

BIB204 Early Church NT2

Unit 6 Study Resource

Commentary on Acts of the Apostles

John William McGarvey

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Acts XX

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XX: 1. (1) “*After the tumult had ceased, Paul called to him the disciples, and bade them farewell, and departed to go into Macedonia.*” Thus ended the long-continued labors of the apostle in Ephesus. The “great and effectual door,” which he saw open before him but a few weeks previous, had now been suddenly closed; and the “many adversaries,” for the noble purpose of resisting whom he had resolved to remain in Ephesus till Pentecost,⁴⁶⁰ had prevailed against him. He had accomplished much in the city and province, but there seemed now a terrible reaction among the people in favor of their time-honored idolatry, threatening to crush out the results of his long and arduous labors. When the disciples, whom he had taught and warned with tears, both publicly and from house to house, for the space of three years,⁴⁶¹ were gathered around him for the last time, and he was about to leave them in a great furnace of affliction, no tongue can tell the bitterness of the final farewell. All was dark behind him, and all forbidding before him; for he turns his face toward the shore across the Ægean, where he had been welcomed before with stripes and imprisonment. No attempt is made, either by Luke or himself, to describe his feelings, until he reached Troas, where he was to embark for Macedonia, and where he expected to meet Titus returning from Corinth. At this point, a remark of his own gives us a clear insight to the pent-up sorrows of his heart. He writes to the Corinthians: “When I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had *no rest* in my spirit, because I found not my brother Titus; but took leave of them, and came away into Macedonia.”⁴⁶² We have followed this suffering apostle through many disheartening scenes, and will yet follow him through many more; but only on this occasion do we find his heart so sink within him that he can not preach the gospel, though the door is opened to him by the Lord. He had hoped that the weight of sorrow which was pressing him down above his strength to bear,⁴⁶³ would be relieved by the sympathy of the beloved Titus, and the good news that he might bring from Corinth; but the pang of disappointment added the last ounce to the weight which crushed his spirit, and he rushed on, blinded with tears, in the course by which Titus was coming. A heart so strong to endure, when once crushed, can not readily resume its wonted buoyancy. Even after the sea was between him and Ephesus, and he was once 242 more among the disciples of Macedonia, he is still constrained to confess, “When we had come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side; without were fightings; within were fears.”⁴⁶⁴ Finally, however, the long-expected Titus arrived with good news from Corinth, and thus the Lord, who never forgets his servants in affliction, brought comfort to the overburdened heart of Paul, and enabled him to change the tone of the second letter to the Corinthians, and express himself in these words: “Nevertheless, God, who is the comforter of those who are lowly, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not by his coming only, but by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, telling us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me, so that I rejoiced the more.”⁴⁶⁵

But the news brought by Titus was not all of a cheering kind. He told of the good effects of the former epistle; that the majority of the Church had repented of their evil practices; that they had excluded the incestuous man;⁴⁶⁶ and that they were forward in their preparation for a large contribution to the poor saints in Judea.⁴⁶⁷ But he also brought word that Paul had some bitter personal enemies in the Church, who were endeavoring to injure his reputation, and subvert his apostolic authority.⁴⁶⁸ For the purpose of counteracting the influence of these ministers of Satan,⁴⁶⁹

encouraging the faithful brethren in their renewed zeal, and presenting to them many solemn and touching reflections suggested by his own afflictions, he addressed them the epistle known as the Second to the Corinthians, and dispatched it by the hand of Titus and two other brethren, whose names are not mentioned.⁴⁷⁰

That we are right in assuming this as the date of this epistle, is easily established. For *First*, He refers, in the epistle, to having recently come from Asia into Macedonia,⁴⁷¹ which he had now done according to the history. *Second*, He wrote from Macedonia, when about to start from that province to Corinth.⁴⁷² But he was never in Macedonia previous to this, except when there was as yet no Church in Corinth, and he was never here afterward on his way from Asia to Corinth.

2, 3. The career of the apostle for the next few months is not given in detail, but the whole is condensed into this brief statement: (2) “*And when he had gone through those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he went into Greece; (3) and having spent three months there, he resolved to return through Macedonia, because a plot was laid against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria.*” Several events transpired in the interval thus hurriedly passed over, a knowledge of which is accessible through epistles written at the time, and which we shall briefly consider.

