

The Function of the Church

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[0 : 00] Turn with me to chapter 4 of Ephesians, chapter 4 of Ephesians, where I'm going to read from the beginning once again, but we're going to look once again at the theme that we've been trying to examine together, and that is the function and the nature of the church and our part in it.

Let me read from the beginning. I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you, as Ephesians chapter 4, page 1176, and we're reading from the beginning of the chapter.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness and with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Last week, you'll remember that we looked at the following verses. There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

And we're going to, before we go on, to look at the actual function of the church, which means what does the church do and what is the church supposed to do and who is supposed to do what within that church.

[1 : 26] I just want us to stop one more time. Last week, you'll remember how I said that the unity of God's church, and by that, I'm not talking about any denomination.

I'm talking about the people, the worldwide body of people who worship and serve and love the Lord and who are contained within thousands of different denominations in this world.

That the unity of God's people is rooted in the unity of God. There is one body, one spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

And then we went on to look at some of the reasons why there are divisions and why there have been divisions in God's church here on earth. Now, we looked at that by way of a snapshot, but tonight I want to return to look at how that can be avoided.

How, and that is, it's central in the mind of the Apostle Paul, that each one of us has a responsibility, belong to the church, to do this. It's to bear with one another in love.

[2 : 38] We have to be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. And that's what I'd like us to look at this evening.

First thing I want to say is this, that as far as we're concerned, the church immediately for us, not the denomination, but it is the congregation to which, if you're a visitor this evening, it's your congregation.

And for those of you who regularly worship here, it's here, here in Stornoway in Kenneth Street. So that, for you and I, is the church. We can think as much as we want about the worldwide church, and it's important to do so and to see our links, the connections that we have with the church worldwide.

But as far as our day-to-day and week-to-week life goes, this is the church as far as we are concerned. So this, it is within this context that the Apostle urges us to bear with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and in the bond of peace.

I want to say, first of all, that the church operates on two, I think it's important to see that the church operates on two levels. Two levels. First of all, it's the level of worship. When we come here on a Sunday, twice, 11 o'clock, 6.30, we're coming here to worship.

[3 : 51] That is the central function of the people of God as they collect, as they gather together on the Lord's day. That's been happening all the way since, for 2,000 years since those first disciples met on the day that Jesus was raised from the dead.

They gather together on the first day of the week to worship him. That's the level of worship. But it's very clear from the New Testament that we ought to operate on another level, and that is the level of the daily.

The daily. We should be a family. We should know one another. We should see one another, not just on Sundays.

Other times, we should be friends. We should be God's community. If we belong to the church, our help and our support in time of need should come from the church.

In other words, the church is not just the body of people coming here on a Sunday and then saying, cheerio to each other and see you next week. No, no. That's not the New Testament picture of the church at all.

[5 : 00] It is people operating and interacting with each other in a unique relationship to Jesus Christ and therefore a unique relationship to one another. Not just friends, but brothers and sisters in the Lord.

The New Testament makes that abundantly clear. Now, as we saw last week, the cynical voice will say, well, that just doesn't happen. Well, it does.

Sometimes. It doesn't happen enough. That's why the apostle has written these words. Because it never happens enough. It happens sometimes in some churches more than it happens to others.

But for every church, we are commanded to look at these words and apply them to ourselves. And to identify where it doesn't happen and if it doesn't happen in certain cases, we have to work to make it happen.

That's why the Bible challenges us as people. That's why. That's how it makes us uncomfortable. Because it identifies just the same way as it identifies my sin and your sin and where we go wrong in a relationship of the Lord.

[6 : 09] It also identifies where we go wrong in a relationship to one another and how much deficiency there is. Let me say, first of all, it does happen sometimes.

And where it happens, that's a good thing. But not enough. And if we don't set out, if we don't appreciate what is being set before us in this chapter, then it will never happen.

You have to have a map in order to find your way to a place. The Bible is the map. And if you don't have it in front of you, you'll never find your way to the place where God wants you to be. And this is the objective.

The objective is as follows. Bearing with one another and eager in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. But the other barrier to the effectiveness of the church, the great barrier rather, the great barrier to the effectiveness of the church is me.

I'm the real problem in the effectiveness of the church. Not me as a minister, but me as I belong to the body of Jesus. Well, we saw last week when looking at why churches divide, that much division happens because of the individual.

[7 : 25] Church is people. You can have the best theology and the best legislation and the best kind of worship. If you don't have people, you don't have a church. And that's where our investment bus, I hear the phrase often, investors and people.

