

**PAUL**

**The Missionary  
Apostle**

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# PREFACE

James Stalker said, “There are some men whose lives it is impossible to study without receiving the impression that they were expressly sent into the world to do a work required by the juncture of history on which they fell . . . This impression is produced by no life more than by that of the Apostle Paul.” When it was time, in the gracious plan of God, to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world, Paul was the special instrument chosen by God to lead the way in world missions. Though to man’s way of thinking, Paul was a most unlikely choice because of his great persecution of the church; yet he proved to be the right choice as do all of God’s choices. His three missionary journeys are legends in missionary endeavor, and they show the principles and inspiration for all missionary work to follow.

Paul’s missionary work made him very prominent in the Bible. In fact, outside of Jesus Christ, no person is more prominent in the New Testament than the Apostle Paul. Prominence was a natural characteristic of Paul. We agree with Stalker that had Paul not gained his prominence in Christianity, he would have gained it in some other field; for wherever he went, he soon became the foremost personality.

This study of Paul is taken primarily from the book of Acts. Some reference is made to his epistles in our study, but Acts is the main text. His epistles are studies in themselves. Our emphasis is on the narrative of Paul’s life as given in the Scripture. Acts gives that narrative; in fact, it gives more narrative of Paul’s life than of anyone else’s life. Of the twenty-eight chapters in Acts, seventeen of them are a chronicle of Paul’s life. And what a great life it was of consecration to the cause of Jesus Christ. He could indeed say at the end of his life that “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” ([2 Timothy 4:7](#)). May the study of this book on the life of Paul help others to be able to say the same when they come to the end of their earthly sojourn.

## I. PERSECUTOR OF BELIEVERS

### VARIOUS TEXTS

THERE IS NOTHING in the initial appearances of Paul in Scripture which would suggest

in the slightest that he was going to be the greatest ambassador of Jesus Christ the church has ever had. Rather, the early mentions of Paul in Scripture introduce us to a vicious persecutor of the followers of Jesus Christ. The very first of these early mentions of Paul in Scripture not only does not give any hint as to his coming great zeal for Christ, but it also does not give any hint as to his coming great world fame, for the first mention of Paul in Scripture is but a footnote which has him doing nothing more than guarding the garments of those stoning Stephen ([Acts 7:58](#)). No greatness there. But Paul was not the type to remain a footnote—be his behavior good or bad! Soon he will be the most prominent character in the rest of the book of Acts. And as we have noted, this early prominence is not as an ardent ambassador for Christ but as an ardent antagonist of Christ’s followers.

In this study of Paul as a persecutor, we will consider the background of the persecutor and the brutality of the persecutor.

## A. THE BACKGROUND OF THE PERSECUTOR

Who was this violent persecutor of Christ’s followers? His cruelty suggests he was perhaps some Roman filled with hatred for the Jews, or he was some vagabond criminal off the street who, with mob mentality, delighted in being in riots and in treating others with capricious cruelty, or he was, as later thought by a high ranking Roman military man, a notorious “Egyptian” who caused uproars in society and was a leader of four thousand murderers ([Acts 21:38](#)). All of these descriptions would fit his actions, but Paul was not any of these. He was not a non-religious, atheistic, God-hating man like Nazis and Communists of our age who have no mercy but are filled with cruelty toward mankind. Paul was surprisingly a far different man. We will discover in examining his race, his region, his raising, and his religion that he was of noble extract, of excellent upbringing, well educated, and extremely religious and God-fearing—things which we normally do not associate with a rampaging, blood-shedding, hate-filled person.

### 1. His Race

Paul was “a Jew” ([Acts 22:3](#)). And he was a full-blooded Jew no less, for he was “an Hebrew of Hebrews” ([Philippians 3:5](#)) “i.e. from Hebrew parents and ancestry on both sides” (Alford). Unlike Timothy, whose mother was a Jew but his father a Greek ([Acts 16:3](#)), Paul was totally Jewish. As a full-fledged Jew, Paul could trace



his ancestry without difficulty; and so he reported that he was “of the tribe of Benjamin” ([Philippians 3:5](#)) which helps us understand where he got the name of “Saul.” This name would be in honor of the first king of Israel who came from the tribe of Benjamin ([1 Samuel 9:1,2](#)) and was the only king to come from this tribe. Being of loyal Jewish parents, he was “circumcised the eighth day” ([Philippians 3:5](#)) in accordance with God’s instructions to Abraham ([Genesis 17:12](#)) and later reaffirmed in the law ([Leviticus 12:3](#)). “At his circumcision he probably received a double name, that of Saul for his family, and that of Paul [[Acts 13:9](#)] for the world of trade and municipal life” (F. B. Meyer).

Yes, Paul was of noble stock, not the usual stock that is associated with the vicious cruelty he exhibited in persecuting God’s people. But as Scripture plainly teaches (note [John 1:13](#)), it is not our human heritage that begets good behavior; it is our heavenly heritage obtained through the new birth that produces genuine godly behavior in man. Royal blood, statesmen’s blood, Jewish blood, or any other highly respected blood of man does not make one godly. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can do that—a truth that is diametrically opposed to much of the current philosophies of our day.

## 2. His Region

Though a pure-blooded Jew, the place Paul called home was not a city in Israel as would be expected. Rather, it was Tarsus, a city located ten miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea in the south east central region of the Roman province of Cilicia. The province of Cilicia was located in the northwest end of the Mediterranean Sea. Though Tarsus was located ten miles inland from the sea, it was, by virtue of the Cydnus River, a seaport town; for the river was navigable from the Mediterranean.

Tarsus, as Paul said, was “no mean city” ([Acts 21:39](#)). It was a very important and significant city. It was a city that was a “thriving emporium of trade, and a focus of intellectual and religious activity” (F. B. Meyer). Some estimate its population reached as high as half a million (E. M. Blaiklock) in its glory days. Tarsus was also a city in good favor with the rulers in Rome. In the civil wars of Rome, it took Caesar’s side which resulted in it becoming a “free city,” that is, a city which had the privilege of self-government. Favor with Rome also resulted in Roman citizenship for those in Tarsus. This helps explain why Paul could claim legitimately to be a Roman citizen ([Acts 22:25–28](#)). He was a “free born” ([Acts 22:28](#)) citizen which meant he was born of parents who were already citizens of Rome—Paul’s parents gaining Roman citizenship by virtue of their Tarsus’ residence.

But for all of Tarsus’ greatness, its lasting fame and recognition comes from the

fact that Apostle Paul is associated with the city. This is a significant reminder of what is really lasting and important in the long run.

### 3. His Raising

We especially note two important items about his excellent raising. They are his education and his vocation.

*Education.* Unlike the first apostles who were unlettered men ([Acts 4:13](#)), Paul was a well educated person. As we noted briefly above, Tarsus, his home town, provided many opportunities for education. Tarsus was “described . . . by Strabo as a seat of science equal or superior to Alexandria and Athens . . . [Thus] Paul’s advantages or opportunities of early education were among the best afforded in the Roman Empire . . . and . . . explain the frequent indications, in his writings and discourses, of familiarity with classical literature” (J. A. Alexander). When Paul was older, he was sent to Jerusalem and “brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect [strict] manner of the law of the fathers” ([Acts 22:3](#)). This, in the Jews’ eyes, would be education supreme. Gamaliel “was called by his contemporaries the Beauty of the Law, and is still remembered among the Jews as the Great Rabbi” (Stalker); and the Talmud says of him, “When he died the honor of the Torah (law) ceased, and purity and piety became extinct” (A. C. Gaebelin). The great respect the Jews had for Gamaliel is seen in [Acts 5:34](#) where it is stated that he was “had in reputation among all the people.” So Paul was indeed given an extensive education. His secular education was obtained in Tarsus—one of the world’s best learning centers in his day, and his religious education was obtained in Jerusalem under Gamaliel—the best religious education obtainable in those days as far as the Jews were concerned.

But as great as Paul’s education was in both Tarsus and Jerusalem, it, like so much education today, failed miserably in giving him the right answers to the most important questions of all in life. Instead of pointing him to Christ, it drove him away from Christ. Instead of encouraging him to honor Christ, it encouraged him to hate Christ. No wonder Paul would later on put this education, along with other things highly esteemed by the world, in the category of “dung” ([Philippians 3:8](#)). Yet in spite of this truth, we have many professing believers who spend much time and money to attend colleges and universities to become learned in that which alienates men from Christ, while they neglect the study of the Word of God. How desperately professing Christendom today needs to get their priorities and values straightened

out on the matter of education.

*Vocation.* The training of the intellect was not done at the expense of practicality, for Paul was also trained in a practical trade of tentmaking ([Acts 18:3](#)). An old Jewish proverb says, “He that teacheth not [his son] a trade is as though he taught his son to be a thief.” Stalker says, “It was a rule among the Jews that every boy, whatever might be the profession he was to follow, should learn a trade, as a resource in time of need. This was a rule with wisdom in it; for it gave employment to the young at an age when too much leisure is dangerous, and acquainted the wealthy and the learned in some degree with the feelings of those who have to earn their bread with the sweat of their brow.” Idleness and laziness were not countenanced by good Israelites. Work was honorable. Such a philosophy needs reviving in our welfare, take-it-easy, short work-week, couch-potato age.