When Paul and Barnabas were in Jerusalem on the mission from the Church in Antioch, as recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Acts, it was formally agreed, among the apostles then present, that Peter, James, and John should labor chiefly among the Jews, and Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles. It was stipulated, however, that the latter should assist in providing for the poor in Judea. “This,” says Paul, “I was also forward to do.”⁴⁷³ In accordance with this agreement, we find that he was now urging a general collection in the Churches of Macedonia and Achaia for this purpose.⁴⁷⁴ The Churches in Achaia, indeed, were ready for the contribution a whole year before this, and Paul had written to them in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, “Upon the first day of the week, let each of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him, that there be no collections when I come.”⁴⁷⁵ For prudential considerations, such as prompted him so often to labor without remuneration from the Churches, he was not willing to be himself the bearer of this gift, although the Churches in Macedonia had entreated him to do so.⁴⁷⁶ He at first, indeed, had not fully intended to go to Jerusalem in connection with it, but had said to the Churches, “Whomsoever you will approve by letters, them will I *send* to take your gift to Jerusalem; and if it be proper that I should go also, they shall go with me.”⁴⁷⁷ The importance of the mission, however, grew more momentous as time advanced, so that he resolved to go himself, and the enterprise became a subject of most absorbing interest.

The circumstance which led to this result was the increasing alienation between the Jews and the Gentiles within the Church. The decree of the apostles and inspired brethren in Jerusalem, though it had given comfort to the Church in Antioch, where the controversy first became rife,⁴⁷⁸ and had done good everywhere that it was carried,⁴⁷⁹ had not succeeded in entirely quelling the pride and arrogance of the judaizing teachers. They had persisted in their schismatical efforts, until there was not a wide-spread disaffection between the parties, threatening to rend the whole Church into two hostile bodies. By this influence the Churches in Galatia had become almost entirely alienated from Paul, for whom they once would have been willing to pluck out their own eyes, and were rapidly led back under bondage to the law of Moses.⁴⁸⁰ The Church in Rome, at the opposite extremity of the territory which had been evangelized, was also disturbed by factions, the Jews insisting that justification was by works of law, and that the

distinctions of meats and holy days should be perpetuated.⁴⁸¹ Such danger to the cause could but be to Paul a source of inexpressible anxiety; and while it was imminent he concentrated all his energies to its aversions.

Already engaged in a general collection among Churches composed chiefly of Gentiles, for the benefit of Jewish saints in Judea, and knowing the tendency of a kind action to win back alienated affections, he pushes the work forward with renewed industry, for the accomplishment of this good end. He presents this motive to the Corinthians, in the following words: “For the ministration of this service not only supplies the *wants* of the saints, but also *superabounds* to God, by means of many *thanksgivings* (they *glorifying* God, through the proof supplied by this ministration of your subjection to the gospel of Jesus Christ which you have confessed, and of the 244 liberality of your fellowship for them and for all,) and by their *prayers* in your behalf, having a *great affection* for you on account of the exceeding favor of God which is in you.”⁴⁸² He here expresses as great confidence in the good result of the enterprise, as if it were already accomplished, and the Jews were already overflowing with affection to the Gentiles, and offering many thanksgivings and prayers to God in their behalf. Thus he felt while stimulating the liberality of the brethren; but when the collections were all made in the Churches, and he was about to start from Corinth to Jerusalem with it, his anxiety was most intense, and he began to fear the alienation of the Jews was so great that they would not accept the gift, and thus the breach he was trying to close would be opened wider. We know this by the almost painful earnestness with which he calls upon the brethren at Rome to pray with him for the success of his efforts. He says: “Now I *beseech* you, brethren, for the *Lord Jesus Christ's sake*, and for the *love of the Spirit*, that you *strive* together with me in *prayer* to God for me, that I may be *delivered* from the *disobedient* in Judea, and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be *accepted by the saints*.”⁴⁸³ If he called thus earnestly for the prayers of the distant Church at Rome, how much more must he have enlisted those of the Churches in Achaia and Macedonia, who were immediately concerned in the enterprise itself! We have here the spectacle of a man who was regarded with suspicion, if not with positive dislike, by a large portion of his brethren, securing from others who were involved with him in the same reproach, a self-denying contribution for the temporal wants of the disaffected party; and, then, fearing lest their disaffection was so great as to lead them to reject the gift—a fear which would cause most men to withhold it entirely—he calls upon all the donors to unite in persistent prayer that it might not be rejected. The object of it all, too, was to gain no selfish ends, but to win back the alienated affections of brethren, and to preserve the unity of the body of Christ. No nobler instance of disinterested benevolence can be found in the history of men. The prosecution of the enterprise as we will hereafter see, was in keeping with the magnanimity of its inception. But before we consider it further, we must briefly notice some kindred facts.

