

2. The Last Goodbye

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 June 2012

Preacher: Andy Gemmill

[0 : 0 0] Well, please do sit down. I'd be very glad if you would turn in your Bibles to the book of Acts and chapter 20. You'll find that on page 929 in the church Bibles.

We're going to read from verse 17 where the Apostle Paul speaks to the elders of the church in Ephesus. Of the many speeches in this book, this is the only speech that is given to Christians and it's to Christian leaders.

Chapter 19, just to set the scene, Paul's ministry in Ephesus is one of the big high points of this book. And the departure from Ephesus is a significant event.

And as he leaves, Paul sends for the elders of the church in Ephesus to meet him at Miletus. And he speaks to them.

We're going to read these verses and consider them at some length this evening. Verse 17 of chapter 20. Now from Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

[1 : 2 3] And when they came to him, he said to them, You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews.

How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And now, behold, I'm going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

But I do not count my life of any value, nor as precious to myself. If only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I've gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I'm innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

[2 : 5 0] Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified.

I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands minister to my necessities and to those who are with me.

In all things I've shown you that by working hard in this way, we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

[4 : 03] And when he'd said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all. They embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he'd spoken that they would not see his face again.

And they accompanied him to the ship. This is the word of the Lord. We praise him for it. Let's have a word of prayer as we come to God's words.

Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that we have your living word. In our own language, with an open Bible in front of us, we can come together and learn from your word together.

We pray, please, for the work of your Holy Spirit among us all this evening. We ask that this word would shape our understanding and our thinking, our living, both individually and corporately.

Help us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Not infrequently, there is something interesting about a famous person's last words.

[5 : 27] Sometimes the speaker is flippant and trivializing. Humphrey Bogart, the famous actor, I should never have switched from scotch to martinis.

Sometimes the speaker is tired and cynical. Winston Churchill, I'm bored with it all. Those were his last words. Sometimes the speaker is completely ignorant of the fact that these are his last words.

The American general, John Sedgwick, said this. They couldn't hit an elephant at this distance. And that was the end. This evening, we are looking at some famous last words.

Not spoken flippantly or cynically or ignorantly, but deliberately and urgently. Because this is the last opportunity for speaking.

Not because the speaker is just about to die, but because the speaker is leaving for good. The words in question, Paul's farewell speech to the elders in Ephesus.

[6 : 31] His last words ever to these church leaders. Remind ourselves where we are. We're in modern day Turkey.

In the ancient world called the province of Asia. Ephesus, the big city of the region. Paul spent over two years there. It's accounted in Acts 19.

It was a very effective ministry. But as that ministry is going at its best, we get a big change. Just turn back to Acts chapter 19, would you?

And look at the contrast, the surprise in verses 20 and 21 of Acts 19. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Things are going well in Acts. In Ephesus. Verse 21. Now after these events, Paul resolved in the spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem saying, After I've been there, I must also see Rome.

[7 : 38] There's a surprise there, is there not? Things are going so well. The word of the Lord is increasing and prevailing mightily. And Paul chooses to go somewhere else.

Why? Well, because there's other work that needs to be done. Churches elsewhere need encouragement. Money needs to be taken to Judea to help Christians in difficulty.

And there's a whole world that needs the gospel. I must see Rome, says Paul. He's got further fields in mind. And that makes him turn his back on this great city and this very influential ministry.

Because there's more to think about. Can I say slightly by way of a side here? There is always more for a church and its leaders to think about than the things that they can see in front of their noses.

Our area, our parish, our city, our region even. There's always more for a church and its leaders to think about. There's always more than that to think about.

[8 : 44] Very important to bear this in mind. Was Ephesus not a very good place for gospel ministry? It certainly was. Was it not a very strategic city in the region? Absolutely it was.

Could not Paul have been employed here for a good time longer? Certainly he could. Certainly he could. But for a gospel worker and gospel churches, there is always more to be considered than what's going on here and now.

Always. And the consequences of that is life is always going to be uncomfortable for gospel workers and gospel churches. Were they glad to see Paul go?

They were not glad to see him go. And this definitely is a last goodbye. Look at verse 25 of chapter 20.

Now behold, I know that none of you among whom I've gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face ever again.

[9 : 43] And look at verse 37. There was much weeping on the part of all. They embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he'd spoken that they would not see his face again.

