

Safe House
Acts 20:27-31
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I. Good Shepherd v. 27

- a. Purpose- Divine Will or counsel
- b. This counsel is predetermined and inflexible; Both phrases emphasize the resolute and inviolable determinateness of the decree.
- c. All the counsel of God that concerned Paul's work and nothing inconsistent with the purpose of God of redemption through Christ Jesus
 - i. Here it must refer to the saving purpose of God for the human race. Paul has proclaimed this in its entirety

II. God's Shepherds v. 28

- a. Overseer - refers to one who has a definite function or fixed office of guardianship and related activity within a group. The term was taken over in Christian communities in to one who served as overseer or supervisor, with special interest in guarding the apostolic tradition
 - i. In answer to the first question we may note that the wandering, charismatic preachers of the Gospel, the apostles, prophets and teachers, are never called ἐπίσκοποι. This title arises only where there are settled local congregations in which regular acts are performed.
 - ii. A second major issue in v. 28 is the meaning of the word episkopos, which is translated "overseer" in the NIV but which has often been translated "bishop." A monarchical bishop ruling over a number of congregations is clearly not in view. Such an organization does not seem to have developed until the second century. In the New Testament, where the term episkopos is used of a church office, it seems to be virtually interchangeable with the term "elder" (presbyteros). That would seem to be the case here, since the Ephesian leaders are denoted "elders" in v. 17. In this instance, however, the term may not be used to denote an office at all but rather a function—that of overseeing the flock.
 - iii. These shepherds are the leaders of the local church (πρεσβύτεροι in 1 Pt. 5:1; Ac. 20:17; ἐπίσκοποι in Ac. 20:28)
 - iv. Here it is closely connected with the work of a shepherd. Elsewhere in the NT the word ἐπίσκοπος is used at 1 Peter 2:25 (of Christ or God, in parallel with ποιμήν) and at Titus 1:7 (where it is certainly used of elders); 1 Tim. 3:2 (where it is probably used of elders; see Pastoral Epistles 32, 58); Phil. 1:1 (along with διάκονοι, and with no reference in the epistle to πρεσβύτεροι). Its general equivalence (but not synonymity) with elder is clear.

- v. that their calling to be bishops comes from the Holy Spirit. This does not exclude either election (cf. Ac. 1:21 ff.; 6:3 ff.) or appointment by an apostle, possibly Paul himself (Ac. 14:23). The decisive point, however, is the work of the Holy Spirit on which the sending and authority of their episcopate rest.
 - 1. Paul may appoint elders, but only those whom the Holy Spirit has already singled out and has thus himself appointed. The ministry is not appointed from below, nor from above if this means by those already ministers; the Holy Spirit is at work in the church choosing and preparing by his gifts those who are to be ministers. The Holy Spirit appointed them in order that they might shepherd
 - 2. Most likely the reference here indicates that church office was viewed more functionally than formally. Those who were recognized by the congregation as having been gifted by the Spirit for a particular role were selected for that responsibility (cf. Eph 4:11f.; also Acts 11:22–26; 13:2–3).
 - vi. To be sure, Paul in Ac. 20:28 is simply depicting the work and task of responsible men in the congregation. But he is already directing his words to a definite circle whose members may be called πρεσβύτεροι or ἐπίσκοποι in distinction from others. And these men know that they are called. The office is already present in substance. It has not yet been given a permanent name. But this will soon come.
- b. Shepherd -
- i. to watch out for other people, to shepherd, of activity that protects, rules, governs, fosters, sense of lead, guide, or rule
 - ii. Only once in the NT are congregational leaders called shepherds, namely, in the list of offices in Eph. 4:11. The absence of art. before the διδασκάλους which follows (τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους) shows that the pastors and teachers form a single group, obviously because they both minister to the individual congregation. The term “shepherd,” however, is not yet an established title in Eph. 4:11; this is obvious once the usage of Eph. 4:11 is set in a broader framework.
 - iii. leaders are called shepherds; the same is true of passages in which the verb ποιμαίνειν is used for the work of such leaders (1 Pt. 5:2; Ac. 20:28; Jn. 21:16) or the noun ποίμνιον is used for the congregation.
 - iv. The pastor’s task is to care for the congregation (Ac. 20:28; 1 Pt. 5:2–4;), to seek the lost (Mt. 18:12–14; cf. 12:30 Lk. 11:23), and to combat heresy (Ac. 20:29 f.). The fulfillment of this task by the pastor is to be an example for the flock, 1 Pt. 5:3.
- c. Guard to be in a state of alert, be concerned about, care for, take care hold your mind on yourselves

