

**PROPAGATING THE RESURRECTED,
ASCENDED, AND ALL-INCLUSIVE CHRIST
AS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

(Friday—First Morning Session)

Message Four

**Shepherding the Flock of God according to God
by Being Patterns of the Flock**

Scripture Reading: Acts 20:18-38

- I. To shepherd the flock of God according to God is to shepherd the flock of God according to God's desire—1 Pet. 5:1-4:**
- A. We must see that the heart's desire, the good pleasure, of God in His economy is to be the fountain, the source, of living waters to dispense Himself into His chosen people for their satisfaction and enjoyment; the goal of this enjoyment is to produce the church, God's counterpart, as God's increase, God's enlargement, to be God's fullness for His expression—Jer. 2:13; John 3:29-30; Eph. 1:22-23; 3:16-19, 21:
1. Instead of drinking Him to become His increase for His expression, we can become like Israel by forsaking God as the fountain of living waters to hew out cisterns (typifying idols) to replace God as our enjoyment—Jer. 2:13.
 2. An idol is anything within us that we love more than the Lord or that replaces the Lord in our life; whatever we possess, and even whatever we are, can become an idol—Ezek. 14:3; 1 John 5:21.
 3. Our peace, safety, health, and possessions may become idols to us, but God is faithful in His purpose to take these things away so that we might drink of Him as the fountain of living waters; God is faithful in leading us into His economy, and His economy is for us to enjoy Christ, to absorb Christ, to drink Christ, to eat Christ, and to assimilate Christ so that God may increase in us for His expression—1 Cor. 1:9; 5:7-8; 12:12-13; Jer. 2:13.
- B. We must be brought back to the realization that we need Christ as our enjoyment; we also have to help others to know how to enjoy Christ, and we have to bring the distracted believers back to the simplicity of the genuine appreciation, love, and enjoyment of the precious person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as their life and everything—2 Cor. 11:2-3; 1:24; Rev. 2:4, 7:
1. To enjoy Christ as our life supply should be the primary matter in the church life; the content of the church life depends upon the enjoyment of Christ; the more we enjoy Him, the richer the content will be.
 2. First Corinthians is a book on the enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ; the enjoyment of the crucified and resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit solves all the problems in the church—1:2, 9, 24, 30; 2:2; 5:7-8.
- II. We must shepherd the flock of God by being patterns of the flock; the apostle Paul, as a pattern to all the believers, the members of the Body of Christ, lived Christ for His magnification as His continuation—1 Pet. 5:3; Phil. 1:19-21a; Acts 9:4-5, 15; 26:19; 1 Tim. 1:16:**

- A. Paul was a disciple of Christ—seeing Christ, hearing Christ, and learning Christ as the reality is in Jesus—Acts 9:1-19, 25-27; 22:14-15; Eph. 4:20-21.
- B. Paul was a chosen vessel of Christ to contain Him, be filled with Him, and overflow with Him for His fullness—Acts 9:15; 2 Cor. 4:7; Eph. 1:22-23; 3:19.
- C. Paul was a man of prayer—Acts 9:11; 13:1-3; 14:23; 16:13, 25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 28:8; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2.
- D. Paul depended on the Body, doing everything in the Body, through the Body, and for the Body—Acts 9:11-12, 17-18, 25-27; 1 Cor. 1:1; 12:14-27.
- E. Paul practiced calling on the name of the Lord—Acts 9:14, 21; 22:16; 2 Tim. 2:22; Rom. 10:12-13; Phil. 2:9-11.
- F. Paul lived by the all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus (the Spirit of a man with abundant strength for suffering) for his preaching ministry, a ministry of suffering carried out among human beings and for human beings in the human life for the building up of the Body of Christ—John 7:37-39; Acts 9:16; 16:7, 22-34; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24; 2 Cor. 6:4; 11:23; Heb. 6:19-20; 13:13.
- G. Paul lived in his mingled spirit (the divine Spirit mingled with his human spirit as one spirit)—Acts 17:16; 19:21; Rom. 8:4, 6, 16; 1 Cor. 6:17.
- H. Paul was filled with the Spirit of joy, essentially for his existence, and with the Spirit of power, economically for his function—Acts 13:9, 52; Eph. 5:18.
- I. Paul exercised himself to always have a good and pure conscience—Acts 23:1; 24:16; 1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9.
- J. Paul lived a life of always rejoicing in the Lord, praying unceasingly, and thanking Him in everything—Acts 16:25; 27:35; Phil. 4:4; Col. 3:16; 1 Thes. 5:16-18.
- K. Paul was allied with God and assisted by God to speak the gospel boldly in the name of Jesus to spread the testimony of Jesus unto the uttermost part of the earth—Acts 9:20, 27; 26:22-29; 28:31; 1:8; 1 Thes. 2:2; cf. Rom. 15:24, 28.
- L. Paul cherished the saints in the humanity of Jesus and nourished them in the divinity of Christ with all the truths of God’s eternal economy, displaying in his living the word of the Lord Jesus that it is more blessed to give than to receive—Acts 20:18-38; 1 Thes. 2:1-12.
- M. Paul was a pattern to the elders in Ephesus, a pattern of what the elders should be to the church—Acts 20:27-38:
 1. He served the Lord as a slave with all humility and tears and trials—v. 19.
 2. He shepherded the saints by teaching them publicly and from house to house, declaring to them all the counsel of God, all of God’s eternal economy—vv. 20, 26-27.
 3. He was burdened for the elders to see the precious love of God for the church and the preciousness, the exceeding worth, of the church in the eyes of God so that they would treasure the church as God did; he admonished the elders to “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”—v. 28.
 4. He warned the elders concerning the destroyers of the divine building—those who are wolves, not sparing the flock, and those who speak perverted things to draw away the disciples after them—vv. 29-30.

