

Text: Acts 20:28-31  
Intended audience: Christians  
Topic: Church Leadership  
Theme: The Security of the Church.  
My purpose for this message: To help Christians recognize the importance of the Church, and recognize the importance of good leaders.  
Delivered: Dec. 12, 2004 @ KEFC

[Book Thesis: The Power of God Spreads the Gospel]

## My Charge to Church Leaders

### PRAY.

Today's topic is church leadership and I have 2 objectives for you: to call you to think soberly about the importance of the church, and as a result pray for church leaders. I have a 3<sup>rd</sup> for some of you: become open to God calling you to help lead the church.

I had been the pastor just 3 months when one of our elders told me he was moving to another state. That left an elder team of me, and one other man. We were short of leader material in that little church. Some men came only occasionally, to meet what they thought was their obligation. Some were gone winters in Florida while others, summers camping and fishing.

Of those who were left, 2 names were floated as possible elders: "Rob" was an outspoken, somewhat arrogant fellow. In addition to having a hyper-critical, judgmental spirit, he had a pattern of failing to follow through on tasks and ministries, even ones he asked for. But he was one of the few men there who had memorized any scripture. Some thought automatically qualified him.

The other nominee was a feisty local politician notorious for opposing anything in the community that cost money. There were several biblical qualifications one or both didn't meet but there simply were no other leaders. We could either choose an unqualified man, or make do with just us two—which could make it look like I wanted to run things myself. In the end, I decided to do what was right and risk being misunderstood. Church leadership matters too much.

Find Acts 20:28-31. Church leadership matters so much because the church matters so much. For example, choosing a local church for you and your family is the second most important decision you'll ever make. More important than who you'll marry because marriage ends at death (Matt.22:30); the church doesn't. And it's the *Church*, that expends all it's effort for matters of eternity.

This is our 4<sup>th</sup> and final message on Paul's farewell speech to Ephesus' elders. And this charge to church leaders was the most important thing he said that day. READ.

Again, let me repeat my 2 objectives for all of you this morning: call you to think soberly about the importance of the church, and as a result pray for church leaders. And a 3<sup>rd</sup> for some of you: become open to God calling you to help lead the church.

### Who are the Leaders of the Church?

These men were *it* for the Ephesus church. They were the leaders with no one called "Dr.," or "Reverend," or "Pastor," no paid professional to turn to, they were it. "Elders" v.17 says.

Yet in v.28 he also calls these same men overseers (aka bishops, επισκοπο/ω), and pastors ("shepherds" ποιμην). Eph.4:11 says pastor-teachers train the church to do ministry. Tit.1 defines the qualifications of elders, men who exercise wisdom, and 1 Tim.3 gives the

qualifications of overseers. Apparently they're simply different names for the same men; identifying different ministries of the one office..

READ 1 Peter 5:1-3 (same thing). Again, all 3 terms used to describe the same men. My dad and I were once discussing church issues and I asked him why his church didn't have elders. He asked, "Does it really matter what you call church leaders?"

"Perhaps not," I responded, "But if you don't use the Bible's *name* for them, what are the chances you will use the Bible's qualifications and role for them?" You see, the closer we get to the biblical model of church government, the healthier we can be.

So, at Keystone, we call elders pastors, and pastors elders. Whether they get a paycheck or not, all rule the church, all guide the church and all care for the church.

### **What are the Dangers to the Church?**

I suspect Paul loved the church more than anyone who has ever walked this earth except it's Bridegroom. But he knew firsthand how demanding and difficult it could be. He didn't sugarcoat the church's demands for his friends: REREAD v.29-31. The church is in danger from you, in danger from wolves in wolves' clothing, and from wolves in sheep's clothing. Leading a church is dangerous.

**Us:** One of the greatest privileges I have during the last 13 years, has been to work with men who sacrificed their own pleasures, conveniences, desires and fears, to lead a church. You don't do that unless you love Christ and the His Church.

