

Author: Patrick J. Griffiths ©  
 Date: July 20, 2008  
 Title: What I have learned about the Shepherd and the Sheep  
 Text: Acts 20:17-38

### **A Look Ahead:**

**July 20**      **What I have learned about the Shepherd and the Sheep**  
 July 27      What I have learned about the Word and Ministry  
 August 3      What I have learned about Christ and His Church  
 August 10     What I have learned about Grace, "Counseling," and Disappointment

**Theme:**      God has placed shepherds over His flock to protect them from savage wolves by faithfully ministering the Word. As shepherds, we must accept the weight of Paul's words and as sheep we must follow the direction of the shepherds.

### **On a Personal Note:**

Last week as I shared with you certain thoughts, I simply surrendered myself to what the Spirit would have me to say and the dynamics of it on a Sunday morning. I found it interesting that God brought certain visitors to our fellowship. I trust what they saw was a fellowship that holds Jesus Christ as the centerpiece of all we do. None of this is about you or me, but always about Him. We are a family of families where we encourage honesty, transparency, and vulnerability. We pray to this end.

I have always understood intellectually the role of shepherd and that of a sheep. I was a sheep for 25 years. I have only been a shepherd for 6 years. As a shepherd my understanding of this dynamic has increased. And in the past year God has grown in me affection for both the shepherd and the sheep. I would like to share with you what God has been teaching me. And I would like us to look at Acts 20:17-38. It is, for me, very personal.

### **Introduction:**

"This speech is quite distinctive among all the speeches reported in Acts. It is the only Pauline speech delivered to Christians which Luke has recorded, and we should not be surprised to discover how rich it is in parallels to the Pauline Epistles." (F.F. Bruce, *The Book of The Acts*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 412).

When Paul arrived in Miletus, he sent a person to Ephesus and summoned for the elders of the church. It is believed that since Miletus is separated from Ephesus about 60 kilometers that by the time they got back to Paul three days had passed. When the elders assembled together, Paul gave a speech to them. The content of this speech is recorded in the place I read today.

### **THE BIG PICTURE**

Paul is on his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23-21:16).

The structure of the text is quite simple. There are four main sections. The first paragraph (verses 1-6) takes us from Ephesus to Troas, the scene of Paul's ministry to the church there, and the raising of Eutychus, which is described in the second paragraph (verses 7-12). The

third paragraph (verses 13-17) takes us from Troas down to Miletus, where Paul calls the Ephesian elders and gives them his parting words of exhortation and admonition, described in the last (and major) section (verses 18-38). The structure of this chapter can thus be summarized this way:

- From Ephesus to Troas vv. 1-6
- Paul's ministry in Troas vv. 7-12
- From Troas to Miletus vv. 13-17
- Paul's ministry to the Ephesian elders vv. 18-38

### **Historical Context:**

Paul's first and hurried visit for the space of three months to Ephesus is recorded in Acts 18:19-21. The work he began on this occasion was carried forward by Apollos (24-26) and Aquila and Priscilla. On his second visit early in the following year, he remained at Ephesus "three years," for he found it was the key to the western provinces of Asia Minor. Here "a great door and effectual" was opened to him (1 Cor 16:9), and the church was established and strengthened by his assiduous labors there (Acts 20:20, 31). From Ephesus the gospel spread abroad "almost throughout all Asia" (19:26). The word "mightily grew and prevailed" despite all the opposition and persecution he encountered.

On his last journey to Jerusalem, the apostle landed at Miletus and, summoning together the elders of the church from Ephesus, delivered to them a farewell charge (Acts 20:18-35), expecting to see them no more.

Paul probably wrote from Rome during his first imprisonment (3:1; 4:1; 6:20), and probably soon after his arrival there in the year 62, four years after he had parted with the Ephesian elders at Miletus.