He is not coming back. However, this is one of the least sentimental goodbyes you'll ever come across. Because the future that Paul describes here in this speech is a difficult one.

Difficult for him and difficult for them. They need to know what to do. It's a wonderful, helpful speech. It's unflinchingly honest.

It's utterly realistic. And more than that, it's tremendously reassuring. On the one hand, it reminds them and us that difficulty is quite normal in church life.

Don't be surprised if it happens. It's just normal. On the other hand, it reminds them and us that with God's help, difficulty can be managed when it comes about.

[10 : 50] Now, let's wander into this wonderful speech and just all too briefly observe several things about it.

Notice, first of all, this is a speech full of reminder. There's a strong emphasis all the way through on things that are already known by people.

Verse 18. You know. Verse 25. I know. Verse 31. Remember.

Verse 34. You yourselves know. All the way through this speech, Paul reminds them of things they already know. About his ministry.

About things he's told them already. Nothing is new, I take it, in this speech. He's just summing up, reemphasizing, underlining things he's already told them.

[11 : 50] He reminds them of three things. How he lived. What he taught. And what the future holds. Let's look at those in turn. First, Paul reminds them of how he lived.

Look at verse 18. You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews.

The emphasis here is on how Paul behaved. And especially how he behaved in difficulty when there were plots against him.

Look at the language. Humility. Tears. In the middle of difficulty, Paul was humble.

There have been difficulties before, he says. And you know how I behaved then. I wasn't arrogant or aggressive in the face of difficulty. But I kept going at it.

[12 : 58] Neither, he says, did I wimp out of difficulty. Look at verse 20. And here we're quickly on to our second thing. He reminds them what he taught. Verse 20.

Let me read 19 again. Serving the Lord with all humility, with tears, with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews. That's how I lived. And how I didn't shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable.

And teaching you in public and from house to house. Testifying both to Jews and to Greeks. Of repentance towards God. And of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Twice in this speech. Paul says to them. That he did not hold back. From declaring to them anything that they might need. Verse 20.

And we see it again in verse 27. Just turn over to that, would you? I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

[14 : 05] And friends, I guess that must mean that there were occasions when the apostle Paul was sorely tempted not to say things that he ought to keep saying.

That there were times when it would have just been easier to keep his mouth shut and not to speak. Not to pursue the gospel agenda.

Not to make a fuss. Instead of that, Paul emphasizes that he has done a comprehensive job. They got the full package from Paul, he says.

It's shown by pairs of words. Did you notice them in verse 20? Declaring and teaching. In verse 20 again. In public and from house to house.

Formal settings and informal. Everywhere I did it, he says. 21. Jews and Greeks. All sorts of people. Nobody was left out of it. Verse 21 again.

[15 : 05] Repentance and faith. Two sides of the same coin. Turning away from things that are false. Turning towards trust in the Lord Jesus. You see the comprehensiveness of those pairs of words?

Declaring, teaching, public, house to house. Jews and Greeks. Repentance and faith. Everybody gets it all the time. The whole package. The point is that in all sorts of ways.

By all sorts of means. In all sorts of situations. He told all sorts of people precisely what they needed to hear. He didn't short change them.

They got the proper message. The full package. And all of that. In a context when it would have often been easier for him. Just to keep his mouth shut.

Not to speak. Not to say the difficult thing. Paul says. It wasn't proudly or aggressively done.

[16 : 07] Humility and tears. But it was thoroughly done. And they knew it. They'd seen it in action.

You yourselves have seen it. He says. How I lived in difficult circumstances. And how all the time. I gave you the full thing.

Not holding anything back than you needed. Now let me make a couple of observations on this. It's very striking isn't it. Do you notice first. How. Life and teaching.

Are inextricably linked in Christian ministry. For the teaching. Requires. Character. Telling everyone.

Everywhere. All the time. That repentance towards God. And faith in the Lord Jesus. Telling everyone. That they need to do that. Is going to cause a fuss.

[17 : 05] It just is. And if you're going to keep doing that. You'll need character to keep doing it. What is the gospel worker to do. When opposed.

Well what do you naturally do. When opposed. What do you naturally do. When opposed. Just think of it. For three or four seconds. What do you naturally do. When people oppose you. Unjustly. Or unkindly.

Well there are two normal human responses to that. First is to fight back. Wallop. Give back as good as you get. Second is to run away. In terror. And not go anywhere near that again.

