

March 3, 2002 by Steve Brandon



The Pastor's Shepherding Work

Acts 20:16-38

1. Paul's Ministry - Service and Speaking (verses 18-21)
2. Paul's Destiny - Affliction (verses 22-24)
3. Paul's Prophecy - Departure and Danger (verses 25-31)
4. Paul's Security - God and the Word of Grace (verses 32-35)

In the life of any church, there are certain milestone days which people will never forget. I remember when Kent Hughes, pastor of College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, was asked, "In your ministry, what was the best of all days?" Though Kent is now the senior pastor at College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, with a congregation of several thousand, Kent described a day when his small church in California moved into their new building that they just built. The previous day, everybody from the church was together doing some landscaping in the lawn in preparation for the big Sunday. The first worship service in the place was a joyous occasion for him. He said that he would never forget that day. There was such unity in the church. It was a day of celebration for all that God had done in the midst of their congregation (Q/A session of the Workshop on Biblical Exposition, May 4, 2001, Wheaton, Illinois).

Today is such a day for Rock Valley Bible Church. Several of us remember July 2, 1998, when we began meeting at the Pearson's home for a Bible Study praying that God would establish a church in Rockford. Several more of us remember July 2, 2000, when we began meeting at Valley Baptist Church for Sunday evening services. Today, March 3, 2002, we experience another milestone in the life of Rock Valley Bible Church -- our first Sunday morning meeting here at Rockford Christian High School.

A special occasion like this demands a special message. This morning, we will look at Acts 20:16-38, a passage most appropriate for us. It records the account of the apostle Paul bidding farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus. He believed that he would never see these men again (:25). He gives them the advice that they need to shepherd the church, without him. As we depart today from Kishwaukee Bible Church, it is most appropriate for us to look at the apostle Paul's admonitions.

Last week, at Kishwaukee Bible Church, Don Dumbacher gave us some parting words of advice. You remember, Don gave the illustration of a mother, seeking to send her little son or daughter off to school for the first time. Such a mother might say the tender words, "Be careful out there." Not that the words are particularly profound, but they communicate a heart of love and concern. I would like to continue the illustration this morning. Doesn't the son or daughter going off to school for the first time normally respond somehow to the request of the mother? Wouldn't a child normally say, "I will, mom. I'll be careful."

On Sunday I had no opportunity to respond. So this morning I would like to respond to Don's charge to "be careful out there" by expositing Paul's heart for the elders at the church in Ephesus found in Acts 20, verse 18-35. We will see Paul's advice to parallel Don's advice (verses 28 and 31 especially). My method will be to use Paul's words as a springboard to affirm my desires for Rock Valley Bible Church. Just as Paul offered his life as an example for elders to follow, so will I affirm my heart to model the ministry of the apostle Paul. Just as Paul spoke from his heart in his farewell address, so I will speak to you from my heart to yours.

In **verse 16**, we pick up the context of Paul's journeys, "Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost." Paul was near the end of his third missionary journey and found himself in a quandary. He had a great concern for those at Ephesus, where he had spent three years ministering to the people. He really would like to speak with these men one last time. Yet, he was torn, because he really wanted to get to Jerusalem for Pentecost, a huge holiday for the Jewish nation. Jews came from all over to celebrate the feast. Paul wanted to be there when all of the people were in Jerusalem. But his travel itinerary was tight.

His final decision is recorded in **verse 17**, "from [the coastal town of] Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church." The elders traveled south the 30 miles to meet him. When they arrived, Paul spoke to them saying, ...

You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise,

speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build [you] up and to give [you] the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my [own] needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (**verses 18-35**).

This is one of the most tender scenes in all of the Bible. When Paul spoke these words, he knew that he would never see these precious men again. Their response was quite appropriate. "And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they were accompanying him to the ship" (**verses 36-38**).

I can only equate this to the death of Rich Kerns, pastor of Grace Church of DuPage. He became pastor of Grace church in the late 1980's and fully devoted himself to the people of the church. He cared deeply for the people of the church, and worked diligently to shepherd them and help them in their distress. The people loved him dearly. Yet, in the providence of God, cancer took his life when he was in his mid-forties. He had a big impact upon the lives of people at Grace Church. At my father's home Rich's impact is still felt. Dad has a picture on the shelf of he and Rich in conversation with one another when the church was in our home. The people at Grace Church were separated from their loved pastor. The people of Grace Church will never again see Rich Kerns until they join him in glory. But his words continue to ring deep into the hearts of those who knew him. Many at Grace Church still miss him. Such is the picture of Paul's words in this passage. **A dearly loved man is giving his parting advice to those whom he loves greatly.**

Some of you were sad last week, as we were "sent off" from Kishwaukee Bible Church. It isn't easy to separate yourself from dear friends. But you will see many of the people from Kishwaukee Bible Church again and again. We will still make efforts to join with that congregation in other events (i.e. Christmas concert, picnics, Thanksgiving service, other conferences, ...). But Paul would be separated from those at Ephesus forever. Their tender response was appropriate.

