Equipping Elders (Part 2)

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[0:00] Welcome to Built on God's Word, the preaching and teaching ministry of Highland Park Baptist Church in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.! Pastor Mike Scrivani teaches on Acts 20, verses 33-38.

We're going to finish our study from last week. We're in Acts chapter 20, verses 17-38. I'm going to review quickly the main idea from this text and then the two points before we get to the third point. That's where we'll finish tonight. This is a passage where we see the Apostle Paul doing what he did so well, just ministering and serving to the churches.
He's on his way back to Jerusalem. He knows that the Holy Spirit has informed him that there are sufferings that will await him there.
He doesn't know any other details besides that. But being the man of God that he is, he's going to do the Lord's will. And he knows that part of doing the Lord's will is facing persecution for the faith.
[1:10] That will give him opportunities to continue to share the gospel and fulfill the calling that the Lord has given to him. I want to read this passage and then we will, again, review the main idea in the two points and then spend most of our time in that last one.

Now, from Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them, you yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews.
How I did not shrink back from declaring to you anything that was profitable in teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.
And now behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.
But I do not count my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course in the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.
[2:25] And now behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.
Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.
I coveted no one silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things, I have shown you that by working hard in this way, we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.
And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all. They embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again.
[3:52] And they accompanied him to the ship. So again, just for review, Paul is meeting here with the elders of the church in Ephesus.

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And Paul had spent a long amount of time for him in Ephesus pastoring that church. He knew these men. He had probably was the one whom the Lord used to share the gospel with him and through whom's preaching they were saved.
So they had a close relationship. And in this text, we see an elder at work through his encouragement to other elders in the church.
And so again, the word elder, pastor, and overseer are used interchangeably in the New Testament. We see that in this text. The example we have in scriptures of churches is that they are led by elders.
And again, one of those examples is in our text tonight. Paul calls for the elders of the church in Ephesus. And they are called overseers here. Their duty to care for the flock implies a pastoral role.
[5:11] And in 1 Timothy 3, 1-7 and Titus 1, 5-9, we have a list of the qualifications that Paul gives to Timothy and to Titus to use as they evaluate men to serve as elders in the church.

1 Peter 5, 1-9, there Peter commands the elders to shepherd the flock of God. So the model we see in scripture in churches is that they were served by a plurality of elders, multiple elders who worked together to provide spiritual oversight of the congregation that they were called to shepherd, to pastor together.
The main idea for this portion of scripture is Paul equips the Ephesian elders to fight the good fight for the faith. Paul equips the Ephesian elders to fight the good fight of the faith.
In verses 17 through 24, Paul equips the Ephesian elders by reminding them of his example. So there in those verses we see how Paul is equipping these men by reminding them of the example that he had set for them.
He had shown them, he had demonstrated to them how an elder is supposed to lead and pastor the church. And then secondly, in verses 25 through 32, Paul equips the Ephesian elders by exhorting them to care for the church.
[6:46] He's told them that they need to be paying careful attention to themselves. They need to be paying careful attention to their church members because he is sure that once he leaves, fierce wolves will come in and seek to undo the work that has been done there to lead believers away from the truth, to snatch them and drag them away.

And then he even tells them, even among your own selves might be these wolves. You might be truly a wolf disguised as such. And so there's that warning.
And so he's exhorting them to pay careful attention to themselves, to the church that God has called them to pastor together.
So now we come to the third point here and how Paul equips the Ephesian elders. Paul equips here the Ephesian elders by encouraging them to follow his example.
So there's a little bit of a repeat here. Once again, he's using himself as the example and he's encouraging them as they serve the church, as they pastor it together, to follow his example.
[7:59] So let's look again at verse 32. 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.

The Greek word translated as commend means to place beside, to set before, to entrust and to commit.
This same Greek word was used to describe how the disciples set the multiplied bread and fish before the crowds in Mark 6, 41 and 8, 6 through 7 and then Luke 9, 16.
In those cases, the disciples were the agents of distributing the food that the Lord miraculously provided for the people. This word is also used or understood in a different sense back then as well, a related sense.
In the Greco-Roman world, this word was used to describe depositing valuables with a trusted guardian. So if you had something of value, maybe you were going to be gone, whatever the case, you wanted somebody to protect your treasure, your valuable, then you would give it to this person and you would trust, you would believe that they would keep it safe.
[9:29] Paul uses the term here in a spiritual sense as a sacred stewardship and a sacred trust. On the one hand, Paul commits to the Ephesian elders the word of God's grace.

They have been entrusted by him with the gospel, with the scriptures, with the doctrines that they are to guard against fierce wolves who are false teachers.
And again, as he said, they are those who teach twisted things to draw away the disciples after them in Acts 20, verse 30. On the other hand, the elders are to set God's word before God's people.

