

Acts - Commentaries by Clifford Henry Brown

Vessels of Mercy, Vessels of Mercy (9:1-22)

Address in Toronto, April 2, 1945

"And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory. Even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles" (Romans 9:23-24).

"Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25).

I want to talk tonight about one of these vessels of mercy. "That He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy."

Acts 9:1-22. This is a scripture we have spoken from many times in the gospel, but it is not the gospel I have particularly before me tonight, although of course one cannot speak from this chapter without touching upon it. It is the story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who became the great Apostle Paul. Substantially the same story is given in three different chapters in the Acts—in the 9th, the 22nd, and the 26th. It must have been an event of tremendous importance to be repeated in God's Word this way, three times.

We find here one of the most remarkable instances; we get in Scripture of one of these "vessels of mercy." Oh, what a delightful term that is! I believe, dear brethren, the older we get in our Christian lives, the more we come to see that all our standing before God is on the ground of those who have received mercy. The older we get, the more we discover how utterly worthless we are, and how there was nothing in us that could call forth from God anything but judgment and condemnation. Yet He set His love upon us, sought us out, found us in our hiding place, drew us forth, revealed Christ to us; and ever since we came to know Christ as our Saviour, and God as our Father, He has been forming Christ in us.

It is His work—God's work in the vessels. Let us ever remember, dear saints of God, that God's work in us is far more important than any little work we will ever do for God.

God is working in us, and He is working in us both to know and to do His will. The object of ministry is to conform us to Christ in glory.

Oh, the patience and grace of God with the saints of God! What material He has to start with! Here was Saul of Tarsus—and what a character he was! If you had canvassed the face of the earth to seek out the most unlikely candidate for salvation, I think you would have decided that of all the hopeless characters, Saul of Tarsus headed the list. There was not a thing about the man that gave evidence of any hope that he would ever bow the knee to the blessed name of Jesus. His whole background was against it. He tells us in the 22nd chapter about his preparation. "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day, and I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (Acts 22:3-4). He was a Jew, and a religious Jew who had many opportunities in this world. He was cultured, well educated, and he came of the best blood. Yes, he had as blue blood as one could find anywhere. He tells us about it in Philippians 3:5-6, "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." He had sat at the feet of Gamaliel, the greatest of all the teachers of his day. He was learned in all wisdom. His mind and thinking processes had been formed by the Jewish system. As a result the man had become possessed with one definite passion in life, and that was to erase the name of Jesus from the face of the earth. He started out to do it, young in life. All his gifts; all that splendid mind of his, all his natural talents, were channeled in the one direction—to get rid of the name of Jesus.

We sometimes read about atrocities that take place in Europe, and sometimes we speak ill-advisedly with our lips and we say, "How is it possible for human beings to do such terrible things?" Perhaps we talk about Hitler or Himmler, or some of the rest of them, and picture them as fiends out of the pit. But after all, their animosity, the hatred of their hearts, is directed against some man or some system of things down in this world. Perhaps they are against capital; perhaps they are against Jews; perhaps it is the hatred of the Nazis against the British, or the hatred of the yellow man against the white man. There are various hatreds that go on in the world, but they are not primarily directed against the Lord Jesus Christ. That was not the case with this man. Every waking moment of his life he was boiling inside with hatred, and it was pointed directly at the face of Jesus, the Son of God. Oh, what a character he was!

God does not have any unnecessary material in His Word. There is no such thing as vain repetition in Scripture. When we get the course of Saul brought before us over and over again as to the animosity that was in his heart, it must be that God wants to teach us a lesson. When Paul says that he was the chief of sinners, I do not believe that he was using a mere hyperbole—I do not think it is just a human exaggeration. I believe he said it in all sobriety, and in the coming day when everything is manifested to the glory of God forever, He will show that the sacrifice of Christ was so all-inclusive, so complete, and so effective, that the worst man that ever trod this earth is in glory forever and ever—and that man was Saul of Tarsus. He had not stolen anything and he was not a gutter character; but he was a man possessed with that awful, burning hatred against the Lord Jesus Christ.

But, oh, the grace of God! "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). The flood-gates of God's grace are going to envelop this man, and completely transform him, and make him a trophy that is going to be to the glory of God forever and ever.

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest" (Acts 9:1). His very breath was charged with hatred against the children of God. Why? "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it." The Church was the loved object of Christ in glory. Saul of Tarsus says, "If you love it, I hate it." He was breathing out threatenings and slaughter. It was not mingled with mercy, either. Look at "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3). It was a house to house canvass, and he did not care whether they were men or women. Oh, what a noble occupation! What a man! "Beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and wasted it" (Gal. 1:13). He went beyond even what a human being would think was proper bounds. He simply abandoned himself to his hate. "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it." What did Saul of Tarsus do? He persecuted it beyond measure and wasted it.

He confesses it again in 1 Corinthians 15:8-9, "And last of all He was seen of me also, as one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever" (1 Tim. 1:12-17).

"Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:7-8).

What a low place he takes! What a transformation has been wrought in his soul! "The least of all saints," "The least of the apostles," "The chief of sinners." What a change takes place in his estimate of himself as he gets into the presence of God!

Let us go back to Acts 9 and see how this all took place. What was this transformation? In Acts 26 when he is rehearsing his experiences before Agrippa, he says, "Which thing I also did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities" (Vv. 10-11). And in the 22nd chapter he tells us about it again (Vv. 4-5): "And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders; from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished." Oh, the madness of his course!

Such we find him in the first part of our chapter, and God is allowing him to go on in this course. Why didn't He stop him before? He had practically emptied Jerusalem of Christians. That persecution that broke out in the days of Stephen, of which Saul appears to have been the ring-leader, had pretty well cleared the Christians out of Jerusalem. Now there is no more prey there for him, and he begins to look afar for other victims. He hears that there are some Christians about two hundred miles away, and he starts out for Damascus. God let him go that far. He could have stopped him when Stephen was stoned. But God was going to teach him lessons, and He was going to teach us lessons too, through the Apostle Paul. Through all this experience He was going to mold and fashion that servant so that after the transformation took place he would go forth as one that had been prepared in God's school for the work He had for him to do. "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (Romans 9:20). Could Saul of Tarsus turn and cast back upon God the charge, "Why did You not save me sooner?" No, he never did that. God let him go on, and when He met him, He took him in the height of his folly, when his hatred was burning at white heat. Then He met him, and He met him in infinite grace. He was overwhelmed with the grace which was in the heart of God, manifested through Christ, and the sense of it was so burned into his soul that it characterized his ministry all the days of his life. As the result of all his experience, he was a fitted, suited vessel, to be able to tell out to you and me the matchless grace and mercy of God to poor lost sinners.

Here he is in his evil work, on his way to Damascus.

His one burning purpose of heart is to enter home and house and hunt out all the Christians. When he finds any belonging to what he calls "the way," he is going to bind them and beat them, and bring them bound to Jerusalem; and when they are put to death, he is going to give his voice against them.

He is following his calling; but at midday something happens. "At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me" (Acts 26:13). What an experience! In that eastern country the sky becomes as clear as crystal as the sun beats down at noonday. Now, above the brightness of the noonday sun there appears a light, and in the 22nd chapter, where he rehearses the story he says, "When I could not see for the glory of that light." That is what smote him—the glory of that light. It brought him down in the dust. There he lies, and he hears a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" There was not a word of censure, but that solemn, soul-searching question. When Saul laid his violent hands upon a child of God, man or woman, he was laying his hands upon Christ. Every member was dear to the heart of Christ; and in that question Paul learns that Christ and His members are one.

