A Charge to New Testament Church Leaders, Part 2
Scripture: Acts 20:29-38
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1974

I invite you to take your bibles at this time and turn with me to the 20th chapter of the book of Acts, Acts chapter 20. And we're continuing and completing the second in this look at the 20th chapter of Acts, on the particular study of New Testament church leadership - "A Charge to Church Leaders." Acts chapter 20. And we've been considering, particularly, verses 25 to 38, and have already looked at some detail into verses 25 to 28. We'll review briefly and then go from there.

Throughout the years of God's Kingdom on earth He has always mediated His rule through specially chosen and qualified leaders. In the Old Testament time patriarchs were the first group of leaders. They were followed by judges, and then there were prophets and priests and kings. In the New Testament time God mediates His rule in the church through evangelists and teaching pastors, as well as through the indwelling Holy Spirit who guides the individual believer.

Now leadership, in terms of all of what God is doing in the world, is very important. God recognizes that because of the chaos of sin things have to be made subject to authority. And so there is authority and submission as a two-fold operation of God in the world. I put on an overhead to perhaps give you a little view of it. We see, first of all, that God ruled directly in the beginning. And in the direct rule of God there were no leaders. There was no need for leadership because there were perfect human relationships under a single authority. There was no need to rule over people because there was no unruliness. There was no disorder. There was no discord. God ruled directly then, in the case of Adam. Then came sin and the fall. And in the fall, the result was disrupted human relationships. Immediately there was a conflict between Adam and Eve, and Adam questioned God, in terms of the statement, "The woman that Thou gavest me."

And then we find the disruption of human relationships so obviously illustrated with the story of Cain and Abel. And that is only the beginning. We see the chaos of city life that begins in Genesis, and so it goes: "And in response to the chaos and disorder and the unruliness of men after the fall, God has instituted another kind of order in the world. And God now rules over people through a directed order that falls into three categories: the family, the church, and the state. And in all of these areas God has set in order that there be leaders and followers. That there be authority and submission. In the family, the parents are the leaders. In the church, the pastors and elders are the leaders. In the state, the government officials are the leaders." This is God's ordained pattern. And we have now a multiple

kind of authority. Disrupted human relationships are brought into some kind of harmony, at least, so that humanity can exist, in some kind of ease, and some kind of peace, if not, total peace.

Now within the framework of a God-directed order, we could single out any of those three areas, and the bible does that. We could talk about the order of the family and how God has instituted authority in the family through the father, first of all, over the wife, and then through the father and mother over the children. Or we could talk about the area of government, and we could go to Romans 13 and to 1 Peter, and find that the Christian is to be subject to the authority that is ordained of God governmentally. But for our time and for our study we draw our attention to the middle one. And that is to the church. God directs His rule in the church through pastors and elders. And that takes us directly into Acts chapter 20. And I only used that just as a lead-in to get you to the place where you'll understand the prospective of this chapter.

Now as we look at Acts chapter 20, from verse 17 through 38, the Apostle Paul is giving information to church leaders, namely pastors and elders. And we've said before, and only remind you now, that a pastor, or an elder, or a bishop, or a presbyter is all the same thing Scripturally. He is the individual given the responsibility of leading the church of Jesus Christ. He is, to the church, what the priest, and the prophet, and the patriarch, and the king, was to the Old Testament. To God's people then.

Now what is it that makes an effective leader? What is it that makes an effective leader anywhere, particularly in the church? Well the world has its standards. Don't they? And we're kind of getting into the political melee again, as we start hearing all the radio and television advertisements regarding, so and so is running, and for this primary and that primary. And we hear a lot, all the time, about national government. We're well aware of the fact that there are qualifications, supposedly, for leadership. But you know if you look at the world's evaluation of leadership, it isn't necessarily the way God evaluates it.

For example, Israel decided they wanted a king. And they found the perfect one. And you know why he was the perfect one? Because there was nobody handsomer in the whole land. And not only that, he was taller than everybody else. Tall, and dark, and handsome Saul was anointed king. What a disaster. You say, "Do people still choose leaders on that basis?" Frequently. Given a certain amount of mentality, a certain amount of glibness, and a certain ability to communicate, anybody can become a leader in our world because of the qualifications. It's sad to say the qualifications are not always innate, internal things. They are mostly external things. For example, the average leader that we know of, in terms of the things that we're familiar with, would fall into the psychological category of an SNL.

Have you ever heard of an SNL? That's psychological abbreviation stands for, strong, natural leader. And most people that get into categories of leadership and exert a rather dramatic influence are called SNL's - strong, natural leaders. They can be characterized by . . . and we can do a whole study

on this, but I'm just gonna give you the terms. They are characterized by being one visionary. They've always got great worlds to conquer, great visions of grandeur out there in the future. They are action-oriented. They're involved, they're aggressive, they are courageous. And, you know, this even happens in the church. Very many times in the church we assume that a man is a great leader, in terms of God's eyes, when all he is a psychological SNL, who happens to be a Christian, and especially in the area of courage. We look at a guy with a lot of courage and we call it faith very often. And what it really is it's just that he's got the guts to do anything. And we say, "What great faith." It may not have anything to do with faith. It may be faith, it may not be. SNL's are also energetic. They are normally objected-oriented, rather than people-oriented. They are egocentric, and they are always indispensable. In other words, the whole thing rises or falls on them. And in most cases in the world these are the people that get into leadership.