The trade Paul was taught helped sustain him during his missionary work. Like all too many missionaries (and pastors and other Christian workers), Paul did not have much material income. Hence he resorted to tentmaking at times to provide for his daily needs. Tentmaking would be especially suitable to him during his missionary travels. Many other trades would not have been very adaptable to this ministry, but tentmaking was. For, as F. B. Meyer says, “This handicraft . . . was highly suitable to the exigencies of a wandering life. Other trades would require a settled workshop and expensive apparatus; but his was a simple industry, capable of being pursued anywhere, and needing the smallest possible apparatus and tools.”

That Paul had to resort to tentmaking to supply his meager daily fare will ever be a stain on many people of his time. What a condemnation it is to these people that the greatest apostle of them all was so unsupported by them that he had to resort to tentmaking to supply his own personal needs. But the folk of Paul’s time are not the only ones to be condemned here. Multitudes in every age have treated pastors and missionaries and other Christian workers in the same manner as Paul was treated. They have so under-supported the servants of God that these servants have had to work extra jobs in order to make ends meet. It will be to the everlasting shame of the stingy, miserly church members that though they have nice incomes and live very comfortably, they feel no guilt at starving the servants of God while demanding they work longer hours than anyone else and produce with excellence at all times.

#### **4. His Religion**

Unlike many young men in every age, Paul's early life was not characterized by disinterest and hardness against religion. He was no atheist nor even just a casual religious person. Rather, he was wrapped up in the religion of Judaism. He himself testified that he "profited [advanced] in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers" ([Galatians 1:14](#)). Hence, "All the observances of the law and the traditions of the elders were conscientiously followed by him" (Gaebelein). He did not live a profligate life stained by immoral escapades. "Whatever struggles with passion may have raged in his own breast, his conduct was always pure" (Stalker).

Paul's religious zeal received much encouragement from his home, for his father was a Pharisee ([Acts 23:6](#)) which Paul also later became (*Ibid.*, [Philippians 3:5](#)). His training under Gamaliel would only intensify his zeal in Judaism. Because of Paul's testimony that he "gave my voice against them" ([Acts 26:10](#), "voice" meaning vote in this verse), some believe Paul advanced so much in his religion and in his acceptance by his religious peers that he became a member of the Sanhedrin. Whether a member of the Sanhedrin or not, Paul was certainly in close and respected association with them; for he could request and obtain authority from them to pursue his persecution of believers into other countries ([Acts 9:2](#)).

Being from Tarsus, Paul would be a member of the Cilician synagogue in Jerusalem. When the dispersed Jews came back to Jerusalem, they organized synagogues according to their former cities and countries. Hence, we read in Scripture of the synagogues in Jerusalem "of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them in Cilicia [Paul's country] and of Asia" ([Acts 6:9](#)). Being of the synagogue of Cilicia brought Paul into contact with Stephen, and this led to the first mention of Paul in Scripture when Scripture reports him guarding the garments of those who stoned Stephen ([Acts 7:58](#)). No one in the crowd gathered outside the city at Stephen's stoning that day could have ever imagined that the man guarding the garments of the stoners would become a greater advocate of the Gospel of Christ than the man being stoned. But such is the power of God which is able through Christ Jesus to transform the souls of men from darkness to light.

That this is the first mention of Paul in Scripture indicates that Paul doubtless was not in Jerusalem during the ministry of Christ. After his training by Gamaliel, he obviously returned to Tarsus. But shortly after Pentecost, he must have come back to Jerusalem, the city any Jew with the religious passions which Paul had would want to be in. Had Paul been in Jerusalem earlier, it is hard to imagine him not being mentioned in Scripture; for it was Paul's nature to be where the action was. No other writer and notably Luke, who was later associated so closely with Paul, mentions him being in Jerusalem during the ministry of Christ or during Pentecost.

And Paul himself likewise never mentions being in Jerusalem at those times—an impossible oversight in his writings had he been there.

The fact that Paul was extremely zealous religiously but at the same time was wholly against Jesus Christ really emphasizes the truth that a Christless religion is not the answer to man's needs. The world has not lacked for religion. But precious little of it has been Christ exalting; and, thus, precious little of it has supplied the greatest need of man's soul. You can be very religious and yet be as lost as the most non-religious person in the world if your religion leaves out Jesus Christ as the only Redeemer of mankind. In judging any religion, the first test is to see what it does with Jesus Christ.

## **B. THE BRUTALITY OF THE PERSECUTOR**

The terrible brutality of Paul in his persecuting of Christians is seldom properly recognized. Some, however, such as Matthew Henry who rightly describes Paul as a "fiery furious persecutor," do seem to grasp something of Paul's terrible evil. But few do. Hence, Canon Farrar is right when he says, "The part which he played . . . in the horrid work of persecution has, I fear, been always underrated."

There are several reasons why the great evil of Paul's persecuting actions are not duly recognized. One reason is that this part of Paul's life is hurried over by many in an effort to ignore as much as possible of this uncomfortable part of Paul's life. Those hurrying over this part of Paul's life unwisely think there is little value in a thorough study of Paul's persecuting conduct. Another reason the great evil of Paul's persecution conduct is not duly recognized is that this part of Paul's life is watered down by some of his admirers in an effort to keep their hero from being too tainted. These folk will unwisely accuse those engaged in a study of Paul's persecution activities of trying to degrade Paul. The main reason, however, that the great evil of Paul's persecution conduct is underrated is that few ever consider more than a verse or two at a time about his persecution. Considering only a verse or two at one time makes his persecution conduct bad enough. But if we want to begin to see the full scope of his evil—and, hence, learn the many great lessons God would have us learn from the accounts of Paul's attack upon the church—we need to bring together at one time as many passages as possible about his persecuting work and then study the words and phrases used in these passages to describe his persecuting action. This we will endeavor to do here as we bring together twenty-six

verses dealing with Paul's persecution of the church.

In examining these many passages of Scripture of Paul's persecuting work, we cannot help but be astounded and shocked at Paul's cruelty. It is hard to believe that this indeed was the man we revere as the greatest apostle of them all. His record was so bloody and so barbaric that one finds it very hard to believe what he reads in these passages about Paul even though the reading is from the infallible and inerrant Word of God. In persecuting the Christians, Paul acted just as brutal as the Nazis, Communists, and other vile people and nations in their barbaric treatment of others. His actions even give the Antichrist a run for his money. No wonder the saints were hesitant to receive him into their midst after his conversion. In fact, it is a marvel that he was ever received by believers.

In this examination of the brutality of Paul's persecution of the church from these twenty-six verses, we will catalogue his persecuting conduct into twenty-one different actions. We will list these various actions in the order in which they are first mentioned in Scripture—some actions are mentioned a number of times in Scripture. The twenty-one actions we will examine are assisting, consenting, destroying, intruding, dragging, disrespecting, imprisoning, threatening, killing, traveling, binding, persecuting, abounding, punishing, beating, opposing, voting, torturing, raging, blaspheming, and injuring.

## **1. Assisting**

They “cast him [Stephen] out of the city, and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul” ([Acts 7:58](#)). The very first mention of Paul in Scripture shows him assisting in the brutal killing of Stephen. It was not a very auspicious introduction for the man who was going to become the greatest apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul did not help throw the stones at this stoning. That doubtless would come later. His duty at Stephen's stoning was simply to guard the stoners' garments from the pilfering of the crowd that had gathered for the stoning.

Paul is mentioned as a “young” man here, but that does not mean Paul was a mere teen. The word can be used for one up to his thirties. Compared to the witnesses who were members of the Sanhedrin, Paul would be considered young even if he was near or at thirty; just as would a preacher of Paul's age be considered young when with a number of veteran pastors. “Young” would reflect more the fact that he was not of the age of the elders on the council, namely, the Sanhedrin, which officiated at this stoning of Stephen.

Interestingly, but for a good reason, the stoners were called “witnesses” in this

text. The reason is that they had “witnessed” Stephen’s sermon, a sermon they considered heretical. They, thus, applied the law about false religion as stated in [Deuteronomy 17](#) to the case. And the law not only stated that one following a false religion should be stoned; but it also stated that “the hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death” ([Deuteronomy 17:7](#)).

The brutal, bloody killing of Stephen and Stephen’s gallant behavior during the stoning did not quell Paul’s hatred of Christianity. Later it doubtless became one of those “pricks” ([Acts 9:5](#)) that pricked his conscience as is attested by his mention of the stoning some years after the event ([Acts 22:20](#)). But rather than the brutal, bloody experience cooling his hatred of Christians, it only inspired him to be more aggressive. From that moment on, Paul ceased to be an assistant—he became the ringleader in persecuting the saints. Like some animals who once they experience the taste of blood, their thirst for blood increases, so it was with Paul. Stephen’s death pleased him (which we will see next), and his appetite to crush other believers became insatiable.