5. He contacted each one of the saints, telling the elders to remember that “for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears”—v. 31.
 6. Because Paul saw that the unique goal of God’s calling is the building up of the Body of Christ and that Christ builds up the Body by the Body, he was a pattern to the elders in Ephesus of functioning to perfect all the saints “unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ,” so that all the saints would grow in life and would function in life according to their measure of life to be a supply of life to cause “the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love”—Eph. 4:11-16.
- N. Paul’s fourth ministry journey (Acts 27—28) shows in a particular way his life of living Christ, magnifying Christ, doing all things in Christ, and pursuing Christ in order to be found in Christ—Phil. 1:19-21a; 3:8-9, 14; 4:13:
1. All during the apostle’s long and unfortunate imprisonment-voyage, the Lord kept the apostle in His ascendancy and enabled him to live a life far beyond the realm of anxiety; this life was fully dignified, with the highest standard of human virtues expressing the most excellent divine attributes—vv. 5-9.
 2. This was Jesus living again on the earth in His divinely enriched humanity! This was the wonderful, excellent, and mysterious God-man, who lived in the Gospels, continuing to live in the Acts through one of His many members! This was a living witness of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and God-exalted Christ!
 3. In Paul’s living and ministry he expressed the very true God, who in Jesus Christ had gone through the processes of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection, and who, as the all-inclusive Spirit, was then living in him and through him—Gal. 1:15-16, 24; 2:20; 3:14; cf. Acts 28:6.
 4. On the sea in the storm, the Lord had made the apostle not only the owner of his fellow voyagers (27:24) but also their life-guarantor and comforter (vv. 22, 25); now, on the land in peace, the Lord made him furthermore not only a magical attraction in the eyes of the superstitious people (28:1-6) but also a healer and a joy to them (vv. 7-10).
 5. The warm welcome that Paul received from the brothers in Rome and the loving care of those in Puteoli (vv. 13-15) show the beautiful Body life that existed in the early days among the churches and apostles:
 - a. Apparently, the apostle, as a prisoner in bonds, had entered the region of the dark capital of the Satan-usurped empire; actually, as the ambassador of Christ with His authority (Eph. 6:20; Matt. 28:18-19), he had come into another part of the participation in the Body life of Christ’s church in the kingdom of God on earth.
 - b. While he was suffering the persecution of religion in the empire of Satan (the satanic chaos in the old creation), he was enjoying the church life in the kingdom of God (the divine economy for the new creation); this was a comfort and an encouragement to him.
- O. The ultimate issue of the church will be the New Jerusalem in eternity future as God’s full and eternal expression; this should be the reality and goal of all

our gospel preaching today as we follow the pattern of the apostle Paul—“proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unhindered”—Acts 28:31.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE SERVICE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ELDERSHIP

We would like to fellowship concerning the eldership. No one among the saints is qualified in himself for the eldership. According to 2 Corinthians 3:5, the apostle Paul says that we are not sufficient of ourselves but that our sufficiency is from God. So all the brothers who bear the responsibility of the eldership should put their trust in the Lord. In order to be faithful to their responsibility, they should spend more time for the church and pay more attention to the saints by visiting them individually.

Acts 20 is the record of a word by Paul addressed to the elders from Ephesus. It was given in Miletus while Paul was on his way back to Jerusalem for the last time. From Miletus Paul sent some to ask the elders in Ephesus to come to him.

Verses 17 through 19 say, “From Miletus he sent word to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they came to him, he said to them, You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you all the time, serving the Lord as a slave with all humility and tears and trials which came upon me by the plots of the Jews.”