But you know something? There's no such category or cataloging of leaders in the Bible. The Bible does not lay down for the church that all of its leaders be SNL's. And, you know, I sadden sometimes when I realize that today a lot of people in the church are being sold a bill of goods, that those are the guys that are really doing the job. But it's the visionary, action-oriented, crusading, one-man show, dramatic-kind of guys that are dragging a whole bunch of people along, and they're all falling all over each other, not knowing what's going on or where they're going, but going like mad. And these are the people that are put out as the ones who are the great leaders, when, in fact, some of them may be and some of them may be God-blessed leaders, but the truth of the matter is, that all of the Biblical qualifications completely circumvent anything like that. And as we saw last time all of the Biblical qualifications for leaders in the church are spiritual and internal, rather than external and physical - all of them. The Biblical pattern does not hold up the external, but the internal.

Now with that in mind, just to draw you to one thing: most SNL's lead by precept and power. In other words, "This is what we're going to do and we're going to do it together." You know? And they just sort . . . they super motivate people verbally, and they sweep people along in the verbiage, and the dramatics, and the courage, and the energy, and the action of what they're doing. That's all right for some things, but in the Scripture there is one great way that Biblical leaders lead, and it's not by precept and verbiage, it's by example. And that's the difference, that's the difference. The leader that God ordains and the leader that God blesses is the one who, not only leads by precept, but who leads by example. And I think in a very real sense this is exactly what America is now going through in the case of the president. The question that is in the minds of people is this: "We know he has led us in his words, but does he qualify as a person to lead us by example?" And that's the struggle in the minds of people. And that is a justified struggle because a true leader is one who leads, not only by what he says, but by what he is. And this is Biblical. Biblical leadership is seen in the area of example, not nearly so much in the power of the precept.

In 1 Peter . . . and I want to call these verses to your attention, in order to support that statement. In 1 Peter 5:3 . . . we saw last week that the Bible says that an elder is to be an example to the flock . . .

an example to the flock. In Philippines 3:17 . . . some of you have stop halfway to Peter. In Philippines 3:17, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them who walk even as ye have us for an example." Paul says, "Take notice and follow the example that is given to you." Leadership is a question of example. And in the next chapter of Philippines 4:9, he says, "The things that you've learned, received, heard, seen, in me, do those." Again, example.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Paul reflects on the ministry he had in Thessalonica, and he says, "For our gospel came not unto you in word only. No, the gospel came not in word only. It is not a question of precept alone, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, in much assurance, as you know what manner of men we were among you." In other words, there was no credibility gap between what we said and what we were. You know that our message was supported by our life. And the next verse, "And you became follower of us." And the word is mimity . . .mimics. Paul was a great leader because he was an example.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:6, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly and not after the tradition which you received of us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us." He says, "Watch out who you pattern your life after. Turn aside from those who walk disorderly and follow us." And then he goes on to say in verse 9, "Not because we have not authority or right." And here he's talking about the fact that he could have taken money from them but he worked for his own wages. "We had the right, but we didn't take any money because we wanted to make ourselves an example, unto you, to follow us." In other words, "We could have asked of money to support our ministry, but we wanted to show you the example of servitude, so we earned our own living, and you should be willing to do the same." And so Paul said, "We lead by example."

In 1 Timothy 4:12, he told Timothy to be an example to the believers in everything. He told Titus, in chapter 2 verse 7, this, "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works." And the idea there is that you ought to be the kind of outline that somebody could put the tracing paper of their life on and copy you. A true leader is one who leads by example.

Now leadership . . . if I can give you a definition of Christian leadership, here it is: Christian leadership is this: it is leading people into Christ-like behavior by example. That's what it is. Yes, precept is part of it, but the real dynamic of leadership is leading people into Christ-like behavior by example. You know what a leader is? I can give you a very simple definition. You know what a leader is? Somebody who's got somebody following him. Yes, a leader is only a leader when somebody's following. And a true . . .watch this . . . spiritual leader, a true godly leader, is only one when somebody is following the pattern of his godliness. I can only say, in the truest sense, that I am a spiritual leader when somebody is following the spirituality that I represent.

Now such a responsibility of being a leader is not easy. Believe me, it isn't easy. It's not easy to be in a position of being a leader. It's like Snoopy said one day in the paper, he said, "I hate being head beagle." It's not always easy to be a leader, because built into leadership are certain problems. For one, it's a tremendous responsibility to be given by God the charge of people. Hebrews 13:17 says, "We have to give an account to God for what we do." And James 3:1 says that, "We have a greater condemnation if we fail." But on the other hand, it can be so blessedly rewarding that it well compensates for the possibility of failure. What is a leader to do? To lead by example, because leadership in true sense is to make people come to the place of Christ-like behavior by following my life.

I love what it says in Hebrews 13. I think it's verse 7. He's telling them about the elders, and he says, regarding the elders, "I want you to do this, he says, whose faith follow. If you're an elder in this church your life is to be exemplary to everybody that crosses your path. They ought to be able to line up beside you, and walk with you, right behind you, the way you walk, whose faith follow." Leadership is a question of example.

Now that brings us right to Acts 20, because Paul is talking to the leaders of the church at Ephesus, and it's so very important that they follow the pattern of Biblical leadership, and it's important that they know that example is part of it. So what he does here is, he gives them all of the precepts of leadership. From verse 17 to 38 he covers them. All of these areas of leadership and all the way through he keeps saying, "You know, like I did it? You know, as I did it to you? You know, how I did it, the way I did it." And over . . . and over . . . and over sets himself as the example, that they might know the precept, and they might learn the principle of example. Now as you look at the passage . . . we'll pick it up at verse 28. And we find in our section for this time there are five priorities to leadership, five priorities to church leadership. And he's speaking to the elders and the pastors of the church at Ephesus, a church which he had founded. These are men which he, himself has discipled. They have the responsibility of caring for the church.

