

"Farewell – Part 3: Wolves, Thieves & Shepherds"
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November 14, 2021

"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 every 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 coveted no one's 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. And they accompanied him to the ship." (Acts 20:28-38)

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Review the qualifications for elders found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and how elders will be called to give an accounting to God found in Hebrews 13:17 because "they are keeping watch over your souls". Scripture tells me that I am to "obey...and submit" to them. Is that my first response when church elders provide direction to the church body? If so, how so? If not, why not?

What does it mean to me when I'm reminded that "the church of God...[was] obtained with [Jesus'] own blood"? Explain.

John Piper once told this story: "I have been moved deeply recently in reading about the life of Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Many of you know about him. Some don't. He was a German, born in 1700, who founded a community of earnest Christians called Herrnhut ("The Lord's Watch"). The community became part of the Moravian Church and was best known for its unparalleled missionary zeal. In 1727 the community started a round the clock "prayer watch" that lasted unbroken for 100 years. There were about 300 persons in the community at the beginning, and various ones covenanted to pray for one of the 24 hours in the day. In 1792, 65 years later, with the lamp of prayer still burning, the little community had sent out 300 missionaries to the unreached peoples of the West Indies, Greenland, Lapland, Turkey, and North America. They were utterly, and radically dedicated to making Jesus known.

I mention this not only because I dream of a church saturated with prayer and sold out utterly to Christ and ready to leave everything for his call. I mention it this morning because behind this community at Herrnhut there was an experience of deep humbling, and cleansing, and power based on the blood of Jesus. After Zinzendorf had finished the university, he took a trip throughout Europe looking at some of the cultural high-spots. And something very unexpected happened. In the art museum at Dusseldorf he saw a painting by Domenico Feti entitled "Ecce Homo" ("Behold the Man"). It was a portrait of Christ with the crown of thorns pressed down on his head and blood running down his face. Beneath the portrait were the words, "I have done this for you; what have you done for me?" All of his life Zinzendorf looked back to that encounter as utterly life-changing. As he stood there, as it were, watching his Savior suffer and bleed, he said to himself, "I have loved him for a long time, but I have never actually done anything for him. From now on I will do whatever he leads me to do...So I ask [] does your heart beat with his heart this morning? Are you pursuing in your life the things he bled to obtain?" Pastor Wally said that, having been blood bought, I need to realize just how precious ("Of great price; costly, Of great value or worth - Webster, 1828) I am to Jesus, but can I ever truly understand how precious I am to Him, if I don't understand just how precious He is to me? Explain.

Titus 2:14 says, "He gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds." (Emphasis added.) Does that describe me? Explain.

Does this describe this church? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Pastor Wally said that church is not an activity, but rather it's who we are day-to-day. In what ways, if any, has church become an "activity" in my life and why?

Elders (and the church) are to keep watch for "fierce wolves" who attack the flock to kill, confuse, and scatter the flock. What are some of the 21st century "wolves" for which we need to watch out for?

Ephesians 6:12 tells me that "...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." I'm not dueling with these enemies from 20 paces and I'm not even sparing in a ring with them; I'm down on the mat, in physical contact with the enemy "wrestling". And then there is Mark 5:9 where Jesus confronted the spirit possessing a man who told Jesus "My name is Legion: for we are many." Spurgeon once pointed out that: "[w]e do not know how numerous these evil spirits are, but there is reason to believe that there are very many of them, so that it will be no easy task to overcome them—and it is no wonder that there is so much evil in the world when there are so many evil spirits constantly seeking to lead men astray. The next idea connected with the name, "Legion," is that of organization, for a Roman legion was not merely a large band of soldiers, but it was a thoroughly organized band of several thousands of men who had taken the oath of allegiance to the Roman emperor and who yielded implicit obedience to the centurions and other officers who were placed in authority over them...The name, "Legion," also suggest a great band of soldiers marshaled for war—not a company of people engaged in peaceful avocations, but an armed host marching to battle at their commander's orders! The Roman legionnaires were protected with heavy armor and they carried short sharp swords with which they did terrible execution. When they went forth to war, it was as when a tornado sweeps away the stubble or a fire sets a forest ablaze until it is utterly consumed... It would be impossible for us to be victors in this dread conflict had we not on our side One who is more mighty than all who can be against us!" One of the first rules a soldier learns to know your enemy. How well do I know my true enemy ("And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)?)

Pastor Wally spoke of thieves (sheep stealers), those who draw people away from the flock by "speaking twisted things" (by perverting the Word of God) that are spoken of in 2 Peter 2:1-3 ("But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.") Before going into battle, a soldier checks his equipment and cleans his weapon and sharpens his knife. What weapons do I have to combat "sheep stealers" and how well am I maintaining my weapons to use against them?

Paul earned his own keep. He didn't rely on the support of others, though he had every right to do so. He showed his commitment to the ministry 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.'" Pastor Wally spoke of the 3 a.m. call for help and how he will take that call (and not because "it's his job"). How about me? Will I take that call for help regardless of the hour? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Pastor Wally said that I am to “work hard to encourage and help others” (“And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. 1 Thessalonians 5:14) So, if I’m going to do that or do that better, what do I need to start (or stop) doing?

Which is more difficult for me: to correct someone, to encourage someone, to help others or be patient with them and why?

Pastor Wally said that I need to “trust Jesus and actively receive (seize) the Word of His grace daily. Paul commended the elders in Ephesus to “God and to the word of his grace” ...to Scripture which will “build you up” and “give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” Pastor Wally said that the foundation upon which my life is to be built my life must be the Bible. Is God’s Word truly my foundation or have I laid some other foundation (e.g., a career, my family, wealth) and am trying to make Scripture an “add-on” to that foundation? Explain.

If needed, am I willing to abandon my current “building project” so that I can start over with the right foundation?

In Revelation 2:1-3 Pastor Wally pointed out how the church in Ephesus had responded to Paul’s instructions but went on to point out what Jesus had against the church of Ephesus found in Revelation 2:4-5. Pastor Wally believes that the first love they had abandoned reflects that they had become “mechanical” in what they did as a church. As we draw close to Thanksgiving and the Christmas season, are there things that I do simply because I always do it (e.g., attending the Christmas Eve service)?