**The Apostle Paul’s Goodbye Kiss**

(Acts 20:28-38)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

One day a wife said to her husband, “Our new neighbor kisses his wife goodbye every morning before he leaves for work. How come you don’t do that?” He replied, “I barely know the woman!

Speaking of kissing someone goodbye, that’s what the Apostle Paul is going to do at the end of this passage here in Acts 20. As we saw in our last lesson, Paul is saying goodbye to the elders of the church in Ephesus. But before he *kisses* them goodbye, he has some more things to say to them, as we see in the opening verse of our text:

**“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).**

Now first of all, remember that when you see the word “therefore,” you’re supposed to look to see what it’s there for. Here, Paul has just finished telling them that when he was in Ephesus, *he* did the things that he’s telling *them* to do now. He took heed to himself and to the flock. He took heed to serve the Lord with all humility of mind, and he fed the flock the spiritual nourishment of *the Word of God.* And now it was their turn to do those things.

Later, he told Timothy the same thing in I Timothy 4:16:

**“Take heed *unto thyself,* and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both *save thyself,* *and them that hear thee.”***

Now Timothy and his hearers were *already* saved *from their sins.* Paul was talking about being saved from all the bad things that happen to you when you *don’t* take heed to the doctrine Paul gave Timothy. We *teach* Pauline doctrine because your Christian life would be a *disaster* without it.

But now, don’t get insulted when Paul calls the church a “flock” there in verse 28. I say that because people only *think* that sheep are stupid. They tell me they are actually very intelligent animals. What they are is *directionless.* That is, they need someone to *lead them,* because left to themselves they will just follow *each other.*

And they will literally follow one another *off a cliff,* as you may have heard. Recently in Turkey, *1500 sheep* fell off a cliff while their shepherds were having breakfast. The good news is, only the first *400* died. The remaining 1100 were saved because they landed on the big, fluffy cushion of the first 400!

So when God calls His people *sheep,* He’s just saying they need a shepherd to steer them away from danger. And the Greek word translated *shepherd* in the Bible is also translated *pastor.* God’s sheep need pastors to shepherd them because if sheep have no leader, they will just play *follow* the leader. Let me give you an example of that.

A shepherd who keeps his sheep in a barn said he stretched a rope across the barn door about knee-high to the sheep, and then opened the door to let them out. The first few sheep jumped over the rope to get out, of course. But after several went by, he cut the rope. The sheep that followed continued to jump over the rope *that was no longer there,* simply because they saw the sheep in front of them jump over something!

And when someone in the church does something wrong, there’s a tendency for people to follow him, and for that sin to spread like leaven. *And,* when someone in the church *teaches* something wrong, there’s a tendency for others to follow that too, and *it too* spreads like leaven—unless there’s a pastor to correct him.

I should add that sometimes grace believers say that we members of the Body of Christ are not sheep, that only Jews are called sheep in the Bible. But as you can see from Paul’s words in our text here, that’s just not true. It *used to be* true under the law, back when Gentiles were called *dogs.* But it’s not true under grace. We are just as sheepish as the Jews were!

Now notice in verse 28 that Paul calls these elders *overseers.* That’s not a word we use much any more, because today we call men like that *supervisors.* Businesses and factories have supervisors who provide *supervision.* The word “super” means *over.* A man in our church builds bridges for the state, and he can tell you that in building bridges, you’ve got your *superstructure* above, and your *substructure* below. So a supervisor *sees above,* or oversees.

And overseers *in the Bible* did what supervisors do today: they watched over and guided *workers,* as we see in II Chronicles 34:13:

**“…they were over *the bearers of burdens,* and were over-seers *of all that wrought the work* in *any* manner of service.”**

Now you know what that means, don’t you? It means that if pastors are *overseers*, then God expects people in the flock to be *workers—*workers who, as it says there, work in “any” manner of service. If you don’t have a job in your local church, just see your pastor. There’s always *something* that needs doing in a local church, and much of it needs to be done regularly by a faithful worker.