Principle number one . . . priority number one in Spiritual leadership is, one, make sure you're right with God. We covered this last time. Make sure you're right with God. You need to be a vessel unto honor, holy, before you'll ever be fit for the Master's what? Use. You are the key. Personal holiness is foundational. And just from my own standpoint I can illustrate it this way. My most important task is to prepare myself not my sermon. Do you understand that? If you're a teacher your most important task is, not to prepare your lesson, it's to prepare yourself to be a channel through which God can effectively work. And more than that, if you're lesson is one thing and your life is something else, you have destroyed the meaning of your lesson. Therefore, it is more important for me to prepare myself than it is my sermon. My sermon's important, myself is more important. And so my primary responsibility is to make sure that my life before God is what it ought to be.

Verse 28, "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves," he says to these elders. Take heed onto yourselves. This is where it starts. As we saw in 1 Timothy and in Titus, the qualifications for an elder, last week, for a pastor, were all spiritual. They were all personally spiritual. No man is really useful to God who is not holy. And you are only as useful as you are set apart unto God. To illustrate this to you . . . from an Old Testament illustration that is very graphic. Second Samuel chapter 11, we go back to David.

Second Samuel 11:1, now listen to this. "It came to pass, after the year was ended, at the time when kings go forth, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel, and they destroyed the children of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem." And all of Israel's army and everybody goes out to fight a war and David stays home. You can make a lot about that, the fact that David was where he shouldn't have been. He should have been out there with the people that he expected to fight. But what happened was interesting in verse 2, "It came to pass at evening tide, that David arose from his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house." He went out and walked on his roof. And in those days and those parts of the world the roof was functional, and he did walk on it. "And from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look on. And David sent and enquired about the woman. And one said, 'Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?' And David sent messengers, and took her." Now that's pretty bold stuff. Right? I mean, it wasn't any kind of clandestine, sneaking meeting. He just sent a bunch of messengers and grabbed her. "And she came in unto him, and he lay with her." And verse 5 says, "The woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, 'I am with child.'" Now you can't imagine anything much more gross than that, much more immoral, much more violently, overtly sinful than that.

But if you think that's bad, the next thing he did was . . . he wanted this woman so badly that he made a situation that would result in the death of her husband. In verse 15, he wrote a letter to the soldiers and he said, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle and retreat, that he may be left there, and smitten, and die." And he was, he was killed. So he'd committed adultery and murder. And you know what happened when he did that? He rendered himself, in terms of any usefulness to God, zero. He was an unholy instrument . . . useless. But, you know, God spoke to his heart and he broke under the weight of his sin, and when he broke he wrote down his feelings in Psalms 51.

Psalm 51 is the broken heart of David over the sin of Bathsheba and Uriah. And I want you to hear what he says because I think this illustrates very poignantly our truth. Here's David crying out to God in the midst of the punishment of his own sin. "Have mercy upon me, O God . . . Psalm 51 . . . according to Thy loving kindness: according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only God, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight, and that Thou mightiest be justified when Thou speakest, and clear when thou judges." In other words, he said, "I deserve anything I get." "Behold, I was shaped in iniquity; and sin

did my mother conceive me. Thou desirest truth in the inward parts: in the hidden part Thou shalt make me know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." What he's saying is "God, restore me, bring me back. Create in me a clean heart, O God; renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence. Take not Thy Holy One from me - thy Holy Spirit."

Verse 12, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, uphold me with a willing spirit." Now watch. . . next verse. "Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee." David wouldn't have been worth anything in teaching or in converting anybody until he was clean. Do you see what he's saying? And it's no different now. The first priority in the ministry of any man is his own holiness.

Robert Murray McCheyne, whose memoirs I've been reading in the last couple of weeks, just as a kind of a devotional study, was a great leader by precept and example. And he wrote a letter to a fellow pastor that he had, had a great effect on. And he wrote the letter in September of 1840, and these were his words. Listen. "Everything I meet with and every day I study my Bible makes me pray more that God would begin and carry on a deep, pure, widespread and permanent work in Scotland. If it be not deep and pure, it will only end in confusion, and grieving the Holy Spirit of God. I am also deepened in my conviction, that if we are to be instruments in such a work, we must be purified from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. O cry for personal holiness, constant nearness to God by the blood of the Lamb. Be filled with His Spirit, or all success in the ministry will only be to your everlasting confusion. You know how I have always insisted on this with you? It is because I feel the need, thereof, myself. Take heed, dear friend, do not think any sin trivial. Remember it will have everlasting consequences. Be as holy as God is holy, pure as Christ is pure, perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. O how much more useful might we be if we were only free from pride, self-conceit, personal vanity, or some secret sin that our heart knows. O hateful sins that destroy our peace and ruin souls." He knew what I know, what Paul says, what you know, "A man is only as good as his holiness in the service of the Lord. Take heed to yourself."

Principal one in leadership: make sure you're right with God. Two . . . principle number two is also in verse 28, "Feed and lead the flock . . . feed and lead the flock." After you've taken care of yourself then to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to feed the church of God, which He's purchased with His own blood. The second priority is to lead and feed. "To lead . . . what is that? Overseers . . . we saw last time . . . to rule." Some of us perhaps are familiar with what is commonly known as congregational rule, where the congregation rules. That's foreign to Scripture.

