

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 63

I. Exposition of Chapter Twenty (Continued).

A. Verse 26 – “Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*.” – The context of this is the fact that Paul had been faithful to preach the “...gospel of the grace of God” (verse 24) and the “...kingdom of God” (verse 25). The use of the word “blood” here doesn’t refer to bloodshed in the sense of physical death but is used in the sense of death spiritually. Dr. Robert Utley explains:

“This is a Jewish idiom, like Acts 18:6, or more specifically, Ezek. 3:16ff and 33:1ff. Paul had faithfully presented the gospel (cf. 2 Cor. 2:17). Now those who responded and those who rejected bear the burden of their own decision. One to service, the other to destruction (cf. 2 Cor. 2:15–16).”¹

**“I declare today that I have been faithful. If anyone suffers eternal death, it's not my fault”
Acts 20:26 – New Living Translation**

B. Verse 27 – “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.” – This is why Paul could confidently say that he was “...innocent of the blood of all men”, he had declared the entire purpose and plan of God. This is what we need today. Pastors, in particular, need to be sure that they teach and preach the entire Word of God. In other words, sometimes pastors only teach on the areas that interest them the most or excite the people the most, but we need to teach everything the Word of God declares.

C. Verses 28-32 – Paul gives his exhortation and warning to the Elders of the Church in Ephesus.

1. Verse 28 - “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock...” – The words “take heed” mean: “to be in a continuous state of readiness to learn of any future danger, need, or error, and to respond appropriately”² Other sources say it means; “to pay attention” or “to be watchful.” So Paul is warning the Ephesian elders to be watchful of their own lives and the lives of their congregation, looking out for danger and error.

2. Verse 28 – “...among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God...” – There a few things to make note of here:

a. First, it is the Holy Spirit Who makes anyone an overseer or elder in the church. Not a man, nor an organization/denomination. Paul opened up his letter to the Galatians by saying:

“Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead.)” – Galatians 1:1

b. Second, the word “overseer” is the word sometimes translated as the word “bishop” (Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7; I Peter 2:25) and means; “a watchman. superintendent, overseer.”³ Here we see that the “elders” (verse 17) are the same as “bishops” (overseers). “Elder” is the Hebrew term and “Bishop” is more of the Greek term.⁴

c. Next, we have the word “shepherd” which means; “to lead, with the implication of providing for—‘to guide and to help, to guide and take care of.’”⁵ This word is sometimes translated as the words “rule” and “feed”. This is the verb form from the noun translated “pastors” in Ephesians 4:11. **So, the elders, bishops and pastors of the church at Ephesus were one in the same! (cf. I Peter 5:1-4).**

d. “...the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” – The “church”, of course is a reference to all those who have been saved or born again. This is what makes us Christians. Notice God “purchased” the Church with His own blood. This word means; “to acquire possession of something, with the probable component of considerable effort—‘to acquire, to achieve, to win.’”⁶ The Bible shows us that you’ve been “...bought at a price” and you “...are not your own.” (I Corinthians 6:19-20). I Peter 1:18-19 makes it clear that we have been “redeemed” by the precious blood. Dr. Bob Utley comments:

¹Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 235.

²Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 332.

³Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, (AMG Publishers; Revised edition, 1993)

⁴Kevin J. Conner, *The Church in the New Testament*, (Victoria, Australia: Acacia Press, 1982), 91.

⁵Louw and Nida, 465.

⁶Ibid, 564.

“This reflects the OT concept of sacrificial substitution (cf. Lev. 1–7; Isa. 53). It is also possibly a strong reference to Jesus’ deity. Paul often uses phrases which point to this truth (cf. Rom. 9:5; Col. 2:9; Titus 2:13).

It is also possible to translate this Greek phrase as ‘through His own,’ meaning near relative (i.e. His Son Jesus). F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the book of the Acts*, p. 416 #59, says this phrase should be translated ‘by means of the blood of His own one,’ which he asserts is well attested in the papyri.”⁷

3. Verse 29 – “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.”

a. **“...savage wolves...” – “metaphorically of cruel, greedy, rapacious, destructive men”⁸**

b. **“...will come in among you, not sparing the flock.” – Paul is warning them that some of these “wolves” will come in from the outside. Paul says they “...not spare the flock.” This means they will cause trouble with the people of God. Grant Osborne writes:**

“The external threats are seen as ‘savage wolves’ who will ‘not spare the flock.’ This is similar to Luke 10:3, where Jesus said he was sending the disciples out ‘like lambs among wolves.’ Wolves were natural enemies, predators who stalked and killed sheep, are often used throughout the Old Testament as a metaphor for the enemies of God’s people (Jer 5:6; Ezek 22:27; Hab 1:8; Zeph 3:3). The shepherd has as one of the primary duties protecting the flock from being torn to pieces by such creatures, and this applies quite well with spiritual shepherds rescuing God’s flock from ‘savage’ false teachers (John 10:11–12; 2 Cor 11:4, 13–15).”⁹

4. Verse 30 – “Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” – Paul adds that not only would “wolves” come from the outside but they also would come from within. Over time they would gain authority and be recognized as leaders but eventually they would lead the people astray. Dr. Stanley Horton adds:

“Not all of these wolves would come in from the outside (see Matt. 7:15). ‘Even from [their] own number,’ even from among the elders themselves, some would rise up. By ‘distort[ing] the truth,’ that is, by using half-truths or by twisting the truth, they would seek ‘to draw away disciples,’ a following, for themselves from the members of the local assemblies. This indicates that their real purpose would be to build up themselves rather than the assembly. They would also attempt to draw away disciples who were already believers; they would have little interest in winning the lost for Christ, nor would they desire to build up the churches that were already established (cf. 2 Cor. 11:13–14).”¹⁰

5. Verse 31 – “Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” – Because of the aforementioned things pertaining to false teachers coming in, Paul warns them to “...watch, and remember...”. This was not something that he was sharing with them for the first time. He had been warning them for three years!

6. Verse 32 – “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.”

a. **“...I commend you to God and to the word of His grace...” – The word “commend” means; “to entrust oneself to the care of someone”¹¹ Paul knows he has done everything he could possibly do to prepare them for whatever may come. Now he places them in God’s hands and trusts God and His Word to keep them. Osborne comments:**

“Paul gives them over to God, and to his great gift to us, ‘the word of his grace.’ Our loving and compassionate God will provide for us his care and protection via his divine word, given to us as his grace-gift. Here we see the true rationale for serious Bible study and what it will do for us. This is how God watches over us and rescues us from the savage wolves of verses 29–30. It is his word that unmasks their lies and reveals the truth about their false teaching.”¹²

b. **Two things the Word does according to this verse:**

1) **Builds us up – Strengthens us and makes us able to stand.**

2) **Gives us an inheritance – Shows us what Christ has done for us and who we are in**

⁷Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, 235.

⁸Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House., 1977

⁹Grant R. Osborne, *Acts: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 369.

¹⁰Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 341-342.

¹¹Louw and Nida, 463.

¹² Grant R. Osborne, 371.

Him. (cf. Romans 8:16-17; Ephesians 1:11-14.)

D. Verses 33-38 – His final words, expressions of love and prayer.