

Acts 20

Part 1

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[00:00:00] May we turn again to the two books we read from yesterday.

First to the book of Acts, chapter 20, verse 17.

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church.

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've been with you at all seasons. 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. And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you and have taught you publicly and from house to house. Testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, [00:01:04] save that the Holy Ghost witnesses in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. 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. And now behold, I know that ye all, among whom I've gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I'm pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. 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 has purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departure, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. [00:02:03] Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch and remember, that by the space of three years, I cease not to warn everyone night and day with tears. And now brethren, I commend you to God, unto the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel, yet ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I've showed you all things, how that so laboring 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. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. [00:03:01] And they accompanied him unto the ship. And once again to the epistle of the Ephesians, chapter four, verse one.

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye

are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit, and the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, even as there are ye are called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Therefore he says, when he ascended up on high, he left captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Verse eleven.

And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, [00:04:02] for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, that we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slate of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, make an increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. It was our exercise in these three evenings to speak a little bit about the assembly, the local assembly at Ephesus, [00:05:01] and the development of this assembly as it is shown us in the Word of God.

And so yesterday we first of all saw in the 19th chapter of Acts how this local assembly in Ephesus was formed through the ministry of the Apostle Paul, and what features characterized this assembly. I'm not going to dwell on these points once again, just mention them as a summary in passing. And then we turn to the first epistle, to the epistle of the Ephesians chapter one, to see what wonderful counsel of God could be unfolded to them because of their spiritual condition at the beginning. Today we see that Paul, after his personal presence in Ephesus, and his ministry among them had come to an end, he for the last time calls the elders of the church of Ephesus to them, to speak to them here in this message in Miletus.

[00:06:07] This passage is most interesting because it is, as far as I know, the only preaching of Paul which is mentioned in the scriptures which was directed to believers.

He has written a lot of letters to them, but all his sermons in the book of Acts were gospel preachings to those that were unsafe. But here, his company he's speaking to does exclusively exist of believers, elders, responsible brothers of the meeting in Ephesus. So it should have a special importance to us. We could divide this speech of Paul quite clearly into four parts.

The first part begins in verse 18 and goes up to verse 21.

And in this part he speaks about his conduct and ministry in Asia.

[00:07:02] And every next part begins with the same words, verse 21 and now, verse 25 and now, verse 32 and now.

In the second part, from verse 21 to 24, he speaks about what lay ahead of him.

In the first part, verse 25 to 31, he speaks about what would happen after his departure. And in the

last part, he speaks about the resources of help for the believer after the apostle was no longer among them.

So first of all, he speaks about his own conduct and ministry among them, which is quite interesting to listen to what he has to say about himself. He speaks about, he has called the elders of the church. Well, I'm not going to speak about elders now in particular. Just mention that this was of course a special office [00:08:02] which existed at the time of the apostles because they appointed the elders, the apostles and some of their helpers like Titus especially did this.

No official appointment of elders today exists. But what they did, the kind of work they did, goes on, the responsible dealing with all the matters of the assembly. The elders and overseers, which are mentioned in several passages, are exactly the same persons.

In Christianity, because of the Greek origin of these words, bishops, episcopalian and presbyters and all these words taken from the Greek meaning of these words, they have made different kinds of offices out of it.

But if you compare the passages where both names are mentioned, you will find truly that they were the same. Here we find in verse 17, [00:09:01] he called the elders of the church. And later on in verse 28, he calls the same persons overseers.

And you could just turn to the epistle of Titus, chapter one, you will find the same.

Titus chapter one, it says in verse five, Titus one verse five, for this cause I left thee in Crete that thou should set in order the things that are wanting and ordain elders in every city as I appointed thee. And in verse seven, he says, for a bishop or overseer must be blameless and so on.

Again, both terms for the same person. First Peter five, 12, you find the same, that Peter as well uses both terms for the same persons. So in the one term elder, it simply speaks about the spiritual maturity [00:10:02] that those brothers had to have.

And overseer speaks more about the kind of work they were doing, but the same person.

And here in our chapter, Paul has called them to himself to speak to them a last time. And he said to them, when they would come to him, ye know from the first day that I came into Asia after what men I've been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind.

