

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Acts: The Continuing Earthly Ministry Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Part VI: The Ministry Of The Universal Church In Its Spread To The Ends Of The Earth, Acts 8:26-28:31

E. Christ's Use Of The Apostle Paul To Spearhead Worldwide Outreach, Acts 14:4-28:31

27. Christ's Letting Paul Make A Questionable Decision To Fulfill His Mission

(Acts 21:15-30; 23:11)

I. Introduction

- A. When trouble erupts from a choice a believer makes, it is easy to presume he has done something wrong!
- B. Yet, we must trust God's oversight and leave the judging of situations outside our rule for God to handle:

II. Christ's Letting Paul Make A Questionable Decision To Fulfill His Mission, Acts 21:15-30; 23:11.

- A. After Paul arrived in Jerusalem, the believers there gladly received him, and he testified of God's use of him and his team to evangelize the Gentiles, news that caused the leaders great joy, Acts 21:15-20a.
- B. However, this joy was tempered by a problem in the Jerusalem Church community, Acts 21:20b-21:
 - 1. The Jerusalem Church leaders reported that many Jewish believers ardently kept the Law, Acts 21:20b.
 - 2. Now, among these believers, a report had gone out that Paul claimed Jewish believers were not to circumcise their sons nor to keep the Jewish customs, Acts 21:21; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 416.
 - 3. Actually, Paul had taught that keeping the law **to be saved** was wrong (Galatians 5:1-3; Acts 15:1-2), but he had not prohibited Jews from circumcising their sons nor from observing their Jewish customs!
- C. To counter this misunderstanding, the Jerusalem Church leaders urged Paul to join in the rituals of believers who were fulfilling a Nazirite vow in the temple (Acts 21:22-24). They affirmed this move would not create a stumbling block for Gentile believers who had received the written decision of the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council that they did not need to keep the customs of the Law, Acts 21:25.
- D. Paul consented to this plan, and went into the temple to participate in the Nazirite rituals, Acts 21:26.
- E. When unsaved Jews who had opposed Paul in Asia saw him there, they stirred up the rest of the Jews with the errant belief that he had defiled the temple by bringing Gentiles into it, creating a riot, Acts 21:27-30!
- F. Now, a great debate has long occurred on whether the elders and Paul were right or wrong in this incident:
 - 1. Reputable Bible expositor, G. Campbell Morgan (The Acts of the Apostles, 1924, p. 484-487) argued that the Jerusalem elders tried to get Paul to misrepresent his stand that the Law was not obligatory for the believer, but that Paul in a lofty motive joined in the ritual to reach his countrymen in becoming a Jew to Jews in order to evangelize his fellow Hebrew countrymen, cf. 1 Corinthians 10:32-33.
 - 2. On the other hand, nothing in the context implies sin in any of the parties involved: in forming their plan, the elders openly admitted that, in line with their own previous Jerusalem Council decision in Acts 15, Gentile believers did not have to keep the Law (Acts 21:25). Paul himself had before kept a Nazirite vow as an Apostle though he knew he was not under the Law (Acts 18:18), and Acts 21:14 teaches all the believers around Paul consented that his getting into trouble in Jerusalem was in God's will; Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T. Luke's silence on any sin involved implies they were all innocent!
- G. Yet, regardless if anyone was right or wrong, God let Paul decide to enter the temple to fulfill his mission:
 - 1. The Holy Spirit had previously extensively testified of the trouble Paul would face with no reference to whether it was wrong for him to go to Jerusalem and face the trouble, cf. Acts 20:22-23; 21:4, 10-14.
 - 2. Indeed, Acts 21:14b with Christ's own vision to Paul in Acts 23:11 imply he was in God's will when he testified in his Jerusalem address that resulted from this riot, and that he would later testify at Rome.
 - 3. Thus, God let the event occur for His glory, and only He can judge all those involved, 1 Cor. 4:3-5!

Lesson: *Though we might debate whether Paul and the Jerusalem Church leaders were right or wrong in their efforts that led to the temple riot, God ALLOWED them to do what they did do, leading to the riot, ALL so PAUL might EVENTUALLY FULFILL his MISSION to WITNESS as an APOSTLE!*

Application: *(1) May we not judge other believers over whom we have no clear Biblical jurisdiction, for that is God's concern, Romans 14:1-4. (2) May we rather trust God's sovereignty over all, and focus on following the Lord in what WE KNOW that HE wants US to DO. (3) In debatable issues, may we opt to do what protects our own consciences, and what edifies other believers, 1 Corinthians 6:12; 8:13.*