But here in verse 28, we have a dispensational difference, because it says that *the Holy Ghost* made these men overseers. That means these elders had a supernatural *gift of the Spirit.* Paul wrote,

**“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given *by the Spirit* the word of wisdom...to another the gifts of healing *by the same Spirit...*to another prophecy...all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as *He* will….are all prophets? *are all teachers?* are all workers of miracles?” (I Corinthians 12:7-11,29).**

Now the “teachers” mentioned there are the *elders* mentioned here in our text. Elders are the teachers in a local assembly. And back then, *the Holy Spirit* made men teachers, and prophets, and healers. *He* decided who got what gift. When you hear a Christian say (as they sometimes say) that he’s trying to figure out what his spiritual gift is, tell him he’s living in the wrong dispensation for spiritual gifts. Paul wrote,

**“This is a true saying, if a man *desire* the office of a bishop, he *desireth* a good work.”**

Today, men have to *desire* to be spiritual leaders. The Spirit isn’t going to choose you.

And if God were still giving men the *gift* of teaching, wouldn’t you expect to find that gift at the ope of the list of qualifications Paul gives for a spiritual leader? But what’s Paul say instead, in the verse next verse:

**“A bishop then must be…*apt* to teach” (I Timothy 3:2).**

Today, men don’t have a miraculous *gift* of teaching, but they should have an *aptitude* for teaching.

Before I got saved, I absolutely *hated* giving speeches in high school. But after I started desiring to be a pastor, a teacher asked me to give a speech about World War II. After I finished, one of my classmates said, “Listening to you talk about World War II was just like watching it on television!” I remember thinking at the time that maybe I *could* be a pastor after all. Up until then I had my doubts.

Then I’ll never forget what happened after I gave my first message. Don Webb told me, “you are apt to teach.” I found this even more encouraging than the words of that classmate, of course.

I don’t have a gift of teaching, *but I have a Bible!* And what’s Paul say about the Bible in IITimothy 3:16?

**“All Scripture is...*profitable...”***

Well, hey, isn’t that what that reference we looked at in II Corithians 12 said, that “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to *profit* withal”? The gifts of the Spirit were given to profit believers, but now that all the gifts are gone, all the profit you need *is in the Book.* And it’s all a *teacher* needs to feed the flock.

When verse 28 goes on to say that God “purchased” the church *with His own blood,* did you notice it *doesn’t* say that we were purchased with *Christ’s* blood? That’s true, but that’s not what it says. It says we were purchased with *God’s* blood! If you ever need proof that the Lord Jesus Christ was God in the flesh, *there it is.*

The blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross was *God’s* blood, but it was also *human* blood. It was both human and divine—just like the Lord Himself was both human and divine. Don’t ask me to explain how that can be, because I can’t. It’s just one of those things about which we say that old adage, “God said it. I believe it. That settles it!”

But when it says God *purchased* us, most Christians don’t know what that implies. We know the Corinthians didn’t, for Paul had to write and *tell them* what it implies when he wrote,

**“Know ye not that...*ye are not your own?* For ye are bought with a price: *therefore glorify God in your body,* and in your spirit, *which are God's”* (I Corinthians 6:19,20).**

When you believed on Christ and got saved, God *bought you,*  and now He *owns* you, lock, stock and barrel, as they used to say. That means you need to use your body as respectfully as you would if you were driving a car that belonged to the president of the United States, because that body you’re driving *is not your own.*

Now next, Paul tells these elders *why* they had to feed the flock:

**“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29).**

Now here we have to ask *how* Paul knew that. Because I don’t think he knew it because he was a prophet, and prophets knew the future. Here all he had to know was *the Scriptures,* for the Scriptures tell us that grievous wolves were *always* entering God’s flock in *every* dispensation. It happened when God was talking to the prophet Zephaniah about Israel and said,

**“Her princes within her are roaring lions; *her judges are evening wolves;* they gnaw...the bones....Her prophets are...treacherous...” (Zephaniah 3:3,4).**