For the same grand purpose which prompted the great collection, Paul wrote, during his three months' stay in Corinth, the two epistles to the Galatians and the Romans. This we have already assumed in our references to them as cotemporaneous with the collection. The most conclusive evidence for assigning to them this date may be briefly stated as follows: In the epistle to the Romans, Paul expressly states that he was about to start for Jerusalem with the contribution which had been collected.⁴⁸⁴ But this could have been said only toward the close of his present stay in Corinth. Moreover, Gaius, who lived in Corinth, was his host at the time of writing to the Romans,⁴⁸⁵ and Phoebe, of the Corinthian seaport Cenchrea, was the bearer of the epistle.⁴⁸⁶ As for Galatians, it contains a reference to Paul's *first* visit to them, implying that he had been there a second time. His words are: “You know that it was on 245 account of sickness that I preached the gospel to you at the first.”⁴⁸⁷ It was written, then, after his second visit. But

this leaves the date very indefinite, and there are no other notes of time within the epistle itself to fix it more definitely. There is, however, a close correspondence in subject-matter between it and the epistle to the Romans, indicating that they were written under the same condition of affairs, and about the same time. This, in the absence of conflicting evidence, is considered conclusive.⁴⁸⁸ It is not certain which of the two was written first, but, as in Romans, Paul speaks of his departure for Jerusalem as about to take place, it is more probable that Galatians was written previous to this. In both, the apostle contends by authority and by argument against the destructive teaching of the judaizing party, striving, by this means, to put them to silence at the same time that he was aiming, by a noble act of self-denial, to win back their good-will, both to himself and to the Gentiles, whose cause he had espoused.

Having dispatched these two epistles, and collected about him the messengers of the various Churches, the apostle was about to start for Syria by water, when, as the text last quoted affirms, he learned that a plot was laid against him by the Jews, which determined him to change his course. This plot was probably an arrangement to waylay him on the road to Cenchrea, and perhaps both rob and murder him. Having timely notice of the danger, "he determined to return through Macedonia," and started by another road.

4, 5. (4) *"And there accompanied him, as far as Asia, Sopater of Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica; Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. (5) These, going before, waited for us at Troas."* This sentence brings us again into company with two familiar companions of Paul, from whom we have been parted for some time. The name of Timothy has not occurred in the history before, since he was dispatched with Erastus from Ephesus into Macedonia.⁴⁸⁹ He had, however, joined company again with Paul while the latter was in Macedonia, as we learn from the fact that his name appears in the salutation of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians.⁴⁹⁰ Luke, the other party here introduced, has not been an eye-witness of the scenes he was describing since the scouring of Paul and Silas in Philippi. His significant *we* and *us* were discontinued then,⁴⁹¹ and are not resumed until he says, in this verse, "These, going before, waited for *us* in Troas." The probability is, that he had resided in that city during the whole of this period, and now, as Paul was passing through on his way to Jerusalem, he once more joined the company. During his absence the narrative has been very hurried and elliptical. We shall now, for a time, find it circumstantial in the extreme.

6. The delay of Paul at Philippi may be well accounted for by the strong affection which he bore toward the congregation there, and his present expectation that he would see their faces in the flesh no more.⁴⁹² (6) *"And we, after the days of unleavened bread, sailed away from Philippi, and came to them in Troas in five days, where we remained seven days."* The "days of unleavened bread" here mentioned remind us that it had been nearly one 246 year since the close of Paul's labors in Ephesus; for he was awaiting the approach of Pentecost when the mob was aroused by Demetrius.⁴⁹³ He probably left there between the Passover and Pentecost, and as the Passover had now returned again, the time he had spent in his tour through Macedonia and Achaia and back to Philippi must have occupied ten or eleven months.

The voyage from Philippi to Troas occupied, as here stated, five days, though, on a former occasion, they had sailed from Troas and reached Philippi in two days.⁴⁹⁴ The delay on this trip is suggestive of adverse winds.

The brethren who had preceded Paul and Luke to Troas had already spent there the five days occupied by the latter on the journey, and a portion of the seven days of unleavened bread which they spent in Philippi. The seven

additional days now spent there by the whole company, making an aggregate of more than two weeks, gave sufficient time to accomplish much in a community where a door was already opened by the Lord.⁴⁹⁵

7. The last period of seven days included and was terminated by the Lord's day. (7) "*And on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break the loaf, Paul discoursed to them, about to depart on the next day, and continued his discourse till midnight.*" This passage indicates both the day of the week in which the disciples broke the loaf, and the prime object of their meeting on that day. It shows that the loaf was broken on the first day of the week; and we have no apostolic precedent for breaking it on any other day.

The disciples came together on that day, even though Paul and Luke and Timothy, and all the brethren who had come from Greece, were present, not primarily to hear one or more of them discourse, but "to *break the loaf.*" Such is the distinct statement of the historian. That such was an established custom in the Churches is implied in a rebuke administered by Paul to the Church at Corinth, in which he says: "When you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's supper."⁴⁹⁶ Now, for this they would not have deserved censure, had it not been that to eat the Lord's supper was the proper object of their assemblage. These facts are sufficient to establish the conclusion that the main object of the Lord's-day meeting was to break the loaf.