In the Scripture the congregation does not rule, the congregation is subject to the authority of the elders. And one of the saddest things, I think, in the church is congregational rule. And I don't say that because I want to exercise authority over people, I say that because it's Biblical. Because when you

put all the people over the leaders you have violated God's pattern for authority in the church. It would be the same as letting the children run the parents, or the people run the government, from their level, and have no leadership. It's just not God's way. And so there is in the church the prerogative of the congregation to choose out from among them men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom and faith. But once those men are chosen of God, and ordained of God, and placed of God, it is theirs to rule, in God's place, as they stand as under shepherds for Christ. And so leadership is important: leading the flock, making wise decisions, leading them into the places and the things that are going to be beneficial to them, but also feeding them.

Verse 28, As you lead them along where are you leading them? You're leading them always to greener pastures, to more food, and feeding is important. And we feed with the Word. And we've studied this again, and again, and how important it is. So first of all a New Testament church leader must, one, take care of themselves, two, he must lead and feed the flock. He must give his life to the feeding of the ship, to the pasturing that God has called him to.

Now a third thing, and this is the flipside of number two, that I just gave you. The positive is feed and lead. Here's negative: watch and warn the flock. That's the third point. The faithful pastor, the faithful elder . . . and incidentally there are some pastors, like myself, who labor in the Word and doctrine. There are others who are in the area of ruling, who may not be always the ones preaching and teaching, but have the same responsibility. And their responsibility, as is my responsibility uniformly, is to watch and warn the flock. Now that's an important thing. This is the flipside of feeding. This is . . . feeding is the positive and watching and warning is the negative. This is protection. A good shepherd doesn't just blissfully lead his sheep out into some nice meadow and sack out. No, he watches the hillsides around, he checks the crevices and the caves and the nooks and the crannies, and he's watching for wolves, who may come in and strip his flock. Vigilance. Yes, feeding and leading is part of it, and that's the forward look, but the backward look is watching what's coming up from the rear. And, believe me, one of the greatest and one of the most . . . what should I say?. . . strenuous kind of struggles is to protect the flock.

Look at verse 29, and I'll show you why it's important. Paul says . . . and I like this, and it's pretty clear what he's shooting at . . . in verse 29, he says, "For I know this." Now I like that. This isn't a maybe, is it? He says, "I know this." You say, "Why do you know it?" "Because I know Satan, I know how he works. I know this, that after my departing shall grievous . . . and the word could be translated dangerous, could be translated strong . . . grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock." False teachers. Paul says, "I know one thing, false teachers are gonna arrive as soon as I'm gone." "How do you know that Paul?" "Cause I know Satan. Wherever the wWord is sown Satan's gonna sow lies. Wherever the Word is, what's gonna be there? The tares. Wherever the truth is proclaimed, Satan will come in with lies to undermine it. I know this." And I know it too. I know it because it's in the Scriptures. I know that false teachers are going to attack Grace Community Church. I know that.

In fact, a few months ago, a girl came to me and said, "Do you know that there are three people in your church, from a false religious system, who have decided to infiltrate your church, and one by one, try to influence people?" We know this. And when we find out about it we act on it. Because it's our responsibility, not just to feed and lead, but to watch and warn, to protect. And false teachers will come. And he describes them as "Grievous wolves." This is the language of Jesus.

In Matthew chapter 7 in verse 15 Jesus made reference to wolves. And you remember the statement. You will when I read it. "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves." And, again, in chapter 10, Jesus sending out people who are gonna preach for Him said this, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." And the twelve went off knowing they could expect to run into some wolves in sheep's clothing. Yes, there are going to be those who come with a sweet kind of holy, kind of religious, kind of aura, and are going to appear to be so good and so godly, and, Oh, they have the Bible. And all they are are wolves - Satan's wolves in sheep's clothing. I'm not sure all them even know that. So if any of them are here I'm announcing to you that that's what you are. Because I think there are some people who are so diluted that they actually believe that what they're propagating is the truth.

Now Paul says in Acts . . . said, "These Ephesian elders . . . he says, "Get ready they're coming." You wanna know something? They came. Paul wrote to Timothy twice. Paul wrote to Timothy both those times while Timothy was the pastor at Ephesus. Did you know he was the pastor at Ephesus? Yes, those two letters were written to him while he was at Ephesus. And in both of those letters Paul makes reference to false doctrine. It came, believe me it came.

In 1 Timothy . . . for example . . . the first time he wrote Timothy while Timothy was still at Ephesus. In 1 Timothy 4, he says, "The Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times . . . and the latter times had already begun, it began when Messiah came the first time . . . some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons." There will be seducers. Do you know what seducers are? They're people who lure away somebody that doesn't belong to them. They lure them away, speaking lies and hypocrisy, forbidding the marry . . . all kinds of false doctrine. He goes on to say, in verse 6, and this is the point I want to make . . . "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ." Do you know what a good minister of Jesus Christ does? He reminds people to watch out for false prophets, he reminds people to watch out for doctrines of demons, and he reminds people to watch out for seducing spirits.

Somebody came to me a few weeks ago and said, "Did you know that one of our teachers in our Acts program is being lured away by such, and such a movement?" It didn't surprise me one bit. It surprised me when they told me who the individual was, and I think it's something that's over and done with. But it didn't surprise me a bit that it was being done. I expect more of it than I'm seeing, and I just praise God for the purity of the Word, that we don't have more of it than we could have,

easily, were we not so conscientious. I thank God for elders who watch and who warn. Because they'll come, believe me, they'll come from the outside to try to tear away those that are God's. And the Bible condemns these people so strongly. You just read 2 Peter 2, it's unbelievable. You know what God calls them in 2 Peter 2? He calls false teachers, "Filths, spots, and scabs . . . filths, spots, and scabs. Wells without water," He says. "Clouds thrown around by a tempest." And they come in and they rip off people just escaping from the world. You know who they attack? They attack the people searching for God, looking for religious answers, just turning away from the world, and moving toward God, and they come in and tear them away. That's 2 Peter 2:18. Those are the ones they're after.