Israel’s *judges* were the wolves in Zephaniah’s day. And in in the Lord’s day, He told the Jews that He ministered to,

**“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, *but inwardly they are ravening wolves”***

But did you ever ask yourself what exactly this analogy *means?* I mean, we know wolves kill and eat sheep. But how would a false *prophet* eat *a believer?*

Here I think that something Ezekiel says might help explain this analogy. He quoted God as saying,

**“…*prophesy against the shepherds of Israel*...and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do *feed* *themselves!* should not the shepherds feed *the flocks?* Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: *but ye feed not the flock”* (Ezekiel 34:2,3).**

In other words, the shepherds of Israel were taking everything they could get from the flock of God’s people, but they weren’t giving anything back.

And that’s what Paul was warning these elders about. He was saying that men would enter their church and act like *sheep,* in the hopes of becoming *the shepherd,* to see what they could *get* out of the church, instead of to see what they could *give it.*

But grievous wolves coming into the church *from outside* the church weren’t the only things these elders needed to watch for, as we see as we read on in Acts 20:

**“Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30).**

Elders must *also* watch out for men *from within their own church* who want to become shepherds to see what *they* can get out of the church!

But men like that are smart enough to know that they’re not going to be able to draw disciples away after them if all they do is keep saying the same things that the elders say. So they start teaching something *different.*

And that’s what that word “perverse” means in verse 30, to lead someone away from what is correct, as we see when Jeremiah said,

**“...ye have perverted *the words of the living God...”* (Jeremiah 23:36).**

The words of God were correct, of course, but in Jeremiah’s day, the pastors stopped saying those words and started saying *something else.* So the elders in Ephesus had to be on the lookout for men like that as well, as Paul goes on to tell them in verse 31:

**“Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.”**

Here Paul reminds them that for three years *he* watched for men like that, and warned about men like that. And when he claimed he warned them “night and day,” we know that this was *not* an exaggeration, because earlier in Acts 20 he preached until midnight, raised a man from the dead, and then *continued* to minister to the saints *until sunrise!*

Next, Paul told these men,

**“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).**

Now that word “commend” in that context means what it means in Luke 23:46, where we read,

**“...Jesus...said, Father, into Thy hands *I commend My spirit:* and having said thus, He gave up the ghost.”**

Right before the Lord died on the cross, He placed His Spirit in His Father’s hands. And that’s what the word “commend” means here as well. Paul was putting *the elders* in the Father’s hands. He was leaving them, but he didn’t appoint a man to be some kind of pope, and commend them into *his* hands. He put them in *God’s* hands. And since God only speaks through His Word, he was actually commending them *to the Word of God,* and putting them in *the Bible’s* hands.

But not just the Bible in general. He was commending them to “the word of His grace,” i.e., the words *of the grace message* found in Paul’s epistles. That’s the only message in the Bible that can build believers up in the dispensation of grace. If you put a believer into the hands of *other* parts of the Bible today, it will *tear him down,* not build him up.

If you put someone in the hands of the law of Moses, he’s going to expect that God will prosper him when he *keeps* the law. An when God *doesn’t* prosper him, it will tear him down nine ways to Sunday. It will tear his faith to shreds. And we could give a log more examples like that.

But verse 32 says that the other thing the words of God’s grace does is give us an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. That’s talking about the Jews who were sanctified when the Lord was here *ministering* to the Jews. Paul is actually referencing something the Lord told him the day He saved him, when

**“...He said, I am Jesus...I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, *to make thee a minister...of...the Gentiles*...that they may receive forgiveness of sins, *and inheritance among them which are sanctified* by faith that is in Me” (Acts 26:15-18).**

As you may know, the only people who were sanctified by faith that was in Christ that day on Damascus Road were the Jews who put their faith in Christ when He was here among them.

