

**PROPAGATING THE RESURRECTED,  
ASCENDED, AND ALL-INCLUSIVE CHRIST  
AS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

(Friday—First Morning Session)

Message Four

**Shepherding the Flock of God according to God  
by Being Patterns of the Flock**

*JL Hymns: 398*

Scripture Reading: Acts 20:18-38

- Acts 20:18 And when they came to him, he said to them, You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you all the time,
- Acts 20:19 Serving the Lord as a slave with all humility and tears and trials which came upon me by the plots of the Jews;
- Acts 20:20 How I did not withhold any of those things that are profitable by not declaring them to you and by not teaching you publicly and from house to house,
- Acts 20:21 Solemnly testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance unto God and faith in our Lord Jesus.
- Acts 20:22 And now, behold, I am going bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing what will meet me there,
- Acts 20:23 Except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in city after city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.
- Acts 20:24 But I consider my life of no account as if precious to myself, in order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus to solemnly testify of the gospel of the grace of God.
- Acts 20:25 And now, behold, I know that you all, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will see my face no more.
- Acts 20:26 Therefore I testify to you on this day that I am clean from the blood of all men,
- Acts 20:27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you all the counsel of God.
- Acts 20:28 Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood.
- Acts 20:29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.
- Acts 20:30 And from among you yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them.
- Acts 20:31 Therefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears.
- Acts 20:32 And now I commit you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who have been sanctified.
- Acts 20:33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing.
- Acts 20:34 You yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my needs and to those who are with me.
- Acts 20:35 In all things I have shown you by example that toiling in this way we ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.
- Acts 20:36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down with them all and prayed.
- Acts 20:37 And there was considerable weeping by all; and falling on Paul's neck, they kissed him affectionately,
- Acts 20:38 Especially pained over the word which he had spoken, that they would no longer behold his face. And they escorted him to the ship.

**I. To shepherd the flock of God according to God is to shepherd the flock of God according to God's desire—1 Pet. 5:1-4:**

- 1 Pet 5:1 Therefore the elders among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory to be revealed:
- 1 Pet 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not under compulsion but willingly, according to God; not by seeking gain through base means but eagerly;
- 1 Pet 5:3 Nor as lording it over your allotments but by becoming patterns of the flock.
- 1 Pet 5:4 And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

- A. We must see that the heart's desire, the good pleasure, of God in His economy is to be the fountain, the source, of living waters to dispense Himself into His chosen people for their satisfaction and enjoyment; the goal of this enjoyment is to produce the church, God's counterpart, as God's increase, God's enlargement, to be God's fullness for His expression—Jer. 2:13; John 3:29-30; Eph. 1:22-23; 3:16-19, 21:

Jer 2:13 For My people have committed two evils: / They have forsaken Me, / The fountain of living waters, / To hew out for themselves cisterns, / Broken cisterns, / Which hold no water.

John 3:29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices with joy because of the bridegroom's voice. This joy of mine therefore is made full.

John 3:30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

Eph 1:22 And He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church,

Eph 1:23 Which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

Eph 3:16 That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man,

Eph 3:17 That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

Eph 3:18 May be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are

Eph 3:19 And to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.

Eph 3:21 To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen.

1. Instead of drinking Him to become His increase for His expression, we can become like Israel by forsaking God as the fountain of living waters to hew out cisterns (typifying idols) to replace God as our enjoyment—Jer. 2:13.

Jer 2:13 For My people have committed two evils: / They have forsaken Me, / The fountain of living waters, / To hew out for themselves cisterns, / Broken cisterns, / Which hold no water.

2. An idol is anything within us that we love more than the Lord or that replaces the Lord in our life; whatever we possess, and even whatever we are, can become an idol—Ezek. 14:3; 1 John 5:21.

Ezek 14:3 Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I be inquired of at all by them?

1 John 5:21 Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

3. Our peace, safety, health, and possessions may become idols to us, but God is faithful in His purpose to take these things away so that we might drink of Him as the fountain of living waters; God is faithful in leading us into His economy, and His economy is for us to enjoy Christ, to absorb Christ, to drink Christ, to eat Christ, and to assimilate Christ so that God may increase in us for His expression—1 Cor. 1:9; 5:7-8; 12:12-13; Jer. 2:13.

1 Cor 1:9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Cor 5:7 Purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened; for our Passover, Christ, also has been sacrificed.

1 Cor 5:8 So then let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

1 Cor 12:12 For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ.

1 Cor 12:13 For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit.

Jer 2:13 For My people have committed two evils: / They have forsaken Me, / The fountain of living waters, / To hew out for themselves cisterns, / Broken cisterns, / Which hold no water.

- B. We must be brought back to the realization that we need Christ as our enjoyment; we also have to help others to know how to enjoy Christ, and we have to bring the distracted believers back to the simplicity of the genuine appreciation, love, and enjoyment of the precious person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as their life and everything—2 Cor. 11:2-3; 1:24; Rev. 2:4, 7:

2 Cor 11:2 For I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

2 Cor 11:3 But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your thoughts would be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity toward Christ.