This conclusion will be of service to us in seeking to determine the frequency with which the loaf was broken. If the prime object of the Lord's-day meeting was to celebrate the Lord's supper, then all the evidence we have of the custom of meeting every Lord's day is equally conclusive in reference to the weekly observance of the Lord's supper. But the former custom is universally admitted by Christians of the present day, and therefore there should be no dispute in reference to the latter.

It must, in candor, be admitted, that there is no express statement in the New Testament that the disciples broke the loaf every Lord's day; neither is it stated that they *met* every Lord's day. Yet the question, how often shall 247 the congregation meet together to break the loaf, is one which can not be avoided, but must be settled practically in some way. The different religious parties have hitherto agreed upon a common principle of action, which is, that each may settle the question according to its own judgment of what is most profitable and expedient. This principle, if applied by congregations instead of parties, is a safe one in reference to matters upon which we have no means of knowing the divine will, or the apostolic custom. But when we can determine, with even a good degree of probability, an apostolic custom, our own judgment should yield to it. So all parties have reasoned in reference to the Lord's day. The intimations contained in the New Testament, together with the universal custom known to have existed in the Churches during the age succeeding that of the apostles, has been decided by them all as sufficient to establish the divine authority of the religious observance of the Lord's day; and yet they have not consented to the weekly observance of the Lord's supper, the proof of which is precisely the same.

As a practical issue between the advocates of weekly communion and their opponents, the questions really has reference to the *comparative weight* of evidence in favor of this practice, and of monthly, quarterly, or yearly communion. When it is thus presented, no one can long hesitate as to the conclusion; for in favor of either of the intervals last mentioned there is not the least evidence, either in the New Testament, or in the uninspired history of the Churches. On the other hand, it is the universal testimony of antiquity that the Churches of the second century broke the loaf every Lord's day, and considered it a custom of apostolic appointment. Now it can not be doubted that the apostolic Churches had some regular interval at which to celebrate this institution, and seeing that all the

evidence there is in the case is in favor of a weekly celebration, there is no room for a reasonable doubt that this was the interval which they adopted.

It is very generally admitted, even among parties who do not observe the practice themselves, that the apostolic Churches broke the loaf weekly; but it is still made a question whether, in the absence of an express commandment, this example is binding upon us. This question is likely to be determined differently by two different classes of men. Those who are disposed to follow chiefly the guide of their own judgment, or of their denominational customs, will feel little influenced by such a precedent. But to those who are determined that the very slightest indication of the divine will shall govern them, the question must present itself in this way: "We are commanded to do this in memory of Jesus. We are not told, in definite terms, how often it shall be done; but we find that the apostles established the custom of meeting every Lord's day for this purpose. This is an inspired precedent, and with it we must comply. We can come to no other conclusion without assuming an ability to judge of this matter with more wisdom than did the apostle."

We return to the meeting in Troas. The extreme length of Paul's discourse on this occasion is in striking contrast with the brevity of his other speeches, as reported by Luke. It is to be accounted for by the anxiety of the 248 apostle, in bidding them a final farewell, to leave the brethren as well guarded as possible against the temptations which awaited them.

8–10. The long and solemn discourse was interrupted at midnight, by an incident which caused great alarm, and some confusion, in the audience. (8) "*Now there were many lamps in the upper chamber where we were assembled; (9) and there sat in the window a certain young man named Eutychus, who was borne down by deep sleep: and as Paul was discoursing a very long time, borne down with sleep, he fell from the third story down, and was taken up dead. (10) But Paul went down, and fell upon him, and embraced him, and said, Be not troubled, for his life is in him.*" It is assumed by some writers, that the young man was not really dead, and Paul's remark, "his life is in him," is adduced in proof of the assumption.⁴⁹⁷ If this remark had been made when Paul first saw him, it might, with propriety, be so understood, but as it was made after he had fallen upon him, and embraced him, action evidently designed to restore him, it should be understood as only a modest way of declaring that he had restored him to life.

11. The alarm produced by the death of Eutychus, the astonishing display of divine power in his restoration to life, and the stillness of the midnight hour in which it all transpired, could but add greatly to the solemnity which already pervaded the audience. Their feelings were too deeply wrought upon to think of sleep, and the meeting was still protracted. They returned to the upper chamber, where the lights were still burning, and the elements of the Lord's supper remained as yet undistributed. Paul, notwithstanding the length and earnestness of his discourse, was still unexhausted. (11) "*And having gone up, and broken the loaf, and eaten it, he conversed yet a long time, even till daybreak, and so he departed.*" Thus the whole night was spent in religious discourse and conversation, interrupted, at midnight, by a death and a resurrection, and this followed by the celebration of the Lord's death, which brings the hope of a better resurrection. The whole scene concluded at daybreak, in one of those touching farewells, in which the pain of parting and the hope of meeting to part no more, struggle so tearfully for the mastery of the soul. It was a night long to be remembered by those who were there, and will yet be a theme of much conversation in eternity.