Paul's speech to the elders breaks down nicely into four sections. Each new section begins with the words, "and now" (with the exception of the first section). Notice these words in verses 22, 25, and 32. At each new section, he focuses on a different aspect of his advice to the elders. Let's look at the first section, found in verses 18-21. My first point, ...

1. Paul's Ministry - Service and Speaking (verses 18-21)

In these first four verses, we have a summation of Paul's ministry while among the Ephesians. It is a glimpse, if you will, of what pastoral ministry is all about. I want to affirm, with Paul, my heart to this task. Paul gives two characteristics of his ministry. The first is ...

1. A serving ministry (verses 18-19)

In **verse 18**, Paul says, "from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time." This is pastoral ministry -- being with people. The pastors of a church shouldn't be untouchable and unreachable and distant. Pastors should be with the people of the church. We know from verse 31 that Paul was with the Ephesians for three years, night and day with them. The sense here (in verse 18) is that he was with them, serving them, helping them, and teaching them. He wasn't simply in his ivory tower enjoying his Puritans. He wasn't a fly-by-night evangelist, who held a few meetings and left town. He wasn't a seminar speaker, who came into town and spoke about his particular area of expertise at a Bible Conference. Rather, he was with them and among them, as any pastor should be.

This is my desire -- to be with the people of Rock Valley Bible Church. I want to serve you and help you and teach you and guide you and direct you in whatever way that I can. As many of you know, we have established our Friday night dinner ministry, where we are systematically working through the families in the church to be at our house. This is a direct application of this verse. It has been a great time for us to be with you. We plan on continuing this ministry. We want to do whatever we can do to be "with you." That is simply one way. You can help us by inviting me and my family to join you and be with you often.

Paul continues on to describe his serving ministry in **verse 19**, "[I was] serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;" He served with a humble attitude. He wasn't, the high and reverend "apostle Paul." His perspective was that of a lowly servant, who served them with tears and who served them in trials. In other words, Paul wasn't among them for his own glory. Paul served them as a lowly servant, who "considered others as more important than himself" (Phil. 2:3).

Let me affirm to you my desire for this. I'm not in Rockford for myself. I'm not in Rockford for my glory. I'm not in Rockford to build a church for me. I am in Rockford for you. I am here to help you in whatever way that I can. Men without jobs, my heart is with you. Marriages with difficulties, my heart is with you. Difficulties that come? My heart is with you. Families with unbelievers, my heart is with you.

By way of application, let me simply affirm to you that you don't have to call me, "pastor Steve." If you want to, that's fine. If you want your children to address me as "pastor Steve," that's fine. I simply want to work hard at avoiding the dangers of the Pharisees in Jesus' day when they loved being called, "Rabbi," or "Teacher," or "father," or "leader." Jesus said, "One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. ... One is your Father, He who is in heaven. ... One is your Leader, that is Christ. ... But the greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 23:8-11). My name is "Steve." It is the name that my parents gave me. It is what I have been called my whole life. If you call me, "Steve," it helps to put me as one among you, rather than "the most holy reverend Steve."

The second characteristic of Paul's ministry is

2. A speaking ministry (:20-21)

Verse 20 says, "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house." Paul didn't withdraw in his teaching. He didn't fear men in his teaching. His teaching was always profitable. He taught publicly. He taught privately. This was his method: proclaiming, proclaiming, proclaiming, teaching, teaching, teaching. Whatever opportunities he had, he used.

Verse 21 gives a summary of his message, "solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." This was his message to all (both Jews and Greeks). It is very simple. "Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is what Jesus preached, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). This is what Peter preached (see Acts 2:38; 3:18). This is what Paul preached, "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." This is what I endeavor to preach.

I was speaking recently with a pastor who was building a building. He said, "In our stained glass, we are going to have the cry of the reformation, 'Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.'" But, they are going to modify it a little bit to bring in this emphasis of Paul. It will say, "Salvation by grace alone, **through repentant faith** alone, in Christ alone." My heart can say, "Amen" to that stained glass window. This is the message we need to hear.

True faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is always a repentant faith. True faith will always come face to face with God and be broken over sin, which leads to repentance. Next week we will look at this very fact, when Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:3-4). These are those who have been broken before a holy God. These are those who see their sin and realize their bankruptcy before God. These are those who realize that they can do nothing more than confess their sin and cry out to God for forgiveness, and turn from their own self-sufficient posture to a submissive posture before God. This is the repentance and faith of which Paul speaks in verse 21.

My desire for Rock Valley Bible Church is to emulate Paul's ministry by serving you and speaking to you.

The next point comes in verses 22-24, ...

2. Paul's Destiny - Affliction (verses 22-24)

"And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me" (**verses 22-23**).

Paul knew that his ministry was not for ease and comfort. It had been prophesied that Paul would encounter trouble in Jerusalem. Yet, he would face it head on. In chapter 21 we see an example of what these prophecies were like.

And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" (Acts 21:10-11).

Can you imagine this? Paul was told that he was going to die. Their response was appropriate.

And when we had heard this, we as well as the local residents [began] begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!" (Acts 21:10-11).

If I were Paul, I think that I would want pull a Jonah. Be bound in Jerusalem? No thanks. I'm going to Tarshish.

But Paul abandoned everything for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was ready to be bound. Paul was ready to die. On the day of his conversion, Paul was told that this would be his destiny. The Lord said, "He is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:15-16). Paul knew that his ministry was not going to be easy street. Rather, Paul knew that he would suffer greatly for the name of Jesus. This is the call of every minister of the gospel of Christ.

J. C. Ryle wrote, "Let it never surprise us when we hear of faithful ministers of the Gospel being spoken against, hated and reviled. Let us rather remember that they are ordained to bear witness against sin, the world and the devil, and that if they are faithful they cannot help giving offense. It is no disgrace to a minister's character to be disliked by the wicked and ungodly. It is no real honor to a minister to be thought well of by everybody. Those words of our Lord are not considered enough -- 'Woe to you when all men speak well of you' (Luke 6:26)" (Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, pp. 88-89).

Paul was prepared for the difficulties that would await him in Jerusalem, "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God" (**verse 24**). This is the perspective of a shepherd -- willing to give his life for the cause of the "gospel of the grace of God."

If my life was to be governed by self-comfort, self-promotion, and self-preservation, I would not be living here in Rockford, pastoring Rock Valley Bible Church. At Kishwaukee Community Hospital, where I left to come up here, things were comfortable.

- I was earning far more than I needed.
- I was working a job I thoroughly enjoyed.
- We were one of the most stable companies in town.
- With my seniority, my job was secure.
- I lived in my home-town, with lots of friends and family.
- My parents were six homes up the street.
- It was comfortable.

But my life isn't about comfort. My life is about endearing myself. If I wanted to do that, I would still be in DeKalb. God has placed such a burden on my heart to know Him and to make Him known that my life is about accomplishing "the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:24). Today, God's plan for my life is about pastoring Rock Valley Bible Church. I am thrilled with the opportunity to be here with you all. I believe that God has exciting things in store for us, as we see Him build His church. Easy things? No. Thrilling things? Yes. There is nothing that I would rather do, than to be here with you all.

My life is about solemnly testifying "of the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). My life is about testifying that "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). For those of us who have a repentant faith (i.e. verse 21) in Jesus Christ, we no longer stand condemned in our sins. Though we have sinned and deserve eternal punishment in hell forever, almighty, holy, infinite God is not against us, as our sins deserve (Rom. 8:31). God is for us, in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:31). God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all (Rom. 8:32). If He gave His son, "will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). This is the gospel of the grace of God, which "seems too good to be true" (John Piper, sermon from 9/30/2001). But, friends, it is. It is my ministry to keep this message in the fore-front of your mind.

Let's focus our attention on ...

3. Paul's Prophecy - Departure and Danger (verses 25-31)

Prophecy #1 - Departure

Verse 25, "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more." We have already alluded to this. Paul says, "I will never see you again." He is prophesying of his departure from them -- never to see them again. "Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (**verses 26-27**).

Paul's goal was never to create a group of people that would be dependent upon him. He never wanted people to hang on his every word. As such, he didn't want to hold things back from them. He let it all out. He said the he declared "the whole purpose of God." His goal was to entrust those at Ephesus Bible Church with a complete understanding of God's will and intention and plan for mankind, that he might be able to leave them innocent.

He didn't shrink from declaring ...

- ... God's predestinating purpose before the world began.
- ... God's electing love, which predestined some to live.
- ... God's timing in sending His Son as a sacrifice for sins.
- ... God's sovereignty in putting His Son to death.
- ... God's power in keeping us from the evil one.
- ... God's work in conforming us daily into the image of His Son.
- ... God's future display of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
- ... God's purpose from eternity past to eternity future -- the whole counsel of God.

