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PAUL'S NEVER-ENDING TASK

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
ACTS 20:20-26
NUMBER 94

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ACTS 20:20-26 "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men."

The Pastors' Conference at Miletus was about to come to an end. Those pastors had listened to Paul teach Bible doctrine and he had given them basic Bible truth. But Paul was convinced that he would see their faces no more, realizing that he probably would never come that way again. So these parting words of instruction are very personal and touching.

ACTS 20:26 "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men." In this verse Paul stated a very basic principle which he followed in all his teaching. "Dia" plus the accusative should always be translated "Because of this". So Paul says, "Because of this I witness before you this day that I am pure from the blood of all men". This is a bold declaration for Paul to make and he is saying to them that he had done everything within his power in order to make them self-sustaining.

"I am pure" comes from "Katharos". Aristotle used this word to describe the reaction of an audience to Greek drama. It was designed to bring out the emotions of people and create in them an attitude of worship. Greek drama was designed to lead people to an attitude of worship for the Greek Gods. Now this word does mean clean, pure, ceremonially clean, but as used here by Paul, it is referring mainly to responsibility. Paul knew the scope of his responsibility to the Lord. Paul knew he had been called of God and prepared by God for the special work of building a platform for the churches of the world. So Paul's responsibility was to believers. He was a pastor at large and his main task was to communicate Bible doctrine to the world. Now in order to communicate doctrine you have to know doctrine. To know doctrine you have to study doctrine. It is a never-ending task. So Paul studied and taught, studied and taught, studied and taught. From this we get a principle. A pastor is not to be primarily a crutch for his people to lean on, neither is he primarily to be a counselor. His chief task is not to go around and pat people on the back to make them feel good. A pastor cannot spend the major portion of his time in administration and promotion and serve as a goodwill man if he is going to discharge his responsibility to the people. The church member has a right to expect from the pastor an accurate teaching and interpretation of the Word of God. Now this is exactly what Paul meant in this phrase when he said, "I am pure". This phrase meant he had accurately and carefully discharged his responsibility to these people. Paul did not mean by the phrase, "I am pure" that he had reached sinless perfection. Paul knew quite well his own limitations. But he also knew he had been true to the responsibility placed upon him. He did the will and work of God by consistently teaching Bible doctrine to the people in the churches and to the pastors. So this verse in a very special way pinpoints the responsibility of the pastor--and that is to give Bible doctrine out to the people.

I am now going to make a statement that may shake some of you up in your minds, but it is true. The statement is this--the PRIMARY responsibility of the pastor toward you is not to love you, to pray for you, and to say nice things about you. The pastor's PRIMARY responsibility toward you is to fill your mind with Bible truth. To be sure a true pastor will love you, pray for you, and try to help you in every way but these things are not PRIMARY. So the result of Paul's work was this--the people who heard him became self-sustaining and they learned not to lean on him but they learned how to lean on the Lord. Let me state this principle again--the important thing is not the man but the message.

Paul went on to say, "I am pure FROM THE BLOOD OF ALL MEN". This phrase, "From The Blood of All Men" is an idiom meaning that you are responsible for your own response to the gospel. You are responsible for your own decisions. The pastor is to give out the message, what you do with the message is your responsibility. "Blood" here refers to their own failures. So after Paul communicated doctrine to them he left it up to them to accept it or reject it.

In 2 Corinthians 6:11-12 Paul says the same thing to the Corinthians. 2 CORINTHIANS 6:11-12 "O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels." "Our mouth is open unto you" means that he taught them Bible doctrine. "Our heart is enlarged" is an idiom meaning that they had to learn doctrine and store it in their minds before they could communicate it to others. Then he said, "You are not hindered by us, but you are hindered by your own emotional patterns". These Corinthians had often been led astray by their own emotions. But remember, emotions as such do not constitute a spiritual experience. These Corinthians depended on experiences and upon emotion instead of the truth of the Word of God.

So in our passage in Acts and this passage in 2 Corinthians Paul says exactly the same thing. KNOWLEDGE OF DOCTRINE PLUS THE FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT EQUALS PRODUCTION OF DIVINE GOOD.

God does three things for us--

1. In salvation God makes every believer into the likeness of his Son.
2. In human experience after salvation God works in us with the Holy Spirit and that work is divine good.
3. In phase three, which will be our life in eternity, we are going to be like Christ in that our old sin nature will be gone and we will then reach ultimate sanctification.

ACTS 20:27 "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." Paul here clearly stated his responsibility as a spiritual leader. "I have not shunned comes from "Hupostello" and this means draw in the sail and hold the ship back. In other words, Paul is saying to these pastors that in every communication he had had with them he had not held back in declaring to them Bible doctrine. Every time Paul opened his mouth he gave them Bible truth. Paul really means to say that he had not exalted his own personality or his own ability as a traveling evangelist. He is simply stating that he had been true to his main responsibility and that was dispensing Bible doctrine.

"To declare" comes from "An aggelos" and "An" means again and "Aggelos" means to communicate. So this means to teach again and again and again. A soldier has to be trained in warfare by going through the drills again and again and again. He is trained so well that when he gets under fire he knows what to do almost without thinking. In this way he comes to be able to respond with confidence. Paul here stated that this was the method he had used with these people. He would soon be gone from them, but he had so drilled them with the truth that they would never be able to forget it. Then he said, "All the counsel of God". The word for counsel is "Boule" and it means the design of God's plan. Paul had declared again and again all the design of God's great plan for man.

In the next few verses in this chapter Paul gave them a final warning.

ACTS 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." They were to beware of two things--themselves and their flocks.

They were to feed their flocks with doctrine.

In John 21 where Jesus talked to Simon Peter beside the Sea of Galilee, he said to him, "Feed my lambs". For the word "feed" he used the word "Bosco". And it means to keep feeding the little new Christians with Bible doctrine. Then Jesus said, "Feed my sheep" and the word he used for feed this time was "Poimino" and this literally means to feed them with the stick of discipline. A shepherd has a staff and the staff is to be used on the hardheaded sheep who insist on not staying in the proper place. If they try to wander off and get lost or get away so some wild animal will rush in and devour them, the shepherd is to take the staff and discipline them back into the right road. Then the third time Jesus said to Peter, "Feed my sheep" and he used the word "Bosco" again, and it means to give Bible doctrine to the sheep who have positive volition and are trying to live in the right way.

Here in this 28th verse of Acts 20 Paul said, "Over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseer" and he used the word "Tithemi". This word means to appoint, and the Holy Spirit does the appointing. This means that a pastor is called, appointed, commissioned by a sovereign act of the Holy Spirit. So often when people fall away from Christian service I will hear someone say, "I wonder if they were really called by God in the first place?" So if someone is thinking of going into Christian service without a divine appointment, let him forget it.

The word for "Overseer" here comes from "Episkopos". It means to look after their spiritual needs. It is a word meaning final spiritual authority. Just as we had in the passage in John 21 about feeding the lambs and the sheep here we have the words "Feed the church of God". He uses the word "Poimino" and it means feed them with the rod of correction and discipline. They are called the Church that belongs to God. So the pastor doesn't own the sheep, he didn't buy them. They belong to Christ. It is the responsibility of the pastor to communicate doctrine to the church member. There his responsibility ends. He is not to follow you around and see whether you carry out these things or not. Whether you are obedient or not is between you and God. You are to learn the Word of God and on that basis you are to live your life as unto the Lord. Always remember--you don't belong to a pastor, you belong to God. So live your life as unto God. And Paul adds, "Which he has purchased with his own blood". This is the cost price, his own blood. That's why our responsibility is to God and to God alone.