And, Paul, probably, when he writes this is mainly thinking about the Judaizers, the legalists. But, you know, it wasn't long until all the false teachers you could imagine plopped themselves into Ephesus. I mean, they got a little bit of everybody. And, you know, Ephesus was just one city in Asia Minor. There was also Smyrna, Pergamos, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and the rest of the cities that are mentioned in Revelation 2. And, you know, by the time Revelation was written, already some of those false systems had moved in and taken over those churches. He writes to the church at Ephesus in Revelation, does Christ. And He says, "You know something," He says, "I like one thing about you, anyway, that you hate the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." We don't know what the doctrine of Nicolaitan's is . . . I mean, specifically we don't know. We can guess that it's some kind of gross immorality. But it already had begun to move against Ephesus. And the next statement he makes to Smyrna, He says, "You have been subjected to the synagogue of Satan." And then He says to Pergamos, "You have been subjected to the doctrine of Balaam." And then to the next church He says, "And you have been subjected to the Jezebel who brought in fornication." False doctrine blitzed the little churches of Asia Manor, just a few years after Paul finished his work. Expected. We expect it.

The second approach of false doctrine is in verse 30, not only from the outside, but from the inside. And this, if anything, is more subtle, isn't it? "Also," Paul says, "Of your own selves shall men arise, right out of your own congregation, speaking twisted things, perverse." Geastrefo - to twist. Speaking twisted things, to drag literally . . . to drag disciples after them. Boy, false teachers always want to get a following, always after a following. Ever notice how false teachers always publish their followings? "We now have two million all over the world followings." Sure, that's their whole point. They had that little guru character on . . . little guy whose trying to grow a mustache. He married some girl and they always have to say, "Guru . . . whoever he is . . . with so many followers." Or it's, "Sun Moon . . . Moon with so many followers." Or it's "Such and such with so many followers." Dragging away people.

And so, the Apostle Paul says, "Not only from the outside, but watch from the inside. They'll come up to draw away disciples. Yes, false teachers on the inside. I guess this is probably the thing that would even be the most heartbreaking to God, inside. You say, "Did that happen at Ephesus?" Yep, it

happened at Ephesus. Do you know that that church started out under Paul, and the eldership of that church were all discipled personally by Paul, and the leading elder in that church, for years, was Timothy, and still it happened? You say, "How do you know it happened?" Because Paul even names them, I mean, he just singles them out by name.

1 Timothy, for example, he doesn't even get three verses into 1 Timothy before he's already nailed them. The first letter he wrote only a hand full of years after Paul left there. He says to Timothy, "As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus . . . 1 Timothy 1:3 . . . when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightiest charge some that they teach no other doctrine." Do you know that some people had already crept into that church in a handful of years and started teaching false doctrine? People who had risen right out of the congregation. And he says to Timothy, "Don't you listen to their false and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edification." Don't listen to them. And they were apparently teaching legalism. And listen to . . . he even named some of them. In the first chapter verse 19, he says, "Some have made shipwreck of the faith." Now listen, "Of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme." Hymenaeus and Alexander. He says, "I gave them to Satan, to teach them not to blaspheme."

In 2 Timothy when he wrote - same thing. Verse 15, 2 Timothy 1, "This thou knowest, who are in Asia turned away from me . . . a staggering statement. I mean, they're turning away from Paul and what he's taught them . . . of whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes." And he names two more of them. In chapter 2 verse 17, he's not done. He says, "And their word will eat as doth a gangrene; of whom are Hymenaeus and Philetus." They've got plenty of them. And then the rest of the unnamed ones are included in 2 Timothy 3: 1 to 9. And he says in verse 5, "They have form of godliness, and they deny the power of it. Of this sort are they who creep into houses, and lead captive silly women lade with sins, lead away with various lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. They're like Jannes and Jambres, who withstood Moses. Men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith." Yes, it was inevitable, inside/outside, false teachers. Believe me they'll come. They'll come from the outside and they'll rise from the inside, and they'll speak twisted things. They'll speak perverse things to draw away the people just escaping from the err of the world.

Jude said this, "Beloved, when I give all diligence to write onto you, the common salvation, it was needful for me to write onto you and exhort you, that you should earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints." Do you know we have to fight . . . do you know you gotta fight to hold onto the faith? No easy going thing. The ministry isn't some kind of a lark. You fight to hold onto it. Why? "For there are certain men who crept in unaware, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation. Ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ." And you know he says in the same little book that they showed up at the love feast. They are spots on your love feasts. They got right into the life of the church.

You know, you think about that in the past, but think about it in the present. I say this, and I say it without fear of contradiction. Most churches . . . most churches in America are dominated by false teachers . . . most. Sad, that's sad, it's true. Paul says, in response to that, look at verse 31. And I use the word church in a very blanket general sense in that frame of reference. Acts chapter 20 verse 31, here's Paul's statement. "Therefore . . . if you know it's coming from the outside and you know it's coming from the inside . . . therefore . . . what's the next word? . . . watch. That's the first one. . . and remember that for a space of three years I ceased not to . . . what? . . . warn. That's the second one. Watch and warn. Those are the two priorities in point number three of our outline. And vigilance is important people.