2 Cor 1:24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but we are fellow workers with you for your joy; for by faith you stand.

Rev 2:4 But I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love.

Rev 2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

1. To enjoy Christ as our life supply should be the primary matter in the church life; the content of the church life depends upon the enjoyment of Christ; the more we enjoy Him, the richer the content will be.

2. First Corinthians is a book on the enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ; the enjoyment of the crucified and resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit solves all the problems in the church—1:2, 9, 24, 30; 2:2; 5:7-8.

1 Cor 1:2 To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours:

1 Cor 1:9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Cor 1:24 But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Cor 1:30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

1 Cor 2:2 For I did not determine to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified.

1 Cor 5:7 Purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened; for our Passover, Christ, also has been sacrificed.

1 Cor 5:8 So then let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

## **II. We must shepherd the flock of God by being patterns of the flock; the apostle Paul, as a pattern to all the believers, the members of the Body of Christ, lived Christ for His magnification as His continuation—1 Pet. 5:3; Phil. 1:19-21a; Acts 9:4-5, 15; 26:19; 1 Tim. 1:16:**

1 Pet 5:3 Nor as lording it over your allotments but by becoming patterns of the flock.

Phil 1:19 For I know that for me this will turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

Phil 1:20 According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I will be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, even now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death.

Phil 1:21a For to me, to live is Christ ...

Acts 9:4 And he fell on the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?

Acts 9:5 And he said, Who are You, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus, whom you persecute.

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, Go, for this man is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before both the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

Acts 26:19 Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,

1 Tim 1:16 But because of this I was shown mercy, that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ might display all His long-suffering for a pattern to those who are to believe on Him unto eternal life.

A. Paul was a disciple of Christ—seeing Christ, hearing Christ, and learning Christ as the reality is in Jesus—Acts 9:1-19, 25-27; 22:14-15; Eph. 4:20-21.

Acts 9:1 But Saul, still breathing threatening and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest

Acts 9:2 And asked for letters from him to Damascus for the synagogues, so that if he found any who were of the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Acts 9:3 And as he went, he drew near to Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

Acts 9:4 And he fell on the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?

Acts 9:5 And he said, Who are You, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus, whom you persecute.

Acts 9:6 But rise up and enter into the city, and it will be told to you what you must do.

Acts 9:7 And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

Acts 9:8 And Saul rose from the ground; and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. And they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

Acts 9:9 And he was three days without seeing, and he neither ate nor drank.

Acts 9:10 And there was a certain disciple in Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

Acts 9:11 And the Lord said to him, Rise up and go to the lane called Straight, and seek in the house of Judas a man from Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying;

Acts 9:12 And he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him so that he may receive his sight.

Acts 9:13 But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many concerning this man, how many evil things he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem;

Acts 9:14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Your name.

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, Go, for this man is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before both the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

Acts 9:16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer on behalf of My name.

Acts 9:17 And Ananias went away and entered into the house; and laying his hands on him, he said, Saul, brother, the Lord has sent Me—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road on which you were coming—so that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 9:18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight and rose up and was baptized.

Acts 9:19 And once he had taken food, he was strengthened. And he was with the disciples in Damascus for some days.

Acts 9:25 But his disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket.

Acts 9:26 And when he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join himself to the disciples; yet all feared him, not believing that he was a disciple.

Acts 9:27 But Barnabas took hold of him and led him to the apostles, and he related to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.

Acts 22:14 And he said, The God of our fathers has previously appointed you to know His will and to see the righteous One and to hear the voice from His mouth;

Acts 22:15 For you will be a witness to Him unto all men of the things which you have seen and heard.

Eph 4:20 But you did not so learn Christ,

Eph 4:21 If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him as the reality is in Jesus,

B. Paul was a chosen vessel of Christ to contain Him, be filled with Him, and overflow with Him for His fullness—Acts 9:15; 2 Cor. 4:7; Eph. 1:22-23; 3:19.

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, Go, for this man is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before both the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