However, none of us is above falling in some fashion. *I am not above falling.* Paul warned his friends *first*, "Keep watch over yourselves..." Last week we received a Christmas card from an elder who had served at a previous church. He had moved to the other side of the state while we still lived there, but this past year he returned to the old town. He wrote:

*...churches seem to have changed in [this] area. Some have started since I left and are now quite big, and others have closed, including the ---- church I attended in the early 1990's.*

Many of you have heard me tell how that church became embroiled in controversy over ministry philosophy. After 5 years, the man who succeeded me, a very successful church planter elsewhere, resigned embittered, and left the ministry altogether. 18 mos. later, the church closed its doors. And perhaps responsibility lies mainly at the feet of two leaders who failed to keep watch over themselves, and lost sight of what really mattered.

**Them:** And of course, there will be threats from without. These, we know little about. Churches sometimes boast about persecution when they get denied a building permit on their newly acquired land. That's not persecution. But someday we may learn what it really is. And the elders may have to do things like sell the property and turn us into a cell-based church that meets in homes. May have to guard us from the wolves who look like wolves.

**Of us:** However the greatest threat comes from the wolves in sheep's clothing. This became true in Ephesus. READ...

- People scrambling for prominence to promote false doctrines, pettiness, division: ; 1 Tim.1:3-7; 2 Tim.4:2-4; 6:3-4.
- Abandoning faith, good conscience, Blasphemy: 1 Tim.1:18-20.
- Poisoned women: 2 Tim.3:6-8; 1 Tim.5:14-15
- Lust for money: 6:9-10.

In fact, READ Rev.2:1-5. The doctrine was right on; they worked hard; they stuck with the faith. But their love for Christ had grown cold. And right behind the collapse of love, was the

collapse of doctrine. History tells us that by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Ephesus and all of Asia was a hotbed of heresy.

Today the church has some unique threats. The Catholic church is reeling under the exposure of pedophilia and homosexuality among its priests. The Anglican Church is on the brink of fragmenting after the American branch ordained a bishop last year who is an openly, practicing homosexual.

Entire denominations that concluded the Bible is not accurate and mixed it with other authorities, are now dying. In most denominations, church discipline has virtually come to a halt with church leaders fearing they will be criticized as unloving, or worse, face a lawsuit. The church is at risk. But it's *always* been. Satan wants to kill it. Jesus promised in Matt.16:18 that such a thing would never happen, but it's not enough for the Church to *survive*, it must *thrive*. Which requires that godly, wise men lead it.

At the risk of oversimplifying, what happens if you make mistakes in the corporate world? People lose money. What happens if you make mistakes in the educational world? People lose information. What happens if you make mistakes in the social world? People lose status and sometimes friends. But what happens if you make mistakes in the church? People lose their souls..

### **Concl:**

That's why the church is important: pray for it. And I hope that some of you men who weren't, are now open to God calling you to help lead the church.

V.28 reminds us that it is the HS who makes a man an elder. This is how He goes about it in our church. To be a God thing, it must be a prayer thing. Elders usually begin praying about the next men 1-2 years in advance. We call the church to prayer usually 6-9 months in advance. Men who sense they will be contacted, pray about it. *Every* step is bathed in prayer.

We solicit suggestions from the congregation. Then the elders screen the list to remove any with glaring disqualifications. We ask those remaining if they sense God calling. If so (or are open to a call), they complete a 2 page form about biblical qualifications, and a 3 page questionnaire on essential Bible teachings.

The Elder Team interviews them, and then interviews each man's wife separately. Only after *that*, does the elder team present them to you. Is that the work of the HS? I believe so. Consider this: this year we had a total of 14 men suggested. 4 of the 14 said they sensed called, or open to a call. At the end of the process, the elders recommended *those* 4 be affirmed by the congregation for service. All were. I suspect that may have been the HS who did the calling.

Jerome translated the Bible into Latin at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, beginning of the fifth. His Latin Vulgate became the standard for a thousand years. He was concerned that the church pay careful attention to its choice of leaders and wrote this in a letter in A.D. 394: *Many build churches nowadays; their walls and pillars of glowing marble, their ceilings glittering with gold, their altars studded with jewels. Yet to the choice of Christ's ministers, no heed is paid.*

As the leaders go, so goes the church. So leadership selection matters, because the church matters.