Well, the church should be investors in people. Because it's people that make up the church. And people means me. I have to start with myself.

I can't go pointing the finger to anybody else. I've got to point the finger at me. I need to take a long, hard look at myself. That's why Paul begins in verse 2 with my humility, my gentleness and my patience.

Because if I don't get that right, I can't expect other people to get it right either. I must look at my humility, my gentleness and my patience. And to what extent I'm bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain that every one of us has this responsibility to make the church what God wants it to be here.

And when we see something wrong, we need to act to put it right. Not to just point the finger at others, but to act ourselves. Because the church is not just made up of the minister or the ministers.

[8 : 35] It's not just made up of the elders or the deacons. It's made up of all of us who love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. And that means taking very, very seriously what is being told me here in this chapter.

He goes on to describe the responsibility that we have in the church. Eager to maintain. Let's look at this. Eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Now you might say this, that if the Holy Spirit, as we saw last week, has created the church to be one church, as he did on the day of Pentecost. And if it's the Holy Spirit that maintains us, that keeps us together and keeps his church together, then why do we have an obligation to maintain that unity?

Surely it's God's job to maintain and to keep his people together. Well, the answer to that is in exactly the same way as Paul tells us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

We have to live a life of obedience in order to live as God wants us to live. And the responsibility is ours. The support comes from the Holy Spirit. God has promised his presence with us and his strength with us.

[9 : 44] But he has also made very clear that we are responsible. In other words, that if the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace breaks down, it's not the Holy Spirit's fault.

It's my fault. If I jeopardize that in any way. So that's why I've got a huge responsibility. In other words, we're commanded to live in such a way as to ensure that the unity of the church stays.

By creating and maintaining to the best of our ability an atmosphere of peace. That's what it means.

An atmosphere. Now that doesn't mean peace at any cost. But it means that every single one of us has to. Now you might say, well, what has this got to do with the gospel? It's got everything to do with the gospel.

Because where churches break down, it's because very often of disunity and disharmony. When a church breaks down, it frizzles away. And when a church frizzles away, the witness of the gospel in that community, it disappears.

[10 : 50] And so there's no gospel being preached in that community. And so people don't get to hear the gospel. And so therefore people are lost. So please don't tell me tonight this has got nothing to do with the gospel. It's got everything to do with the gospel.

Because God has chosen his people through whom, as the instrument through whom, to bring the gospel to a lost world. And if we don't get it right, then there won't be a gospel.

The gospel will be preached in other countries, but there won't be. Can you conceive of the day coming when there won't be any gospel in Stornoway? It's hard for us to do because we've got so many churches, don't we?

We've got so many congregations, all of which preach the gospel for the moment. But that's been the case in the past. There have been areas and towns and cities and various places in the world where the churches thrive.

And then only a short time later, maybe 100, 200 years later, disappears altogether. Why? Well, that's not for me to say. But all I'm saying is that the church is key.

[11 : 47] The church is the instrument through which God has chosen to bring his message of good news to a lost world. So please don't tell me that this is not important. This is vitally important.

Now, when we set our hearts on doing what is this, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace, this requires prayer and it requires skill on our part.

Peace doesn't come naturally to a broken world when there are people, even amongst friends, as we know naturally. Issues can arise which divide us. It's just that happens every, whether you're Christian or not, issues arise which will divide us.

And that's because of sin that divides people. When Adam and Eve, before the fall, there was perfect unity and perfect harmony of purpose and love for one another and love for the Lord.

It was rooted in their commitment to the Lord. It was perfect. But then as soon as they broke God's law, the one thing that God told them not to do, that's what they did. What happened then? A breach came, first of all, between the relationship that stood between them and God.

[12 : 55] But then the breach also came between them and each other. Adam and Eve, they fell out. Adam started blaming Eve. The woman that you gave me. She was the one who did it. That was the first fallout that they had ever experienced.

And so it went on. The breach came in there and then. And so, and what came on the back of that were all the evils that have plagued the human race and that have caused so much misery and so much heartache in the world.

Jealousy, envy, pride, resentment, cynicism, sarcasm, backbiting, gossip, lies, hatred, tribalism. You name it, you could go on.

Now, when somebody is converted, these old characteristics of jealousy and pride and resentment, they don't just disappear from us.

Because they're so ingrained within our character that they stay with us. At least a remnant stays with us. And as a Christian, I have to deal with these bad qualities, with these bad traits of my character.