### **Time Line:**

- Paul's first and hurried visit for the space of three months to Ephesus is recorded in Acts 18:19-21.
- On his last journey to Jerusalem, the apostle landed at Miletus and, summoning together the elders of the church from Ephesus, delivered to them a farewell charge (Acts 20:18-35), expecting to see them no more.
- Paul probably wrote [the book of Ephesians] from Rome during his first imprisonment (3:1; 4:1; 6:20), and probably soon after his arrival there in the year 62, four years after he had parted with the Ephesian elders at Miletus.
- First Timothy follows Ephesians about 1-2 years later and 2 Timothy follows 1 Timothy about 1-2 years later. The apostle John wrote the book of Revelation around 90AD.

### **Its Eternal Value:**

All sheep need shepherds.

<sup>35</sup> "Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of

sickness. <sup>36</sup> Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:35, 36).

We neglect this truth to the detriment of soul health.

### **The Present Danger:**

<sup>7</sup> “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. . . <sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:7, 17).

As shepherds, we can look at our position as something that has popularity and prestige, but fail to see its weight and necessity. As sheep, we can disregard the role of the shepherd in our own lives and place ourselves in peril.

The issue in this relationship between the shepherd and the sheep is of utmost importance. At stake are the souls of the sheep.

### **The Problem:**

Because our culture has become consumed with careers, retirement, convenience, and creaturely comforts, shepherds have a tendency to lose sight of what they are doing. I would not encourage flocks to keep their shepherds poor, but I would call all shepherds to guard themselves against the deceitfulness of riches. In addition, as a culture we are so independent and autonomous to the point that the rights of the individual are celebrated and exasperated. In the light of such thinking, sheep often seek to separate themselves from the direction of shepherds. This is a problem. I believe Paul addresses our present needs in his address to the Ephesian elders.

From day one, I have believed that God’s will for us is known by the collective voice of the sitting elders. I still believe this to be true. God says He will lead us by His Word, and a means of doing so is through His shepherds. It is tragic that the idea of submission has taken on so much negative coloring. Yet the idea of submission is fundamental to internal and external peace. Are you willing to submit yourself to the leadership of the local church? I am not talking about any or all shepherds, but those with whom you have aligned yourself. Any leader that “plays God” should be resisted, but shepherds are appointed by God in order to guide and guard the sheep. Somewhere in your thinking you and I must come to grips with this.

### **The solution:**

It is only as we submit to our shepherds that we are truly submitting to the chief shepherd. It is wrong to think you are submitting and loving Jesus when you are refusing to following the shepherds of the local church. Although I see a significant role of under-shepherds, the under-shepherd will never do or be for you what only the chief shepherd can do and be.

**The Storyline:**

Those whom God secures by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone congregate into intentional assemblies. These assemblies are communities of faith under the direction of shepherds. These shepherds are appointed by God to guide the sheep in the Word of God and to guard the sheep from wolves. God has always had shepherds who are under Him and who are responsible for the sheep to Him.

**Questions:**

1. Is there such a thing in the New Testament as shepherd-less sheep?
2. Is it biblical to be a shepherd and not love the sheep?
3. Can shepherding be done from a distance?
4. Should sheep align themselves with a local fellowship, and should they place themselves under the direction of its shepherds?
5. Is the attack against the sheep certain?
6. What can a church do in order to guard the shepherd from abandoning the sheep?
7. How are sheep to view the shepherd and respond to his leading?
8. How does a shepherd go about guiding and guarding the sheep?

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas:

**To Know:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to know that God has structured His body with shepherds and with sheep.

**To Choose:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose to guide and guard the sheep and to follow those whom God has put in place to guide and guard.

**To Feel:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of living in the truth of God's Word.

**Outline:**

Before we begin to note this passage, I would like to make two initial observations.

First, Paul looks back over the years which he has spent with these men, drawing upon his conduct and teaching and the work of God in their midst. And then Paul looks forward, to his own fate and the dangers which lie ahead, which seem to spell his death, or at least imprisonment, and thus his "farewell" to these leaders. Paul also looks forward to the dangers which lie ahead for this church and to these men in particular. He therefore warns them of these dangers and spells out God's resources for them.

Second, these words of Paul are those of a man who has a deep affection for these elders, and they are received by these men with the same love and affection for Paul.