Here we find the servant of the Lord who could with a pure conscience speak about his service, that he was serving the Lord with all humility of mind.

How wonderful it would be if the Lord could say this of every one of his servants, that they serve the Lord with all humility of mind.

And when we read the epistles of Paul and his life is written down in the Acts, we find that he really was a man of humility in all his service. He was an apostle and he was, I'm sure, [00:11:03] one of the greatest servants God ever had on earth. He was a greatest evangelist and teacher and pastor. He was one of these exceptional cases where one brother had all these three gifts, but never mind, he in all these was serving the Lord with all humility of mind. God had given him a thorn in the flesh so that

he might not be thinking too much about himself.

And Paul was quite sure about this. He had asked the Lord three times to take this away from him, but the Lord had said to him, my grace suffices for thee.

Perhaps you and I, for my case, I know this, but perhaps you as well might ask yourself why in your life there is this or that thing you would like to get rid of. And perhaps it is because the Lord finds it suitable so that you could serve him in humility of mind. That there might be some kind of thing which you might think, well, if this and that were not there in my life, [00:12:01] this health problem or whatever it is, I could serve the Lord far better. That's what you think, but the Lord thinks differently about this. He says, no, it's just what you need so that you could serve the Lord in dependence and humility of mind.

And then you realize that sometimes just when you feel that you couldn't do anything because you are so weak, that just at this moment, the Lord gives you the strength to do something for him so that at the end, you can only give the honor to him and the praise and not to yourself because you quite clearly feel that it was the Lord's help.

And so here we have this servant serving the Lord in all humility of mind. And he goes on to say, and with many tears, I might mention two verses in connection with this. One of it is in Philippians chapter three, Philippians three verse 18, where Paul says, Philippians three, 18, for many walk of whom I've told you often [00:13:03] and now tell you even weeping that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. There were some and Paul saw the development of them and he often told the saints in Philippi about them. And now when it was quite clear to everybody, he again had to say with weeping that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. They were the enemies of Christ. When Paul saw a development going into a bad direction and it was lastly come to the open that everybody could see it, he was not saying, well, I told you this before. Why didn't you listen to what I tell you? No, he was weeping that his warnings had really come true. And there were those that were the enemies of Christ. And there's a very touching verse about him in second Corinthians chapter seven, chapter two, second Corinthians two verse four, [00:14:03] for out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote unto you with many tears, not that he should be grieved, but that he might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you. He's speaking here about the first epistle he had written to the Corinthians. He had written them an epistle. And when we read the first epistle to the Corinthians, we might think, well, Paul is a very straightforward man and he's very hard in what he's saying. He was telling them that they had to put the wicked out of their midst. He was going to tell them that there were things in their midst which were not right. And he was speaking in very clear terms about this. But here, after this ministry he did in the first epistle had shown its result, now he tells them that he had written this letter with many tears. Perhaps you might think when a brother comes to you because he wants to re-exhort you, rebuke you for something in your life which is not right. And you might think, well, this brother is always so hard to me. [00:15:02] And you don't know that perhaps before he came to you, there were many tears he shed in the presence of the Lord. Many, much trembling in which he comes to you, but he feels that he has to rebuke you to help you. Paul said, it was abundant love to you.

Even in another verse he says, the more I love you, the less I am loved. This is something I suppose everybody who tries to follow the Lord in faithfulness will find out. You might in love do something where other people might say, well, that's not love. But love in a biblical sense is not being nice and kind to everybody at all times.

Perhaps love must speak in serious terms.

You know this, if you have children, you couldn't always speak to your children in a nice way. Perhaps sometimes you have to rebuke them for something they did. But this is also coming out of love. And Paul says, I wrote this letter with many tears because I love you. [00:16:01] Now he could tell it to them. He didn't tell them before because he wanted to, that the full weight of what he said fell on their souls. But now he tells them about his love to them and the many tears. And in our chapter especially, the tears are connected with the opposition of the Jews.

This apostle, he loved his people.

