇒ **Abundance** (Rom 5:17).
- ⇒ Men **reigning** (Rom 5:21).
- ⇒ Being **freed** from the dominion of sin (Rom 6:14).
- ⇒ The **election** of God (Rom 11:5).
- ⇒ **Distinguishing** salvation from a system of works (Rom 11:6).
- ⇒ Spiritual **gifts** (Rom 12:6).
- ⇒ Being a **wise** master-builder (1 Cor 3:10).
- ⇒ Being a prodigious **laborer** (1 Cor 15:10).
- ⇒ A **godly** life (2 Cor 1:12).
- ⇒ The **humility** of Christ (2 Cor 8:9).
- ⇒ **Sufficiency** (2 Cor 12:9).
- ⇒ What we are **called to** (Gal 1:6).
- ⇒ Being **called by God** (Gal 2:9).
- ⇒ Being made **accepted** (Eph 1:6).
- ⇒ The **forgiveness** of sin (Eph 1:7).
- ⇒ Being **made alive** with Jesus (Eph 2:5).
- ⇒ **God’s kindness** toward us (Eph 2:7).
- ⇒ Being **saved** (Eph 2:8).
- ⇒ The **measure** of the gift of Christ (Eph 4:7).
- ⇒ Spiritual **knowledge** (Col 1:6).
- ⇒ **Consolation** and **hope** (2 Thess 2:16).
- ⇒ The gifts of **faith** and **love** (1 Tim 1:14).

- ⇒ Being **strong** (2 Tim 2:1).
- ⇒ **Bringing** salvation (Tit 2:11).
- ⇒ **Teaching** us how to deny sin and live godly (Tit 2:12).
- ⇒ Christ **tasting of death** for every man (Heb 2:9).
- ⇒ Divine **help** (Heb 4:16).
- ⇒ **Serving** God acceptably (Heb 12:28).
- ⇒ **Establishment** (Heb 13:9).
- ⇒ The final **revelation** of Christ (1 Pet 1:15).
- ⇒ Being **stewards** (1 Pet 4:10).
- ⇒ **Standing** (1 Pet 5:12).
- ⇒ **Growth** (2 Pet 3:16).

able to make you strong,"^{BBE} "able to build further,"^{GENEVA} "help you grow,"^{GWN} "Able to build further,"^{TNT} "able to build your faith,"^{LIVING} "can help you,"^{CEV} and "can make you into what He wants you to be."^{MESSAGE} The great majority of the versions read "build you up."

And what does it mean to be built up? The words "build you up" are translated from a single Greek word – ἐποικοδομησαι. This word means "to finish the structure of which the foundation has already been laid," i. e. in plain language, to give constant increase in Christian knowledge and in a life conformed thereto,"^{THAYER} "build up, make more able, cause to be strong,"^{FRIBERG}

The idea of building upon the foundation of Christ is declared in other places. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul refers to the church being "God's **building**" (3:9). He speaks of those who build upon the foundation that has been put in place (3:10),

"with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph 3:18-19).

There really is no point to an immature church, for it contradicts the very purpose for its existence. In His doctrine, Jesus made clear that maturity relates to fruit bearing, and that bearing fruit to God is a principle point of being saved. This is confirmed in the parable of the sower. Of the four soils upon which the seed was sown, only one yielded a harvest. One soil yielded no response at all, and thus the birds ate up the seed sown upon it. Two soils showed some signs of life, but did not bring forth fruit "to perfection" (Lk 8:11-15).

Romans 7:4 states, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, **that we should bring forth fruit unto God**" (Rom 7:4). It is inconceivable and foolish to the point of absurdity to infer that the purpose for salvation could not be met, and yet its effects remain.

If the word of God's grace is able to build us up, then it ought to be constantly affirmed. **There is no excuse for people being Christians for years, yet hearing very little about the grace of God and what it provides.** I personally had to overcome the doctrine of the church with which I was affiliated to come to any satisfactory understanding of God's grace. I lament that this was the case, but it was, and it is time for people with similar experiences to declare it. **If the means through which spiritual maturity is reached is withheld from the people, we should not be surprised when we see professing Christians remaining in juvenileness for the greater part of their life.** It is uncomely for such a state to exist, and there should be an instant abandonment of anything that sustains such a miserable condition.

WHICH IS ABLE TO GIVE YOU AN INHERITANCE

" . . . and to give you an inheritance . . ." Other versions read, "give you your heritage,"^{BBE} "give you all

What can really be said of a message that does not leave people thinking about and depending upon the grace of God. How is it possible for the Holy Spirit to have inspired so much to be said about God's grace, yet professing believers to be so ignorant about it? The answer is simple, although it is by no means pleasant. It is because an erroneous message has been preached!

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WHICH IS ABLE TO BUILD YOU UP

" . . . which is able to build you up . . ." Other versions read, "which is

declaring that care must be taken on HOW and WHAT is **built** upon that foundation (3:10-12). In his letter to the Ephesians Paul states that the church is "**built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone**" (2:20). He states that the building is "**fitly framed together,**" growing together "unto a holy temple in the Lord" (2:21). He further states that the church is "**builted together for a habitation of God through the Spirit**" (2:22).

This building has to do with growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15). It is going on to perfection (Heb 6:1), and coming into spiritual maturity. It relates to being "**men in understanding,**" and comprehending

the inheritance," ^{LIVING} "give you the blessings," ^{IE} "give you your inheritance," ^{WEYMOUTH} "give you your proper possession," ^{WILLIAMS} "give you [your rightful] inheritance," ^{AMPLIFIED} "give you what belongs to God's people," ^{CEV} "give you everything you possibly need," ^{MESSAGE} and "give you your place." ^{PHILLIPS}

Salvation is not completed until the inheritance is obtained.

