

Portrait Of A Pastor – Part 3

Acts 20:27-38

Pastor John Miller

I want you to go back to Acts 20:17 to set the stage. Luke says, “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus,” that’s about 28 miles along the coast there. It says that he, “called the elders of the church.” What happens from verses 18-38 is that Paul meets with a group of elders. We saw that the elder is synonymous with a pastor and the overseer. We’re going to get that in verse 28 tonight, where he talks about “...the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God,” that’s where we get our word “pastor.” It means to feed or to shepherd. I believe that these three terms are synonymous, and I want you to get that. Elders, which speaks of the presbytery, are mature believers; the word “overseer,” where we get our word bishops or Episcopalian from, means the oversight of the church; the word “feed,” where we get our word pastor, the words “pastor” and “feed” convey the same concept. The word “pastor” is latin, but it means to shepherd or to feed the church. This is an office in the church. There are two offices: elder, pastor, or overseer, and the other is that of a deacon. The qualifications for these men (and they are to be men) are given to us in 1 Timothy and Titus. These are pastoral epistles describing the qualities of these individuals.

It’s interesting that God has established His church, and He has established leadership in His church. God has established the home and leadership in the home—the head of the wife is the husband. God has established government, and we’re to be subject to the powers that be; and He has also established the church. These are divine institutions. I know that they get corrupt and perverted, but God has established that we are submitted to those who are in authority. It’s important to be a part of a local church. The New Testament knows nothing of a lone-ranger Christianity. “Well, I like Jesus, but I don’t like the church,” or “I’m a Christian, but I don’t like Christians, and I’m not a part of a church.” No. We need to be part of a family. We need to be in the flock of God. The church is described as the building, a habitation of God through the Spirit. The church is also described as the bride of Christ and the body of Christ. One of the beautiful metaphors in the Bible is that we are the body and Christ is the head, and we’re to be united to Him and united to one another. We all have individual parts in the body to be used to be His hand extended here on earth. The Bible teaches that the local church is important. God has established these spiritual leaders over this church, and God wants them to be shepherds after His own heart.

Let me just remind you of the three divisions. In verses 18-21, Paul describes his past ministry. It’s that of humility, faithfulness of preaching and teaching the Word of God, and he was serving the Lord. In verses 22-27, last week we looked at Paul’s present ministry among them there in Ephesus. Notice in verse 27 he says, “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” He was teaching and preaching to them the Bible, and he was teaching the whole Bible in a balanced way. He wasn’t riding any hobbyhorses. He was teaching the whole Word of God. We move into the third and last division of this farewell speech of Paul to these elders at Ephesus. By the way, this is the only speech, so-called, or teaching (it’s really more of

a speech that Paul gave in the book of Acts) where he spoke solely to believers. In other cases there were always unbelievers listening in and he's preaching the gospel; but he's talking only to believers, and they were pastors or spiritual leaders. The last division is verses 28-38, and that's what we look at tonight, Paul's warning about the future. That's the essence of what he's going to say. He's going to warn these spiritual leaders about the dangers that lurk in the future for them. The focus shifts from Paul to the pastors in Ephesus. He's not talking so much about himself, he does do that, but the focus is on them and what they need to be and do.

If you're taking notes, we're going to look at five truths that should characterize their ministry and their lives—five truths that should characterize every pastor and every believer as we serve the Lord Jesus Christ. The first characteristic is they should not neglect their own souls. Write that down. They must make sure that they stay close to God and stay strong in their relationship to the Lord and not neglect their own souls. Look at verse 28. He says, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves," stop right there. You say, "You're not getting very far." That's my first point—take heed therefore unto yourselves. In other words, don't neglect your own walk with God. Let me give you some very important advice. It can happen so easily. You can get so busy serving the Lord and others that you don't take time to feed your own heart and to feed your own soul. What quite often can happen, and it happens to pastors, is that they're preparing sermons, counseling, and doing the work of the ministry, but they don't take time to stay close to God and stay strong in their walk with the Lord. What happens is they get familiar with holy things, but their hearts grow cold and they drift away from God.

