

For the Love of the Church, Part 2

Scripture: Acts 20:1-7

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We continue this morning in our study of the 20th chapter of the book of Acts. And what an exciting insight it is to the ministry of the Apostle Paul. And in this particular passage, we have kind of digressed from just the close verse by verse examination and kind of felt our way out into a little bit of the dimension of Paul's personal life has been kind of hinted at in this passage. And it's been a great joy.

In Acts chapter 20, verse 1 to 17, we have entitled the section For the Love of the Church. For the Love of the Church. And we've seen in this not directly stated but implied the tremendous love that the Apostle Paul had for the church. And by that we mean not the organization, but the people. The saints and this really is what made the difference in the life of that man. He loved the church.

Paul said in Ephesians 5, "Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for it." But that could have equally been Paul's testimony for he loved the church and gave himself for it as well. Jesus gave Himself to redeem the church; Paul gave himself to serve the church. In redeeming the church, Jesus died. In serving the church, Paul died. And so there was a parallel if not in exact purpose, certainly the level of Paul's commitment was the level of absolute and total self-sacrifice.

Paul had a tremendous desire to see the church be what it ought to be. And I think the basic reason for that was because he so intensely loved the Lord Jesus Christ. That whatever the will of the Lord was became the will of Paul. You know it is when we fall in love with Jesus in the truest sense that we begin to want passionately what He wants. We looked a little bit into this last time when we saw in 1 John 5, the statement of John. "That if you love the One who begets, you love the ones begotten of Him."

In other words, it's not hard to love Christians if you love the Lord who begotten them. And the Apostle Paul was so in love with Jesus Christ that the fulfillment of his life and this is important; came in the fulfillment of the will of Christ for the church. He was lost in the will of Christ. He had no separate will. And that's maturity. It is not spiritual maturity to submit my will to Christ. It is spiritual maturity to will with Christ for that which He wills.

And most of us are still learning how to submit our wills. We haven't grown to the level of maturity where we will what He wills. But that was Paul. He loved the church and gave himself for the church because he so loved Jesus Christ that there was no other reason for living and to fulfill the will of Jesus Christ in behalf of His church.

In Ephesians 3:20, he saw in a great dimension. He said, "now unto Him that is able to exceed abundantly above all that we could ask or think according to the power that works in us." In other words he says to the Ephesians and to all Christians, you ought to really be moving out powerfully, dramatically, dynamically. You ought to be fulfilling your potential and the reason is this. That unto Him, be glory in the church. In other words, he saw God glorified when the church was maximized in terms of its potential.

And this was his passion. For this he lived, for this he suffered. For this he died for the love of the church. I'll tell you we need more men like that. God only knows what could happen if men loved the church. Men who were responsible to the church and to the Lord and if they loved the church in that way. Look what one man did who so loved the Lord and so loved the church. And incidentally there was a price to pay and he was willing to pay it.

In Colossians 1:24, he said, "who now rejoice in my sufferings for you." He was willing to pay the price. If the price of the maturity of the saints, if the price of the unity of the church. If the price of the full-grown stature of the church was pain, he willingly paid the price. "I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake which is the church." In other words, I suffer in the place of Christ; I take the blows the world would mean for Him willingly for the sake of His church.

Now he loved the church. He loved the church. Even in jail when he wrote the Philippians, he said, "that which has happened to me my being in prison has fallen out to the advance of the gospel and some people in the church are becoming more bold because of my imprisonment and I am happy." He paid the price. He loved the church. And his love was defined as self-sacrifice. Now Paul knew what it was then to be a passionate man. He knew what it was to pursue a goal.

And this goal simply was the perfecting of the saints, to bring them to full maturity that they might totally honor God that God might be glorified and therefore Jesus be satisfied and therefore Paul be satisfied. He loved the church. And really down at the bottom of every motivation in the ministry that may be the heart of it all. Is to love the church. I can't see how if a person didn't really love the church he'd ever really give himself to it.

You know recently I had a great joy. Just a personal little joy that probably no-one will even know but me. Now you'll know when I tell you. Although it's something that maybe thousands and thousands and thousands of people have read concerning me they would never really know what it meant to me. Recently in the Christianity Today which is a theological magazine there was a review about the book

I wrote called The Church, The Body of Christ.

And you always kind of wait anxiously to hear what reviewers are going to say because they can either make you or break you, just by whoever the reviewer is. But this review said one little thing that just I just was so overjoyed. This is what the reviewer said. "The book reflects genuine love for the church." Well no-one could ever know except now you know what that meant to me. Because if there is one thing that in all of my heart I want that is to know something of what Paul knew when he said he loved the church.