"Why persecutest thou Me?"—"Who art Thou, Lord?"—"I am Jesus." Oh, what a revelation! That is the name he hates. That name Jesus formed the very core of all this burning hatred that he has been spewing out these many years. What a break-up is taking place! The vessel is breaking now under the surges of the mighty ocean of God's grace.

There he lies, smitten down by the light above the brightness of the sun, and he says, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" He gets his directions. He rises from the dust and continues his journey on to the same place for which he was headed. But oh, the change that has been wrought in that proud arrogant man! If I had read that passage in 1 Timothy 1 in the other translation, I would have read "Who was before an insolent and overbearing man." That is the kind of man he was. Now he continued his journey to Damascus, and what kind of a man is he? He is stumbling along with somebody leading him by the hand. He is absolutely blind—everything is as dark as Egyptian midnight before him.

Where is all the glory of his retinue? Where is all the pride and arrogance? He is as helpless as a little child, and he has to be led by the hand as he continues on his way into the city.

Somehow he finds a room there, and he lapses into soul loneliness, as he is shut in the dark with God. It does not make any difference to him whether the sun is shining or whether it is midnight. He does not want anything to eat. He does not want anything to drink. Day comes and day goes, and night comes and night goes, and there he is—alone with God. What is happening? Ah, beloved, there is a mighty transaction going on in that man's soul. He is learning what is inside his heart, and at the same time he is learning the grace of the heart of Christ. What awful strippings are going on! What things are dropping off during those hours of agony! What mighty wrestling is taking place! It is going to be a different man that comes out of this experience. He is reviewing his whole life, and thinking of what he has been, and of the One who met him by the way.

"And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said to him, Arise, and go into the street that is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus; for, behold he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."

There is a lesson for us here. When Naaman the Syrian came down to Elisha the prophet, Elisha sent his servant out to him and told him to go and dip in Jordan seven times. The man was violently enraged. He said, "I thought the prophet would come out and strike his hand over the place and heal me of my leprosy. Instead he sends one of his servants, one of his menials to give me a message." Saul is learning a further lesson here. It is not the Apostle Peter, the man with the keys of the kingdom of heaven, that is sent to him. That might flatter Saul of Tarsus. Instead, it is an unknown Ananias. He is somewhat like Melchizedek. He just appears and functions and then he is gone. He is just a common, everyday disciple; and when he gets his commission he does not want to go. Do you blame him? Sometimes (if I may throw in a side remark here) the Spirit of God says to you or me, "You go down into that street called Straight." You do not want to go, do you? Isn't that a fact? Ananias did not relish his mission either, but the Lord says, "You go."

"Behold, he prayeth" (vs. 11). Saul is the dependent man now. He is not insolent and overbearing any more. He is down in the dust—a praying man.

Ananias is sent to him, and the Lord knows where he lives. Ananias cannot make any mistake. God is interested in us, brethren—in the little things of our lives. He knows where we live. He knows our house number. He knows when we pray; and He knows when we do not pray. He knows all about those prayerless days that flit by, and He knows why we fell into that temptation, and why we dishonored the Lord. It is good to know that the Lord knows all about us.

Ananias obeyed the directions. "And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost" (vs. 17).

"Brother Saul"—what a bond! What a lovely greeting!

"The Lord, even Jesus"—that same name, but how differently it sounds in his ears now!—the sweetest name on earth! Isn't that blessed!—the glory of that Light had blinded him, and now it is that same One who says, "I am going to give you your sight, but you are going to see things through different glasses from now on. The world will never look the same to you again. You will see all things new."

"And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth" (Acts 22:12-14). That is where it all started—"The God of our fathers hath chosen thee." It started with God, not with Saul. Dear brother and sister in Christ here tonight, your salvation did not start with you, it started with God. "God hath chosen thee." I have a motto hanging in my library, and I like it. It has just one word—"Chosen." Isn't that a blessed word?

"That thou shouldest know His will." What a wonderful thing to know His will! Do we know it?—He wants us to. God wants us to know His will as to the question of salvation. He wants us to know His will as to the Church of God. He wants us to know His will as to our path through this world. God chose you to know His will. Are you interested?

"If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17). What blessing lies ahead for the willing soul! God wants you to know!—"chosen thee that thou shouldest know His will." We will never be able to shirk responsibility by saying, "I did not know what the Bible said." God intends us to know His will, and to search His Word to find it out. The Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica because they searched the Scriptures to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:11). Brother or sister here tonight, if you are not in the path of God's will, God wants you to get there; and the Church and guidebook is right here. The path is marked out, and God wants your feet in the path of His will.

"And see that just One." What a blessed experience that is! And, you know, Paul did see Him. "And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw Him saying unto me. Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem; for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me" (Acts 22:17-18).

"That just One"—how could He be just, and spare: that thrice-guilty man—that double-dyed sinner, who hated all that was dear to the heart of God? Why did He not send down fire from heaven and consume him? He certainly deserved it. Calvary is the answer to that. Saul's course, inspired by Satan and led on by the powers of darkness, had all been met, and met before Saul ever started on that wicked way. It had been met on Calvary's cross, and now God could come out in grace and still be the just One, and justify a man like Saul. "That He might be just,

and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). What a marvelous truth! If you do not understand it, read the first eight chapters of Romans until you do. God can be just, and the justifier of him that believeth on Jesus, though he may be the worst rebel against God that ever breathed.

"And shouldest hear the voice of His mouth." What intimacy! How sweet that voice! "Never man spake like this Man." How lovely the communications that fell from those blessed lips! It makes one think of Psalm 45:2—"Grace is poured into thy lips." Here, as Saul gets his commission from Ananias, he is told, "Thou shalt hear the voice of His mouth." When he heard the voice of His mouth, in place of bringing his sins to remembrance, in place of condemning him and reminding him of what a terrible character he had been, He brings before him the heart of God that loved him in spite of all his rebellion. The floodgates of grace are opened to take care of all he had been.

"Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil. 3:5-6). Paul rehearses there what he had been. He knew what it was to have a standing in this world. He had good breeding and upbringing, and every advantage, position, power and influence. He tells us about a lot of things there that gave him a standing in this world, and then he tells us what he did with them. He says, "I just threw them all away." "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:7-8).

Sometimes one hears saints talking about what they have given up, patting themselves on the back. Paul says, "I counted it all but dung." Who is going to talk about the sacrifice of giving up dung? He is not talking about sacrifice, he is talking about unloading a lot of things that hindered him in the race, that he might win Christ. He threw them away, and he never went back and picked them up. He never lost sight of that Object—Christ. I believe in those days and nights of darkness alone with God, it was all reviewed in His presence, and there he had a revelation that gave him to evaluate things according to God's standards.

If you and I are going to get the mind of God, we will have to get into His presence. We will never get the proper evaluation if we take the standards we see in the world about us. They are diametrically opposed to the judgment of God. You have to go to the Word of God, and in the secret of His presence let these things penetrate into your soul, before you can get His mind. It is not done in a moment, either. Paul was three days in the darkness, as he fought this battle, and learned what was worth while.

He came through the experience. He was baptized. He received the Spirit of God—and what was the next thing? "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). What a different testimony! Our King James version says he preached Christ; but the correct rendering is "Jesus." He preached Jesus—that name he had hated. He started right out with that burning testimony that characterized him right down to the day of his martyrdom. He preached Jesus—the Son of God—exalted and made high. He started out with that testimony as to the Person of Christ, and that was Paul's theme all the days of his life.