People are often asking me, "Pastor John, what can we pray for when we pray for you?" You can put that right on the top of your list, that God would help keep my heart on fire for Him, that I wouldn't grow cold in my love for Jesus, that I wouldn't drift away from the Lord, that I would take time to pray, that I would take time to read His Word, that I wouldn't just read the Bible looking for sermons, that I wouldn't listen to other sermons thinking, I can steal that for myself, but that I would actually take it in as food for my own soul. Believe it or not, there's a lot of ministers that are drifted far from God, and they are ministering to other people in their marriages but their marriages are a disaster. They're telling other people how to live the Christian life, but they are not living the Christian life themselves.

This can happen to you. You can get busy teaching Sunday school, maybe you're a greeter or an usher, maybe you're working around here at Revival, maybe you're a missionary or a pastor and you get so busy, yet you've drifted far from God. It's not real in your own life. Don't neglect your own walk with God. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves," you do that by spending time alone with God in prayer and listening to Him speak through His Word. Don't get overconfident. That happens too often. "Well, I know the Bible. I've been in ministry for years. I'm a strong Christian. I can't fall." The Bible says, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Our most vulnerable dangerous times are when we think we're strong. Now, don't raise your hand but if I were to say, "How many of you feel like you're a strong Christian?" and you raise your hand, "Oh, yeah. I'm a strong Christian." Watch out! Take heed.

Remember when David was older and was walking that one spring day upon the roof of his

house? All of his mighty men were out fighting battles, but David was walking on the rooftop. He looked over in the courtyard and saw a beautiful woman taking a bath and lusted after her, longed after her, and sent his servants to go get her. He went in unto her, committed adultery, and then committed murder to cover his sin. David, writing about that said, "For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." David was the one who wrote these beautiful psalms. David was the one who penned these psalms of praise. He was the sweet psalmist of Israel, but he committed one of the most heinous and horrible sins recorded in the Bible. He committed adultery and murder to try to cover his sin. Read Psalm 51. It's when David finally repented of his sin, and he cried out to God, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me...take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." It's so dangerous that we can drift away from God, so I want you to just do a little self-evaluation. If you're serving the Lord tonight, do you know Him?

The second thing that Paul tells them is that they need to keep watch over the church, verse 28. It's twofold. He says, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves," or take watch to yourselves, but then notice secondly (verse 28), "and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you," and here's that word, "overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." He gives them some instruction. They are not only to take heed to themselves, but they're to take heed of watching over the church. One of the most important things for a pastor to have is a love for the church. If you're going to be a shepherd, you have to love sheep, right? It's kind of hard to be a shepherd and you don't like sheep, so a pastor needs to love God's people, needs to love the church, and needs to have a love for the church. All these years of ministry and all the problems that I've seen in the church, but I still love the church. It belongs to God. It's the apple of His eye. It's the bride of Christ, and I want to be spent and spend for the work of expanding the church, blessing the church, and strengthening the church. It's so important that a pastor have a high view of the church.

I want you to notice some things in verse 28. He says the church is a flock. He uses that metaphor, "and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers." The Bible makes it clear that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Actually, in the Greek it's He's the Shepherd, the Good One. I like that. He's the Good One. There's bad ones and He's the Good One, and we as pastors are undershepherds. He has entrusted to us the care, protection, and the feeding of His flock—a metaphor picture of the church. Notice also the Holy Spirit appointed them overseers. No man is a pastor, elder, bishop, overseer by self appointment. It has to be an appointment by God. There has to be a call of God. It has to be ordained of God. We make a lot of ordination on man's side, but the Bible only refers to God being the One who ordains.

I have a little card (I've never used it. I haven't used it in 40 years) which says: The Reverend John Miller. I don't use that term. People don't call me Reverend. I did a wedding for a friend once and to get me he signed a check, an honorary and thank-you check, for doing his wedding. I didn't really see how he made it out. He made it out: To The Right, Most Holy Reverend. I'll never forget it. I went to the bank and just endorsed it real quick on the back, "John Miller," and went to cash it. The teller says, "Pastor Miller, you're going to have to write it

the way it's done." That's what he was trying to get to me. He was laughing. He knew I was going to be embarrassed, so I had to write, "To The Right, Most Holy, Reverend, John Miller," you know.