While we remain in the body, and in this world, we have "the firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom 8:23), and not the whole of the inheritance. The inheritance of this text is an "eternal inheritance" (Heb 9:15). The aim of all valid ministry is to bring the saints to "receive" that inheritance (Acts 26:18). All who are immoral are excluded from this inheritance (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5). The inheritance is "obtained" because men have been "predestinated according to the purpose of Him that worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph 1:11). Presently, we have the "earnest," or down payment, of that inheritance, "until the redemption of the purchased possession" (our bodies) – not the whole of it (Eph 1:14). Further, we have been begotten in order to obtain that inheritance (1 Pet 1:3-4). **To come short of that obtainment is to have lived in total vanity.**

THEM THAT ARE SANCTIFIED

"... among all them which are sanctified." This inheritance will be realized by "all them which are sanctified." Other versions read, "among all the saints," ^{BBE} "all those who have been set apart for God," ^{CJB} "all of God's holy people," ^{GWN} "all who are consecrated," ^{NAB} "all those He has set apart for Himself," ^{NLT} "all God's set-apart ones (those consecrated, purified, and transformed of soul)," ^{AMPLIFIED} "this community of holy friends," ^{MESSAGE} and "all those who are consecrated to God." ^{PHILLIPS}

Those who "are sanctified" are holy, dedicated to God, and living for Him. They have been set apart for God by their faith. Jesus Himself said that they are "sanctified by faith that is in Me" (Acts 26:18). Their sanctification is no more sure than their faith, and is in direct proportion to that faith. These are the people who are living by faith and walking in the Spirit. They are not of this world,

but are strangers and pilgrims in it (1 Pet 2:11). They alone are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17), for the children of God are heirs, and they are "all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26).

These days, a lot is not being said about the "eternal inheritance" and being sanctified by faith. Men speak about heaven and the world to come with a certain disdain, as though there was

commandment as integral to life in Christ Jesus. As Paul said of them, "some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (1 Tim 1:7).

The truth of the matter is that no one who is unholy has a bright future. Those who are continually yielding to sin are facing a dismal eternity – and that is putting it

All who are immoral are told they will not receive the inheritance for which men are begotten again. It is impossible for them to be "forever with the Lord" if they are living in opposition to Him. If this were made sufficiently clear in the churches, the greater percentage of their recovery programs would no longer be required.

something inferior about living for the future. However, the Lord has been very clear about this matter. This world is destined for destruction by fire (2 Pet 3:10-12), and is going to be replaced by "a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet 3:13). There is no possibility of this judgment being reversed, and thus men are obliged to prepare for "the end of all things" (1 Pet 4:17). Men may write about "Your Best Life Now," and boast of being the head in this world, and not the tail – but no such thing is promised to those who are in Christ Jesus. Even when that was promised under the Old Covenant – which was a vastly inferior covenant – it was attached to this unalterable condition: "And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; **if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them: And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them**" (Deut 28:14). Israel **never** achieved that status, for the Old Covenant was "weak through the flesh," not providing as much as one mote of strength to keep the commandments of God. Yet, there are actually people preaching this

mildly. God has spoken so plainly on this matter that a person has to be a fool not to see it. All who are immoral are told they will not receive the inheritance for which men are begotten again. It is impossible for them to be "forever with the Lord" if they are living in opposition to Him. **If this were made sufficiently clear in the churches, the greater percentage of their recovery programs would no longer be required.** The existence of such programs can only be maintained if men are kept ignorant of the excluding and disqualifying nature of sin. Once this is seen, those who are serious will work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

Now, if the word of His grace is able to give men the inheritance, then what can be said of those who are not subjected to this word? Precisely what chance is there of a person obtaining the inheritance if he rarely hears about it, and does not know what excludes men from it? And what can really be said of preachers and teachers who teach the people as though life in this world were the fundamental life, and that Jesus died to secure for men a happy and successful life in this world.

Note, the text says "all them which ARE sanctified." Whatever one

chooses to emphasize in this world, nothing is more important than preparing to receive the inheritance – “*the things which God hath prepared for them that*

love him” (1 Cor 2:9). That is the focus of Jesus’ present ministry, as well as all those whom He has “*put into the ministry*” (1 Tim 1:12). Absolutely no

advantage or benefit will be brought to anyone who has not made himself ready to receive the inheritance, and be forever joined to the Lord.

PAUL AND LIFE IN THE FLESH

“³³ I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. ³⁴ Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.”

Paul does not hesitate to remind people how he lived among them, for that was the outward evidence of his unwavering commitment to the Lord. **Faith, when obtained and nurtured, compels the individual to live unto the Lord, and in strict harmony with the Divine Nature.** Consistently flawed lives are the product of a lack of faith, for “*this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith*” (1 John 5:4).

never been hungry for money or fine clothing,” ^{LIVING} and “*silver, gold, or [costly] garments.*” ^{AMPLIFIED}

Here, the Jerusalem Bible captures the sense of the text: “*I have never asked anyone for money or clothes.*” **In this case, the lack of covetousness is not established by a verbal testimony, but by Paul’s manner of life.** Unlike many professed Christian leaders of our day, Paul was not a professional beggar. It was not that he refused to receive support from brethren, for he often spoke of those who provided for his needs. To the Philippians he wrote, “*For even in Thessalonica ye sent once*

perceived. He was not dominated by the flesh, and his conduct among the saints confirmed this was the case. Neither, indeed, did he spend time raising support for himself.

THESE HANDS HAVE MINISTERED TO MY NEEDS

“*Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.*” Other versions read, “*provided for my necessities and those who were with me,*” ^{NKJV} “*to my own needs and to the men who were with me,*” ^{NASB} “*supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions,*” ^{NIV} “*to support myself and my companions,*” ^{NRSV} “*not only for my own needs, but for the needs of my coworkers as well,*” ^{CJB} “*I worked to support myself and those who were with me,*” ^{GWN} and “*mine earned enough to meet my needs and those of my companions.*” ^{NJB}

Faith, when obtained and nurtured, compels the individual to live unto the Lord, and in strict harmony with the Divine Nature. Consistently flawed lives are the product of a lack of faith, for “this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith”

The commitment of a man to the feeding of the flock of God is measured by the degree of personal inconvenience he is willing to endure. The person who thinks of himself in an inordinate manner will not be used extensively, if at all, in the vineyard of the Lord.