All the rest of his life, too, he taught along the lines of the preciousness of the members of Christ to the Head in heaven, which he had learned the hard way when Jesus had said to him, "Why persecutest thou Me?" It was thus he learned that Christ loved the Church. As a result, in his ministry he was always referring the members to the Head. If we have right thoughts about the Church we will do the same. The members of Christ will be precious to us, because we know they are precious to the Head in heaven.

We started out with a chosen vessel—chosen before he ever had thought of bowing the knee to Christ. He was one picked out by God. The question might arise, if the grace and sovereignty of God did that for Saul, would it not forever give him the idea it would do the same for other people, and that he need not worry about them? Would he not have had that biased opinion of election that would give him to be careless about preaching? He knew from experience all about God's sovereignty—yet he is the man who says, "I endure all things for the elects' sake, that they also might obtain salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10). He was willing to be sacrificed, to be offered up as a drink offering, in order that the saints of God might learn more of Christ, and be brought through the journey and landed safe in heaven. He did not say, "if they are going to be saved, they will be saved anyhow without my bothering about them." He said just the opposite—"I am willing to endure anything that they might obtain salvation."

This truth does not make you careless. It tells you God has some precious material He is going to bring in, and nothing will prevent His bringing it in. But you and I have the privilege of going out with the glad tidings.

Every child of God in this room was just like Saul of Tarsus—once a rebel, once away from God, dead in trespasses and sins; but you were chosen too, weren't you? The Spirit of God came along and brought you to the light, gave you to bow the knee to the name of Jesus, and it became precious to you.

What a wonderful thing it is to be associated in this world with the company that Christ loved—"Christ loved the church." Do we realize how dear the Church is to the heart of Christ? If we do, we are not going to be careless about Church truth. We are not going to say, "Oh, well, as long as you get busy in the gospel that is all that is necessary." Brethren, Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it. If you are in communion with His mind, the Church will be dear to you, and you will want to have His thoughts about it.

God wants you and me to be in communion with Christ, who loved the Church and gave Himself for it. How much are you willing to give? How much are you willing to suffer in order that others may come into the good of these precious truths? Paul was given to share in Christ's sufferings, and in a secondary way you and I are given, not only to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, but also to suffer for His name's sake. That is our privilege, and when we realize how dear the Church is to Christ, we ought to throw all our energies into line with His will, and seek to go through this world in communion with Him as to His thoughts about the Church.

Rather than this person or. That's an hour meditation, so they can only help you send the surface of it. What is your proper farewell message? Through the season, Elders who tells us in this chapter that he labored among them for three years. Some of us were speaking at the dinner table today of the precious, tender relationship. Affections that exist among the members of Christ where we're thrown together. And the associations that become us is the large redeemed. The lands of these associations continued. And that precious label comes they become less intimately associated in the bounds of Christ. You have to put the two out rounds. The deer Apache hastening to get to Jerusalem Brothers 8% across. You can't take the time to go up to episodes. IPL 2018 delayed 2 months. The next arrangements ahead of time, we might have the elders come down. And he don't burden me. Talk to them and they can take the message back to the beloved brethren of Epic. Chambali Dil SE Sentir Ephesus that my leaders will support. Hey, Cortana. And my ladies be sent to appetite and child the elders of the church. What is the artifacts, the number there and asked what does that mean the elderly of the church? In those days. We take it for granted and I think that we go. That the apostle had seen to it that wherever he ministered. Elders were ordained by himself or one of his representatives in every place where they live. Happy to. Chapter in hand, look at the 14th chapter of this hat here. 21St verse. At 1321. And when they got in many they returned again to Mishra, and to Athenian, and to Antioch. Concerning the souls of the disciples and exotic them to continue in the faith, and that we must do much stipulation enter into the Kingdom of God, and when they had ordained them elders in every church. And it played the fasting, they recommended them to the Lord, and who may have belief when they had ordained them elders in every church. Ordained elders in every church. That is his argument in the day of the Apostles. Now we may drive around conclusions at this point. You may say, if that's the case, let us have the same today. Let us have ordained elders and all our assemblies. Yeah, beloved, there are two reasons why we don't have them and why we can't have them. In the first place, we're having any apostles. We're having any properly constituted authority to place them in our meeting. That's the first reason. There are no occasion as far as the word of God tells us, but the church itself ever hold an election and elect or choose their elders. That was left to the apostles or to those who have delegated as far as family. We have no package today. Can you test me the password on the New Testament traffic we're occupied with laying the foundation of the Church of Dust? We had better find the foundation of the apocryphal Jesus Christ and stop being the truth for His soul.

They belong to the foundation. The foundation is laid. Apostleship was not passed on in the treasure. You get that very distinctly Black Hat and Peter's epistle. The first is one of the teachers of the apostles. And he reminds us of whom he looked at after his decision. They were to keep in mind, not what his successor should tell them. But they were to keep in mind what he had written to them. In other words, the only especially that has on his demise would be the written word itself. He made no provision to have someone take his face when he was flew down here. Why was any such provision made? As far as we can learn from Scriptures for the Church of God down to the ages, your provision made for a continuation of their postulates. That's the one route. Now the second reason is this. The person will have the Apostle Paul here today. And we could say to him, well, Brother Paul, you know, we in the Fullerton here would like to have some Arduino. And we would suggest that since he was here, that he should depart him. You know how I surmise would be the apostles reaction to that? What those are Sally's up was another question. And say, well, if I ordained elders for the Church of God in silicon, where shall I put them? I just asked that question on to ask what would we say? Would we say this is the Church of God in Fullerton? We would not if we were taught of God. No, he wouldn't be justice have a misinterpretation or a misunderstanding of the mind of God to say anything like that. That is the Church of God in Fullerton. The Church of God in Fullerton is composed of every blood vapor spirit in that soul. In politics, the sense of God in Orange County is composed of every blood that will feel so our spirit in black souls, and 30% of that. If your pastor wouldn't say, well, I'm going to put them all here in this little group. Or how inflated we would become. But he couldn't do it. He couldn't consistently do it. Because we cannot rightfully put a sign out in front of any building where we descended to meet and save the Church of God when we hear it such and such a time. Why gently? Because we're only just a poor little women. A poor evil little women spying in these last days. To maintain the truth as you find it in the word of death. But let us, none of us ever become incapacitated with the idea. Can you ask him back? Your brethren was just a poor little woman. Where the God has much to say about remnants, you know they have a lovely place and scripture. It's a permanent to be identified with the believing remnants, but the remnants must never get the idea, but they represent the whole thing never and God that any member. Of the body of Christ. When are included? Ears in the heart of the Savior, as anyone of us here in this room this afternoon. God doesn't believe in favoritism in that way. Every dear bloodbath soul is precious to the heart of God, to the heart of faith, and if you and I have the stress of God, which we think we strapped after Him, we're going to have affection for the members of Christ as we move them here in both.