Ordination is of God, it's not of man. If God has called you to ministry, nothing can get in the way. You have to trust Him. You have to look to Him by faith. You have to prepare your heart saying, "Lord, here am I, use me." God is the One who raises us up and puts us in positions of authority. The Bible says, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." He's the One that raises us up. We can't be self-appointed. It's not something that we do of our choosing. The other week I talked about you only go into the ministry if you can't do anything else, and by that I didn't mean you can't do anything else, I meant that there's the call of God upon your life. This is an amazing statement. Don't miss it in verse 28. The Holy Spirit has made you the overseer. It's not a denomination. It's not an affiliation. It's not an organization. It's the work of the Holy Spirit who has appointed you into that place, and you can trust God with the ministries that He's given you.

I believe with all my heart that when God calls an individual, He equips that individual. We can develop our gifts, and we should work hard at using them to the best of our ability to the glory of God, but with God's calling is God's enabling. Whatever God has called you to do, God will give you the ability to do. One of the indications of what God has called you to do is the abilities that God gives you. If God has called you to sing, He'll give you a voice. I've had people say, "I believe God's called me to sing." "Well, sing a song." "Aheheheh!" "No. He hasn't called you to sing. If He has, He better do a miracle and He'll give you a voice." If God has called you to preach, He'll give you the gift of teaching and the ability to communicate God's Word. Whatever God calls you to do, God enables you to do because the Holy Spirit is the One who has appointed them, and there's that word, as I pointed out, "overseers." We get our word bishops or Episcopalian from it. It means to oversee or to see over the entire work of the church, and then what are they to do? They are to feed the flock of God. I love that. They're to feed the flock of God. We've touched on that all the way through this whole farewell speech of Paul.

The number one responsibility of the pastor is to teach and preach the Bible, and that's how he feeds the flock of God. The number one job of a pastor is to be a teacher. When Paul tells the Ephesians, which is the same group of people he's talking to here in Miletus, that God has given pastor-teachers, it's hyphenated. It's one person. Now, you can be a teacher without being a pastor, but you can't be a pastor without being a teacher. There are men that are called to just teach the Bible, but they are not called to be in a pastoral position. You can't be a pastor without the gift of teaching because your primary responsibility is that of feeding the flock. Remember in verse 20 he actually said, "...I kept back nothing that was profitable...and shewed...and taught publicly, and from house to house." Notice again, we already read verse 27, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." A pastor worth his salt will teach everything the Bible teaches. He won't hold things back in fear that it might offend someone, he'll teach the full counsel of God.

Notice also in verse 28 that the church, the flock, is the church of God. Again, the high view of Scripture, it belongs to God. It is the church of God, and notice also that it was bought with the blood of Christ—literally, the blood of his own. Some see here a reference to the deity of Christ where he makes mention of, “the church of God, which he,” that is, God, “hath purchased with his own blood,” Jesus being God, but the statement in the Greek actually reads, “the blood of his own,” so it’s more likely a reference to the Son of God, which is divine as well as the Father, but that Jesus died on the cross to give His life so that He might purchase the bride, the church. When you think of the church, don’t just think, Oh, a bunch of people that I like some but don’t like some of them. I get kind of picky and crabby and maybe don’t like people so I’ll find another church. I’ll go to this church or that church. You need to think of the church as being bought with the blood of Jesus Christ. We’re a local expression of the church, but this is the church, the body of Christ. We are His people. We’re the sheep of His pasture. We’re His children. We’re His body. We’re united to Him, the head, and we were actually bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

The church is so valuable, and we ought to pray for the church, give for the church, serve for the church, and sacrifice for the church. Too many Christians in our modern Christian world today have a very lax and limited and shallow commitment to the church. They think they just show up, watch the worship team and then grade them on a scale of 1-10 on how the worship was that night, and whether the pastor was any good or boring, you know, whether they liked things that are going on instead of realizing, Father, this is Your flock. These are Your people. This is the family of God, and it was all purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus had to give His life on the Cross so that we could be bought and redeemed and a part of this household of faith, this family of God.