2 Cor 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not out of us.

Eph 1:22 And He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church,

- Eph 1:23 Which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.  
 Eph 3:19 And to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.
- C. Paul was a man of prayer—Acts 9:11; 13:1-3; 14:23; 16:13, 25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 28:8; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2.
- Acts 9:11 And the Lord said to him, Rise up and go to the lane called Straight, and seek in the house of Judas a man from Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying;  
 Acts 13:1 Now there were in Antioch, in the local church, prophets and teachers: Barnabas and Simeon, who was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen, the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.  
 Acts 13:2 And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.  
 Acts 13:3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.  
 Acts 14:23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church and had prayed with fastings, they committed them to the Lord into whom they had believed.  
 Acts 16:13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.  
 Acts 16:25 And about midnight Paul and Silas, while praying, sang hymns of praise to God; and the prisoners were listening to them.  
 Acts 20:36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down with them all and prayed.  
 Acts 21:5 And when we completed the days, we went forth and went on our way, with all of them, including the women and children, escorting us until we were outside the city. And when we had knelt down on the beach and prayed,  
 Acts 22:17 And when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I went into a trance;  
 Acts 28:8 And the father of Publius was lying down sick with fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him, and having prayed and laid his hands on him, healed him.  
 Eph 6:18 By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit and watching unto this in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints,  
 Col 4:2 Persevere in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving,
- D. Paul depended on the Body, doing everything in the Body, through the Body, and for the Body—Acts 9:11-12, 17-18, 25-27; 1 Cor. 1:1; 12:14-27.
- Acts 9:11 And the Lord said to him, Rise up and go to the lane called Straight, and seek in the house of Judas a man from Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying;  
 Acts 9:12 And he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him so that he may receive his sight.  
 Acts 9:17 And Ananias went away and entered into the house; and laying his hands on him, he said, Saul, brother, the Lord has sent Me-Jesus, who appeared to you on the road on which you were coming—so that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.  
 Acts 9:18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight and rose up and was baptized.  
 Acts 9:25 But his disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket.  
 Acts 9:26 And when he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join himself to the disciples; yet all feared him, not believing that he was a disciple.  
 Acts 9:27 But Barnabas took hold of him and led him to the apostles, and he related to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.  
 1 Cor 1:1 Paul, a called apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Sosthenes the brother,  
 1 Cor 12:14 For the body is not one member but many.  
 1 Cor 12:15 If the foot should say, Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body, it is not that because of this it is not of the body.  
 1 Cor 12:16 And if the ear should say, Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body, it is not that because of this it is not of the body.  
 1 Cor 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were the hearing, where would the smelling be?

- 1 Cor 12:18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, even as He willed.
- 1 Cor 12:19 And if all were one member, where would the body be?
- 1 Cor 12:20 But now the members are many, but the body one.
- 1 Cor 12:21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.
- 1 Cor 12:22 But much rather the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.
- 1 Cor 12:23 And those members of the body which we consider to be less honorable, these we clothe with more abundant honor; and our uncomely members come to have more abundant comeliness,
- 1 Cor 12:24 But our comely members have no need. But God has blended the body together, giving more abundant honor to the member that lacked,
- 1 Cor 12:25 That there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same care for one another.
- 1 Cor 12:26 And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it.
- 1 Cor 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.
- E. Paul practiced calling on the name of the Lord—Acts 9:14, 21; 22:16; 2 Tim. 2:22; Rom. 10:12-13; Phil. 2:9-11.
- Acts 9:14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Your name.
- Acts 9:21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, Is this not the one who ravaged those who call upon this name in Jerusalem and came here for this, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests?
- Acts 22:16 And now, why do you delay? Rise up and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name.
- 2 Tim 2:22 But flee youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.
- Rom 10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all and rich to all who call upon Him;
- Rom 10:13 For "whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."
- Phil 2:9 Therefore also God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,
- Phil 2:10 That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- Phil 2:11 And every tongue should openly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.
- F. Paul lived by the all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus (the Spirit of a man with abundant strength for suffering) for his preaching ministry, a ministry of suffering carried out among human beings and for human beings in the human life for the building up of the Body of Christ—John 7:37-39; Acts 9:16; 16:7, 22-34; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24; 2 Cor. 6:4; 11:23; Heb. 6:19-20; 13:13.
- John 7:37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.
- John 7:38 He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.
- John 7:39 But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.
- Acts 9:16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer on behalf of My name.
- Acts 16:7 And when they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, yet the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.
- Acts 16:22 And the crowd rose up together against them, and the magistrates tore off their garments and ordered some to beat them with rods.
- Acts 16:23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them securely,
- Acts 16:24 Who, having received such a charge, threw them into the inner prison and secured their feet in the stocks.
- Acts 16:25 And about midnight Paul and Silas, while praying, sang hymns of praise to God; and the prisoners were listening to them.