And it says in my implication over and over and over in the New Testament. As we watch Paul. I mean you say; well MacArthur isn't that great, you love the church. Are you to be patted on the back? No. I'm not saying it for that reason, I'm saying for this reason. If a man doesn't love the church, God help him if he tries to minister. If the goal of the ministry is not for the love of the church to see the saints brought to the place where God is glorified in their lives, then you've got a perverted goal. If a man approaches the ministry from his own standpoint to fulfill himself, and for the love of his own ego and his own exultation or position or whatever, then he has perverted it. The only reason to be in the ministry is for the love of the Church.

The only reason Jesus came into the world was for the love of the church, to die to redeem us. To redeem mankind and again this is basic to the ministry. I'm not to be commended. I would be to be expelled if I didn't love the church. That's basic; I just wish to God I loved the church like Paul did. Well Paul loved the church and that's really where the ministry, that's where the heart of the ministry is. You say, well does that include me? Sure you have a ministry. You have just as much a ministry as I do.

You say, but I wasn't called a priest, but you're given spiritual gifts, weren't you? And I'll tell you something, the measure of the effectiveness and the intensity of your ministry of spiritual gifts will be determined by whether or not you love the believers. If you really love the believers, then you'll know they need you to minister to them. And if you really love them, you'll minister to them because you love them. And you want them to be grown up and full stature.

The ministry of gifts is for the others. My gift isn't for me; it's for you. It doesn't do me any good. I could study and really preaching and teaching is something that you need not for me. I could study the same things, go and hide in the closet. But it's my gift only in terms of effectiveness when it's given to you. And one great motive has to be that I care about you. That I care that you grow up. That I care that you're mature. That I care that Jesus is honored in your life. That I care that God is glorified. And you have to have the same view.

You say, well my gift is the gift of health, fine, then you ought to know that for the love of the church, you ought to spend yourself to help others. Whatever it is. That's basic to any ministry. Well Paul

loved the church. He loved the church enough to spend his energy on it. He loved the church enough to die for the sake of the preaching of the gospel and the nurturing of the saints.

Now in this passage, verses 1 to 17, we see Paul's love for the church implied. And it isn't here directly it's here indirectly. And I just kind of read between the lines a little bit. I tried to sense the feeling of the passage without adulterating its meaning. But I hear and see here as I move with Paul and visualize and try to see realistically what's happening in these 17 verses. I just see love oozing out in the white spaces you know. It's there. I can't get away from it. That's the one dominant thing I kept having in my mind as I read and re-read and re-read this passage several weeks ago when I began to pursue a study of it.

Now Paul is on his third missionary tour. And this time he is in the same area generally that he'd been previously. The area of eastern Mediterranean. You remember that he had covered a lot of ground. Syria, Cilicia, and moving west to Galatia and then the area of Phrygia and Pamphylia and all that. And coming further west to Asia Minor and then to Macedonia, then to Achaia, which is where Corinth was. He covered all that area and planted churches all over the place.

The gospel was growing up. Oh here was the third tour through this time and this time he has companions with him as he's had before. And he's ministering and moving about and this time he stayed for long time on this tour in Ephesus for three years nearly. But it's coming to a close. He's leaving Ephesus. In fact a riot just broke out. Verse 1 begins after the uproar was ceased, the riot just ended. And Paul was leaving Ephesus, this is the last little swing and he's going back to Jerusalem then from Jerusalem he wants to go to Rome and from Rome to Spain.

So in his mind he feels this is the last time he'll ever be in Eastern Mediterranean. He has some tremendous, tremendous roots there. Some beloved, beloved sons in the faith. And he knows in his own mind that the feeling is it's over, this is it, this is my last time, this is farewell, this is swan song and so forth. And so there's a feeling through this passage of finality. It's interesting that probably he did get back if very briefly. And that's due to the fact that he made the statement that he left Trophimus ill at Miletus. And since that didn't happen here, it must have happened at a later time and so we conclude that perhaps his Roman imprisonment was separated into two sections and in the middle he made another little trip near Asia Minor.

But for the most part, this is it. This is the wrap up on it. And you sense farewells and I suppose all of us know that when farewells come along there's kind of love, kind of rises to the top. And when we're saying goodbye for the last time to the people we really care about, all the little things sort of fade and just kind of love sort of rules. And maybe that's in a sense what happens here. Although I think it probably ruled in all the life with Paul, from the time of his conversion.

And so we see a series of goodbyes and a series of farewells all through chapter 20 as Paul goes back toward Jerusalem. Now as we look at these 17 verses and originally I thought we could do all 17 in one time because it's just narrative. And then I thought we could certainly do it in two times. But now we'll do it probably in three times or more. Because we didn't get past verse 7. But we see here six areas, just words. They don't really mean that the text is divided by God this way. It's a very poor outline in fact. Just some nails to hang your thoughts on. But there are six different things here that express Paul's love. His affection, his giving, his teaching, his persistence, his availability and his concern. And you have a little outline there in your bulletin that you can follow along and make some notes if you want.