[14 : 03] You know, I'm not saying that we're all the same. Somebody's got a worse temper than another person. That happens. But somebody who hasn't got a bad temper might be resentful. And what's going on in that person's mind might actually be much worse than the person with a temper.

Because that person might be much more murderous and evil in their mind. So just because a person doesn't come out, we're all different. We're all different in the way that we behave and in the way that we conduct ourselves.

What happens when a person is converted? Well, what happens is that we must get to work on these who have the power of the Spirit. To put to death, Paul says, these characteristics that we take with us into the Christian life.

And we are most challenged when we have to live and work and interact with other people. What did I say two weeks ago?

I said this. That I would be the most humble person in the world if it wasn't for other people. I'm sure we could all say the same. We'd be the most gentle person in the people in the world. We'd be the most patient people.

[15 : 08] But it's other people that really challenge us. And God uses other people to challenge us. And very often, Christians, it's our fellow Christians that bring out our worst characteristics.

Just the same, I suppose, as in a family. A wife might bring out the worst in her husband. And a husband might bring out the worst in his wife. That happens naturally. It also happens in the church. When we get on with, when we try to get on with one another, we find ourselves dealing with people that are very different to ourselves.

It causes us to question, to stop and question our own character and how we react and how we conduct ourselves.

Well, from the very beginning, if you look even at the book of Acts, it wasn't going to be easy living as a church. For example, in Acts chapter 6, one of the very first things happened.

Perhaps weeks after the church was born, there was a complaint because there were two sets of widows. Remember, of course, there wasn't benefits in those days.

[16 : 11] There wasn't a pension system. There wasn't NHS. There wasn't government provision. And so when you were old, then you relied on your family.

And if you were a widow, you were particularly vulnerable because your husband, who was the main breadwinner, wasn't there anymore. So there were several widows amongst those who were worshipping in the church.

And there were Hebrew widows, people with a Hebrew-Jewish background. And there were Hellenist widows with a Greek background. Now, if we think there's racism today, you ought to have lived in those days.

Because naturally, people grew up hating one another. You have no idea of how much hatred there was within the heart of a Jewish person towards a Gentile person.

They hated one another. And I mean they really hated one another. And so when they were converted, it was a massive challenge because they all came together as equal human beings, brothers and sisters in Christ.

[17 : 15] But there was still that remnant of the old resentment that they had for one another, you see. And so what happened was, inadvertently, the Jewish widows found that they had more.

They were given more by the church than the Hellenists, than the Greek widows. Or rather, they were given at first. And the Greek widows had to wait.

I wonder why. Because the old resentments were still there. Because the old tensions were still there. They wouldn't disappear in a moment.

And so this complaint was raised. Right away. This is at the very beginning. This is not 100 years into the church. This is at the very beginning. And of course, the way in which, the marvelously wise way in which they dealt with this was to set up the first deacons.

As the first deacons. The seven deacons that were in Acts chapter 6. Men who were full of the Spirit. And whose responsibility was then to provide fair and square with everyone who was there.

[18 : 25] And that's how it was resolved. Very wisely. And it saved, I'm quite sure, the situation getting worse and worse.

But there were many other conflicts as well. The church is a body of people from different backgrounds. With different ages and different abilities. Personality types. Ideas. And the challenge of how to get on together.

Not just to get on, but to love one another. But with an evident love that witnesses to the love of Jesus. Wouldn't it be so much better if everyone was like me?

Would it not be so much better? I'm sure that every Christian that's ever lived has said that about his fellow Christians. So I wish that God had given me different people to be in the church with me.

But that's not the way that God has done it. He has put together. Remember that verse that we read in 1 Corinthians chapter 12? He says, God has put together all of us.

[19 : 21] God has so composed the body. Giving greater honor to the part that lacked it. That there may be no division in the body. He has brought us together. Have you ever wondered at the providence of God?

You ever ask yourself the question, why am I here tonight? Why am I me? Why was I brought up in the family I was brought up in? Why am I in Stornoway this evening?

Well, maybe because you live here. Why do I come to this church? Why do I know the people that I know? I'm in my year in school or I'm at my particular place of work. Well, the great thing about following Christ is that there's nothing.

You know that nothing happens at random. God has placed you where you are tonight. And God has brought us all together. You'll forgive me if you're a visitor tonight.

