

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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### **How People Change – Part X**

**Pastor Ty Blackburn**

**Acts 20:17-38**

**March 6, 2016**

Amen. Please turn with me in your Bibles to the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts, Acts 20. We are continuing our series we began at the first of the year, ‘How People Change’. A topical series, departing from our normal practice of just working verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, through books. We feel like it is appropriate and helpful for the church to have a seasoning of topical messages. This may seem like a lot of seasoning, I don’t know, but from time-to-time I think it is appropriate, and right, and healthy. So we, as Elders, had felt burdened about this particular issue of helping our folks, helping all of us to have a holistic, biblical view of sanctification. What it is we need in our lives so that we grow to be more like Jesus? That is what sanctification is, the process by which those who are already saved become, in their daily experience, they begin to live more consistent to who they really are—blood-washed, righteous, holy forever, once you repent and believe. Your standing before God is perfect, and yet we still battle with the flesh. We live in a world that is opposed to the things of God, and so it is a challenge to change. And so we’ve been asking the question, *Why don’t we change?* And we’ve been considering problems in our lives that hinder that, and how we need to address and seek change biblically.

One of the things that we’ve seen as the theme of the New Testament, is the importance of redemptive relationships. That God works through relationships in the body of Christ, that we need to have growing levels of fellowship, true fellowship, *koinonia*, with other believers where we share our hearts. We encourage them in the Lord, they encourage us in the Lord. Without that our sanctification is dramatically hindered. We will not be all that God wants us to be without those relationships. It is actually one of the reasons why, on our board out in the foyer, we have our core values. The sixth core value is the primacy of relationships. We see this as something that is very important to God. He defines all of the law, the Lord Jesus says, “The whole law hangs on two commandments,” and those two commandments are relational. The whole law is summed up in, “Love God with all your heart, love your neighbor as yourself.” Relationship is where everything is. God is a triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, from eternity past, always existing in a relational communion of love. So He creates us in His image, and likeness, to relate, to love one another. So redemptive relationships are what we’ve been talking about.

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Today we are going to look at a particular redemptive relationship that the Lord has called us to have in our lives. And that particular redemptive relationship is the relationship that we all are called to have with our shepherds, our Elders, or our shepherd/Elders. That we need that in our lives, and we see this in a very clear and strongly impressed way in Acts 20, where the apostle Paul calls to himself the Elders of the Church of Ephesus, and impresses upon them their urgent responsibility, with a sense of great passion. You could hear it, as we read the text in a moment, listen for Paul's passion, his earnestness to say, "You must shepherd the people. It is a matter of life and death." So in seeing that, what we are going to see is that every church, this is basically the thesis of the sermon from this passage, every church desperately needs an effective shepherding ministry. And an effective shepherding ministry is where the Elders, with wisdom and diligence, actively seek to shepherd the flock. So listen for the urgency, almost a sense of desperation, but of course not truly desperation, but just the earnestness of Paul. Verse 17 to Verse 38, we're going to read all 22 verses.

***Acts 20:17-38 ~ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. 18 And when they had come to him, he said to them,***

***"You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. 24 But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.***

***25 "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. 26 Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. 28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made***

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*you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 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 who are sanctified. 33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. 35 In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

*36 When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, 38 grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.*

Let's pray together.

*Father, we ask that You, by Your Spirit, might impress upon us the things that You have for us from Your word. That You might open our minds, enlighten our understanding, illuminate our hearts. Grant us faith and repentance. And we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

Every church desperately needs an effective shepherding ministry where the Elders minister with wisdom and diligence in shepherding the members. This means that you and I all need to be shepherded. That is the implication of this, if the church needs it, then the members of the church need it, so we personally need it. I think it is a challenge for us to deal with this. It is a challenge for us, as Elders, to really face our responsibility because there is something about, "Well, we're all sheep, and so we just don't really see things the way they are." And then you add to it American society, our individualism, all these things work against us seeing this the way we need to. When we look carefully at the passage, it becomes clear that shepherding is something of the utmost importance. You can hear Paul's intensity, I mean, his tears, his earnestness, his concern for the church at Ephesus. And what