Sin begets sin; one sin encourages another sin and makes it easier to sin more. Remember these truths when temptation knocks on your door. Yielding to a temptation makes it easier to yield to future temptations. Evil snowballs if not stopped by the grace of God. Paul got quite a persecution snowball going before in the grace of God, he met Jesus Christ.

## 2. Consenting

“And Saul was consenting unto his [Stephen’s] death” ([Acts 8:1](#), [Acts 22:20](#)). To consent to the brutal stoning of Stephen, one must have a very hard heart, a heart that is filled with exceedingly great hatred for Christianity. Such was Paul’s heart before his conversion. The word translated “consenting” in these two texts emphasizes this hardness of Paul’s heart. The word meaning involves “to take pleasure with others in anything, to approve of” (Vine). Paul’s consenting to Stephen’s death was not just a tacit approval, but with pleasure he approved! He was glad when Stephen finally died, for it shut up the voice of a great apologist of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul hated the Gospel and those who embraced and propagated it. Therefore, he delighted in the killing of those who embraced and proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ. No wonder his persecution actions were so brutal.

What we delight in dictates our actions and reveals our hearts. A number of professing Christians betray their professed affection for Jesus Christ by their delights, for they delight much in many things of the world which are certainly not in accordance with Christ. Like Paul, they will approve with pleasure evil conduct

because the love of Christ does not dwell in their hearts. The increasing acceptance of lower standards regarding morals and music and money (gambling) are examples of actions by professing Christians which reveal a serious lack of love for Jesus Christ in their hearts.

### 3. Destroying

“As for Saul, he made havoc of the church” ([Acts 8:3](#)). The word translated “havoc” only appears this once in the New Testament. It means to thoroughly destroy, to ravage, to devastate. A graphic illustration of the meaning of the word is found in the Septuagint where the word is used in [Psalm 80:13](#) to describe the destruction of a vineyard by a wild boar. We read it in the English, “The boar out of the forest doth waste it.”

The destroying actions of Paul are also spoken of in [Acts 9:21](#) (“Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name”), [Galatians 1:13](#) (“I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it”), and [Galatians 1:23](#) (“preacheth the faith which once he destroyed”). A different Greek word is used in these texts than in [Acts 8:3](#), but the same thought and meaning are present, so we also include these verses under this heading.

In Paul’s destructive persecution conduct, he is said to have brought destruction to three things. He brought destruction to the “church” ([Acts 8:3](#), [Galatians 1:13](#)), to “them”—i.e. the believer ([Acts 9:21](#)), and to the “faith” ([Galatians 1:23](#)). Regarding the “church,” his brutal conduct caused churches to be destroyed when their members were killed, imprisoned, or forced to flee to other cities. Regarding the believers, his murderous conduct resulted in many of “them” being mercilessly slain. And regarding the “faith,” his cruel attacks caused the weak believers to denounce their faith in order to save themselves from further physical torture or from being slain. What a terrible brutal record of destruction Paul had in persecuting the followers of Jesus Christ.

Herschel Ford gave us a good practical exhortation from this text when he said, “We read that Saul ‘made havoc of the church’ ([Acts 8:3](#)). This is a tragic thing to do, but in this modern age we still have those who do the same thing . . . Some members are not content to see the church going well, and people happily serving God, so they try to hurt the church. God will take care of them—I do not want to be in their shoes.” Many pastors are well acquainted with the problem of havoc-makers in their churches, for so many churches are cursed with a number in their midst who do indeed create havoc in the church by their dissident attitudes and actions. These members, like Paul, continually (the word “havoc” in [Acts 8:3](#) is in the



imperfect tense which means it was continuing action) cause havoc in the church. Churches need to wise up to this problem and vote these havoc-causing members off the rolls.

#### 4. Intruding

“Saul . . . entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” ([Acts 8:3](#)). In his violent hatred of believers, Paul intruded, that is, he literally forced himself into home after home to find Christians to cruelly drag them off to prison. The brutal belligerence of Paul’s persecution efforts would stop at no one’s door. Heartless, he broke up many homes with caprice which produced untold sorrow and harm as a result. Paul’s actions in searching for Christians were similar to the actions of German soldiers in World War II who went house to house searching for Jews or Jewish sympathizers. Years later after his conversion, Paul was still going house to house. But in a far different manner and for a far different reason! Speaking to the Ephesian elders in farewell instructions to them, Paul said he had in Ephesus gone “from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” ([Acts 20:20,21](#)).

The evil of Paul, in breaking up homes, reminds us that where Christ is rejected the home will not be respected. The greater the rejection of Christ, the greater the lack of respect for the home. Breaking up homes by persecution, as was done by Paul, is not the only way the rejection of Christ evilly affects the home. But the increasing rejection of Christ in our land today is also evident in such evil things as the increasing attack on family values, the increasing popularity of day care centers, the increasing rise and respect of single-parenting, the increasing promotion and protection of abortion, the increasing practice and acceptance of homosexuality, and the increasing rise and justification of divorce.

#### 5. Dragging

“Saul . . . haling men and women committed them to prison” ([Acts 8:3](#)). Here we focus on the word “haling” (in the first edition of the KJV it was written “hailing”). Haling “is an old English form of hauling, i.e. violently pulling, dragging” (Alexander). A. T. Robertson similarly says it is “dragging forcibly.” When Paul found Christians in the homes, he would forcibly drag them out of their houses to the magistrates to be committed to prison. There would, of course, often be much protesting verbally and physically by Christians to Paul’s entering their houses and breaking up their

homes with wantonness. But Paul, doubtless often with a number of cohorts, would overcome that opposition by brutally forcing the Christians down the streets to be imprisoned or even put to death.

Being forcibly dragged down a street for standing for that which is good is not unique to Paul's day. It was done by the Germans in their hatred of Jews and Jewish sympathizers, it has been done frequently by Communists in their brutal crushing of political opposition and of Christianity in their countries, and it is often done in our land to those who protest the brutal murdering of babies via abortion. What a pathetic sight to see Paul dragging Christians down the street to be punished; and in like manner, what a pathetic sight to see anti-abortionists dragged down the street because they are trying to stop murder. With such sick, murderous attitudes prevailing in our land, the day is going to soon be upon us when people will be dragged down the street to be punished, imprisoned, or put to death because they follow Christ.

## 6. Disrespecting

Paul persecuted both "men and women" ([Acts 8:3](#)). Three times the fact is mentioned that he gave no respect to the weaker sex (the other two times are [Acts 9:2](#) and [22:4](#)). There is a principle here that needs more emphasis today. The principle is this: the treatment of women is related to the treatment of Christ. Where Christ is respected, women will be respected. But where Christ is rejected, women will lose that respect. In heathen lands where Christ is unknown and idolatry prevails, women are slaves. In our land which is increasingly rejecting Christ, this loss of respect for women is increasing. This loss of respect comes, however, in a very subtle package. It comes under the guise of equal rights. Women are more and more being treated as equals with men. The feminists think this is wonderful and that it is liberating the women. But how deceived they are. Women being drafted for war, women standing side by side with men in dirty and dangerous work, and women being subjected to the same hardships as men is not progress for women! Equal rights say the woman can open the door herself, seat herself, and not expect a host of other courtesies from men. That is not progress for women either! But the more Christ is rejected, the more will women lose their favored distinction. Paul hated Christ. No wonder he made no difference between men and women.

## 7. Imprisoning

"Committed them to prison" ([Acts 8:3](#), see also [22:4](#), [22:19](#), [26:10](#)). At least

four times in Scripture, we are told plainly that Paul put followers of Jesus Christ in prison. Criminals need to be put in prison, not those who follow Jesus Christ, however. Paul's actions belonged in prison; the believers' actions did not! Paul was the criminal in his persecution conduct, not the believers in their faith in Christ.

Paul was just like many cruel nations in every age who cannot tolerate Christians. Put them in prison was his philosophy. Hard to believe that the greatest apostle of them all was at one time zealously and violently putting many Christians in prison.

What Christians experienced from Paul is something we fear may not be very far off for believers in our fair land. The clouds of hostility towards our faith in Christ are gathering more and more and becoming blacker and blacker in our society. Will you have the strength of faith to not recant though you are faced with prison if you do not deny your faith in Jesus Christ? There is no question that our so called fundamental churches are today filled with multitudes who will recant before they will go to prison or suffer much of any other kind of punishment. Their faith is so flimsy and suspect in good times that they recant on church attendance for ball games and other things which ought never to have priority over worship. Such will quickly give up their faith if prison bars stare them in the face.

## 8. Threatening

"Saul, yet breathing out threatenings . . . against the disciples of the Lord" ([Acts 9:1](#)). Threatening here means what you think it means—the declared intention to hurt someone if they do not give in to your demands. Paul played the part of a bully. Especially could he do this to women whom, as we noted earlier, he gave no respect to in this persecution brutality. He would threaten the Christians with prison or beatings or even death if they did not recant their faith in Jesus Christ. Threatening here is not a nice deed. It was a cruel act. It would instill tremendous fear in people as they would hear from friends and neighbors the threats made to other Christians.