These are words that are tearfully delivered and which are tearfully received. Paul can talk to these men as he does because they know him well, just as he knows them intimately. He speaks to them frankly, out of love, as they listen with hearts of love for him, through whose ministry (no doubt) they have come to faith. The message and the man are very much intertwined. Paul's conduct and his content are inseparable, and thus he moves from his practice to his preaching, back and forth. He also wishes for his teaching to work it out in very practical terms, and so he moves from his teaching to the lifestyle which it requires.

I. Paul reminds them of the past (vv. 18 - 21)

It would be safe to assume that Paul's statements are in response to personal attacks by those whom he identifies as savage wolves.

Paul's life had a transparency to it, so that they could know him well. Over this extended period of time they could see Paul's consistency in lifestyle. He was not putting on a show for them. They knew what he was like.

Serving (v. 19), profiting (v. 20), and testifying (v. 21) are all present participles. Each defines Paul's past. Paul was always serving God by serving others.

- A. He speaks of his tears (v. 19a)
- B. He speaks of his trials (v. 19b)
  - 1. "The plots of the Jews" (v.19)
  - 2. "Bonds and afflictions await me" (v. 23)

The warnings of his future bonds and afflictions were but further clarification of what he had been informed at the time of his conversion:

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:15-16).

Paul's goal was to "finish his course," to accomplish that which God had given him to do.

- C. He speaks of his teaching (vv. 20-21)

"He had told them all God's will and pandered neither to the fear nor the favor of men." (William Barclay, *Mark*, 152).

"Interestingly Paul used several words in referring to his role in communicating the gospel: (a) 'preach' (Acts 20:20) and proclaim (v. 27), both from **anangelo** ('proclaim, announce'); (b) 'taught' (from **didasko**, 'teach,' v. 20); (c) 'declared' (v. 21) and 'testifying' (v. 24), both from **diamartyromai** ('solemnly bear witness to'); (d) declare (**martyromai**, 'testify,' v. 26). (Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *BKC*, eds. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck [Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983], 414).

- 1. His teaching was profitable ("profitable")
- 2. His teaching was public ("publicly and from house to house")

“Paul’s ministry from house to house (cf. 2:46) is contrasted with his public ministry and probably refers to house churches. If so, each elder was possibly the overseer of a house church.” (Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *BKC*, eds. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck [Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983], 413).

### 3. His teaching was personal (“repentance and faith”)

He called his audience to repentance and faith. Some only see one in the absence of the other. I believe the New Testament teaches both. Repentance and faith are simply two sides of one coin.

“In the Greek the words repentance and faith are joined together by one article. This may imply that these two words stress two aspects of trust in Christ (cf. 2:38).” (Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *BKC*, eds. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck [Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983], 413).

### 4. His teaching was pointed (“preaching the kingdom”)

“Preaching” is a present participle. The present participle stresses the continual action stated. Paul was always communicating kingdom truth.

## II. Paul alerts them of the future (vv. 22-24)

Verses twenty-two and twenty-five both begin with “and now, behold.” Paul is drawing our attention to what he is about to say.

### A. He speaks of his submission (v. 22a “bound in Spirit, the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me”)

There is a discussion as to whether or not the Spirit in verse 22 is his own spirit or that of the Holy Spirit. Either way the compelling desire he had within his own spirit was Holy Spirit produced and driven.

### B. He speaks of his suffering (vv. 22b-23 “bonds and afflictions await me”)

### C. He speaks of his sacrifice (v. 24 “I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself”)

Paul begins verse 24 with a strong contrasting connector. Even though I know that my future is filled with heartache, misery, and pain, I am willing to sacrifice all of my creaturely comforts and even my life in order “finish my course with joy and the ministry I have received from the Lord Jesus.” There is a textual variant with the words “with joy.” The Greek manuscript behind the King James Translation has “with joy” whereas the Greek manuscript behind the New American Standard and the New International Version excludes the statement. Either way I believe it is safe to imply the idea in the statement.