Do you see what Paul says. I didn't do either of those. I didn't wallop back. When bad things happened. Neither did I run away. And stop doing the difficult ministry. You see how life and teaching.

Are inextricably linked. You can't do one. Without the other. Paul. Paul. Humility. Tears.

[18 : 03] And a comprehensive ministry. Second observation. You can tell a genuine Christian ministry. By looking closely at it.

Is it a thorough ministry of the gospel. Or are things left out. Are difficult things left unsaid. Because they might provoke a response.

And in particular. How does it react under pressure. What does your minister do under pressure. It's always a good question to ask that.

Does the minister react brutally and arrogantly under pressure. Or patiently and humbly. Or patiently and humbly. Under pressure.

Does the minister. Shy away from the responsibilities of the work. Or keep doing it. Even if things are difficult. Brothers and sisters.

[19 : 02] If you have one. That is thorough. And patient. And humble. You ought to be very thankful indeed. Don't you not. Is that not a difficult thing to keep doing.

You can tell a genuine ministry. By looking closely. Especially. When it's under pressure. How he lived.

What he taught. Why is he making this point. Well because Paul knows. That just as the past. Has had its difficulties. In Ephesus. The future.

Will also. Have difficulties. And just as the past. Has required. Careful thoroughness. So will the future.

And just as the past. Has required. Courage. And diligence. And not cutting corners. So will the future. And so we're on to the third thing.

[19 : 59] What the future holds. First. What the future holds. For Paul. Verse 22. Now behold. I'm going to Jerusalem.

Constrained by the spirit. Not knowing what will happen to me there. Except that. The Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city. That imprisonment. And afflictions.

Await me. But I do not count my life of any value. Nor as precious to myself. If only I may finish my course. And the ministry that I received. From the Lord Jesus.

To testify to the gospel. Of the grace of God. He says. Look I don't know exactly. What the future holds. But I do broadly know. What the future holds.

Because everywhere. The Holy Spirit testifies to me. That difficulty is going to come. That's what he's saying. Isn't it? I do have a pretty good idea.

[20 : 56] Of the general shape of things. From this point onwards. What responses needed. Verse 24. Well the response that's needed is.

Keeping going. At the right thing. See what Paul is doing here. The past may have had its difficulties. You know how I handled them.

The future is going to have its difficulties. And I have to keep handling them the same way. What awaits me as I move on. Is more of the same. Can I step back from this again.

And say. I mean it's the most obvious thing to observe really. Isn't it? Spirit driven gospel ministry. Always involves hardship. The Holy Spirit testifies to me.

In every city. The prison and the hardships await me. Spirit driven ministry is difficult. You would think it wasn't. Wouldn't you? You'd think if it was. Spirit driven ministry.

[21 : 56] It would be. Kind of floating above the ground. And above the difficulties of life. Not so for Paul. It means ending up in prison from time to time. And having a few beatings.

And a couple of shipwrecks thrown in. That kind of thing. I don't know what shape it's going to take exactly. He says. But I do know that it's going to be tricky. What awaits the Ephesians?

Well look at verse 25. Because life isn't going to be easy for them either. Now behold. I know that none of you among whom I've gone about. Proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.

Therefore I testify to you this day. That I'm innocent of the blood of all of you. For I didn't shrink from declaring to you. The whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves. And to all the flock.

In which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. To care for the church of God. Which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure.

[22 : 55] Fierce wolves will come in among you. Not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves. Will arise men speaking twisted things. To draw away the disciples after them.

Therefore. Be alert. Paul is disappearing.

He's leaving. He says to them. If difficulty comes. It's not that you didn't get the full thing from me. You did get the full thing from me. The full gospel.

I've told you the whole will of God. I take it that doesn't mean brothers and sisters. That he covered the whole Bible in two years. I don't think he did that. I think by the whole counsel of God. He simply means.

I told you the gospel. Comprehensively. So that you really understood everything that God was doing in Christ. They need to know that.

[23 : 53] Time and again. Paul's churches were assailed by people. Who told them. That Paul did not give them. The whole package.

The whole gospel. Oh yes. What Paul has said is okay. But we need to tell you something new. Something that will help you. Get through the difficulties of life.

Something that will add. Supplement. The full thing. No says Paul. You've had the full thing. Comprehensively. The full thing. So if anybody wanders around when I leave.