We're passing calls to the elders. How many were they? When I told you. I don't believe you can find anywhere. And in the testament. Well, we're given anything, any, any description that we can pin down that elderly ship and say everything had 7 elders, 5 elders, 3 elders. But there's one thing we absolutely can turn back, and that is that there was no church that just had one. There's no such thing in the New Testament as the elder of the church that's out. No, the elders were always more than one. Now another question. We do that ordained out of it because we don't have the proper authority to ordain it. Let's ask ourselves this question. Does that mean that they have no elders? No, I do not think it means that we live out early, but we are without official elders. That in the goodness of God. In His mercy and His shame. In his consideration. Paris, in our remnant church. He does raise up with those among us that function in the capacity of elders. Thanks God for such. And I believe that faith recognizes such. Not losing our place here. Look at first. That's the name. The first chapter. Last chapter, First Thessalonians and the 11Th verse. Wherefore trumpet ourselves together. And edify one another even as also you do. And we beseech you, brethren. To know them. Which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord? Handed money and to assume them very highly in love for their work state. Andrea Teak among yourself. There is an extra safety to faith that gives recognition to those. Whom the Lord is praised, the rays of America that take the lead a month. That's only this further to the last chapter of Hebrews. You got a similar set. The last chapter of Hebrews on the 17th verse. Although then I submit to them that have the rule among us better translated, that take the leader on you. Submit yourself. For they watch for your soul, as they that must give account that they may do it with joy and not with dreams, for that is uncomfortable for you. I wish we'd heard of that. We are going to have that spirit of submission to those whom the Lord may place in a position as badly leadership among us. There are such in the rings of God among us wherever we go. Submit yourselves under them. Where is it? Take the lead among us, where they watch these souls. I presume some of us in our younger days had little idea of the exercise of soul through which some of our older brothers passed in their desire to see us. Go on with the left. How much time is spent in prayer? How often they mentioned our news because a friend of Grace as they sat the leaders and in the proof and she is preserved.

And I would say to these younger Christians that are here today. Don't despise the leadership that God has been pleased, success and the meeting with which you are identified. When a brother in the assembly comes to you and seeks to speak with you. In Shepherd's care for your soul. If you resist him, it isn't that you're just in rebellion against that particular damage, but you're rebelling against the law because

the Lord has faithful in the meetings, it has on their hats, the welfare, the things of that. And they sound out of an honest and good half a shepherd and chair for the flap of death. You know this word elder is synonymous with another word and secure. That's the word business. Look at the 1St chapter of Titus and you'll see that. What is the first chapter? And the fifth word. While this has left Ivy and Creek without its seven orders, the things that are wanting and ordained elders in every city by the point of these, if any be blameless. The husband of one wife having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly for a Bishop. Now, these things are terminologies. We're still talking about the same man. There's things that terminology. Now he's a Bishop. A Bishop must be blameless as a cured of God, not self will not seem angry, not given behind, no striker, not given to self remover. Of hospitality, a lover of Goodman, sober death, holy, temperate, holding fast to faithful words. He has been fast. But if you'd be able by sound doctrine both to exert and convinced the game players. I rarely see that Alder and a business. I have the same. If I use the two words. There is the elderly, the name of the Raptor. I don't have a pic from the original word accused or elders that it suggests that it's an old brother. When I turn older person to relatives turn. In a country such as the United States of America. Where the ordinary lifespan seems to be around 60 or 70. We looked for the older brothers, the Big Brothers with grey hairs, expecting to be well on in years. But our brother Alexander was telling me that down there, and that's part of Mexico where he's been living, but he don't live that long. Brother, Brother Eric Smith told me to sit down on the platform. There's a northern Bolivia. That the lifespan down there is comparatively good. Servicetitan pin this thing down and say you've got to have 60 birthdays before you can be an elder. They'd be only have to have 50 or maybe 30. In a way it's a relative matter, so we must be legal in these things. But we do see that one thing was replicated, that they should be those of life and experience, both in their personal life and in the assembly and their family life. They were not to be novices. I've met with some characters in my day, and I suppose you have two. I've met young men around unmarried young men around 2122 years of age. That would tell me the considerable price. Yes, I'm an elder in the church, an unmarried young man in his twenty. Well, we don't find anything like that in the Word of God. Those that are going to assume the place of leadership in the Assembly of God are those that are ripened and experienced. And remember this, that that is so substitute.

For life and experience and the things of death. That's the reason the word of God says not a novice, not one unit comes to the faith. Sometimes we have those back to the Lord energetic services. During the leadership. Then didn't really say that they had to do things and they immediately tried to take over. I need to wait, I need to be part of that. They need to ripen up in the school of breath. Or in the ways of God, he hasn't seen fit to put whirl in the church, our leadership in the church in the hands of such. I remember old brother Willis. That's first Super Willow. She's fat. What was that at the conference in Chicago? With a speaking language line. Because all my children have a better education than I have. But he says there's one thing that none of my children have. They don't have my experience. Let us not discount the fact that some of our brethren have been in the past few years. Has raised the problem that believers meet along the way. They start to get God's mind about the various situations that arise in the Church of that and what a privilege is to have those diseases and goals that are able to give us actual advice along the way. No, I've been to that. In its last analysis, the authority of the Word of God takes two things over anybody's advice. That goes without question. None of us are ever worried at the end the Word of God. None of us are going to be guilty of putting forth any drugs, nor the Word of God in the trains of food. But let us see where. And we resist the greatest careful leadership. Other sites have some brother or sister in the middle who trying to help us. Let us see to it, but they're not interesting. The voice of God the our country. If they do it would be to our left. Can I send a call presenting himself here? An apprentice of the axe to Belden? The 2nd 18th verse. You know from the first day that I came into Egypt. After what manner I have been among you at all things? After that manner. At all three. Sometimes that is wonderful. They don't seem to have more weight. Why the brothers don't listen to them better than they do? You think you might have an answer to it here? It also reminds Jesus and elders after what manner he had been among them of all seasons. And then as we read that chapter, we finally a Bishop and Titus, if you notice the qualifications. Are you complaining if your brother don't listen to you? You feel a hurt and slighted because you don't have more weight in your meeting. Without problem that you might have some of the answer to it. And this deception of the Bishop not S world. Not soon ended. Dear brother, look at the South Wales we'll lose your temper. If you do, it's in South Wales. Lose your temper if you're a stressor. At least 100 all the time. It felt wonder. That the veterans do not tell you the respect and they speak to them if you'd like.

Now the things work both ways. I said he my brethren, when they come to me. But on the other hand, that brother who assumes the place of leadership in the Church of God can speak to it, that he has a manner of life that corresponds to that place of leadership and a brother who's constantly losing his tent. It's constantly trying to have his own way. Resting in chakras. Not one that's going to command the respect in the confidence of the base. After what murder? I've been Redwood all season, serving the Lord with all. Good melody of mind, humility of mind. Is nothing more. Except that the limit little extremists turn that down. There are few things more unbecoming and a servant. Then to become pompous and over business. The apostle was not that. No, He served the Lord with all humility of mind. And with many kids. Administration, for him, never became a fast, easy pursuit. Yeah, he wasn't cleaning back in the lap of luxury and his services, right? It was a rugged reality for him. Wherever he went. He served the Lord with many tools and trials. I remember dear old brother father saying more than once he said if you want a happy service besides go out and fix it up. Then he says if you want style cats, serve the church and pass. And venomous food. But I'm just going to serve the church that God is going to bear on his path. All the trials and troubles in a six or eight and that is not true that the 1000 troubles that may be in our local assemblies at present moment. Are you saying in the history of the Church of God here on earth, they have all they said here? Certainly takes the truth of the church. Satan is the enemy of God and the Christ. Satan doesn't want to see anyone going on with the Lord in this world. He wants the swears in the confusion he's ever casting in the apple of discord among us that we need get us out with one another. And he's doing that. He's working at his place. But never got discouraged because things are not going as smoothly as a name. So let's increase into the closet. And then on our news we tried to God to wisdom and help with the difficulty that may be present at that time. Or I've seen. Some situations. Deadlocked situations and impact days that had seen that nothing to break. God came in and answered. To eat and long prayer sinks underneath firing of the United prayers and got the community and I've seen those situations clear up and dissipate and disappear. He came down again and happy harmony Alex. Remember that we have a living God in heaven that's interested in the World Heritage people just with a bunch of terms. Will be all stories that we exist. If your man is hired so. Who was his out and they they were in a bad company just looking for the next month, but. The lady was not. We deserve to represent. Is there to see first combined itself and he says I have kept back nothing underneath.