I HAVE NOT COVETED

“*I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel.*” Other versions read, “*silver, gold, or clothes,*” ^{NASB} “*silver, gold, or clothing,*” ^{NIV} “*silver, or gold, or garments,*” ^{MRD} “*I have never wanted,*” ^{NAB} “*I have desired no ones,*” ^{NET} “*I have never asked anyone for money or clothes,*” ^{NJB} “*silver, or gold, or fine clothes,*” ^{NLT} “*silver, gold, or vesture,*” ^{PNT} “*I have*

and again unto my necessity” (Phil 4:16). He reminded the Corinthians that he “*took wages*” from “*other churches*” in order to minister to the Corinthians (2 Cor 11:8). **But these gifts were not solicited by Paul.** That is the point of this text. As Paul said to the Corinthians, he preached the Gospel “*without charge*” (1 Cor 9:18). And again, “*And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself*” (2 Cor 11:9).

He is not speaking of an lust for money and clothing, as ordinarily

Note that Paul not only labored to support himself, but those who were with him as well. This is a display of the deep devotion and humility of this man. He was thoroughly devoted to the Lord, and was mindful of those who joined him in the work. He did not send his companions out to raise their own support – a practice that is quite common today. I have noted that those who are fond of establishing various practices by referring to apostolic precedent are rarely, if ever, noted for following this Pauline practice. Of course, Paul was not establishing a precedent, but was rather displaying his love for the work of the Lord and the brethren who were also engaged in it with him. His heart is made known in this action, not the fulfillment of a command.

Paul frequently referred to the fact that he worked for his own needs. To the Corinthians he wrote, “*And labor,*

The more the Gospel is perceived, or comprehended, the more supple the individual becomes in the hand of the Lord. Self-centeredness diminishes decidedly, and the care of others is brought to godly maturity. From the vantage of the laborer, there is no sacrifice too great for the servant of God to pay.

working with our own hands" (1 Cor 4:12). To the Thessalonians he wrote, "For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God" (1 Thess 2:9). And again, "Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you" (2 Thess 3:8).

This was not something Paul was required to do, but was a choice that he made in interest of the churches. From the strictly legal point of view, it would have been right for him to have received wages for his labors. Therefore he wrote to the Thessalonians, "Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess 3:9-10).

Jesus Himself said, "for the workman is worthy of his meat" (Matt 10:10). Again, when sending out the seventy, He told them, "And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the laborer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house" (Luke 10:7). **In other words, when it comes to kingdom**

laborers, what is given to them is not, strictly speaking, charitable giving. It is rather compensation for their labors.

God established this principle under the Law, that commanded the people to support the Levites with their tithes and offerings (Deut 12:12,19). Paul taught that this principle carried over to the church (1 Cor 9:13-14). Yet, he said, "But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void" (1 Cor 9:15). He was driven by a higher principle than obtaining support. He therefore forfeited something that was right in order to set an example for the people.

Paul reasoned with the Corinthians, who misinterpreted the ground for the labor of his hands. "Have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the

law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?" (1 Cor 9:4-9). Again he said, "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ" (1 Cor 9:11-12).

Paul even taught the Galatians, "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Gal 6:6). However, Paul did not say these things so the people would support him. There were some few souls who saw the value of Paul's teaching, and therefore sent support to him – but it was not because he asked them to do so.

A Conclusion

As we survey the marvelous ministry of Paul, we are beholding the impact of the Gospel on those who perceive it. **The more the Gospel is perceived, or comprehended, the more supple the individual becomes in the hand of the Lord.** Self-centeredness diminishes decidedly, and the care of others is brought to godly maturity. From the vantage of the laborer, there is no sacrifice too great for the servant of God to pay. He will proclaim the truth that he has been given to see, regardless of what it takes to do so. If he is among a people who can misinterpret his motives, he will extend himself to make it difficult for them to do so. If there are others involved in the work that he is doing, he will not overlook their necessities. **His life itself will testify to the effectiveness of the message that he is proclaiming.** Boiled down to its essence, that effect is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of the brethren.

THE SPIRIT OF GIVING

"³⁵ I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed

to give than to receive."

Paul now affirms that he not only taught them "all the counsel of God" (20:27), but set before them a consistent

example of the manner in which a godly leader is to live. While these words can properly be applied to all of the saints, they particularly are pertinent to those who feed the flock of God. **There must**

not be inconsistency between what the teacher teaches and how he lives.

I HAVE SHOWED YOU ALL THINGS

"I have showed you all things ..."

Other versions read, *"I have shown you in every way,"* NKJV *"I have given you an example,"* NRSV *"I was an example to you,"* BBE *"by every means I have shown you,"* NJB *"I have been a constant example,"* NET *"In everything I have pointed out to you [by example],"* AMPLIFIED and *"in everything I've done, I have demonstrated to you."* MESSAGE

A person cannot embrace the doctrine, then live in contradiction of it. **As soon as one's life gets off course, the truth can no longer be heartily embraced.** That is precisely why people are known by their fruits. When hardness of heart sets in, waywardness in living commences.