“The apostle signifies by his words that the race will last as long as life endures, and that he must not faint in the middle, whatever suffering may be in store.” (J. Rawson Lumby, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Cambridge: At the University Press, 1937], 360).

### III. Paul warns them of the present (vv. 25-30)

#### A. Do not abandon the centrality of the Word (vv. 20, 27)

The Bible must be taught in its fullness. This fullness is seeing the parts in light of the whole. It is addressing the various “chapters” as they relate to the theme of the “Book.” No passage is faithfully understood if it is not seen as a part of the storyline of Scripture.

In verse twenty-six he calls his audience to testify either for him or against him as to the truth of his statement (“Wherefore”).

The “for” of verse 27 explains why his conscience was unhindered. Paul faithful preached the whole Bible. In so doing he faithful discharged his duty as a shepherd.

He had declared “the whole purpose of God.” The word purpose is the word for “will.” I always struggle when people are trying to find the will of God as if it is complicated or mysterious. The will of God is neither complicated nor mysterious. It is simplistic and clear. God desires for you to live by faith. Living by faith is resting in the control and compassion of God. Living by faith affirms His control and affirms His unconditional love for you no matter what your circumstances might be saying to the contrary.

#### B. Do not abandon the necessity of the shepherd (vv. 28-30)

Verse twenty-eight is a conclusion drawn from what he has just shared (“Therefore”). Our New American Standard translates the word “feed” with “shepherd.” Since we have a misunderstanding of the word “shepherd” I believe it is better to use the word “feed.”

“The verb ‘feed’ in this verse represents **poimainein**, literally ‘tend as a shepherd’, from **poiman**, ‘a shepherd’ (cf. Eph. 4:11; 1 Peter 5:4).” (F.F. Bruce, *The Book of The Acts*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 415, 416).

The elders of verse 17 are the overseers in verse 28.

“The term ‘elders’ has primarily Jewish antecedents and stresses the dignity of the office, whereas ‘overseers’ is mainly Greek in its derivation and emphasizes the responsibility of the office, namely, ‘to look after’ others.” (Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *BKC*, eds. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck [Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983], 414).

The word “elder” in verse 17 is presbyter and the word “overseer” in verse 28 is **episkopos** or bishop. Elders, bishops, and pastors are all referring to the same office. Elder might refer to character whereas pastor might refer to conduct, but all three words refer to the same position or individual.

It was not just Paul who was in for trials and tests. There were dangers ahead for the church at Ephesus, and even for these elders themselves. Paul's words of encouragement must also include words of admonition and warning. These men must be on guard, not just for the flock, but also for themselves. These men were appointed as elders by the Holy Spirit, and as such they were to shepherd the flock of God, among which God had placed them. This flock was threatened by "wolves," and these "shepherds" were to guard the flock and protect them from such individuals, who would seek to do them harm.

1. Stay Awake (vv. 28, 31) – the admonition exists because the threat of drifting is real.

"Significantly before they could provide for the flock they had to care for their own spiritual well-being." (Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *BKC*, eds. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck [Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983], 414).

- a. "Be on guard" (v. 28)

"'Attend to' in the sense of taking care of." (Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *BKC*, eds. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck [Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983], 414).

- b. "Be on the alert" (v. 31)

The word literally means, "Keep awake." Do not fall asleep on the job. If we understand the idea correctly we will see that shepherding a flock is emotionally, spiritually, and physically exhausting.

The New Testament uses the word "toil" or "labor" to describe the activity of those who lead.

"Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord" (Rom. 16:12).

"And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it" (1 Cor. 4:12).

"I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Gal. 4:11).

"Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain" (Phil. 2:16).

"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you" (1 Thess. 5:12).

"For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (1 Tim. 4:10).

"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17).

"The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits" (2 Tim. 2:6).

The ministry of the Word is a taxing and toilsome work, but it is a work that has tremendous fruit and blessing.

Listen to the warning found in Ezekiel 34 against slothful shepherds.

