

SHAPING SHEPHERDS (Acts 20:25-38)

A. **What did Paul say & do** to shape the shepherds in Ephesus?

I. BY HIS EXAMPLE

[There's a key phrase that gives us insight as to how Paul shaped these shepherds (35).]

A. "*I have shown you... the whole counsel of God*" (26-27).

1. "Shunned" means to withdraw oneself; to be timid, cower, shrink, hesitate to avow what they believe (Thayer).
2. I think he remembered Ezekiel's warning from God (Ezek 3:16-21).

3. Notice the individual attention Paul gave these shepherds (31).

4. Notice the stewardship of God's word Paul entrusted to them (32).

5. Shepherds must be men of the Book; they must have a deep commitment to it.

B. "*I have shown you... in every way*" (33-35).

1. "I showed you everything I did. My life was an open book. I was an out-front example setter."
2. Paul's shaping of these shepherds wasn't just talk; it was walk, it was living, it was lifestyle. He didn't just proclaim the new man in Christ, Paul modeled it.

3. He showed them that the shepherd's ministry is about giving, not receiving accolades or honor.

4. {Pause} There is nothing that can damage a shepherd's credibility with the flock more than acting out of self-interest.

5. What Paul is saying is that shepherds need to be out among the sheep where they can see the manner of their lives & the unselfish concern & interest they have for the sheep.

6. That's also the only way to shape the next generation of shepherds in the church.

[So a man doesn't become a shepherd just by hearing sermons. He studies enough to be able to teach the whole counsel of God, & then he accepts the challenge of being an example "*in every way*" that "*it is more blessed to give than to receive*".

What was the second thing Paul did to shape these shepherds?]

II. BY HIS EXHORTATION

A. "*Take heed to yourselves...watch*" (28, 31).

1. Before Paul came on the scene preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is likely that some of these men were silversmiths making trinkets for the worship of Diana; they may have been sorcerers practicing magical arts, & even unabashed idolaters.

2. So it's no wonder that Paul had to exhort them to "take heed to" themselves!

3. The lesson for shepherds today, is that they cannot be blind to their weaknesses.

4. Shepherds have to be keenly aware at all times of the ways in which Satan can snare them & gain advantage over them.
 5. Jesus gave His disciples that exhortation (Luke 21:34).
 6. Paul shaped Timothy to be an evangelist with similar words (1 Tim 4:16).
 7. So it's not enough for a shepherd to be doctrinally sound; he's got to keep an eye on his life; he must "take heed" keep "watch" over himself.
 8. Shepherds – deacons too – are to be men whose lives are above reproach; they're not appointed just to perform a function; they are to be models of Jesus' disciples.
 9. When we appoint shepherds & deacons, we're not just trying to fill a certain number of positions, we are supposed to appoint men whose lives are holy.
 10. There is no leadership apart from holiness, because a shepherd's authority does not come from his title, but from his life.
 11. People will follow or imitate a life, but they can only acknowledge a title!
 12. So if a shepherd does not "take heed" & "watch" over his life, he cannot be a true shepherd in the Lord's church – even though he may have a title.
- [The second exhortation Paul used to shape the shepherds at Ephesus...]

B. *“Take heed to ... all the flock”* (28-30).

1. Paul was not just giving a glib warning, the very thing he warned about happened.
2. A few years later, Paul wrote to the evangelist Timothy who was “stationed” in the church at Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3).
3. And then a few years after that, in a second letter to Timothy, Paul’s prophecy was already evident (2 Tim 2:17-18).
4. That’s the reason we don’t recklessly extend fellowship to everyone.
5. Shepherds have the right & responsibility to determine the lines of fellowship, because they are charged with making sure that wolves don’t get into the flock!

6. There are 3 things shepherds need to remember in taking on the responsibility of determining local church fellowship.
 - a. 1st - The flock doesn’t belong to them, it belongs to Jesus (John 21:15-17).
 - The church is not a political party used to achieve anyone’s agenda.
 - b. 2nd - The flock belongs to Jesus, He shed His blood to secure ownership (28).
 - Something to keep in mind when the sheep wander & need recovery.
 - c. 3rd - Shepherds are not accountable to the flock, but to the Holy Spirit... (28).

- Shepherds dare not sit around passively waiting to discover which way the sheep want them to lead.
- That may be what the sheep want, & that's certainly what the wolves want, but shepherds must be proactive in leading the flock away from the spiritual wolves & toward green pastures of spiritual nutrition.

[How did these shepherds from Ephesus feel about Paul's pointed message? Did they resent him?

No, they knelt down & prayed, they wept freely, & they fell on Paul's neck & kissed him.

They did not resent the fact that Paul aggressively shaped their shepherding!

I want to close quickly with two lessons.]

III. TWO FINAL POINTS

A. **To the sheep:** We can't avoid danger by avoiding our shepherds.

1. Why do you think the Lord picked sheep as his image of us?
2. A vine is a beautiful thing. We like to be compared to a vine. But sheep?
3. Sheep are not the smartest of creatures, they are dirty & defenseless.
4. The only way a sheep can keep itself safe is by staying next to the shepherd; if they wander off they will die ([Heb 13:17](#)).

B. **To the shepherds:** you cannot watch the sheep unless they can see you.

1. Shepherds are leaders, & a leader is someone who has another someone, maybe more than one person, following him.
2. In order for the sheep to be able to follow the shepherd(s), the sheep must be able to see how the shepherd lives his life – in as many circumstances as possible.
3. More than at assembly times, during times of visitation & occasions of hospitality, the sheep will be able to see how the shepherd behaves under many varying scenarios.

[So the spiritual shepherd must always be visible to the flock he is shepherding (we know that's the case in the literal shepherding of sheep – don't we?).]

CLOSING

The famous football coach of Notre Dame, Knute Rockne, was well known for his fiery & enthusiastic halftime speeches.

But is that why his teams won so many games & national titles?

Rockne said (paraphrasing), “That’s not it, I’ve seen a lot of teams with enthusiasm lose games. Enthusiasm is no substitute for talent.”

One time Rockne sent the opposing team (Army) the plays he was going to use against them, but Notre Dame still won the game handily.

Rockne said, “It’s not the plays that win games, it’s the execution. You can know what we’re going to do, but if we do it right you can’t stop us.”

Lesson: The devil could marshal all his forces against the church, but if we execute the Lord’s playbook not even Satan can’t stop us.

You can’t stop a well shepherded flock from growing & reproducing. No secret strategy is necessary, it just takes a lot of wisdom & dedication to the Lord’s revealed playbook.

1 Peter 5:1-4 (NIV) – To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings & one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.