The third thing, and we must move on, that is supposed to be true of these pastors, pastors today, and every believer today, that is, they must warn the flock of danger (verses 29-31). Let’s read that. Paul says, “For I know this,” he was certain that this was going to happen, “that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. 31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.” Paul makes this amazing statement in verse 29, go back there with me. He says, “For I know this.” Paul was absolutely sure of something. What was he sure of? He was sure that wherever God is working, satan is going to attack.

You can always bet that wherever there’s a church where God is working, people being saved, the Bible’s being taught, Christians are loving each other and serving the Lord, and the church is healthy and growing, you can always bet that satan is going to attack. Someone said, “Bugs are attracted where the light shines the brightest.” Have you ever noticed that? You have a church that’s shining brightly—bugs will show up. There may be some bugs here tonight. I’m not thinking of anyone. I’m not going to look at anyone, okay, but you know who you are. People come into the church to disrupt. They come into the church to spread false doctrine, false teachings, their own agenda, their own ideas to convince others that they know the truth and they don’t, and “You must follow and listen to me.” Now, this is a very important section,

and it can get very controversial. I have to admit that I'm kind of wondering how far I go with this, but I want you to buckle your seatbelts for a moment. At least just hear me out because Paul was a pastor who wanted to protect the sheep from wolves.

Paul knew false teachers would come. I know that as the pastor of this church, that there will be those who will come into this church or those who will be not part of this church that will try to teach false doctrine and lead people astray. I know that you contact other preachers on tv and radio, there are books out there, other churches out there, and you listen to their preaching. A lot of times you're getting things that aren't biblical or scriptural. A lot of times sheep, don't take offense to this, sometimes can be silly. They're not the smartest animals. They do tend to wander off and go astray, and sheep sometimes need to be protected. They need to be warned.

Now, Paul spoke about it a lot...real quickly, and I don't want to take too much time, but I want you to see it rather than me just quote it. Turn to 1 Timothy 1:19-20. I'm going to give you just two quick little samples or examples that Paul was not afraid to name names and identify false teachers. When he was writing to his protege, Timothy, this pastor, he wanted him to beware of false teachers. Start at verse 19. You need to actually go further back, but lets start at verse 19. He tells Timothy, "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away," so he's warning him, "Hang onto your faith, keep a clear conscience," "concerning faith have made shipwreck: 20 Of whom is," and notice what he does here, he names names. "Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme." We're going to see Hymenaeus again, and what he was teaching is that the resurrection had already passed and he overthrew the faith of some. Wherever Paul went, Judaizers and false teachers followed him. The New Testament warns about those that were into gnosticism, mysticism, and legalism. All those things are still alive and with us today.

Turn to 2 Timothy 2:15. There's another little warning there. We know the passage. He says, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." It's so important for a pastor to cut the Bible straight. That's what it means. Rightly dividing means to cut it straight, properly interpret the Scriptures, "But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness." In other words, they're dishonoring to God, these teachings that just get people sidetracked. Notice verse 17, "And their word will eat as doth a canker," or cancer, "of whom is," and here he is again, "Hymenaeus," and now there's a guy named, "Philetus; 18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. 19 Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. 20 But in a great house," it's a reference to the church, "there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour." These vessels represent God's messengers. There are quality messengers and those that aren't quality. There's false teachers and true teachers. So he says, "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet," fit, "for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." Go back with me to chapter 21.

I just wanted to point out to you that in the Bible, and you can spend weeks looking at it, there are all these warnings about false teachers that are dangerous. Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." In other words, they're going to look like the real thing. They're going to talk like the real thing. They're going to say that they're Christians but they're not. "Oh, we believe in Jesus. We believe in the Bible. We're Christians, too," but their doctrine is not Christian. Their doctrine is not biblical. We can't judge a person's heart or their motive or know what's going on in their life, but what they teach, Jesus said you'll know them by their fruit.

