

“THROUGH THE BIBLE”

PASTOR SANDY ADAMS

ACTS 19-20

A tourist traveling through southern Europe visited a cathedral that had a human skull on display. The tour guide told his group that it was the skull of the Apostle Paul. The next day in a neighboring city the group entered another cathedral that also displayed a skull - again, supposedly of Paul. One of the tourists complained, "Now, wait just a minute! Something is fishy. We've seen two skulls and you say both are of the Apostle Paul?" The guide replied, "That's right! The skull you saw yesterday was Paul as a young man and the skull you saw today was Paul when he was older."

There were dozens of cities throughout Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Greece that could've claimed a special relationship with the Apostle. Paul was not a man to let any grass grow under his feet. He was always on the move – *sharing* the Gospel, and *starting* new churches. At the end of Acts 18 Paul returns to Antioch, but after a brief R&R he's off again. In Acts 19 we catch up with him on his 3rd missionary journey...

Verse 1, "And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus." This was Paul's second visit to Ephesus. It was an important city in the Roman world. Its population pushed 300,000 at the time of Paul's visit. Ephesus was the commercial center of the wealthy region of Asia Minor. People called it, "The Treasure Chest of Asia." Yet ironically, Paul discovers that the people who had-it-all financially were lacking spiritually...

"And finding some disciples (Paul) said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." Remember who'd just ministered in Ephesus? "Apollos." And recall his problem? His understanding of Christianity was incomplete. At the end of chapter 18, Aquila and Priscilla had to pull him aside and explain to him "the way of God more accurately." Apollos was trying to fulfill the *Great Commission*, while guilty of the *Great Omission*. He didn't realize the Holy Spirit not only wants to *indwell us*, He also wants to *empower us*. This missing ingredient was replicated in his listeners. They believed in Jesus, but they knew nothing of the Spirit.

"And (Paul) said to (the Ephesians), "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism." When Jesus told His disciples to go into all the world and baptize, He provided us a formula... We should baptize believers "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." If the Ephesians had been baptized as Christians they would've at least heard of the Holy Spirit. But rather than believer's baptism, they were baptized with John's baptism – a show of repentance. "Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." Or literally, they were baptized as Christians.

Sadly, you'll run across folks who point to this verse and suggest if you haven't been baptized with this exact verbiage, "*in the name of the Lord Jesus*," you haven't been biblically baptized. That's not true. The phrase "*in the name of the Lord Jesus*" is just a way to indicate "*Christian baptism*." In fact, the context of the passage indicates the baptismal formula, or proper verbiage, included mention of the "*Holy Spirit*." Whenever I baptize someone I use the language Jesus gave us in Matthew 28:19. I baptize the person "*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*."

Verse 6, "And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all." When the Ephesians first believed the Spirit came quietly to indwell their hearts, but now the Spirit fills and overflows their life. And it's not quiet... it's noisy! Ecstatic utterances occurred. They spoke in foreign languages *praise to God* – and they spoke in their native tongue *messages from*

God. Tongues are *praise*. Prophecies are *proclamation*. Both are a burst of communication - like a cork popping from a bottle of champagne. Tongues is us speaking to God. Prophecy is God speaking to us. Tongues let's our spirit speak while our mind takes a break. Prophecy is God's bullhorn. The Spirit uses our voice to give volume to His whispers. When Paul laid hands on the Ephesians the Spirit came upon them and a sudden rush of power set off *speaking in tongues* and *words of prophecy*. One New Year's Day, the Tournament of Roses parade was delayed by a float that ran out of gas. It was beautifully decorated with an assortment of roses. But the float sputtered, and kicked, and eventually came to a halt. It was quickly discovered that the organizers forgot to fill it with gas. But the irony is that the float was sponsored by the Standard Oil Company. A company with vast reservoirs of petro, ran out of gas. Yet this can happen to a Christian. We have a pipeline to God's power. His name is the Holy Spirit. We should never run out of gas. But we need to ask God continually that He'll fill us and empower us with the Holy Spirit.

