

# Paying Careful Attention

## Explaining and Expanding on a Biblical View of Eldership

### Acts 20:17-38

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#### Introduction

You've been walking for three days straight. Your feet are killing you. You've barely slept and barely ate. It matters little. You will not miss this appointment with the man so much responsible for who you are now. You look around at your companions, as the days have gone by, there has been progressively less conversation... you simply run out of things to talk about. Less talking means more thinking and your mind wanders back to when he was with you. Maybe five years ago in the synagogue (Acts 18:18-22). On and on about Jesus Christ and how he was the Messiah... you'd heard it all before. Just another crazy zealot. But then there was Aquila and Priscilla – they were rather dramatic as well – but so eloquent, it was hard not to listen as they told about the “way of God” (18:24-28). It was all so different than your Judaism, which you were completely fed up with anyway. Then he came back about a year later. People were baptized (19:5), and he began to teach every day in the Synagogue saying that the Kingdom of God had come (19:8). You had to hand him one thing, he certainly believed what he was saying. And he was so, just, good, or something. He'd proclaim this stuff in people's homes, in public, to your people, to all those who were not your people... and always the same thing. He was so remarkably consistent.

By the time the ever dogmatic zealots chased him out of the synagogue (19:9), you were pretty clear on his core message – Jesus Christ was the Son of God, the one that God had promised as the “forever king.” He died on the cross to be the sacrificial lamb for his people. But unlike the lamb, he was a once and for all sacrifice. And unlike the temple sacrifice, this sacrifice was not just for Jews. And then, to become one of God's children, you needed to repent and confess this Jesus Christ as Lord. He never even blinked when the religious leaders would get in his face. Same message, to all the people, all the time.

Then he was on to the hall of Tyrannus (19:10). Looking back, you can now describe much more accurately what was happening. At the time, though, it was simply “happening” and you barely had words to describe it. God had opened your spiritual ears and eyes. You had been given the gift of faith, the ability to respond to God because you had been regenerated. For two more years you sat at his feet and grew and grew and grew. And you matured. And eventually it was realized that your giftedness and maturity were fitting to that of a pastor, a shepherd among the sheep. So during this time, *...the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily (19:20)*. Then, the inevitable happened.

The city basically exploded with people who hated him (19:21-41). It was utter chaos. You couldn't let him go out there, though he wanted to, to help his friends. You had to get him out of Ephesus. It all happened so fast. All of a sudden, you were on your own as the elders

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of the Ephesian Church. You heard about him on and off for the next year or so. Then one day a messenger came, "Come to Miletus, Paul wants to see you." This must be important...

## Series Introduction

Please open your Bibles to Acts 20:17, "*Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them...*"

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Back in April of this year, the Elders at the Chapel took several days away, as we have from time to time, to focus and concentrate in study, prayer, and discussion on issues important for this body. The area of body life that we focused on this year was our leadership structure, namely Elders and Deacons. Our September series, which is beginning today, is the upshot of our work during this time. Here is a quick review of what we intend to do during the month of September:

The AM/PM rhythm will be similar to how we have conducted other topical series. In the morning we will work through a text and its implications together and in the evenings we again open the Word, but with an eye toward speaking to our context specifically here at the Chapel. Over the four Sundays in September we will cover the following topics: eldership, the diaconate, further working out our commissional nature, and flocks. In the bulletin each week you will find a small sheet available for you to write questions on as they arise. At the end of each service, baskets will be provided at the back door of the auditorium in which you can drop your questions. On the last Sunday evening, we will conduct an open forum that is focused on addressing those questions.

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So why that retreat topic? Why this series? Just like yourselves, your pastors as well as our body as a whole, are always in the process of growth. We saw some things – Elders struggling to fulfill their roles, a diaconate that was under recognized and underutilized, a commissional self view that needed to continue to grow in its implementation, a flock structure that has served its purpose and could now use some adjusting. Hence our goal in this series is to address these areas and by doing so more fully fulfill *Ephesians 4:12-13 ...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.* Let's begin with prayer.

