

American Council of Christian Churches  
71<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention, October 23-25, 2012  
Cedar View Independent Methodist Church, Kingsport, Tennessee  
Resolution on the Conference Theme: Faithful Shepherds in a Hostile Wilderness

The apostle Paul dearly loved the elders of Ephesus. With a heart-felt address to them that he believed would be his last, Paul exhorts them to faithfulness before kneeling with them in prayer, weeping with them in battle, exchanging with them expressions of brotherly love, and sorrowing with them over their mutual farewells (Acts 20:17-38). Paul explained that the Holy Spirit had made them overseers who were to shepherd the church of God, which He, God incarnate, had purchased with His own blood (v. 28). Paul's love for the Ephesian elders was his love for Christ's church, and his love for Christ's church was Christ's love for His own church welling up within the apostle.

A seasoned appreciation for the hostile environment surrounding this blood-purchased flock fed the flames of the apostle's concern for them. He was hurrying through Asia in an effort to reach Jerusalem prior to the Passover fully aware of the Holy Spirit's warning that bonds and afflictions awaited him there (v. 23). He could not be deterred in his mission, for the force that bound his spirit to his calling was greater than the force of the bonds that threatened his future safety (v. 22).

This spirit, willing to confront courageously a hostile wilderness, was enabled with the grace that refused to count life dear unto itself, so that he might finish his course with joy and the ministry, which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify of the gospel of the grace of God (v. 24). Had Paul fallen short of this grace, his hands would have been stained with the blood of men, for his mandate to declare to the Ephesians all the counsel of God provided them with an opportunity in God's providence to know the hope of eternal salvation (v. 27).

Faithful shepherds in a hostile wilderness, filled with this love, aware of this hostility, and enabled by this grace, must take heed to themselves as well as the flock. They watch themselves against the temptation to tire of warning God's people day and night with tears (v. 31). They watch themselves against the temptation of covetousness, remembering that it is more blessed to give than to receive (vv. 33-35). They watch the flock against enemies from without and within (vv. 29-30), and they watch the flock against neglect of the Word of God's grace, which is able to build them up and to give them an inheritance among all them that are sanctified (v. 32).

Therefore, the American Council of Christian Churches, at its 71<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention, October 23-25, 2012, in the Cedar View Independent Methodist Church, Kingsport, Tennessee, resolves together to commit ourselves as faithful shepherds in a hostile wilderness to Christ's love for His church, which must fill us, to an awareness of the hostility of the enemy that threatens us, and to the grace of God who equips and enables us. We commend ourselves to God and to the Word of His grace, asking Him to bless us with a conference that knows the power of God's Spirit, which was known by Paul and the Ephesian elders on that special day in Miletus. And we determine to pray for, and weep for, and express love for one another in this common cause for the glory of Christ.



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