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I want us to do in our time today, to begin to unpack this, is to organize our thoughts around three questions. We are going to use again some of the W's, I love to look at the text that way. We are going to ask the question *What?* And then we're going to look at *Who?* and *Why?* But we're going to start with *What?*

### 1) What?

What is Paul's message to the Elders of the church at Ephesus? *What?* That is the first point. What is his message? And essentially his message is an earnest appeal to them to perform their God-given task. Now, what is that task? Well, there are two key words that describe the task of elders here in this passage. The first word, the main word, the most important word, I think, in the passage, that describes the task of Elder, remember he is talking to the Elders of the Church of Ephesus. The two words that describe the task, the first is the word '*shepherd*', in Verse 28.

***Acts 20:28 ~ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God...***

He is calling them to the task of shepherding. In fact, I think that word is the most important of the two words I'm going to share because it is in a verb form. There in the NASB it reads, as it does in the Greek, as an infinitive. You know, the English infinitive uses the word '*to*' and then the verb form, '*to shepherd*'. In Greek it is an infinitive, the idea of '*to shepherd*'. So he is basically saying, "Be on guard," is the main verb in Verse 28. The ESV I think gets it a little better when it says, "Pay attention to yourselves, and all the flock, to shepherd." So '*pay attention*' kind of bleeds into '*shepherding*'. The idea of that verb, '*pay attention to*', means to have, actually it is a compound word in Greek that means '*to have toward*', '*to hold in mind*' is the idea, '*to keep in mind something*'. It would be used, this word would be used if like you are trying to hear something and you lean in, and turn your good ear. I do that because my right ear is better than my left ear. If I'm really trying to hear something, then I'll turn. This is the idea of this verb. It could also mean if you are looking, you are watching something, and you focus a little more.

Say you are outside with your children in the front yard, and a car is coming, and you've got toddlers, and you look a little more focused exactly where your children are. That is the idea of that word, '*pay attention to*'. And so, "Give attention to yourself and the flock to shepherd." Not just give attention to them in general, just

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look at them, just pay attention to them. No, pay attention to shepherd. So shepherding is this main idea of what the Elder is called to do. It is what Jesus called himself, 'The Good Shepherd', and He is given the task in the church of shepherding to certain men like this. The Elders of Ephesus were called to shepherd the other members of the flock.

A second key word though, not just the word '*shepherding*', we're still considering what is the task of Elders. '*Shepherding*', the second word, also in Verse 28, is the word '*overseers*', ...***the Holy Spirit has made you overseers***,... The English translation is an excellent translation of the literal Greek. It literally means '*to see over*'. Sometimes you'll hear this word translated '*bishop*', that is the Latinized form of the word, it came into English that way. But basically, the idea of the word is '*to watch over*'. It pictures some sense of accountability and responsibility in looking upon, watching over. So he is saying, his earnest plea with them is to perform their God-given task, which is to be a shepherd to the flock, and to watch over the flock.

Now the implication of course is the flock needs shepherding, and the flock needs watching over. The reality is that every one of us needs shepherding, and every one of us need watching over. In fact, he's going to say, remember he says in Verse 28, when he says, "Watch over yourselves." ***Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock***,... to shepherd. He doesn't leave them out of the need for shepherding, do you see that? He is basically saying, you know, "Pay attention to yourselves, and the flock, to shepherd," because the Elders themselves are sheep. This is one of the mysteries of God's ways, He shepherds with sheep. It seems like a bad plan to me, but obviously it is not a bad plan, it is the perfect plan because it shows His glory. He has to work through weak sheep to make them faithful shepherds. But the implication is, we all need someone watching over us, we all need someone shepherding us, leading us, feeding us, protecting us.