Now these are just simple little words that'll help you key on a concept at each given section. But Paul's love is revealed in just little simple ways implied in the text. First one, Paul's love is revealed in his affection. Verse 1. After the uproar was ceased, the riot of Ephesus, Paul called unto him the disciples and embraced them. Now stop right there. I don't want to make a big point out of this as I said last time because it isn't a big point. It's a very minor thing. He just embraces it. Literally he drew them to himself.

That's all it means. But the usual embrace in that particular part of the world, the usual customary thing was a hug and a kiss on the cheek. That was customary. Well that just set my mind at thinking. Here is the apostle Paul and he they must have had his farewell when he's going through and it was always customary to hug people. Remember I told you that's why Jesus told the people that he set out not to stop and greet everybody, because that could really get long? You had to go through the whole crowd and hug everybody and give them a little friendly thing.

So he just says, keep moving; don't get hung up. And today, in our world, we see somebody hug, and it's over. In those days there was time for people to talk to people. And there was fellowship, we're always in a big hurry all the time, so we can't relate to that. But anyway, here was a time when he went through the whole gang at Ephesus. And I just begin to think; well this says something about the man. Something about his personal touch.

But not much. Just something about it. You say it's only a custom; everybody did it. Right. But over in chapter 20, verse 37, we added this thought. That when he left Ephesus at a later time, we'll see about this in a couple of weeks. It says, they all wept much fell on his neck and kissed him. And here he uses the term in the Greek which has to do with a fervent affectionate vehement repeated kissing.

Now listen. You've got to be a certain some kind of a person for people to want to do that. Alright? Let's face it. There are some people no matter what they did or no matter why they left, no-one would do that. There was something about the man that endeared him and people felt that they could affectionately touch him, embrace him, hug him, kiss him. And there's something good about that. And that is this. Here was the man who was the greatest man alive in that world at that time. If we can

measure greatness by effect on history, right?

Paul. And as great a man as he was, and as dominating a figure as he was, and as strong a man as he was, and as critical a man as he was to God's plan, he was a man among other men. And other men knew that. There was something so human about Paul that people could love him even in a physical way. God deliver us from caste systems, from spiritual hierarchies. Well we have certain people who are untouchables.

There should be such an affectionate feeling toward every man of God. There should be, you know there must have been something so warm about Paul that they felt comfortable in loving him in this manner. You know I think it's important for us to recognize that love should be able if it's legitimate, to be reduced to the physical. You know in our world, that's just such a foreign thing. Some parts of the world it's still that way. I told you I was in Mexico and we were hugging everybody that came along. It's just, but there's something about that that's good.

I don't want to make a big case out of it, but it's interesting that today in psychology there is such an emphasis on touching. I've been reading all about this sensitivity training, everybody wants to touch. Now they have groups where you just go and you just touch. That's right and that's no exaggeration. Psychology has proliferated with touching groups. Feeling groups, I got invited to one for ministers only, where we all go and take our clothes off and sit in a warm pool and touch each other, that was legitimate. I was invited to be one, they had one for ministers early, it was so successful they're going to have another one. I don't need to sit in a warm pool and it's ridiculous. It's an amazing attempt on the part of people to make love somehow physically demonstrated. I think it's good, I think it's good.

I think in your home it ought to be that way with your children. I think men that your kids ought to see you grab your wife and plant one on her. And they ought to see that often. They ought to see it often. It is a healthy thing for them to be able to demonstrate their affection. And I think it ought to be that way with your kids. I think it ought to be that you could affectionately touch and hug and kiss your children. I think that's important. You know you see kids that grow up in homes where parents are gone, they're working they're busy; the child never knows the meaning of physical affection. He grows up with a warped personality.

That's part of human life. The physical need is there for the touch. And you respond to it and I do too. I do too. You say, well is that a big deal for the Christian to be able to demonstrate his love? I think if the love is there, there ought to be that kind of ability to demonstrate it even physically. Listen to this. And I'll just give you a few verses that are interesting. Roman 16:16, "greet one another" don't try to follow me, you'll never get there. "Greet one another with a holy kiss." That's Alama, kiss of friendship and embrace in those days. Alright, that's Roman 16:16. 1 Corinthians 16:20. "Greet one another with a holy kiss." 2 Corinthians 13:12. "Greet one another with a holy kiss." I think there's a message here for us. 1 Thessalonians 5:26, "Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss." Now maybe the Thessalonians

were a little selective, so Paul says, all of them.

1 Peter 5:14. You say Paul had a hang-up. No Peter had the same thought. "Greet one another with a kiss of love." Do you realize that five times in the New Testament the church has commanded to demonstrate its affection physically? Now that's an interesting point to me. That we are not to be distant and aloof, but tender and affectionate, even to the touch. And I think it's important for us to demonstrate love that way. That breaks down a lot of barriers people it really does. That's not just custom, that's teaching.