- Acts 16:26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken. And instantly all the doors were opened and everyone's bonds were unfastened.
- Acts 16:27 And the jailer, waking up out of his sleep and seeing the doors of the prison opened, drew his sword and was about to do away with himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.
- Acts 16:28 But Paul called out with a loud voice, saying, Do no harm to yourself, for we are all here.
- Acts 16:29 And the jailer asked for lights and rushed in; and trembling, he fell down before Paul and Silas.
- Acts 16:30 And leading them outside, he said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?
- Acts 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.
- Acts 16:32 And they spoke the word of God to him together with all those in his house.
- Acts 16:33 And he took them with him in that very hour of the night and washed their wounds. And he was baptized immediately, he and all his household.
- Acts 16:34 And he brought them up into his house and set a table before them; and he exulted because he had believed in God with all his household.
- Phil 3:10 To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,
- Col 1:24 I now rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body, which is the church;
- 2 Cor 6:4 But in everything we commend ourselves as ministers of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,
- 2 Cor 11:23 Ministers of Christ are they? I speak as being beside myself, I more so! In labors more abundantly, in imprisonments more abundantly, in stripes excessively, in deaths often.
- Heb 6:19 Which we have as an anchor of the soul, both secure and firm and which enters within the veil,
- Heb 6:20 Where the Forerunner, Jesus, has entered for us, having become forever a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedec.
- Heb 13:13 Let us therefore go forth unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.
- G. Paul lived in his mingled spirit (the divine Spirit mingled with his human spirit as one spirit)—Acts 17:16; 19:21; Rom. 8:4, 6, 16; 1 Cor. 6:17.
- Acts 17:16 And while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he beheld that the city was full of idols.
- Acts 19:21 And when these things were fulfilled, Paul purposed in his spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.
- Rom 8:4 That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.
- Rom 8:6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace.
- Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.
- 1 Cor 6:17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.
- H. Paul was filled with the Spirit of joy, essentially for his existence, and with the Spirit of power, economically for his function—Acts 13:9, 52; Eph. 5:18.
- Acts 13:9 But Saul, who is also Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him
- Acts 13:52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.
- Eph 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, but be filled in spirit,
- I. Paul exercised himself to always have a good and pure conscience—Acts 23:1; 24:16; 1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9.
- Acts 23:1 And Paul, looking intently at the Sanhedrin, said, Men, brothers, I have conducted myself in all good conscience before God until this day.
- Acts 24:16 Because of this I also exercise myself to always have a conscience without offense toward God and men.
- 1 Tim 1:19 Holding faith and a good conscience, concerning which some, thrusting these away, have become shipwrecked regarding the faith;
- 1 Tim 3:9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

- J. Paul lived a life of always rejoicing in the Lord, praying unceasingly, and thanking Him in everything—Acts 16:25; 27:35; Phil. 4:4; Col. 3:16; 1 Thes. 5:16-18.
- Acts 16:25 And about midnight Paul and Silas, while praying, sang hymns of praise to God; and the prisoners were listening to them.
- Acts 27:35 And when he had said these things and had taken bread, he gave thanks to God before all; and he broke it and began to eat.
- Phil 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.
- Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God.
- 1 Thes 5:16 Always rejoice,
- 1 Thes 5:17 Unceasingly pray,
- 1 Thes 5:18 In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
- K. Paul was allied with God and assisted by God to speak the gospel boldly in the name of Jesus to spread the testimony of Jesus unto the uttermost part of the earth—Acts 9:20, 27; 26:22-29; 28:31; 1:8; 1 Thes. 2:2; cf. Rom. 15:24, 28.
- Acts 9:20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, that this One is the Son of God.
- Acts 9:27 But Barnabas took hold of him and led him to the apostles, and he related to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.
- Acts 26:22 Having therefore obtained the help which is from God, I have stood unto this day, testifying both to small and great, saying nothing apart from the things which both the prophets and Moses have said would take place,
- Acts 26:23 That the Christ would suffer and that He, being the first to rise from the dead, would announce light both to the people and to the Gentiles.
- Acts 26:24 And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, You are insane, Paul. Much learning is driving you insane.
- Acts 26:25 But Paul said, I am not insane, most excellent Festus, but I am uttering words of truth and soberness.
- Acts 26:26 For the king knows about these things, to whom also I speak freely, for I am persuaded that none of these things have escaped his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.
- Acts 26:27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.
- Acts 26:28 And Agrippa replied to Paul, By so little are you trying to persuade me to become a Christian?
- Acts 26:29 And Paul said, I would to God that both by little and by much, not only you, but also all those who hear me today might become even such as I am, except for these bonds.
- Acts 28:31 Proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unhindered.
- Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth.
- 1 Thes 2:2 But having suffered previously and having been outrageously treated, even as you know, in Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much struggle.
- Rom 15:24 Whenever I may go to Spain, for I hope to see you in passing and be sent forward there by you, if first I am filled, at least in part, by your company.
- Rom 15:28 When therefore I have finished this and have sealed to them this fruit, I will go on by way of you to Spain.
- L. Paul cherished the saints in the humanity of Jesus and nourished them in the divinity of Christ with all the truths of God's eternal economy, displaying in his living the word of the Lord Jesus that it is more blessed to give than to receive—Acts 20:18-38; 1 Thes. 2:1-12.
- Acts 20:18 And when they came to him, he said to them, You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you all the time,
- Acts 20:19 Serving the Lord as a slave with all humility and tears and trials which came upon me by the plots of the Jews;



Acts 20:20 How I did not withhold any of those things that are profitable by not declaring them to you and by not teaching you publicly and from house to house,

Acts 20:21 Solemnly testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance unto God and faith in our Lord Jesus.

Acts 20:22 And now, behold, I am going bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing what will meet me there,

Acts 20:23 Except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in city after city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

Acts 20:24 But I consider my life of no account as if precious to myself, in order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus to solemnly testify of the gospel of the grace of God.

Acts 20:25 And now, behold, I know that you all, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will see my face no more.

