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PAUL'S HEART REVEALED.

– SEPT. 19. – ACTS 20:22-35. –

"Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." – Acts 20:35.

PERHAPS no other words give us a clearer insight into the heart of the Apostle Paul than his address to the elders of the Church at Ephesus. They show us what were the moving impulses of his active life. He sought not for ease or fame or worldly pleasure. He was thoroughly imbued with his Master's holy spirit which delighted in honoring God and doing good to all, regardless of earthly reward, persecutions, insults, slander and misrepresentations.

In our lesson for August 29th we saw how the Apostle "endured a great fight of affliction" at Ephesus, just as he was about to start for Macedonia. It is supposed that he spent about ten months in Macedonia and Greece, visiting the Churches of Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and Corinth, besides extending his labors into other cities further north, not previously reached, but where some interest had been awakened by others. Having gone the rounds, he was now on his way to Jerusalem with the collections of the Churches of Macedonia and Corinth. His time was limited, if he would reach Jerusalem in season for the Passover, and hence instead of going overland and visiting the Churches of Asia-Minor, he continued his course by sea and sent word from Miletus, the seaport, to Ephesus, inviting the Elders of the Church there to [R2221 : page 279] come to him: and this lesson is Luke's report of his discourse to them.

God made known to the Apostle the fact that something extraordinary was to befall him at Jerusalem, as a consequence of which he would never again have the privilege of meeting these dear brethren in the flesh. This made the present meeting with the elders

or representatives of the Church a specially impressive one, and at the end of his talk his auditors were in tears.

Wishing to stimulate these dear brethren who, inasmuch as they were chosen as elders or special servants of the Church, may be regarded as amongst the most earnest and zealous of the Lord's people in Ephesus, the Apostle very briefly refreshes their minds on a subject already well known to them; – his own methods and course as a minister of Christ. He would impart to them some of his own spirit of consecration – the Master's spirit – that they might be the more faithful as servants of the Lord and of his people. He reminds them, but not boastfully, of his own humility of mind in serving the Church; how he kept back nothing that was profitable to them, but on the contrary sought to impart to all the same knowledge of the divine character and plan which he himself enjoyed, and how he had not affected a superior wisdom that made peculiar statements without submitting the proofs. The inference is left for his hearers that they would thenceforth have an increased responsibility and should seek to follow the same heaven directed course.

While telling them that his trials were not over, but that evidently worse things awaited him, he courageously declares, "But none of these things move me, [R2221 : page 280] neither do I count my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy and [fulfil] the ministry that I received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel by the grace of God."

After calling their attention to his own faithfulness in keeping back nothing that would be profitable, and thus making sure that he was free from responsibility in respect to any that might fall away, he exhorts his hearers to take heed, to be careful **(1)** of themselves: that they might make their own calling and election sure; that they might so walk in the footsteps of the Master that they would be acceptable to him. And **(2)** they should remember that, having accepted special appointment as ministers, they had an added responsibility on behalf

of the Lord's flock. Oh, that all the servants of the Lord's cause might take this exhortation to heart, and feel the responsibility that rests upon all who minister in holy things. (And this will apply in a still wider sense, for every brother and every sister is to some extent his brother's and sister's keeper, and is commissioned to help in watching over the Lord's flock.) The Apostle points out that their commission is not merely that of the Church which selected them to be its servants in holy things, but that they became representatives of the holy spirit, and are therefore not to think lightly of the responsibility which they have accepted. The whole Church of the consecrated are begotten of the spirit, and hence their conscientious action in selecting their Elders, according to divine direction, is to be considered the work and selection of the holy spirit.

The object of the appointment of these elders, as the Apostle points out, was to *feed* the Church of Christ; to bring to the attention of the flock the green pastures and still waters of divine truth. They are not commissioned to pen them up in human sects and thus hinder the sheep from pasturing upon the Lord's provision. Neither are they to consider the sheep as so much mutton whereoff they may feed themselves, and from whom they may shear the golden fleece for their own benefit: they are to remember that the Church is not theirs, but God's, which he purchased with the precious blood. They are therefore to conduct themselves as servants or ministers of the Lord's flock, and not as its lords and masters.