<sup>1</sup> "Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? <sup>3</sup> You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. <sup>4</sup> Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. <sup>5</sup> **They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered.** <sup>6</sup> My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them."<sup>7</sup> Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: <sup>8</sup> "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "surely because My flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field **for lack of a shepherd**, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock" (Ezek. 34:1-8).

Listen also to the comparison and contrast found in John 10 concerning Jesus as the good shepherd and those who are false.

<sup>1</sup> "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." <sup>6</sup> This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. <sup>7</sup> So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. <sup>9</sup> I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. <sup>11</sup> I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, <sup>15</sup> even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. <sup>18</sup> No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father." (John 10:1-18).

The sheep are called upon to follow the leadership of the shepherds.

<sup>7</sup>“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. . . .<sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:7, 17).

We neglect these ideas to the peril of our souls.

## 2. Shepherds are to guide the sheep in the Word (vv. 20, 27)

In light of everything Paul has already said concerning the place of the Word in shepherding, we must conclude that a large part of oversight is Word centered. This is equally picked up by the statement following the title “overseer,” to “feed the church of God.”

## 3. Shepherds are to guard the sheep from the wolves (vv. 28-30)

The guarding side of oversight is Word-centered since wolves will “speak perverse things” in order to draw the flock away from the truth and toward themselves. Guarding and guiding are both Word-centered activities.

Verse twenty-nine is explanatory as to why Paul exhorts the shepherds to guard the flock of God. Paul describes these wolves as savage. Verse twenty-nine speaks of these wolves coming from without and making themselves at home. Their intent is to destroy the flock of God, to create disharmony and to cause chaos.

### C. Do not abandon the urgency of the threat (vv. 29, 30).

May we never drift into a false sense of security? The enemy is always at work. Think about what John wrote in Revelation 2 when addressing the church of Ephesus. Verse 30 “gives an idea of the greater nearness of the apostasy which the Apostle predicts.” (J. Rawson Lumby, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Cambridge: At the University Press, 1937], 363).

The statement “to draw away” “implies the tearing away from that to which they are already attached, and this more literal translation of the verb expresses the labor and exertion which these false teachers will spend to achieve their object.” (J. Rawson Lumby, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Cambridge: At the University Press, 1937], 363).

Is this threat real? Consider the context and occasion of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, and John’s letter to the Ephesians in Revelation 2:1ff, and why John wrote and those of 1 and 2 Timothy where Paul writes to Timothy who is pasturing in the city of Ephesus. Although the church of God will triumph and although the gates of hell will not prevail against her, the pull to apostasy is always real and present. The shepherds must stand vigilant against the onslaught of false teaching.

D. Do not abandon the priority of the sheep (vv. 28-30)

Pastors often joke about loving the ministry except for the sheep. Friend, there is no ministry except for the sheep. If a person said they were a shepherd by vocation but did not have any sheep or even like the smell of sheep, we would highly doubt whether or not his desire or calling to be a shepherd was genuine.

The sheep are the church of God. They are His and He owns them. It is His flock. Shepherds are simply working for God in the caring of His sheep.

1. The entire role of the shepherd is inseparably linked to the sheep
2. The sheep are inseparably linked to the Shepherds

E. Do not abandon the identity of the church (v. 28)

1. God appoints who leads His church.

He makes those whom He wills to be shepherds of His sheep. He gifts individuals to lead His people by feeding them the Word.

“They were overseers of the flock of God. That was not a duty they had chosen but a duty for which they had been chosen. The servants of the Good Shepherd must also be shepherds of the sheep.” (William Barclay, *Mark*, 152).

“By reminding them from whence their appointment came, St Paul would enforce on them the solemnity of their position. Though they be ‘in the flock’ they are not as others, more has been given unto them, and so more will be required.” (J. Rawson Lumby, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Cambridge: At the University Press, 1937], 362).

2. God owns the church, it is His.

We would be negligent if we did not note how the church is always described as “the church of God.”

3. God owns the church because He purchased the church with His own blood.

The value of a church is the price tag God places on it. The church has been secured by God as His own by the offering up of His own life-blood.