Acts 20:26 Therefore I testify to you on this day that I am clean from the blood of all men,

Acts 20:27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you all the counsel of God.

Acts 20:28 Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood.

Acts 20:29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

Acts 20:30 And from among you yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them.

Acts 20:31 Therefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears.

Acts 20:32 And now I commit you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who have been sanctified.

Acts 20:33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing.

Acts 20:34 You yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my needs and to those who are with me.

Acts 20:35 In all things I have shown you by example that toiling in this way we ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Acts 20:36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down with them all and prayed.

Acts 20:37 And there was considerable weeping by all; and falling on Paul's neck, they kissed him affectionately,

Acts 20:38 Especially pained over the word which he had spoken, that they would no longer behold his face. And they escorted him to the ship.

1 Thes 2:1 For you yourselves know, brothers, our entrance toward you, that it has not been in vain.

1 Thes 2:2 But having suffered previously and having been outrageously treated, even as you know, in Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much struggle.

1 Thes 2:3 For our exhortation is not out of deception nor out of uncleanness nor in guile;

1 Thes 2:4 But even as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who proves our hearts.

1 Thes 2:5 For neither were we found at any time with flattering speech, even as you know, nor with a pretext for covetousness; God is witness.

1 Thes 2:6 Nor did we seek glory from men, neither from you nor from others, though we could have stood on our authority as apostles of Christ.

1 Thes 2:7 But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children.

1 Thes 2:8 Yearning in this way over you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own souls, because you became beloved to us.

1 Thes 2:9 For you remember, brothers, our labor and travail: While working night and day so as not to be burdensome to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

1 Thes 2:10 You are witnesses, as well as God, how in a holy and righteous and blameless manner we conducted ourselves toward you who believe,

1 Thes 2:11 Just as you know how we were to each one of you, as a father to his own children, exhorting you and consoling you and testifying,

1 Thes 2:12 So that you might walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

M. Paul was a pattern to the elders in Ephesus, a pattern of what the elders should be to the church—Acts 20:27-38:

- Acts 20:27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you all the counsel of God.  
Acts 20:28 Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood.  
Acts 20:29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.  
Acts 20:30 And from among you yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them.  
Acts 20:31 Therefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears.  
Acts 20:32 And now I commit you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who have been sanctified.  
Acts 20:33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing.  
Acts 20:34 You yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my needs and to those who are with me.  
Acts 20:35 In all things I have shown you by example that toiling in this way we ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.  
Acts 20:36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down with them all and prayed.  
Acts 20:37 And there was considerable weeping by all; and falling on Paul's neck, they kissed him affectionately,  
Acts 20:38 Especially pained over the word which he had spoken, that they would no longer behold his face. And they escorted him to the ship.

1. He served the Lord as a slave with all humility and tears and trials—v. 19.  
Acts 20:19 Serving the Lord as a slave with all humility and tears and trials which came upon me by the plots of the Jews;
2. He shepherded the saints by teaching them publicly and from house to house, declaring to them all the counsel of God, all of God's eternal economy—vv. 20, 26-27.  
Acts 20:20 How I did not withhold any of those things that are profitable by not declaring them to you and by not teaching you publicly and from house to house,  
Acts 20:26 Therefore I testify to you on this day that I am clean from the blood of all men,  
Acts 20:27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you all the counsel of God.
3. He was burdened for the elders to see the precious love of God for the church and the preciousness, the exceeding worth, of the church in the eyes of God so that they would treasure the church as God did; he admonished the elders to “take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood”—v. 28.
4. He warned the elders concerning the destroyers of the divine building—those who are wolves, not sparing the flock, and those who speak perverted things to draw away the disciples after them—vv. 29-30.  
Acts 20:29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.  
Acts 20:30 And from among you yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them.
5. He contacted each one of the saints, telling the elders to remember that “for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears”—v. 31.
6. Because Paul saw that the unique goal of God's calling is the building up of the Body of Christ and that Christ builds up the Body by the Body, he was a pattern to the elders in Ephesus of functioning to perfect all the saints “unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ, ” so that all the saints would grow in life and would function in life according to their measure of life to be a

supply of life to cause “the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love”—Eph. 4:11-16.

Eph 4:11 And He Himself gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers,

Eph 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ,

Eph 4:13 Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

Eph 4:14 That we may be no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error,

Eph 4:15 But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ,

Eph 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

N. Paul’s fourth ministry journey (Acts 27—28) shows in a particular way his life of living Christ, magnifying Christ, doing all things in Christ, and pursuing Christ in order to be found in Christ—Phil. 1:19-21a; 3:8-9, 14; 4:13:

Acts 27-28 be omitted.

Phil 1:19 For I know that for me this will turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

Phil 1:20 According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I will be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, even now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death.

Phil 1:21a For to me, to live is Christ ...

Phil 3:8 But moreover I also count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ

Phil 3:9 And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is out of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is out of God and based on faith,

Phil 3:14 I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward.

Phil 4:13 I am able to do all things in Him who empowers me.