Now one thing I want you to see, that becomes obvious, but I need to point this out because there is a lot of confusion sometimes in the Church, in the various denominations, and how they see the role, or the officers in leadership in the Church. We believe that the New Testament teaches clearly there are two leadership offices in the Church, two and only two. They are the office of Elder and the office of Deacon. This is made clear a number of places, particularly 1 Timothy 3, which I will refer to again a little bit later. We will actually turn there briefly, but those are the two leadership offices. Some folks think there are Bishops, there are Elders, even try to add pastors as a different office. We believe



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that the New Testament teaches two offices—Deacon, the office of service, that leads the church in serving, because Jesus was the preeminent servant, and so they lead, Christ leads His Church through servants, the Deacons. Filled with the Holy Spirit, having all of the same character qualities as the Elders, the only difference being the Elders teach. And Elders, who are shepherds, because Jesus is the shepherd, and so He shepherds the sheep through the Elders, and He serves and leads in service through the Deacons.

And the Elder, the office of Elder, we believe is only one office. Like I said, there are not Bishops or overseers, and Elders, and pastors, and the reason is because the words are used interchangeably. In this passage they are used interchangeably. He sends to the Elders of the Church of Ephesus, they are the Elders, and what does he tell them to do? Shepherd, which could be translated, pastor. You are Elders, so pastor. In fact, this is a little bit confusing, but try to stay with me for a moment here. The word *'pastor'* is actually from Latin. The Greek word, *'poimēn'*, means 'shepherd', but when they translated it into Latin, you know because the Roman church, and Rome was so dominant, and that was the language of Rome, they translated the word into Latin, it became the word *'pastorum'* or something like that, whatever you do with Latin at the end of the word. But then the English took the word *'pastor'* into its vernacular, and when they translated it, like William Tyndale translated the Bible into English, he used the *'pastor'* for *'shepherd'*, but it is actually the word *'shepherd'*, it is in the text, do you see? So then *'pastor'* equals *'shepherd'*, but what I want you to see here is that *'Elder'* equals *'shepherd'* equals *'overseer'*. Verse 17:

***Acts 20:17 ~ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.***

Verse 28, speaking to those Elders he said:

***Acts 20:28 ~ ...among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,...***

“You are Elders, but you’re overseers.” Paul, in fact, in Titus 1, the passage we read earlier, He says to Titus, remember? “Set in order what remains, and appoint Elders in every city.” He goes on a verse below that and he says something about their families, their kids need to be obedient because an overseer must be above reproach. He is talking again about Elders, but he uses the word *'overseer'* because it is interchangeable in the mind of the apostle Paul. It is also interchangeable in the mind of the apostle Peter. In 1 Peter 5, he says in that verse, basically saying

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the same thing, making the case that we need overseers, and Elders, which are the same thing. He says, “I, an Elder, your fellow Elder, exhort the Elders among you to shepherd the flock of God, exercising oversight.” So he is using the words ‘overseer’, ‘shepherd’, ‘Elder’, interchangeably. So there is one office, there are not two offices, so that in the church, the pastor, what we normally think of as a pastor, a man who stands up on most Sundays and preaches, whose livelihood comes more, usually he gets paid a salary from the church. We think of that, but that is a subset of the Elders, it is not a separate office. So anyway, Elder equals overseer equals shepherd.

Now let me add to this, an important thing we need to see as well that God wills for there to be a plural number of Elders in every single church. The church is to be led by Elders, not an Elder. And you see this, turn with me back to Chapter 14, Verse 23 of Acts. This is talking about Paul’s first missionary journey and he’s moving through parts of Asia Minor ministering, evangelizing, and look at Verse 23 of Chapter 14:

***Acts 14:23 ~ When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.***

He says they go around evangelizing, ministering in cities, sharing the Gospel, and they look for the Lord to raise up Elders, but you see it is Elders plural, for them in every church, singular. Do you see that? ***When they had appointed elders*** (plural) ***for them in every church***, (singular), then they were ready to commend them to the Lord and move on. This was the ministry model. They had to have leaders in place.

Now, in Chapter 20 and Verse 17, our passage, he called to the Elders, plural, of the Church, singular, of Ephesus. And you see it again in Verse 28, ***...the Holy Spirit has made you overseers***, (plural), ***to shepherd the church...*** (singular). You see that in Verse 28 also. So Paul’s message to the Elders is to fulfill their responsibility to shepherd, and to oversee as a group.