After the flesh of the Jews. And he did a lot for them. And it brought tears to him when he saw that they didn't want to listen to the gospel, that they always opposed him when he preached the gospel. And so there were a lot of tears in his ministry. And then he says, in this chapter to them, and how I kept nothing, back nothing that was profitable unto you. That was another sign of this faithful servant. He kept back nothing that was profitable to them. When you see the saints and you see this and that is profitable to them, [00:17:02] then he didn't hold it back. Perhaps some people might have said, well, you must say this and that to the saints.

But he said there was something they had to hear because it was profitable to them. And then he did not keep this thing back.

But I have showed you and have taught you. At the end of his preaching, he comes to the same thing he mentions here. I've showed you and I've taught you. His practical testimony and his oral testimony were in full harmony.

What he said and what he did was completely in harmony. He had shown them and he told them. How wonderful it is when these things are in harmony. The Lord Jesus once said to the multitudes, what the Pharisees tell you. They have set themselves on the seat of Moses and what they tell you they do, but do not how they live because their deeds are not in harmony with what they said. They were saying the word of God, [00:18:01] but their activities were quite contrary to that. But Paul could say, I've showed you and I've taught you publicly and from house to house. This was, here we find on the one hand, the teacher Paul.

He had taught publicly the word of God in the assemblies. We know how faithfully he did this ministry. When he had the last chance to speak to believers, we once know that he even spoke till after midnight because it was the last possibility he had to teach the word to them. And so he taught it publicly, but also from house to house. There we have Paul the shepherd, the pastor. He went from house to house. And there were things which he would not speak about publicly, but he knew they had to be dealt with in private, in personal conversations in the house, there came questions arising. I could just imagine that when Paul went from house to house, these new Christians, they wanted to know a lot of things from Paul. And they asked him questions about the Christian pathway and about faith. And Paul taught them these things from house to house, or things they had done before [00:19:01] when they were still heathens. And now he had to tell them that as Christians, they had to change from these things. And so he not only taught publicly, but also from house to house. How blessed it is when we could when we have fellowship together in the houses, when we find time to speak about the saints of God, publicly and from house to house. Testifying both to the Jew and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. There are four things

that Paul preached.

This is the first one that mentioned this chapter, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the first thing and he taught it to Jews and Greeks. This was the gospel as we might call it, repentance to God and faith toward our Lord Jesus. Everywhere where Paul went, he preached this clear gospel. And how good it is when this clear gospel is preached today, repentance toward God. It's absolutely not enough to say to people, [00:20:02] well, just come to Lord Jesus or take Jesus in your heart or some other nice phrases. What they need is repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. The full gospel was preached by Paul. And then verse 22, he begins the next paragraph to speak what lay before him. And he says that he wanted to go to Jerusalem. He was bound in his spirit unto Jerusalem and he didn't know his future as nobody of us knows the future. But he knew one thing, the spirit testified it to him and witnessed in every city, that bonds, affliction and persecution would be his lot when he came to Jerusalem.

And then he says, but none of these things moved me. Neither count I my life dear unto myself. You know that in the Acts, some brethren tried to hold Paul back and say, no, don't go to Jerusalem. And I'm not going to speak now about the matter [00:21:03] if it was right for him to go there or not. I have a personal opinion about that, I'll leave this to the side.

But when they saw he was bound to go, they said, well, the will of the Lord might be done. And then he went and says, no, all these trouble and all this persecution cannot hold me back to go there to Jerusalem because that I might finish my course with joy.

The first thing, I might finish my course with joy. What a wonderful thing he had in his mind.

And when we come to 2 Timothy chapter four, we find what he could say about this. 2 Timothy four, the apostle writes, 2 Timothy four verse seven, he could say to Timothy, I have fought a good fight. I finished my course.

I've kept the faith.

Henceforth, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day, not to me only.

[00:22:02] So he could say at the end of his life, I finished my course. Here he says he wanted to finish his course and later he could say, that's what I've done. And he wanted to finish it with joy. Or you might say, but at the end, he was sitting in prison, not a place of joy, particularly. But in Philippians, the epistle he writes from prison, he's speaking about joy, quite openness. You know, he finished his course with joy and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus. The ministry he had received of the Lord Jesus.