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In their preaching, teaching, instructing, guiding, directing, and in their decision making, they are to set God's word before God's people to feed them, to nourish them, providing them with the spiritual nourishment they need to grow and develop as disciples of Jesus Christ.
Paul gives this same instruction to Timothy and mentions the names of two men whose teaching contradicted the sound doctrine that had been entrusted to them.
[10:57] In 1 Timothy 1, 18-20, he says, Later on in 2 Timothy 2, 1-2, Paul says, Timothy was to identify men in the church who possessed Christ-like character and who were able to teach God's word to serve as elders in the church.

Elders today have the same sacred trust. They are to pay careful attention to themselves, and they are to identify men in the church who possess the qualifications mentioned in Scripture.
If an elder is to feed and protect the flock of God, then he must know Scripture well.
He must be a student of God's word. 1 Timothy 3, 14-15 says, How do we know how one ought to behave?
We do by knowing God's word. If elders don't know, or if they don't trust that Scripture is God's word, then they won't be an example to others, and they will not be able to teach God's word to God's people, and as a result, people won't know how they ought to behave in the church, in God's household.
[13:13] In which case, the pillar collapses, and the church loses its power and its purpose. When I was in seminary, I was in preaching class, and this was the class before we preached.

Our teacher called it the laboratory, where we're learning how to organize a sermon. We're learning how to use the tools we've been given to understand the meaning of the text, and then how to organize that into a sermon, and the work that's involved with that.
So I was, at the time, a youth pastor in a United Methodist Church, and I was curious to know how our pastor organized or prepared his sermons, and he told me that he, like a lot of United Methodist pastors did, and I'm sure they still do, use a liturgy where you have this as the text for the week.
He said, I'd look at that, and then I'd find one word that sticks out to me, and I'd write a sermon on that. It's like, okay, thank you. Good to know.
I will not be doing that. And it was no surprise, just the spiritual state that our church was in, because our congregation wasn't fed well, and honestly, they didn't really want to be fed well.
[14:36] That's why they were there. But again, elders have the important job of preparing and presenting and feeding the flock so that they are healthy, that they are nourished, and that they know God's word, and how they ought to behave in the household of God.

And just as an aside here, too, elders should name false teachers by name, especially today with things like YouTube and the prevalence of Christian conferences and Christian books, and I'll put that in air quotes.
Hopefully what is being put before the church develops an appetite within the members for healthy food that nourishes and builds them up spiritually, and then they're able to distinguish between what is good for me and what is bad for me.
Cotton candy tastes good, but it's not good for you. A diet of cotton candy will rot all of your teeth, and you'll be going to the doctor a lot, right? James, you kind of hum there like, I'm sorry, is that your plan?
Is to eat cotton candy all the time? Those days are long. Anyhow, a diet of cotton candy is not good for you, and a diet of false teaching is even worse.
[16:00] But again, elders should not be afraid to name these people by name, because how else are people in the church to know who is a teacher they can trust and who is one that they can't?

As 1 Peter 2, 2 through 3 says, like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.
And so if you have been fed well, you will have an appetite for what is good because of how it's helped you grow and develop your understanding of God's word as a student of scripture, and you develop an appetite for that, for that alone.
The inheritance Paul speaks of in verse 32 is the blessing of the consummation of salvation. which is being glorified with Christ in the new heaven and the new earth, which will be untouched and unstained by sin.
Paul encourages the elders to focus on the main task that they've been entrusted with, protecting the church from false teachers, feeding the sheep, putting God's word, the truth consistently before

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them.
[17:15] The spiritual growth and development of the flock is the task that the elders should be most preoccupied with. Notice that Paul doesn't say anything to these elders about budgets.

He doesn't give any instruction to these elders about buildings or bulletins or any other thing. Not that they aren't important, but they aren't what is most important.
verses 33 through 34, Paul says, again, talking of his example, I coveted no one silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and those who were with me.
In a final retrospective of his ministry spent in the church in Ephesus, Paul asserts here before them again his integrity, especially on financial matters.
Paul's ministry, his service to the Lord and the church, his efforts to share the gospel and to pastor the church was not, and the other churches, was not motivated by a desire for money.
[18:30] He didn't expect to be paid for his missionary and pastoral work. Eckerd Schnabel said, Paul did accept gifts from other churches after he had left them, and he cites 2 Corinthians 11, 8 through 9 and Philippians 4, 15 through 16, but not from the people among whom he was preaching the gospel.

Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that he provided for his own needs as well as for the needs of his coworkers. In 1 Timothy 5, 17 through 18, and 1 Corinthians 9, 13 through 14, Paul teaches that those elders who primarily have the task of regularly preaching God's word should be compensated by the church, but for them, and really for all believers, we should not be primarily motivated by what we do for money.
Money should not be our primary motivator. Jesus said in Matthew 6, 24, no one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.
You cannot serve God and money. Hebrews 13, 5 says, keep your life free from love of money and be content with what you have, for he has said, I will never leave you or forsake you.
And this is important because love of money has always characterized false teachers. In the Old Testament and in the New Testament and in our time, the primary motivator of a false teacher is money.
[20:08] Isaiah 56, 11 says, the dogs have a mighty appetite, they never have enough, but they are shepherds who have no understanding, they have all turned to their own way, each to his own gain, one and all.

So he's talking about the leaders of Israel there. Jeremiah 6, 13 says, for from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely.
Micah 3, 11 says, its heads give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets practice divination for money, yet they lean on the Lord and said, is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us. In the New Testament, Paul described false teachers in Titus 1, 11 as those who must be silenced since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.
Peter also warns against false teachers in their greed in 2 Peter 2, 3. There he says, in their greed, they will exploit you with false words, their condemnation from long ago is not idle and their destruction is not asleep.
[21:24] So when you are listening to someone preach, whether that's in our church or on TV or on YouTube or whatever it is, if they talk a lot about money, and primarily they talk about money, and if they ask you to give them money, alarm bells should be going off in your mind, in your heart.

They are telling you that if you give them money, God will give you money, that God will bless you. But in reality, they don't care about you.
They don't care about the people who are sending them money. They are making money off of those people. They are motivated by greed and material gain.
They do not care for the flock of God. So, again, if you're listening to someone, whoever it is, if they're talking a lot about money and they are asking you to send them money, then turn off whatever you're listening to.
If they're present with you, just get up and walk out because that is the primary motivation of a false teacher. Verse 35, In all things, I have shown you that by working hard in this way, we must help the

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weak and remember the words of the Lord, how he himself said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.
[23:01] Paul's care for his coworkers and those in need is a model for the Ephesian elders to follow and for elders today. In all things, he said, he showed them that Christians, in particular, leaders of the church must support the weak in the church by hard work.

Now, the weak here can refer to those who physically were ill or perhaps suffered from some kind of physical disability that prevented them from being able to work with their hands and provide for themselves to meet their needs.
It can also describe someone who's experienced some kind of personal incapacity or limitation causing them to not be able to work and lack material things that they need to survive.
However, if a person is capable of working and providing for their needs, the Bible says that they should. Paul gives this instruction several times in the letters that he wrote.
Ephesians 4.28 says, let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.
[24:21] 1 Thessalonians 4.11-12 And to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands as we instructed you so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

2 Thessalonians 3.10-12 He says, For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at your work, but busy bodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.
And then in 1 Timothy 5.8 He says that primarily if someone is in need, then it's the family who should be the first to step up and help meet that need. But if anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
At the end of verse 35, Paul quotes an instruction from Jesus that's not found in any of the Gospels. Certainly, Jesus said many more things than are recorded in Scripture.
In fact, John says that if we could record everything that Jesus said and did, that there wouldn't be enough books in the world to contain all of these things. And so we know that Jesus said things that aren't recorded in Scripture and this is one of those things that he said.
[25:46] But certainly, knowing what Jesus did say in the Gospels, what is recorded in there, this is not at all out of line with something that Jesus would teach. Those who can give to those truly in need should do so.

And more importantly, they will be truly content and blessed if they use their resources for the benefit of others who are not as fortunate as them because in doing so, they will be following Jesus' example and demonstrating that Jesus is who they most love and the one whom they most treasure.
Luke's report of the meeting of Paul and the Ephesian elders ends with a farewell scene in verses 36 through 38. Again, verse 36 says, And when he said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.
the structure of the Greek sentence here indicates that after Paul had spoken, he and the other elders of the church in Ephesus knelt down together as Paul led them in prayer.
Now, as Christians, you don't have to kneel every time that you pray, but when possible, I think especially when you are praying alone, kneeling is an appropriate gesture because it communicates humility.
[27:23] Kneeling communicates that the one who is being kneeled to is superior. And so, in prayer, as we've seen in our study in the book of Hebrews on Sunday mornings, in Christ, yes, we are to come boldly and confidently before the throne of God's grace in our time of need, but we still must be reverential when we do that.

Understanding that while God is our Father, that He is also holy. And while Christ is our brother, He is also our Lord, and He is our Master.
And so, we should pray in bold confidence humility. Not thinking that we are in position to command God, that God is a genie, and that we can just tell Him what to do, but expressing our need to Him, humbly asking for His help, and trusting in faith that He will provide it so long as what is being prayed for is in accordance with His will and His word.