Speaking prophetically, the Apostle declares his knowledge of the fact that greedy wolves would get in amongst the flock, and full of selfishness would be reckless of the interests of the sheep, and careful only of their own interests. These are some of the "wolves" which deceptively present themselves "in sheep's clothing," for otherwise the sheep would be on guard against them. And still worse than this the Apostle prophesies, – there would arise amongst themselves certain "heady" ones who, desirous of name and fame, would preach errors in order to "draw away disciples after them."

Alas, how true this prophecy has proved, applicable not only to the Church at Ephesus but to the Church all the way down, from then until now! How few like the Apostle seem willing to preach not themselves, but Christ, and not human philosophies (their own or those of other men) but the cross of Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God to every one that believeth. And the Apostle points out that he had been guarding them and the whole Church along these lines for three years.

These, he says, will speak *perverse things*; – that is, they will distort the truth, to make it harmonize with some theory which they have accepted and which they wish to impress upon others, thereby exalting themselves as the discoverers of new light. No less than five of these false teachers who arose in the Church of Ephesus, some before and some after, are mentioned in the Apostle's epistles to Timothy, – Hymeneus, Alexander, Phygellus, Hermogenes and Philetus. – 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:17.

Under the circumstances, realizing the trials that were coming upon them, and that he would be unable to share these with them, what commendation would the Apostle give to these representatives of the Church? He gave them grand advice in these words, "I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Ah yes, there can be no better recommendation to any than this – to keep close to the divine Word, and to take heed lest they twist or wrest the Scriptures, and thus blind themselves and make ready for the Adversary to lead them further into darkness. The Apostle thus points out to them that they are not yet ready for the heavenly inheritance; that they must first be built up in sanctification; and that the spirit of the Lord's Word permeating them will more and more produce this sanctification of heart and life.

What a noble testimony by the grace of God Paul was enabled to give: "I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel." He not only

had used his trade as a tent-maker for his own support, but also to help financially those who were associated with him in the gospel work. Praise God for so noble an example of devotion! For altho the Apostle could not and did not endure more, nor as much, as his Redeemer, and is not to be considered as a superior example, nevertheless the illustration of a full devotion which his life affords does us great good; for we remember that our Lord was perfect, – holy, harmless, separate from sinners; but the Apostle declares that he had "like passions" with ourselves; – he was imperfect, and obliged to keep [R2221 : page 281] his "body under," in subjection to his new mind, the will of God in Christ.

And now we come to the grandest expression of the whole discourse: "I have showed you [illustrated to you, in] all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Would that these words might be deeply graven upon all our memories. The world's rule, the general disposition of the fallen nature, is to give adherence or support to the strong, and expect weaker ones to rally around and support or uphold us. This is self-pleasing – the way of the fallen nature: but the method of the "new creatures" is to be the reverse of this – they are to be on the lookout for the welfare, interests and comforts of others, especially in their own families; and applying the Apostle's words to the Church they inculcate carefulness for the weaker members of the "household of faith." Each of the stronger should take pleasure in helping the weaker and the less learned, and so far as possible in bringing all up to the stature of manhood in Christ.

And the Apostle here shows that the secret of his success as a servant of the Lord, and the reason why his life could be pointed to as a pattern, was that he was remembering and putting into practice the words of the Great Teacher. The art of *giving himself* is one of the secrets of a happy Christian life. He first gives his will to the Lord, then his time, his energy, his talents, to the service of the Lord and for

the Lord's people. He has pleasure in the giving and a blessing, whether others know and appreciate it or not; and by and by his time for receiving will come, – the Lord's time for giving. The Lord will give unto such eternal life, eternal glory and association with himself in his Kingdom.

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