If they do, they're not in the mind of the spirit of dust. Will you be there in the 2nd 10 minutes as the time is coming? But they'll hit for themselves preaching having the two years and turn away in their years in the truth. They'll have the penalty for that. They should be turned on the table. The dream is just the truth of God. If you say I won't have it. Then you're going to have certain substitutes. We're going to be turned aside. There's something that's not the truth of that. There are the dear faithful apostles. Wherever he went, he didn't hold back anything. We're living in the air compromise. The desires for something. If I said hi. And that is the two sufferers. Those characters in the mood.

Because man has set certain goals and you say the. At that price. All, sad to say, at the price of the surrender of much of the precious fruit of God's Word. 16 value more. Assembly. Upenders getting together. Or the plain places and the graduated trees of death, and all experience which could be the first. Lord has something he wraps and the truth of God. Indeed it does. There, that will commit. The devil was always looted into the apartment. Broken life. Is there? Well, how do you have to be so different from everybody else? What is your father in the town the accepted pattern around? Don't you know how that works? What do you do? So you do well, things aren't too far offenders. Let's do it. Let's file in your accepted pen. His acceptance pattern 25 years from now, how to do it today? No, it's just gone that much further offended. And so it could try to keep up with acceptance. You're just drifting, drifting, drifting and generation to generation. And you know where you're going to end up. We're going to end up in layer to see us. Where you'll end layer to see it. What is layer is layer to see It's the last of the 750 as it started in the second and third captions of Revelations. And it's a professional Church of that. It turned such a massive thing that the large easy place the head of the church. Has to say I'm going to steal you out of my mouth. As a Facebook a rejected customer. That's exactly what's going to come. All this filled up that drawing around it was going on around us today. We're build up the world's house, whether it be the paracetamol, whether it's interesting. It's all heading for the same precipice, but it isn't far up and the whole thing is going to collapse under the government or hand of death. It's a day at present in the Lord lower than it is. And thank God he has been doing this. He knows it. They're not messing the crowd. He has his eye on it. One of these days you'll hear this guy, whatever he deems under the crowd out of this world, and he's the Lord in the earth. But there is something sad things to think, but all around suspended themselves and spills around functioning as though nothing had happened.

Representation design. That people can be there to work, the elders in the building can be there, and the thing can go on functioning as well. The Lord has never found where. Because it's an unsold truth and unsaved distance an unsaved elders and unsaved members. And that may be an extreme illustration, but it shows the points. The Lord is going to take out all the mediums and again those that have a cycle linked with a Living Tyson glory going to take them out and this shared life is so fighting is going to be left behind. Royal Dulles, they can't afford to take it over. Paul says I said that nothing that is possible to do. You want a half gospel. Without the preaching of the line of truth, but constantly dodging 50. And it's going to be dragging around here and there to the street that he comes across in God's Word. Or the Word of God's healing. And you and I have no right to discount one church within the midst of the book. It's proud. Looking for our instructions and our learning. Well, that was a burden of cause ministry. That was far as the gospel of the testifying both the Jews and the Greeks. The attendant served us. And faith, Lord our Lord Jesus Christ. Can never improve on that. If you haven't started with repentance toward that and faith in our Lord, the strike, we just haven't started. That's fundamental. That lies at the foundation of all. Have you taken sides of God against yourself? Have you taken your place in the press? And it tries to come your All in all. As you said, W is a pleadings of the Spirit of God had returned to the Lord Jesus Christ. Kentucky, Florida, and faith in our lives in the faith. And the one in whom you'll have to put your face in God, but. Many o'clock sights today. No trouble, Mr. Fox Noah. Yes, it is. Your doorbell rings. You go there and somebody wants to give you some medicine, maybe, the magazine says. Oh, wait. You know that magazine would be better named better Please. It's an opiate that puts you asleep. It's a denial of defeated God. Yes, Britney's busy. Who do I be? Of God's price, I'll be sure. That the price when you're trusting is God's price for the world is full of any price today. And their number is increasing and one of these days in a different. Plan B 295 it's going to be a pure on the truth and the world that has turned its back on website is going to weapons taking anything. Oh what a world it's been. Part of the Christian says Even so, some Lord Jesus. We're a little further down. 26 third. Therefore I took you to record this day, but I am sure from the blood of all men. When I have not done to declare to all personal death. People say, well, how do I have to go into all those things? Parents are satisfied just to pick the gas. Just that people save another girl that. I'd rather not a misrepresentation of the heart of Scratch, that is. Where is he, Godfrey? Learning a passive power board upon his part in his ministry to present.

Perfect in five feet, every man perfect. Firm ground mature. Don't ever be satisfied with your attainment is sufficient or their vast heights kept. He never returned down here, but ground ground ground. Some days they're going to be weaponed into the perfection of his presence, then there's no more progress to be made in that place but down here. We can always have more of Christ. We can search the word and if you live to be 100 years old. Mind clearing up the sink? You be discovered you and blessed truth in the word of God that you haven't seen before. I had that bill, Mr. Patterson, at my home. In 19 years in success and during this time of the morning Country, sometimes it's very two weeks, sometimes it's very six weeks. And the thing that I haven't noticed. And to wear that old gentleman ready back. And he got up early too, he decided. And he said crap to me. You know, I saw something in me in the stripped in that scripture this morning I never saw before in my life. And I think to myself, well, I don't understand that. I thought she knew everything was in that book. And yet she was making new discoveries, and there was with his patriarchal old way ahead of his, and his white beard, looking the very pictures of heavenly wisdom. Yet it is still finding new discoveries in the Word of God. Well, that's open. I take redirected to this day that I am cured from the blood of almond. How's your name below? Oh, he needs it. No one can ever tease him. Of having mislead them. After the truth of God, they can never say. Children never told us that. You never ministered that truth. I'm not done to declare you all the pain you won't let. You're not left. You wanna live by left. I would rather go to some company where they're quite satisfied with 75% of 50% and 25% and 30% of, you know, 75 or 10%, five percent, 1%. How much do you want? I'm not going to declare you all that is 12 minutes. Well, the good man comes down now to the end of his address to the elders. And the clear load up running down the street. As you told them, a sad move. After he was gone, Satan was going to get business. And devoured them, swapper them. And that Saturday was going to take place in two ways. The Jehovah Witnesses and the 7th Day Adventists and the Christian Scientists were going to come along. That Jesus was shatter the flesh. I don't believe that hurts the apathy. I don't believe that was a mess. Also of your own selves shall men arise. This intervention should draw a little disciples after them. That's made in new. Absolutely sat there for what? To remember that by the space of three years. I think not the one everyone doing that for sure. Oh how sad he when a brother. Assumes a responsibility. Of devoting the things of God, Of your own self shall men arise. Seeking her birthday? Flip something, experimenting. What's her? There are a world of scrambled after himself.