Now one more thing I wanted to say about the *What?* before we move on. What is Paul’s message to the Ephesian Elders? I said it is an earnest appeal to them to perform their God-given task. Note that this task is definitely and emphatically demonstrated to be a God-given task. In Verse 28 when he says, ***Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made***

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*you overseers*,... “It wasn’t that you guys were just elected, the fact that you are in the role you are in,” Paul says, “is because the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” It is the working of the Spirit of God to set apart qualified men, and so when they are set apart, we know that the Spirit of God has done that. Now the church needs to be careful to examine, and we are told in 1 Timothy 3, and Titus 1, we read earlier, to look for these particular character qualities because becoming an Elder, or being recognized as an Elder, is about character, godly character. But it is important to see that it is the Lord who gives the Elders to the church.

It is interesting, the triune working of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, working together to perform the plan of redemption. Here, Paul emphasizes the Holy Spirit’s action in appointing Elders, or overseers, Elder/overseers. What did we see when we were looking at Ephesians 4:11? Who was it that gives the shepherds to the Church? He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as shepherd/teachers. Who gave? Jesus! So the Lord Jesus gives, and the Holy Spirit appoints, and so the idea is we should see this as the work of God. That is very sobering for those who are set apart to the task of shepherding. The Holy Spirit has put you in this place, it is a very serious matter of the greatest importance. How humbling that is. So Paul’s message then is to perform the God-given task, and the implication is that the Church of Ephesus desperately needs shepherding. Now that is the *What?*

### 2) Who?

The second question I want us to look at this morning is *Who?* Or more strictly, or correctly, *Whom?* To whom is Paul speaking? Or for whom is Paul concerned? He is concerned for the church at Ephesus. He is talking to the Ephesian Elders. Now let’s think about the implications of this, that God, in His wisdom, led this particular conversation that Paul had to be inscripturated. He obviously many times talked with Elders, talked with leaders, he exhorted people, but this particular passage is placed in the canon of Scripture. Now think with me for a moment about the *Who?* or the *Whom?* of this, and how it adds weight to this.

Paul makes this urgent appeal to the Elders of the church at Ephesus, and let’s share a little background of the church at Ephesus. Paul visited the city first, a city in Asia Minor. It is actually what would now be Turkey. The city was a huge city for its time, the fourth largest city in the Roman world. There were 250,000 people in the city of Ephesus. The thing that Ephesus was known for, above everything else, was the massive, splendid temple to Artemis. It was considered one of the



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eight wonders of the ancient world at its time. That temple was four times larger than the Parthenon in Athens. People came just to see it, and then of course, the worship that was involved in that, it was a center of Pagan spirituality.

Paul goes there first, now listen, Paul goes there first in Acts 18:18-21, we are told about his first visit to Ephesus, and he is ministering there for a brief period, we are not told exactly how long, but it looks like just a few weeks. He then leaves Priscilla and Aquila there. Priscilla and Aquila were two of his associates that is a husband and wife team. Priscilla, the wife, and Aquila, the husband, who were basically there church planting. So the church at Ephesus received a direct visit from the apostle Paul, and then they received the missionaries, Priscilla and Aquila. Shortly thereafter, a guy named Apollos shows up, and has a brief ministry there, along with Priscilla and Aquila, and we are told that he was a man mighty in the Scriptures.

So he comes into this infant church of Ephesus, and so you have Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos, and then shortly thereafter, Paul returns in Acts 19, and he ministers there, as we read just today, for a period of three years. This is unparalleled in the New Testament. The longest visit we know about compared to this is 18 months that he spent in Corinth. Paul's visits would vary in duration, but we know that in Thessalonica, for instance, he had a very fruitful ministry there. The Thessalonian Church was especially blessed of the Lord, but he only stayed there three Sabbaths. He was there a little more than two weeks in Thessalonica, and yet the Lord built a church there. He's three years at Ephesus. I mean, think about that. And as he said, he's ministering the word from house to house and publicly, admonishing each one with tears. Imagine what it must have been like to have been in that church, to have sat under the ministry of the apostle Paul for three years.