But this is true for you. Where you are in your congregation, in your church. But God has all brought us together. To function and to conduct ourselves in his name. And to, what the Bible says is, To show forth his praises of the one who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[20 : 28] So we're to worship together and we're also to witness together to his name. Now, that means that we have to be absolutely different from the world around us. And that difference is not always easy.

Take, for example, the early church. Take, for example, a great example of this is slaves and owners. Slaves and owners. Now, again, you have to appreciate the relationship that there was in those days between slaves and owners.

If you were an owner, you literally owned your slave. It's hard for us to understand that. There was somebody in your house who did everything for you. Can you imagine that?

It's not just somebody who works for you. But you actually own him or her. You actually own him. He's your property. You can do with him what you want. You don't have to care about his welfare.

You don't have to care about, well, it's in your interest to keep him healthy. So you give him enough food. And it's in your interest to make sure that he's not in pain or anything.

[21 : 29] Because otherwise he's going to be lying in bed. And he's not going to be able to do what you want him to do. It's really quite strange. Of course, we have no concept of that. Because we live in a society where equality is the rule.

Quite rightly so. But in those days it wasn't. And everybody lived like that. Your neighbors lived like that. Your whole town lived like that. Now, you're an owner of a slave and you get converted.

At some point during your Christian life, you're going to have to think to yourself, well, what's my relationship with my slave going to be like? Because my Bible tells me that this man or this woman is made in the image of God.

And that person has dignity in the eyes of God. So therefore, and what's more, that person has a soul. And that soul needs to be saved. So how does my relationship, so you have to begin to think about your slave in a totally different way.

That was not easy. And so you start going to church. You're converted. You start going to church. What's your slave? Because if you want him to be a Christian, then you're going to have to invite him to church.

[22 : 38] So you invite him to church. Maybe it meets in your home. It did in those days, perhaps. And you invite him to church. He starts coming down. You sit beside him in church. This was unheard of.

And then the slave gets converted. Okay? And maybe they have, let's say, the equivalent of tea after the church. I'm only putting this in. I'm only using this as a, let's say they have lunch together, as they would have in the church in those days.

And let's say there's a rota for who serves who lunch. And the owner has to serve his slave. It was unheard of.

You just didn't do that in those days. People got to hear about it. Your reputation plummeted. What's he doing? He's going to have all the slaves.

In an uprising, they're going to be rebelling against their masters. This is the thin edge of the wedge. I'm telling you, that was the real problem. That's why Paul talked about slaves and masters later on in this very letter.

[23 : 38] This is a real problem. I'm not exaggerating. That's just a wee example. It was the same between Jews and Greeks. I've told you that already. There was a massive difference, a massive problem between Jews and Gentiles.

It was the same between male and female. We think that there's sexism nowadays. But you ought to have lived in those days. A man seriously had to rethink his whole relationship with his wife and to stop committing adultery.

It was the order of the day. It was a done thing amongst all men who were married. Their marriage meant nothing to them. And all of a sudden, they had to stop. Everything about your life had to change when you became a Christian in those days.

And everything in our lives changes now when we become Christians. We are new. That's why Paul said, he says, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Behold, all things.

Behold, the old things have passed away. And all things have become new. When you come to Christ, you are a new person. Only God can bring about that work in your life.

[24 : 49] He can create within you a new heart. What happens if the slave gets made an elder in the church and the owner doesn't?

Now that is a problem. Now we're going too far. And now the owner is very tempted to start going around spreading discontent.

Going around people saying, this has really gone too far. I can't cope with this. It's not right. We need to do something about this. It's unheard of.

You see? And that's when trouble starts. When you start going around spreading seeds of discontent, you are no longer eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace.

Because you have allowed something that you object to, something that's real to you, to come between you and the bond of peace and the unity of the spirit.

[25 : 51] See, it's hard. We think it's easy. Oh, that's no problem. Eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. I'm quite happy to be nice to everybody. That's not what it's about. It's about prayerful, skillful care.

In focusing upon the unity and the harmony of the people of God for the sake of the gospel. And it all, listen to this, it always comes at a cost, a personal cost.

If you seriously are going to take these words to heart, be prepared to pay. Be prepared to die to yourself, because that's what living the Christian life is all about.

Dying to yourself. That's what Jesus says. If any man comes after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Today, of course, things are different. We don't have the challenges that the early church had, but the challenges are still there. The church is made up of a variety of individuals, some of whom you naturally get on with better.

[26 : 54] That was true even in Jesus' time. Even amongst the disciples. There were three disciples. Peter, James, and John, to whom he felt closer than the rest. It naturally saw. He felt closer to them.