## Do As I Have Done

Most of you know that I am a new father. I now have a son. Here is a question for me, and for you. Will I be able to say to him in five years, "Son, live like I live. Think like I think. Want like I want. Talk like I talk. Sing like I sing. Give like I give. Do like I do..." Every Christian father should strive to live in a way that he can call his children to emulate. Paul had done this before the Ephesian elders and now, without reserve, just like a father, he vigorously calls them to do as he has done, to be as he has been. These are Paul's last spoken words to the Ephesian elders. They are not a theological treatise or moralistic brow beating, rather they are a forceful reminder of gospel ministry and its profound beauty, where Truth,

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love, and real life are gloriously joined – in the local church. *Let's read verses 17-38 together.*

Let me make clear to you that it *is* Paul's intentions that the Ephesian elders look to him and remember his three years with them as an example. Note that from the outset he challenges them to recall his example, *You yourselves know how I lived among you (v.18), how I did not shrink from declaring (v.20), remembering that for three years I did not cease day or night to admonish (v.31), You yourselves know that these hands ministered (v. 34), I have shown you that by working hard we must help the weak... (v.35).*

What is Paul doing here in this last conversation with the leaders of the Ephesian church? He is telling them how to be Elders, how to shepherd the flock, and he is doing it directly through commands and indirectly, though not subtly, by setting his life forward as a pattern of how shepherds live among the sheep... and the wolves. Therefore, we have our approach set. We will follow Paul, the undershepherd, as he follows Christ, the great overshepherd. So, what now can we learn from this last talk Paul gives to the Ephesian elders?

### How I Lived Among You (vv. 17 -21, 24)

I was very tempted in writing this sermon to divide up and segment and categorize the different pieces of Paul's message. And while this is appropriate with other parts of Scripture, it did not suit here. What Luke has recorded here is not a letter – but rather a very short challenge that was hastily spoken a short distance from the boat that Paul was about to get on and sail to Jerusalem, where he knew he faced imprisonment and afflictions (v.23). It is the final talk the coach gives before the game starts, the general to his soldiers before battle, the father to his son before marriage. It is the very most important things you can think to say before some major event occurs... in this case, Paul's last meeting, ever, with the Ephesian elders, and his slow movement toward his own death.

So we are going to take this passage just as it has been given to us by Luke without too much rearranging or categorizing. Paul's first thought is to draw the elders' attention to how he lived when he was among them. Of course they remember – for almost three years he was with them and has only been away for less than a year now. He describes his time with them as being made up of several activities: Serving (v.19), declaring and teaching (v.20), and testifying (v.21). **There is no reason to divide these activities up into distinct categories – what is important here for us, is *how* Paul served and *what* he declared and testified to.**

**So here is a summary of how Paul served: The whole time, in humility, in the midst of trials and tears, in the face of serious and life threatening opposition, and in public and private. If you'd like a recap of these days, read Acts 18 & 19. And here is a summary of what he declared: without shrinking, all that was profitable (including the whole counsel of God [v. 27]), to all people, of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus (also testifying to the gospel of the grace of God [v.24]). This is what Paul did, this is what the Ephesian elders were to do, and this, is what the Chapel elders are to be doing.**

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Do any of you men desire to be an elder? Here is the beginning of your job description. So when one steps into eldership and shepherding, how far does the commitment go? Where does it stop? Verse 24 shapes our perspective in answering this question: *But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.* Note that this statement of Paul's is not duty driven. It is value-driven, precious-driven. If not your life Paul, then what is precious or valuable to you? Note carefully that "testifying to the gospel" is just another way to speak of Paul's course or ministry. I would argue that it is not so much "the course" or even finishing here that motivates Paul<sup>1</sup>, but the person who gave the course and calls him to finish. Paul is driven by the desire to honor and give glory to a person, that is Christ.

Dear friends, this is the kind of men you must encourage your elders to be. Those who are clear minded about their mission and big-hearted about their master. They are not to be men who go begrudgingly about their duties, doing as little as possible, and hoping it is enough to still "look" like an elder. Rather they are to be those who are bent on seeing the gospel go out to believers and unbelievers for the glory of their King. They will serve not only behind pulpits, but in living rooms and mall eateries. They will not speak of the gospel as a personally held belief that works for them, but as a universal and eternal truth that lays claims to all people's lives. They will not preach a gospel that stops short of all that the Bible says, but they will proclaim accurately the whole gospel of God. And they will not limit their proclaiming to those that like them or are like them, but they will unshrinkingly tell all truth to all people. And they will be humble men. Chapel Elders – is this you?

