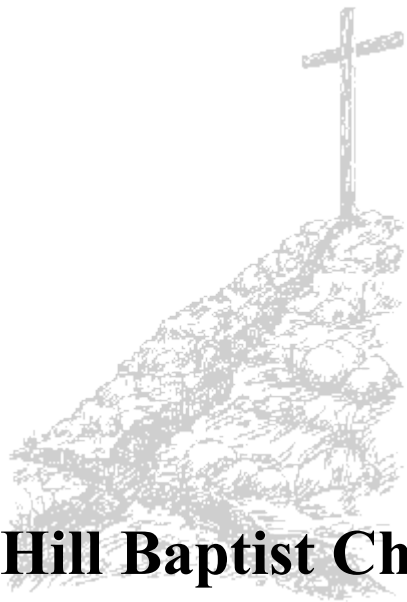


Take Heed Therefore

Acts 20:17-28

Focal Acts 20:28



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Responsive Reading (Acts 20:17-28 KJV) "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. {18} And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, {19} **Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:** {20} And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, {21} **Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.** {22} And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: {23} Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. {24} **But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.** {25} And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. {26} Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. {27} For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. {28} **Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.**"¹

Parable Two men met one another on a busy street. One

¹ Bold faced text is to be read by the congregation in unison

man looked at the the other and said, "Do you think that's a good idea"? The second man said, "What are you talking about?" The first man said, "Listen now, do you think that's a good idea?" The second man walked away both confused and angry, not knowing what his friend was asking him. Why didn't the second man understand the first man? There are a number of reasons. The first man attempted to communicate his idea to the second man, but he never actually *spoke the words out loud*. Unless the second man could get in his friend's *body*, inside of his head, then he would never understand what thought was being conveyed. The first man completely knew what he wanted the second man to know. He could hear *himself*, though the second man could not hear him.

You must be in the same Body that the thought originates from if you expect to understand what the Body is telling you.

Power Question Are you a *onlooker*, an *overcomer*, or an *overseer* in the magnificent Kingdom of God?

1. Are You A Onlooker?

Our focal verse today is the last verse that our congregation read, **Acts 20:28 in the KJV**²:

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers³, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

² King James Version

³ episkopos, overseer, one who superintends or looks over an organization

Acts 20:28 (HCSB⁴) "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood."

The Apostle Paul has been faithful to do that which God had called him to do. Paul now knew that he was going into a *serious battle zone* - he was heading into Jerusalem, and had already been warned of God that he was going to be bound over for prison. Paul knew that the moments of his freedom were quickly running out. Like the sand in an hour glass he knew that, in a very short time, he was going to go through one of the worst trials any human should ever have to face.

So Paul called the *overseers*, the *pastors* of the local churches in Ephesus, and gave them a warning. He knew that he wasn't going to be there at all times. He wouldn't be there forever - who can be? So Paul called these people together, these *overseers*, and warned them that they needed to be *actively involved in their local churches*. They needed to be, just as Jesus was, **about their Father's business**⁵. The need for them to be *about their Father's business* was critical, for the Church of God has *always been under attack from Satan's emissaries, even from the beginning*⁶.

⁴Holman Christian Standard Bible

⁵ Luke 2:49, Jesus as a child was *about His Father's business*, the business of telling others about the Kingdom of God and it's righteousness, the business of salvation by faith in Christ.

⁶ (Acts 20:29-30 NASB) ""I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; {30} and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."

Paul wanted these men to be *overseers*, actively involved in the Kingdom work.

Power Question Are you a *onlooker*, an *overcomer*, or an *overseer* in the magnificent Kingdom of God?

Some of you are probably thinking, "What does this have to do with me? Paul was speaking to *pastors*, not to those in the pew!" And thinking this thought you may turn off your minds, turn away, look off, and continue to be an onlooker. I tell you this, the entire week of this Revival the Lord has spoken to my heart and told me these words:

My Plan is the Church, My purpose is only fulfilled by the Church, and every member in My Church is called to an area where they labor for Me.

There is hardly a week that goes by that I don't receive a call from some *para-Church organization*. There is **Teen Challenge**, the **Promise Keepers**, the **Gideons**, just to name a few. There are groups like **Alcoholics Anonymous** and **Al-Anon**, not necessarily Christian organizations but groups that do good work. Am I saying that these groups are bad groups? Absolutely not! These groups do good things. Some of these groups are doing works that honor Jesus Christ. But Beloved, the **work of God in the New Testament was commissioned by Jesus Christ to be fulfilled by His Church!** Paul tells the pastors in Ephesus:

Acts 20:28 KJV: "Take heed therefore unto

yourself, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers⁷, to feed⁸ the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

to **keep on feeding** what? What are these pastors, these *overseers*, supposed to **keep on feeding**? Promise keepers, the Gideons, Al-Anon? No, but they are to **keep on feeding the church of God**. Why? Because the Church is that which **God shed His Blood for**. That's what our text tells us, **God purchased this Church with His own Blood**.