Alright, secondly, I think Paul's love was demonstrated not only in this area of affection physically, I think people just felt close to him. They felt the warmth of his love. It was just there. But secondly it was demonstrated in a much greater way in his giving. Remember we talked about this last time? He was all over the place, running around, collecting an offering; verse 1 says, "He departed to go to Macedonia. And when he had gone over these parts, or those parts, stop there. He went to Macedonia for what reason? Remember? 1 Corinthians 16 tells us he just wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus and then he went to Macedonia and he said, "I'm going to take a collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem." Imagine it took him one year or close to it to get that done.

That man chased all over that part of the world just collecting money for somebody else's needs. He was a giving man; that says he loved them. You know you can tell a man's love by his sacrifice. And you know Paul spent most of his ministry earning his own living, didn't he? How did he do it? Made tents and worked with leather. Most of his whole ministry he spent earning his own living. And he didn't ask for anything.

Well he often said, I didn't come asking for a thing. I would not be chargeable unto you. And then when somebody'd give him a love offering, he'd say, "but I want you to know how much I appreciate it." While he never asked for one thing for himself and never sought for one thing for himself, he was busy seeking to meet the needs of others. He was a selfless person. He was a giving person. That is love.

That's love. And we saw last time how he chased everywhere to give. He even said in 1 Corinthians 13 when he wrote, he said, "Love seeks not its own." And then he went out to seek the needs of others. There's a very interesting verse in Ezekiel 33:31. It says this. "With their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after covetousness." See thy talk about love but they covet.

Love gives. What's the opposite of love? Covetousness. That takes. Now this principle is illustrated and worth our attention by looking at 1 John 3:16. 1 John 3:16 illustrates the biblical principle of giving in terms of this relationship to love. Verse 16 says, "By this perceive we the love of God." How? How do we know God loves us? Because He said so? No. Because He laid down His life for us.

Now love then is defined in terms of supreme sacrifice, right? I always think about what my dad used to say about the guy who wrote his girlfriend and said, "I love you so much I'd climb the highest mountain, I'd cross the burning sand, I'd swim the ocean to be near your side. And if it doesn't rain I'll be over tonight." That's in a sense that's the kind of love that all of us have. It's that verbal stuff that doesn't quite cut it.

But love is measured truly by sacrifice. That's how God's love is measured, right? And His is the standard. God has the standardized love. And if ours is defined as love, it'll measure the standard which he said. Alright, so He said, God loves us and proves it by laying down His life. Self-sacrifice. Now watch. And we ought, notice there's an obligation. There's a moral obligation, there's an ought there. "We ought to lay down our lives for the brothers."

The supreme measure of our sacrifice of love is to be willing to give our lives. Now some Christians aren't even willing to give their time, let alone their life. Or maybe their money. Some aren't even willing to minister their spiritual gift empowered by the Holy Spirit. Some Christians aren't even willing to give you their attention. We ought to lay down our lives. Now maybe not all of us are going to be called on to do that, and that's kind of a generality, we ought to lay down our lives. But I want you to notice that he really particularizes that. The brethren is very general.

You know it's easy to say, oh I love thee brethren. That's like saying I love humanity. You know many people very concerned about humanity. They just don't like people. As individuals, CS Lewis said, "It's easy to be enthusiastic about humanity with a capital H. It's a lot easier than loving individual men and women. Loving everybody in general is an excuse for loving nobody in particular."

But here he particularizes it in verse 17. If you are willing to lay down your life for the brethren, here it comes down to personal. "Whosoever hath this world's good and seeith his brother." Alright, we've reduced brethren as a generality to his brother. Anybody that has need and shuts up his compassion for him, how dwell is the love of God in him. Don't say you love the brethren unless you meet the need of the one guy that crosses your path. Remember what Dr. Ririe said about the Good Samaritan? That's our obligation. To that one brother.

Statements of love are not enough. God doesn't want sentiment; he wants sacrifice. Verse 18. My little children; let us not love in word, either in tongue, but indeed in truth. So giving is inseparably tied to loving. You can't say you love God unless you want to make sacrifice. Notice this. "Whosoever have this world's good sees his brother, have need, shuts up his compassion from him, how dwells the love of God," this is talking about just a plain old financial need.

Can you really say you love the brothers unless you're willing to make financial sacrifice? There's a great statement that sets the standard. And boy does it set the standard up there. 2 Corinthians 8:7

and it says this. Well let's look at 8:9 for time's sake. It says "for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that thou He was rich, He had for your sake He became poor that you through His poverty might be rich."

Now he says in the Verse before, "Prove your love is sincere." How are you going to prove your love is sincere? Make it like Christ who was rich, became poor that you might be rich. Now you want to measure your love? Watch this one. Boy does this hit me. "If you really loved totally you would make yourself poor to make somebody else rich."

