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PAUL'S PROPHETIC WARNING TO THE MILETUS PASTOR'S CONFERENCE

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 95
ACTS 20:28-30

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ACTS 20:28-30 "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. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."
We have studied Paul's responsibility toward the pastors of the Ephesus area. While Paul was moving on toward Jerusalem to go there and help deliver the large offering that had been collected for the poor of that city, he had stopped off at Miletus, the seaport of Ephesus, and had called the pastors in for a short Bible conference. Paul had emphasized again and again to these preachers that the most important thing in all the world for the minister was giving of the Word of God to the people. This is always to be the chief responsibility of the pastor. The pastor is not primarily a promoter, a money-raiser, an administrator, or a good-will man. His primary responsibility all the time, year in and year out is to give the Word of God to the people. Correct interpretation of Scripture in the ears of the people is always the first responsibility of the Pastor. He must do some secondary things also, but his main task is to study and teach.

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." Paul had been reminding these pastors that we are all born losers. We have no merit within ourselves. What we receive at the hands of Christ from the cross is all unmerited. We are Christians by the grace of God and not because of any achievement or merit of our own. We are to keep this thought uppermost in our minds at all times. This is the only way for a believer to be self-sustaining. In every phase of the plan of God let us remember God does the work. He provided salvation for us. After we are saved he provides the Holy Spirit to live within us and give us daily guidance. In eternity the home in which we will live he will provide. So in all three phases of our experience, God does it all. The whole plan of God is based on grace and man simply receives in a non-meritorious way what God has provided. God never blesses us on the basis of who and what we are but on the basis of who and what he is. In the Miletus Conference Paul has made this quite clear.

So in verse 28 Paul says "Take heed" but the Greek word actually means "beware". Paul reminds these pastors that they have a responsibility in two directions--toward themselves and toward their people. They are to "beware" lest they get away from their main responsibility. Their task is to give Bible doctrine and this is what makes a pastor function. These pastors are being warned to take a real good look at themselves and their task. If they are Spirit filled and if they give themselves to their main task then they can function as effective pastors. Evidently some of these pastors in the Miletus Conference were very weak in Bible doctrine and in Bible instruction so Paul reminds them again of their main task.

In the very next verse we are going to see how problems will arise in the churches and how trouble makers are going to enter in to lead the people astray. Paul knew that the only way to get these people ready for facing these troubles is for them to be armed with the truth of Scripture. The plan of God is for Christians to be self-sustaining through a knowledge of the Word. Paul reminds them "To keep on looking to yourself". This means they are not to depend on their own personality, not to depend on their own personal charm or charisma. They are to depend on the Word of God. Neither does Paul want these pastors to depend on him. He knows that he soon will be gone and if they don't have inner stability they will crumble under pressure. So Paul reminds them again "The Holy Spirit hath made you pastors". They were in the ministry for one reason and one reason only--the Holy Spirit had put them there. Spiritual leadership is infinitely different from any other leadership and from human leadership. The Holy Spirit never makes a mistake, never gives the wrong signals or direction, never leads the individual into some blind alley. This word for "made" is "Tithemi" and it refers to the point of time when the Holy Spirit picked them up and made pastors out of them. Their spiritual gift as pastor and teacher was not an achievement but their spiritual gift had been given them by God the Holy Spirit. When any pastor is beginning to believe that he is accomplishing something great because of his amazing capabilities he should read this verse and heed again Paul's word "The Holy Spirit has made you". It is even more expressive than that. The language here says "I myself, I the Holy Spirit have made you a minister. I picked you out and commissioned you. I hold you in my hand every day." The indicative mood here of "made you a minister" refers to the reality of the work of the Holy Spirit inside the life and it means that a servant in Christian service is to take no credit for his call. So the Pastor's authority is the authority of the Holy Spirit. Paul goes on to say that God has purchased the Christian "With his own blood." You recall how in the past we have discussed the fact that Christ did not bleed to death on the cross. We must understand very clearly what this phrase "With his own blood" means. It is a relationship between an anticipation of the cross and the historical fulfillment of it.