Saying he didn't give you the full thing. Well you'll know what to do. I take it that Paul knows this is going to happen.

And he explicitly tells them. That they've had the whole package already. Nothing missing. Nothing lacking. Paul is going to go.

[24 : 49] And secondly. And perhaps more worryingly for them. Wolves are coming. Verse 28. Paul is leaving. Wolves are coming. Wolves are coming. Be shepherds.

Wolves are coming.

Shepherd the church of God. He says. Which he bought with his own blood. Notice two things. First that Christians are very precious to God.

Bought with his own blood. Obtained with his own blood. Carelessness is not appropriate. With these people.

Carefulness is demanded. Notice that also they are in great danger. These ones. Bought with the blood of Jesus. Here we have the shepherding language.

[26 : 07] Of the New Testament. Why is the shepherding language used here? Is it to evoke thoughts of happy rural scenes.

With woolly lambs. Gambling around the hills. On a nice green background. Brothers and sisters. It is not. Think of the mind picture.

Evoked by the word pastoral. In our own culture. And in our churches. When people talk about pastoral issues. What are they talking about?

Well generally. If it's in your school. Or your university. They're talking about. Helping people in particular difficulty. To get over their problems.

Now of course that's a good thing to do. But that is not the way. The pastoral language is being used here. No. The mind picture here.

[27 : 03] Is filled with aggression. Brutality. Blood stained wool. And dead animals lying around. That's the picture. And unless we recover this image.

Our concept of pastoral ministry. Will be spineless. The work of the shepherd. That is being outlined here. Is not that of cuddling. Fluffy lambs.

But are fighting off. Ruthless predators. Just the same way. The Lord Jesus describes it. Does he not? John chapter 10. I am the good shepherd. What does the good shepherd do?

He lays down his life for the sheep. What does that mean? Well. When he sees the wolf coming. He stays in fights. Not like a hired hand who runs off. The fighting wolves image.

Is right at the middle. Of the pastoral language. In the Bible. Keeping the enemy away. The wolves are coming. Says Paul. And they won't be nice tame wolves either.

[28 : 03] They'll chew your head off. Eat your insides out. Pray on you in various ways. That's the image. They won't have your good in mind. These wolves.

And the primary responsibility. Of these church leaders. Is to protect people from them. Protection is the key word. Now.

At this point. Can I make the observation. That wolves do not announce themselves. As wolves. They do not wander through the door. Wearing a kind of. Wolf suit.

And flashing their shiny teeth. And wearing their big. Bling W. Around their neck. No one would fall for a wolf. That looked like that.

Would they? No. Wolves never look like wolves. Do they? That's why people are deceived by them. The Lord Jesus calls them. Wolves in. Not wolves clothing.

[28 : 59] But sheeps. They look like sheep. But they're not. They got big teeth underneath. And they're very fierce. Wolves. Wolves never look like wolves.

That's why people are deceived by them. That's why they look like sheep. That's why people don't think they're dangerous. But here says Paul. People will wander into your assembly.

Into your church. Wanting to profit from. The people in your church. I have a good friend. Who I met.

As a missionary in Belgium. For many years. After he'd been there. For about 10. I met him one summer. Over in this country. On holiday. He said.

You know. Of all the summers I've been. I've been in Belgium. This is the first. When I felt safe. To go on holiday. In summertime. Because. Every time.

[29 : 55] So far. That I've gone on holiday. The Sunday after. People have turned up. In our church. And tried to take it over. Isn't that extraordinary? There are people out there.

Who want to possess. The sheep of the Lord Jesus. For themselves. Paul is going. Wolves are coming.

But. Wolves don't just wander in. They're in already. Verse 30. And from among your own cells.

Will arise men. Speaking twisted things. To draw away. The disciples. After them. Therefore. Be alert. Remembering. That for three years. I didn't cease.

Night or day. To admonish. Everyone with tears. This is not a new message. Now notice. This must have been. Very hard to believe. Don't you think? He is talking to the church leaders.

[30 : 49] In the church in Ephesus. Presumably. People. He's been involved in appointing. And he says to them. When I go. Not only will dangerous people. Wander in the door.

But some of you. Some of you will get up. And try and make people follow you. Instead of the Lord Jesus. Do you think they find it easy to believe that?