It is a question of some curiosity whether it was at daybreak on Sunday morning or Monday morning, that this assembly was dismissed. They were assembled in the early part of the night, yet the time of their assembling was included in the "first day of the week." If the brethren in Troas were accustomed to begin and close the day at

midnight, according to the Greek custom, it must have been Sunday night when they met. But if they reckoned according to the Jewish method, which began and closed the day with sunset, then they must have met on what we call *Saturday* night; for in this case the whole of that night would belong to the first day of the week, and *Sunday* night to the second day. It is supposed, by many commentators, that the Greek method prevailed, and that they met Sunday night; but, with Mr. Howson, I am constrained to the other opinion; a conclusive proof of which I find 249 in the fact, that if the meeting was on Sunday night, then the loaf was broken on Monday morning; for it was broken after midnight. There can be no doubt of this fact, unless we understand the breaking of the loaf, mentioned in the eleventh verse, as referring to a common meal. But this is inadmissible; for, having stated, (*verse 7*,) that they came together to break the loaf and now stating, for the first time, that Paul did break the loaf, we must conclude that by the same expression, Luke means the same thing. To this objection that Paul alone is said to have broken and eaten the bread, I answer, that this would be a very natural expression to indicate that Paul officiated at the table; but, on the other hand, if it is a common meal, it would be strange that he alone should eat, especially to the exclusion of his traveling companions, who were going to start as early in the morning as he did. I conclude, therefore, that the brethren met on the night after the Jewish Sabbath, which was still observed as a day of rest by all of them who were Jews or Jewish proselytes, and considering this the beginning of the first day of the week, spent it in the manner above described. On Sunday morning Paul and his companions resumed their journey, being constrained, no doubt, by the movements of the ship, which had already been in the harbor of Troas seven days. His example does not justify traveling on the Lord's day, except under similar constraint, and upon a mission as purely religious as that which was taking him to Jerusalem.

12. Recurring again to the incident concerning Eutychus, in order to state more particularly the gratification which the brethren felt at his recovery, Luke here remarks: (12) "*And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.*" The close connection of this remark with the departure of Paul and his company, and its disconnection from the statement concerning the resumption of the meeting, indicate that it refers to their bringing him away from the meeting.

13. Paul and his whole company departed at an early hour in the morning, and the meeting breaking up at daybreak for this purpose. But their routes for the day were different. (13) "*We went forward to the ship, and sailed for Assos, intending there to take in Paul; for so he had appointed, intending himself to go on foot.*" The coasting voyage of the ship around Cape Lectum to Assos was about forty miles, while the distance across was only twenty.⁴⁹⁸ This would enable Paul to reach that point on foot about as soon as the ship could sail there with favorable winds. His motive in choosing to walk this distance, and to go alone, has been a subject of various conjectures. But the deep gloom which shrouded his feelings, caused by prophetic warnings of great dangers ahead; by the critical state of the Churches everywhere; and by the final farewell which he was giving to Churches which he had planted and nourished, naturally prompted him to seek solitude for a time. On shipboard solitude was impossible, and while in port there was always a group of disciples or a whole congregation claiming his attention. His only opportunity, therefore, during the whole voyage, for solitary reflection, such as the soul longs for amid trials like his, was to 250 seize this occasion for a lonely journey on foot. Amid the more stirring scenes of the apostle's life, while announcing, with oracular authority the will of God, and confirming his words by miraculous demonstrations, we are apt to lose our human sympathy for the man, in our admiration for the apostle. But when we contemplate him under circumstances like the present, worn down by the sleepless labors of the whole night; burdened in spirit too heavily

for even the society of sympathizing friends; and yet, with all his weariness, choosing a long day's journey on foot, that he might indulge to satiety the gloom which oppressed him, we are so much reminded of our own seasons of affliction, as to feel, with great distinctness, the human tie which binds our hearts to his. No ardent laborer in the vineyard of the Lord but feels his soul at times ready to sink beneath its load of anxiety and disappointment, and finds no comfort except in allowing the very excess of sorrow to waste itself away amid silence and solitude. In such hours it will do us good to walk with Paul through this lonely journey, and remember how much suffering has been endured by greater and better men than we.