So what’s this inheritance that Paul says we have among them? Well, look what God told the very *first* Jews, a man named Abraham. Paul says that,

**“...the promise, that he should be the heir *of the world,* was...to Abraham...” (Romans 4:13).**

God promised Abraham and his descendants that they would inherit *the world,* and all the people *in* the world, the Gentiles. They would be their rulers, the veritable rulers of the world.

And we have an inheritance *among* those Jewish rulers of the world. What’s Paul say in ICorinthians 6:2?

**“Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? *and*... the world shall be judged *by you...”***

We *both* are going to rule the world!

So how’s that going to work? Well, remember what Paul says in the very next verse?

**“...we shall judge angels” (I Corinthians 6:3).**

Members of the Body of Christ are going to judge angels in heaven, and the government of heaven is *over* the government of the earth. So we’ll judge the world *through Israel.*

If that’s not clear to you, compare how in the government of the Christian home, you husbands are over your wives, and you wives are over your children. You husbands are the head of the entire home, but you rule your children *through your wives.* And in the same way, we’ll rule *the world* through Israel. If you’re saved, *that’s your future!* We’re going to be *masters of the universe* through Christ.

Now does that make the people of Israel *inferior* to members of the Body of Christ? Well, how many of you husbands think your wives are inferior to you? How many know better than to answer that question!

Godly husbands know that it’s not a matter of inferior or superior. It’s just a matter of how God has structured the Christian home. And the people of Israel aren’t inferior to us either. It’s just the way God has structured the future of the government of the universe.

Now let me ask you a question. If you know all that, if you know you’re going to rule angels in heaven someday, and the world beneath them, are you going to become a grievous wolf and try to become the ruler of a flock of people on earth in order to get their money? Of course not! And neither would Paul, which explains why he went on to tell the elders,

**“I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel” (Acts 20:33).**

Paul understood the *riches* of the inheritance that awaited him in heaven, so he didn’t covet the money that the Ephesian church had in their bank account. He had no problem waiting for the riches God had reserved for him in glory. In fact, he did what it says in verse 34 of our text:

**“Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me” (Acts 20:34).**

As we’ve already seen, Paul was a tentmaker who made tents with his hands, and could pay his *own* way, and meet his *own* expenses in Ephesus. Now does that sound like something a grievous wolf who was after their money would do?

Now that doesn’t mean churches shouldn’t pay pastors. When the Corinthians refused to pay Paul, he reminded them that,

**“...when I was present with you, *and wanted,* I was chargeable to no man: *for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied...”* (IICorinthians 11:9).**

When the Corinthians didn’t pay Paul, he accepted money from the Macedonian church in Philippi. So he believed in letting churches pay him. But he worked as a tentmaker in Ephesus instead, because of something that he talked about in verse 35:

**“I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).**

Paul refused to take money from the Ephesians to show himself to be an example to those elders. Of course, that begs the question of why he didn’t want *them* to draw a paycheck from the Ephesian church if one of *them* became the pastor.

I think it was to help with a temporary situation that existed in Ephesus at that time. You see, there were a *lot* of people who were financially “weak” in the Ephesian church—and it was all Paul’s fault!

Do you have any idea how many people Paul put out of work in Ephesus? Before he came to town, there were men who were making a living as exorcists. But then Paul came along, and this happened:

**“...certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits...We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth....And the evil spirit...*leaped on them...*so that they fled out of that house *naked and wounded”* (Acts 19:13-16).**

After that happened, how many young men in Ephesus do you think said to themselves, “I think I’ll go into exorcism! I hear there’s some real money in that!” On the contrary, Paul *destroyed* that industry.

He destroyed *another* Ephesian industry as well. After Paul put those exorcists out of work, we read,

**“And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and...many...which used curious arts brought their books...*and burned them...*and they counted the price of them, and found it *fifty thousand pieces of silver”* (Acts 19:17,19).**

After that happened, men who printed books about curious arts were *also* suddenly out of work, and so were men who *read* those books and *practiced* those black arts! And Paul positively *clobbered* the #1 industry in Ephesus, the making of silver shrines for the false goddess Diana. When some of those silversmiths got saved and turned in their union cards, *they too* found themselves standing in the unemployment line.