Now grab that thought. Some of us part with every dime. Like that. It's very difficult. The epitome of love is to make myself poor just to make somebody else rich. It's the measure of my love. God help us to give, Paul gave. Here he runs all over collecting for the church. The third point. We see his love in Acts 20, thirdly in his teaching. And I want to spend a minute on this because it's so important to me.

It says in verse 2, "When he had gone over those parts and given them much exhortation he came into Greece." Another thing that I know is proof positive that he loved the church was the tremendous effort he spent in teaching them. You know the greatest thing that I can do to prove my love to the church is to teach the church. I think that's true. I think that's the greatest thing. I think you have a progression. I think it was wonderful that Paul showed physical affection, it was more wonderful that he took care of financial needs. It was super wonderful that he gave them spiritual truth, right?

Because that's the core. That's what makes them grow up to be all that Jesus wants them to be. He loved them much exhortation. Much teaching, much preaching, much encouragement. You know it's a simple principle. If you really love your children, you're going to teach them, right? Whenever I see an unruly child, untaught, undisciplined and rebellious, I assume the parents did not love the child. They may say they love the child, but they do not love the child. And the truest sense of love, for if they love the child, they would have given the child the principles that would have made his life fulfilling.

Right? And so we have the same thing here. If you really love the church, you'll teach the church. You'll make the church have the resources to grow up in Christ if you love the church. And here's the mark of a loving ministry. He teaches the flock, he teaches tirelessly, selflessly driven, not by his own desires or his own ideas, or his own opinions, but by their need for spiritual food.

Now there's a ministry and that's to feed the flock. That is the ministry. I can't resist a brief digression on this theme because it's so strategically important I think. And I worry sometimes today, I pray to God that there will be preachers raised up in this generation. I know God's going to do that. But I see so many people, so many seminaries and so many people in denominations who are preaching is just minimized.

And you know many of you people are here in this church today because you want a teaching, you want a preaching with content. You want a _____ you didn't know that, but that's what you wanted. In the early church, preaching was central. Preaching was the key to everything. The center of it all was the proclamation of God's truth. And I still believe it's a priority in 1 Timothy when Paul wrote to Timothy who is a preacher, he said this, verse 13. Chapter 4, 1 Timothy. Listen. "Til I come he says, you give attentives to reading exhortation and doctrine, three things, read the text, apply the text and teach the text."

And you know what that is, that's expository preaching. And he said, you keep doing that, don't neglect it, meditate upon it and give yourself holy to it. Take heed to the doctrine to thyself and continue in them. And later on, 2 Timothy he wrote back to him just in case he forgot and said, "Timothy, preach the Word, in season, out of season, ___ rebuke, resort with all long suffering." And he said, "remember the day's going to come when they'll not endure that kind of thing." And I think we're living in that day.

I think the church has gotten so watered down and so far away from the apostolic preaching of the cross and the powerful preaching of God's truth that the church has turned into all kinds of things other than what it is to be which is a center for teaching and proclamation. To instruct the saints. To feed the saints that they may go out to win others. And you know there are reasons for this. Let me just share, this is a digression. Let me just share some things.

I think there are reasons that preaching is minimized today. And it is believe me. You have to look through about three or four seminaries of the whole of the United States if you want to find preachers coming out. It just isn't happening. But and many of the denominations don't even consider this as an option to have a dynamic pulpit is almost a dead issue. But one of the reasons I think first of all there's a loss of belief in the authority of the Scripture.

You see if you don't believe in the authority of the Word of God, you can't proclaim anything. All you can have is a discussion. Or you could have a lecture on a certain opinion. Or a view. But if you do not believe that the Word of God is authoritatively and inherently God's truth, then you can't preach. So you haven't gotten any conviction. You don't know what you're dealing with. Opinions.

The second thing that I think has and I think this in the other extreme. That's the liberal thing. But I think in many cases, we fundamentalists have contributed to the demise of preaching. You say in what way? I think that many people react to professional pulpitism. And if you study the history of fundamentalism or the history of evangelicalism in the last 50 years or 100 years, you will find that there are many men who dominated the pulpit and used it as a big club to hammer the heads of their people. They used it as like a throne from which they dictated.

And consequently academically oriented people perceptive people, logical people, reasonable people saw what was going on and reacted negatively and threw the baby out with the dirty bath water. That's what preachers do so let's get rid of preaching. Professional showman who handled and manhandled people and played on their emotions and had them going up and down aisles and doing all kinds of things. And this is still the image in the minds of many people. A whole lot of class with no content. Sound and fury signifying nothing.

And there's a lot of that, just unending ramblings. And I think in a great measure, that kind of preaching has done just as much to destroy the positive response to preaching as has the authority of the Scripture being demised. Thirdly and another thing, I feel that the church has been invaded by media, materials, music and testimonies. And I think this has been a problem.

