

## 34. The whole counsel of God

March 30, 2014

I think our culture today could be described as an “ABC” culture: “Anything But Christ.” You can talk about religions in general, people would tolerate it somewhat. But if you start to talk about what Christ has done in your life, all of a sudden, they consider you like a cockroach. They want to exterminate you for good.

If I tell those people that they were no different than the idol worshipers of Ephesus in Asia Minor 2000 years ago, they might be offended because they consider themselves “very sophisticated 21st Century intelligent people” and they take pride in it. But in reality, they are no different than the idol worshipers of Ephesus in rejecting the truth and believing and following just about “anything but Christ.”

People still believe in false gods. Those gods may no longer be forms of statues to fall down and worship, but people still put other people or things in the place of the true living and loving God. They want to find some religious system that will please their lost and empty hearts desperately. So they choose a little bit from Christianity, a little bit from this religion and that one. They make their own religion to satisfy one’s hearts. In other words, the focal point of their worship is themselves.

When it comes to the Word of God and following the Lord, we cannot pick and choose what we want. This is not a buffet course, either you follow the Lord wholeheartedly or you don’t; either you take the entire Word of God or you don’t. That is what apostle Paul taught the believers in Ephesus while he was there.

As he was about to leave the leaders of that church at Miletus to go to Jerusalem, he reminded them how he lived, how he taught them, and gave them stern warnings for their future. I believe that the Lord will speak to us clearly how we should take the whole counsel of God that comes from His Word.

### A. A SOLEMN DECLARATION

*Acts 20:25-28 And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. 28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

The word “preach” originally carries the meaning of declaring a message as the herald of a king. The witness tells what has happened to him or the situation, but a herald declares what the king tells him to declare. That is exactly what Paul did – declaring the Good News of the Almighty King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In chapter 18, Paul already stated that he was like the watchman on the walls to give warnings. As a watchman of God, he had to stay awake and alert, ready to sound the alarm if he saw danger approaching. He had to be faithful, not fearful, because the safety of many people rested with him. Unfortunately, we have today many unfaithful watchmen who think only of themselves.

From time to time, you guys have heard me telling you the names of some Bible teachers or pastors for their false theologies. Some of you may not like the idea of

me going against fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord. I do not apologize for what I said, because I've never said that they are not saved. I do not judge their salvation status because it is not my place to judge it, but I can alert and warn you of their dangerous false doctrines as a watchman of God.

I take my job as a watchman of this church very seriously. But this job doesn't stop with me, but it extends to all of you who are the followers of Jesus Christ. If you see your brothers and sisters in the Lord heading to any spiritual danger, it is your obligation to warn them lovingly.

*Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*

Let's go back to the very important verse:

*Acts 20:27 For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.*

What did Paul mean when he said, "declare to you the whole counsel of God"? It means that he taught everything the Lord told him to do for the Ephesian believers without leaving anything behind.

Sometimes there is a temptation for a pastor or Bible teacher to only speak on the topics that personally appeal to him. But for me as the pastor of this church, I have a solemn responsibility to declare the whole counsel of God and feed the flock of God.

That is the advantage of expository preaching and teaching. By expository, I mean taking the text and letting it unfold from the first verse of the Book of the Bible to the last verse. I don't impose my views on the Scripture text; I just let the text impose its views on all of us. It is not for us to add things to the text. As we study the Bible verse by verse, chapter by chapter, Book by Book, we get to have the Whole Counsel of God as He intended.

As many of you already know that the Bible, the Word of God is a collection of 66 different Books – a compilation of 39 Books in the Old Testament and 27 Books in the New Testament. All these 66 Books in the Bible are consistently pointing to One person: Jesus Christ. The Word of God was written over a period of approximately 2000 years, covering over 60 some generations and written in three languages – Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic.

When the Lord allowed His people to put together these 66 Books into one binding, He did it with His unsearchable judgments and unfathomable ways. In other words, it's way above our pay grade and comprehension but for our own good. Taking the Word of God as is in its entirety is extremely important for us.

But many preachers today simply use a Bible text as a launching pad, and then go on to say what they want or what the people want to hear. Others throw in a few Bible quotations to illustrate their points, or to illustrate their stories. The pastor who preaches what his audience wants to hear, and not the whole counsel of God, hurts both his congregation and himself. Yet the real calling of a pastor is to simply let the Bible speak for itself and let it declare its own power.