You know, one of the things that you have to do, as an elder or a pastor, and you do it, not because it's some kind of an obligation or duty, but because you care for the flock, is you got to watch for false teachers and you've got to watch for the tares being sown among the wheat. You know, in Matthew 13, Jesus said that the tares would be sown. Right? And he said, "Don't you try to go around and find all the tares because that's too difficult. They'll grow together until the harvest." You know, that's a scary thing to me because that means if the tares get in you can't get rid of them. And there's only one way to keep the tares from getting in, and that's to watch. And the watch is part and parcel of responsibility spiritually. And it's up to us we know who's here as a part of Grace Church, who's teaching, who has responsibility, who sits in a place of leadership. We owe that to the Lord Jesus Christ, for the sake of the purity of His chaste virgin, that he wants presented to him as chaste as he desires to be.

Some people sometimes say, "But, John, you know I applied for membership in the church and it took so long. I wonder what's going on." One of the reasons that it may take a long time is because we're careful, and because we want to know, beyond a shadow of any human doubt, that the person we're dealing with truly knows and loves the Lord Jesus Christ. "Lest, we, because of our lack of vigilance allow tares among the wheat." So be patient.

Paul told Timothy, in simple words, this: "Watch thou in all things." Feed ‘em but look around, and expect it, it's coming, false teachers. God said to Ezekiel, "Ezekiel, you're My man and I have sent you as a watchman upon the wall. Look for the enemy, he's coming." Second thing is to warn. And the word there is nouthesis. It means to admonish. Admonishing is giving counsel with a warning involved. Giving counsel that includes warning. There's a kind of firm gentleness, where we not only are looking around, but we're warning. And I do that to you this morning. I warn you. Be aware and be alert and expect that false teachers will arise and they will infiltrate, expect it. And my dear beloved people, be in a position to earnestly contend for the faith. And the only way is to be sure that you know the faith that you claim to believe. So I warn you. Paul warned them.

Look at this, "For the space of three years, I cease not to warn you." You say, "It's a broken record." No, it's a priority. "I cease not to warn everyone personally, everyone, night and day with tears." You

know why he wept? Because he knew the terrible, terrible consequences of false teachers infiltrating. He didn't sleep much. First Thessalonians 2:9, he said, "I labored night and day." Second Thessalonians 3:8, he said, "I work night and day." Here, he says, "I warn night and day." I don't know when he ever slept. I mean . . . you know, when he laid his head on the block and his head got chopped off, that may have been the first time he put his head down in a long time. He personalized his ministry. He warned everyone, as the shepherd watches his flock by night. So the pastor is to be vigilant. So the elder is to protect them from the wolves of false doctrine. And Paul is saying, "Do it," and then he's saying, "Do it like I did it." Example, again, is leadership.

All right, then in addition to your own spiritual life, to leading and feeding, there is watching and warning, then fourthly. A fourth priority is to study and pray. To study and pray, or to pray and study. This duo priority isn't new. It's as old as Acts 6. At least in the book of Acts, where the Apostle said, "We'll give ourselves . . . remember?. . . verse 4 . . . continually to the prayer and the ministry of the Word." This is the heart of the leader’s life. What do I spend my time doing? Praying and teaching, praying and studying. Verse 32 . . . I like this . . . "And now brethren I commend you to God." Stop there. You know what that is? That's what prayer is. People, I've told you everything I can tell you. I've given you all the truth that's in my heart to give you. I've given you all the information that's in my head to explain. I've done everything I could do to you. You know what I have left to do? Commit you to whom? To God. And I'll tell you something, I'm glad I can do that, and I've done it, and I do it all the time. I say, "God, I gave ‘em what I knew. I told ‘em what I gained out of the Word. I gave them the best that I could offer. And now God I can't take ‘em any further. All I can do is give ‘em to You." That's really part of the ministry.

When you get to the place where you're satisfied with what you're accomplishing, you're dead. This is His flock. This is His church. And I committed to Him, because if it's His, it's His ultimately to safeguard and care for. And so, Paul says, "I commit you to God." And everything the church ever does should be bathe in that kind of committal. That I believe becomes a priority for every kind of ministry. We must pray about everything. Everything we do must be committed to God. You know, you can take the book of Acts and just start going through. You find that when they met together to choose somebody to take Judas' place they were praying, Acts 1:24. By the time you come to chapter 2 they're praying again. In chapter 2 verse 42 says, "When they came together, they came for the apostles' doctrine, and the breaking of bread communion, and prayer."

You go on further and the gospel begins to expand, and they're praying. They anoint deacons in chapter 6, and they pray, and they anoint them. Later on, they pray when they send out Paul and Barnabas. When they get to a new area, they pray and commit it to God, and they go in and minister. Prayer bathed everything they ever did. Why? Because they gave everything to God. But nowadays the church has got methods for that and we don't need prayer. Prayer sometimes becomes tokenism, doesn't it? "Lord, we're gonna do this, pray You'll bless it." That's the first time we even acknowledge He exists. We get this whole thing invented and all mapped out and laid out our fantastic thing. "Now

God bless this." Which is sort of a parachute in case the plan doesn't work; it'll at least have a soft landing. But that isn't how it is in terms of the New Testament.

Do you know there's no substitute for prayer? That sounds a little bit archaic and hackney, but it's true, there's no substitute for prayer. Not prosperity, no. Not good ideas, not good programs, not growth, not success, not confidence, not talent. No, none of those things are substitutes for prayer. It's sad to say, it's so easy for the church to get so organized. Got a wonderful program, good committees, straight methods. Have a lot of carnal success and take the credit for it. But, you know, if you just commit everything to God, just say, "God it's Yours, now You do what You want." Then when it's done who you gonna thank? God. But if you did it all and it went well, who are you gonna thank? Modestly . . . hum. And you're robbing of glory, and He doesn't like that. "I will give My glory to nobody," He says. Isaiah 48. Prayer.