Threats were an early practice of the enemies of the church. Peter and John were the first to experience threats from the enemy. The Sanhedrin, in private counsel concerning what to do with Peter and John, said, "Let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name" ([Acts 4:17](#)). Threatenings tend to cower the one threatened. Peter and John, therefore, give us the answer as to what to do when we are threatened for our faith. They prayed, "Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word" ([Acts 4:29](#)). If your faith results in your being threatened regarding the loss of friends or a job or some other loss, remember what the Word of God shows us to do

in these situations—pray for more boldness to live your faith. Do not cower before threats, but instead pray for more boldness.

## 9. Killing

“Saul . . . breathing out . . . slaughter against the disciples of the Lord” ([Acts 9:1](#)). “Slaughter!” What a ghastly word. It is murder. It is gruesome killing. Stephen’s stoning would demonstrate this awful death—a body brutally battered and bloodied until it ceased to live. Only strong stomachs could endure the sight of many of these killings. It was not a quick rifle shot that can often leave little trace of entry into or damage to the body. No, the kind of killings Paul was involved with were just plain gruesome. Stones would so bash in a head that it could become unrecognizable. Nothing but bloody gore was the remains of many a saint who experienced the vicious stoning of Christ-haters.

Three other times in Scripture ([Acts 22:4](#); [22:20](#); and [26:10](#)) Paul himself speaks of being associated with the killing of Christians. His persecuting of the saints was murderous business. He did not stop with threats and beatings (we will note the beatings later) and imprisonments of believers. He often pursued them to their very death. Brutal indeed! Some of the killings Paul was involved with were like the stoning of Stephen in which he did not actually participate in the stoning or other forms of execution. But he did the arresting of Christians, the dragging of Christians to the executioners, and the voting (as we will see later) for the death of Christians. However, Paul doubtless also did his share of stoning. And some of the beatings he helped to administer in the synagogues surely eventually resulted in death for some of the saints. Much of the killing of saints, of course, was not the work of one man at a time but a group of men—such as the stonings. But no matter how it was done, Paul was guilty of murder; and he knew it.

One does not die a martyr’s death unless their faith is strong. One wonders if many in our modern churches today have that kind of faith. Many sing in the morning service the song which says, “We will be true till death”; but they cannot even be true till the evening service. Christ was faithful unto death on our behalf. Let us so cultivate our faith that we will be strong enough to be faithful to Him even if we are faced with death for being loyal to Him.

## 10. Traveling

“And Saul . . . went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus . . . went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for

to be punished . . . I persecuted them even unto strange [foreign] cities” ([Acts 9:1,2; 22:5; 26:11](#)). Paul did not limit his search for Christians to just Jerusalem. He traveled all over in an effort to find believers in order to persecute them. The persecution against the church was so intense in Jerusalem that many of the believers fled to foreign cities ([Acts 8:3,4](#)). But this did not deter Paul. He followed them to the foreign cities. Zealous indeed was Paul in persecuting the church of Jesus Christ.

After Paul’s conversion, he demonstrated the same traveling zeal by going to many foreign cities to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ. That is the spirit of the Great Commission. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” ([Mark 16:15](#)). The purpose of mission programs is to reach out into all the world with the Gospel. And we must not be lax in this endeavor, for the forces of evil are making sure they reach out into all the world—Paul’s persecution efforts illustrate that fact well.

## **11. Binding**

“Bring them bound unto Jerusalem . . . hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name . . . that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests . . . binding and delivering into prisons . . . bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem to be punished” ([Acts 9:2,14,21; 22:4,5](#)). At least five times Scripture speaks of Paul binding believers. The word for “bound” (or “bind”) in [Acts 9:2,14](#) and [22:5](#) is a generic word which speaks of a binding of any sort—good or bad. But the word used in [Acts 9:21](#) and [22:4](#) is a different word and means to put in fetters. The context tells us that the passages with the generic word for binding are indeed speaking of cruel fetters. The word used in [9:21](#) and [22:4](#) stops any watering down of the binding. Paul was not binding the believers with charity, but with chains. What cruelty. How brutal. Because a person became a follower of Jesus Christ, Paul would fether the person like a criminal is fettered.

In all of this binding of believers, we need to be reminded for our own edification and encouragement that you do not stop the Gospel by physically binding people. Paul emphasized this fact when he wrote to Timothy. He said, “Wherein [for the cause of Christ] I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound” ([2 Timothy 2:9](#)). “The word of God is not bound” is a triumphant statement that should inspire every believer. Paul experienced what he himself had done to Christians, but he saw that binding him physically did not bind the Word of God. Let the persecutors bind every thing they can, but they will never bind God’s holy Word! And His Word will have the last word!

## 12. Persecuting

“And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” ([Acts 9:4](#)). This text is the first of thirteen times we find the actual word “persecute” or other forms of the word mentioned in our English Bibles regarding the action of Paul against the church. The other twelve times the word appears regarding Paul’s conduct are in [Acts 9:5](#); [22:4,7,8](#); [26:11,14,15](#); [1 Corinthians 15:9](#); [Galatians 1:13,23](#); [Philippians 3:6](#); and [1 Timothy 1:13](#). The word in our English translation is from the same Greek word in each of the above references.

We have used the word “persecuting” to describe the sum total of Paul’s conduct against the church. Here we examine its meaning along with the meaning of other words used in Scripture to describe Paul’s hostility against the church. In its basic meaning, the Greek word translated “persecutest” in the above texts means to put to flight, to drive away, and to pursue. It can be used in both a good and bad sense. In the context of Paul’s behavior, it means, as Thayer’s Lexicon informs us, to harass, trouble, molest, and maltreat. The word shows Paul’s zeal in his hatred of Christ’s followers, his cruelty towards them, his causing them to flee from Jerusalem, and his going after them and harassing them wherever they fled. It is a terrible indictment on a person to have such a word used about them to describe their attitudes and actions towards those who love our Lord.

Scripture says, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” ([2 Timothy 3:12](#)). Not everyone who is godly will suffer persecution as intensely and brutally as many did in the early church because of Paul. But it will be present in some degree in the lives of all those who live godly. If you have not experienced persecution, you are either not what you profess to be (which is probably the case) or your day is soon to come when you will experience it in some way. You cannot live godly in this old wicked world of ours without maltreatment of some form.

## 13. Abounding

“I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints” ([Acts 9:13](#)). That which compounded Paul’s guilt and multiplied the brutality of his persecution work was “how much” evil he did in this work. “Evil” describes his persecuting conduct in a general way, for it simply means that which is bad. It is translated from the Greek word *kakos* which is the opposite of the Greek word *kalos* that means good, fair, and beautiful. Note our text says it was “many” who reported this evil. “Many” as well as “how much” also emphasizes the abounding evil deeds of Paul in his persecution of Christians.

This text is not the only one to emphasize the abundance of Paul's evil. He confesses it himself (unlike many, he does not water down his evil; true confession of sin never does). Speaking before Agrippa, Paul spoke of doing "many" things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, of putting "many" saints in prison ([Acts 26:10](#)), of punishing the saints "oft" ([Acts 26:11](#)), and of pursuing his persecution work in "every" synagogue (*Ibid.*). When writing to the Galatians, he said, "beyond measure I persecuted the church of God" ([Galatians 1:13](#)). Like the Apostle Peter, his contemporary, Paul never did anything by halves be it good or bad; and his persecuting of the saints certainly bears this fact out.

Unfortunately, most people, unlike Paul and Peter, have more zeal for evil than for good. They can "do evil with both hands earnestly" ([Micah 7:3](#)) but have trouble getting one hand to do good half-heartedly let alone earnestly. They can work hours and hours of overtime for more money, knock themselves out to excel in sports, and labor incessantly for their own selfish projects; but that time, energy, and enthusiasm is no where in sight for the Lord's work. They can spend extravagantly for vacations, cars, houses, clothes, and endless playthings; but when it comes to the Lord, they are so tight that, as the old timers used to say about tight wads and the buffalo nickel, they pinch the nickel so hard they get a cream check from it.

#### **14. Punishing**

"I received letters . . . to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, to be punished . . . I punished them oft in every synagogue" ([Acts 22:5](#), [26:11](#)). The word "punished" here basically means "to take vengeance" (Robertson). It came in various forms. A. C. Hervey, in commenting upon the [Acts 22:5](#) text, says the punishment was either "by rods or by death." Death could come from stoning or from the aftereffects of the rods. J. A. Alexander, in commenting on the [Acts 26:11](#) text, said the punishment in the synagogues was "no doubt by scourging, which was the customary form of punishment . . . practiced in the synagogues" (note [Matthew 10:17](#), [23:34](#)). The form of punishment would vary depending on the location. But any form of punishment upon the saints was cruel. Hence, the brutality of Paul's persecuting of the saints is again emphasized.

When society rejects Christ, it always ends up punishing good people but exonerating evil people. Justice is completely backward. This practice, unfortunately, is not uncommon in our day. More and more we are witnessing the absurd way in which our courts treat people. The criminal is given all sorts of rights, exemptions, mercy, and favor while the victim and the arrester are put under scrutiny and reprimanded or sued because of the way they reacted to the criminal and the crime.