Verse 8, "And (Paul) went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus." This was philosophy forum. Tyrannus had a large meeting hall Paul rented out in the afternoons. The Greek work day was from 7:00am to 11:00am, then from 4:00pm to 9:00pm. From 11:00am to 4:00pm they beat the heat and broke for siesta. Every afternoon folks went home and took a nice long nap - sounds like a great idea, doesn't it? There was a saying, "You'll find more people sound asleep in Ephesus at 1:00 in the afternoon than at 1:00 in the morning!" This passage gives us a glimpse at how hard Paul worked. For two years he made tents - mornings and evenings - then forfeited his afternoon siestas to teach the Bible. Ministry was Paul's *passion*, not just Paul's *profession*. I'm sure he figured he would take his siesta in heaven.

"And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them." These handkerchiefs were work cloths Paul used to wipe the sweat from his brow - his bandanas. Paul's Survivor buffs. His apron was a cloth he wore to protect his clothes while he worked - and to wipe his hands. Both articles would be soaked with Paul's sweat. I read where Jimi Hendrick's sweat bands sold at an auction for \$7000. Some poor fellow thought there was something magical about the famous guitar player's sweat. He figured Jimi's sweat might still be in the bands, and if it trickled to his hands he'd be able to play the guitar like Jimi. We hear such a theory and think it ridiculous. But this was the idea behind the Ephesians preoccupation with Paul's sweatbands, and God used it to work miracles. What's the big deal about apostolic perspiration? Is there anything to the *healing hankies* and *blessed bandanas* you see advertised by questionable preachers on late night infomercials? Does God resort to gimmicks? I thought for God, healing power was *no sweat*?

Understand, Paul was human just like us. He called himself "the chief of sinners." Certainly his glands didn't secrete supernatural sweat. Yet God work miracles through him. The Ephesians so associated Paul with God's power that the thought of drawing close to the Apostle activated their faith. What happened had nothing to do with *perspiration*, but *expectation*. If you believe, but don't expect - do you really believe? Expectation is the trigger to faith. In the minds of the Ephesians God and Paul were so intricately linked together that *his buff* stimulated *their belief* in *God's Spirit*.

This is how it works with *the laying on of hands*, or *the anointing of oil*, or *the celebration of communion*, or *the raising of holy hands to God* - they all serve the same purpose. They stimulate faith - and give the believer a point of contact where he or she can release their expectation in the work of God.

"Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so." When God works supernaturally it's glorious, but it also brings weirdos out of the woodwork. Here several Jewish exorcists pop up to take advantage of the situation. I once read about a Brit named Andrew Green. He fancied himself "a secular exorcist." He claims to be a real-life ghost buster. People hire him to expel ghosts from haunted houses. He reminds me of the sons of Sceva. They got paid upfront and Luke says they were "*itinerant*" - or always on the move. That means didn't have be accountable for their lack of success. These guys were also always on the lookout for a special incantation or formula they could employ in their trade. So when they saw Paul casting out demons in the name of Jesus they assumed this was the ticket to the top. They gave it a try, "*We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.*"

But here's what happened, verse 15, "And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" Literally it reads, "Jesus I

recognize, and Paul I am acquainted with; but who are you?" Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." Both the sons of Sceva and Paul spoke the name of Jesus to cast out demons. The difference was that Paul had a relationship with Jesus. The Jews saw Jesus as a *spell*. Paul served Him as the *Savior*. The power of God is conveyed through *relationship* - not *rite* or *ritual* or *recitation*. It's *faith*, not *formulas* that unleash God's power in our lives. Using the name of Jesus without a relationship with Jesus is like using a gun that's not loaded. These Jews were bruised, and bloodied, and beat to the buff. We're called to go out in the name of Jesus and confront satanic strongholds, but we need to be sure we're *in touch* with Jesus before we *invoke* His name. There needs to be *possession* behind our *confessions*.

"This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds." There was public confession of sin. People were openly renouncing evil. "Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned *them* in the sight of all." In ancient times documents that were laced with spells and curses were called "*Ephesian Letters*." The region was renown for its occult connotations. But when the people came to Jesus they repented of their sin and burned their *paranormal paraphernalia*.

"And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled 50,000 *pieces of silver*." – the equivalent of the combined yearly salaries of 150 men. When the Ephesians met Jesus what they formerly valued they saw as garbage. They tossed their horoscopes, and Ouija boards, and crystals, and new age books, and tarot cards, and Harry Potter Library into the bonfire. They didn't take their record collections, and libraries, and sale it for a profit - or hold a garage sale. They torched the remnants of their past life! They made a clean break with the past and pledged to follow Jesus! When I came to Jesus I had a very *expensive* record and tape collection. I remember taking all my stuff to the dumpster behind where I worked. I shattered the records, ripped up the tapes, and threw it all into the trash. It was big moment for me. At the time, it was a costly commitment. But I have no doubt it was a turning point in my life, as in verse 20, where "*the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed*" just as it did in Ephesus.