You need to know sound doctrine if you're going to be able to detect a false teacher. When you listen to preaching or teaching you need to be discerning. Is that what that verse really says? Is that what that verse really means? You read before and after the text and take it in its context. You ask yourself, "What did it mean to the original recipients? When it was written, what was the meaning of this text?" All Scripture has only one meaning not multiple meanings. A lot of preaching I hear today reads the text, skips interpretation, goes right to application, so people never learn the Bible. They'll come in sheep's clothing. It's kind of, "Grandma, what big teeth you have!" They act like Christians but they're not.

The book of Jude says, "...earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." The entire second epistle of Peter is about apostates, false teachers. The entire epistle of John—1 John, 2 John, Jude—is all warning Christians about false teachers. The problem is that in our Christian culture today it's not popular to name names or to label people as false. The sad and tragic thing is today that Christians have bought into the secular pluralistic culture, and we think that everyone's okay—you're truth is your truth, my truth is my truth, all religions are equally valid, and I can't say one's right and one's wrong. I can't even say Jesus is the only way because that's kind of narrow and prideful and that's not right to do that. We want to be nice and loving, but we've sacrificed truth. Truth always comes first. Purity always comes before peace. There can't be any peace if there's no purity. I'm not talking about going around and all we're doing is looking negatively at everybody and being critical, faultfinding, and judgmental. Jesus condemned that in John 7. He said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," but it is true that the Bible is clear over the spirit of truth and over the spirit of error.

I want to point out in this text a couple of simple things. In verse 29, we first see that there's a danger to the church from the outside. Notice verse 29. He said, "...that after my departing," I'm going to leave you pastors in Ephesus, "grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." What he's basically saying is, "You're going to be inundated and infiltrated by false teachers. They're even going to come and knock on your door." You know, you don't have to find a false prophet, they'll ring your doorbell on Saturday morning. I mean, don't raise your hand, have any of you ever been visited by someone from the Watchtower Society? Jehovah's Witnesses ring a familiar bell or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Mormons? These groups are not Christian. They are anything but Christian. They have a different Jesus, a different gospel.

One of the characteristics of a cult that you need to be aware of is they always have their own

translation of the Bible, and it's the only inspired Word of God. They always have their literature that if you're going to know the truth, you must read our literature to be able to understand the Bible. They have a new revelation—if it's new, it's not true; and if it's true, it's not new. If I'm teaching you the Bible, I'm saying nothing that Christians haven't believed and taught for two thousand years. So, if you come here and go, "John, just give us some new revelation." I don't have that for you. I'm earnestly contending, and by the way, this is a fight we're in. One of the most demanding, taxing, challenging and difficult things that a pastor deals with is confronting the heretic, confronting false doctrine, confronting error; and not a week goes by but some silly sheep is saying things that I know they've been influenced by a false teacher or somebody that's in error, and I have to try to lovingly and tactfully share with them without freaking them out.

I think if we grow and mature, we become discerning. We're able to not have a personality cult, worshipping an individual—I'm of Paul, or I'm of Apollos, or I'm of Cephas—but we are devoted to and our allegiance is to the Word of God. If I ever start teaching false doctrine, get rid of me—the faster the better—but run for your life or something. If I deviate from God's Word, if I deviate from orthodox Christianity, then that's an abomination. Paul said, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed," anathema. That's hard core. That means cursed to the lowest hell. He said that he should be cursed if they preach another gospel.

I mentioned only these two that come from the outside, but the cults go on and on and on. Jehovah's Witnesses are not Christians, at least their doctrine is not. Mormonism is not Christianity. They're called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Joseph Smith claims that some angel, Moroni, showed up and gave him some new revelation that all Christian denominations were apostate and had fallen away from the truth, and God gave him a new revelation on these golden plates and all this stuff. They have the Book of Mormon, The Doctrine of the Covenant, The Pearl of Great Price, and all their teachings that are not anywhere found in the Bible. You need to know the truth and be careful.

