

Acts 20.¹⁷⁻³⁸

Background

As he returned to Jerusalem at the end of his missionary journey, Paul took time out to meet at the port of Miletus with the elders from the church at Ephesus.



Ephesus wasn't exactly *that* close (just under 45 miles), so the willingness of the elders to make the trip is indicative of the level of mutual commitment which there was between the followers of Jesus.

In many ways, it's that mutual commitment in the way the believers lived their lives which is the major theme of this week's study – and that's why the study starts with Paul's exhortation to the church at Philippi: you'll see in the note for that day that I've included the quote from Francis of Assisi. Our lives, and not least the quality of our relationships, are as powerful (and as necessary) a testimony to the grace of God in the gospel as anything we say with our lips.

As we ease our way into this new series on the church, therefore, this week's study obliges us to consider the nature and quality of our relationships with our fellow believers within Christ's church. It also enables us to understand the better just why these relationships and our mutual commitment to one another matter so much.

It'll be helpful to start by reading the whole passage – indeed, there's benefit in reading on from v.13 of the chapter (and noting the Bible Reading for Day 2 in relation to those prefatory verses) – before you start looking at particular portions of it. You'll get a better sense, that way, of the bonds of love which pervaded the believers' living.

You may not have time for each of the seven sections, and if that's the case I suggest you start by concentrating on days (3), (5), and (6), in relation to each of which there's an additional question or two.

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1) Monday 27th September – gospel

Read [Philippians 1.27-30](#)

".. conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ .." (Phil.1.27)

Your daily living is a powerful complement to the testimony you share in words. The famous quote of Francis of Assisi ("It's no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching") is always to the point. Let your life today proclaim Jesus.

What does that sort of living look like in the face of adversity or hostility?

Why will those who 'believe on' Jesus also inevitably 'suffer for Him'?

Prayer: *Guard my heart, my lips and all my living today, Lord Jesus, that in all I do and say and think I may help others see You, love You and learn to trust You always.*

2) Tuesday 28th September – order

Read [Acts 20.13-16](#)

".. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot .." (Acts 20.13)

These diary notes set out the practical arrangements which were made in the course of the full and demanding life of missionary work. 'God is not a God of disorder but of peace' ([1 Cor.14.33](#)): the Spirit prompts such careful forward planning in His people.

What factors came into play in the planning of the arrangements recorded here?

If you are rather disorganized and 'haphazard' in the way you live your life what steps might you take today to 'order' your living better?

Prayer: *Almighty God, You order all things wisely and well: may the Spirit-given order in my manner of living proclaim that glory of Your handiwork.*

3) Wednesday 29th September – consistency

Read [Acts 20.17-21](#)

".. You know how I lived the whole time I was with you from the first day .." (Acts 20.18)

There was a great consistency in Paul's living. His manner of life was consistent with the message he preached: the Christ-likeness of his living was consistent in word, deed and thought: and that pattern of life was consistent throughout his time at Ephesus.

As you think back over your own life, perhaps from earliest years, whose manner of living has had the most profound effect on you, and what was it about their living which spoke to you so powerfully?

What did Paul point to as the hallmarks of his living among them during his time at Ephesus?

What would your fellow believers recognize as the 'hallmarks' of *your* living, both among your neighbours/colleagues and as part of Christ's church?

Prayer: *Long as my life shall last, where'er my lot be cast, teach me Thy way, O Lord. Until the race is run, the journey's done, the crown is won, teach me Thy way!*

4) Thursday 30th September – testifying

Read [Acts 20.22-24](#)

“..if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me’ ..”
(Acts 20.24)

The task given to every believer is the same, for all that the particular context will differ: ‘the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace’ will be the ‘one thing’ you seek to do through the course of your daily living.

As you think ahead to the coming day, in what ways might you be able to testify to the gospel of God’s grace?

How might you become more reliant on the prompting, emboldening and enabling of the Holy Spirit in all the circumstances of your daily life?

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for those through whose living You showed me the gospel of Your grace: help me in turn so to live that my life will testify to that same gospel!*

5) Friday 1st October – bought

Read [Acts 20.25-31](#)

“.. the church of God which He bought with His own blood ..’..” (Acts 20.28)

The church is Christ’s. Purchased by Him and precious to Him. But the church is comprised of flawed individuals and is therefore always fragile – very vulnerable, like sheep, to the savagery and subtlety of those intent on drawing disciples away.

If you’re a believer, you were ‘bought with a price’: what will it mean for you to ‘honour God with your body’ ([1 Cor.6.20](#))?

How will the knowledge that the church of God is ‘bought with His own blood’ affect the way you view and treat your fellow believers?

What steps can you take to guard yourself against being drawn away from Christ by subtle distortions of His truth?

And what steps can we all take within the on-going life of the fellowship (the elders perhaps especially) to safeguard one another in the face of all that might harm us and draw us away from Christ?

Prayer: *Grant me grace to stand my ground, O God, as I don the full ‘armour’ You have given us in Christ. Keep me close to the Shepherd throughout today.*

6) Saturday 2nd October – giving

Read [Acts 20.32-35](#)

“.. ‘..the word of His grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified’ ..” (Acts 20.32)

Paul’s own life and manner of living had clearly been shaped and built by that word of grace, well expressed in the words he quotes from the lips of Jesus: ‘giving’ lies at the heart of grace, and the blessing of being made like Christ (sanctified) is tied to that.

Your growth in grace flows from your exposure to God’s Word: are there ways in which you might ensure you have a greater exposure to His word?

In what ways are we a ‘giving’ church? How might that be evident to those who live around us?

What sort of ‘hard work’ on your part **as an individual, and on our part as a fellowship**, might ‘help the weak’ today?

Prayer: *May the grace of the Lord Jesus be mine, O God – that grace whereby, though rich, He became poor that we through His poverty might become rich.*

7) Sunday 3rd October – love

Read [Acts 20.36-38](#)

“.. *They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him ..*” (Acts 20.37)

The transforming grace of God in Saul of Tarsus’ life had made him into a man whose tears for his people ([v.19](#)) were matched by their tears for him: the bonds of mutual commitment and love run deep within the church which bears Christ’s name

In what ways did the mutual affection of Paul and the Ephesian elders find expression, as recorded here?

Today the Lord’s people gather for worship: if you’re able to gather thus yourself how might you give expression today to those bonds of love?

Prayer: *How deep Your Father’s love for us, how vast beyond all measure, that You should give Your only Son to make a wretch Your treasure and bring many sons to glory*