Allow me for a moment to speak to a group that is rarely addressed in sermons, but who are so important. Elders' wives, you have probably one of the most underappreciated roles in the entire church. Few know what you are asked to do. And I thank you for your love for your husbands as they serve. Ask the Lord to teach you to speak the words of verse 24 in your hearts with an earnestness that exceeds even your husbands. For if you do not come to Christ, his gospel, and his people this way, you will continually be, perhaps at a very low level, resenting or chafing against gospel ministry and all it entails, because it is precious beyond life in your husband's eyes. How much better to set your face as his and without reserve to love this Christ who spilled his blood for this people (v.28). You must trust that the call to eldership is not a call to abandon all the other commands of our Lord, including those to love one's wife, to manage one's household well...<sup>2</sup> in fact, a man is qualified for eldership by these very things. No, eldership should only, ever, and always increase the vigorousness with which men pursue these things. Do not fear losing your husband to ministry, only pray that your heart will beat passionately for the church and that God will give grace to your husband to be all that he is called to be, lest he be disqualified. No man fights fiercer than when he fights with his own wife just behind whispering to him of the glory of the Kingdom, the majesty of the King, and the goodness of the gospel. Understand that I do

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<sup>1</sup> See Philippians 1:9-11, 1 Peter 4:8-11. It was always the person of Christ that motivated Paul

<sup>2</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1ff

not say this because we have elders' wives who are not on board with their husbands – I say this because the strains and the sacrifices are real, and all people, even in this solid group of women need encouragement.

### And Now, Behold... (vv.22-27)

In verses 22-23, and again in 25-27, Paul speaks to what his future will look like. He is headed to Jerusalem. In fact, Luke tells us in verse 16 that he is actually hurrying to Jerusalem to be there before Pentecost. Paul tells them that persecution lie ahead, and that he will never see them again. They are deeply troubled. He also sounds defensive (vv.26-27) Why does Paul tell them these things in particular? I think there are several reasons – to demonstrate willingness to suffer for the gospel (v.24), to display a heart that is supremely satisfied in the work of the gospel, and to prepare the Ephesian elders for his absence and the attacks it will bring. It is this last reason that I want to focus on this morning.

To some extent, being an elder is a little like having a target painted on your back. There will always be those who are ready, eager, and willing to question your integrity, your teaching, and your wisdom. And to some degree I thank God for these people. Regardless of their motive, which may be pure or impure, it does keep you thinking hard about what you do and why you do it. Your heart is continually being laid bare and exposed. As Paul has already mentioned, humility is a core distinction of a gospel worker, and generally there is no lack of opportunity to practice it. Paul's ministry was no exception. Over the course of his ministry he was the recipient of vicious attacks from inside and out of the church. He understood that one's integrity was all that he had to rely on before men. Surely, God knew the truth and God, in his time, would avenge. **But while here on Earth, an elder relies on the purity of his living testimony to function as his street credibility.** This is a reason why elders must be "above reproach," to eliminate as many opportunities as possible for the enemy to attack him on the charge of dereliction to duty, or failure to hold forth, or ministering for personal gain, or weakness in declaring the gospel.

Paul takes great care during his speech to remind the elders repeatedly of his integrity before them and before God. Consider the following expressions from Paul: *the whole time from the first day I set foot in Asia (v.18), how I did not shrink (v.20), I am innocent of the blood of all of you (v.26), for three years I did not cease day or night... (v.31), I coveted no one's silver or gold (v.33), these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me (v.34), in all things I have shown you (v.35).* When an elder fails in his personal or public life, he opens himself and his teaching up to discrediting, putting in danger both the flock and, temporally, Christ's testimony. Paul cements in the elders mind his integrity, hard work, and commitment to the mission as a defense against doubts and later attacks. **After Christ, an elder has no defense so formidable as his own integrity in ministry.** We need not look far for this principle played out in other spheres. Consider that once a person announces their intent to become part of public life, a politician, the dirt digging begins. All know that in many instances to discredit a person's character and life is to discredit their eligibility for service.

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Lastly in this section, I want to draw your attention to verses 26 and 27 and a sobering warning. Paul turns his hearers repeatedly to the gospel and the word throughout the entirety of his talk. He did it first when he reminded the elders of what he declared, taught, and testified to (v.21), he did it again when shared what he valued over his own life (v.24), and now for a third time refers to gospel/word as the “whole counsel of God.” In stating that he did not shrink from declaring all the Word to the Ephesians, he lies to rest any doubt that he has fallen short of what God had called him to do. Elders are, above all, gospel and word speaking men. I assure you that committing to proclaiming the “whole counsel of God” will often require saying hard things, unpopular things, risky things. However, to willfully fail to do so is to risk blood on one’s hands (see Heb 13:17). A sobering warning indeed.