I know I've had this experience where you run into somebody that's at John MacArthur's church. "What's that like? You've been with him for 20 years? You're kidding." But we have a little bit of sense because we can listen to him now, right? But in the old days you had to get the cassette tapes. Remember that? You had to send off for a cassette tape. Wow, how times change. Anyway, but to sit under a ministry like that, but this blows that away. The apostle Paul for three years, what an investment. In fact, he had a very fruitful ministry there. When he first gets there for a second visit that lasts three years, the Lord just gives an extraordinary blessing to his ministry, and conversions are happening in droves. In fact, it's so great, we're told in Acts 19 that people are turning from the magic arts and the occult that was so strong and so dominant there in Ephesus. They're

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turning to Christ from idolatry and the occult worship and involvement, witchcraft and things like that. They're turning in such numbers that they have a book burning, basically, where they burn all of the books that were a part of their former wicked way of life—witchcraft, sorcery, and these books, and they burn them. We're told in Acts 19 that the value of the books that they burned, this new church, this explosion of evangelism, the value of the books was 50,000 pieces of silver, which the ESV Study Bible calculates to be \$6 million. So many people had come to Christ, that when they bring their books together, the value was that great. Books were more expensive back then too. It wasn't like you could just print them with a printing press. But anyway, the point is it was \$6 million. That's a lot of people. It was a three-year ministry.

Now, what's the point of this? What an extraordinary investment by God. In fact, later Timothy would be sent by Paul to minister here for a number of years. So they would have Paul, Priscilla, Aquila, Apollos, Timothy, and many folks think that John the apostle was there later too. What an investment by God in these people, and yet Paul says a church like that with an investment by God like He's going to give, still urgently needs shepherding. The argument is from the greater to the lesser. If this church needed it, surely every church needs it, and that's what we see as we look at the New Testament.

I mentioned 1 Timothy 3. Turn over there with me and let's just quickly—hold your place at Acts 20, and let's look quickly at three other passages. In 1 Timothy 3:1-7, the apostle Paul is talking about, in Verse 2 he says *an overseer*. He's talking again about the office of elder = overseer = shepherd, and he gives the qualifications.

***1 Timothy 3:2 ~ An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife,...***

That sounds just like what we saw in Titus. And he speaks about the overseer in the first seven verses, and then in Verse 8 he says:

***1 Timothy 3:8 ~ Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain,...***

He goes all the way down through Verse 13. It's interesting to note the context. And then he says in Verse 14:

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***1 Timothy 3:14 ~ I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; 15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.***

He's saying, "Listen, I'm writing you, Timothy. I sent you to Ephesus." We find out he sent him to Ephesus, in Timothy, Verse 3, to deal with false teachers, which Paul is warning us about, because Acts 20 comes between Paul's ministry there and Timothy going there (1 Timothy). Do you follow me? He sent him there to deal with false teachers, but now he's saying, "I want to come soon to see you, but in case I'm delayed, I want you to know how you're to build the church." And it's quite instructive to realize that that's basically a statement of *why I wrote the book*, Verses 14 and 15. "This is why I wrote this letter to you, Timothy." But to think about, he put the purpose statement right after he talks about the urgency of leadership. The place that it came to the apostle's inspired mind to say, "Why I'm writing," was after he said, "Elders need to be like this. Deacons need to be like this. I'm writing to you so that you will know how to conduct yourselves, so that the church will be the church, the pillar of the truth." So leadership is so important.

Then you turn over a couple of pages past 2 Timothy to Titus, the passage we read earlier, and Paul is essentially doing the same thing.

***Titus 1:5 ~ For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,...***

Basically, *...set in order what remains...* means to fix what's not done. There are some things that have been left undone, obviously left undone, and the first thing I want you to do is appoint elders to address those things. And then 1 Peter 5, I mentioned this passage earlier. Let's look at it together for a moment. Now think back. Paul is writing to Timothy at Ephesus and he says, "You need godly leaders." He's writing to Titus in Crete and he says, "You need godly leaders. Peter is writing to the church in Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, churches that he's ministered to, and what does he say in Chapter 5? "You need godly leaders." Look with me at 1 Peter 5:1.