All of this is a commentary on the increasing Christlessness of our society.

## 15. Beating

“I . . . beat in every synagogue them that believe on thee” ([Acts 22:19](#)). While the punishing act noted above probably at times included this beating, it did not necessarily involve this beating. Therefore, we have made beating a separate heading in listing the various actions of Paul in persecuting the saints. Vine tells us that the word “beat” means “to flay.” To flay is to strip off the skin. Hence, it is interesting to note that the word “beat” in this text comes from the root word from which we get our word dermatology. This type of beating could come from whipping and scourging, for the tools used to do these things would peel hunks and slices of skin off the body. Beatings would leave bodies a gory sight. Oh, how brutal Paul was in his persecuting of the saints.

Christ predicted that His followers would be beaten in the synagogues ([Mark 13:9](#)). In making that prediction, He used the same word Paul used in [Acts 22:19](#). So not long after the prediction, the fulfillment began to come about. All that Christ promised His followers was not peaches and cream. Christ did not whitewash things. He promised eternal life to His followers, but He also told them they would experience some hard trials in this life. We hear a lot of sugar-coated Gospel today which distorts the true Gospel message by leaving out the tough times in this life. This sick Gospel promises good health and abundant prosperity in this life to the followers of Christ. Such a message will indeed appeal to many, but it will not find support in the Scriptures! This does not mean that all Christians are headed for the guillotine. But the Biblical message, as we noted earlier, says that all those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall indeed suffer persecution ([2 Timothy 3:12](#)). And we must not complain. After all, Christ suffered terribly in providing our salvation. He was beaten just as He predicted His followers would be (“smote” in [Luke 22:63](#) is the same Greek word). And His suffering did not stop there—He paid the supreme price of death for our redemption. Away with the phony Gospel message that promises great health and personal prosperity. It is not a message that makes strong and loyal saints of Jesus Christ.

## 16. Opposing

“I verily thought within myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” ([Acts 26:9](#)). “Contrary” means to be antagonistic about someone, to be against someone. In this case, Paul was antagonistic towards Christ.



He was against Christ. He, who would later become the greatest advocate of Jesus Christ the church has ever had, was at one time so greatly opposed to Christ that he vented his opposition in cruel, hateful, bloody acts.

We have a lot of professing Christians in our churches who belong in the category of “contrary” more than in any other category, for they are always opposing the work of the church. Whatever position the pastor takes, they take the opposite. Whatever the church majority votes to do, they vote against it. Then after the vote is over, they continue to speak out incessantly and conspicuously and, yes, obnoxiously against whatever the church voted to do. This bunch will one day find out that being against the work of the Lord will result in the Lord being against them. It will not be a pleasant discovery!

## **17. Voting**

“And when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them” ([Acts 26:10](#)). “Voice” in this text means stone, particularly a pebble. Voting was often done in councils and groups by casting a pebble into a container of some sort. Therefore, to say that you gave your pebble for something meant you voted for something. In this case, Paul voted to put Christians to death. Some believe this meant that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. He may have been a member, but it was not necessary for him to be a member of the Sanhedrin to be engaged in voting of some sort for the death of Christians. Voting by other groups, be they big or small, could easily have taken place in the persecution of the believers.

The method of voting in Paul’s day is different than our day. We pull levers in voting booths or put an “x” on a ballot instead of putting a pebble into a container. There are other methods of voting, too. Some in church vote against the church by their absenteeism or by their lack of giving. These methods of voting are just as effective as a voting machine or ballot or pebble.

## **18. Torturing**

“I . . . compelled them [believers] to blaspheme” ([Acts 26:11](#)). The word translated “compelled” means to constrain either by persuasion, threat, entreaty or force. It does not necessarily involve cruel action. The context must be examined to determine what was involved. Examining the context in which Paul uses this word and comparing it to other texts speaking of Paul’s action in persecuting Christians, it is very evident that brutal, physical torturing was resorted to by him to get believers to recant their faith and to speak evil of Christ. Paul was no different than those

cruel nations of every age who delight to torture their enemies to get confessions out of them in time of war.

The enemy of the Gospel must ever resort to tactics such as this to suppress Christianity. The Gospel, however, conquers through its message to the heart of man. Other religions and philosophies resort to cruelties to force their views upon mankind. But there is no plan in the Great Commission for torturing unbelievers into becoming believers. The Gospel message comes with the power of the Holy Spirit working in hearts to convict unbelievers through the Word of God as it is preached and taught and read. This truth also condemns the carnival of gimmicks many churches use in order to get a crowd. Employing these practices produces a lot of insincere results just as torturing does. Furthermore, the gimmick business really cheapens the character of Christianity and the services at church.

## **19. Raging**

“I . . . being exceedingly mad against them” ([Acts 26:11](#)). Here is the attitude of Paul which helps explain why he dealt with believers so unmercilessly. The word “mad” means a fierce rage, to be furiously against something. Paul’s actions against the saints leaves no doubt that he was in a rage even if he had not confessed it here in this text. It was a pathetic attitude which Paul had concerning the church and Jesus Christ. There were plenty of other things in Palestine to be in a rage about with the Herods ruling the land and with corrupt religion dominating the people. But in attacking the Gospel of Christ, Paul raged against the best thing that ever came to the land.

The problem with man in regards to rage has always been having rage in the wrong places. Man gets in a rage over good things or things that do not matter; while he is very tolerant and passive regarding evil and things that do matter. Let someone get upset about evil and he is immediately branded as some sort of eccentric individual speaking entirely apart from wisdom. Society simply cannot tolerate rage against evil; but rage against good is protected ardently under the guise of free speech, rights, justice, and politics. Paul the raging persecutor was the darling of the Sanhedrin and Judaism, and he was not reprimanded for his rage by the Roman government. But when he went to enthusiastically proclaiming the Gospel, he was attacked severely by these groups. So it is today.

## **20. Blaspheming**

“Who [Paul] was before a blasphemer” ([1 Timothy 1:13](#)). Referring to his days

when he persecuted the church, Paul tells us he was a blasphemer. Brutal language accompanied his brutal actions in persecuting the saints. The word “blasphemer” in our text means abusive, evil speaking. It not only can refer to blaspheming God; but it also involves reviling, calumny, and evil speaking in general. Paul, being a staunch Pharisee, would not blaspheme Almighty God. But not recognizing Jesus Christ as Incarnate God, he would not hesitate to speak vilely of Him or of Christ’s followers.

One of the good things the Gospel does to man’s behavior is improve his language, as is seen in Paul’s case. The Gospel cleans up a person’s mouth and puts character into it. This does not mean a Christian cannot use strong words in denouncing sin; but it means a Christian will not use profane, foul, and false language. We need to use strong language in denouncing sin in order to properly characterize and condemn sin. But it does not have to be impious, filthy, or deceitful.

## 21. Injuring

“Who was . . . injurious” ([1 Timothy 1:13](#)). The final action we note in Paul’s persecuting the saints represents the effects of all his persecuting conduct. The word “injurious” here means to be insolent and violent. It involves injuring others by word or by deed or by both. Patrick Fairbairn says, “The word signifies a doer of violence and outrage.” Vincent said one who is injurious “is one whose insolence and contempt of others breaks forth in wanton and outrageous acts.” The word certainly describes well the actions of Apostle Paul in persecuting the church.

Paul left a lot of scars on Christians by both his evil words and deeds. But Paul also left a lot of scars on himself by his persecuting actions. While in the mercy of God he was saved, he learned a truth which many are still learning; and that truth is that while God saves you and forgives you your sins so you can gain eternal life in heaven, you can still in this life carry a heavy burden regarding your sinful past. Paul expressed this fact when writing the Corinthians. He said, “I . . . am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” ([1 Corinthians 15:9](#)). God had sanctioned the apostleship, but Paul still felt unfit and unqualified because of his past sin. His past sin was ever a great burden to him. But this attitude about his sin was a mark of genuine repentance.

We have many today in our churches who do not demonstrate this attitude but still want and expect us to believe they have repented anyway. These are the church folk who fall into some deep sin, such as immorality; then after they have acknowledged their sin and said they were sorry, they expect to be instantly restored to their former respect, office, and status in church. They evidence little or no sense of unworthiness because of their sin. But if they were truly repentant, they would

be much concerned about their unworthiness; and instead of insisting on being eligible for church offices, they would be most reluctant to assume such offices. This was Paul's attitude, for he truly repented of his evil behavior. He did not water down the awfulness of his sin of persecuting the church.

## II. POWER OF GOD

### [Acts 9:3–18](#)

AFTER CONSIDERING PAUL'S brutal persecution of the church, we could not think of a more fitting title for this chapter on his conversion than "The Power of God." Paul himself gave us that phrase in regards to the Gospel when he said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the *power of God* unto salvation to every one that believeth" ([Romans 1:16](#)). Oh, what great power there is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Men, with their great motors and rocket and nuclear bombs, think they have developed such great power; but the greatest power man has ever developed is nothing but feebleness compared to the great power which is present in the Gospel. Such power can transform a brutal persecutor into the greatest apostle of the Gospel the church has ever had.