Paul viewed himself as a messenger with a message, who didn't edit the message. What was given to Paul went through him and was delivered to others. My I simply affirm my goal for all of you. When I leave Rock Valley Bible Church, (either by natural causes, when God takes me to be with Him, or by imprisonment, or when you send me to plant another church), my goal is that I might be innocent of the blood of all men, because I have faithfully communicated the whole counsel of God to you. The best way to do this is through expository preaching through the scriptures. To preach topically allows me to chose the topics that I want to preach. To preach expositionally, allows the spirit of God to choose the topics for us.

Notice how Paul describes his message ...

- In verse 21, he spoke about "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."
- In verse 24, he spoke about "the gospel of the grace of God."
- In verse 25, he spoke about "preaching the kingdom."
- In verse 26, he spoke about "declaring ... the whole purpose of God."

Paul sought to bring together all of the Scriptures for those at Ephesus. He taught about what God was doing in the garden of Eden. He taught about God's purpose for Israel and the law. He taught about God's love to Israel's, who didn't believe. He taught about God's faithfulness to send a Savior. He taught about God granting salvation by grace alone through faith

alone in Christ alone. He taught about God's kingdom He is establishing for Himself and for His glory. He taught of the glory God will receive in the ages to come.

Prophecy #2 - Danger

In **verses 29-30**, Paul gives another prophecy of the things to come, "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."

Don's exhortation to us last week was very appropriate when he said, "be careful out there." We need to be careful, because there are wolves out there. There are those who will want to come into our church and ravage it as a wolf would do to a flock of sheep. These wolves will be vicious ("savage") and will show no mercy ("not sparing the flock").

They will attack the leaders of the church by attacking their teaching, their character, their activities. They will seek to attack whatever they can find to stick. They will seek to persuade you to follow them, rather than the leaders here at Rock Valley Bible Church. Often they will come in undetected. Verse 30 indicates that these wolves will arise "from among your own selves." Remember that Paul is here speaking with elders of the church. I believe that Paul is saying that these wolves will come from among the elder board -- among the elders and pastors. When it occurs, it will shock many.

Jesus said that false prophets will "come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matt. 7:15). They keep their lamb-skin on and remain undetected until they are ready to unleash their deadly attack. They remove their lamb skin and bear their vicious teeth. Like a fox in a chicken coop, they destroy many in the church. I have seen this happen. I have seen men come on elder boards and literally destroy the work of the local church.

I ask two things with respect to this. First, your unified support in dealing with the wolves. Paul told Timothy how to deal with unrepentant elders who continue in sin. Paul instructs Timothy to "rebuke [them] in the presence of all" (1 Tim. 5:20). Second, your patience as we identify other men for the pastoral and deacon work. Two verses later, Paul instructs Timothy, "do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others" (1 Tim. 5:22).

If the church at Ephesus wasn't immune to the wolf problem, neither is Rock Valley Bible Church immune either.

Paul gives two instructions to solve the wolf problem. The first is found in **verse 28**, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." The second is found in **verse 31**, "Therefore be on the alert, ..." These commands are practical synonyms. To be on guard is to keep your antennas out looking for potential danger. To be on the alert is to be vigilant, not sleepy.

Paul told these elders to let everything pass under their inspection and let nothing pass which is dangerous to the church. The security guards at airports search each passenger crossing the security counter. The guard who lets a passenger board a plane with a bag full of knives is doing a poor job of being on guard and being on the alert.

But notice the order of Paul's admonition. He exhorts these elders to be diligent in watching over themselves as of primary importance and watching of the flock as secondary importance. Only when an elder diligently watches out for himself will he be able to watch out for others. This is the same order of 1 Tim. 4:16, "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching." Let me simply say that my first and greatest responsibility as a shepherd of Rock Valley Bible Church is the nurture and cultivation of my own heart and life in the presence of God. I have sought to begin every day I "work" with an hour of Bible reading and an hour of prayer. I don't say that to put myself on display. Quite frankly, there are times in which the pressures of what needs to be done overtake this priority. But I realize, beloved, the utter importance my relationship with God as it pertains to my ability to shepherd this church. The fragrance of a Christ anointed ministry is my goal. Someone once said, "It is a frightful thing to perish under the shadow of a gospel pulpit." But, let me add, "It is worse to perish in the pulpit." I realize that to be on guard for the church, I need first to be on guard for myself. That's what Paul says.

