

Paul has gathered the elders of the Ephesian church, giving them his farewell address; they are greatly saddened because he has broken the news that they will never see him again. To Paul, the most important thing he can leave with them is his dire warning of all that is coming for the True Church as Satan will work to see it gobbled up into the false, apostate church which has grown alongside the True Church for 2000 years; we've seen the 'falling away' church growing around us even in our own experience; no church is immune to the dangers of apostasy, of falling away from doctrinal truth; the only safeguard any church has is leadership that is always guarding the flock which God has entrusted to their care...

Acts 20:21: 'Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. ²⁹ For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.'

Paul knows that ultimately, prison and death await when he goes down to Jerusalem; he will be persecuted by the Jews (what's new!) and then he'll be shipped off, eventually to Rome; while imprisoned in Rome, he will write his 'prison epistles, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. His letter to these Ephesians was likely a 'circular letter' meant to be passed around to all the churches of Asia Minor; in fact, most of Paul's letters were copied over and over while being passed back and forth to all the churches until they were finally compiled together to form the bulk of the Church's Doctrine in the New Testament.

Here, Paul speaks boldly and forcefully in warning the Ephesian leadership of soon coming false teachers who will be so destructive in the life of all the Church but in his letter to the body of the church in Ephesus and beyond, he does not mention false teachers and, yet, Luke, in documenting Paul's travels, commends the regular Christians in Berea because they all carefully searched the Scriptures, daily, to make certain that all of what Paul taught did, in fact, accurately comport with all the Old Testament Scriptures.

Some 30 years later as the Lord Jesus Christ is showing John *The Revelation*, the first church He addressed was the church at Ephesus and there, He does come against false teachers and false teaching but not saying that false teachers have yet infected the church at Ephesus; He says: '... But this thou hast (I commend you), that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.'

The Elders at Ephesus whom we here see Paul sternly warning, had still, 30-40 years later, continued to withstand the wickedness of the Nicolaitanes which would eventually infect so much of the Church not many years hence. The teaching of the Nicolaitanes was what moved the True Church toward the false church of Catholicism. The word, nico-laitane is from two Greek words: meaning 'victory over the laity.' It laid the groundwork for the professional priestly cast ruling over the common people: the hierarchy of pope/cardinal/bishop/priest ruling over the people while keeping the True Scriptures from them. That wickedness smothered the True Church for more than 1000 years until the Reformation when God began to awaken men of God to the Truth of His Word and His Will for His Church.

Verse 31: 'Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.'

'I stayed with you for three full years, more time than with any other church!' Ephesus had a stronger foundation than any other Church; Paul was there for three years and then Timothy, Paul's protégé, spent years there as Pastor. Then, 30-40 years later, the only Church which received a more positive message from Jesus Christ, than Ephesus, was our *Last Days True Church of Philadelphia*.

We know that the seven churches to which the Lord Jesus Christ addressed His seven Letters in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, were not only specific, literal churches of that day but that they also gave a picture of the entire 2000 year history of the Church after the Written Word of God was completed with *The Revelation*. The first of the seven was Ephesus which represented the True Church of that early time which was still relatively pure in its Doctrinal obedience and the last two, Philadelphia and Laodicea, represented the Last Days Church

just prior to the Lord Jesus Christ's Return for His True Church in the Rapture: Philadelphia representing the Church which is ready and watching for His return while Laodicea represents the fallen away apostate church of the Last Days which depicts the vast majority of the Church of these Last Days.

Paul strongly warned the Ephesian Elders against false teaching and then Timothy pastored Ephesus which enabled them to stay strong, perhaps longer, than any other early church.

Verse 32: *'And now, brethren, I commend you 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.'*

Ultimately, Paul understood that the True Church's only protection was God, Himself, and His Written Word which Paul would begin to write out, with help from various scribes, soon.

Verse 33: *'I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. ³⁴ Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.'*

Paul said, *'I have conducted myself honorably and Godly throughout all my years of ministry.'* (so unlike so many 'ministers' who would follow him through the years and centuries)

Verse 35: *'I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*

Paul was telling these Ephesian elders, and all who would follow after, that they, too, should be willing to work outside the church if necessary; certainly a pastor should be supported by the church he pastors: *'Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? ¹⁴ Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.'* 1 Cor 9:13 But if that is a burden on the people, as in a small church, a pastor should also be willing to go out and get a job; if he is not so willing, perhaps he is not a genuine pastor and shepherd who cares for the flock over which God has placed him. God is saying that it is, to Him, more important that those in the church with genuine needs be cared for than for their pastor to expect a life free from the need to work a regular job. He is saying: *'You pastors; it is more blessed for you to give of yourself in willingness to work for your flock than it is for you to receive an easier life.'* Paul certainly never had an easier life!

Verse 36: *'And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. ³⁷ And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, ³⁸ Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.'*

This was a difficult parting; there is great love between Paul and these Ephesian elders; everyone 'wept sore' and kissed Paul, not wanting him to leave, knowing they would never see him again, they held him and pulled at him as this would be the last time they would ever see Paul.

Acts 21:1: *'And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara:'*

The word Luke uses for: *'after we were gotten from them'*: apospa'o, literally means, to tear away, to drag forth; it was a difficult parting for them all. Then, sailing south and east, down and around Turkey from Ephesus on their way, eventually, to Jerusalem... Coos is an Island off the coast of Turkey, 40 miles south, then about 50 miles to Rhodes, another, larger island and Patara, 65 miles, a city on the southern coast of Turkey.