You say what do you mean by that? Well you know it used to be that the church came together to hear the Word of God. But somebody then thought, well wouldn't it be good if we had this and this and that? And everybody became creative and created so many things that now there's a zillion things that are battling for the hour that used to be given to preaching. All kinds of wonderful things, movies and musicals and all kinds of new materials and new media things and just a tremendous amount of things.

And some of it's very, very excellent, very, very good. But I'll tell you something friends; it cannot take over the place of the local church, in the local church of the teaching of the Word of God. You know I believe with all my heart this. I believe that God has placed me here at Grace Community Church. And I believe he has placed the elders here at Grace Community Church and those who would teach them because he wanted us to teach this part of the church. And I will not relinquish that responsibility to outside sources. I talked to a pastor who never preaches on Sunday night, ever.

He always has a movie or a musical or somebody give a testimony, some well-known person. You know what he's done? He's turned over his church to all those outside influences and those people may be wonderful people and all those things wonderful things, but they are not really sensitive nor are they plugged in for what that church is and where it is and what God is doing there. And I think that's part of the genius if there is a genius in a church where preaching goes on is it's related to the people.

This is something that I feel strongly about it. Preaching has been pushed in the back corner; men have found that you have to work hard to preach. You have to study hard, you have to be diligent and it's a lot easier to come in with some other kind of a thing that doesn't take quite so much commitment and so forth and get a lot of time off for other things that are good things, but not priorities.

And now you know we used to come together for preaching and teaching and now we have the service. What is that? Anybody ever realize what that? I haven't the faintest idea. I've heard that word all my life. The service. What is it? What do you mean the service? So we call it the fellowship of worship in the morning and a family bible hour at night because I don't know what the service is.

I haven't found anybody else who does. And you know we've now when I have people say, well we like to have a lot of worship. So what is worship? Martyn Lloyd Jones says and this is good, he says if preaching has waned, there has been an increase in the formal element of the service. The manner of receiving the people's offerings has even been elaborated. That fills times in some places, not here we hope, but someplace. The minister and the choir now enter the building as a processional. And some churches there's music and all kinds of things happening while they walk around.

He says, "Still more on the increase is the element of entertainment in public worship. The use of films and more and more singing. On top of this, the giving of testimonies. If you can find an admiral or a general or anyone who has some special title or a baseball player, or an actress or actor, get them to give their testimony. This is desired and to be of much greater value than preaching."

But that's what's happened. Many, many cases. All the gimmicks may get a crowd. That's right, they may do that. They may get a crowd, but you know you never get the real problem. The real problem in the church isn't poor attendance; it's spiritual malnutrition. See that's the problem. And many churches are doling out sugar coated happy pills while everybody's being eaten up by spiritual abscess. They're injecting morphine for people who have ruptured appendix.

Doesn't help a bit. Then I think another problem the church faces and the demise of preaching is the fact that somebody has sold the church the bill of goods that the emphasis should be on the pastor as a counselor and social worker. Not a preacher, not a man of the Word, but a counselor and social worker. And they say that the counselor thing says well you can't meet people's individual needs through preaching.

Listen, if you can learn God's principles, you can learn them just as well hearing them preach or hearing them told to you. And if God's principles aren't the key to your own spiritual health and your own mental health, I don't know what are. Somebody else comes along and says, "Well, we've got to get socially involved." And the minister should be at the front of the social picture. Or I have a good passage that I always use on people who say that. And that's Acts 6, and it's very clear. It simply says this, "that the Greek widows weren't getting the goodies that they were supposed to get." Somebody wasn't taking care of their needs.

That's a social problem. The Hebrew widows were getting their needs met. But they were, the Greek widows were saying in effect that the Jews aren't being fair. So they went to the apostles, hey, you've got to take care of the social issue. Food for the needy. The 12 called them all through the disciples

together and said it's not fitting that we should lead the Word of God and take care of social issues, pretty straight.

So you choose out some deacons to do that and we'll give ourselves holy prayer to the Word of God. And that's what makes the difference. So that's one of the problems. I think another thing that's happened that's caused preaching to kind of decline is the church has become identified as a community organization rather than a teaching center. Everything happens at the church. The church has become the center of everything. And we have unbelievably wrapped our lives around some buildings somewhere. Everything happens at church. And some people associate their Christian life with what happens in the building.

You know people say to me, John do you think Grace Church is too big? Grace Church is too big if it's too big to teach. If it's not too big to teach, it's not too big. You say, but there's so many people. Just think of all that you could choose from for fellowship. I mean we've got them every kind. Take what you want. I'm not defending our church as over against a smaller church because God wants some big, some small, some middle sized and that's His prerogative. Doesn't matter to me. But I'm just saying that if a church teaches, then a church does what's right.

And if you can learn sitting here just as well as you could learn sitting with 30 people, then you can learn the principle that comes out of the Word of God at any context and that's all God wants the church to be and a place where you can minister. And all you need to minister to is the people nearest to you, not everybody.