It's about this ministry, he says in 1 Timothy 1. 1 Timothy chapter one, verse 12.

And I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, who has enabled me for that he can't be faithful, [00:23:01] putting me into the ministry who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor. Paul never forgot what he was, a blasphemer and persecutor. And he was persecuting the church of God, which was so dear to the heart of God. And so he said, he found me faithful, putting me into that ministry. And when he remembered what he was and what God had made of him, he had this desire to fulfill his ministry.

And the Apostle Paul also writes to other believers about the ministry.

I just mentioned in Colossians four, this one verse, Colossians four at the end. Colossians four, verse seven, I think it is.

No, it's 17 at the end. 17 at the end.

And say to Archippus, take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, [00:24:01] that thou fulfill it.

Here was a young man, or perhaps not so young, I don't know. He was a servant of the Lord who had got a ministry and had started this ministry, but obviously there was the danger of his life that he might give up. And so Paul says, take heed to thy ministry, that thou fulfill this ministry. The Lord had given him a task. And when we serve the Lord, there will be opposition. And then he might say, well, I give it all up.

But Paul said, I would like to fulfill my ministry.

And he says that he was sure that the Lord Jesus was going to keep that which he had entrusted to the Lord. At the end of his life, Paul the Apostle stood there, if you'll forgive me for this modern term, he was there as a loser.

If we only look at the result of his work, everybody in Asia had left him. He was in prison. [00:25:01] Nobody found this path of faithfulness and no compromise very attractive.

They all left him. They didn't leave Christianity. They left Paul and the way he was serving the Lord. There was nothing. Today we often say, well, we have to judge a thing by its results. If there is a lot of growth, it must be right. If this were the teaching of scripture, I might say we just all get up and join the charismatic movement, which is growing more than anything else. But it doesn't say anything about if things are right or not. We have to search the scriptures. There was this servant of old, Moses, God said to him, speak to the rock. And he beat the rock, he hit it. What happened? All that came out, abundance of water. All we might say, so it must be right what Moses did. If there came so much water out of the rock, well, God is sovereign to act as he wants. But he spoke to Moses afterwards about this matter and said, you are not going to see the land because you have not glorified me before the people. [00:26:04] We have to judge the thing according to the scriptures and not what we might see as an outward thing. And at the end of Paul's life, it seemed as everything was lost. But he says, I have entrusted my ministry and my whole life into the hands of the Lord. He will keep it to that day. On that day, he will get a reward for everything he did. And here we find this man. He was to fulfill his ministry.

He had received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God. That was the second thing he preached, the gospel of the grace of God.

Not exactly the same as in verse 21, because I'm sure the gospel of the grace of God goes further than only repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus. Because the gospel, the grace of God, the grace of God also has a future aspect.

In Ephesians chapter two, he writes, [00:27:02] Ephesians two, verse seven, that in the ages to come,

he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Jesus Christ. There are ages to come in which the riches of the grace of God will be shown. And this was also a part of the gospel of the grace of God called this preaching. And then in verse 25, he speaks about what would happen after his departure.

He says, behold, I know that ye all among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God. This is the third thing he preached, the kingdom of God. We also found this in chapter 90. But repentance to what God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he had taught Jews and Greeks. Kingdom of God, he says, ye all.

This was something he told the disciples. Kingdom of God, that somebody is a disciple of the Lord [00:28:03] living in the kingdom of God was teaching necessary for the saints, necessary for believers. So he told them the kingdom of God. And they all, he said, shall see my face no more. And then he said, in verse 27, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. This was the fourth thing Paul preached among them, all the counsel of God.

What that is, we saw a little bit yesterday in the first epistle to the Ephesians, he unfolds to them what all the counsel of God. He could preach about these things to the Ephesians in such a wonderful condition they were that he could unfold all the counsel of God to them, which were entrusted especially to this apostle. And then he says, take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock. Perhaps you remember that Paul writes to Timothy very similar words.

Take heed unto yourself and unto the doctrine.

This is for the teacher. Take heed to yourself and unto the doctrine. [00:29:03] And here we have for the pastor and overseer.

Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock. So before we can be occupied with teaching the doctrine and taking heed that the doctrine is taught in the right way and before we can care for the flock of God, we have to take heed to ourselves. There are many scriptures, I don't think we have the time to go into all of them, which take us, we should take heed of something. It's worthwhile studying these scriptures. But here we find that these overseers, the shepherds among the flock, that they are to take heed unto themselves and to the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed or to shepherd the church of God.

This was their particular task, to feed this flock among whom they were working, to feed your church.

No, to feed the church of God.

[00:30:04] It was the church of God. And he even says more, which he has purchased with his own blood.

What a better translation would be like, you find in Darby's translation, with the blood of his own. It's the blood of the Lord Jesus, of course, which he means.

So God has purchased this church with the blood of his own.

So obviously, everybody who really values what the Lord did in Calvary knows what value the church

of God has in the eyes of God.

He purchased it with the blood of his own. And this should be the motive for the overseers here, for the shepherds to feed the church of God, because they know what price God has paid to have this church, to purchase this with the blood of his own.

He purchased with the blood of his own. Why was this so important? For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves [00:31:01] enter in among you. Two dangers he's describing, which would happen after the apostle had gone. The first comes from the outside. Grievous wolves would enter among you, not sparing the flock.

The Lord Jesus speaks about these wolves as well, in Matthew 17, where he says, there are those false prophets in sheep's clothes, but inward they are ravening wolves.

And here he says, these grievous wolves, they enter in among you from the outside. Even at the early beginning of Christianity, there were those false teachers coming from the outside among the saints, not sparing the flock.

We could again connect this back to the verse before.

We read in Romans chapter eight, that God spared not his son, because he wanted to purchase the church. And so if there are those who spare not the flock, he has purchased at such a price, [00:32:02] we should realize how serious that is. And these responsible men among the saints should watch if there were those grievous wolves, they would come and they were not sparing the flock. What a serious thing, but this was not all. There was a second danger, which came from among the saints.

He says, also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Also we know from the church's history, from the early times on, there were those men among the Christians who were coming up and they spoke perverse things, and they tried to draw away the disciples after them. And Paul is, and also the other apostles are very clear about this matter, how serious this was. Paul in the epistle to the Romans, he speaks about one of these groups, Romans 16, he says in verse 17, [00:33:03] Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine, which ye have learned and avoid them.

For they are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches, deceive the hearts of the simple.

There are those that came up among the Christians, and they were not telling just straightforward, we are going to tell you some new doctrines, some new things about the Lord Jesus, which differ from what others say. They were speaking in good words and fair speeches, and they were deceiving the simple. It reminds me of Absalom, Absalom in his time, I couldn't call this in English, so I read it better in 2 Samuel 15, 2 Samuel 15 verse 11, [00:34:03] And with Absalom went 200 men out of Jerusalem, that were called, and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not anything. There were those people, those simple who followed the false leaders, because they were deceived, they didn't know really what was going on, they just followed them. This was the task of these people coming up, they wanted to draw the disciples away from the Lord Jesus, following themselves. The apostle John

speaks about this man, Diotrephus, who wanted to be the first in the assembly, and he threw everybody out, it was not following him. How different from John the Baptist, when they came to him, and said to him, well, all are following this man, whom thou gavest testimony, the Lord Jesus, they are all going to following him. What has John said? He must increase, but I must decrease. [00:35:01] John the Baptist was quite happy, that everybody followed the Lord Jesus, because this was just what he wanted to do, point people to the Lord Jesus. If somebody's there trying to, draw people away from the Lord, and after himself, this is always a great danger among the saints. And Paul showed, these believers in Ephesus, that exactly this would go to happen in their midst.

This was the thing he could, he had to show them as a warning. And he said, I have told you all these things, I've ceased not to warn everyone, night and day with tears, about the things that were going to happen. And now brethren, well, what's there to do? What are the resources for the faith, in such a difficult situation? These Ephesian Christians, and we as well have come into.

He does not say, well, now brethren, I commend you to the following apostles, that will be after me, because there were no apostles to be. [00:36:01] He does not say, I commend you to Timothy and Titus, and some other faithful brethren, that will lead you to the Lord. He says, I commend you to God, and the word of his grace. There were these two things, God, who had purchased this assembly, which is his assembly, through the blood of his own, and his word that abide.