***1 Peter 5:1 ~ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to***

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***the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.***

So it was on the heart of all the apostles to instill upon the people of God this need for a plural leadership, the office of shepherd, elder, and of course the office of deacon as well. So the *Who?* makes it clear that if it was true for that church with that investment, it's true for every church. So what has Paul called them to do? He's called them to perform the task of elders, to do the duty of shepherding and overseeing. Who did he give that task to? He gave it to the church at Ephesus, a church which had the best foundation a church could have. If anybody would have thought they didn't need shepherding, it would have been the Ephesians. They would have said to the Corinthians, "You Corinthians only had 18 months of the apostle Paul. We had three years. By the way, did I mention we also had Apollos, we had Priscilla, and Aquila? It's understandable that you guys have all the problems you have. You need shepherding." But it wasn't the Corinthians that God inspired this passage to be written to in Acts 20. It was the Ephesians.

So for us, our tendency is the same as theirs. "Yeah, shepherding is good in theory. I agree with it in theory. The Bible says it, but when it comes to really believing that I need it, that's another matter." And so we want to consider how we can understand what that really means in our lives, and we're going to continue looking at that. But thirdly, I want to move to our third point. First: *What?* Secondly: *Who?* Thirdly: *Why?*

### 3) Why?

Why is it such an urgent matter for the church at Ephesus and all churches to be shepherded? The apostle makes clear in this passage that it is a matter of life and death, and you can see this when you really note that there are only three imperatives in the entire passage. In 22 verses from Verse 17 to Verse 38 there are only three imperatives, three commands. The first is in Verse 22. It's the word *behold*.

***Acts 20:22 ~ And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem,...***

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Basically, behold means listen up. So he's trying to get their attention, the earnestness of the moment. "Listen up, I'm on my way to Jerusalem and I'm about to tell you what you guys need to know." So the *behold* is kind of an introductory imperative. "Listen up." The second imperative is in Verse 28, translated in the NAS as *be on guard*. I mentioned already that I like the ESV's rendering of it better, where they say *pay close attention to*. That's the idea of the word, to hold in mind, to lean in, to listen, to focus your vision upon. The idea is to watch, to be especially watchful. The third imperative is in Verse 31.

### ***Acts 20:31 ~ Therefore be on the alert,...***

So you have, "Be on guard..." in Verse 28, and "Be on alert..." in Verse 31. In *be on the alert* the verb basically comes from a word which means to wake up, to rise up when you wake up. You wake in the morning, you get out of bed, and you stand up. This is the idea of the word. So what he's saying here is, when he says, "Be on the alert," he's basically saying don't be sleepy. Don't let yourself become drowsy. Refrain from sleep. Be in a constant state of watchfulness. What he's saying is focus your mind, and then he comes back with the second imperative and says it basically again. "Wake up!" The reason for those second two imperatives is sandwiched in between Verse 28 and Verse 31. He says, "Be on guard," in Verse 28, and, "Be on the alert," in Verse 31, but look at the interior of the sandwich. Those are like the two pieces of bread. Look what's inside of it. Verse 29:

***Acts 20:29 ~ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.***

The idea is the eminent danger of false teaching. He's saying, "You guys have got to be on guard. You've got to be on the alert." "Paul, we had three years of your excellent instruction. We finished seminary." Three years is how long you go to seminary. The whole Ephesian Church has been through the best seminary. He says, "You guys that are in charge as elders, you've got to be alert. You've got to be on guard." This is where again, we don't realize how susceptible we are to false teaching. I was convicted last week. I actually woke up Monday morning burned in my heart about not so much what I said, but how I said part of what I preached last week, that when I was talking about the fads and how Ephesians is teaching clearly that as the church grows up in the word and gets stronger, they're not infants tossed here and there. And I think it's true that the American evangelical church



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kind of bounces from fad to fad because there's not that stability. But I said it's not so much what I said but how I said it. I feel like that my tone was insensitive and arrogant in that the reality was, and as I said, I woke up Monday morning just convicted about it, because I think that insensitivity and arrogance also makes it harder for people to hear what you're saying. So it's awful in that sense. It doesn't honor God and it hurts people. So please forgive me for that, and pray for me that I'll not be like that.