Paul affirms that his life demonstrates this. Any person could examine his life closely, whether in public or in private, and would find that what Paul here confesses is the truth. The scope of the consideration is quite impressive: *"all things."* That is, Paul's faith had impacted the whole of his life, not merely a segment of it. Now, the particular area he mentions can be a sensitive one, particular for those who emphasize themselves, living only for self. **What Paul now says will clash with the thinking of those who amass great debt providing for temporal things that are of no real consequence.** It will make no sense at all to the person who plans for his own security with no regard at all for others. Each person will have to do their own thinking on this matter, as this kind of living is not determined by a moral code, or law. Notwithstanding that circumstance, we are dealing with something that is necessary: *"ye ought..."*

SUPPORTING THE WEAK

"how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak . . ." Other versions read, *"by laboring like this ye must support the weak,"* NKJV *"by working hard in this manner you must help the weak,"* NASB *"by this kind of hard work we must help the weak,"* NIV *"by so toiling one must help the weak,"* RSV *"by laboring like this,*

it is necessary to help the weak," CJB *"thus laboring we ought to come in aid of the weak,"* DARBY *"it is a duty to labor, and to care for the infirm,"* MRD *"we must exert ourselves in this way to support the weak,"* NJB *"you can help those in need by working hard,"* NLT *"so laboring ye ought to rescue the weak,"* PNT *"behoveth us to partake with the ailing,"* YLT and *"by*

gathered from all of the churches for the poor was for *"poor saints"* that were in Jerusalem (Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 16:1). When addressing the assistance of the poor, Paul referred to *"ministering to the saints"* (2 Cor 9:1,12). The church cared for widows who were believers, and qualified for such care (Acts 6:1; 1 Tim 5:3-10,16).

As you can see, there is also protection for those who have more than enough to sustain themselves. By assisting the poor, they reduce the possibility of self-reliance, and a denial that every good and perfect gift comes down from above – including "our daily bread"

working diligently in this manner, we ought to assist the weak." AMPLIFIED

"The weak" refers to certain who are unable to provide for themselves. In keeping with the rest of the text, these are people within *"the flock,"* or *"the church of God."* Although assisting the poor of the world is a noble work, the church has not been appointed a caretaker of the world, and no one must attempt to lay that burden upon the body of Christ. Those who have the means to do this are certainly in order doing so – UNLESS it means the neglect of the people of God. Jesus said men would be judged for their response to His *"brethren,"* not to the needs of those within the world (Matt 25:40,45).

Among the general manner of life for all believers is *"distributing to the necessity of saints"* (Rom 12:13). Such relief is not limited to the saints, for the body of Christ is also said, *"Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head"* (Rom 12:20). However, the emphasis of such care is placed upon the household of faith. As it is written, *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith"* (Gal 6:10). In mentioning care for the poor and needy, John referred to a believer seeing *"his brother"* (1 John 3:17). James did the same (James 2:15-16). The collection Paul

There are no examples of believers caring for the poor of the world, or being admonished to do so. As I have said, this is not to be construed as a law. However, it does mean that such endeavors cannot be pressed upon the churches as though it was required of them to meet the needs of the world. Blessed is the person who can handle this knowledge in a God-honoring manner.

The idea of caring for the poor is that they be not faced with temptations to conduct their lives their lives in opposition to the truth by seeking. Solomon spoke of this kind of temptation being leveled at the poor when he said, *"Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain"* (Prov 30:9). As you can see, there is also protection for those who have more than enough to sustain themselves. By assisting the poor, they reduce the possibility of self-reliance, and a denial that every good and perfect gift comes down from above – including *"our daily bread"* (Matt 6:11)..

Paul applied the text to his own labors which met the needs of his companions in labor. It is quite possible that they had forsaken *"houses"* and *"lands"* to travel with Paul, putting them at a seeming advantage. If this was the

case, Paul was sensitive to the circumstance, and therefore worked with his own hands to provide for them as well.

REMEMBERING THE WORDS OF THE LORD JESUS

“ . . . and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*”

These words are not found in the record of Jesus’ ministry (Matthew-John). That should not prove to be a difficult situation for anyone, for everything Jesus said was not recorded by

This confirms that the record God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11) was not intended to be a thorough report of everything He said and did during His three and one half year ministry – to say nothing of the first thirty years of His life. The record, however, is thorough in its representation of what Jesus said and did.

the Gospel writers. After giving a rather extensive report of the sayings and works of Jesus, John ended his gospel by saying, “*And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen*” (John 21:25). This confirms that the record God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11) was not intended to be a thorough report of everything He said and did during His three and one half year ministry – to say nothing of the first thirty years of His life. The record, however, is thorough in its representation of what Jesus said and did.

I gather, therefore, that this is a saying of Jesus that is not recorded, yet was passed along by those who heard it.

⇨ This was in perfect accord with the instruction under the Law. “*But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard . . . At the end of three years thou shalt*

bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest . . . If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou

shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth” (Ex 23:11; Deut 14:28-29; 15:7-8).

⇨ This principle is also reflected in the Psalms. “*Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness . . . A good man showeth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid, until he see his desire upon his enemies. He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness*

endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honor” (Psa 41:1-3; 112:5-9).

⇨ Solomon also spoke of the advantages associated with assisting the poor: “*He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again*” (Prov 19:17).

⇨ Isaiah the prophet also declared the advantage of giving to the poor: “*But the liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand . . . Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward*” (Isa 32:8; 58:7-8).

⇨ It also was in strict harmony with the revealed teaching of Jesus. “*Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink . . . Give to every man that asketh of thee . . . do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil . . . Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee. . .*” (Matt 25:34,35; Lk 6:30,35,38; Lk 14:13-14).

⇨ One of the marks of the one who believes on Jesus is that “*OUT of his belly shall flow rivers of living water*” (John 7:38).

- ⇨ When Jesus sent out His disciples He said: *“freely ye have received, freely give”* (Matt 10:8).
- ⇨ In his instruction to the church at Ephesus he wrote, *“Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth”* (Eph 4:28).

