

Dear members and friends of SEC

There is no more moving scene in the Bible than the seaside farewell which is so beautifully painted by Luke in Acts 20:17-38. The apostle Paul, having spent three years in Ephesus, now stops briefly at nearby Miletus and takes leave of the Ephesian elders, setting his face, like his divine master, towards Jerusalem. The language employed by Luke, a master storyteller and himself the instrument of the Holy Spirit, is poignant, powerful, pungent – he writes of tears and trials, of imprisonments and afflictions, of fierce wolves and the flock of God, of silver and gold, of prayers and yet more tears.

But this is far more than a tear-jerking parting. What is at the heart of Paul's parting speech? Read it through, and you will notice that three times he uses a very similar expression.

In verses 20-21 he says to them '*I did not shrink* from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Then, in verses 26 and 27, 'Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for *I did not shrink* from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.'

And finally in verses 31 and 32, 'Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years *I did not cease* night or day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.'

So as Paul sailed out into the Aegean Sea he reassured his own conscience, as he had reassured the souls of the Ephesian elders, with this one great fact: he had faithfully taught these people 'the whole counsel of God', all of which is 'profitable' and able to 'build up' believers. This is what the minister of God is required to do – though every minister knows himself to be utterly insufficient for such a task. This month we are commencing a new project - systematically reading through the Bible together, from day to day. May I urge every one of you to consider joining in, and doing so with prayerful and eager expectation, so that as a body of believers we would be built up together.

Your brother in Christ,

Paul Yeulett