One of the new believers who has come to know Christ as her Savior and Lord recently told me, "I've been in many churches. I went into those churches with an

empty heart, and left there emptier. But I heard the Word of God here and came to know the Lord Jesus." That is the power of the Word of God.

## **B. A SOLEMN WARNING**

*Acts 20:29-38 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. 32 So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. 34 Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. 35 I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" 36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, 38 sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.*

In v29-30, Paul gave them two warnings:

### **1) Savage wolves from outside – v29**

Paul was telling them that a pastor, a leader among God's people has to do more than only feed and lead – he also has to protect the flock against false teachers and their false doctrines, because they exploit the church for personal gain.

If someone comes to you and tells you that he or she has received a special message or revelation from the Lord, please be careful. If what they say contradicts the Word of God in context, discard their message and do not associate with them again, because the Lord's message will never contradict His own Word, the Bible.

### **2) Perverse danger from inside – v30**

It is a lot easier for a pastor to deal with the wolves that come from the outside. But it is much more difficult to deal with those who rise up from within the church.

We had our share of it in our church. About ten years ago we had a man who wanted to be a pastor so bad that he was able to draw away a handful of people after himself with his slick words. He always used the phrase, "the Spirit led" to justify his ungodly acts. Within a month of their gathering, those people realized that they'd been had, but too proud to admit that they were wrong. Later I found out that this man had done the same kind of thing in three different churches in Tucson and Sahuarita.

By the way, the Greek word for 'perverse' is "diastrepho" of which definition is "distort, to turn aside from the right path." What a description of the word! Imagine how these men listening to Paul would have received this. I am sure that they were looking at each other and wondering who that perverse person was like the disciples of Jesus did.

I just love the honesty, integrity, and transparency of Paul in v31 through 35. Paul's style of leadership was neither distant nor secretive. He lived among them. They knew his home address, his cell phone number, his email address and his Facebook

page. He talked to them. He didn't preach a sermon and then conveniently slip out the back door during the last song of the service. He remained approachable, accessible, and real. His life was an open book. Most would agree, that kind of leader is refreshing. He had nothing to prove, no secrets to hide, no pretense or air of self-importance, never feeling compelled to remind others of his qualifications for the job. That was Paul.

Out of v34 and 35, we can tell that Paul was not covetous, nor was he lazy and expected others to provide his luxury. Covetousness means a consuming and controlling desire for what others have and for more of what we ourselves already have. "You shall not covet" is the last of the Ten Commandments, but if we do covet, we will end up breaking all the other nine. Those who covet will steal, lie, and murder to get what they want, and even dishonor their own parents. Covetousness is idolatry and it is a serious sin.

This reminds me of "3 S" that destroy men and women of God:

**1) Sloth** – Most often some men and women of God put themselves on the spiritual plateau where they start to think that they have arrived and they don't have to work for the Lord so much as before. They start to become lazy and complacent. This is the gateway for other sins.

**2) Silver** – It represents 'Greed and covetousness'. Many men and women of God allow themselves to fall into this trap because they desire more than what the Lord allocated to them.

*1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

**3) Sex** – This represents 'adultery' and 'fornication.' By the way, ladies, don't you ever think that this problem is only limited to men. In case you haven't noticed, it takes two to tango. I've seen godly women get sexually involved with men other than their husbands. This can happen to anyone.

In v35, Paul said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." If you look for this comment by Jesus in the four Gospels, you will not find it. Does it mean that apostle Paul just lied to us? No way, Jose. Remember what apostle John said at the end of his Gospel? It must have been one of Jesus' comments that was not recorded in the Gospels.

*John 21:25 And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.*

You see, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us how to be blessed; here the same Jesus tells us how to be more blessed. In other words, the blessing does not come in accumulating wealth, but in sharing it. After all, Jesus became poor that we might become rich.

*2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.*

If you are not tithing to the church, nor do you help others because you are greedy, I feel sorry for you, because you are robbing your own blessings by not giving.

### **C. APPLICATIONS**

1) Let your godly character grow through the Word of God everyday.

Reputation is what others think about you; character is what God knows about you.

2) Whether you are a leader of a ministry or not, as a follower of Christ, let your life be honest and full of integrity that others may give glory to the Lord.