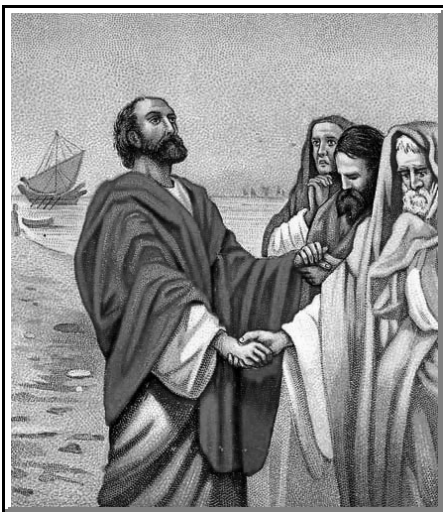
- ⇨ When Paul met with the apostles, they asked him to remember the poor. *“And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the*

same which I also was forward to do” (Gal 2:9-10).

Therefore, this word is in perfect harmony with the Law, the Psalms, the Proverbs, the testimony of the prophets, the words of Jesus, and apostolic instruction in righteousness. There is no reason to doubt its truth, necessity, or practicality. It is the business of believers to work out their own salvation on this matter.

HE PRAYED WITH THEM ALL

“³⁶ And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.”



A tender sight, indeed, as the faithful teacher admonishes, then prays, with these elders from Ephesus. **He has spent three years among them, but it had not diminished his love and affection for them.** They were among the churches for which he cared *“daily,”* wanting them to go on to perfection, and be uncontaminated with the teaching of spiritual impostors. Later, en route to Rome as a prisoner, and having met some disciples from Tyre, Paul *“kneeled down”* and prayed with them, together with their wives and children (Acts 21:4-5). **It is a blessed circumstance when brethren can pray together.** It eases the burden of kindred spirits when they are forced to

part.

Luke does not provide us any specifics concerning the content Paul’s prayer. **However, enough has been revealed about the way in which he prayed for the churches that we can form some very sound views of the matter.** Here are a few excerpts from his recorded prayers for the churches.

- ⇨ **MIGHT HAVE A PROSPEROUS JOURNEY TO MINISTER TO THE PEOPLE.** *“For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me”* (Rom 1:9-12).
- ⇨ **DO NO EVIL, DOING WHAT IS HONEST.** *“Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates”* (2 Cor 13:7).
- ⇨ **LOVE ABOUND IN KNOWLEDGE AND JUDGMENT.** *“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment”* (Phil 1:9).

- ⇨ **BE GIVEN THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.** *“Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power”* (Eph 1:16-19).

- ⇨ **BE STRENGTHENED, CHRIST DWELL IN THEIR HEARTS, BE ROOTED AND GROUNDED, AND COMPREHEND THE EXTENT OF SALVATION AND THE GREATNESS OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST.** *“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God”* (Eph 3:14-19).

⇒ **BE FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL. WALK WORTHY OF THE LORD, BE FRUITFUL IN EVERY GOOD WORK, INCREASE IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, STRENGTHENED UNTO ALL PATIENCE AND LONGSUFFERING WITH JOYFULNESS.** "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and

longsuffering with joyfulness" (Col 1:9-11).

⇒ **SANCTIFIED COMPLETELY, SPIRIT, SOUL, AND BODY.** "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 5:23).

⇒ **COUNT WORTHY OF CALLING, FULFILL GOD'S GOODPLEASURE, EXPERIENCE THE WORK OF FAITH WITH POWER, AND THAT JESUS MIGHT BE GLORIFIED IN THEM.** "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and

fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power: That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess 1:11-12).

Even a casual perusal of these prayers confirm the vast chasm that exists between the church of our time and the one depicted as being of God. If these prayers reflect the will of God for His people, the modern church has, indeed, fallen upon hard times. This circumstance is largely owing to its leaders. And the messages they deliver to the people.

A SORROWFUL MOMENT

"³⁷ And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him,^{38a} **Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.**"

When hearts are "knit together in love" (Col 2:2), and by that "nourishment" that comes from above (Col 2:19), parting is not an easy thing. One of the telling marks of a shallow religion is the absence of such sorrow, and the failure to take advantage of opportunities to be together. An infrequency of gathering will not allow for a sorrow in parting. This, however, is not the circumstance of our text. Also, one of the marks of the degeneracy of the modern church is the lack of this kind of love and affection among its members. If there is a closeness at all, it is built around belonging to the same sect, or having similar worldly interests.

THEY ALL WEPT SORE

"And they all wept sore . . ." Other versions read, "wept freely,"^{NKJV} "began to weep aloud,"^{NASB} "there was much weeping,"^{NRSV} "were all in tears,"^{BBE} "a great deal of weeping,"^{CSB} "they wept all abundantly,"^{GENEVA} "cried a lot,"^{GWN} "there was great weeping among them,"^{MRD} "wept bitterly,"^{RWB} "there came a great weeping to all,"^{YLT} "cried

and cried and cried,"^{IE} "loud lamentation,"^{WEYMOUTH} "loud weeping,"^{WILLIAMS} "considerable weeping,"^{EMTV} and "a river of tears."^{MESSAGE}

The words "wept" comes from the Greek word κλαυθρός, which is a strong

was difficult for them. **Spiritual attachments and association are exceedingly precious to those who are strangers and pilgrims in this world.** Secondly, they were no doubt moved by his prayers, which put into words his feelings and desires for them.

The entire history of God's dealings with humanity confirm that His preference is for those who are aligned with or seeking Him. The same was true of Jesus, who spent all of His quality time with His disciples, and those who wanted to hear what He had to say.

word meaning "lamentation,"^{THAYER} "a strong inner emotion, weeping, crying, lamentation,"^{FRIEBERG} "bitter crying, wailing,"^{UBS} and "to weep or wail, with emphasis upon the noise accompanying the weeping."^{LOUW-NIDA}

As I see it, their profound weeping was occasioned by at least two things. First, their closeness to, and appreciation of, Paul himself. He had been a faithful and exemplary teacher among them for three years, and seeing him leave

While the content of his prayer is not specified, we can obtain a very good idea of their content by how he was prone to pray for the people of God. Tender hearts are touched by such expressions.