### Pay Careful Attention and Be Alert (vv. 28-31)

In verse 28, Paul turns the talk from himself, to the elders and his admonition is striking in its simplicity: Pay careful attention... Herein lies profound pastoral advice. Pay careful attention. Willfully exercise your powers of perception, detection, comprehension upon yourself and all the flock. [John Stott comments on this saying: “\[Pastors\] must first keep watch over themselves, and only then over the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made them responsible. For they cannot care adequately for others if they neglect the care and culture of their own souls.”](#)<sup>3</sup> Now one may be tempted to use such a rationale to vindicate their own laziness, reclusiveness, sloppiness, or reluctance to engage people and the work of the ministry. But there is no hint of defense for this in Scripture. Paul lays out clearly what the life of a minister, who paid careful attention to himself, looked like and it did not include any of these. Undoubtedly, many a pastor drifts off course when he stops paying close attention to his own self. My own best example of this is my driving. I have a terrible time paying attention when I am in the car. Most recently, while travelling home from a *pastoral* visit to a state trooper, I, while on the cell phone and trying to figure out directions, ran a red light and hit the back end of a car in the crossing traffic. No one was hurt, but this is what it is like when we fail to pay attention – all of a sudden (seemingly) I strike another car. But it wasn’t all of a sudden, was it? It was laxness about cell phone usage in the car, it was trying to figure out directions and drive at the same time instead of stopping, it was a culmination of many small choices over time. There are few surprises in pastoral ministry, but many eventualities.

Pay attention. Watch yourself. Watch the flock. A sheep is headed toward the bluff – do you realize it? Pay attention. A sheep is eating a poisonous plant – have you noticed? A sheep is about to be injured by a wolf, do you have your staff and are you ready to step in? This duty is not one that cannot be taken lightly, for two reasons. First, we are appointed through God’s people by none other than the Holy Spirit himself (v.28). Second, we are called to care for that which was obtained by the precious blood of the Son of God (v.28). When an elder looks at the church, he should see a thing of incredible worth – not because

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<sup>3</sup> Stott, J.R.W. (1990). The Message of Acts. The Bible Speaks Today New Testament Series. p. 326.

it is worthy in and of itself, but because the blood of Christ was spilled to secure its position before God. When you visit a battle field or a memorial, is it the dirt, the grass, the granite that is valuable? No. What makes the site valuable is what has been given for it. Understanding this about the church will help the pastor past a great many frustrations and discouragements. Hear Stott again, "...some people are a great trial to their pastors (and vice versa). And their pastors persevere in caring for them only if they remember how valuable they are in God's sight."<sup>4</sup>

And what is it to care for the church? In 1 Thessalonians we can hear Paul's heart as he "cares" for the church. Chapter 2:7-8 read, *But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.* That is a clear description of the pastor's heart toward his people. It is a clear picture of what caring looks like. I recently challenged the Elders with this quote from Calvin as he comments on the Thessalonians passage which captures this well: *We must bear in mind, that all that would be ranked among true pastors must exercise this disposition of Paul – to have more regard to the welfare of the Church than to their own life, and not be [motivated] to duty by a regard to their own advantage, but by a sincere love to those whom they know that they are conjoined, and laid under obligation.*

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### Fierce Wolves (vv. 29-31)

So why must elders be alert and pay attention? It is certainly for the good and the growth for the church, but specifically in this passage the answer is given in verses 29 and 30. It is because fierce wolves from inside and outside of the church will do what wolves do – that is, prey on sheep, particularly the weak or injured. And what form will this take in the church, will they come in wearing hairy costumes with halloween fangs in their mouths? If only it was that simple... we'd all laugh and walk away. No. The fangs, claws, and jaws of a fierce wolf are attractively wrapped presents filled with unsound doctrine and false teaching, or what is described here as "speaking twisted things."

Elders must protect the flock. We have to be clear here. Paul did not use the imagery of a fierce wolf to communicate that these "twisted things" were minor and of little danger. No! Wolves do not spare the flock. They kill sheep, by drawing away the disciples after them (v.30). But, unlike wolves, the death may be slow and subtle. Did you know you can follow the Ephesian church over about a 40 year period through the New Testament? Want to see if Paul's prediction was right? Want to see if the Ephesian elders successfully performed their duty?

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Let's consider the last piece of information we have about the Ephesian church first. It can be found in Revelation 2, 35-40 years after Paul's first work in Ephesus. We won't go there now, but here is the summary. There are people in the church calling themselves apostles.