1. All during the apostle’s long and unfortunate imprisonment-voyage, the Lord kept the apostle in His ascendancy and enabled him to live a life far beyond the realm of anxiety; this life was fully dignified, with the highest standard of human virtues expressing the most excellent divine attributes—vv. 5-9.

Phil 4:5 Let your forbearance be known to all men. The Lord is near.

Phil 4:6 In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

Phil 4:7 And the peace of God, which surpasses every man’s understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:8 Finally, brothers, what things are true, what things are dignified, what things are righteous, what things are pure, what things are lovely, what things are well spoken of, if there is any virtue and if any praise, take account of these things.

Phil 4:9 The things which you have also learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace will be with you.

2. This was Jesus living again on the earth in His divinely enriched humanity! This was the wonderful, excellent, and mysterious God-man, who lived in the Gospels, continuing to live in the Acts through one of His many members! This was a living witness of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and God-exalted Christ!

3. In Paul’s living and ministry he expressed the very true God, who in Jesus Christ had gone through the processes of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection, and who, as the all-inclusive Spirit, was then living in him and through

him—Gal. 1:15-16, 24; 2:20; 3:14; cf. Acts 28:6.

Gal 1:15 But when it pleased God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace,

Gal 1:16 To reveal His Son in me that I might announce Him as the gospel among the Gentiles, immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood,

Gal 1:24 And they glorified God because of me.

Gal 2:20 I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Gal 3:14 In order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Acts 28:6 And they expected that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited for a long time and beheld nothing unusual happening to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

4. On the sea in the storm, the Lord had made the apostle not only the owner of his fellow voyagers (27:24) but also their life-guarantor and comforter (vv. 22, 25); now, on the land in peace, the Lord made him furthermore not only a magical attraction in the eyes of the superstitious people (28:1-6) but also a healer and a joy to them (vv. 7-10).

Acts 27:24 Saying, Do not fear, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.

Acts 27:22 And now I advise you to cheer up, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.

Acts 27:25 Therefore, cheer up, men, for I believe God that it shall be so, even in the way in which it has been spoken to me.

Acts 28:1 And having been brought safely through, we recognized then that the island was called Malta.

Acts 28:2 And the natives showed us uncommon kindness, for they kindled a fire and took us all in because of the rain coming on and because of the cold.

Acts 28:3 But when Paul had collected a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened onto his hand.

Acts 28:4 And when the natives saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to one another, Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, whom, though he has been brought safely out of the sea, Justice has not allowed to live.

Acts 28:5 However he shook off the snake into the fire and suffered no harm;

Acts 28:6 And they expected that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited for a long time and beheld nothing unusual happening to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

Acts 28:7 Now in the vicinity of that place were the lands of the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and gave us hospitality three days in a friendly way.

Acts 28:8 And the father of Publius was lying down sick with fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him, and having prayed and laid his hands on him, healed him.

Acts 28:9 And when this happened, the rest also in the island who had sicknesses came to him and were healed.

Acts 28:10 They also honored us with many honors; and as we put out to sea, they put on board the things for our needs.

5. The warm welcome that Paul received from the brothers in Rome and the loving care of those in Puteoli (vv. 13-15) show the beautiful Body life that existed in the early days among the churches and apostles:

Acts 28:13 From there we sailed around and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind came on, and the second day we came to Puteoli,

Acts 28:14 Where, having found brothers, we were urged to remain with them seven days. And thus we came to Rome.

Acts 28:15 And from there the brothers, having heard about the things concerning us, came as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

- a. Apparently, the apostle, as a prisoner in bonds, had entered the region of the dark capital of the Satan-usurped empire; actually, as the ambassador of Christ with His authority (Eph. 6:20; Matt. 28:18-19), he had come into another part of the participation in the Body life of Christ's church in the kingdom of God on earth.
    - Eph 6:20 For which I am an ambassador in a chain, that in it I would speak boldly, as I ought to speak.
    - Matt 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.
    - Matt 28:19 Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
  - b. While he was suffering the persecution of religion in the empire of Satan (the satanic chaos in the old creation), he was enjoying the church life in the kingdom of God (the divine economy for the new creation); this was a comfort and an encouragement to him.
- O. The ultimate issue of the church will be the New Jerusalem in eternity future as God's full and eternal expression; this should be the reality and goal of all our gospel preaching today as we follow the pattern of the apostle Paul—"proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unhindered"—Acts 28:31.

## **Excerpts from the Ministry:**

### **THE SERVICE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ELDERSHIP**

We would like to fellowship concerning the eldership. No one among the saints is qualified in himself for the eldership. According to 2 Corinthians 3:5, the apostle Paul says that we are not sufficient of ourselves but that our sufficiency is from God. So all the brothers who bear the responsibility of the eldership should put their trust in the Lord. In order to be faithful to their responsibility, they should spend more time for the church and pay more attention to the saints by visiting them individually.