The idea though is kind of blown away by this passage. Even more like the Lord just really led me to this passage to just turn the knife on me and say, "Ty, what you did last week was so dumb." I was a stupid sheep. Because the point he's making here is who can fall into false teaching? The idea is clearly all of us. When Paul says to them, "From among your own selves men will arise," he's talking to the cream of the crop as far as biblical gifts, teaching gifts. Everybody is equal before Christ, but these are the ones who have the gifts to give them the ability to understand the truth with great clarity, given to the church for that. And he looks at them and he says, "From among your own selves men are going to arise." It's as if the Spirit gives him insight into the future, and here he's speaking prophetically. "Some of you guys are going to turn away." They would have thought, "No way." But it's true. Any of us can fall.

So we ought to be sober and vigilant in helping one another not to fall. So when talking about things like *The Prayer of Jabez*, and *The Shack*, and *Jesus Calling*, there should have been more tenderness on my part, and it should be on all of us, because in reality, the fact is, this was something the Lord showed me too, was I read *The Prayer of Jabez*, and it took me a while to figure out that it wasn't a good thing. I didn't know right away. I think I probably finished the book and was just kind of pondering, "I'm not sure about it." Then the more I got thinking, and eventually the Lord really showed me. Why is that? Why was *The Prayer of Jabez* a phenomenon? It's because there's something in all of us where we want the Christian life to be easy. "I found the secret." That's in all of us, so we shouldn't despise it in somebody else, and I think we do because we know we're convicted of it ourselves.

*The Shack*, that book was basically it's a man's musings about the Trinity. Dangerous? Yes, but I understand the appeal, because the story was very compelling, and just the fact of understanding the Trinity, to make that accessible, isn't that something you'd like to be able to understand? So you see, it kind of comes right along what we all would want, and so we can't stand in a sense of

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judgmentally condemning. We can say, “That’s error and you ought not do it. You ought to repent.” But it’s different than to say, “I understand how easy it is to fall into these things.” With *Jesus Calling*, what’s going on there? People are wanting an intimate experience with Jesus Christ and that’s a good thing. The Christian life is hard, and it’s often the state of believers to feel very distant from God. We see this in the Psalms. “Why do You stand afar off, O Lord?” But we’re not to use unbiblical means to address that real need. The Lord doesn’t tell us to go outside of the Scriptures to find Him. It’s the Scriptures that testify of Jesus. So it’s just a matter of we can gently say, “Yeah, I understand. We all want to have a closer walk with God, and I appreciate the burden that you have that way, but that’s not the way to find it,” rather than looking down on it. So I think that’s where we need to be.

At the beginning of what he said about his ministry there, he served the Lord with all humility and with tears. That should mark us. Pray for me and us as elders that it will mark us and that it will mark all of the body of Christ here. I mentioned how easy it is to fall into things. I’ve seen this in an even more profound way in something recent. I had a conversation with a brother the other day and he was sharing about a church he’d been a part of some years back that was an excellent church. It was sound, trying to adhere to the Scriptures in every area, and this church got sidetracked by something called *The New Perspective on Paul*. *The New Perspective on Paul* is basically some theologians basically looking at the temple and temple writings, or basically Jewish writings during the time of Christ. Not Christian writings but Jewish writings, called Second Temple Judaism. The temple after it was rebuilt in 520, all the way up until it was destroyed in 70 A.D. and looking at Second Temple Judaism and kind of theorizing about the state of the Jewish nation when Jesus came. And basically the thesis is we misunderstood Paul, because we misunderstood the setting in which he ministered. It really is completely wrong, *The New Perspective on Paul*. There are some helpful things, but basically it’s almost all unhealthy and heretical.