Paul concludes in **verse 31**, "... remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears." Paul's perspective of his work was that it was never finished. I feel like my work is never done as well. I simply keep laboring. I want to be a pastor like Paul. I want to be with you and admonish you night and day. I want you to know that I am always available for you. Whenever it is convenient for you, it is convenient for me as well -- I'll make the time.

Many of you know that my day off is Monday, which simply means that I try not to study at all on Monday. I try to serve my wife and be with my children on that day. But don't worry about calling me on my day off. If there is something on your heart you want to discuss, by all means, call me. If it is important to you, trust me, it is important to me. I don't at all see this dichotomy in my life between church and family. My life is one big melting pot. Don't worry, **I won't sacrifice my family for the sake of the church. But, neither will I sacrifice the church for the sake of my family.**

I think about the schedule of many of the men in this room. You work for your employer Monday through Friday. We meet for Men's Equippers on Saturday. We meet for church on Sunday. When is your "day off"? Why should I expect to have a "day off" different than any of you? I had somebody call me at 8pm one night. This person found me in my office and said, "burning the midnight oil, huh?" In my mind, it's part of the night and day thing. I'm not punching a clock, I'm simply doing what it takes to shepherd the flock of God, "which [Jesus] purchased with His own blood" (verse 28).

My labor is well worth my effort. Verse 28 tells us that Jesus purchased the church "with His own blood." We measure the worth of something by what another is willing to pay for it.

- You can purchase a gumball for 5 cents.
- You can purchase a gallon of milk for \$2.
- You can purchase a steak dinner at a restaurant for \$15.
- You can purchase a lawn-mower for \$300.
- You can purchase a new car for \$15,000.
- You can purchase a new house for \$150,000.
- You can build a brand-new church building for \$1,000,000.
- You can purchase the Chicago Bulls for \$500,000,000.
- You can purchase Microsoft for \$10,000,000,000.

How much does it take to purchase the church? All the silver and gold in this world was not enough. It took the precious blood of the spotless lamb of God, Jesus Christ, Himself to purchase the church. All of the silver and gold in the world doesn't match up to this price tag. **We know that the church is precious in God's sight because of what God was willing to pay. Does it not deserve our entire attention and devotion?** It has my attention and devotion!

Finally, let's look at ...

4. Paul's Security - God and the Word of Grace (verses 32-35)

One last time, let's revisit Don's illustration. When a parent sends a child off to some new adventure, what can the parent do? Sure, a parent can say, "be careful." But eventually, the parent must hand the child over to God and pray, "God, I have done all that I can do, I trust that you will guard and protect and help my child in this endeavor." This is what Paul is doing in **verse 32**, "And now, I commend you to God." This word translated "commend," simply means, "to hand over, to give, to entrust" (i.e. see Luke 12:48; 1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:2). Paul says, "I have done all that I can do for you. I now entrust you to God. May He guard and protect and help you in the shepherding the church."

Two weeks ago, I stated that our greatest need at Rock Valley Bible Church is for God. "Unless the LORD builds the house they labor in vain who build it" (Ps. 127:1). It is also true, "Unless the LORD builds the church, they labor in vain who build it" This is a perfect illustration of this point, "I commend you to God," your greatest need. It is a comforting thought! It gives a sense of security knowing that the sovereign God is in control.

But notice also, that Paul entrusts them with, "the word of His grace, which is able to build [you] up and to give [you] the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." This is simply ...

- ... the message of the gospel of the grace of God (verse 24),
- ... the message of repentance and faith (verse 21),
- ... the message of the kingdom, (verse 25),
- ... the whole purpose of God (verse 27).

This is the message that we earn nothing before God, but that in Christ Jesus, every debt has been paid. This is the truth "that sets you free" (John 8:32). We are free to serve God. We are liberated from our old self. Sin is no longer master over us (Rom. 6:14). The word of condemnation simply destroys. The word of grace builds up!

Paul concludes with a few rapid fire comments about his own integrity and sacrifice while among the Ephesians in **verses 33-35**, "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my [own] needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

It could never be said of Paul that he was in the ministry for the money. While shepherding these people in Ephesus, Paul worked a full-time job to support himself. He worked hard as an example. In 1 Corinthians 9:6-18 Paul spoke about his liberty to proclaim the gospel with or without monetary reward. He labored among the people as an example for them. Similarly, I don't covet your money. My path to money is the computer world, not that of a pastor.

We have seen Paul's advice for the pastor in his shepherding work ...

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4. Paul's Security - God and the Word of Grace (verses 32-35)

Such is my pledge as a shepherd of Rock Valley Bible Church.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 3, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.