"When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." Paul has his eyes set on the capitol of the empire, but his heart still pulls toward Jerusalem. "So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time." And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands." Demetrius was the union organizer for the local Idol Workers. He could see that Paul was cutting into their business. "So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship."

Ephesus was a major city for many reasons, but the Temple to Diana was certainly its most famous landmark. Pagans from all over the world came to Ephesus and the temple to worship the Greek fertility goddess. The great temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was larger than the Parthenon in Athens - 425 feet long, by 220 feet wide, by 60 feet high. It was surrounded by 127 marble columns. The whole temple was adorned with beautiful engravings and paintings. In contrast to the beauty of the temple the statue of Diana was ugly and grotesque. It was a squat figure made of a black stone, with a female face and covered, front and back, with mammary glands - a symbol of fertility. I suppose you could say that the worship of Diana... *was a real bust!* Of course, when you came to Ephesus it was important you left with a trinket to show your friends where you were - a miniature replica of Diana. Demetrius and the local silversmiths made a bundle selling these ugly souvenirs. Idolatry was big business and *the Gospel was a financial threat*.

And take note, this is how you put sin out of business - not by *picketing* or *protesting* - but by spreading the Gospel and cutting into the demand. In the 1901 Welsh revival God awakened sinners to the point where every tavern and pub in Wales went belly up - and guess how many anti-alcohol sermons were preached? None! Once people were touched by the Lord and filled with the Spirit people just lost all interest in their booze. Hey, *social reformation* is useless without *spiritual transformation*. To really change society you start by sharing the changing people's hearts.

That's what happened in Ephesus. The Gospel *spread* and the *spreadsheet of the silversmiths shrunk*. Demetrius' cronies felt threatened so they tried to enact legislation to stop the church and squelch the Gospel. They called a meeting to discuss the shrinking profits and stir up the crowd.

"Now when they heard *this*, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!" So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions." Visit the ruins of Ephesus today and you can enter the huge theater where the mob rallied. We're told by the archeologists it was able to seat 25,000 people The union members erupted into a frenzy and grab the first believers they could find, Gaius and Aristarchus. Ben Franklin once said, "*a mob is a monster with heads enough, but no brains.*" This was the case in Ephesus.

"And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater." But you've got to love Paul's courage. He thought... "*a stadium full of people - I can preach!*" To Paul there was no such thing as *opposition*, just *opportunities*.

Verse 32, "Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together." The situation was total chaos. "And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people." In the Roman world whenever an uprising occurred someone usually blamed it on the Jews. Here, the Jewish leader, Alexander, wants to make it clear that the Jewish community had nothing to do with Paul and his efforts. But Alexander's attempt backfired. "When they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!" The appearance of a Jew only inflamed their pagan loyalties.

Verse 35, "And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Zeus?" The statue of Diana was black probably because it was made from a meteor. This added to its allure. Local lore claimed it came from Zeus, chief god of the Greeks.

"Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess." Apparently, Paul didn't enter Ephesus and go on an anti-Diana campaign. He preached the Gospel of Jesus, and the light of God's Word uncovered the darkness. "Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly." A city official brings some reason to all the frenzy. There are courts for legitimate, legal grievances.

Then he warns, "For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering." The city of Ephesus had special Roman designation. It was "*a free city.*" This came with special privileges, and it curtailed the authority of the Roman army. This clerk is warning the Ephesians that this uproar might give the Romans a reason to enforce martial law and move in. The last thing they wanted was a crackdown... So "*when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.*" And all the people went home.

Chapter 20, "After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to *himself*, embraced *them*, and departed to go to Macedonia." He sails from Ephesus for Philippi and Thessalonica. "Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece and stayed three months." During which time he wrote his letter to the Romans. "And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria (or Antioch, so), he decided to return through Macedonia."

And here's the entourage that traveled with him. Paul's posse' - "Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia - also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas." One of Paul's purposes for his return trip through Macedonia was to collect an offering for the famine-stricken church in Jerusalem. The men listed were the people entrusted to transport the offering for their churches.

“But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days.” Troas was a port on the Aegean Sea, 130 miles up the coast from Ephesus. They waited a week for a ship sailing southeast toward Syria.