But to see the people that have fallen into it, it’s just kind of mind blowing. This was something that impacted the Presbyterian Church in America, a solid denomination, in a significant way. They dealt with a number of churches being put out of the PCA, because they embraced this. The appeal is it uses, as Satan always does when he brings up false teaching, he teaches truth out of balance. Truth out of balance leads to heresy. And so the idea of *The New Perspective on Paul* is they focus on things like the Kingship of Christ, that the good news of the Gospel is Jesus is King and He’s Lord. That is part of the Gospel, but that’s not all

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the Gospel. The fact that Jesus has come to make Jew and Gentile one, that's the main thrust of what Paul is dealing with in Romans. This is what they say. Well, there's definitely something that's going on in Romans and it's going on in Ephesians clearly, that he's making Jew and Gentile one. But what happens is they emphasize these things and they downplay justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. It's like an omission of this central urgent doctrine so that they make salvation slowly become not about the fact that you're a sinner who has offended a holy God and you need a legal forensic declaration by that holy God based on the finished work of Jesus Christ, that He took your sins in His own body on the cross and He gives you perfect righteousness. That's what the Bible teaches about justification, and they misread it by listening to this other stuff, and I think well-intentioned people have gone that way.

Now, what should we do? We should urge them to come back, but again, realizing that we all—the old saying, “There for but the grace of God go I.” So if people like that who like in Reformed circles celebrate the Gospel, could depart from the Gospel, we see that what Paul is saying here in Ephesians 20 is of course much more real and eminent as a danger than we would normally think. We should be very sober and vigilant, very prayerful for one another, for other believers in the church universal that we know that love God. We should pray for them that they will stay faithful. Pray for one another. We need to be aware that we need shepherds. That's why we need shepherds to help us.

It's true for all of us, and praise God He's put in place this church that's perfectly designed to do exactly what He wants to do. Now, it's perfectly designed, but there are a whole bunch of flawed people in the process. But that way with flawed people, God does perfect things, and therefore He gets all the glory. We never have to look at the person and say, “Wow, that guy's got it together so much. I understand how he could help me.” No, you look at that guy and say, “He hasn't got it all together, but the Lord helped me. Wow, glory to God.” That's what the Lord is doing, and He wants us to be people who are willing to accept His design. We need shepherding. We all do. What this looks like, how we do that, that's what we're going to talk about next time. But I want to encourage you to pray. Pray for us as elders. Pray for the deacons as we're trying to figure out what the Lord wants us to do with what He's teaching us. How do we practically work this out? We want to do it according to His plan. Pray for each of us individually that we'll also know and be able to work together to make this happen.

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I mentioned last week in our business meeting that you'll be receiving an email about this later in the week. We were asking you to consider taking part in a season of prayer next week, Monday through Wednesday, the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup>, and you can proceed however the Lord leads you. You can just spend extra time praying. You can fast in a variety of ways that people fast, if you want to fast food, or some people fast the things they really like, and just sort of eat a sustenance diet like Daniel did, a Daniel fast. You may want to fast a meal. You may want to fast a day. You may want to fast the entire time. Do whatever the Lord leads you to do, and of course, with wisdom about your own health situation and that kind of thing. But the idea is that we're going to send out some prayer requests, and we're going to ask you to pray the Scriptures, and we're going to have some passages of Scripture we want you to read and pray through, and pray for the Lord to help us become more what He wants us to be. It's a marathon. It's a process. We're supposed to always be reforming, and we want to be obedient to Him. Everything that He does, every great thing God does, He does through prayer. So let us pray. Let us take what the Lord has shown us, is showing us, and really ask Him to do it. I love that verse, "Faithful is He who called you. He also will do it."

Let's pray together right now.

*Father, we thank You for Your patience, Your mercy, the riches of Your grace which You've lavished upon us. Lord, we confess our sins and the ways that we don't honor You, and don't honor one another, and don't love unbelievers in the way that You would have us to. Forgive us for pride, insensitivity, lovelessness. Help us to be like Jesus. Help us to be lowly and meek, fervent for truth, loving souls of people, and loving most the glory of God. Father, we ask that You will continue to do the work that You've committed to do to build Your church, that the word of Your grace will build us up and give us the inheritance among all those who are sanctified, and we pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.*

"How People Change – Part X"

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