Well I think some of these things have contributed to preaching kind of going on the lean and I pray to God that God's going to raise up some great man in the pulpit, great man of the Word. And I really think and lately I've seen a trend toward the new revitalized interest in the pulpit. And some ministers that I've spoken to have talked about it and I think that's great. Well that ends the review. We got 10 minutes left for the sermon.

Let me give you a quick one here. Fourthly, we see Paul's affection then in his teaching and his relentless teaching, but we also see it in his persistence. You know he is persistent. And love is persistent and love pursues its objective and it's not matured and I love this about Paul. Verse 3. "He abode three months" notice in verse 2 he was in Greece which was really Achaia or the city of Corinth. "He abode in Corinth three months." And you remember what he did there? He wrote the book of Romans. He was busy and he was teaching.

And when the Jews laid wait for him as he was about to sail into Syria, he was going to catch a pilgrim's ship, he was on his way to the Passover in Jerusalem and each Passover season a pilgrim ship would stop at the ports and pick up the Jewish people wanting to go to Passover so he was going to grab the there's a little port near Corinth called Cenchrea. And he was going to catch the

boat the pilgrim's ship at Cenchrea, but the Jews probably plotted to shove him overboard.

Well he found out about the plot. So what do you think you're going to do? Well he ___ after his life. And he knew that the whole world was after his life. At least the world he was going into. In fact over in verse 23, he admitted the Holy Spirit had witnessed to him and every city nothing but bonds and affliction waited him. He knew all the way along this journey to Jerusalem he got warned and warned and warned. They're after you, they're after you, they're going to get you, they're going to get you. And he got there and they did.

They did. But you know something; the man was absolutely persistent. It didn't matter to him. And so when he heard about this, all he did was change his route. He purposed then to return through Macedonia. He says, alright, if they want to shove me overboard, I'll just go to Macedonia; catch a different ship. Persistent.

No coward this man. And when he went to Macedonia, he would have had to gone all the way back to the cities that had chased him out. Persistent. He was going to get that money to the Jerusalem Saints if it had cost him his life if it was the last thing he ever did, he was going to do that. And there when he was sitting in Corinth, he wrote the Book of Romans and he even said this to the Romans. Chapter 15:30. "I beseth you brethren for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, for the love of the Spirit that you describe together with me in your prayers to God for me. That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea."

In other words, he said, I know it's going to be a problem. And I'm going to get it all the way especially in Judea. There's going to be antagonism, pray for me. But he was persistent. Love is persistent. Well love if you really love the Lord Jesus Christ, and you love the church against all odds, you'll pursue the ministry. Against all odds, against discouragement. Against direct persecution. Against all kinds of confrontation if you love the church, you'll pursue the ministry. Nothing deters you if you love the church. He was persistent. He proposed to return for Macedonia, all the way back up there he went again. A long journey, this is a tired man, a weary man.

A spent man. But he would never consent to change his plans because he believed God was in it. Amazing persistence. Well when he went, he didn't go alone. Verse 4. "I accompanied him into Asia, stopped at Berea and the Thessalonians there Secundus and Gaius of Derbe, Timothy of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. He's going before tarrying for us at Troas." Notice the little word us, Luke's back. Luke is the author. Whenever you start seeing the us again, Luke is back. Paul had left Luke at Philippi, now he comes back through Philippi again, picks him up and so the narrative becomes the us.

It's also interesting because everything from here on out gets very detailed. And we know that we got an eyewitness there. Whereas the ground covered from verses 1 to 5 is so general, from 6 on, every

little detail is covered as we have an eyewitness in Luke. Now notice what Paul does, he takes these guys for the simple reason that they represented all the churches of the Gentiles. And he's going to take this offering to the Jews and he says, "I know that the Jews need this, but secondly I know they need to see the unity of the church."

So I'll take all these Gentiles with all this sacrificial money and it'll weld the church together as one Jew and Gentile. So he collects guys from every area. Sopater, Aristarchus and Secundus were from the Macedonian churches. Notice Gaius and Timothy were from the Galatian churches. Tychicus and Trophimus who are mentioned elsewhere by Paul were from the Asia Minor churches. And in 2 Corinthians 8 he says, "Titus was from Achaia." And there was also another with Titus. So there are guys from every one of the areas of churches with their money to give the Jerusalem saints as a token of love.

A very beautiful thing. Well it says in verse 6, "And we sailed away from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread." That would be after the Passover. He originally wanted to be in Jerusalem for Passover, but when the plot came up, he couldn't make it. So now he had to put his plans off and hope to get there by Pentecost which was 50 days after Passover. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was of course the feast which lasted seven days immediately after Passover. So they had Passover there and seven days of unleavened bread in Philippi and they came across to Troas, took them five days, only took them two days the first time they came the other way. So it must have been a difficult trip. And they stayed seven days. Now this is his persistence. He gets these guys together. It's a long journey across, five days instead of the normal two. And they got to hang around Troas for seven more days to catch the right ship. And he's missed the Passover, though he did celebrate it in Philippi and he makes a note of that because it tells us again that Paul was still very Jewish in his heart and his attitude.