Verse 2: *'And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth.'*

It sounds like they found a ship the same day and now they are sailing down and across the NE section of the Mediterranean Sea over to Syria, about 400 miles with only about 3 weeks left until Pentecost for which he is trying to hurry 'up' to Jerusalem.

Verse 3: *'Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden.'*

Cyprus is the large island of the NE Mediterranean; they sailed past it on the south, going directly to Syria, just north of Israel. Tyre is in southern Lebanon but during Paul's time, it was part of Syria.

When Jesus gave John the seven letters to seven churches in Rev. 2-3, to Pergamos He said: *'I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is...'* In Isaiah 14, God pronounces His curse on Lucifer under the title of 'King of Babylon while in Ezekiel 28, He does the same where Satan has the title of 'King of Tyrus/Tyre. In other words, Lucifer is the god of this World. Even in Pergamos and Tyre, the True Church was planted; each church was an outpost to occupy in enemy territory and to then spread out even further.

And so we see the church, even in Tyre:

Verse 4: *'And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. ⁵ And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again.'*

This is reminiscent of the recent scene in Ephesus. As soon as they land in Tyre, they search out Christians with whom they stay for an entire week; Paul knows he still has plenty of time to reach Jerusalem in time for Pentecost. One or more of these believers is given the gift of prophecy who, by the Holy Spirit, warns Paul not to go to Jerusalem but he knew the same Holy Spirit was leading him to Jerusalem where he knew his fate lie; he fully expected to be arrested and eventually killed.

When they all knew it was time to leave, all the disciples, men women and children came to see them off on the shore where they knelt down and prayed together; once again, they had to tear themselves away to finally find a ship to take them further south, 'home' to Israel, even though no place on Earth is really home.

Let's go back for a moment to the Ephesians clinging to Paul and weeping over knowing they'd never see him again. Then, these in Tyre and undoubtedly in every church Paul revisited... we read in his first letter to the Thessalonians: *'And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. ⁷ So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.'* 1Thes 1:6

All these many new believers had, first, become followers of Paul; to the Corinthians he wrote:

'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.' 1Cor 11:1

This is why it was so hard for these new disciples to 'lose' Paul; he was, to them, the picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, even in his persecutions and suffering. To the Colossians he wrote: *'... I Paul am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church'* Col 1:23

When Paul left them for the last time, they felt lost, adrift, alone in this dark, hate filled World; Paul knew, however, that he could confidently commit each and every one of them to the care and protection of the Holy Spirit; to Timothy he wrote: *'For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. ¹³ Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.'* 2Tim 1:12

Paul committed himself to God but he also confidently committed his 'children' to God. We are called unto the same confidence and ministry unto those for whom we care so deeply. We are charged with telling the Gospel and then praying, faithfully for our unsaved loved ones but then we are to commit them to God, knowing that their Salvation is ultimately His responsibility and His alone.

Verse 7: *'And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.'*

Ptolemais is about 15 miles north of modern Haifa, Israel's northernmost major city. Paul always finds Christians or leads the lost to faith in Jesus Christ. It's who he is and what he does.

Verse 8: *'And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we*

entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.'

Philip the evangelist, one of the seven... remember him? Soon after the birth of the True Church on Pentecost *'And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. ² Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. ³ Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. ⁴ But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. ⁵ And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and **Philip**, and (five others): ⁶ Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.'* Acts 6:1

Then, we saw this same Philip again in another famous incident: *'And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. ²⁷ And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,'* Acts 8:26 Philip led the Ethiopian Eunuch to faith in Jesus Christ who then took Christianity back down to the court of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia. Then, amazingly: *'And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord **caught away Philip**, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.'*

Luke uses the very same word for 'caught away,' *harpazo*, which Paul uses when he writes: *'Then we which are alive and remain shall **be caught up together** with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.'* 1Thes 4:17 This is another proof positive of the Rapture of the Church.

Philip had to have been a pretty famous guy in the early Church. Now, we see Paul, in the latter days of his ministry dropping by to pay Philip and his family a visit, just passin' through on his way down to Jerusalem.

Verse 10: *'And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. ¹¹ And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'*

Agabus, by the Holy Spirit, tells Paul he will be arrested by the Jews and turned over to the Romans but notice, Agabus does not, by the Holy Spirit, tell him he should not go to Jerusalem; he simply prepares Paul for what awaits. Paul knows this, he expects this, and he is ready for whatever comes because he knows, beyond doubt, that he is in the center of God's Will and that he will be strengthened and sustained by the Holy Spirit until God's planned moment for his departure to Heaven. To Timothy, he will write: *'For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷ I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: ⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.'* 2Tim 4:6

Paul expects a Crown of Righteousness from the Hand of Jesus when he stands before Him because he has always looked forward, expectantly to the Rapture; when he was taken up into Heaven to be taught all our Doctrine, he was taught of the Rapture but he was not told that it would be a long time in coming; God's intent was that every True Believer throughout all time should look forward to His coming at any moment.

Verse 12: *'And when we (Luke, Timothy and all the rest) heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁴ And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.'*

Paul was ready for all that would come but the Christians were not; they feared being left without Paul. Every generation is the same; we hate to lose leadership but God always raises up His men for that time... always!