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<sup>4</sup> Stott, J.R.W. (1990). The Message of Acts. The Bible Speaks Today New Testament Series. p. 329.

They are evil and the Ephesians church is faithfully dealing with these people... but, somehow, in the midst of dealing with decades (we'll get there in a moment) of false teachers, they have abandoned the love they had at first. Their love for Christ, for each other, had cooled. Doctrinally, they remained committed and adamant. But in practice, the warmth was waning. Their doctrine was becoming simply an argument to be defended versus a person to be loved. It was cognitive, not of the heart. The threat was so real that Christ calls the church to repent or have its lampstand removed (vv. 1-7).

If we pedal backward in time we find ourselves in 1 and 2 Timothy, where Timothy had been sent to minister to the Ephesian church about 10 years after the start of the church and about six years after the passage we are studying today. Troubles with false teachers are abundantly evident. There were those who through unsound doctrine had stirred up controversy and quarrels leading to envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction (1 Timothy 6:3ff.). They were from inside the church (Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus 1 Timothy 1:20, 2 Timothy 2:17). Irreverent babble led to ungodliness, stirred up, fears about the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ having past, and allowed false teachers to creep into households and capture weak women – with an appearance of godliness but denying its power (2 Timothy 3: 5ff). That's the short version of the Ephesian church's history.

How did these elders on the beach at Miletus do? The results are mixed at best. And these were men who spent three years with the Apostle Paul. This should chill any ideas we have about the church being immune to either false teachers or the effects of false teaching. Elders must be ever vigilant, ever alert, paying attention to the care of the flock. The danger is real and the danger is present. The Chapel is NOT a special case. We are always at risk. Paul's hands were free of blood. He faithfully declared the whole counsel of God, testifying to all of repentance toward God and of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. How about our hands? This matter is so very serious, our church's health and well-being depends upon the faithful protection of its shepherds as they serve the overshepherd, Christ.

### **And Now I Commend You (vv. 31-35)**

So how are the elders to protect the flock from fierce wolves, from growing cold, and from forgetting their first love? In practice, the answer is in verse 31: *Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.* This is ceaseless, earnest and sincere, exhortation, challenge, warning, and instruction (noutheteo) over the long haul. We should be reminded by this example that there is no room for dispassionate gospel ministry. A biblical appreciation for gospel ministry will call on the full extent of all of your affections. This is not a matter of "getting emotional" and somehow gearing yourself up to be more expressive, no, it is a matter of becoming ever more convinced of the holiness of God, the glory of Christ in his gospel work, and the eternal weight of gospel ministry in the lives of the people around you. As an elder, one may never "blow off" his work. Especially in regards to false teaching, we must be ready to

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boldly, clearly, biblically, and persuasively, deal directly with those who would bring un-sound doctrine into the church<sup>5</sup>.

Well that is how it is done in practice. But from where does the elder draw the strength, the ambition, the wisdom, the courage, the ability to do these things? Now we are into territory that extends well beyond defending the flock from wolves. We are asking a question that extends to all that Paul has called the elders to be by example and by command. The answer to this question is in verse 32 and it is so wonderfully, beautifully Pauline, and so consistent with the canon of Scripture as a whole: *And now I commend 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 that are sanctified.* Have you noticed this theme throughout this talk near the docks? Listen again: v.20 – declaring what was profitable, teaching you in public and in your homes; v.21 - testifying to all of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus; v.24 – ministry that is characterized by testifying to the gospel of the grace of God; v.27 – declaring to you the whole counsel of God. The ministry of an elder is first and foremost a ministry of the gospel and the Word. Paul sets before the elders the exact same thing that he had set before all Ephesians.

Thus, he commends them to God and to the word of his grace. Is that it? Is that the best Paul can do? No growth program? No treatise on apologetics? No polemics course? Only a simple commendation. No more is necessary. Why? Because our God and his word of grace, Christ, IS ABLE to build you up and to give you the inheritance.<sup>6</sup> The same thing that Paul calls the shepherds to give to the sheep is what the shepherds themselves must rely on for their own sustenance and enablement. What is good for the sheep is good for the shepherd. There is not two-tier system here. Elders, like their people, are in desperate need of having their God, his Son, and his word set before them. As elders, when not providentially hindered, we should be in ABE or teaching the word in another ministry. We should be sitting in on the preaching of the word with our minds and hearts fully engaged. We should be regularly in our private study reading the *word* directly, though there be many good and helpful books available to us. We too must be fully submitted to the ministry of the word. We cannot call our people to it and think somehow that we have grown beyond the need for it, or need less of it. Just the opposite is true. Our ministry depends on our exposure to this word of grace.