At that time Paul and these believers were people absolutely for God. At the same time there was another group of people, the Jews, who claimed to be for God also. These two were in rivalry. The Jews even hated Paul and his followers to such an extent that they plotted and conspired to damage Paul and his ministry.

PAUL BEING A PATTERN TO THE ELDERS

Paul is a real pattern to all the elders. He is a real pattern. Although he himself had never been an elder, he set up a model, a pattern, an example, for the elders whom he had trained. So whatever he spoke about himself, his expectation was that all the elders would follow his steps and imitate what he had been doing. First, Paul said that he was serving the Lord as a slave. The elders all have to serve the Lord as a slave. They are not put into a position of dignity or rank. In the church there is no rank and no position. There is only humility and slavery. Following humility there are tears, not joy and happiness. Then third are the trials that come upon us from other people who claim to be for God and even conspire to undermine the work.

SERVING AS SLAVES

Elders should serve the Lord not just as servants but slaves, losing their right and all kinds of liberty. Actually, to be put into the eldership is to be brought into slavery. We all are slaves to serve the Lord. To serve the Lord here is not to serve the Lord directly but indirectly by serving His people. The elders must pick up the burden of a slave to serve the big family of their Master. We must behave, do things, and even have our being as slaves with all humility.

We should brand ourselves with the word *humility*. We have no right to be proud of anything. Everything that is glorious should go to our Master. He is the only One who is qualified to be proud of anything. We are destined to be humble. To be humble is not an easy thing; to be proud is easy. To be humble and even to be humbled are not a happy thing but a thing of tears.

For the elders never to drop tears for the saints under their care might not be so good. Tears should go along with our humility. We should be humbled by the situation and ready to accept the trials from others.

This portion of the Word spoken by Paul is not only an admonishing word but also a kind of prediction, or foretelling. It is not only a charge but also a foretelling. What is pictured in these few verses is exactly the situation in which we are today. Paul was serving the Lord as a slave with all humility and tears because at his time there were others competing with him. They even plotted to undermine his work, his ministry, and himself, so trials followed.

The elders should not anticipate much comfort but be prepared to face sufferings and trials. On the one hand, we all must pick up the burden of the eldership. Yet on the other hand, we must be ready to face any kind of trial that comes upon us from others. At Paul's time the trials came from the Jews, who were not atheists but those who worshipped God and, in their view, served God.

SHEPHERDING AND TEACHING PUBLICLY AND FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE

Then Acts 20:20 says, "How I did not withhold any of those things that are profitable by not declaring them to you." Paul did not shrink from his duty. He did not withdraw from declaring to the saints anything that was profitable to them. To declare something is more crucial and more important than to merely tell. Paul did a faithful job to declare every bit of God's interests that He had toward His people.

Paul did not withdraw from his responsibility. Rather, he taught the believers publicly in the meetings and privately from house to house.

From now on the elders should do more home visitation. By visiting the homes of the saints, the elders can teach and shepherd the saints. *Teaching* in this verse really means shepherding. In the New Testament, teaching goes along with the matter of shepherding. Shepherding needs the proper teaching.

Among us in the past, our concept was that the elders only manage the church affairs, make decisions, and give announcements. But we have to realize that to manage the business affairs of a local church is secondary.

A local church in its administration does need some management in its business affairs. But the main responsibility of the elders is first to shepherd, as Peter tells us in his first Epistle, chapter 5, verse 2. As we have indicated, shepherding requires teaching, so the elders should also teach (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17). For the elders to teach others, they first of all must be taught. They must learn first.

Just to visit the homes of the saints and tell them to trust in the Lord and believe in Him is not adequate. The elders must read to them some profitable verses, give them some definitions, and teach them with the holy Word. Then they will be edified, established, strengthened, and built up.

To shepherd is not just to give a message. This is neither adequate nor primary. The primary responsibility is to go to the saints and shepherd them in their homes. So Paul set up a pattern for the elders by teaching the saints publicly and from house to house. In Greek *from house to house* means "according to houses." If there is a house, the elders should go. If there are ten houses, they should go to each one to visit each of the saints.

When I was in the Lord's work on mainland China close to fifty years ago, I spent much time visiting people for the gospel to get them saved and going to the saints' homes. By

visiting a home, the real situation of that person's environment could be seen. Then the elders could render them the proper shepherding.

Although we need to mow the lawn, keep our house clean and neat, clean the windows, and vacuum the carpet, do not spend that much time on these things. Rather, we should save some of the time to shepherd the saints. If we go to the homes of the saints to shepherd them, there will be a record of this in the heavens.

DECLARING GOD'S ETERNAL ECONOMY

In Acts 20:27 Paul continued to say, "I did not shrink from declaring to you all the counsel of God." Not only did Paul teach them, care for their interests, and care for the things that were profitable to them, but he declared also God's counsel, God's plan, and God's economy. No doubt, Paul taught the Ephesians a great deal concerning God's New Testament economy.