14–16. The ship and the footman arrived together. (14) *“And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. (15) Sailing thence, the next day we arrived opposite Chios. In another day we came to Samos, and remaining all night at Trogyllium, on the following day we went to Miletus; (16) for Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, so that he might not spend time in Asia; for he was hastening, if it were possible for him, to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.”* If the ship had been under Paul's control, he could have spent at Ephesus the time which was spent at Miletus, without delaying his arrival in Jerusalem. The fact, therefore, that he avoided Ephesus, to keep from losing time, shows that the vessel was not under his control, but that a visit to Ephesus would have required him to leave the ship he was on, and take passage on some other bound for that port. This might have caused delay, and the uncertainty of meeting at Ephesus a vessel bound for Syria might have protracted the delay too long to reach Jerusalem in the time desired. The mention of the matter by Luke shows that Paul felt some inclination to revisit Ephesus, that he might witness the present results of his protracted labors there. The day of Pentecost, however, furnished the only occasion which he could expect before fall,⁴⁹⁹ on which the Jews would be generally congregated in Jerusalem, and he desired to be there to distribute the contribution for the poor without visiting the rural districts individually for that purpose. We will yet see that he made the journey in time for the feast.

17. His desire to see the brethren in Ephesus was gratified, in part, by a short delay of the vessel in the harbor of Miletus. (17) *“But from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called for the elders of the Church.”* The distance was about thirty miles.⁵⁰⁰ gone up himself but for some uncertainty about the movements of the vessel, which was probably waiting for some expected ship to come into port before proceeding. If he had missed the vessel, it would have 251 defeated his purpose of attending the feast; whereas, if the elders should get down too late, they would suffer only the inconvenience of the walk.

18–21. The interview with these elders may be regarded as a type of all the meetings and partings which took place on this journey, and was, probably, described with minuteness on this account. (18) *“And when they had come to him, he said to them, You well know from the day in which I first came into Asia, after what manner I was with you all the time, (19) serving the Lord with all humility and many tears and trials which befell me by the plots of the Jews; (20) that I have kept back nothing that was profitable, but have declared it to you, and taught you both publicly and from house to house, (21) testifying to both Jews and Greeks repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”* The order in which the terms *repentance* and *faith* occur in this last sentence, and in some other passages,⁵⁰¹ has been urged as proof that repentance occurs before faith in the order of mental operations. But this is a most fallacious source of reasoning. From it we might argue that sanctification precedes faith, because Paul addresses the Thessalonians as having been chosen to salvation “through sanctification of spirit and the belief of the truth;”⁵⁰² or that the confession precedes faith, because Paul says: “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and

believe in thy heart that God has raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”⁵⁰³ The order of the words describing two actions proves nothing in reference to the order of their occurrence, except when it is made evident that it was the writer's intention to indicate the order of occurrence. No such intention is manifest here.

The purpose of the sentence in question is to state the two leading topics on which he had testified among the Ephesians, and the order in which they are mentioned was suggested by the nature of the case. All the Jews in Ephesus and all the Gentiles who attended the synagogue worship already believed in God, before Paul preached to them concerning Jesus. It was also necessary that all the heathen should learn to believe in God, before hearing the gospel of the *Son* of God. Moreover, they might be induced to repent toward God, as they had all been taught that they must do, before they believed that Jesus was the Son of God. Repentance toward God, bringing men to an honest and candid state of mind, was a most excellent preparation for faith in Jesus Christ. This was the design of John's ministry. He prepared them for the reception of Jesus Christ, by calling them to repentance before God. Paul also attempted to make known the true God to the Athenians, and told them that God had “commanded all men everywhere to repent,” before he introduced to them the name of Jesus. This, however, is far from being proof of repentance before faith in the ordinary sense of the expression, which requires not repentance toward *God* before faith in *Christ*, but repentance toward *God* before *faith in God*.

That a man can repent toward a God in whose existence he does not believe, is not assumed by any party; but all grant that some degree or species of faith must precede repentance, while the prevailing Protestant parties 252 that *saving* faith, as it is styled, must follow repentance. The mistake which they commit arises from a misconception of the nature of both faith and repentance. Regarding repentance as simply *sorrow for sin*, and faith as a *yielding up of the will to Christ*, they very readily reach the conclusion that the former must precede the latter. But in this conception the sorrow for sin which produces repentance is mistaken for repentance itself; while the yielding up of the will to Christ, which is really repentance,⁵⁰⁴ is mistaken for faith. Repentance, therefore, really covers all the ground usually assigned to both repentance and saving faith, leaving no room for faith to arise after it.

A correct definition of *faith* is equally inconsistent with this conception. It is “confidence as to things hoped for, conviction as to things not seen.”⁵⁰⁵ It can exist, in this its fullest sense, only when its object is both unseen and a subject of hope. When the object is not a subject of hope, as in the faith that the worlds were framed by the word of God,⁵⁰⁶ the faith is merely a conviction as to something not seen. But Jesus the Christ, the prime object of the Christian's faith, is both unseen, and the being upon whom all our hopes depend. Faith in him, therefore, is both “confidence as to things hoped for, and conviction as to things not seen.” But it is impossible for me to repent of the sins which I have committed against Christ before I am *convinced* in reference to his Messiahship, and have confidence in reference to the things which he has promised. It is, therefore, impossible for repentance to precede faith, in reference to him. On the contrary, faith, or conviction that he is the Christ, and confidence in reference to what he has promised, is the chief means of leading men to repentance; although it is still true, that deists, such as modern Jews, and some others who believe in God but reject Christ, might be induced to repent toward *God* before they believe in *Christ*.