I think they find it impossible to believe that. Don't you think? If you were to say that to your eldership today. Do you think they'd find that easy to believe? I don't think so.

Do you? Here we get the internal workings of the wolfy mind. Why do people teach deviant forms of Christianity?

Well there are a number of reasons in the Bible. One of them is to avoid hardship. But here is the big reason. People teach untruth to have others follow them.

[31 : 50] Look at verse 30. Speaking twisted things. To draw away the disciples after them. The possession and plundering of people.

Is the great motivation of the false teacher in the scriptures. The biggest one. Wanting people to follow you. So that in various ways.

You. Can profit from them. Some people are driven by insecurity. They want people to follow them. To prop up the failing ego.

Some people are driven by ambition. They want people to follow them. So that they can look important. Some people are driven by greed. They want people to follow them.

So that they can gain things from them. Sometimes the profit is psychological. These people need me. These people trust me. These people want to have me.

[32 : 51] Rather than the Lord Jesus. Sometimes the profit is material. These people will pay me. All over the world. Ministers of the gospel.

You wouldn't believe this actually. But all over the world. Gospel ministry is a great way to financial gain. Now you wouldn't think that in this country. But it is really. Brothers and sisters.

There's a lot of money in Christian ministry. And one of the ways that false teachers profit. Reasons they do it. Is to gain financially. Sometimes the gain is sexual.

These people will sleep with me. Psychological. Material. Sexual. It is characteristic of all the religious cults. That they become psychologically.

Financially. And sexually exploitative of people. The leaders. Eat up. The people who follow them. Deep in our sinful nature.

[33 : 49] Is the knowledge that we can profit from others. And says Paul. To his best trained group of elders. Some of you guys will do that.

That's a shocking thing to say. Is it not? And of course they did. Less than a decade later. Read 1 and 2 Timothy.

Written to Timothy in the church in Ephesus. Ephesus. And some of the leaders in the church in Ephesus. Are doing precisely. What Paul says here that they would. That is a worrying thing.

Isn't it? You worried by that? Worries me. These things happen. Says Paul. I find that very hard to believe.

Think. Think of yourselves. Think. Think if you'd had. This church is a. As a great history. Of gospel ministry. For a long time. But think.

[34 : 52] If you'd had the apostle Paul. As your minister. How long would that keep you on the straight and narrow? Honestly. I think that might at least last for a generation.

Don't you? I mean the apostle Paul. As our minister. That would seriously do the business. How long did it last in Ephesus? Less than a decade. Isn't that a shocking thing?

I'm involved in something called the pastor's training course. We had a residential week. Last week. Thank you. For praying for that. We try and get good people. To come and teach the guys on our course. If I could get the apostle Paul.

Wow. Wouldn't that be terrific? Wouldn't it be terrific? You'd think a week of exposure. To the apostle Paul. Would keep somebody going for a lifetime. How long did it keep these leaders going? Less than a decade.

Isn't that a shocking thing? Human sinfulness is deeply rooted. And it expresses itself in leadership. People who want to possess others for themselves.

[35 : 58] Now. I don't want you to be too discouraged by that. Because Paul is very encouraging here. This is reality brothers and sisters. It's reality. It's not a surprise.

When you see untruth prospering in the churches. And church leaders involved in untruth prospering in the churches. It's all written here in this speech in Acts chapter 20. It happens. It's normal.

It's not a surprise when it happens. How do you face that kind of future? Well Paul says two things here.

And I'll be brief. First. God and his gospel word. Verse 32. Now I commend you to God. And to the word of his grace.

Which is able to build you up. And give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Sanctified. The work of the gospel is such a weak looking thing.

[36 : 55] To pastor the people of God with. I mean. Faced with these threats. Wouldn't you have a huge security system outside your church building. And regular checks on anybody in leadership. Wouldn't you?

Paul says no. The way to pastor God's people is with the gospel of God. The word of his grace. It is able to build you up.

Leaders and churches. And give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Can I say that there are so many more things to give your attention to.

There are so many things that clamor for your attention. There are so many things that clamor for the attention of a church leader. There are so many other things that look useful and profitable.

But brothers and sisters. If we don't. If we lose hold of. Or neglect. Or sideline. The comprehensive teaching of the gospel of God.

[37 : 55] Well we miss out on the resource that God has provided for us. The second resource here is Paul and his gospel pattern. Verse 33.