The thing has already started and stirred and tired doing anything on the paradise which is either paralyzed by this. But it's just as soon as in God's sight today as it was once. God threats haven't changed a bit. And you know, beloved things in God, I believe I can say it that that true humility impact. I'd rather just. Sit. I'd rather death right here. And Victoria. Ever be left in this thing to divide the Church of God? Aashiqui is one of the saddest prejudices ever possibly comes into the light of a of a servant of the Lord. The majority of leading away a person of the Church of God who decides to say he just put him out of personal following or have concurred in the heart of Christ that is. The Good Shepherd gathers his feet together. The good separate Kingdom set together as one glass. He lives in everyone. He wasn't, and Mr. Carter said that has been helpful to me down through the years. Extended. We have driven. Remember the Lord has shepherds. Remember the Lord has shepherds, but he has no shepherd's blood. All that that's been off, that takes up to me. In what spirit do I do I yearn after? Going whom? I'm a cheap train. Is it a stuff like these experiences and spirit or do I have a heart of strength? Which bears them upon my heart is allowing

you. And there are long deceiving gathered backwards like this ascended, but they might be happy in His presence again. And our brethren. I come in with a job and to the word of His grace. Notice he didn't say. I command you to the apostles. He didn't say I commanded to the elders or the deacons. We commanded them to know as the authority whatsoever. It amended them to two unchangeable objects. That and the Word and God things no God that change. It's not forever. Thy word is settled in heaven. He commanded them to God and the word of His faith, which is able to build you up. And to good you, and in the Spirit, and amongst all them in the sanctified. God wanted to be built up in our most Politico. And who wants us to have it in the paradise? Among all them, the expenses are 7. That people are sanctified people. They separated people, they gathered out people. I'm so proud of commanding into that job and to that word that would bring them into the realization that God wants us separated in the holy people. Well, when you see things like that. Signs of Tom Noodle. The holy things of that in the space of this world, but an insight. It is a blessed large peace. What's up? But remember how near we are to the early. Is our association that. God can recognize as a sanctified association. Is our fellowship of sanctified intelligence. I would like something from time to time. Are they trying to find relaxation? Somewhere in the desert and the rest of us that are no objection to people coming apart and resting as high, but are they sanctified relaxation?

536. When he had best person, he kneeled down and prayed with the man. Prayed with the man. So Jason not happen. Well, not permanent. All knelt down together and he prayed with them all. And I left SO and fell on child's nest decision. I love it as your sexy as the people of that. Don't ever speak to anything like that in the world. You'll never find it. John this or that, But you'll pay your way in and you'll pay as long as you're there. And all that you have is a mercenary and is a mercenary returns it's on the basis of your breath. And all, beloved, this fellowship in the Jew and I are brought by the Jason Shot is the food of Calvary. It comes down from a belt on the head of the church. Such lovely affections as he displayed here. Your weapon fell on his neck and have a lovely. Will be an unfaithful shepherd. Have you always spoken new things to them? Just the way they handed it. Absolutely no when it came to the farewell time. Their hearts and conscience is full. And that that dear man of God had told him the truth. And the third spoken to show their arms around them and their tears and jeans fears mingle as a pardon for the last time here on this earth. Darling, most of all for the words that he spoke. That they should see his face no more. And they accepted into the ship, yes, there they go down to the shore and watch them get on the boat. And I can see them waving as the boat turns out. You know, we're having their old brother among us, namely William George Sooner of Otter. He was insane, Never in my being at the Vancouver conference. My wife and I both 1913. And we took both and there down to Seattle. In that old manner, ensuring that last time I ever saw him, I broke, pulled out, and there's the old Gray head vector. That faithful servant didn't really have a feasibility food out there into the Bay. That was our last side of the ministry. All, beloved, how real are the attractions of Christ must not be president. That's not super substitutes. Let's surround the job. The Lord is coming. Let's go closer together, meet each other. I need your encouragement, and though I'd love to be a little encouragement to you. The Lord's coming is so near. Double quote.

Paul's Farewell Message, Paul's Farewell Message: Part 1 (20:16-20)

Let us read together Acts 20:16-38. This is the Apostle's farewell message to the Ephesian elders. Paul had labored among the Ephesians for more than three years, so that they had become very dear to his heart. Is it not true that the longer these associations in Christ continue, the more precious they become?

Here we have to picture to ourselves the dear Apostle hastening to get to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. He feels he can not take the time to go inland to Ephesus, so he makes arrangements ahead of time that the elders should meet him at the port of Miletus. He called for "the elders of the church." Would it be out of place to stop a moment here and ask the meaning of that expression, "the elders of the church"? In those days it was Paul's custom to either personally, or through a deputy, ordain elders in every church where he had labored. See Acts 14:21-23. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church."

Ordained elders in every church. Such was the order in the days of the apostles. Some will ask, "If that was the case then, why not today?" I would answer that there are two reasons why we do not have them, and why we can not have them now. In the first place, we haven't any apostles; we have no properly constituted authority to place official elders in our meetings. On no occasion, as far as the Word of God tells us, did the Church itself hold an election and choose their elders. That was left to the apostles or to those with delegated authority from them. As remarked before, we have no apostles today. The New Testament apostles and prophets were regarded as connected with the foundation of the Church, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone (Eph. 2:20).

Nor is it recorded that there was any provision made for "apostolic succession." You get that very distinctly brought out in Peter's epistle. He, of course, was one of the chiefest of the apostles. He reminds those to whom he wrote that after his decease they were to keep in mind, not what his successor should tell them, but what he had written to them.

In other words, the only succession they were to have after his demise would be the written Word itself. He made no provision to have someone take his place. No, brethren, there is no scriptural provision made for a continuation of the apostolate.

Now for the second reason why we have no officially appointed elders in the Church today. There would be no logical or consistent place in which to set them. Supposing we had the Apostle Paul here today, and we should say to him, "Brother Paul, we would like to have some ordained elders; since you are here we suggest that you appoint them for us." How would the Apostle react to such a situation? I rather think he might challenge us with another question: "If I ordain elders in the church of God in F, where shall I put them?" If he passed that question on to us, what would we say? Would we dare say, "Our group here in F is the Church of God?" We would not if we were taught of God. No, we would not be guilty of such a blunder. What is the church of God in F

The church of God in F is composed of every blood bought, Spirit-indwelt soul in

F If the Apostle were to say, "I'm going to put all the ordained elders in F in your little group, what would be the result? Oh, how inflated we would become! But the Apostle could not consistently do such a thing. We are not the church of God in F No, we are just a poor little remnant, trying in these last days to maintain the truth as we find it in the Word of God. But let none of us ever become intoxicated with the idea that

we are the church of God.

The Word of God has much to say about remnants; they have a lovely place in Scripture. It is a real privilege to be identified with a believing remnant; but the remnant must never imagine that they are the Church. In God's thoughts any member of the body of Christ here in F is just as dear to the heart of the Savior as any of us here in this room today. God shows no such favoritism. Every blood-bought soul is &many precious to the heart of Christ; and if you and I have the thoughts of God, we are going to have affections for the members of Christ wherever we meet them.

The Apostle called for the elders. How many were there? We are not told. There is nothing in Scripture to certify how many elders were placed in any one church, or that they all had the same number. But there is one thing of which we can be absolutely sure; that is that there was no church that had just one elder. There is no such official mentioned in the New Testament as the elder of the church. No, there was always a plurality of elders.

Now another question; we have ruled out ordained elders for the present day, because we have no valid authority to choose such. Then does this mean that today we have no elders in the Church of God? No, I do not think we need come to any such conclusion. While it is admitted that we are without official elders, yet in the goodness of God and His tender care over us, He sees to it that we have those among us in the assembly who do the work of an elder. I believe that faith will recognize such.