Verse 7 “Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.” Notice a couple of points... First, apparently the early Christians met on the first day of the week. At first glance this seems trivial, but think about it - for 1500 years the Jews met to worship on the last day of the week, the Sabbath. Why did the early Christians change their day of their worship from Saturday to Sunday? There was only one reason. Church meetings were a *celebration of the resurrection*. Something dramatic occurred to budge a ritualistic people out of a proud tradition. The transforming event was Jesus' victory over death.

Second, notice the early Christians met on Sunday night rather than Sunday morning. In pagan Rome Sunday was a *work day* not a *holiday*. Believers labored all day Sunday. When the job ended, they met to worship.

And third, Paul's ship sailed at sunrise, this was his last opportunity to speak to the believers in Troas, so he threw away his watch. Paul wasn't worried about getting kids to bed, or guys going to work the next day, so he spoke until he had nothing else to say. If he started at 6:00, it means he preached a six hour sermon - *and you think I'm long winded!*

There's a detail about the room where Paul preached, in verse 8, “There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together.” In the first century, Christians were a strange, new minority. All kinds of rumors circulated about their practices and beliefs. They were accused of sexual promiscuity since they always talked about love. Communion also caused misunderstandings. People heard the Christians ate the body of Christ - were they cannibals? They drank His blood - were they vampires?

I remember, in the early days of CCSM people would drive by on Sundays and see everyone in shorts and T-shirts - or they'd roll down their windows and listen to the rock and roll music - or they'd see the pastor on his motorcycle - and they'd wonder if we were some kind of a cult. It was because of these suspicions that the early church always lit their meeting halls with an overabundance of candlepower. They wanted the room so bright if you walked by or looked you could see clearly. No secrets. Now you can get a feel for the conditions in the meeting room at Troas... A Sunday evening after a tiring day at work - a long-winded preacher - a stuffy, smoke filled room – meant that poor Eutychus didn't have a chance...

“And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep.” In fairness to Eutychus he probably went to the window to get some fresh air. He thought the night air would wake him up. But “He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead.” Drowsiness led to death. Eutychus' fall proved fatal. He fell three stories. Hit the dirt and died on impact. I've had people get drowsy and fall out of a chair, but never a window!

“But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, “Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him.” It reminds me of the man who fell asleep in church. The pastor shouted at the usher, “Hey, wake that fellow up?” The usher shouted back, “You put him to sleep - you wake him up!” Well, Paul is a responsible preacher. If he puts you to sleep, then he'll wake you up. He falls on Eutychus - Elisha-style - and God works a miracle. “Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed. And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted.” Paul raised the dead and served a meal. He went on fellowshiping until daybreak and time to leave.

Understand, Eutychus is not the only person who's ever dozed off. We have folks in our church get sluggish spiritually. They fall away and crash. And like Paul, the body of Christ needs to go to them and cover them, and revive them with our warmth. We'll resuscitate them with compassion. It's love that awakens a cold heart and revives a slumbering spirit.

Verse 13, “Then we went ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, there intending to take Paul on board; for so he had given orders, intending himself to go on foot.” From Troas to Assos was 25 miles. Paul could walk it as fast as his posse could sail. He needed to spend some time with the Lord, and since he stayed up all night, he decided to pray while he walked. If you're having problems dozing off while praying... pray while you walk.

“And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. We sailed from there, and the next *day* came opposite Chios. The following *day* we arrived at Samos and stayed at Trogyllium. The next *day* we came to Miletus. They were working their way down the coast. “For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost. From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.” The beach at Miletus was 28 miles south of Ephesus. If Paul had docked at Ephesus he'd have been there for days. A thriving church – a multitude of friends – he would've never gotten back to sea. So he skips past Ephesus, and from Miletus sends word to meet with only the elders of the church at Ephesus. He hosts a leadership summit.

Understand the NT uses three names for the same person – **elder**, **bishop**, and **pastor**. Acts 20:28 refers to these “*elders*” as “*overseers or bishops.*” In the same verse these same men are to “*shepherd or pastor.*” “**Elder**” speaks of a man’s *maturity*. “**Bishop or overseer**” his *ministry*. He supervises. “**Pastor or shepherd**” his *method*. He feeds and leads. In the book of Acts we have eight of Paul’s sermons. Most of his messages are from *Paul the evangelist* or *Paul the apologist*, but here we hear from *Paul the pastor*. His words on the beach reveal his love for the flock. They should reflect the heart of everyone who calls himself a pastor.