We may further remark, that, in the scriptural distribution of our conception of the divine nature, God is the proper object of repentance, and Jesus Christ of faith. To believe that Jesus is the Christ is *the* faith; but repentance is

not thus limited; it has reference to *God*, independent of the distinction between Father and Son. It is this thought which suggested the connection of the term *repentance* with the name of God, and faith with that of Christ.

22–27. The apostle next reveals to these brethren the cause of that deep sorrow which we have seen brooding over his spirit even before his departure from Corinth. (22) *“And now, behold, I go bound in spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things which shall befall me there, (23) except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions await me. (24) But none of these things move me, neither do I hold my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the favor of God. (25) And now, behold, I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. (26) Wherefore, I call you to witness this day, that I am pure from the blood of all; (27) for I have kept back nothing from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”* 253

28–35. Having thus eloquently expressed himself in reference to his past fidelity and his present devotion, he gives them a prophetic warning in reference to trials which yet awaited them, and places his own example minutely before them for imitation. (28) *“Take heed, therefore, to yourselves, and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers, to be shepherds to the Church of the Lord, which he has purchased through his own blood. (29) For I know this, that after my departure, fierce wolves will enter in among you, sparing the flock. (30) Also from among yourselves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. (31) Therefore, watch; remembering that by night and by day, for three years, I ceased not to warn each one with tears. (32) And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his favor, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all the sanctified. (33) I have coveted no man's gold, or silver, or apparel. (34) You yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me. (35) In all things I have shown you, that so laboring, you should support the weak, and should remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* It was a fearful responsibility which rested on the shoulders of these men, to watch as shepherds for the flock, and realize that only by fidelity like that of Paul, could they be free from the blood of them all. In leaving them to this work, he directs their thoughts to the only power sufficient to strengthen them to perform it, by commending them to *God* and to his *Word*, assuring them that the Word was able to build them up, and give them inheritance among the sanctified. This is another among many proofs which we have seen of the confidence of the apostles in the sufficiency and power of the word of God.

The closing admonition has reference to relief of the needy, and to the discharge of their duty, even if it were necessary for them to struggle hard to make their own bread and meat, remembering that it is more blessed to give than to receive. In this, also, he could appeal to his own example, saying, “You yourselves know that these hands,” holding them out to them, “have ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me.” Thus he warns and admonishes these elders, in a speech of inimitable pathos, which is recorded by Luke that it might bear the same lesson to elders of Churches everywhere, teaching that no less than apostolic zeal and self-sacrifice are expected of them.

36–38. When these solemn and touching words were concluded, the apostle was ready to re-embark upon the vessel about to weigh anchor in the harbor, and the final farewell must be spoken. (36) *“And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all; (37) and they all wept much, and fell upon Paul's neck, and kissed him, (38) sorrowing most of all for the word which he had spoken, that they should see his face no more.”* It would be difficult to imagine a more touching scene. The tears of women and of children are sometimes shallow; but

when full-grown men, men of gray hairs, who have been hardened to endurance by the bitter struggles of life, are seen to weep like children, and to fall upon one another's necks, we have the deepest expression of grief ever witnessed on earth. Such, however, is not the sorrow of this world. When the strong man of the world is 254 overwhelmed with grief, he seeks for solitude, and his heart grows harder while it is breaking. But the sorrow of the man of faith is softening and purifying. It binds the afflicted in closer sympathy with one another and with God, while it is sanctified by prayer. It is painful, but it is not altogether unwelcome. It is a sorrow which we are willing to feel again, and which we love to remember. The history of the Church is full of scenes like this. When the paths of many pilgrims meet, and they mingle together, for a few days, their prayers, their songs of praise, their counsels, and their tears, the hour of parting is like a repetition of this scene on the sea-shore at Miletus. Tears, and heavings of the breast, which tell of grief and love and hope all struggling together in the soul; the parting hand and fond embrace; the blessing of God invoked, but not expressed; the sad turning away to duties which the soul feels for the moment too weak to perform—these are all familiar to the servants of God, and are remembered as tokens of those hours when, most of all, the joys of heaven seem to triumph over the sorrows of earth.