Similarly, all the elders must learn what God's New Testament economy is and point this out to the saints. By knowing God's eternal economy, most of the saints would then be solidly grounded and deeply rooted. Most Christians today receive only shallow teachings, instructing them to be good, humble, loving, and kind. This is the kind of teaching that you can hear in today's Christianity. The things of God's New Testament economy, God's eternal plan, and God's plan for the church are absolutely lacking among them. Hence, what is needed among us is the proper biblical, divine revelation concerning God's eternal economy.

The elders must learn all the things of God's economy and dive into them. By so doing, they will pick up a real burden. They will be able to comfort the disappointed saints by telling them God's economy. To hear God's economy and receive such a high calling will become a strong comfort and encouragement to the disappointed ones. The problems that we are facing today in the recovery are mainly due to the lack of a deep understanding and realization of God's eternal economy.

Human beings need a goal. In order to have a goal, we need a high vision. Those people who love their country have such a vision. This vision strengthens them, comforts them, and encourages them to pass through all kinds of opposition and attack. We in the Lord's recovery are God's overcomers today, fighting for His kingdom and doing something for His interests. Yet many among us are short of a high view of God's eternal economy.

Once we see the vision, we will become another person because we have such a high calling. This will change our concept concerning our human life and daily life. Because we are short of such a high view, we care for just our family life and daily life. There is not much consideration for God's eternal interests. To impart such a vision merely by general teaching in the meetings is not adequate. It is like a professor speaking to a large class of students. We need some tutors to tutor the saints in details.

If the burden and responsibility of the eldership grow to such an extent that they do not allow you enough time to do your secular job, that might be the time for you to give up your occupation and trust the Lord for your living. I do believe that the Lord will supply you.

OVERSEEING AND SHEPHERDING

In verse 28 Paul admonished the elders to "take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers."

Apparently, it was Paul who appointed them as elders. Actually, it was the Holy Spirit who placed them as overseers. Here Paul uses the term *overseers* instead of *elders*. These two synonyms are used interchangeably. The term *elder* refers to the person, but *overseer* speaks of his responsibility. An overseer should not be sloppy or sleepy but all the time watchful.

He must be aware of the situation of the church and oversee each member of the flock. If so, he will know what the need is and what they should do.

Paul charged the elders not only to teach but also to shepherd the church of God, which God obtained through His own blood. *To obtain* in Greek also denotes “to acquire,” or “purchase.” *His own blood* is a dear term. God considers the church as a treasure that is very dear and precious in His eyes. He loves the church to such an extent that He purchased it with His own blood.

Similarly, the elders should also love the church as God does. Even the parents always save the best things for their dear children. God used His own blood. So we must love the church with this kind of fine feeling and affection.

Verse 29 says, “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.” To spare the flock means that we love the flock with tender care by cherishing and nourishing. However, the wolves would not care for the church in this way. On the contrary, they would sacrifice the church for their own interests and satisfaction. They are wolves hunting for prey.

Verse 30 follows, “And from among you yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them.” Not only will wolves come in from without, but men will rise up from within the church, speaking perverted things.

Throughout the centuries there have been these two classes of negative people. Paul likened one class to wolves and the other class to perverted persons who would rise up from within the church to speak perverted things with the purpose of drawing away disciples after them. These two classes of people were there at Paul’s time, and they are still here today.

Throughout our own history of the past sixty-seven years in mainland China, Taiwan, and the United States, there have been these two classes of people. Romans 16:17 tells us to mark those who make divisions and causes of stumbling.

This word by Paul is not just an admonishing word but a prediction, telling us what would happen. Within a short time, this word transpired at Ephesus (2 Tim. 1:15).

ADMONISHING WITH TEARS NIGHT AND DAY

Finally, Acts 20:31 says, “Therefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears.” Paul not only went to their house, but he also admonished each one of them with tears day and night. The elders among us must pick up a burden to do this day and night. They should go to the homes of the saints and admonish each one with tears.

To admonish with tears is not so easy. At first the saints may not listen to you. Some may listen, yet they would not take your word. Then your word would not be very effective. Quite often one drop of tears may work much better than a thousand words. This is especially true with the sisters. At times, rebuking and advising may not do as much good as dropping your tears.

Paul was a very emotional person. Acts 20 mentions tears twice. In verse 19 Paul served the Lord with humility, tears, and trials. Again in verse 31 he spent three years, night and day, admonishing each one with tears. This kind of admonishing is the necessary responsibility of the elders. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1989, vol. 4, “Talks concerning the Church Services,” pp. 209-215*)