Verse 18, “And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you...” Paul was not a ivory tower preacher – he wasn’t cut off from everyday struggles and concerns. He lived among the people he served. His ideas were lofty, heavenly - but his feet were firmly planted on earth.

He lived among them, “*Serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews...*” Everywhere he went Paul was the object of persecution. Most often by the Jews. Paul came “*...serving the Lord with all humility...*” Too many pastors today develop an entitlement mentality. They make a few sacrifices, but then they think God, or the people, owe them. Not Paul. He was a giver not a taker. He reminds them, “*how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you...*” Paul kept back nothing. He left it all on the field. Why save for a rainy day, when today might be your last. “*To spend and be spent*” - was his motto. Paul’s goal was to die with nothing left in his tank.

“And (I) taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.” Every where Paul traveled he was forewarned about trouble in Jerusalem.

Verse 24, “But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” A concern for his safety was not Paul’s concern. He had one *pressing priority* – to finish his race with joy – to faithfully preach the gospel of grace.

“And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more.” This was his last visit with the Ephesians. Paul realized he would never travel this way again.

“Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.” At the end of my journey on earth this is what I hope to say. My goal as a pastor is to proclaim to my congregation “*the whole counsel of God.*” Too many pastor preach part and parcel. They gravitate toward their own pet subjects. But what their people really need is the whole counsel of God. It’s been said, “*It takes the whole Bible to make a whole Christian.*” At times I grieve that there’s not more of an appetite for this type of teaching. But I know this is the diet it takes to create real consistent growth.

Verse 28, “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock...” Notice, before a pastor *takes heed to the flock* he should *take heed to himself*. Too many pastors burn out on *ministry for the Lord*, since they don’t receive *ministry from the Lord*. The neediest person I know is me! I want to live as broken bread and poured out wine, but my ministry won’t last very long, or be very successful, if I pour from an empty cup. Every minister’s first priority is to take heed to himself, *then* to the flock of God.

“Among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” A shepherd has two duties toward his flock - he *leads and feeds - oversees and undergirds*. And he'll be faithful to his duties if he recalls that the flock belongs to God. It was purchased at a steep price. It cost God the blood of His Son. Once a man purchased his parents a very rare, exotic, tropical bird. He paid thousands of dollars for it and sent it to them as an anniversary gift. After a few days he called his dad and asked how he liked the bird. The father replied, "It was delicious. Your mother and I ate every bite!" Pastors need to remember that the sheep are not for lamb chops. They're prize livestock. The flock of God cost the sinless blood of His only Son. God loves His flock. He wants them *nurtured* not *slaughtered*.

And God also wants the flock protected... “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.” A faithful pastor *feeds the flock*. But a spiritual wolf *feeds on – and feeds off -* the flock. A spiritual predator fleeces the flock to pad his own pockets.

“Also from among yourselves men will rise up...” Notice wolves come from two directions – from *within* the church and from *without* the church. When the devil can't defeat a church, he'll often try to join it. He can sabotage it from the inside as easily as he can oppose it from the outside. Wolves come “speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” Here's how to identify a spiritual wolf. Rather than create followers of Jesus – he creates his own followers. He draws folks to himself.

“Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” With spiritual predators on the prowl can there be any hope for the prosperity of God's flock? **Yes!** It's His Word that builds us up and guarantees our inheritance. Our safety is in the Scriptures. It's continuing in the word of His grace.

Verse 33, “I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.” Paul wasn't after anybody's money. Like in Corinth, while in Ephesus Paul made tents during the day to support himself. He served the Ephesians without being a financial burden.

“I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Paul was an example to the church. He could've demanded a salary. It was within his rights to do so. But he wanted to prove the Ephesians that it's more blessed to give... By the way, where Paul got this quote from Jesus - “It is more blessed to give than to receive” - we have no idea. It doesn't appear in the Gospels. Paul had another source... It's often called “The Supreme Beatitude.”

Verse 36, “And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.” As Juliet said to Romeo, “Parting is such sweet sorrow.” Paul loved the Ephesians and the Ephesians loved Paul. Grown men hugged and cried. Tear trails were seen in the sand. The elders left encouraged and instructed. Paul set sail with the Ephesians on his heart.