I want you to notice the second danger in verses 30-31, that is, the danger from inside the church. There's the danger from the outside and then there's the danger from the inside. Notice verse 30. "Also of your own selves," this is a danger that comes from inside the church, "shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Notice, they come from their midst speaking perverse things, and their purpose is to draw away disciples, not after Christ, but after themselves. Verse 31, "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." This is where it gets difficult because if I name names...I haven't named any names in the six years that I've been here at Revival. I've been trying to be nice, but I want to mention a few names tonight.

Within the church...now I don't know people's hearts. I don't know if they're saved. All I can do is evaluate the content of their preaching. One of the real dangerous things that I would've loved many years ago to see just completely disappear off of planet earth is within the church what is commonly called Word Faith teaching or movement. It's sometimes called the Health

and Wealth Gospel. This movement was popularized by a man by the name of Kenneth Hagin. He also has Rhema Bible College, also popularized by Kenneth Copeland, who is also alive and well today, brought on the scene by Fred Price, Charles Capps, and all these individuals. I'll name a few more people in just a minute because you see their teaching filtered into a lot of popular preaching today, especially on television and in Christian books.

There are a lot of popular Christian books today that are very, very unbiblical and very dangerous biblically. Basically, their teaching focuses on this idea that there's power in your words. Take note when you turn on TBN. I don't know why, but every once in a while I turn TBN on. They even have this whole big special where they have these preachers talking about, "The POWER of your words," and that "You can be healthy, and you can be wealthy, and you can have prosperity. You can create your own reality by what you say." It's true God's concerned about what we say, and our words come from our hearts, and we can speak negative words and discourage people, but we don't have the ability to create our own reality. Only God has what is known as fiat—that's the ability to speak things into existence.

What they do is take Scriptures and don't give them proper interpretation. They take them out of context and say, "If you just say to this mountain be removed, you'll have what you want. If you just say it. If you say, you're not sick, if you say you're healthy, if you say you're wealthy. You take your wallet out and you speak to your wallet." You can talk to your wallet all you want! I mean, it's not going to make money appear in your wallet. You can't speak prosperity. You can't speak a Volkswagen into a Porsche. You can't go into your garage and your old beat-up car, you know, "It's a Rolls Royce in the name of Jesus. I speak it." They're speaking over their physical bodies, over their health, and speaking over their financial wealth, and every time they preach they're like one string on the guitar. All they preach is either on wealth or health, or that by faith you can be a well-off person, a happy person, or a prosperous person. Or, "You can get that job," or "You can get that healing and you can be happy." Everybody just eats this up, but it's not biblical.

I actually have done a whole series (I think it's on our website) on this. I did it probably 25 years ago where I actually did a series called: Beware of Counterfeits. I took each one of their teachings, I let them speak. I actually played their audio, went to the verses they taught, and showed how they twisted and took them out of context—all of the Word Faith teachers. Their little gods doctrine, they believe that we're actually little gods, that we're divine, and they teach that Jesus had to go to hell and be suffering in hell, that Jesus was born again in hell and then he rose from the dead, and we have the same kind of divine powers that Jesus had to bring healing, prosperity, and health. None of it is biblical. It's actually kind of mind science stuff, but here's the danger. A lot of what they've taught, not entirely, but it has filtered into a lot of popular preachers today, one of them being Joel Osteen.

A lot of people listen to Joel, and I've listened to him and checked him out. I've listened to sermons where there's a lot of good things that he says, but he's using verses out of context. He's using a text as a pretext, and notice that his sermons always come back around to the same thing about health, wealth, and prosperity, and "You're going to get the promotion," and

“You’re going to make money,” and “You’re going to be happy,” and “You’re going to have wealth,” and “It’s going to be your best life now.” If this is my best life now, that’s pretty sad because I’m looking for heaven, aren’t you? Now, the reason I mentioned him is not because I don’t think he is a brother in Christ but because I think that he doesn’t rightly divide the Word; and some of what he teaches is quite aberrant, quite wrong, quite unbiblical, yet people buy into that. He’s got traces of prosperity, health, and wealth and so does the popular teacher Joyce Meyer.