Everything the church ever does, everything you ever do in your ministry should be committed to God - not as an afterthought, not as sort of a sanctified salt on your human ideas, but before it's ever brought to fruition it should be committed to Him. My philosophy on the thing . . . it may be even strange to some . . . but my philosophy is, if you think you have an idea that might work, just start praying about it, and see if God makes it happen. I'm not interested in inventing any kind of programs at all. I'm just interested in saying, "God, I had an idea the other day. I don't know if it's from You or not, but here it is. I'm just gonna offer it to You in prayer, and if You want to make it happen, go ahead, make it happen. We're ready for it." I just . . . I supposed when I was younger and I tried to make programs and then stuff the Holy Spirit into the box that I had invented, that I found out it didn't work well. So I'd rather let the Holy Spirit be independent, and pick me up, and take me along when He's moving - much more exciting.

Second thing: prayer and study the Word. He says, "I commend you to God and to the Word of His Grace." So what happened? He said to these elders, "Guys, I just give you to God, and to the Word." And that's Acts 6:4, again. Our whole commitment is to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. And the Word is able to build us up. "Spiritual growth . . . 1 Peter 2:2 . . . that you may grow thereby, the pure milk of the Word." The Word causes us to grow. "And to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified." The Word is that which secures the promise of our inheritance. You know, when people say to me, "I'm too sure. Oh, I'm so insecure. I have so many doubts." I say, "Do you study the Bible, because if you studied the Bible faithfully, the Bible continues to guarantee your inheritance." "And among all those that are sanctified . . . that means set apart, holy unto God. There is an inheritance." But if you don't have the assurance of that it'll come when you study the Word. So he says, "The Word feeds you and makes you grow, and gives you assurance." So prayer and the Word . . . prayer and the Word - priorities. As you study the Word you build up and you're assured that the promised inheritance is really yours, set apart for all those who are holy through Christ.

Well lastly, very briefly. The last priority for the elder is this: for the pastor, freedom from self-interest . . . freedom from self-interest. And this touches close to my heart because I've seen so much of this that grieves me. And Paul uses himself as an example. Verse 33, "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me." He says, "I not only work for my own needs, but I work to supply the needs of others. "I have shown you all things, how that so labouring you ought to support the weak, and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, 'It's more blessed to give than receive.'" Now what's Paul saying here. He's saying, "One thing you have to remember in all your ministry, you're gonna have to look at it as a giving, not a receiving, right?" "And I never coveted any silver, and I never coveted any gold, and I never coveted any clothes." Freedom from self-interest people.

Simply put, it says this: "God does not bless the ministry of a man who is concerned about money. I have never yet seen a man in a ministry who got preoccupied with money, who didn't have Ichabod written on his ministry. You can't serve God and mamen - money, can't be done. Freedom from self-interest. This was Paul's heart. He came into town. He says, "I have the right to ask of you, but I don't. I'll work to earn my own keep, just to show you the pattern of example, that that's how it's to be, and if God wants to bless you by giving you something, fine, fine." Paul even said that an elder who was faithful was worthy of double honor, in 1 Timothy 5. And most commentators would say that means financially. And Paul made the statement that, "I have the right to receive from you. That's fine, it's wonderful. I have that right, but I've chosen to show you an example of earning my own, and not being a burden, and not asking for anything." I don't believe a man of God in the ministry should ever ask for anything.

And I've talked to people who've said, "Well, you know, when I went to such and such church, I told them what I ought to get. And we worked it out, and I got what I asked for." It just makes me sick. I'm afraid I'd get what I deserve. I just rather say nothing and let grace be grace. Whatever God gives me I'm just thankful. I don't believe it's right for man in the ministry to ask for anything. In fact, I'm so strong in this; I don't believe it's right to ever set a price on anything you do as a minister of God - ever. People call me all the time, on the telephone, you know, to speak. They say, "John, we'd like to have you come to such and such conference. What's your fee?" Oh, that just irritates me when they do that. And I always say, "What do you mean, what's my fee?" "Well, how much do you charge?" I say, "I don't charge anything. If God's in it I'll be there." I think when you put a price tag on your ministry you price yourself right out of blessing.

I know how that works. I traveled for 2 ½ years in meetings, and when you go into town, you're just carnal enough, and just crass enough, and just human enough to say, "Oh, wonderful me. This is gonna be terrific," and "Wow, do they give big love offerings." Uh,_____ see. I don't like that. I don't like to know anything about any kind of money, period, paragraph, at all, while I'm ministering. That just messes up my mind. I want the liberty to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and whatever happens, happens. And if they give me something, fine. If they give me nothing, that's just as fine, ‘cause I don't

care anyway. God help those people who have to set a price on their ministry.

Paul would go and do anything, for anybody, anytime, for nothing. And if God sent an offering along, fine. Remember the Philippines chapter 4? He says, "Hey, I'm so glad you sent your offering. It's so wonderful, not because I need it, because you needed the lesson in giving." I like that. He says, "Look," he says, "I know how to make and I'm content. I know how to be abast and I know how to abound. In everything, and always I'm content." And then he says, "Incidentally, I know you gave sacrificially, but keep this in your mind," 'My God shall supply all your needs, according to His riches, in Christ Jesus.' "Don't you worry about it, God will give you back multiplied what you gave." Listen, whenever a man in the ministry . . . whenever a man in spiritual responsibility gets concerned about how much money he's getting, he prices himself right out a blessing.