Only in those days, the government didn’t give money to men just because they were unemployed—so Paul told those *elders* to work and give them money! And later he told *the people* in the Ephesian church to help them too when he wrote,

**“Let him that stole steal no more: *but rather let him labour,* working with his hands the thing which is good, *that he may have to give to him that needeth”* (Ephesians 4:28).**

Now there we see men that Paul was *still* putting out of work—*thieves!* Members of the villians, Thieves and Scoundrels Union that Boris Badenof used to talk about on the Rocky and Bullwinkle show. Listen, Ephesus was an *extremely* wealthy city, and where there’s wealth, there’s always going to be *thieves* trying to *steal* that wealth! But when some of those thieves got saved and started working, Paul told *them* to help the weak as well.

And to get the elders to do their part, he tells them to remember the words of the Lord, how He said that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Now here, notice that he didn’t say what I often say to the people in my church. I’ll often say, “Go home and read Ephesians 2,” or whatever passage that will follow up on what I just taught them. Paul couldn’t tell the elders to do that because *those* words of the Lord aren’t *written* in Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, the books that contain the record of His ministry in Israel. But the Lord must have been famous for saying those words, because Paul does tell the elders to remember them.

Now the thing about that quote that people often overlook is that it *is* a blessing *to receive.* If you are in need of money, let God’s people bless you. Let them be a blessing to you. Over the yars, I’ve been helped by people in our church, and I’ve helped a lot of them in turn, and continue to do so. It’s just *more* blessed to give than to receive.

So if you’re looking for a blessing in your life that’s *in addition* to your “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph.1:3), just give money to ab rother who needs it, or receive it when *you* need it!

Helping others must be the highest level of spirituality you can reach, because after saying this, *Paul didn’t say anything more.* Verse 36 says,

**“And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all” (Acts 20:36).**

If you know your New Testament well, you know that the Lord said that the two greatest commandments in the law were: Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself. These elders had no doubt learned to love God when they got saved. Now if they’d just learn to love their neighbors enough to help them, they would reach the highest spirituality they could reach.

Finally, our passage ends by saying,

**“And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him,**

**“Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship” (Acts 20:37,38).**

Now you’d *think* that they’d sorrow most of all to hear that *grievous wolves* were coming! But here’s the thing about that. They could *do* something about that. They couldn’t do anything about Paul’s words that they’d never see him again.

Now is there anything you can learn from that? If things happen to you in your life that you can’t control, *just sorrow like an elder.* There’s nothing wrong with that. But for everything else that happens to you, just *steel your resolve* and determine you’re going to do something about it, as I’m sure these elders did when they heard about that incoming pack of wolves.

And may God grant you the wisdom to know the difference. I say that because I counsel a lot of believers who don’t, and knowing the difference is the secret of happiness. I talk to way too many Christians who are troubled by something in their lives that they can’t control, and they worry themselves sick about it. I try to explain to them that they’d lead *much* happier lives if they just learn to accept the things they cannot change.

In closing, let me tell you something else I learned about sheep this week. Sheep will drink from a puddle that’s filled with the most polluted water you can imagine, unless the shepherd catches them and saves them. And Christians will drink in some of the most polluted doctrines you can imagine without a *pastor* to catch and save *them.* So if your pastor dies or retires, don’t be like some churches I hear about who decide that they don’t really *need* a pastor, because—

Well, you know what they say about dogsled teams, don’t you? Unless you’re the lead dog, the view never changes. Unless you’re the lead dog, all you ever see is the rear end of the dog in front of you, so you have to go where he leads.

And the same is true for a flock of sheep. If they don’t see some tall shepherd towering over them, all they see is the rear end of the sheep in front of them, the one that might lead them right off a cliff. So if you have a faithful man of God serving as your pastor, thank him, pay him, and thank God for him.