If Paul had been parting from these brethren under happy anticipations for them both, the sorrow of neither party could have been so great. But, added to the pain of a final parting was the gloom of their own uncertain future, and the terrible and undefined afflictions which certainly awaited him. There is not, in the history of our race, apart from the sufferings of the Son of God, a nobler instance of self-sacrifice than is presented by Paul on this journey. He had already, twelve months before this, recounted a catalogue of sufferings more abundant than had fallen to the lot of any other man. He had been often in prison, and often on the verge of death. From the Jews he had five times received forty stripes save one, and had three times been beaten with rods. Once he was stoned, and left on the ground, supposed to be dead. He had suffered shipwreck three times, and spent a day and a night struggling in the waters of the great deep. In his many journeys, he had been exposed to perils by water, by robbers, by his own countrymen, by the heathen; in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, and among false brethren. He had suffered from weariness, and painfulness and wakefulness. He had endured hunger and thirst, and had known what it was to be cold for want of sufficient clothing. Besides all these things, which were without, he had been and was still bearing a burden not less painful in the care of all the Churches.⁵⁰⁷ And besides even all this, was that thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, which was so irritating and humiliating that he had three times prayed the Lord to take it from him.⁵⁰⁸ These sufferings we would think enough for the portion of one man; and we would suppose that his scarred⁵⁰⁹ and enfeebled frame would be permitted to pass the remainder of its days in quiet. Yet here we find him on his way to Jerusalem, engaged in a mission of mercy, but warned by the voice of prophesy that bonds and afflictions still awaited him. Most men would have said: I have suffered enough. The success of my present enterprise is doubtful, at best, and it is certain to bring me once more into prison, and into untold afflictions. I will, therefore, remain where I am, amid brethren who love me, and strive to end my days in peace. Such may have 255 been the feelings of the Ephesian elders, as they clung tearfully around him; but how grandly the hero lifts himself above all such human weakness, while he exclaims: "None of these things move me, neither do I hold my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the favor of God." When parting forever from such a man, they might well weep, and stand mute upon the shore till the white sails of his vessel grew dim in the distance, ere they turned in loneliness to the toils and

dangers which they were now to encounter without the presence or counsel of their great teacher. We are not permitted to return with them to Ephesus, and listen to their sorrowful conversation by the way; but must follow that receding vessel, and witness the bonds and afflictions which await its most noted passenger.

[460](#)1 Cor. xvi. 8, 9.

[461](#)Verse 31.

[462](#)2 Cor. ii. 12, 13.

[463](#)2 Cor. i. 8.

[464](#)2 Cor. vii. 5.

[465](#)2 Cor. vii. 5–12.

[466](#)2 Cor. ii. 5–11.

[467](#)2 Cor. ix. 1, 2.

[468](#)See 2 Cor. x, xii, *passim*.

[469](#)Ib. xi. 13–15.

[470](#)Ib. viii. 16–24.

[471](#)Ib. i. 16; vii. 5.

[472](#)Ib. viii. 3, 4; xii. 14; xiii. 1.

[473](#)Gal. ii. 6–10.

[474](#)2 Cor. i. 1; viii. 1–15.

[475](#)1 Cor. xvi. 2; 2 Cor. ix. 1, 2.

[476](#)2 Cor. viii. 4.

[477](#)1 Cor. xvi. 3, 4.

[478](#)See Com. Acts xv. 30–35.

[479](#)See Com. Acts xvi. 4, 5.

[480](#)Comp. Gal. i. 6; iv. 15, 16; iv. 10–21; v. 1.

[481](#)Rom., chapters iii, iv, v, and xiv..

[482](#)2 Cor. ix. 12–14.

[483](#)Rom. xv. 30, 31.

[484](#)Rom. xv. 25, 26.

[485](#)Comp. Rom. xvi. 23; 1 Cor. i. 14.

[486](#)Rom. xvi. 1.

[487](#)Gal. iv. 13.

[488](#)See the argument more fully stated, Life and Ep., vol. 2, p. 135.

[489](#)Acts xix. 22.

[490](#)2 Cor. i. 1.

[491](#)Acts xvi. 16, 17.

[492](#)Comp. verse 25.

[493](#)1 Cor. xvi. 8.

[494](#)Acts xvi. 11, 12.

[495](#)Com., verse 1.

[496](#)1 Cor. xi. 20.

[497](#)Olshausen.

[498](#)Life and Ep., vol. 2, p. 208.

[499](#)At the feast of Tabernacles.

[500](#)Life and Ep. vol. 2, p. 214.

[501](#)Mark i. 15.

[502](#)2 Thes. ii. 13.

[503](#)Rom. x. 9.

[504](#)See Com. iii. 19.

[505](#)Heb. xi. 1.

[506](#)Heb. xi. 3.

[507](#)2 Cor. xi. 23–28.

[508](#)2 Cor. xii. 7–9.

[509](#)Gal. vi. 17.

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/mcgarvey/acts.ch20.html>