Now turn to 1 Thess. 5:12, 13. "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." This is an exhortation to faith to give recognition to those to whom the Lord has entrusted leadership among us locally. Now turn to Hebrews, the last chapter and the 17th verse: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." If we are taught of God, we will have that spirit of submission to those to whom the Lord may entrust godly leadership among us. In the ways of God we find such among us wherever we go. I presume some of us in our younger days had little idea of the exercise of soul on the part of some of our older brothers in their desire to see us kept in the path of dependence and obedience—how much time they spent in prayer for us as they sought the throne of grace for help in preserving us from the snares that were laid for our feet. I would say to you younger Christians who are here today, don't despise the leadership which God has been pleased to set in the meeting with which you are identified. When a brother in the assembly comes to you and seeks to speak with you in shepherd care for your soul, if you resist him, it isn't that you are just in rebellion against that particular brother, but you are rebelling against the Lord who placed such shepherds in the assembly. They seek out of an honest and good heart to care for the flock among whom they serve.

This word "elder" is closely related to another word in Scripture; that word is "bishop." Look at the first chapter of Titus, and you will see this identity. The fifth verse reads, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: if any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless." You see we have changed our terminology; we are still talking about the same man, but now he is spoken of as a bishop. So here we can readily see that a bishop and an elder are one and the same office. Why use the two terms? The answer is, elder is the name of the office, and I would conclude from the original Greek word that the term elder intimates an older person. Now that word "older," of course, is a relative term. In a country such as the United States where the ordinary life span is around sixty or seventy years, we expect the older brothers to be men of gray hairs. But our brother A has just told us that in that part of Mexico where he has been preaching they do not live so long. Brother S also told us that in South America, on the plateau of northern Bolivia, the life span is comparatively short. So we can not pin this down and say that one must have had sixty birthdays before he can be recognized as an elder. Maybe he might be such at fifty, or at forty. In a way, it is a relative matter. So we must not be legal in these things; but we do see that elders (bishops) must be those of ripened experience, both in their personal life and in the assembly.

I have met unmarried young men around twenty-one or twenty-two years of age who told me very blithely that they were elders in the church. How far this is from the scriptural pattern! Remember this, there is no substitute for experience in the things of God. This is the reason the Word says, "not a novice"—not one newly come to the faith. Sometimes we have those brought to the Lord who are energetic characters, born to leadership. They, being newly saved, wish to get things done; and they immediately strive to take over the gospel testimony. Such need to wait; they need to be taught of God; they need to ripen in the knowledge of the Word. God has not seen fit to put leadership in the assembly in the hands of such. I well remember an old brother giving an address at a conference, and he made this remark: "All my children have a better education than I have, but there is one thing none of my children have. They do not have my experience." Let us not discount the fact that some of our brethren have been in the path for years. They have weighed the problems that believers meet along the way. They have sought to get God's mind about the various questions in the assembly. What a privilege it is to have those to whom we can go who are qualified to give us help and advice.

Now I grant you that in its last analysis the Word of God takes precedence over anybody's advice. That goes without question. None of us are ever wiser than Scripture. None of us would desire to put forth any dogma. No, the Word must reign supreme. On the other hand, let us not resist the prayerful oversight of those brothers in the assembly who are seeking our good. Let us be sure that we are not resisting the voice of the Spirit to our conscience. If we do, it will be to our loss now and in that day to come.

In verse 18 of our chapter Paul calls attention to his demeanor as a servant of the Lord. "Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons." Sometimes brothers wonder why they do not seem to have more weight; why their brethren do not listen better to them. Do you think that this word of Paul's here may be the answer? The Apostle reminds these Ephesian elders after what manner he had been among them at all seasons. Did you notice as we read in Titus the qualifications of a bishop? He was not to be "self-willed, not soon angry." Do your brethren look at you as self-willed? Do you lose your temper? If you do, if you are a "striker" (a loud, ill-tempered man), you can not wonder that your brethren do not pay you the respect you would like. No, this thing works both ways: I should heed my brethren when they come to me, but, on the other hand, the brother who assumes a place of leadership in the assembly should see to it that he has a manner of life that corresponds to the place he takes. A brother who is constantly losing his temper, who is ever trying to have his own way, thrusting himself through, can not hope for the respect and confidence of the saints.

Again Paul says, "serving the Lord with all humility of mind." There are few things more unbecoming in a servant of the Lord than to become pompous and overbearing. The Apostle was not so. He served the Lord with all humility and with many tears. Ministry for him never became a soft, easy pursuit. He was not leaning back in the lap of luxury in his service for Christ. It was a rugged reality for him wherever he went. I remember dear old brother P saying more than once, "If you wish for a happy service for Christ, go out and preach the gospel; if you wish sorrow of heart, serve the Church of God." And brethren, it is true! The one who would serve the saints is going to bear on his heart all the trials and troubles that occur among them. Nor let us ever think that the trials and difficulties that may be in our local assembly at the present moment are a new thing in the history of the Church. They have always been here. Satan hates the truth of Christ and the Church. He does not wish to see any going on with the Lord; he would ever throw us into confusion. Satan is ever stirring up strife among God's dear redeemed people.

But let us never be discouraged because things are not going as smoothly as they might. Let us rather retreat into our closets, and get on our knees and cry to God for wisdom and help through the trial. I have witnessed situations, deadlocked impasses that it seemed nothing could break, and yet God came in in answer to deep, earnest, longing prayer. I have seen such sad circumstances clear up, dissipate, and disappear; and the saints were again in happy harmony. Oh, let us remember that we have a living God in heaven who is interested in the welfare of His people. Don't give up. Seek grace from God to have such resolved. He can do it.

Paul's Farewell Message, Paul's Farewell Message: Part 2 (20:20-38)

In the 20th verse of our chapter, the Apostle says: "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house." The Apostle Paul was no man's hired servant; he was not in the field of God's husbandry on a monthly salary basis. He was there as sent of God; he was there to speak forth the mind of Christ, so he can say, "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you."

Brethren, do we desire teachers that will speak to us smooth things, things that tickle our ears? If we do, we are not in the mind of the Spirit of God. In second Timothy we read of a time "when they will not endure sound doctrine; but... heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth." What is the penalty for such an attitude? They "shall be turned unto fables." If we resist the truth of God—if we say, "I'll not have that"—then we shall have to have Satan's substitute. We shall be turned aside to something that is not the truth of God.

The dear, faithful Apostle Paul, wherever he went, held back nothing profitable for the saints. We are now living in a day of compromise; the desire is for big things; the sights are set high, with the end result being that the truth suffers. "Truth is fallen in the street," because men have set certain goals that they are determined to reach. Sad to say, the result is often spiritual bankruptcy. Which do we value more? the great, big, powerful assemblages of Christian profession, or the plain, precious remnant path as marked out in the Word. You know, it costs something to walk in the path of the truth of God. Indeed it does! "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Satan would always lead us into the path of compromise if he can not make total unbelievers of us. He would tell us, "Why do you have to be so different from everybody else? Why do you not conform to the accepted pattern of the day?" Now suppose we hearken to his suggestion; why not conform, and thus accomplish more for God? Wherein lies the fallacy of this attitude? Is it not in the all too patent fact that the "accepted pattern" is forever changing? It is like the sand dunes, forever shifting and changing shape. There is no solidity. If you try to keep up with the popular standards in the religious world you will discover that you are just drifting, drifting, drifting. Where will it all end? The Word tells us in no uncertain terms; it will all culminate in Laodicea.