Well his persistence. He loved the church and he was persistent. Lastly and just to hit at this and we'll cover this point next time, the last thing that we're going to see here this morning is that he loved the church and that's visible by his availability. He was a tired man, a weary man, a spent man as I said and he arrives in Troas and look what happens. Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them ready to depart on the next day. You know he had to leave the next day on a tedious journey, a journey of six or seven weeks. And he stopped long enough preached to them, continued his speech until midnight, knowing he had to leave the next day. Say, man that's a long sermon. You haven't seen anything yet.

They took a little break in the middle, he came back and it says at the end of verse 11, "he preached until the break of day." He went there, tired, weary and he preached all night long. And it wasn't just a sermon; he answered all their questions. Met all their needs in terms of information from God. Availability, now that's just a beginning hint at his availability. There's another beautiful little statement in verse 13 that we're going to see next time. "We went ahead to the ship, sail awaits us, there

attending to take Paul for so had he appointed minding himself to go afoot." While the guys got on the ship and went 30 miles to Assos, 30 miles by sea, Paul walked to Assos. It was a very specific reason. This was an available man. Here he was in Troas and he gave himself all night. Well an interesting thing happened that night. A guy fell asleep in the middle of his sermon, fell backwards out of the window and was killed.

And if you want to know what happened to him, come back two weeks from this morning. And we'll look at that. Let me just grab one thought and then we'll close. Look at verse 7. "Upon the first day of the week." Now there is the first direct statement of the time when the church met. What is the first day of the week? Sunday. Now the Sunday came from the sun god, so we ought to spell it Sunday or call it what it's called in Scripture, the Lord's Day. In Revelation 1:10, John said, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day."

So apparently by that time the Christians had known Sunday as the Lord's Day, and that's the way we ought to know it. As the Lord's Day. In 1 Corinthians 16:2, Paul said, "Lay by him in store, every one of you on the first day of the week." It became the pattern for the early church to be the first day of the week. You know the first meeting the church ever had after the resurrection was on the first day. They were being, remember they were together in the room and Jesus came through the wall. And so that became the commemorative day. The first day of the week. Let me read you an interesting statement.

Ellen G. White, who is responsible for starting Seventh Day Adventist wrote this. Quoting "to us as to Israel the Sabbath is given for perpetual covenant. To those who receive His holy day, the Sabbath is a sign that God recognizes them as His chosen people." What she's saying there is that people that meet on the Sabbath are the chosen people; the others are not. "The sign or seal of God is revealed in the observance of the 7th day Sabbath. The mark of the beast is the observance of the first day of the week."

But you know something; that is not scriptural. In Galatians, not only from the life of the church, they probably meant every other day, but the Lord's day was a special day. But in Galatians 4:10, Paul says to those Christians in Galatia, "you observe days and months and times and years." In other words, you're still hung up on the Jewish Sabbath. I'm afraid that I have bestowed upon you labor in vain. If you really were saved, you ought to be over that. That part of the old covenant is gone. In case that isn't convincing enough to show you the Sabbath is not anymore to be observed, listen to this one. Colossians 2:16. "Let no man therefore judge you in food or in drink or in respect of a feast day or of the new moon or of a Sabbath day which are a shadow of things to come." Don't let anybody condemn you for what you eat or what you may drink or a feast you may or may not keep or a new moon or a Sabbath. Those things were shadows, when the reality came the shadow was gone.

There's no justification for Sabbath. The early church met on the Lord's Day. And that's why we do as well. But there's nothing wrong with meeting every other day too. Every other day. And they met

together, notice to break bread. The Lord's table. So important. Oh, so important, trust you'll be here to share it with us even this week.

Well, Paul loved the church, he loved the church, as seen in his affection, as seen in his giving, seen in his teaching, seen in his persistence, seen in his availability to teach when he was totally at the end of his rope. Still available. All night to give of himself. May it be true of us whatever our gifts, we so love the saints that we measure that love by sacrificially giving ourselves.

Let's pray. Father we thank You this morning for the opportunity that is ours to share together. We thank You for the various ministries that You've committed to each of us through the spiritual gifts that we have. Father we pray that we might as Paul did love the church so much so that we give ourselves and all we are and all we have for the sake of those who are the loved and beloved of God.

We thank You that we can see the pattern, the example of such love and such commitment in the life of this most marvelous man. And Lord we would pray that we would never become so selfish that we cannot spend ourselves for others as Paul did. God we know that if we were all to love the church and to love each other as Peter said with a pure heart fervently, the world would never be able to even stand the power of our testimony. May it be so in Jesus' blessed name, Amen.

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