In a national society such as ours, the display of such affection is rare. **Self-centeredness is being cultured among the people to such a degree that godly associations are rarely valued.** In fact, quite often they are denigrated as people are taught to value

and prefer worldly associations to godly ones. Some are even taught that this is virtuous. I cannot see how any view could be more unlike God and Jesus than this. **The entire history of God's dealings with humanity confirm that His preference is for those who are aligned with or seeking Him.** The same was true of Jesus, who spent all of His quality time with His disciples, and those who wanted to hear what He had to say. How people can read the Scriptures and miss this is most remarkable to me. Yet, the staggering influence of false prophets has moved them to do so.

FELL ON PAUL'S NECK AND KISSED HIM

“. . . and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him . . .” Other versions read, “embraced Paul; and repeatedly kissed him,”^{NASB} “Threw their arms around his neck and kissed him farewell,”^{CJB} “hugged Paul and kissed him,”^{NLT} “to throw their arms about his neck, and to kiss him lovingly again and again,”^{MONTGOMERY} “threw their arms around Paul's neck and kissed him fervently and repeatedly,”^{AMPLIFIED} “falling on Paul's neck, they were affectionately kissing him,”^{EMTV} “falling on the neck of Paul, they ardently kissed him,”^{LITV} and “Much clinging to Paul, not wanting to let him go.”^{MESSAGE}

These were affectionate kisses, but not romantic ones. They had to do with the heart, not the flesh, and were an expression of a deep spiritual and tender fondness for Paul. This is an example of a “holy kiss”(Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26). It was not intended to inflame fleshly feelings, but to express holy preference. **This was an outward display of the love of the brethren.** It is not something that can be legislated among the saints, for that could negate its meaning.

It is a most marvelous thing that in this text weeping and kissing are joined. That is a most excellent commentary on the nature of spiritual life, which joins the most meaningful, tender, and profitable expressions of men.

SORROWING MOST OF ALL

“Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.” Other version read, “would never see his face again,”^{NIV}

“would not see him again,”^{NRSV} “behold his face no more,”^{ASV} and “not seeing Paul again.”^{GWN}

This was after Paul spent three years among the Ephesians brethren – a rather brief time by many standards. Yet, when you consider the nature and power of Paul's ministry, this time represented an enormous amount of insightful teaching. We know that at least two of those years he taught every day.

Consider how much Paul said in his epistles to the churches – Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians. You can easily read aloud all of these letters in considerably less than eight hours.

WORDS CONTAINED IN EPISTLES TO THE CHURCHES

Romans	9855 words
1 st Corinthians	10,326 words
2 nd Corinthians	6,580 words
Galatians	3,238 words
Ephesians	3,177 words
Philippians	2,287 words
Colossians	2,074 words
1 st Thessalonians	2,015 words
2 nd Thessalonians	1,116 words
Total	40,668 words

Speaking at a rate of 100 words a minute, which is very moderate rate, the whole of the epistles listed would require less than seven hours to read. This would allow for a clear and succinct reading.

Jewish history estimates that Paul spoke daily for two years in the school of Tyrannus, speaking each day for about five hours. I understand this to have been a customary length of time for teaching in a disciplined environment. This being true, Paul could have said every word written to the churches listed above more than four times in the first week of that two-year period. No person of sound mind would even entertain the notion that such a thing was even possible. In the context of the present religious environment, it is not even possible to give a reasonable estimate of the sheer volume of words Paul must have said during his stay in Ephesus. **Add to**

your consideration that there is not a single instance of the apostle speaking publically about politics, social trends, or various domestic and social issues of the day. I do not question that his preaching and teaching would be considered by many of our peers as totally irrelevant to the complexities of daily life. I doubt that such people would even be capable of weeping at the thought of never seeing Paul again. Of course, such people have spent little time subjecting their minds to his teaching as provided in his epistles.

The point here is that the doctrine presented in Scripture, and the record of specific discourses, is in seed form. The whole of what was said is not recorded. Thus we read expressions like, “many other words” (Acts 2:40), “speaking to them” (Acts 13:43), “long time abode they speaking boldly” (Acts 14:3), “with many words” (Acts 15:32), “continued his speech”(Acts 20:7), “among whom I have gone preaching”(Acts 20:25), etc.

Insightful preaching requires a working knowledge of the Scripture, as well as living by faith and walking in the Spirit. A grasp of the revealed purpose of God is essential, for this allows for the proper integration of the preaching with the purpose of God, the Scriptures as a whole, and the teaching of Jesus and the apostles in particular. This is involved in preaching “the kingdom of God” (Acts 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31).

I gather that it was not merely Paul's friendship that these men would miss. **It was rather his preaching and teaching,** which is the very activity that he mentions in connection with his presence among them. He refers to:

- ⇨ “Serving the Lord with all humility of mind” (20:19).
- ⇨ Keeping nothing from them “that was profitable” to them (20:20a).
- ⇨ Showing them, and teaching them “publicly and from house to house” (20:20b).
- ⇨ “Testifying” to the Jews and the Greeks “repentance toward God, and

faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (20:21).

⇒ *"Preaching the kingdom of God"* (20:25).

because they would *"see his face no more."* This was not a man who identified with all the troubles and challenges of their lives. **It was rather the one who taught them the things of God, and**

noted that the closer a man is to the Lord, the greater his understanding of the things of God, and the more faithful he is in proclaiming the mysteries of the Kingdom, the less popular he is among church folk. This is a lamentable circumstance. Yet, I find there are few exceptions to this rule. The more popular preachers and teachers are generally rather shallow in their proclamations. Of course, it appears that it was this was also the way it was during the early days of the church. There were people who had the advantage of a lengthy ministry of Paul – like Corinth, who did **not** maintain a high evaluation of the man. Yet, because Paul was not the servant of men, this did not deter him in the preaching of truth.