What is Laodicea? It is the last of the seven churches as described in the second and third chapters of the Revelation. Laodicea is the professing church of God, having become such a nauseous thing that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, has to say, "I will spue thee out of My mouth." The great ecumenical buildup that is in progress today, whether in Protestantism or in Catholicism, is all headed for the same divine repudiation at the hands of Christ. Meanwhile, the Lord knoweth them that are His. They are all, every one, individualized before Him; and each is precious in His sight. One of these days the redeemed will hear the shout in the air, and we shall all be caught out of this world to meet the Lord in the air.

Is it not a sad thing to think that the apostate church will continue to function here on the earth after the true Church is removed? The preacher may be there the next Sunday to give his usual sermon; the unsaved church members will be there to listen to it; the elders and the deacons may applaud the effort. How can this be? Because it is an unsaved preacher; unsaved deacons and elders; and unsaved church members. This may be an extreme illustration, but it carries the point. The Lord is going to take out all that are real, born again, those who have a vital link with a living Christ. When He removes them, the lifeless profession will be left behind.

No, beloved, we can not afford to take the road of compromise. Woe be to the man who reads his Bible to find in it that which pleases his particular prejudice. Every word of God is pure. You and I have no right to discount one verse within the pages of God's revelation.

What was the burden of Paul's ministry? As for the gospel, it was, testifying to the Jews and to the Greeks, "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." You can never improve on that. If you haven't started with "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," you haven't started at all. That is fundamental; that lies at the basis of all blessing for your soul and mine. Have you taken sides with God against yourself? Have you taken your place in the dust of repentance, and has Christ become your all in all for salvation? Have you said, "Yes" to the pleadings of the Spirit of God? The only Object for your faith is Christ Himself.

Today there are many false Christs. Such are peddled from door to door. Maybe on your answering the door bell you are offered a copy of the magazine, "Awake." The more appropriate name for that periodical would be, "Go to Sleep." It is a total denial of God's Christ. Yes, Satan is busy; he would rob you of Christ. Oh, he sure that the Christ in whom you are trusting is God's Christ. The religious world today is infiltrated with many antichrists. The number is ever increasing. One of these days (and it is not far off) the antichrist is going to appear in person on the scene, and the world that has turned its back on God's Christ will welcome Satan's antichrist. Oh, what a world it is! No wonder the heart

of the Christian cries, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Now verses 26 and 27: "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." What a far cry this is from the present day notion that the gospel is all that need concern us in our preaching. The popular idea seems to be, just get people saved and let it go at that. What a misrepresentation of the heart of our blessed Lord! The Apostle Paul in his ministry had it ever upon his heart to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." That is, Paul would have the believer to be full grown, to be mature. Let us never be satisfied with our present development in the Christian life. There will always be vast depths yet to be explored in God's Word, so let us ever seek to be "reaching forth unto those things which are before." Some day we shall be welcomed into the privilege of knowing even as we are known. But until that day dawn, let us be diligent in the daily searching of the Word, both for our own souls, and for those unto whom we would minister.

Paul says, "I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men." What does he mean? I believe he had a clear conscience before God that he had never knowingly misrepresented the truth of God. The saints would never be able to say, "Why, Paul, you never taught us that; you never ministered that truth; you kept it from us." Can we imagine Paul replying something like this: "Well, I feared if I ministered such truth among you it might cause trouble; or, at least, some of you would not accept it." No! No! There was no such evasion with the Apostle. He can say, "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you."

Brethren, do we desire less than the full truth? Do we prefer to fellowship with some company of believers who only desire 50% or 75% of the truth? Some today are content to go on with even less than this. Rather let us seek to be in the good of the whole counsel of God.

Now the dear Apostle comes near the end of his address to the elders. No doubt the tears ran down his cheeks as he told them the sad news as to what would happen after he was no longer among them. Satan was busy himself in dividing and scattering them. This dispersion was going to take place in two ways. First, evil teachers such as Judge Rutherford of Jehovah Witnesses, Joseph Smith of Mormonism, and their kind, would arise as grievous wolves and tear the flock to pieces if possible. But the second danger of which the Apostle warned them was more serious than the first. The second scattering would be those of their own number who would form parties and divide the flock. "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Ah, that was what made Paul weep. That was the reason he said, "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." Oh, how sad it is when a brother assumes the responsibility for dividing the saints of God. They speak perverse things; headstrong things; self-willed things. What for? "To draw disciples after them." The Church of God has suffered under that scourge all down through its history. The spirit of the thing was already abroad in Paul's day, so that some were saying, "I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ." But it is just as heinous in God's sight today as it was then. God's estimate has not changed in the least.

One of the saddest tragedies that can possibly come into the life of a servant of the Lord is that of being guilty of leading a portion of the Church of God away from Christ the Center. How contrary to the heart of Christ for one to seek a following after himself! The Good Shepherd desires to see the flock kept together. He loves them every one. Dear old brother P used to say, "Remember, our Lord Jesus has shepherds who tend the flock, but He does not have any shepherd dogs." In what spirit do I yearn after those whom I may see straying? Is my concern a self-righteous, pharisaical one, or do I have the heart of Christ, the Chief Shepherd? Do I long to see these scattered sheep gathered back to Christ the Center, that they may again be happy in His presence?

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace." Notice, the Apostle did not say, "I commend you to the elders" or "to the deacons." He commanded them to no earthly authority whatsoever. He commanded them to two unchanging and unchangeable objects: God and the Word. Can God change? No. Can the Word change? No. "Forever, O LORD, Thy word is settled in heaven." He commanded them "to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Such is the wish of God for all of us today, that we might be built up in the faith; that we might be readied for the grand inheritance that awaits us. God's people are a sanctified people; a separated people; a gathered out people. Paul knows that the will of God as expressed in His Word would be realized among a separated and holy people. When we see saints of God seeking to commingle the holy things of God with the trash of the world, what an insult it is to the blessed Lord! This spirit of admixture of the holy and the profane is all about us today. Let us avoid it as we would a plague. Oh, beloved, let us wake up! Let us remember how near we are to the end. Are our associations those which God can call sanctified? Are our relaxations from time to time sanctified relaxations? "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while." God has no objections to our coming apart to rest and relax, but are such periods in disharmony with His will for us?

Now the 36th verse: "And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all." Prayed with them, not at them. No, nor over them. They all knelt together, and he prayed with them all. "And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him." How lovely are the affections of the people of God! Do not ever seek for anything like it in the world, for you will never find it. This wonderful fellowship into which you and I have been brought is the fruit of Calvary. It comes down from above, from the Head of the Church. "They fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him." How they loved him! Was he an unfaithful shepherd? Had he always spoken smooth things to them? Was he always trying to conform them to his personal comfort? Absolutely no! But when it came to the farewell their hearts and consciences told them that that dear man of God had told them the truth. And the Spirit of God caused their tears and his to be mingled, as they parted for the last time on earth.

"They should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship." They watched him board the boat, and I can see them waving their farewells as the ship sails away. How well I remember parting from a dear old servant of the Lord some fifty years ago. As our boat left the wharf, this old veteran servant stood on the shore; and as long as we could see him he was waving his kerchief at us. That was our last sight of him in this world. Our next meeting will be the one "in the air" when the Lord comes for His Church. Oh, beloved, how real are the affections of Christ! Let us not betray them. Let us not seek a substitute. Let us come closer together. We need one another. I need your encouragement. I know I would love to be a little encouragement to you, while together we await His coming.

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