If He shed His Blood for this Church - and He did When we partake of Christ's Communion, we read His words:

(Luke 22:20 KJV) "Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."

His Blood, the Blood of Christ, the Blood of God in the flesh, was shed *personally for, for this Church*. Not for the para-Church groups, though these groups do - many times - work that honors Christ. But His Blood was shed for His Church.

⁷ episkopos, overseer, one who superintends or looks over an organization
⁸ ποιμαίνω ποιμαίνο *poi-mah'-ee-no*, from [4166](#); TDNT-6:485,901; v AV-feed 6, rule 4, feed cattle 1; 11. Present Active Infinitive, *keep on feeding*

1) to feed, to tend a flock, keep sheep

1a) to rule, govern

1a1) of rulers

1a2) to furnish pasture for food

1a3) to nourish

1a4) to cherish one's body, to serve the body

1a5) to supply the requisites for the soul's need

There are many who come to Christ's Church who are merely *onlookers*. They watch Rock Hill and every other Church to see what His Church is doing. But Beloved, Christ did not shed His Blood so the Church could be filled with *onlookers*. Onlookers do little to honor God - God calls His people to be *overcomers and overseers*, not just onlookers.

Application and Parable There have been many times when we have all been *stuck on the highway* because of a traffic accident. I remember coming back through Nashville, Tennessee one day, and getting stuck in a traffic jam that was caused by an accident. My wife and I sat nearly two hours as traffic moved, ever so slowly, forward. When I got close enough to the scene of the accident I saw what the problem was. Two cars had run into each other, and they were pulled over on the side of the road. That wasn't what was causing the traffic jam. The problem was as people were *passing by the accident* they were pausing and doing what I call *rubber necking*. They were *onlookers*, gawking at what was being done. The ambulance attendants, the firetruck, the wrecker - tow truck crew, and even those involved in the accident were working together to resolve the problem. The onlookers, however, were doing nothing but slowing down the progress of those who were trying to fix the problem at hand.

There will always be *onlookers around a Church*, but Beloved mere *onlookers* are never *a part of the Church*. God does not call us, His people, to be *onlookers*, but to be *overcomers and overseers*. And you must be an *overcomer* before you are an *overseer*.

2. Are You An Overcomer?

Acts 20:28 in the KJV: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers⁹, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

Are you an *overcomer* rather than a *mere onlooker*? If you aren't, then God our Savior wants you to **be an overcomer**. Why are people, professing Christians many of them, *mere onlookers and not overcomers*? Well, the first, the most obvious answer is *you may not be saved by faith in Christ*. You see, the Church is purchased **with the Blood of God**, because the Church is *composed of Blood bought believers, Christians*, overcomers because of Jesus Christ. Listen to what the Apostle John tells us:

Revelation 1:5-6 (NKJV)¹⁰ "and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Jesus Christ **loved us and washed us from our sins in His own Blood**. Not only that, **He made us Kings and Priests to His God and Father**. Because Jesus is an overcomer, we who have accepted Him by faith are *overcomers as well*.

⁹ episkopos, overseer, one who superintends or looks over an organization
¹⁰New King James Version

Parable Louis Pasteur's coworker in the demonstration of what used to be called the germ theory was Dr. Felix Ruh, a Jewish doctor in Paris. The physician's granddaughter had died of black diphtheria, and he vowed to find out what had killed her. The medical association of Paris succeeded in getting Pasteur exiled because they disagreed with his methods of research, but that did not stop him. He built a modest laboratory in the forest in order to continue his forbidden research.

Twenty beautiful horses were led out into the forest to the impoverished laboratory. Scientists, doctors, and nurses came to watch the experiment. Dr. Ruh opened a steel vault and took out a large pail filled with black diphtheria germ. There were enough germs in that pail to kill everyone in France. The scientist went to each horse and swabbed its nostrils, tongue, throat, and eyes with the deadly germs. Every horse except one developed a terrific fever and died. Most of the doctors and scientists wearied of the experiment and did not remain for what they thought would be the death of the remaining horse.