Even in the times when there are those, from outside or from among the saints, trying to teach wrong doctrines, trying to draw his disciples after themselves. He says, there is God, who watches faithfully over his assembly, and there's the word of God. He could turn to this, as sure resources. The word of which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them, which are sanctified. Then he speaks again a little bit, about his own ministry. We have not so much time, I'll just go over it. And again in verse 35, he says what he'd said before, I have showed you all things.

[00:37:01] Not only taught, he showed them these things. And then they fell on Paul, they prayed together there.

And then we read that they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him. Oh, that seems to be a very nice, and attractive picture. These elders, these brothers, weeping together with Paul, at this moment of departure. But if we read a bit carefully, between the lines, I'm sure we hear, see already the beginning, of what we find later, developing in this assembly. Their heart's condition, was not as it ought to be. Because it says, they were sorrowing most of all, for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. I suppose when they really, had listened to what he said, they should have been shocked, by what he said was going to happen, after his departure.

And they should have saw, the face of the Lord, in this matter.

But this, which was the most sorrowful then, [00:38:01] was that they were not going, to see Paul anymore.

They were still looking at this man. He had just told them, what serious development, was going to happen. And had shown them, their only resource would be God, and the word of his grace. And that's where they should have turned, on really seeing, what was going to happen. But they were still, very much occupied, with the present moment, and not with the real truth, Paul was going to tell them. But Paul in the epistle, he wrote to them later, from which we read a few verses, in the second

half of this epistle. The practical part of it, as we said yesterday, he speaks a bit more in detail, about the resources they had, in this time in which they lived. They should walk worthy, of this vocation, into which they were caught. Paul had said to them, in the first three chapters, he now says, well, you should walk worthy, in all this.

And he goes to speak about this, [00:39:03] in detail in, first in relation to the assembly. Secondly, later on in their practical godliness, as individuals, and also in connection with family, and social relationships, husband, wife, parents, children, servants and masters. But he starts with the assembly. How should they do this? He mentions seven qualities. I only mention them again. Lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, love, unity, peace.

These are the four qualities, seven qualities he mentions in this, verse two and three, which should characterize them, in walking worthy, in their vocation, according to their vocation, which they were caught. And we could meditate, on all these seven qualities, some evenings, but that's not our purpose tonight.

[00:40:02] And then he speaks, in verse four, five, six, about these three circles, in which they were living. The first one is, there is one body, and one spirit, even as they are called, in one hope of your calling. This is what has been called, the circle of life, where everything is reality. The spirit is mentioned, preeminent here. There's this one body, the one body, which exists of all true believers, and nobody else.

So this is the circle of life, the circle of reality. One body, there is one spirit, the spirit which every believer has, and one hope of our calling, the hope of the saints. And so that is what he speaks about first, when speaking about the assembly. The second circle is, verse five, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

This is the circle of profession, of the Christian profession. Unfortunately, not everything is real here. The profession, there is one Lord. Yes, everybody in the Christian countries [00:41:03] says there's one Lord, you know, Jesus, and there is one faith, which means the Christian faith, and there's one baptism, Christian baptism. So that is the circle of profession. And then thirdly, we get an even wider circle, one God and Father of all. Here we have the circle of creation, and so he speaks later on about this area of creation as well, when speaking about the family and about these things. One God and Father of all, which means here that God, as the creator, is the source of everything.

And he says, who is above all, even if he is the creator of all, there might be the most powerful thing created. God is above all, and he is through all.

Everything that is worked, is worked through him. And he says, and in, it doesn't say all, in you, all.