Paul's conversion "was truly one of the most momentous of history" (D. J. Burrell). Many will agree with A. C. Gaebelien who said the "conversion of this great persecutor and his call by the risen and glorified Lord to be the Apostle to the Gentiles . . . is the greatest event recorded in Acts next to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost." Griffith Thomas said that the conversion of Saul "was indeed the pivot on which turned not only his own career, but the future of the Christian Church." We believe it would be impossible to come up with another conversion that has so affected in a positive way the growth, development, and history of the church.

To examine the great conversion experience of Paul, we will note the revelation of Christ ([Acts 9:3,4,7](#)), the response of Paul ([Acts 9:5,6,8,9,11,12](#)), and the role of Ananias ([vv. 10–18](#)) in it.

### A. THE REVELATION OF CHRIST

The conversion of Paul was brought about by a personal revelation of Jesus Christ to him. This revelation, which occurred “near Damascus” ([v. 3](#)), involved a literal face to face meeting with the risen and glorified Redeemer. Scripture repeatedly records this fact. It is recorded early ([vv. 3, 4](#)) in this first report of the encounter of Christ with Paul. A bit later in this same ninth chapter of Acts, Ananias is recorded as verifying it when he visited Paul three days after Paul’s encounter with Christ. Ananias said, “Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest” ([v. 17](#)). Further on in the chapter, Barnabas is also recorded as affirming the same. “Barnabas took him [Paul], and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way” ([v. 27](#)). Three times Paul, himself, is recorded as testifying of this fact. Before Agrippa he spoke of what Christ said to him: “I am Jesus . . . I have appeared unto thee” ([Acts 26:15,16](#)). In defending his apostleship in his first epistle to the Corinthians, he mentioned that he had seen Christ which was one of the qualifications to be an apostle. “Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord?” ([1 Corinthians 9:1](#)). And in the last part of the same epistle, he again testifies of seeing Jesus when in listing those to whom the risen Lord had appeared, he said, “And last of all he was seen of me also” ([1 Corinthians 15:8](#)).

While it is not necessary to literally see Jesus Christ in order to be saved, the principle in Paul’s experience is that soul salvation is only obtained through Jesus Christ. Leave out Jesus Christ, and you have no salvation whatever for man. Unfortunately, much modern theology pushes Christ to the background or excludes Him altogether and, therefore, has no help or hope for man’s soul. A theology that does this to Christ does not help convert souls; it only helps to curse souls. But if you want true conversion, if you want true salvation for the soul of man, you must focus on Jesus Christ. The message of salvation must proclaim Him as the Savior. He must be front and center in the Gospel proclamation. It was so in Paul’s case. Near Damascus, he met the crucified and risen Savior and was marvelously converted.

To study this revelation of Christ to Paul, which brought about Paul’s conversion, we will consider the mode, moment, mercy, message, and might of the revelation.

## **1. The Mode of the Revelation**

“As he journeyed, he came near Damascus; and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven” ([v. 3](#)). Light was the mode by which the Savior was manifested to Paul. The light is further described in [Acts 22:6](#) as a “great” light, in [Acts 22:11](#) as the “glory of that light [hence a glorious light],” and in [Acts 26:13](#) as being “above the brightness of the sun.” The light completely engulfed Paul. It

“shined round about him” ([v. 3](#)) and also those men who were with him at the time—“shining round about . . . them which journeyed with me” ([Acts 26:13](#)).

The revelation being in the form of light spoke of four things about the person and work of Jesus Christ. It emphasized that He is the Son of God, the Redeemer of man, the Messiah of Israel, and the Conqueror of evil. After his conversion, Paul spoke forcefully of each one of these truths about Jesus Christ; for he indeed saw the light about The Light.

*Jesus is the Son of God.* The Deity of Christ is seen in this light. Paul saw Christ in His glorified Divine person. He could say as the Apostle John said, “We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father” ([John 1:14](#)). Christ walked on this earth for some thirty years in the form of humanity willingly setting aside His Divine glory in order to die for our sins (cp. [Philippians 2:6–11](#)). So lacking in glory was He that Isaiah said in prophetic verse, “He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him” ([Isaiah 53:2](#)). But after the cross is the crown and after the grief is the glory. No longer is Christ to be seen in such humble appearance. After the ascension, Christ is only seen in His glorified form. Paul saw a risen and glorified Savior. He saw more than a man; he saw Christ as the Son of God.

Significantly, when Scripture speaks of Paul’s first preaching experiences right after his conversion, it says, “he preached Christ . . . that he is the Son of God” ([Acts 9:20](#)). Later in Hebrews, Paul (whom we believe is the author of Hebrews) used the “light” symbol in speaking of Christ’s Deity. Paul wrote, “Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” ([Hebrews 1:3](#)).

*Jesus is the Redeemer of man.* Both the Old and New Testaments use light and redemption together at times. Malachi in the Old Testament refers to Christ as the “Sun of righteousness . . . with healing in his wings [or beams, wings is a figure here for the beams of light from the sun; cp. [Psalm 139:9](#) ‘wings of the morning’]” ([Malachi 4:2](#)). In the New Testament, John reports that Jesus said, “I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” ([John 8:12](#)). After his conversion, Paul, in reference to his salvation experience, said, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus

Christ” ([2 Corinthians 4:6](#)). Our world is walking in great darkness today because we have rejected the Great Light. Hell is fittingly a place of great darkness ([Matthew 22:13, 25:30](#)), for it is the place where all those who have rejected the Great Light will spend eternity.

*Jesus is the Messiah of Israel.* In Scripture, the coming Messiah was spoken of occasionally as a light. As an example, [Isaiah 9:2](#) speaks prophetically of the coming of Christ when it says, “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.” In [Matthew 4:16,17](#) Christ refers to this passage in speaking of Himself as the Messiah. [Isaiah 49:6](#) says, in prophecy concerning Christ, “I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.” When Jesus spoke of Himself as the light of the world ([John 8:12](#)), He not only emphasized His redemptive work, but the Jews that day knew He was also speaking of Himself as the Messiah Who would come to rule Israel. The Apostle Paul recognized Christ as the promised Messiah when he said, “Concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh” ([Romans 1:3](#))—“seed of David” here meaning a good deal more than a descendent of David but also the heir to the throne which Jesus Christ is. Israel’s greatest glory will come when they receive the Glorious Light as their Messiah.

*Jesus is the Conqueror of evil.* Paul, himself, in writing to the saints at Thessalonica, uses the symbol of light to forcefully describe Christ as the Conqueror of evil. “Then shall that Wicked [antichrist] be revealed, whom the Lord . . . shall destroy with the brightness of his coming” ([2 Thessalonians 2:8](#)). Paul personally knew something of the overpowering effect of that Light, as we will note later.

## **2. The Moment of the Revelation**

In considering the moment of the revelation, we note both the location of the sun and the location of the sinner.

*The location of the sun.* In [Acts 9:3](#), we are only told that “suddenly” the light came. But in [Acts 22:6](#), we are told that it was “noon” and in [Acts 26:13](#), we are told it was “midday.” So the sun was at its highest and brightest in the sky when Christ revealed Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus. Noting the location of the sun emphasizes two things: the greatness of God’s glory and the greatness of Paul’s

zeal.

First, the greatness of God's glory. The location of the sun emphasizes how great was the light that shone around Paul and his companions. Even though the sun at that time was at its very brightest, the light of the glory of God in Jesus Christ made it pale into darkness by comparison. No glory is greater than God's glory. But in spite of that fact, man seems only interested in the glory of the world. Men will throw their character to the winds to gain glory from their fellow man. But the glory of man is nothing compared to the glory God gives. God glorified His Son as the world could never do. In like manner, when we faithfully serve Him, He will give us far greater glory than we could obtain in this world. Remember that the next time you want to skip church to play ball or do some other activity in order to gain the honor, applause, approval, and favor of man. You are only sacrificing the great glory of heaven for the worthless glory of man. It is a sacrifice no one can afford to make.

Second, the greatness of Paul's zeal. Normally folk did not travel in those days when the sun was at its highest. But Paul's zeal in persecuting the church was so great that he kept on going when others would stop. Evil is always full of zeal. This not only rebukes our lack of zeal in the cause of righteousness, but it also reminds us that evil will never be defeated if we do not combat it with great zeal. If we are going to stop the runaway crime problem in our land, our courts must be more zealous about giving stiffer penalties. If we are to stop the destruction of our churches by church dissidents, our churches must be more zealous about opposing these dissidents and giving them strong discipline. If we are to stop evil habits in our own lives, we must deal with them with a zealousness that exceeds our desire to practice the evil habits.

*The location of the sinner.* The revelation of Christ came to Paul as he was "near" Damascus. He had obtained authority from the high priest to go to Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them bound back to Jerusalem to be either severely beaten or else put to death ([Acts 9:2](#)). But just as he neared the city and was about ready to enter in and begin an awful siege upon Christians, God stepped in and stopped the proceedings.