For several more days this final horse lingered, lying pathetically on the ground. While Dr. Ruh, Pasteur, and several others were sleeping on cots in the stables, the orderly on duty had been instructed to awaken the scientists should there be any change in the animal's temperature during the night. About 2:00 AM, the temperature showed a half degree decrease, and the orderly awakened Dr. Ruh. By morning the thermometer had dropped two more degrees. By night the fever was entirely gone, and the horse was able to stand, eat, and drink. Then Dr. Ruh took a sledgehammer and struck that beautiful horse a deathblow between the eyes. The scientist drew all the blood from the veins of this animal that had developed the black diphtheria but had overcome it. The scientists drove as fast as they could to the municipal hospital in Paris. They forced their way past the superintendent and the guards and went into the ward where three hundred babies lay, segregated to die from black diphtheria. With blood of the

horse, they inoculated every one of the babies. All but three lived and recovered completely.

They were saved by the blood of an overcomer.¹¹

Jesus Christ overcame sin, and death, and darkness, and Satan when He shed His Blood on that terrible tree we call the Cross. We who believe in Him are meant to be *more than onlookers*. We are meant to be *overcomers* because our King is and will always be *the Overcomer*.

The reason that many times people are *onlookers* instead of *overcomers* is because they are not saved. But a person can even be saved, but still be functioning as an *onlooker instead of an overcomer* because that person fails to understand the *potential* that the Christian has. When the Apostle Paul told the Corinthian believers about that upcoming event we call *the Rapture of the Church*, and told us all about the *new bodies we will one day receive*, the Apostle ended that wonderful section by saying:

1 Corinthians 15:55-58 (NLT)¹² "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. How we thank God, who gives us victory over sin and death through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

We have *victory* because of Jesus Christ. We *will overcome sin and death* because of the Blood of Christ. **The Apostle continues in verse 58:**

¹¹ Adapted from Max Lucado's "And the Angels were Silent" (1992, Walker and Company), by Kevin B. Hash.

¹² New Living Translation

"So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and steady, always enthusiastic about the Lord's work, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless."

Listen to that section of Scripture, dear Beloved. We are to be **always enthusiastic about the Lord's work**. When you move from the state of *mere onlooker* to *overcomer*, then you will be enthusiastic about this work, this work of the Church, **the Lord's work**. God is watching you and watching your reaction to this message - will you continue to be onlookers, or will you be overcomers?

Power Question Are you a *onlooker*, an *overcomer*, or an *overseer* in the magnificent Kingdom of God?

The *overcomer* knows that he is doing God's Work when he works in the Church. And listen to what else the Apostle tells us. He says, **nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless**. Nothing! If you do it in the Church, you're doing it for God. If you sing, God hears - and will reward you for singing. If you teach, God sees it, and will reward you. If you pray, God watches you pray for His Church, and will reward you. The Christian *is designed by God to be an overcomer*. The Apostle John tells us:

1 John 5:4-5 (WE)¹³ "Everyone who is God's child wins a victory over the world. We win because we believe God. Who wins a victory over the world? It is only the person who believes that Jesus is the Son of

God."

Application and Parable When I was a young boy, I was usually picked *last* to be on any sports team. That's because I was, quite frankly, fat, and slow, and my vision is very poor. When the team captains began to make their choices, they would always choose the best, the fastest, the most coordinated children first. After all others were chosen then the weaker were picked. This used to hurt my feelings, and I guess it does even today. But I want you to know this. Jesus Christ said:

John 15:16 (NIV)¹⁴ "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last...."

Jesus Christ, the Captain of God's Team - He chose ME! He chose YOU! And He chose us, the Bible says, not because we are the *best and brightest*, but because we are *sinners*, the weakest and the frailest. The Bible says:

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 (NLT) "God deliberately chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose those who are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important, so that no one can ever boast in the presence of God."

or as Jesus said:

¹³Worldwide English

¹⁴New International Version

(Mark 2:17 KJV) "... They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

God knew that *you are not naturally overcomers*, but He chose you anyway. He overcame all things on the Cross and from that empty tomb, and now He lives inside of you by faith so *you can overcome through Him*. My *life Verse*, the one that means the most to me is in:

(Galatians 2:20 KJV) "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

The little fat boy, rejected by all, has been chosen by the Lord of all Creation. If you are a Christian, saved by faith in Christ, you are saved and designed to be an overcomer.

3. Are You An Overseer?

Power Question Are you a *onlooker*, an *overcomer*, or an *overseer* in the magnificent Kingdom of God?

