

Acts 20 Bible Study

1. What do you think is the most important thing, humanly speaking, if we are to remain a living and growing church of God?

Allow the group to share ideas without making anything conclusive. Say we'll come back to this.

2. Read Acts 20:1-16, 22 & 25. This is now Paul's third journey from Antioch. How does he show it might be his last? What are Paul's main objectives?

This part of the journey seems focused on encouraging believers. The work of primary evangelism is now up to them. Paul makes the most of whatever time he has left eg speaking through the night (even poor Eutychus' fall doesn't stop the meeting!)

3. Read Acts 20:17-21. Paul's address to the Ephesian elders is perhaps an example of the kind of thing he was encouraging the believers with in vv2-12. Why does Paul start the way he does in v18? What does this tell us about ministry, Christian leadership, and the Christian life? Read also: 1 Cor 10:31-11:1; 1 Tim 4:16; 2 Tim 3:10.

Paul always lived as an example to others. He was not merely a "talking head" or "teacher of doctrine" (see v37 for how the Ephesians felt about him!). It is not just the doctrine / teaching of Christians that matters, it's our whole life too, and we are to watch both! What we believe is to shape and transform how we live

4. Read Acts 20:22-24. If the Spirit warns Paul of prison and hardship, why does he go towards it instead of away? What made Paul able to do this?

*A warning of trouble does not mean you need to avoid the trouble – it can be a gracious word that helps you be prepared. Remember 2 Tim 3:12. Paul is, once again, using himself as an example to follow – it is possible to face any troubles that come for the sake of Jesus, but we need to, like Paul, value eternal things greater than our physical life (and comfort and security and leisure!) Paul says literally, "I do not make my life **precious**..." – this freed him to finish the "race" and work of Jesus.*

5. Read Acts 20:25-38. As Paul speaks to the Ephesians, what are the different ways that he describes the message he proclaimed? What does each mean?

v20 "anything that would be helpful" – for spiritual life and health

v21 All must turn to God in repentance and faith in Jesus – life and beliefs must change, turning away from living for self and beginning a right relationship with Jesus as Lord.

v24 God's grace – the gospel is always about God's mercy not our goodness or worthiness.

v.25 The kingdom – the message that Jesus is King and we must enter – submit to his rule

v.27 The whole will of God – God wants people to repent and be saved, to honour Christ as Lord, to enter his glory. The gospel is to whole will of God, not merely a side issue to him.

6. Consider the list of Q5. Can you think of examples of the kinds of 'distortions' the 'savage wolves' offer?

NB This will be anything that draws us away from the 'race' - so things added to the Bible as essential for faith – as though the Bible was not enough for spiritual life and health eg Book of Mormon, some modern "prophets" with 'new revelations'; teaching that downplays or denies the reality of sin, especially as defined in the Bible; teaching that emphasises our own part in salvation eg Roman Catholicism.

7. We've all either said or heard the saying, "You don't have to go to church to be a Christian". What does verse 28 say about this attitude? How could you respond next time someone who says it to you?

The church was bought with the blood of Jesus. We can forget how costly it was for God to form this gathering and often end up treating it as something ordinary, even of little value – this verse challenges us to repent of such thinking.

8. Think back over Paul's address in Acts 20 and answer again Q1. Make a few specific and practical points. Commit these to God in prayer.