Joyce Meyer is quite popular. Her books are also quite popular. I’ve heard her speak and I’ve heard her say things where okay, everything she’s saying is fine, but—listen to me very carefully—it’s not always what they say, it’s what they don’t say. Notice the absence of what they don’t say, and notice how they take this text, bounce around, and take it out of context. I’ve heard her preach a message and thought, That’s not bad, and I turn around a couple days later and everything she says is heretical and unbiblical, but people get swept up in her teaching. There’s a lot of popular preachers today, even though I like some of the Hillsong Music, some of the Hillsong preaching today is out of context and unbiblical. They twist the Scriptures and use it as they want to for their own purposes. So you have people like Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, some of the Hillsong’s preachers, T.D. Jakes, which has even a faulty view of the trinity, and Benny Hinn, which is popular with a lot of people. I’m not saying they’re not Christians, but I’m saying they arise within the church. That’s what makes it more difficult.

Do you know where the greatest danger is? It’s not the cultist on your doorstep, it’s the evangelical preacher in the pulpit. It’s the guy that’s writing books that are being sold in the Christian bookstore. About 15 years ago, there was this new movement called the Emergent Church with a guy named Rob Bell. Other preachers came on the scene and started preaching, and it became quite popular. All their books were being sold in Christian bookstores. It took some time, but it began to be evident that they did not believe in the bodily resurrection, the deity of Christ, or they didn’t believe in a literal hell or that salvation was by grace alone through faith alone. They didn’t believe in the divine inspiration, in the inerrancy of the Bible, they had a low view of Scripture, yet Christians were buying their books and reading their material. You have to be discerning. The only way for you to know a counterfeit is to be familiar with the real thing. If you get grounded in the truth and Jude does say “...that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” I guess my exhortation to you is just think biblically. Learn to properly handle the Bible and rightfully divide the Word of truth.

I’ll just touch these next two. Here’s the fourth quality. Let’s move on. These pastors and we people must believe in the power of prayer and the power of God’s Word. Notice verse 32. He says, “And now, brethren, 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.” Paul says, “Look, I’m just going to pray and dedicate you to God.” He wasn’t giving them to a hierarchy or to some organization. He’s saying, “I’m just going to give you to God.” A pastor wants to give, by prayer, the people in the congregation to God; and a pastor should pray for the people, pray for the church, and pray for the congregation as he entrusts them to God in prayer as he intercedes for them. Then, you need to believe in the power of the Word. Notice, I love this, he

says, "...and to the word of his grace," so I commit (the King James has commend you) you, I entrust you to God; so in faith, believing in prayer, "I'm putting you in God's hands and I'm trusting the Word of God to have the work of God in your life."

Notice the three things they believed the Word of God would do, and I believe them, too. The Bible is able to build you up, make you a strong believer; give you an inheritance, you understand what is yours in Christ and you can claim those things that are legitimately yours; and it will set you apart among those who are sanctified or set apart. So, the Bible, the Word of God, is the chief means by which God sanctifies or sets apart or makes holy the believer. A pastor must be committed to prayer and to the Word of God.

