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Be Alert with Regard to Yourself

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BE ALERT WITH REGARD TO YOURSELF

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 96
ACTS 20:30-31

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ACTS 20:30-31 "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."

We have been in an intensive study of the proceedings of the Pastors' Conference in Miletus. We have been studying the instructions Paul gave to these pastors. These instructions Paul gave to the pastors have a very vital application to every Christian, for every Christian is in full-time Christian service. We are all members of the body of Christ and Christ has provided for each individual Christian a spiritual gift. It is very much like a football team. Are all quarterbacks? No! Are all guards, or ends, or fullbacks? Certainly not! Each player had his particular spot and all members of the body of Christ are important and the Holy Spirit selects each one of us and gives us a special assignment. We are to perform in a certain way and in a certain spot because of the appointment of the Holy Spirit. We need to remember that as long as we are alive in this earth each one of us is in full-time Christian service, and whatever we do in life, we do it as unto the Lord and to please the Lord only. Every single task in God's great plan is to be filled with a God-appointed man, each in his God-appointed place. Please remember this--you are not a second class Christian just because you sit in a pew and do not stand in the pulpit or go across the sea and serve as a missionary. You are to live your life as unto the Lord and witness for him in your own way and place. As a follower of Christ you are to do your best in your place and not one single place filled by a Christian is insignificant. In order to live this kind of life it is absolutely essential that you know Bible doctrine.

Let us think of some of the misconceptions we have today concerning these things. Just suppose at the end of an evangelistic service the evangelist gives some instruction to the new converts who have come forward in response to the gospel appeal. He reminds them, among other things, that it is necessary for them, if they expect to grow as Christians, to read and study the Bible every day. But remember, the new convert is a spiritual baby and when he picks up the Bible and tries to read it, he actually gets very little out of it. A new baby cannot sit in his playpen and read the newspaper, neither can a new baby Christian pick up the Bible and read it and get very much out of it. The Bible is the revealed plan of God. But God has given the gift of pastor and teacher to certain people and it is through this gift that you are to be taught and in this way learn Bible doctrine. My responsibility to you is to study the Word of God and in turn give the truth of that word to you. I must do this day in and day out. It is verse by verse and chapter by chapter teaching. My responsibility is to give you Bible doctrine. But as a pastor-teacher I cannot make you learn it neither can I force you to apply it. If I could, then you would use me as a crutch and you would not learn how to use the Word of God in time of need. I cannot live your life for you, but I can give you Bible doctrine and you can take that truth and live by it. In the process of communication it takes your cooperation and you have to be willing to study and learn and then study and learn some more until finally you have your mind filled and saturated with Bible truth. Now many times we want to speed up the process and we look for some magic formula or some gimmick which will make a big splash so people will look at us and talk about how great we are. This means that a pastor must mind his own business and not try to force people into decisions that they are not ready to make. The one thing that counts is that we give doctrine to Christians--what they do with it is between them and the Lord.

ACTS 20:30 "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Paul had given stability to the church at Ephesus and to all the surrounding churches great stability by giving them doctrine. During that process a great many men had been called into the ministry and had become pastors. Here Paul is talking to these pastors and he tells them that even though he had trained them himself, he knew that some of them would become apostate. It literally means "From your own ranks some will arise speaking distorted things". Distorted or perverted things means to take something that is true and super-impose on it something that is unnecessary or false. It means to take true doctrine and true principles and super-impose on them some human system or some human solution. This is the way to rob the Word of God of its power. Paul reminded that some of them will "draw away disciples after them". It means that instead of people following the instruction of Bible doctrine they will get their eyes on the pastor and magnify his personality and follow his instruction instead of following the instruction of the Lord. The purpose of the pastor is not to sell his own system or personality to the people, but his purpose is to give the people the Word of God without distorting it or toning it down. So we come back again to our thesis--IT IS NOT THE MAN BUT THE MESSAGE THAT IS IMPORTANT. The safest system for the pastor to follow is this--Take Scripture verse by verse, chapter by chapter and in the process of time every need of every person in the congregation will be met. In this way the preacher protects himself and he protects the people also. Detours are avoided and both the pastor and the people stay on the main issues. It is so easy to leave the Word of God and move forward on our own schemes and systems. This is when we get off the main issue and begin to major on minors. Don't get involved in systems, but saturate your mind with Scripture and live each day by the clear teaching of the Word of God. Don't ever do anything just because I say for you to do it, unless what I ask you to do lines up with the clear teaching of Scripture. What you accomplish is either human good or divine good. What you do in keeping with the instruction of Scripture always ends up in divine good and everything else you do results in human good. The plan of God is perfect because God is perfect. So when you follow God's plan you always produce divine good.

In the profession of law or medicine or school teaching or anything else do your work as unto the Lord, and you will begin to live relaxed, you will be happy, and you will discover abundant evidence of God's approval of your life. The most important thing we do here at this church is to teach Bible doctrine and this is the only way you will ever become spiritually self-sustaining. In your life operate on the basis of the truth of the Word of God and you will become a solid, stable, growing Christian.

Here in verse 30 please notice the result of the crooked, perverse teaching of these apostate pastors. "They drew away disciples after them". If they had taught aright then they would have drawn away disciples after Christ. But people followed their personality, their programs, their human schemes and were actually drawn away from Christ. So people became psychologically adjusted to these distorted views and came to feel at home with them. Then when another pastor comes along they have to learn another set of programs and procedures. Exactly in this way so many times people can find the foundation fall from beneath them. Let me ask you a question--On whom do you depend, on some man or upon God? Do you depend upon what the preacher says or on what the Word of God says? Now if the preacher is accurately and truthfully speaking the Word of God, then you can safely act upon what he says, but be sure you know your doctrinal ground. This is precisely the issue Paul faced with the pastors in the Bible conference at Miletus. And the problem is just as real with us today as it was in Paul's day. You remember this--Pastors come and pastors go, but the Word of God abides forever.

ACTS 20:31 "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."

The word for watch is "gregoreo". We get the name "Gregory" from it and it means to be alert. There are two Greek words translated "watch" and the other word is "Phulasso". Now "Gregoreo" means to be alert with regard to yourself, while "Phulasso" means to be alert with regard to the things around you. So the word Paul used here means that these pastors are to be alert with regard to themselves. It simply means that the pastor better stick with the Word of God. A pastor must ever keep his eye on himself and be sure that his old sin nature doesn't take over. He must never let his success go to his head. He must never for one minute think about his own greatness. The pastor needs to keep his eye on Christ all the time and study Scripture all the time so when he opens his mouth out will come nothing but true doctrine. So you see, the Word of God protects us from ourselves as well as from others. The present, active, imperative form of "gregoreo" means to keep on being alert all the time for it is a command of the Lord. The thing they are to remember is Bible doctrine.

MATTHEW 4:4 "But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

HEBREWS 3:7 "Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice,"

So all of us, all the time, under every circumstance and condition are to depend on Bible doctrine.

Notice that it says, "By the space of three years I ceased not to warn you. The word "warn" comes from "Noutheteo" and it means fill the empty shelves of their minds with Bible truth. Paul had tried to fill the empty shelves with truth.

What is the result of all this? It is RELAXED MENTAL ATTITUDE. There is simply no other way to reach spiritual maturity. We grow on the basis of Bible doctrine in our minds.

Paul knew he was leaving them, but he also knew he had taught them accurately and he is appealing to them to forget him and fall back on the truth he had deposited in their minds.