The final question we ask ourselves today is *am I an overseer?* Just as all Christians are designed by God to be overcomers, all Christians are designed by God to *over see* or have a function in His Church that they do for the glory of Christ. Paul told the Ephesian pastors:

Acts 20:28 in the KJV: "Take heed therefore unto

yourself, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers¹⁵, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

Application and Parable It is the Holy Ghost or, if you prefer, the Holy Spirit of God Who **makes overseers** in the Church. On my body - this wonderful tool that God gave me at physical birth - there are *no useless or unneeded parts*. There was a time when doctors believed that **the human appendix** was a useless organ, something that was a *leftover* as we - as the foolish evolutionist states - *evolved from goo to you!* Michael Matthews from *Answers in Genesis* writes:

"We all might be dead, in fact, if we were born without an appendix. You see, the appendix is a highly specialized organ with a rich blood supply, not what you would expect from a degenerate, useless structure. It has long been known that the appendix contains lymphatic tissue and has a role in controlling bacteria entering the intestines (see Frederic H. Martini, Fundamentals of Anatomy and Physiology, 1995). A clue to the appendix's function is its strategic position where the small bowel meets the colon. The colon is loaded with bacteria that are useful there, but which must be kept away from other areas. The appendix's main role is likely to be in early childhood. The organ's highly concentrated lymphoid follicles, which play an important role in the immune system, develop about two weeks after birth—at the same time that the colon begins to be

¹⁵ episkopos, overseer, one who superintends or looks over an organization

colonized with the necessary bacteria."¹⁶

We all are born with an appendix because our loving God *wanted us to start this life*, to grow up, and to meet Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Just as the appendix is *vitaly necessary* in the development of human life, each and every believer in this Church, this *Body of Christ*, is vitally necessary to the life of the Body.

Just as the Holy Spirit puts pastors, *overseers* in place in His Church, the Holy Spirit gives each and every member of God's Church a gift, a calling, a talent, a duty to fulfill. The healthy Church is the Church that has *a minimum number of onlookers, but a maximum number of functioning believers*. Listen to the Scripture:

1 Corinthians 12:12-25 "For as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. So the body is not one part but many. If the foot should say, "Because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body," in spite of this it still belongs to the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body," in spite of this it still belongs to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But now God has placed the parts, each one of them, in the body just as He wanted. And if they were all the same part, where would the body

be? Now there are many parts, yet one body. So the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" nor again the head to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, all the more, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are necessary. And those parts of the body that we think to be less honorable, we clothe these with greater honor, and our unpresentable parts have a better presentation. But our presentable parts have no need [of clothing]. Instead, God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the less honorable, so that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same concern for each other."

Many times people come to Church and believe that, in coming, they have fulfilled all that God wants of them. That's not true! This Church was purchased with the Blood of God - the very Blood of God. Purchased by that Blood, the Lord expects us to work together to tell others about that sacrificial love.

A young girl visited a church service one time. Following that service she wrote the pastor the following letter:

Parable "I attended your church yesterday. Although you had invited me, you were not there. I looked for you, hoping to sit with you. I sat alone. A stranger, I wanted to sit near the back of the church but those rows were all packed with regular attenders. An usher took me to the front. I felt as though I was on parade. During the singing of the hymns I was surprised to note that some of the church people

¹⁶ <http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs2002/0718appendix.asp>

weren't singing. Between their sighs and yawns, they just stared into space. Three of the kids that I had respected on campus were whispering to one another throughout the whole service. Another girl was giggling. I really didn't expect that in your church. The pastor's sermon was very interesting, although some members of the choir didn't seem to think so. They looked bored and restless. One kept smiling at someone in the congregation. There were several people who left and then came back during the sermon. I thought, "How rude!" I could hear the constant shuffling of feet and doors opening and closing. The pastor spoke about the reality of faith. The message got to me and I made up my mind to speak to someone about it after the service. But utter chaos reigned after the benediction. I said good morning to one couple, but their response was less than cordial. I looked for some teens with whom I could discuss the sermon, but they were all huddled in a corner talking about the newest music group. My parents don't go to church. I came alone yesterday hoping to find a place to truly worship and feel some love. I'm sorry, but I didn't find it in your church. I won't be back.. "¹⁷

I pray that, as a Church, we all work together to do the Lord's Work. Nothing we do together for the Lord is ever *without value*. But unless we work together, loving one another, encouraging one another to be *overseers*, stewards of the manifold Grace of God, then none of us will ever achieve the potential that God has in store for us.

And our inaction may condemn someone to hell. May God touch your hearts with this word!

¹⁷ <http://www.ozsermonillustrations.com>