Because that, of course, [00:42:02] is related to the believers now. So we have this circle mentioned, and the believer is living in each of them, and in each he has a responsibility. Living in the circle of creation, we have a responsibility as man and wife, because what God laid down for man and wife is something that goes back to creation. And then we have this circle of profession, where we have to show that our profession is true and real. And then there is this one body of the assembly, and he's going to speak about this. And then he says, this body, first of all, I'm going, could only touch on these points shortly, because we have not the time to deal too much on them. First he says in verse seven, but unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. So he

says, there's this one body. And in this body, every one of us has a gift from God, which is called here a grace. It's given grace according to the measure [00:43:01] of the gift of Christ. Speaking about the body, this is obviously something which we understand quite well. Nobody would say, well, in my body, this finger is no use whatsoever. There's no member of our body which is not a tongue, when we have an accident or something and couldn't use some of our members, we realize how useful they were when we could use them. And this is the same with the spiritual body. Every member of this body has given the grace to work according to the measure of the gift of Christ. But there are also particular gifts he has given.

And so he says in verse 11, and he gave some, he does not say everybody, because that wouldn't be true. He gave some apostles, some prophets.

These were the gifts who laid the foundation, who are no longer there, but their writings in the book, inspired scriptures, are still available to us. [00:44:01] And some evangelists and some pastors and teachers. So he mentions these three fundamental gifts, which still are there. The evangelist that preaches the gospel to bring those into the body that gets saved.

Then we find the pastors and teachers, those that care for the souls, that teach the doctrine of God.

And this all is for the perfecting of the sins that we grow, that we become mature Christians, so to say, for the work of the ministry. This is a very wide application.

Every ministry which there is, he has given gifts for it, for the edification, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Every gift should be used for the edifying of the body of Christ. If we use a gift and it's not edifying for the body of Christ, we may ask ourselves, what is wrong with that? Because they are given for the edifying of the body of Christ.

[00:45:01] Here we all come to the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and to this perfect man, this mature Christian man.

And then he says later, that we should no more be children tossed to and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine. Here we see what he was saying in Acts 20, that there were people coming, teaching wrong things. And if we are not established in the faith, then we will be like those children in the faith who are tossed to and fro by the wind of doctrine. Anybody comes with a new doctrine and these immature people here, they say, oh, that's something new we heard. And that's interesting. But this is nothing which should characterize a believer. The unbelievers in Athens, when Paul was there, they spent their time with nothing else but hearing something new. And so they were very interested when Paul was going to preach to them about the Lord Jesus and resurrection.

[00:46:02] When he first said this, they were thinking he was going to offer them two new gods for their Olympus because he was speaking about the Lord Jesus and resurrection. But later on, when he preached to them, they understood quite clearly what he meant. And therefore they started to approach him. But now we find we should be, through all this ministry, we should become mature Christians. And of this, every wind of doctrine, by the slate of man and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. It is man who is still there in all his cunning craftiness and trying to deceive man, the believers.

But we should be speaking the truth in love, growing up into him in all things, which is the head, even

Christ. Head, Christ is the head. And there's the body. And everything is in perfect harmony as long as we teach this truth in love and are not deceived by anything else. [00:47:02] And then he comes back to everybody.

He's spoken about some, but now he says again in verse 16, the whole body fitly joined together, compacted by that which every joint supply.

Every joint of the member supplies something to the edifying of itself in love.

What does that mean? It says here, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Edifying of itself does not mean that I'm only going to work for my own edification, but it means that the body of Christ is in a way made by God that it could edify itself.

The body of Christ does not need anything outside itself to be edified.

Let me be very clear about that. We're living in times when some people say, well, we must take science as well.

[00:48:03] It's a great help for growing the faith, for understanding God's philosophy, theology, or whatever you might think about. But God is saying, nothing outside the body is for the edification of it.

The body could edify itself in love in using what he has given.

The word of God, the gifts he has given and the grace he has given to every joint suffice, it is enough to edify the body.

Nothing else is needed for that. How often Christians have tried to put other things and add them to the word of God. God says, no, the word of God and his spirit are enough to edify his body when we are in the right condition. So we see that Paul could show the Ephesian Christians that they had everything they needed to become mature Christians on the way of faith. But we will see, Lord willing tomorrow, [00:49:01] that they took a development, not to the better, but to the worse.

And the reason for that was not that anything was lacking on God's side, obviously not, but that their heart's condition was wrong. And so we might take this as a warning.

But for today, we might finish with this thought, taking it with us that God has indeed equipped his body with everything it needed to be established, to be edified and to be united to the head and to keep the unity of the spirit of the bond of peace.