He says, in verse 34, he says, "Yea see these hands . . . you know, he was Jewish, talked with his hands. I can just see him there. He's dictating to the scribe and he says . . . verse 34 . . . Yea, yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and not only mine, but to the necessities of them that were with me. I've shown you these things, he said, and I worked among you . . . in verse 35 . . . to support the weak. I did it as an example, and I want you to remember the Words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, 'It's more blessed to give than receive.'" Well, that's probably one of the most interesting little quotes in all the Bible. It's what we call agrafa. What that means is that's a quote of Jesus that never made it into the gospels. That's a quote that Jesus gave that nobody ever wrote down and Paul quotes it. You look for that in the gospels you won't find it, but Jesus said it. You say, "Did Jesus say things that aren't written in the gospel?" Oh, did He . . . why, you read the end of the Gospel of John, He said so many things, I suppose, John says, "The books all in the world couldn't contain everything He said." And this is just one of those things that He said, "It's more blessed to give than receive." He says to those men, "Remember in your ministry, the most important thing is giving . . .giving . . . giving . . . giving, not receiving." God help us from getting crass.

Just to give you an illustration of this, the world, I think, expects . . . I don't like the fact that the world, I think, sees the image of a minister as somebody who always needs a handout. One thing that bugs me is when ministers ask for a clergy discount. Oh, I hate that. What do you want a cler . . . who are you? You mean you're some poor soul that deserves to take some money out of somebody else's pocket because you're a minister. Don't you do that to the gospel. What do you think a guy thinks when you come and say, "I happen to be a minister. Does that mean any discount?" What does that do to Christianity? Don't do that. If you need a discount, come see me, I'll give you the rest. I'll make it up to you. Don't ask for it.

I went to get a car, not too long ago, because we needed a bigger one, had another baby so . . . so I went to this place, and it was so funny because I walked in there and I looked at the car. I said, "That's a nice station wagon there." He said, "Oh, I'll give you a terrific deal." When he told me this thing it was a lousy deal ‘cause I'd read Consumers Guide, I knew everything I needed to know. And

so I was ready. He said, "It's a terrific deal," and I said, "No, that's not a terrific deal. That's terrible." I said, "In fact, you're not being honest with me. You're trying to take me." Boy, you know . . . so he went back to see the next guy up the ladder and finally came back and we continued to talk. And I knew what the car was worth, I knew the whole thing, ‘cause I'd done some homework on it, and I want to be a steward of the Lord's money, so I said, "This is what would be right, and this is what would be fair, and this is what I'd like. Now if you can't do this, it's fine." So he went back, and finally came back, and he said, "Oh," he says, "You're really getting into us." He said, "There's nothing in this for us. You know, this is . . . oh . . . you know." And went on and on.

So finally I said, "Well, good." I said, "You know, I'm a Christian," and I said, "The most important thing to me is that the Lord be honored." And I said, "You probably need the money more than I do, and the last thing I ever want to do is take a penny from you, from your commission, from this company. I want to do what's right. And I believe this is right and fair, in most cases, and if it's not right for you then don't do the deal. I'll just go somewhere else." And he said, "No, no, no, don't do that. Don't do that. We can work it out. We can work it out." And he went in the back room and I had somebody along with me, who overheard the conversation in the backroom and they were saying, "We can't believe this. Can you believe this guy?" You know, it was really interesting because my concern as a Christian was that they get what was right for them within the bounds of what was right. And they hadn't dealt with that before. I got the car, incidentally, at what I felt was the right one.

Yes, I really feel that in the ministry one of the great ways that our godliness is manifest is in our love of Jesus Christ and the ministry, with absolutely no thought for money. And I'll tell you God takes care when all things are right before Him and you're the kind of man you ought to be. God will supply over and above, won't He?

What are the priorities of the ministry: self-examination, feed and lead the flock, watch and warn, pray and study, and no self-interest. You minister like that and you know what your reward will be, look at the verses that follow, and we'll read them in closing, 36. "And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all." Here's a group of elders and they're all kneeling praying. Says something for the posture of kneeling when you pray, humble, bowed before God. "And they all wept much, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him." Do you think they liked him? Think he meant something to them? Sure he did. You know why they loved him? They loved him because there was a consistency between what he said and what he was. They fell all over his neck, and tears ran down their faces, and trickled down his neck, and they continually kissed him. They kept on kissing him and embracing him. "And they were sorrowing . . .it says, in 38 . . . most of all for the word which he spoke, that they should see his face no more." When he told them he wouldn't see them any more they just sobbed. And then it says, "They accompanied him to see him to the ship."

I'm just human enough to want to be loved. I'm just human enough, I guess, to want to be loved like that. And I know that if I . . . the power of the Holy Spirit can come anywhere close to ministering the

way the Spirit wants me to, that God will reward me with the love of the saints. And that's important. And I want people who love me, not for me, but, like it says in verse 38, "They loved him, most of all for the words which he spoke." A faithful minister has that marvelous reward.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for our time. We rejoice in the truth that we've learned, and our hearts are somewhat saddened, at least mine, as I think about the fact that by the time the letter of the Lord Jesus to Ephesus was written, in Revelation, You had to say that they had left their first love. And that if something happened You'd remove them as a church. And, Father, we know historically that You did that and there is no church at Ephesus. We can't understand it. We can't understand how under the leadership of Paul and Timothy so fast could happen, but we know Satan works.

Father, help us to teach, to lead, to feed, to watch, to warn, to pray, to study, protect the flock, that this may be a pure people till the day that Jesus comes. In whose name we pray, Amen.

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