Again he reminds them of how he was. And what he did. Why does he do that? Well I think as an antidote. A way of testing others who might come along.

The wolf who might wander through the door. In disguise. The wolf who might emerge from the existing eldership at Ephesus. In disguise. How do you test them?

Well does this person have these kind of personal characteristics? Verse 33. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. I wasn't after your stuff.

He says. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities. And to those who were with me. He funded his own gospel ministry.

[38 : 51] Significantly. In all things I've shown you that by working hard in this way. We must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus.

How he himself said. It is more blessed to give than to receive. What he's saying is. You've seen the way I live. The things I did. Especially with relation to material things.

I didn't act like a greedy person. In fact I supported myself much of the time. And I was generous. Not acquisitive.

And I worked hard. I wasn't lazy. Do you see how that personal example. Is there as a guard for these people. When they're not sure about someone.

They're to say. Do they do it the way Paul did it? They're generous like him. They're hard working like him. They're greedy.

[39 : 52] They want to have stuff. They're always interested in what they can get. Or are they always. Giving. Lending. Not expecting things back in return. That'll tell the difference.

Two very important things then. God and his gospel word. Paul and his gospel pattern of doing things. Now our time is gone.

Let me say three things by way of conclusion. One. Recognize the means of attack. The means of attack.

The means of encouraging people into untruth. Is generally. To make Christians believe. That they have not got the whole package. Paul is emphatic.

That in proclaiming repentance and faith. In Christ. He has given them. The whole package. Nothing lacking. Recognize brothers and sisters.

[40 : 53] The means of attack. When you personally. Or corporately. Are being made to feel inferior. Because somebody seems to have more than you do.

More than faith in Christ. Be very suspicious. Be very suspicious. It's the characteristic means. Of turning people away from faith in Christ.

Try and persuade them. They haven't got the whole thing yet. Point you to themselves. As the place where you can get the whole thing.

Recognize the means of attack. Second. Recognize the means of defense. The gospel. Properly taught. And properly lived. Is the antidote to this. The safeguard.

For all the difficulties. That the future might hold. And third. Recognize. The dangers. Of responsibility.

[41 : 55] He's talking here to church leaders. Do you notice how he tells them. To watch out for themselves. Verse 28. Pay careful attention.

To yourselves. And the flock of God. It's dangerous. Being in a responsible position. For people.

It's dangerous. And the longer you're in a position. Of responsibility. The easier it is. To begin to think. These people are here for me. These people are here for my benefits.

What a splendid person I am. Because these people are at my Sunday school class. Or Bible class. Or house group. Or prayer meeting that I'm running. Or whatever it is.

Consider what a dangerous person you could become. If rather than. Wanting to point people away from yourself. Towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

[42 : 58] You become glad to point people. Towards yourself. Have them trust you. Rather than trust him. And of course that's true.

At a small level. And at a big level. In church families. Is it not? People become very possessive. Of my little area. Or. My big congregation.

Or whatever it happens to be. Recognize the means of attack. Recognize the means of defense. And recognize the dangers. Of responsibility.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together.

And to those who were with me. In all things. I've shown you that by working hard. In this way. We must help the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus.

[44 : 16] How he gave. How he himself said. It is more blessed to give. Than to receive. We thank you Heavenly Father.

For this great speech. We thank you for its realism. We thank you for its warnings. So often we recognize. That those warnings are well founded.

In the world in which we live. We thank you too. For its encouragements. We thank you that there is protection. For the people of God.

In the gospel. And in Paul's faithful. Unself-seeking pattern of ministry. We pray Heavenly Father.

That whatever our own level of responsibility. In our church. In our Christian union. In whatever situation. You would help us to be people. Who don't covet.

[45 : 11] The things that people can give us. But rather long. That people will turn their attention. And their focus.

And their trust. Towards the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray for the leaders of our own church. We pray that you would keep them. Humble. And patient. Especially.

In opposition. We pray that you would keep them. True to your gospel. Especially. When that will be difficult to do.

We pray that you would be merciful to us. We pray that you would grant us. A comprehensive ministry of your gospel. Patiently and gently.

Done. And we pray that not only for those. With big responsibilities in our church family. But also for each one of us. As much as we have responsibility.

[46 : 10] Deliver us from being self-seeking. Help us to point others to the Lord Jesus. Hear us. For we ask it in his name.

Amen.