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prayer. Sometimes I've heard in conversations with different Christians that prayer can be hard for them. It can be hard for them because they know God is sovereign, and in their mind they think, well, God has determined the end from the beginning, His will will be done, so why should I pray? Or they feel like their prayers are kind of like just following the same formula, you know, I pray for this and this and this and this and the other thing, to which I say it's good that you are praying, don't want to discourage anybody from praying, but this is what I've found to be helpful.
[29:18] Sometimes if I feel like, you know, where do I start, or maybe I've prayed for these things, this is what helps me, is when I'm reading God's word, to be praying through God's word as I read it.

And man, once that starts happening, it's flowing and it's awesome because you know, you're reading God's word, you're praying God's word, back to him, you know, reading these commands, reading these instructions, Lord, help me to do this.
Lord, praying for other people, that helps me. If you haven't done that before, I encourage you to do that. Pray before you read the Bible, that's good, but then pray as you're reading the Bible, and man, that's just, I've learned to do that and so thankful for some sermon I read, somebody encouraged doing that, and ever since then, I've found that time to be even more rich and good for me.
So try that if you're stuck, if you feel like you're in a prayer slump, just try that. Verse 37 says, and there was much weeping on the part of all, they embraced Paul, and they kissed him.
So clearly this was a very emotional scene. these men loved each other as brothers in Christ. They spent a lot of time together serving the Lord.
[30:41] I'm sure many, again, if not all of them, were saved by the Lord through Paul's preaching, the gospel. They were discipled by Paul.

He was their mentor. And so no doubt, I'm sure, they did not want to see him go. Paul, we see here, shared their sorrow.
But sometimes doing God's will means separating from those we love. Obviously, in this culture, kissing was a socially acceptable practice among men, as it still is in many other cultures.
In our case, a handshake, a hug, a pat on the back is sufficient. I had a friend in seminary again from India and he said that where he was from in his village and his community, it wasn't uncommon for two guys who were friends to just, you'd be walking together and you'd just grab the other guy's hand and you'd just be holding hands and walking together.
It's like, wow, that's really neat. In your culture, don't do that in our culture. You know, just walking next to you will be fine with me. We don't need to hold hands in class. You're our brother in Christ.
[31:55] I love you know, some things don't cross over in cultures. What makes this parting different is what we read in verse 38.

Being sorrowful most of all because of the word that Paul had spoken to them that they would not see his face again and they accompanied him to the ship. So it was hard enough for these men knowing that Paul was leaving but harder still was realizing that they wouldn't ever see his face again.
And again, they were uncertain exactly of what awaited Paul in Jerusalem. And so understandably these men were grieved.
Sometimes doing God's will means leaving and it means saying goodbye to people that we love. And it's hard. But even if we never see the face of that brother or sister in Christ again in this life, we know that we can look forward to spending our eternity with them, with the Lord forever.
So here we see in this text, Paul spent his final moments with these elders and he spent his final moments with them, equipping them, encouraging them, reminding them of his example, that they would fight the good fight for the faith.
[33:28] And in doing so, he's shown those who serve as elders an example of what it looks like to shepherd the flock. And to church members, this is what we should expect from the leaders in our church.

Elders, pastors, aren't CEOs, they aren't celebrities, they aren't life coaches, they are shepherds. As a church, we must continue to build up our understanding of the role of an elder pastor based on what the Bible says, not what we see in culture.
Elders have Paul's example, they have his exhortation of what to do and how to do it, and they have his encouragement to follow Jesus who is the great and good shepherd.

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Lord, let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this time that we've been able to have together and to pray for people in our church and to look at your word and think about its instruction and how to apply it to our own lives.
And Lord, we thank you for the men that you call to serve as elders in the church. Lord, thank you for those who are faithful, who aren't afraid to speak the truth, but who do so in a loving way as we see the example in your servant Paul's life.
[35:01] Lord, we pray that for our church, God, for our elders, that they would be encouraged to follow this example. Lord, that all of us would just be mindful that whatever teaching we are taking in and are receiving is in line with your word and is right.

And if not, Lord, help us to do what we need to do just to protect our congregation and our members from the influence of false teachers and from Satan's influence creeping into our congregation.
Lord, our desire is that we would be a church that pleases you in what we teach and what we do, the decisions that we make and decisions that we don't make.
So, Lord, thank you for this congregation. Thank you for our members. And, Lord, help us to keep our focus on you, the hope that we have in you that endures all things.
And, Father, we pray that you would be glorified in our lives and in our church. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. To learn more, visit us in person or see the website at highlandparkbaptist.net.

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