

Acts Chapters 20

PAUL PREPARES FOR THE END

It is well known that church leaders today find it difficult to motivate others to suffer for the cause of Christ. In fact, they often find it difficult to motivate Christians even to take on inconvenience for the sake of Christ. We all need to realize that the greatness of the cause of Christ should fire us with an ambition to take on suffering as a natural response.

Nowadays, we seem to have become obsessed with lesser causes, so much so that those who suffer for the gospel are viewed as failures and are pitied in the church rather than admired. We need to raise up a generation of radical Christians who are willing to pay the necessary price for us to shake this world [and especially your little world] with the revolutionary message of Christ.

In his farewell speech to the Ephesians, Paul gives specific instructions and examples to the leaders he has appointed. Mixed with his own aspirations, the speech tells us that:

- The leader's business is to be helpful to the church. (20:20).
- The leader's goal must be to complete all that God has called him or her to do (20:20).
- The leader's lifestyle is to be exemplary, simple and peaceable (20:26,33).
- The leader's teaching must cover the whole gospel (20:27).
- The leader's task is to care for and protect the church members (20:20).
- False teachers will arise from within the ranks of the church (20:29-30).
- The leader's responsibility is to warn members of dangers they may not see (20:31).

Read Acts 20: 11-21

Questions for Discussion

- From your reading of Acts, what kinds of hardships has Paul already encountered? How would you explain what motivates Paul to keep going on (compare 20:24 with Philip. 3: 3-8)?

- Some people viewed the office of elder or church leader as a way of gaining power and wealth. How does Paul oppose that idea here?

- How would you paraphrase Paul's summary of the gospel (v.21) to explain the faith to someone?

- What do you suppose the Ephesians will miss most about Paul?

- What does Paul say the future holds for him?

- In what circumstances can a believer's future look seemingly "bleak" because of our obedience to the Lord? Give examples (in the office, church, home, family, marital, business or social relationships).

- What is motivating Paul to press on with his plans?

- If someone watched you the past year, what would they assume a Christian lifestyle is like? How would you like to change so they can get a more accurate picture?

- How would you complete this sentence: "The one thing I must accomplish at any cost is _____"

How does it relate to Paul's goal in verse 24?

- In the race of doing God's will, are you in the front of the pack, one of the stragglers, or an onlooker? Why?
