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A SOLEMN CHARGE AND A TEARFUL FAREWELL

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
ACTS 20:32-38
NUMBER 97

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ACTS 20:32-38 "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. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed 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. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship."

Paul is speaking here to the pastors at the Bible conference.

"Brethren" is a word used here for believers. Most pastors are believers but indeed it is a sad commentary of our times that we have to admit that some men who call themselves preachers are not believers.

ACTS 20:32 "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." The phrase "I commend you to God" is a very important statement. The word for commend is "paratithemi". "Tithemi" means to place and "para" means from the immediate source of self. When you place the two words together, the two words mean "To make a deposit". It is present, middle, indicative and means "I keep on making a deposit". Paul did this by studying and then by teaching these pastors the things he had learned. Paul deposited Bible doctrine with these pastors and he can walk away from them and with confidence leave them in the Lord's hands. These men do not need Paul, but they do need Bible doctrine. So Paul said, "I now deposit in you the word of grace". This is the greatest thing any theological teacher can do for his pupils. This is the greatest thing any pastor can do for his people. Actually there are five different deposits spoken of in the New Testament.

1. At salvation every believer deposits his life with the Lord.
2 TIMOTHY 1:12 "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."
2. The Lord makes a deposit with us as we live the Christian life.
2 TIMOTHY 1:14 "That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us."
3. The believer makes a deposit with the Lord as he places his problems and burden in the Lord's hands.
1 PETER 4:19 "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."
PSALM 55:22 "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."
4. The believer is to deposit the gospel with the unbeliever.
ROMANS 1:14 "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise."
5. Believers are to deposit doctrine with other believers.
2 TIMOTHY 2:2 "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

2 TIMOTHY 2:1-2 "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

Paul here admonishes Timothy to teach others the things he had taught him in the theological school. Paul was the only theological school Timothy had. Timothy traveled with Paul and Paul told Timothy it was his responsibility to teach others the things that he had learned. Paul tells him to teach the things he had learned "from the immediate source of me". Paul is telling Timothy that he in turn is to train other preachers just as Paul had trained him. This passage does not apply to all believers, but to pastors and teachers for he specifies "to faithful men" and this is a technical term used for pastors and teachers. So if you have been wondering if theological schools are scriptural, here is scripture foundation for them. These theological students are to learn, and once they have learned then they are to go out and teach others. "Who shall be able to teach" is the description Paul gave to Timothy and his task. This is the task of the theological professor and also the task of the pastor. Now be sure you have learned it correctly, but once you have learned it, then go out and teach others. These five deposits are very important. First, you deposit your life with the Lord, and then he deposits his truth in your mind. Then the believer is daily to deposit his problems in the Lord's hands. Once this is done we are in a position to witness and deposit the truth of the Lord in the minds of unbelievers. So seminary students are taught so they can teach others.

This 20th chapter of Acts is a key chapter and that is why we have spent so much time with it. You can't just go off half-cocked and start churches and turn them loose under just any kind of teaching. This is where so many of our problems have come from. The wrong kind of teaching leads to the wrong kind of emphasis in the church and the wrong emphasis in the church gets people off on tangents and detours. These pastors are soon to leave Paul. They must go back to their churches and stand on their own foundation. Will they be able to do it? It all depends.

"The word of his grace" is in the instrumental case and should read "Through the word of his grace". Paul does not have to be on the scene in order for them to be effective pastors. They are to get their eyes off Paul and they are to focus their eyes on the Lord and on their own doctrine. A pastor is no greater than the doctrinal content of his message. It is fine if the personality of the preacher or teacher is good and attractive, but this is not the most important factor. The truth of the doctrine proclaimed is the important thing. "Which is able to build you up" is the result of doctrine in your mind and there is no other way you can be built up. You can't depend on promotion and inspiration and thrills and dedications. You must have the mind of Christ and the only way you can do that is to have doctrinal truth in your mind.

In these next three verses in Acts 20, we have Paul's motivation. Paul has given these preachers sermon material so they need never run out of something to preach. Some preachers have a few sermons and they preach those sermons and then they say, "The barrel is empty". Now if a pastor will stick to the Bible, he never will have that experience. These pastors Paul had trained need never worry about sermon material. Paul had given them material for a continuing ministry and their barrels would never run dry. This also means that they could be assured that they would always have a congregation to whom they could preach. So I suppose Paul left Ephesus with peace of mind so far as these preachers were concerned. This is one reason why these preachers are going to cry and fall on Paul's neck and kiss him. They were thankful for all he had taught them.

ACTS 20:33 "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel." Paul in this verse mentioned silver, gold, and apparel. He had not coveted their money, and to refer to this he used the word "silver". The word "gold" here refers to wealth in general. The word "apparel" refers to material things. Paul had not catered to the rich so he could get material things. This is a good principle for a preacher to follow. No minister should butter-up the wealthy in order to get their financial support. "Covet"

as used here means to set your affection on something. Paul never had any material wealth and he here stated the principle upon which he operated. This had been his principle of operation throughout his entire missionary career. It is wrong for a preacher to covet material things. You can't covet material things and give out the gospel at the same time. This doesn't mean that the preacher should be a pauper. The pastor's income should be sufficient for his living so he can give his whole attention to spiritual matters. Paul never made an issue of money.

ACTS 20:34 "Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me." Paul worked and took his own money and helped support the theological school for the seminary students. This is a very important principle for a pastor. He is to work hard and to use his money to help bring in the kingdom of God. I would like to add a personal word here. I express publically my thanks to a church that has cared for my financial needs. Because of this, one of the great joys of my life has been the opportunity I have had to pour money back into the work of Christ locally and around the world.

ACTS 20:35 "I have shewed 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." Paul says, "I have pointed out all things to you". Paul is here reminding them that they are to give financial help to the needy ones among their congregation and community. The word for support is "antilombanamai" and means to take your turn at bat in helping someone in distress. Paul now reports something Jesus said which is not recorded anywhere else in scripture. Here it is--"It is more blessed to give than to receive".

Six Points on the Words "more blessed"

1. Giving expresses the principle of grace.
2. The principle of grace depends on the character of the giver.
3. The person gives on the basis of who and what he is and not on the basis of whether the one who receives the gift is worthy or not.
4. Often the needy to whom you give are obnoxious and unworthy.
5. How much a person needs your help is not the issue in giving.
6. The issue in giving is your stability of character, your generosity, your genuine love. Operation grace is the issue in giving.

Six Points on the word "receive"

1. The recipient is the object of grace but they are not the object lesson of grace. The giver is the object lesson.
2. The more frequently the believer gives the more real the principle of grace comes to be in his life.
3. The more a believer is reminded of grace the more he is oriented to grace.
4. Giving depends on the character of the giver. It does not depend on the recipient.
5. Giving gimmicks are to be avoided. Don't give to impress people or because someone else gives. Give as unto the Lord.
6. If a believer gives in order to get something back from God he has missed the whole principle of giving by grace.

ACTS 20:36 "And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all." This is the benediction of the Pastors' Conference. They prayed. It must have been a very great hour. When men kneel and pray something wonderful always happens.

ACTS 20:37 "And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him"
This is the weeping of gratitude. They wept considerably. They fell on Paul's neck and kissed him. Remember that this was a custom in those times. In many of the old countries this is still a very important custom. They kissed on both sides of the face and neck. To them this was a maximum expression of gratitude. I might add that I am glad that we do not have that custom in this country.

ACTS 20:38 "Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship." So this is the tearful farewell. You can almost feel the sadness of this occasion. Paul meant more to these preachers than anyone else on earth. They would see his face no more. I somehow believe Paul was relieved when it was over.