Waiting until Paul was about ready to enter the city would be a real test of faith for the Christians in Damascus. The word had gotten around in Damascus of Paul's coming ([Acts 9:13,14](#)). As a result, Christians surely were beseeching the Lord for help. But with Paul coming ever closer and nothing seemingly in the way to stop him, hearts would grow faint and fearful. But deliverance did come, though it waited until Paul was near the city.



Sometimes God waits until trouble nears the door before He steps in to stop it. We all would prefer Him to stop trouble in Jerusalem before it even starts to Damascus. But in order to better strengthen our faith and to better glorify Himself, God often delays deliverance until troubles become very acute. Let this encourage every saint who sees trouble coming closer and closer and who feels because it is so close that there is no prospect that God will intervene and bring deliverance.

### **3. The Mercy in the Revelation**

In view of Paul's terrible persecution record, surely the most prominent feature of this revelation is the grace of God. When we read, "Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven" ([v. 3](#)), we expect destruction, not deliverance; incineration, not salvation. Many times in Scripture, the word "suddenly" is associated with judgment. As an example, "He [that] deviseth mischief continually . . . his calamity [shall] come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy" ([Proverbs 6:14,15](#)); "He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" ([Proverbs 29:1](#)). But the "suddenly" in our text was not judgment, it was grace—and grace indeed! Paul deserved judgment, but grace prevailed. Paul spoke of this matchless grace when writing the Galatians. After making reference to his awful persecuting days when "beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it" ([Galatians 1:13](#)), he then said, "God . . . called me by his grace" ([Galatians 1:15](#)). How great is God's mercy.

Paul's conversion informs us that the grace of God can lift anyone out of the deepest pit of sin. If Paul, the terrible persecutor, can be saved, so can the worst sinner. That is one important reason why we need to consider thoroughly, as we did in the last chapter, the persecuting ways of Paul. As Paul said to Timothy, "I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern [example] to them who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" ([1 Timothy 1:16](#)).

### **4. The Message of the Revelation**

"He . . . heard a voice saying" ([v. 4](#)). The revelation involved the Word of God; it came with a Divine message. Matthew Henry said, "Saul not only saw a light from heaven, but heard a voice from heaven; whenever the glory of God was seen, the word of God was heard . . . God's manifestations of himself were never dumb shows, for he magnifies his word above all his name, and what was seen was always designed to make way for what was said." We need to remember this truth when we put on

our specials at church. Too often when we have special musicals or other special programs, we either leave out the sermon altogether or relegate it to a short “blah” devotional. Some of these special programs are just “dumb” shows used to attract people, not edify them. Not all of them, of course, are of that character—some are indeed of excellent quality. But as good as some may be, none of them ought ever to crowd out or diminish the sermon. To the contrary, they ought to make way for an extra special sermon!

There are at least three parts to this message Christ gave Paul. They are the indicting of the sinner, the irreverence of all sin, and the identification of Christ with the church.

*The indicting of the sinner.* The message in the revelation condemned Paul. “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” ([v. 4](#)). “Before Saul was made a saint he was made to see himself a sinner . . . A humbling conviction of sin is the first step towards a saving conversion from sin” (Matthew Henry). The Gospel message includes grace and love; but if you do not get the sinner to the place where he sees himself a sinner, he will not see the need of grace and love from God. It may be more comfortable to have the preacher talk about love instead of condemning sin. But without condemning sin, the sinner will never see his need of being freed from condemnation.

*The irreverence of all sin.* The message said that Saul was persecuting Christ. “Why persecutest thou me?” ([v. 4](#)). This message instructs him that he was not only hurting people, but he was also hurting God. Sin is first and foremost against God. When confessing his sin, David said, “Against thee, thee only [chiefly], have I sinned” ([Psalm 51:4](#)). Our sin hurts other people—and more people than we realize, but it hurts God the most. Nathan pointed this out regarding David’s sin when he told David, “By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme” ([2 Samuel 12:14](#)).

*The identification of Christ with the church.* In a truth similar to the one we have just considered, we learn from this message to Paul that Christ identifies Himself with the church. If they suffer, He suffers. Paul was persecuting the church, but Christ reminded him that this constituted persecution of Christ also. When you hurt one member of the body, you make the whole body suffer. And since Christ is the Head of the Church, He indeed suffers. Christ’s identification with the church also has a

positive side to it. This was taught us when Christ said, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” ([Matthew 25:40](#)). The kindnesses you do to God’s people are kindnesses done to Christ. But the harm you do to God’s people is harm against Christ. Being nasty, stingy, and disrespectful to the preacher involves being nasty, stingy, and disrespectful to Christ Himself. Helping and aiding Christ’s servants will be found to be helping and aiding Christ. This truth ought to encourage the godly but shake up the cantankerous souls.

## 5. The Might of the Revelation

We have already intimated the might of this revelation. Here we look at it more fully by looking at the effect of the light upon Paul and his companions. Both Paul and his traveling companions “fell” to the ground when the light suddenly shown around them ([Acts 9:4](#), [22:7](#), [26:14](#)). Paul is also reported as “trembling and astonished” ([Acts 9:6](#)) and to have been blinded for three days by the light ([Acts 9:9](#), [22:11](#)). Scripture says his companions, besides falling to the ground, were “speechless” ([Acts 9:7](#)) and “afraid” ([Acts 22:9](#)).

To better appreciate the overcoming might of this revelation, we need to remember that these men were not a bunch of effeminate weaklings who would faint at the sight of a mouse running across their path. These were men who were cruel and brutal. These men were in the business of torturing, imprisoning, and killing people. They were at that moment on a special errand to violently oppose the church. Yet, these men were stopped in their tracks, thrown to the ground, trembling, afraid, speechless, and astonished by the might of this revelation. This reminds us of the incident in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before the crucifixion. “Judas . . . [and] a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons” ([John 18:3](#)). Yet, this group of men all “fell to the ground” ([John 18:6](#)) when Jesus said just two words, “I am” (*Ibid.*). Martin Luther understood this might of God when he wrote the song “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” In one stanza he said, “The prince of darkness grim, We tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, For lo! his doom is sure, One little word shall fell him.” Yes, “one little word” is enough, and a great light is even more than enough.

We noted earlier that the great and powerful antichrist will be destroyed simply by the “brightness of his [Christ’s] coming” ([2 Thessalonians 2:8](#)). How powerful is God. How foolish, therefore, to oppose God. Yet, men everywhere despise His Word, reject Christ, and endeavor to create a society that is without God. So haughty, so

full of sin, they do not realize that in an instant God can squish them into nothing. The brightness of His glory or a word from His mouth can end it all for them and send them instantly into eternal torment. Let every rebelling soul tremble at God's might and bow low and long before Him in worship.

## B. THE RESPONSE OF PAUL

Paul's response to the revelation of Jesus Christ could not have been better. In view of his past, his response was also absolutely amazing and incredible. A wicked, brutal persecutor, stopped dead in his tracks, in moments yields himself to the Person he had so hated. But as we noted at the beginning of this chapter, the Gospel is the "power of God" unto salvation. Great indeed is that power as is seen in Paul's response.

To study this response of Paul, we will look at the asking by Paul and the actions of Paul.

### 1. The Asking by Paul

As would be the experience of anyone in similar circumstances, the perplexities would be extremely great for Paul and his companions that noon hour near the city of Damascus. But Paul asked two questions to help clear up the perplexities, and these two questions were the best questions anyone could ever have asked in those circumstances. He asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" ([v. 5](#)) and "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" ([v. 6](#)).

*Who art thou, Lord?* Paul obviously suspected right at the outset of the revelation that this overwhelming light was a Divine manifestation. "Lord" tells us that fact. Now his first question seeks to confirm his suspicion and give him more information regarding the identity of the One Who spoke to him. The question "Why persecutest thou me?" which Paul had just heard had to greatly shock Paul into a realization that his knowledge of God was woefully and perilously defective. He was persecuting Christians because they believed Jesus was the Son of God. Now to hear what he heard causes him to wisely cry out for a very much needed fuller knowledge of the Almighty. He desperately (the circumstances make it imperative that the tone of the question is extremely earnest) wants to know more about God.

Paul started where the soul always needs to start. Men need first and foremost to know about God. Men study diligently to learn about so many subjects today but spend very little time learning about God. It is not necessarily wrong to expand our minds in various subjects. But the subject of all subjects is God. Learning about God will help mankind more than learning about any other subject. Men will never solve the great problems of the day when they walk in ignorance of God. Our eternal destiny depends on knowing God correctly. And nothing is more important for our souls than securing a heavenly, eternal destiny.

Our churches are certainly not doing well today in teaching about God. Most sermons and lessons in even the fundamental, Bible-believing churches are so shallow and so sick that one can attend church for a long time and yet learn very little about the Almighty. No wonder cults thrive. Churches that boast of winning hundreds and even thousands of souls a year are often not churches where you can learn much about God. They know how to count numbers in baptisms and attendance, but they are woefully short on true knowledge about God and cannot teach much about Him. Many pulpits are very entertaining to man but not very enlightening about God. A good many in our fundamental churches look down on the idea of getting deeper into the teaching of God in our Sunday Schools and preaching services. But no aspect of theology will ever be correct if we are not correct on the knowledge of God; and if the theology is faulty, the ministry of the church will lose its value and validity.

