

Message Three

(Friday—Evening Session)

Shepherding the Flock of God

(2)

The Charge of the Apostle Paul concerning Shepherding

Scripture Reading: Acts 20:28-31

I. “From Miletus he [Paul] sent word to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church”—Acts 20:17:

- A. The term *elders* indicates something organic, something of life; an elder is a person who is mature in life.
- B. The function of the elders must be something of the Spirit organically—1 Cor. 12:4-7, 28; Rom. 12:8:
 - 1. If the elders take the lead in an organizational way, this indicates that the church has degraded.
 - 2. If the elders live in the spirit by life to nourish, cherish, and shepherd the church, they are not organizational but organic.

II. “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood”—Acts 20:28:

- A. Paul charged the elders to watch and take heed to themselves and to all the flock—vv. 31, 28:
 - 1. The elders need to pay close attention to themselves and to their teaching, holding to the faithful word, which is according to the apostles’ teaching, that they may be able to stop troublesome talkers, calm a tumultuous situation, and fulfill their duty in teaching—1 Tim. 4:16; 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9-14.
 - 2. “There shall be one flock, one Shepherd”—John 10:16:
 - a. The one flock signifies the one church, the one Body of Christ, brought forth by the Lord’s eternal, divine life, which He imparted into His members through His death—vv. 10-18; Eph. 2:14-16; 3:6.
 - b. The Lord’s sheep have received the divine life, and by the divine life the sheep live together as one flock.
 - c. The one flock is not an organization—it is a flocking together in life to be the organic Body of Christ.
 - d. This one flock is the one universal church, the Body of Christ; it no longer belongs to the Jewish fold or the Gentile world but stands by itself as the church of God set apart from the Jews and the Gentiles—1 Cor. 10:32.
 - e. The local churches are the flock of God, His possession, allotted to the elders for their care—1 Pet. 5:2-3.
- B. Paul told the elders that it was the Holy Spirit who had placed them among the flock as overseers—Acts 20:28:

1. The apostles appointed the elders in every church (14:23), but in 20:28 Paul says that the Holy Spirit had placed the elders as overseers to shepherd the church; this indicates that the Holy Spirit was one with the apostles in their appointing of the elders and that the apostles did it according to the leading of the Holy Spirit.
 2. From Paul's word we see that the existence of the churches is altogether due to the Holy Spirit, not due to the apostles; because the Holy Spirit establishes the elders, it is the Holy Spirit who establishes the churches.
- C. Paul charged the elders to shepherd the church of God—v. 28:
1. Although a local church needs administration and management in its business affairs, the main responsibility of the elders is to shepherd—1 Pet. 5:2:
 - a. The local church is like a flock, and the elders are the shepherds to shepherd this flock, taking care of the situation of the flock and meeting the needs.
 - b. The responsibility of the elders as overseers is not to rule over others but to shepherd them, to take all-inclusive tender care of the flock.
 2. The elders should shepherd the church and take care of the church according to the apostles' teaching—Acts 2:42; Titus 1:9:
 - a. The elders should never separate themselves from the apostles' teaching.
 - b. The elders take the lead to put the apostles' teaching into practice.
 3. Shepherding requires teaching, so the elders should teach; for the elders to teach others, they must learn first.
- D. Paul reminded the elders that the church was precious to God, for He had obtained it through His own blood—Acts 20:28:
1. Paul's word here indicates the precious love of God for the church and the preciousness, the exceeding worth, of the church in the eyes of God.
 2. Paul expected that the elders as overseers would treasure the church, as God does.
 3. As those appointed by God to care for the flock of God, the elders need to love the church.
 4. In taking care of a church, we should never take the way of legality but the way of love, the only way which builds up the church—1 Cor. 12:31b—13:13; 8:1.

III. "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among you yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them"—Acts 20:29-30:

- A. To spare the flock is to love the flock with tender care by cherishing and nourishing; the wolves, who are hunting for prey, do not care for the flock in this way but sacrifice the church for their own interests and satisfaction.
- B. The perverted ones among the believers in the church are always used by the devil, who hates the church, to draw the sheep away after them to form another flock.