And it's the same with people that we know, and people that are in the same way feel closer. But, of course, his command in John chapter 15 was, this is my commandment, that you love one another as, listen, as I have loved you.

That's the kind of love that needs to exist, and it's a practical love. And it's a love in which I have to put to death my own inclinations and my own feelings sometimes, and what I want, and what I think, we have to put it to death for the sake of the peace of the people of God.

You have different personalities in any group of believing people. You have a clash sometimes. You have perhaps somebody who's naturally quiet, and another person is naturally extrovert and loud.

The church is a collection of quiet people and loud people. You also have similar personalities. Sometimes it's the similar people that don't get on very well. You have the old enemy, don't you?

[28 : 10] Pride. Always creeps up. And it's only a matter of time. If it's not there right now, if it doesn't manifest itself tonight, it's going to manifest itself next week or next month.

There's going to be some situation in which my pride, pride that won't back down in an argument, for example. Pride in which the more I argue something, the more I refuse to give in, and looks down on other people.

You have different people, different intellects in a church. And a person who's more intellectual may be very tempted to look down on the lesser. But you remember this, that it was through a bunch of fishermen that Jesus changed the world.

And the original church was made up of the strangest collection of all kinds of intellects. But it was ordinary people.

Remember what the Pharisees said? The scribes said that they took note that these men, they were only fishermen, but that they had been with Jesus. That's the kind of people. You know, don't ever think, oh, the church needs a certain type of intellect to get to move on in the world.

[29 : 19] No, it doesn't. Because the Lord has progressed his church for 2,000 years using the most ordinary people. The most ordinary people.

And then, of course, you have jealousy. Then you have the refusal to examine yourself in the light of the Bible. That's always a poor way to start. And then there's criticism.

A refusal, and then a willingness to criticize others, and then a refusal to criticize ourselves, or to take criticism. Remember what David said?

He said, let the righteous smite me. He was always willing to be put right by someone who he believed was walking with the Lord. But the church is also a place where there's differing views on different things.

You ever sat down and thought, and those of you who have been Christians for years will know this, just like I do, on how many different views there are on different things in the Bible?

[30 : 21] I discovered this when I was a wee boy. I was brought up in a manse in Glasgow, and every time communion came around, there was a big crowd of people, sometimes on a Friday night or a Saturday night or a Sunday.

Huge crowds, just the same as you have sometimes here at a communion. It's huge. I grew up with that. And when I was a wee boy, I used to sit, just first as an excuse so that I wouldn't be sent to bed.

But I would sit, I would position myself in the middle of this room full of people, so my mother would find it difficult to grab me and take me off to bed. But after a while, I began to listen to the things that were said.

And it fascinated me, because at that time, I was beginning to think really seriously about the gospel. I was beginning to read my Bible. And I was fascinated by the different views that people had.

One man would argue with another man, and they would argue, they'd toss, and they would come back and forward. And you would leave, and you'd think, who was right? And still to this day, I don't know who's right.

[31 : 22] There's loads of things. For example, if you read Romans 7, Romans chapter 7, Paul describes this mysterious description of a man.

You don't know whether he's a Christian, or whether it was Paul before he was a Christian, or some imaginary man who's under conviction, and not yet converted. Different people have different views. And you start reading commentaries on it, and you find that one commentary differs from another.

And then Revelation speaks about a new heaven and a new earth. What does that mean? Is it a spiritual heaven? A spiritual earth? Or is it this earth, cleared away of all the sinful stuff, and then built again?

Is that what God means? I remember one occasion, when I heard an argument, as to whether the new heaven and the new earth, were spiritual or physical. And then is there a millennium?

Revelation 20 talks about a millennium. Do you believe that a millennium, a thousand years, is going to come when Jesus is going to come? He's going to reign on the earth, physically, and actually, for a thousand years.

[32 : 23] Or is the millennium just a description of the period between the cross and the coming of Christ? There's all kinds of different views. And they're the stuff of discussion.

They're the stuff of fellowship. And the challenge is, how do you live with these different views? How do you proceed with these different views?

How do you maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, when there are so many views? And there have to be, because as soon as you form your church, if you think you can design your own church that agrees with you, it's only a matter of time.

It's only a matter of weeks before you'll divide, because somebody's going to fall out. The church necessarily has to contain a variety of different personalities, ages, views, practices.