Acts 20 is the record of a word by Paul addressed to the elders from Ephesus. It was given in Miletus while Paul was on his way back to Jerusalem for the last time. From Miletus Paul sent some to ask the elders in Ephesus to come to him.

Verses 17 through 19 say, "From Miletus he sent word to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they came to him, he said to them, You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you all the time, serving the Lord as a slave with all humility and tears and trials which came upon me by the plots of the Jews."

At that time Paul and these believers were people absolutely for God. At the same time there was another group of people, the Jews, who claimed to be for God also. These two were in rivalry. The Jews even hated Paul and his followers to such an extent that they plotted and conspired to damage Paul and his ministry.

### **PAUL BEING A PATTERN TO THE ELDERS**

Paul is a real pattern to all the elders. He is a real pattern. Although he himself had never been an elder, he set up a model, a pattern, an example, for the elders whom he had trained. So whatever he spoke about himself, his expectation was that all the elders would follow his steps and imitate what he had been doing. First, Paul said that he was serving the Lord as a slave. The elders all have to serve the Lord as a slave. They are not put into a position of dignity or rank. In the church there is no rank and no position. There is only humility and slavery. Following humility there are tears, not joy and happiness. Then third are the trials that come upon us from other people who claim to be for God and

even conspire to undermine the work.

## **SERVING AS SLAVES**

Elders should serve the Lord not just as servants but slaves, losing their right and all kinds of liberty. Actually, to be put into the eldership is to be brought into slavery. We all are slaves to serve the Lord. To serve the Lord here is not to serve the Lord directly but indirectly by serving His people. The elders must pick up the burden of a slave to serve the big family of their Master. We must behave, do things, and even have our being as slaves with all humility.

We should brand ourselves with the word *humility*. We have no right to be proud of anything. Everything that is glorious should go to our Master. He is the only One who is qualified to be proud of anything. We are destined to be humble. To be humble is not an easy thing; to be proud is easy. To be humble and even to be humbled are not a happy thing but a thing of tears.

For the elders never to drop tears for the saints under their care might not be so good. Tears should go along with our humility. We should be humbled by the situation and ready to accept the trials from others.

This portion of the Word spoken by Paul is not only an admonishing word but also a kind of prediction, or foretelling. It is not only a charge but also a foretelling. What is pictured in these few verses is exactly the situation in which we are today. Paul was serving the Lord as a slave with all humility and tears because at his time there were others competing with him. They even plotted to undermine his work, his ministry, and himself, so trials followed.

The elders should not anticipate much comfort but be prepared to face sufferings and trials. On the one hand, we all must pick up the burden of the eldership. Yet on the other hand, we must be ready to face any kind of trial that comes upon us from others. At Paul's time the trials came from the Jews, who were not atheists but those who worshipped God and, in their view, served God.

## **SHEPHERDING AND TEACHING PUBLICLY AND FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE**

Then Acts 20:20 says, "How I did not withhold any of those things that are profitable by not declaring them to you." Paul did not shrink from his duty. He did not withdraw from declaring to the saints anything that was profitable to them. To declare something is more crucial and more important than to merely tell. Paul did a faithful job to declare every bit of God's interests that He had toward His people.

Paul did not withdraw from his responsibility. Rather, he taught the believers publicly in the meetings and privately from house to house.

From now on the elders should do more home visitation. By visiting the homes of the saints, the elders can teach and shepherd the saints. *Teaching* in this verse really means shepherding. In the New Testament, teaching goes along with the matter of shepherding. Shepherding needs the proper teaching.

Among us in the past, our concept was that the elders only manage the church affairs, make decisions, and give announcements. But we have to realize that to manage the business affairs of a local church is secondary.

A local church in its administration does need some management in its business affairs. But the main responsibility of the elders is first to shepherd, as Peter tells us in his first Epistle, chapter 5, verse 2. As we have indicated, shepherding requires teaching, so the elders should also teach (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17). For the elders to teach others, they first of all must be taught. They must learn first.

Just to visit the homes of the saints and tell them to trust in the Lord and believe in Him is not adequate. The elders must read to them some profitable verses, give them some definitions, and teach them with the holy Word. Then they will be edified, established, strengthened, and built up.

To shepherd is not just to give a message. This is neither adequate nor primary. The primary

responsibility is to go to the saints and shepherd them in their homes. So Paul set up a pattern for the elders by teaching the saints publicly and from house to house. In Greek *from house to house* means “according to houses.” If there is a house, the elders should go. If there are ten houses, they should go to each one to visit each of the saints.

When I was in the Lord’s work on mainland China close to fifty years ago, I spent much time visiting people for the gospel to get them saved and going to the saints’ homes. By visiting a home, the real situation of that person’s environment could be seen. Then the elders could render them the proper shepherding.

Although we need to mow the lawn, keep our house clean and neat, clean the windows, and vacuum the carpet, do not spend that much time on these things. Rather, we should save some of the time to shepherd the saints. If we go to the homes of the saints to shepherd them, there will be a record of this in the heavens.