The church of our time stands in desperate need of men who have a grasp of the truth, and are faithful in its proclamation – even of it means suffering at the hands of the Christian populace

⇒ Declaring to them *"the whole counsel of God"* (20:27).

⇒ Warning *"every one night and day with tears"* (20:31).

This is the man that caused them to weep sore, and sorrow greatly,

acquainted them with the manner of the Kingdom of God. I do not believe I am exaggerating the case when I say that few professing Christians have been exposed to such a man.

A FINAL OBSERVATION

Throughout the years, I have

The church of our time stands in desperate need of men who have a grasp of the truth, and are faithful in its proclamation – even of it means suffering at the hands of the Christian populace.

THEY ACCOMPANIED HIM TO THE SHIP

^{38b} **And they accompanied him unto the ship.** Other versions read, *"Then they brought him to the ship,"* ^{NRSV} *"so they went with him to the ship,"* ^{BBE} *"escorted him to the ship,"* ^{CSB} *"they brought him on his way to the ship,"* ^{DOUAY} *"they took Paul to the ship,"* ^{GWN} *"they accompanied him down to the ship,"* ^{LIVING} and *"they walked him down to the ship."* ^{MESSAGE}

Although their hearts were heavy with sadness, these faithful elders accompanied Paul to the ship on which he would sail on the next leg of his journey to Jerusalem. The word *"accompanied"* is translated from a word that means, "to send forward, bring on the way, accompany or escort . . . to

set one forward, fit him out with the requisites for his journey," ^{THAYER} "as furnishing things necessary for someone's travel help on one's journey, send on one's way," ^{FRIBERG} "send or help on one's way; escort, accompany," ^{UBS} and "to send someone on in the direction in which he has already been moving, with the probable implication of providing help - 'to send on one's way, to help on one's way.'" ^{LOUW-NIDA}

These brethren did not send Paul on his journey with the words, *"be ye warmed and filled"* (James 2:16), but no doubt provided things necessary for the trip. This would include the fare for the journey itself, and perhaps some food and drink for the trip. He had taught them well, and they had learned in truth that *"it is more blessed to give than to*

receive." Keep in mind, this was not a missionary they were themselves sending out. In fact, they regretted to see him leave, knowing that a certain spiritual poverty would follow his absence, just as he had said. **Yet, their hearts were joined to him, and they did everything within their power to assist him.**

Thus Paul's stop at Miletus came to a close – an ancient seaport city in western Asia Minor. He did not stop to see the sites, or to rest, but to minister to those leaders with whom he had labored for three productive years. He saw the impact of truth had stirred the powers of darkness, and there warned the brethren.

CONCLUSION

In our text, the solemn warning of a spiritual defection is attended by a strong exhortation to guard the flock. **The intrusion of false teaching is**

always a serious thing. This has been confirmed in our generation by the wake of its effects. While false prophets herald a coming time when a wicked despot will

rule the world, we are living in the very midst of the falling away that was foretold by the Lord Jesus Himself, as well as His apostles. While I have mentioned some of

these texts in this lesson, I am compelled to gather them together in this conclusion. They are of a most serious nature that demands our comprehension of them.

⇨ **MANY WILL BE DECEIVED.** “And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And **many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.** And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matt 24:10-12).

⇨ **STRONG DECEPTION.** “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matt 24:24).

⇨ **FALSE CLAIMS.** “And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them” (Luke 21:8).

⇨ **NOT SPARING THE FLOCK.** “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29).

⇨ **A MASSIVE FALLING AWAY.** “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except **there come a falling away first,** and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess 2:3-4).

⇨ **A DEPARTURE FROM THE FAITH.** “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times **some shall depart from the faith,** giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth” (1 Tim 4:1-3).

⇨ **POWERLESS RELIGION.** “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; **Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof:** from such turn away” (2 Tim 3:1-5).

⇨ **FALSE DOCTRINE PREFERRED.** “For the

it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time” (1 John 2:18).

⇨ **MANY FALSE PROPHETS.** “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

⇨ **MANY DECEIVERS.** “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist” (2 John 1:7).

The erroneous teachings concerning a falling away are of themselves proof that it has already taken place. The staggering divisions among professing Christians confirm that a falling away has taken place. The pervasive presence of immorality and ignorance within the churches announce that perilous times are here. The prevalence of religious opportunists and charlatans within the Christian community is validation of a falling away.

time will come when **they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;** And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim 4:3-4).

⇨ **DAMNABLE HERESIES.** “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as **there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies,** even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (2 Pet 2:1-3).

⇨ **MANY ANTICHRISTS.** “Little children,

What is there about these words that would lead a person to think this defection is not accompanied by the greatest dangers? How is it that the doctrines of demons, who are stronger and more persuasive than mere men, are not something to be detected and avoided? What has moved men to imagine that the church will be removed before this massive falling away takes place?

The erroneous teachings concerning a falling away are of themselves proof that it has already taken place. The staggering divisions among professing Christians confirm that a falling away has taken place. The pervasive presence of immorality and ignorance within the churches announce that perilous times are here. The prevalence of religious opportunists and charlatans within the Christian community is validation of a falling away. The fact that the masses of Christians have so readily received those whose teaching is, at the least off-center, and at the worst an outright lie, confirms that

the time of deception has arrived.