We must hurry on. In verses 33-35 Paul's challenge to the elders seems to take an awkward turn. He returns to shoring up his integrity before the elders and remembering his ministry before them. What is happening here? Well, I do believe Paul is again making the case for the integrity of his own ministry – but the emphasis is a little different here. He has just seconds ago spoken of the fierce wolves and how they will not spare the flock and draw away the disciples after them. I believe Paul is now directly contrasting the nature of his ministry with theirs. We won't take time, but if you look at the descriptions of the false teachers in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy, you will see that these were people who were in the minis-

<sup>5</sup> See 1 and 2 Timothy for extended discussions on the pastoral approach to dealing with false teachers

<sup>6</sup> 2 Timothy 3:14ff

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try for gain – that is, to take. Whether it was for material gain (gold, silver, apparel, stuff) or for immaterial gain (having influence, controlling people, being the focus of attention), they are in the ministry to *get* something from it for personal gain.<sup>7</sup> In stark contrast, Paul holds up his hands and says, in effect, I never took for personal gain. I did not prey upon the weak, I worked hard so that I could help the weak. I, like Christ, gave. And this perhaps is a very appropriate note for Paul to end his challenge. It is more blessed to give than to receive. The ministry of an elder is about unchecked giving of the gospel to God’s people. Verse 24 defines the scope of this giving (only until death). Verses 19-21 describe the activities of this giving (serving and declaring). Verses 20-22 describe the substance of this giving (word and gospel). Verses 18, 20, 28, 31, describe the intensity of this giving (unflinching and unceasing). And verse 32 describes the enablement of this giving (by God and the word of his grace). This, then, is a picture of true eldership.

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A few short notes as we conclude our message this morning. Luke records, in a picturesque manner, the last few moments exchanged near the shore prior to Paul’s sailing away. Here he shows us how the gospel weaves bonds between God’s people, and here specifically, between gospel ministers. There is praying, weeping, embracing, and kissing. Luke’s point is not to showcase sentimentality, but rather the affections that accompany kingdom living. God does not call elders to do their work alone. God does not call the church to do gospel ministry alone, as isolated silos of activity. God has called “us” “we” “the body” to live and strive together. He has called elders to plurality. In this conjoining of people for his kingdom he knits hearts together, he knits minds together, and in doing so gives us a picture of the Father’s love for the son, the oneness of the father and the son, just as Christ prayed for in John 17. In addition, Christians in community under gospel ministry, being served by bold and courageous elders who proclaim the whole counsel of God, calling them to repentance an faith, in homes and in public, shrinking from nothing, and fighting against fierce wolves, giving all when necessary, result in the whole body growing up in every way into the head, our Christ, from whom the whole body is joined and held together, each body part doing its body work, holding the body together and making it grow, so that we are built up in love.<sup>8</sup> There is nothing so powerful on Earth as the church. Dan recently shared a quote with the elders that captures well the experience, from a knight’s point of view, of body life when it is cherished and prized in the midst of hardship, attacks, and afflictions.

## Conclusion

As you stand there on the shoreline with Paul, you weep, you embrace, you think to yourself...

*Battle is a joyous thing. We love each other so much in battle. If we see that our cause is just [Christworthy] and our kinsmen fight boldly, tears come to our eyes. A sweet joy rises in our hearts, in the feeling of our honest loyalty to each other; and seeing our friend so bravely exposing his body to danger in order to fulfill the com-*

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Timothy 1:7, 6:3-5, 2 Timothy 3:1-7

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 4:1-16

*mandment of our Creator, we resolve to go forward and die or live with him on account of love. This brings such delight that anyone who has not felt it cannot say how wonderful it is. Do you think someone who feels this is afraid of death? Not in the least! He is so strengthened, so delighted he does not know where he is. Truly, he fears nothing in the world.<sup>9</sup>*

These are the sentiments of a gospel worker –whether he be elder or not. This is the solemn joy among the ranks of those who are Christ’s, finishing the course and ministry that we have received from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Tonight, we will consider several principles in bullet fashion that can be drawn from Acts 20, briefly consider 1 Peter 5:1-5, and discuss that changes that are upcoming in the eldership at Clearcreek Chapel.

Let’s Pray.

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<sup>9</sup> This quote was made by a French Knight named Jean d Brueil in the year 1465. It is cited in Michael Frost’s book *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*, p. 117-118.