Animal sacrifice was used to draw a physical picture of the death of Christ for our sins. An animal was placed on the altar and the offending man would stand there, place his hand on the head of the animal, and name his sins to the priest. This was a picture of the fact that his sins were transferred to the innocent animal. The priest would cut the throat of the animal and the animal would bleed to death. The animal would die physically, bearing sins that were not his. The blood was the physical death of the animal.

But the blood of Christ represented his spiritual death on the cross. He died spiritually for our sins and after our sins were payed for on the cross then he died physically. Jesus bled from his hands and his feet but he did not bleed to death on the cross. So the physical blood of the animal represented the spiritual death of Christ on the cross. The sins of every man in the human race were poured out on Christ and he died spiritually for those sins and then said "It is finished" and he was still alive. Then he dismissed his spirit and he died physically. Christ died twice on the cross. He died spiritually and he died physically. So when the Bible says "The wages of

sin is death" it is always referring to spiritual death. Let us go back to the first case of spiritual death in the Bible. In Genesis 2:17 God said to Adam "Dying, thou shalt die". When Adam disobeyed God and sinned he died spiritually and received immediately an old sin nature. And the first act of that old sin nature was something that God has constantly warned us about, namely, HUMAN GOOD. In Adam's case it was operation fig leaves. It was the work of his own hands to try to cover the nakedness of his sin. But human good, human works, can never satisfy God. But remember it was over 900 years later before Adam died physically. Adam didn't die physically when he sinned, he died spiritually. So Paul here used the phrase "With his own blood" to refer to those who were blood bought, who had believed in Christ and were born again. Paul here stated the basis for membership in God's family--namely, they were under the blood.

Acts 20:29 "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." Paul here states a fact and says "For I know". Paul had learned this from experience. As an apostle Paul had authority over the churches. By 96 A.D. all the apostles would be dead and this kind of authority would cease. A little later Timothy would have this authority and then John. But when they passed off the scene this kind of authority was over. We do not have one line of Scripture that gives a Bishop or some other man authority over churches.

This phrase "grievous wolves" comes from the Greek word "Barous" and means "heavy pressure" and in usage it came to mean a burdensome bully. Paul knew some of these pastors would try to throw their weight around and would try to distate policies to the churches that were not in keeping with true doctrine. So Paul calls them grievous wolves. Some of the very men who were at that moment listening to Paul's voice would be guilty of that very thing. We know this from the language in the very next verse. Paul says "Come out from your own selves" will be guilty of leading the churches astray. The wolf is an unbeliever and false teacher who will end up in the lake of fire, but some of the pastors listening to Paul would provide false leadership, and being believers, they would complicate the situation even more.

Acts 20:30 "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Possibly a more literal translation would read "And out from among your own selves shall men revolt, speaking perverse things". Now what are these "perverse things" that these false preachers are going to teach. There is a hint of it in 2 Peter 2:10.

2 Peter 2:10 "But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities." Though they are believers, they are controlled by the old sin nature. They cater to the wealthy. They also downgrade nationalism. Practically all false teachers are internationalists. They advocate social action and socialism. Remember, this is going on today right here in our own nation. They despise nationalism, yet the nation is a divine institution designed by God.

Back in verse 29 we have the method these "grievous wolves" will use. It says they "enter in". The Greek word is "eisechhomai" and it means being subtle, being sly, being a deceiver. With their soft words and pleasing personality they sell you on certain strange doctrine and before you know it they have you in their trap. These false wolves

slip in and almost before you know it the church is destroyed. So Paul warns these preachers to keep up their guard against false teachers rising up in their midst. We have this problem until this very day. The word in verse 30 translated "arise" really means revolt. So some of these very pastors would become apostate and lead a revolt away from the true Bible doctrine Paul had taught them. They would speak "distorted things" with little emphasis on true Bible doctrine. The result is that disciples are drawn away. The word is from "apospao" and means seduce. They are going to seduce them by selling them on themselves instead of on Bible truth. It really goes like this. "Man shall not live by bread alone but by the charming personality of a pastor who leaves the Word of God and relies on his own methods and schemes to get things done." Paul is giving them a stern warning about such false doctrine. In other words, some of them would be pastors of congregations and some of them would be seducers of congregations. The pulpit is not a place to communicate your personality but to communicate doctrine. In our next study we will witness the crying session in Paul's final farewell.