IV. Paul tells them of His pattern (vv. 31-38)

I think we would be in error if we did not see what Paul did against that of the hireling and false shepherd. I do not believe Paul is giving us precedence, but I do believe that a shepherd’s pattern must be similar to the principles noted in the following verses.

Paul opens verse thirty-one with a concluding idea. Verse thirty-one speaks of what this oversight looked like for Paul.

A. It was a pattern of urgency (v. 31)

Paul's was relentless in knowing the souls of the sheep.

B. It was a pattern of dependency (v. 32)

Paul's entire weight was placed on God and His work, a work of grace to finish what He alone began. The word "commend" speaks of transfer. Paul was depositing the elders and the church into the hand of God.

Notice how this grace is described. It is able to do two things. The grace of God has power. It is able to accomplish what God wants it to do.

1. The grace of God builds up the body of Christ.

Grace builds up; law tears down. Word-centered preaching celebrates the grace of God in the kingdom of God. This is the kind of preaching that builds up and renders certain the outcome. It fills the citizens of His kingdom with hope and moves them to endurance.

2. The grace of God guarantees the certainty of completion.

Because God begins the work, He will finish the work. The end result of His work is not dependent on you. The end of what He has promised sits squarely on God.

Paul describes the people of Ephesus as having been sanctified. Although Paul speaks of something that is still yet future, Paul is not so blind as to realize the immediate reality of their sanctification.

C. It was a pattern of integrity (vv. 33-35)

Paul knew the place of money, hard work, and helping the poor. No one could accuse Paul of ministering for the money. Paul, on the other hand, had a ministry which was marked by a servant's spirit. He did not gain from his ministry among them, even though he could legitimately have done so (1 Cor. 9). He worked with his own hands, supporting not only himself but those who traveled with him. His ministry came at great cost, not to the sheep, but to himself. He was free from lust for their money or possessions. His ministry did not require money from others, and so he was free from the time-consuming process of raising funds, and from the temptation to misuse them so as to personally gain from his ministry. His ministry was characterized by giving, not by getting. His strength was not used to prey upon the weak, to take advantage of their weaknesses, but to support the weak. His life was lived on the principle taught by our Lord Himself: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (verse 35).

Those who minister the Word must be free from the love of money. Although preaching can be vocational, it must not be viewed as a career whereby the preacher is always looking for greener and richer pasture lands. Shame on us, if such is the case.

D. It was a pattern of sincerity (vv. 36-38)

“Through all this scene runs the dominant feeling of an affection as deep as the heart itself. That feeling should be in every church; for when love dies in any church the work of Christ cannot do other than wither.” (William Barclay, *Mark*, 152).

There was a mutual respect between the shepherd and his sheep. The language used by Luke to describe the scene is touched with pathos. This kind of a response is the result of a life touching a life. Such a scene is the consequence of an intimate relationship. There is in this picture the character of biblical discipleship.

### **SHEPHERDING THE PEOPLE:** (What’s the NEXT STEP?)

1. God has placed shepherds over His flock to protect them from savage wolves by faithfully ministering the Word. As shepherds, we must accept the weight of Paul’s words. To the shepherds of Waukesha Bible Church, I ask you to weigh seriously the role to which you have been called.
2. The shepherds of WBC are to oversee the sheep by feeding them the Word of God.
3. To the sheep called Waukesha Bible Church, I ask you to weigh seriously your relationship to the shepherds of this flock. As sheep are you following God’s shepherds? I know we like to respond to such thinking by saying “The Lord is my shepherd” thus I do not need you or any flock. I respond by saying such thinking is unbiblical, and you are placing your soul in jeopardy.
4. Although you might reject this thought, I would encourage you to join us through membership. In our culture, membership is a simply action step of showing your understanding of the shepherd/sheep relationship.
5. What is your view of the shepherds and what is your response to the shepherds?
6. If you are a shepherd-less sheep, I ask you to weigh seriously your need to find shepherds under which you can be guided and guarded.
7. In the absence of either sheep or shepherds, there is no lasting health.