### **DECLARING GOD’S ETERNAL ECONOMY**

In Acts 20:27 Paul continued to say, “I did not shrink from declaring to you all the counsel of God.” Not only did Paul teach them, care for their interests, and care for the things that were profitable to them, but he declared also God’s counsel, God’s plan, and God’s economy. No doubt, Paul taught the Ephesians a great deal concerning God’s New Testament economy.

Similarly, all the elders must learn what God’s New Testament economy is and point this out to the saints. By knowing God’s eternal economy, most of the saints would then be solidly grounded and deeply rooted. Most Christians today receive only shallow teachings, instructing them to be good, humble, loving, and kind. This is the kind of teaching that you can hear in today’s Christianity. The things of God’s New Testament economy, God’s eternal plan, and God’s plan for the church are absolutely lacking among them. Hence, what is needed among us is the proper biblical, divine revelation concerning God’s eternal economy.

The elders must learn all the things of God’s economy and dive into them. By so doing, they will pick up a real burden. They will be able to comfort the disappointed saints by telling them God’s economy. To hear God’s economy and receive such a high calling will become a strong comfort and encouragement to the disappointed ones. The problems that we are facing today in the recovery are mainly due to the lack of a deep understanding and realization of God’s eternal economy.

Human beings need a goal. In order to have a goal, we need a high vision. Those people who love their country have such a vision. This vision strengthens them, comforts them, and encourages them to pass through all kinds of opposition and attack. We in the Lord’s recovery are God’s overcomers today, fighting for His kingdom and doing something for His interests. Yet many among us are short of a high view of God’s eternal economy.

Once we see the vision, we will become another person because we have such a high calling. This will change our concept concerning our human life and daily life. Because we are short of such a high view, we care for just our family life and daily life. There is not much consideration for God’s eternal interests. To impart such a vision merely by general teaching in the meetings is not adequate. It is like a professor speaking to a large class of students. We need some tutors to tutor the saints in details.

If the burden and responsibility of the eldership grow to such an extent that they do not allow you enough time to do your secular job, that might be the time for you to give up your occupation and trust the Lord for your living. I do believe that the Lord will supply you.

### **OVERSEEING AND SHEPHERDING**

In verse 28 Paul admonished the elders to “take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers.”

Apparently, it was Paul who appointed them as elders. Actually, it was the Holy Spirit who

placed them as overseers. Here Paul uses the term *overseers* instead of *elders*. These two synonyms are used interchangeably. The term *elder* refers to the person, but *overseer* speaks of his responsibility. An overseer should not be sloppy or sleepy but all the time watchful. He must be aware of the situation of the church and oversee each member of the flock. If so, he will know what the need is and what they should do.

Paul charged the elders not only to teach but also to shepherd the church of God, which God obtained through His own blood. *To obtain* in Greek also denotes “to acquire,” or “purchase.” *His own blood* is a dear term. God considers the church as a treasure that is very dear and precious in His eyes. He loves the church to such an extent that He purchased it with His own blood.

Similarly, the elders should also love the church as God does. Even the parents always save the best things for their dear children. God used His own blood. So we must love the church with this kind of fine feeling and affection.

Verse 29 says, “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.” To spare the flock means that we love the flock with tender care by cherishing and nourishing. However, the wolves would not care for the church in this way. On the contrary, they would sacrifice the church for their own interests and satisfaction. They are wolves hunting for prey.

Verse 30 follows, “And from among you yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them.” Not only will wolves come in from without, but men will rise up from within the church, speaking perverted things.

Throughout the centuries there have been these two classes of negative people. Paul likened one class to wolves and the other class to perverted persons who would rise up from within the church to speak perverted things with the purpose of drawing away disciples after them. These two classes of people were there at Paul’s time, and they are still here today.

Throughout our own history of the past sixty-seven years in mainland China, Taiwan, and the United States, there have been these two classes of people. Romans 16:17 tells us to mark those who make divisions and causes of stumbling.

This word by Paul is not just an admonishing word but a prediction, telling us what would happen. Within a short time, this word transpired at Ephesus (2 Tim. 1:15).

### **ADMONISHING WITH TEARS NIGHT AND DAY**

Finally, Acts 20:31 says, “Therefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears.” Paul not only went to their house, but he also admonished each one of them with tears day and night. The elders among us must pick up a burden to do this day and night. They should go to the homes of the saints and admonish each one with tears.

To admonish with tears is not so easy. At first the saints may not listen to you. Some may listen, yet they would not take your word. Then your word would not be very effective. Quite often one drop of tears may work much better than a thousand words. This is especially true with the sisters. At times, rebuking and advising may not do as much good as dropping your tears.

Paul was a very emotional person. Acts 20 mentions tears twice. In verse 19 Paul served the Lord with humility, tears, and trials. Again in verse 31 he spent three years, night and day, admonishing each one with tears. This kind of admonishing is the necessary responsibility of the elders. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1989, vol. 4, “Talks concerning the Church Services,” pp. 209-215*)