Now, I'm not saying that we should tolerate anything at all. I'm not saying that at all. In fact, Paul didn't. When it came to circumcision, and those who were insisting, for example, in Galatians, there were those who were insisting, that in order to be saved, you had to be circumcised.

[33 : 34] Paul had none of it. And if you want to see Paul at his angriest, you read the book, his letter to the Galatians, and he was angry because this threatened the very heart of the gospel.

And Paul saw the danger, and he was having none of it. There was no tolerance with him as far as that was concerned. Zero tolerance. But when it came to the vast varieties, when it comes to the vast varieties of other views on the lesser important subjects, it's the same with practical issues.

The practical issues, again, I don't need to know this. There's all kinds of ways in which we differ. What kind of clothes you wear to church? Whether you wear hats to church.

Whether the differing views on, which I hope that we can argue from the Bible. And yet, there are different views on these.

From people who love the Bible, and who live by the Bible, we have to prioritize. We have to choose what things are important, and what are not important.

[34 : 40] And Paul makes that very, very clear. And just let me remind you, because at the time has gone, just let me remind you, the risk of repeating myself.

I don't think I could repeat myself too often on this at all. What does Paul say? He says humility. He says gentleness. He says patience. These are the three words that go together to make the character that I must be within the body of Christ.

Humility, gentleness, patience. Humility is what I think of myself in relation to my brother and my sister in Jesus. And humility is Jesus coming, coming off his chair and taking the towel on the basin and going round his disciples and washing their feet.

That's what humility is. Anytime you want to know what humility is, remember what he did in the upper room, washing the feet of the disciples. Gentleness is the way I conduct myself towards other people, the way I speak to other people.

the sensitivity to other people's feelings and that sense, you know, a gentle answer turns away wrath.

[35 : 57] That's what the Bible tells us. A gentle answer turns away wrath. You know what it is and it militates against everything that we are by nature.

Sometimes you want to sort things out and you think you're going to sort things out and I'm going to tell that person. That's not being gentle at all. When it's a brother or sister in the Lord, you have to ask, how would Jesus have tackled this problem?

What kind of character did he have? Jesus did to others what they would have, what he would have them do to him.

That's the golden rule. Do to others what you would have them do to you. Now, I know that there are questions that this raises. I know that. But that's fine. Let's proceed with them.

Patience is my reactions when other people try me, when other people annoy me, when other people irritate me. It's my refusal to react to that.

[37 : 01] It's my steadfastness in being the same day by day by day and showing the world and my friends and my church that I have the character of Jesus in the patience in which I am.

It's the way in which I talk. Our speech is so important. Watch your tongue. I believe Kenny had a brilliant example this morning for the children about the nails and the wood.

Remember that. Remember that. The damage that we can do and the damage we think we can do. That's not a problem. Well, it is a problem. It could be a problem. You have the key to unity or to destruction.

It lies within you. It lies within me. What a responsibility God has given us, hasn't he? What a responsibility. Well, there's the challenge.

You have to take a look at yourself. I have to take a look at myself. I have a long, hard, honest look at my character, my humility, the way I look at other people, people who I get on with and people who I perhaps find it difficult to get on with.

[38 : 13] And I'm not thinking of anybody in particular, by the way. It just always is the case, isn't it? Humility, gentleness, and patience.

That's the challenge. Christ-likeness. being willing to die to ourselves for the sake of others and for the sake of the Lord Jesus who purchased us with his own blood, who was willing to die himself for his people.

I want to ask you in closing to pray for our assembly on Thursday and Friday, and I didn't design this for that purpose. I want to ask you simply to pray that the Holy Spirit will guide our church on Thursday and Friday.

Will you please pray for that? Simply this, that the Holy Spirit will keep us. The gospel, that Scotland needs the gospel as never before.

And the devil's strategy to take away the gospel out of Scotland is to break up his people and to sow seeds of disharmony amongst them. We have to refuse to let that happen.

[39 : 32] Please pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us in everything that we do, our mannerisms, the mannerisms of all of us, not just us who are in leadership, but you also.

And may the Lord bless his church, his work, and his word. Let's pray. Amen. Our Father in heaven, we give thanks for your word and for how challenging and for how stimulating your word is.

We thank you, Lord, that it is clear and it brings the needs of this world to us in stark reality. And we ask, Lord, that you will make us obedient to you.

We pray, Lord, that whatever we need to do for you, whatever changes there must be within us, within our hearts, the old nature has to go. We pray, Lord, to look to Jesus, forgive our sin and in Jesus' name.

Amen.