Yet, in the midst of all of this religious confusion and defection, the professing church is sound asleep – with the Judge standing at the door (James 5:9). How appropriate are the words of the Spirit: “And that, knowing the time,

that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and

wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:11-14). **It is time for the church to shake itself, and throw off the mantel of lethargy!** This is “high time,” and to fall asleep during it is lethal.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 10/23/09. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The Eighty-fifth lesson will cover verses 1 through 9 of the twenty-first chapter: “TRAVELING BY SHIP AND MEETING BRETHERN.” God was with Paul in his travels, giving him a remarkable level of favor with the military man in charge. Along the way, he was able to meet with brethren who encouraged him in the Lord, and he was given time to spend with them, even though he was technically a prisoner. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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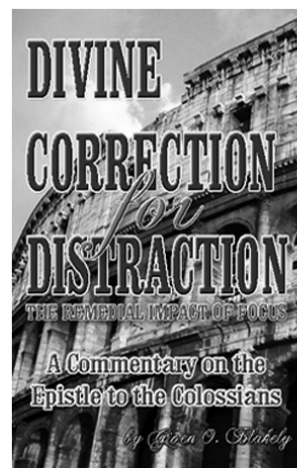


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"Openings and Introductions" = 7-10 minute exposition of truth to promote spiritual focus; "Calling" = 7-10 minute exposition of truth designed to provoke disciplined thought; "Sermon" = 45 minute exposition of the things of God as revealed in Scripture; "Exhortation" = 5-8 minute challenge to act upon the truth we have heard; "Table Meditation" = 8-12 minute exposition of matters relating to Christ's role in salvation; "Lead Scripture shower" = Leading of the quoting/reading of Scripture without comment; "Lead prayer session" = Presentation of three matters for prayer that are taken from the Word of God; "Lead Intercessory Prayer" = A time of focused prayers for personal needs.

DURING SEPTEMBER, 2009

1. *Blakely, Benjamin* (Lead AM Singing, Closing Scripture/Meditation, AM Calling).
2. *Given O. Blakely* (PM Sermon, PM Sermon).
3. *Blakely, Jonathan* (AM Opening, AM Calling, AM Table Meditation, PM Sermon).
4. *Blakely, June* (Lead Evening Prayer Session, Teach AM Class, Lead PM Singing).
5. *Blakely, Mattie* (AM Opening).
6. *Blakely, Michael* (AM Calling, AM Exhortation, AM Table Meditation, AM Sermon, PM Table Meditation).
7. *Blakely, Michele* (Play Piano, PM Introduction).
8. *Cobb, Anita* (Lead Scripture Shower).
9. *Cobb, Matthew* (AM Opening, PM Sermon).
10. *Cobb, Nicole* (Lead Scripture Shower, AM Calling).
11. *Cobb, Robert* (AM Exhortation, AM Table Meditation, AM Sermon, AM Exhortation, AM Sermon, Lead PM Singing, PM Introduction, PM Table Meditation, PM Exhortation).
12. *Dill, Sarah* (Quote AM Closing Scripture)
13. *Hill, John* (Lead Intercessory Prayer).
14. *Hutchcraft, Aaron* (AM Sermon, AM Exhortation, Teach AM Class, AM Table Meditation, PM Exhortation, PM Exhortation).
15. *Hutchcraft, Barbara* (Lead AM Singing, AM Closing Scripture/Benediction, Lead PM Singing, Lead PM Singing, PM Introduction).
16. *Hutchcraft, Debbie* (Lead Scripture Shower, Lead PM Singing).
17. *Hutchcraft, Gene* (Intercessory Prayer, Teach AM Class, AM Sermon, AM Exhortation, PM Exhortation, PM Table Meditation).
18. *Hutchcraft, Judah* (Lead Scripture Shower, Introduction to PM Sermon, Read PM Sermon Text).
19. *Micah Hutchcraft* (AM Table Meditation, PM Table Meditation).
20. *Leah Hutchcraft* (AM Calling).
21. *Miller, Amanda* (Lead AM Singing, PM Opening).
22. *Miller, Levi* (Lead AM Singing).
23. *Murphy, Mariah* (Special Piano Numbers for PM Message, Read AM Sermon Text, Read PM Sermon Text).
24. *Murphy, Micaela* (Read AM Sermon Text, Read PM Sermon Text).
25. *Parker, Melissa* (AM Benediction, AM Scripture Shower).
26. *Parker, Tony* (AM Opening).
27. *Rebecca Scalf* (Lead AM Singing).
28. *Sims, Annie* (Read AM Sermon Text).
29. *Sims, Baylie* (Read PM Sermon Text).
30. *Sims, Ricky* (Teach AM Class, PM Sermon).
31. *Stuhlman, Laura* (Closing Scripture/Meditation. Closing Scripture/Meditation).
32. *Williams, Jeremy* (AM Opening, PM Opening, PM Sermon).
33. *Williams, Logan* (Play AM/PM Lord's Table Interlude, Read AM Sermon Text, Read AM Sermon Text, Introduce AM Sermon).
34. *Williams, Nichole* (PM Introduction).
35. *Williams, Sydney* (Read PM Sermon Text)
36. *Preparing Lord's Supper* (Various sisters).

THE BODY OF CHRIST

It is a fact: "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him" (1 Cor 12:18). He did not set them in the home, but "in the body." He did not place them in society, but "in the body." They are functioning members of the body who fill necessary functions – edifying roles in the solemn assembly (1 Cor 12:19-27). The functioning value and ministry of "the body" is realized when it is "together," not when the people are separated. The ministry of each member is determined by their faith – "a measure of faith" that has been given to them in order to the "profit" of the entire body (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:7). This is how the Lord has put together "the church, which is His body" (Eph 1:22-23). We make no apologies for the ministry of the entire body – publicly, in the assembly, and in order to the edification of the saints. This is all done in an orderly manner, with due thoughtfulness and regard for those who are in Christ Jesus, and who, in faithfulness to God who gave these various abilities. Our assemblies are designed to allow for the various expressions and insightful responses of all who are of honest and good heart, have faith, and are in, and living for, the Lord Jesus.