Fifthly, and lastly (write this down), a pastor must live free of self interests or selfishness, verses 33-35. Listen to what Paul says in these concluding statements. He says, "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel." That's a verse that a lot of Word Faith teachers don't preach from. "I didn't want anyone's gold. I didn't want anyone's silver, and I didn't want anyone's apparel." He said, "Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. 35 I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said," and if you've got a red-letter Bible, these words are red, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," right? That's a statement made by Jesus found nowhere else in the Bible. Isn't that cool? It's not in Matthew, not in Mark, not in Luke, and not in John. John says, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." There's a lot of things Jesus said that aren't even in the Bible. When we get to heaven, we're going to say, "Hey, Jesus, what else did you say?" Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Let me just break it down real quick because we've got to wrap this up. Notice in verse 33, don't covet. It is so clearly taught in the Bible that a pastor, an elder, an overseer, a spiritual leader, is not to be in it for the money. He is not to be begging for money, asking for money, pleading for money, and he's not to charge for his ministry. Sometimes people will call me and say, "Can you come speak at this conference?" or "Can you speak at our church?" I'll say, "Well, let me pray, and I'll give you my answer," and they say, "Well, what do you charge?" "What do I charge?!" I mean, that just...I'm sorry, that's stupid. Jesus said freely you've received, freely you should give. Why would I charge for what God's given to me freely by His grace? Now, if you want to bless me, you want to write a check to The Most Holy, Right Reverend, go ahead, but I don't have any charge. I don't have any fee. I don't have any amount. Jesus said when you go out serving Me, don't even take your wallet with you. (I'm famous for not having my wallet.) Don't take an extra coat, just go. Trust Me. Just serve Me and trust Me. You just do it as unto the Lord.

In Peter's epistle, and that's by the way in 2 Peter 5, he said that pastors are not to do it for filthy lucre. They're not to do it for money. They're not to say, "Well, I'll take over the church," or "I'll pastor that church but what is the salary going to be? How much will I get paid?" No. You don't even think of that. You don't even ask about that. You just come. You trust the Lord. You

don't covet people's things. You don't do it for gold or silver, a new car, new things. You just do it as unto the Lord. That's the quality of a true man of God. They're not materialistically minded, and Paul writing to Timothy again said, "...supposing that gain is godliness," there are some people that preach that godliness is a way to get rich, "from such withdraw thyself... For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. But godliness with contentment is great gain." Don't be about the money. Don't be covetous.

Verses 34-35, be an example. Paul said, "I labored. I worked. I got callouses. I supplied my own needs. I didn't take offerings for myself. I didn't ask for money." "I shewed you ...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." What did Jesus do when He was here? He got down on His knees and washed the disciples feet. That's ministry. He got down on His hands and knees and washed the disciples feet and said, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet," and then I love it, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Here's the closing principle on ministry, that is, it's giving not getting. If you're a minister, you give, you don't get. Jesus said to His disciples, "You feed them. Don't send them away. Make them sit down and you feed them." I want you to notice how this ends in verses 36-38. "And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all." So, here they are kneeling on the beach in Miletus. "And they all wept sore," the word "wept" means that they sobbed convulsively. They were weeping sore, "and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, 38 Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship." What a moving scene this is as they knelt there on the beach.

I'd like to close with this thought: A shepherd is also a sheep. Let me apply it to my own life. I'm not only an undershepherd over this flock (and we have more than one pastor. I'm not the only pastor here at this church), but I'm also a sheep. I'm also a brother, and you are my sisters and you are my brothers. I'm part of the family of God, so I'm not over you, I'm among you. I'm one of you. Not only am I a shepherd, but I'm a sheep, so I have sheep needs. Do you know what one of my sheep needs is? Is that I'm loved—I love you, and you love me. Pastors aren't just to walk around, you know, in an arrogant kind of like, "I'm the shepherd." I'm a sheep, "Baaaa!" I want you to know how much I appreciate your love, how much I appreciate your prayers, how much I appreciate your encouragement, and how much I appreciate your fellowship. I'm just one of the sheep. I'm a sheep just like you.

They had such a deep love for Paul that when they left they cried and prayed and tears flowed. I put in the margin of my Bible right there: Grown men do cry. Men of God cry. Christians cry. Christians sorrow. Now, it's believed that Paul actually did end up back in Ephesus after his imprisonment, but they might not have all seen him, and Paul didn't know he would come back. Now, Paul is going to leave them. He's going to go to Jerusalem. He's going to be arrested and sent as a prisoner to Rome. They're just brokenhearted, this man that brought us the gospel, that taught us so many things from God's Word. "We're never going to see him again." How

sweet and how awesome is the love of God and the family of God. Amen? The love of the saints, the love of the brethren, what a blessing that is! Let's pray.