- i. to be in a continuous state of readiness to learn of any future danger, need, or error, and to respond appropriately—‘to pay attention to, to keep on the lookout for, to be alert for, to be on one’s guard against
 - ii. in itself means to direct the mind towards, to give thought to, but this naturally extends along the line of with a view to the advantage of, take thought for. Here the elders are bidden in the first instance to take thought for themselves, that is, to maintain the quality and integrity of their own Christian life, and in the second place to take thought for the church in which they hold a responsible position
- d. Be On Alert –
 - i. recalls apocalyptic passages in the gospels (especially Mk 13:34, 35, 37, and parallels), in Paul (especially 1 Thess. 5:6), and elsewhere (e.g. Rev. 3:2, 3; 16:15); it is significant that here it refers not to watchful preparedness for the coming of the Son of man at the End but to vigilance in caring for the continuing life of the church.

III. Sheep v. 28

- a. Flock- a defined group of persons under a leader, flock the followers of Christ constituting a well-defined membership group—‘people who are like a flock’
 - i. Group of believers who resided and gathered in Ephesus
- b. Church of God - the global community of Christians, (universal) church Mission
 - i. Purchased - to gain possession of, acquire, obtain, gain for oneself
 - 1. Its meaning in the OT and NT seems to be prevailingly ‘save alive’, or ‘rescue from destruction’. This observation is justified; see e.g. Isa. 31:5, περιποιήσεται καὶ σώσει; 43:21, λαοῦ μου ὃν περιεποιησάμην; also Luke’s own use at Lk. 17:33. Marshall adds Ps. 74 (73):2, ‘which significantly follows a verse in which Israel is likened to a flock’. The two ideas are very close together: God acquired a people by saving them.
 - ii. With His Own Blood- with the blood of his own,” “his own” referring to Christ, God’s own beloved Son. This is grammatically arguable and perhaps the best solution for those who find the reference to “God’s own blood” unlikely for Paul or for Acts

III. Wolves v. 29-30

- a. Savage - being of unbearable temperament, fierce, cruel
- b. Wolves shows that the error is not a minor evil but represents a mortal threat to the community which has to be averted
 - i. In the NT λύκος is found in the warning of our Lord against false prophets in Mt. 7:15: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves (λύκοι ἄρπαγες).” Since these false prophets seem to belong to the community, and turn this

appearance to destructive ends (wolves in sheep's clothing), the reference is to false teachers. The criterion by which to distinguish between appearance and reality is offered in the accompanying saying about the tree and its fruits

- ii. Jesus had already so described false teachers who would raven the fold (John 10:12). Whether Paul had in mind the Judaizers who had given him so much trouble in Antioch, Jerusalem, Galatia, Corinth or the Gnostics the shadow of whose coming he already foresaw is not perfectly clear.
- iii. From yourselves - But it is not only from intruders from outside that false teaching will proceed: from their own ranks some will arise to seduce their followers into heretical by-paths. That this development did in fact take place at Ephesus is evident from the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 1:19–20; 4:1–3; 2 Tim. 2:17–18; 3:1–9) and from the letter to the Ephesian church in Revelation. In 2 Tim. 1:15 mention is made of a general revolt against Paul and his teaching throughout the province of Asia; and in the apocalyptic letter the church of Ephesus is reproached for having abandoned the love it had at first (Revelations 2:4).
- iv. The early Christian writings appear to be influenced by Jesus' warning against false prophets who come in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15). That false teachers did soon arise to prey upon the Asian churches is well attested by Eph. 5:6–14 and Col 2:8 as well as by the Letter to Ephesus in Rev 2:2. The Letters to Timothy, which related to the Ephesian church, confirm Paul's prediction that some from the church's own ranks would succumb to such false doctrines and draw other Christians with them (v. 30) .