

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for August 13, 2017

The Responsibility of Church Leaders
Acts 20:28-31

Acts 18:23-21:16 details Paul's third missionary journey which centered on the city of Ephesus. Acts 20:17-38 records his final visit in Miletus with the leaders of the church of Ephesus, which he founded five years earlier (Acts 18:19). This is the one speech in this book that the author would have heard with his own ears.

1. The preparation for defense (20:28)

We cannot defend the church without defending ourselves. Unqualified leaders poison a church. As the church leadership goes, so goes the church.

2. The primary duty (20:28)

The Holy Spirit sovereignly established the overseers of the church, who were also known as elders (20:17). The overseer is to be "among" the flock in order to keep watch over the church as a guardian or caretaker.

The phrase "church of God" is used only by Paul in the New Testament. His epistles emphasize that the church belongs to God.

The phrase "which He purchased with His own blood" could be translated as "with the blood of His own." Clearly referring to Christ's death, the sacrificial work of God for the church drives the motivation of the leaders. We do not merely serve people, we serve the Lord's people.

This passage provides a perspective on the shepherding role of church leaders. The primary duty in shepherding a church is protection.

3. The potential danger (20:29-30)

Jesus warned His disciples regarding false teachers who come in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves (Matthew 7:15). Jesus taught that those who ignore the wolves are not shepherds but are only hired hands (John 10:12-13).

The two areas of danger are from outside the church (20:29) and from inside the church (20:30).

We can see that what Paul warned of actually materialized as early as five years later when Paul wrote to Timothy who was in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:6-7, 19-20; cf. 2 Timothy 1:15; 2:7-18).

There is an endless supply of twisted ways that people advance doctrinal error. However, they all “draw the disciples after them.” The primary characteristic of people who are a danger to the church is selfishness. People looking to advance themselves do so in opposition to God (1 Peter 5:5).

The church leaders have the direct responsibility to protect the church of God, but this work involves the church too.

4. The practice of diligence (20:31)

“Be on the alert,” like “be on guard” in Acts 20:28 is a command. While church leaders will be challenged to shepherd the church of God, there is no excuse for not being diligent.

We learn the outcome of the ministry of these Ephesian elders in Revelation 2:1-7, written nearly forty years after Paul’s address to the Ephesian elders. The church of Ephesus remained faithful to sound doctrine and resisted evil men, but they failed to remain zealous for their faith. We can think right and live wrong. We can be doctrinally rich and ministry poor.

May we be on guard for ourselves and our church!