The answer Paul received to this first question of his was simple but very significant, short but wide in scope. It not only revealed the person of the Christ, but it also repeated the persecution condemnation and reminded of the pricked conscience.

First, it *revealed the person of Christ*. The answer began with just three words, “I am Jesus” ([v. 5](#)). But these three words were a great revelation of the Lord Jesus—and they would also be a great shock to Paul. This answer identifying the Voice told Paul that this was the Jesus he had despised and, because the light and voice were Divine (which Paul obviously recognized), it meant that Jesus was the Son of God He had claimed to be! Hence, Paul had been persecuting God Almighty. No wonder he trembled and was astonished ([v. 6](#)) after the answer.

The “I am” part of the answer should not be passed over lightly, for it also emphasizes the Deity of Christ. It is the identifying name of Deity which Moses learned about in [Exodus 3:14](#). Griffith Thomas asked, “In reply [to Paul], did [the] Voice pause after ‘I am’?” A great study of the “I am” truth can be found in going through the Gospel of John and examining all the times Christ used the “I am” title. Many, however, miss the significance of the “I am” repetition in John because either

they focus on what comes after the “I am” (such as, “I am *the bread*”), or they are distracted by the translators’ additions after the “I am.” An illustration of the translators’ addition causing the reader to miss the impact of “I am” is found in [John 18:6](#) which tells of Christ’s arresters in the Garden falling down when He said, “I am.” The translators add “he” after “I am”; and many, therefore, miss the relationship of the “I am” to Deity. No wonder the arresters fell down—“I am” was too powerful for them.

Second, it *repeated the persecution condemnation*. For the second time, Paul is rebuked for persecuting Christ; for after Christ identified Himself, He added, “Whom thou persecutest” ([v. 5](#)). Many would complain that Christ was “rubbing it in” by bringing up the persecution charge a second time so quickly. But such folk do not recognize the sinfulness of sin, nor do they see the importance of pressing home the guiltiness of the sinner in order to bring that person to Christ for salvation. In our day of wickedness, we have a high tolerance for evil and a low tolerance for rebuking it. Let not the church and the men of God get caught up in this mood of society. Cry out against sin fervently. Failure to do so only hurts mankind.

Third, it *reminded of the pricked conscience*. The last part of the answer, which says, “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” ([v. 5](#)), tells us something about Paul which we have hitherto not known; namely, Paul was troubled inside about all the persecution business. Doubts were continually inflicting wounds. His conscience was not at rest. And Christ reminded him of that nagging problem in a fitting postscript in His answer.

“Kicking against the pricks” was a good way to describe his problem. The figure of speech came from a practice in Eastern countries used to get oxen to do as they were bidden. Herschel Ford said, “In Bible times they used oxen to pull the plows. At first these animals would rebel and would fling their heels back in protest against the beam. So the farmer . . . would put sharp iron spikes on the beam; then when the oxen kicked they would be sharply wounded. Even a very stubborn ox would soon get tired of this and settle down to work.”

Paul would have many things that would be “pricks” to his conscience. Such things as the sobbing in the homes as he broke them up by taking away fathers and mothers from their children; the strength many Christians evidenced in going to death for Christ rather than recanting; the many stomach-turning scenes of bloody, beaten bodies from whippings and stonings; the continual reports of Christ and all the wonderful things He did; Paul’s knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures which would not soothe his conscience about all his hate and brutality; his knowledge of the corruption of the leaders of Judaism that pushed the persecution; and Christians (as Stephen did) showing convincingly how Christ fulfilled the Scriptural promises

about the Messiah would all be goads to make his conscience uncomfortable day after day. Truly, “the way of the transgressors is hard” ([Proverbs 13:15](#)). Many are the “pricks” that help make it so. And many are the people who have discovered this truth the hard way. Sin looks so exciting, so fulfilling, and so attractive. But sooner or later the “pricks” start bringing more and more pain, and life then becomes more and more miserable. Think about this truth when you are tempted to do evil, for it will help make sin much less appealing.

*What wilt thou have me to do?* Once we find out Who Christ is, the only question we can ask next is the one Paul asked. Salvation begets service. After illumination comes obligation. Salvation is not just a fire escape from hell; it is the door to service, too. In fact, when one is truly saved, he will want to serve the Lord in some way. Salvation gives us a new Master. “It is not, What will the high priest and elders have me to do? What will my own wicked appetites and passions have me to do? But, What wilt thou have me to do?” (Matthew Henry).

Christ’s answer to Paul’s question was, “Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do” ([v. 6](#)). This answer teaches us two very important truths about service, truths which many have much difficulty accepting. These two truths concern the character of our duties and the communicating of our duties.

First, the *character of our duties*. “Arise, and go into the city” ([v. 6](#)) told Saul what his first assignment was. This was not a very important sounding duty. But humble duties are given before high duties. Simple and easy duties are given before complex and difficult duties. In God’s service we start at the bottom, not the top. This does not appeal to the flesh, of course. Proud man wants exalted duties right away. He wants to be chairman of the deacon board before he has learned to be faithful in attending the services. But God would prove us before promoting us. If you are not faithful in doing the lowly tasks, do not expect God to give you exalted tasks.

Second, the *communicating of our duties*. From Paul’s orders given him by Christ, we learn two important truths about how God communicates our duties to us. God communicates them to us according to our needs and according to our obedience.

“Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do” tells Paul all he needs to know at that moment. He is told his immediate duty but not his future duty. He needed to know his immediate duty, but not his duty for the future. God did not communicate to him at that moment that he would be an apostle, a great missionary, a writer of a number of books of the Bible. No, God only told Paul what his duty was for that hour. This is the habit of God. He seldom reveals His will to us for years in advance. Generally it is a step at a time. We will always know

enough to do God's will today. Tomorrow's duties, however, may not be disclosed until tomorrow; but they will always be disclosed in time.

"Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee" also tells us that the communication of our duty depends on our obedience. Paul must "Arise, and go into the city" if he wants to obtain the "it shall be told thee." If Paul does not "Arise, and go into the city" as instructed, he will not find out the next step. Many miss the will of God this way. They neglect their duties which keeps them from meeting the right people, hearing the right messages, and being given the enablement to serve (such as Paul's blindness was removed by Ananias in Damascus). Taking this truth to heart will cause us to do some trembling and to endeavor to be more earnest in faithfully doing the will of God. Always do what God wants you to do and always be where God wants you to be if you would experience great opportunities, delight, enablement, and fulfillment in God's service.

## **2. The Actions of Paul**

Sometimes after folk find out what their duties are, they lose their interest in serving. Some professing saints can seem very interested in living for the Lord and can really impress folk with their talk about serving Christ. But their actions betray the insincerity of their talk. Their actions—the lack thereof—speak louder than their talk. Submission to the will of God in our actions is the real vindicator of one's sincerity in spiritual matters. Paul gave quick evidence by his actions that he was a new man and that his conversion was real when, after he was told by Christ what to do, he acted accordingly.

The actions of Paul which showed his submission to the will of God revealed to him on the road to Damascus included moving, waiting, abstaining, praying, and learning.

*Moving.* Paul was told by Christ to "go into the city" ([v. 6](#)). That meant he was to go into Damascus, the city he had been headed for in hot rage against the Christians. After an encounter with Christ, such as Paul had, most folk would prefer to turn around and head for some other more safe and less humbling locale. Paul had "letters" ([v. 2](#)) for the synagogue leaders in the city authorizing his leading a violent attack upon Christians in Damascus. But now he must go into Damascus acknowledging that his views of Christ had completely changed and that he was no longer pursuing his persecution mission. This would not be easy to do. And what would add to the difficulty and humility of it all was that he had to be led because



he was blind and could not go on his own. But to Paul's credit, he obeyed the Lord without a murmur.

Conversion does not give us orders to run and hide so we can escape the ridicule and perils of our new life in Christ. One of the first duties of a new convert is simply to acknowledge without apology to those around him that things have changed in his life and that he is now a follower of Christ. This will generally bring sneers and jeers and other mean responses from a number of folk, so the new convert's initial duty to live his faith before those whom he had previously lived an ungodly life will strongly test the earnestness of his commitment.

What a different arrival in Damascus Paul experienced than he had anticipated. James Stalker sums it up when he says, "What a change was there! Instead of the proud Pharisee riding through the streets with the pomp of an inquisitor, a stricken man, trembling, groping, clinging to the hand of his guide, arrives at the house [where he was to stay] . . . amidst the consternation of those who receive him." In spite of his entrance into Damascus being so humbling and unimpressive, Paul gave a great testimony of Christ in this move to Damascus. And the reason this was so was that he was obeying Christ. Obedience may not look spectacular to the world—it may sometimes even look ridiculous to the world, but it will testify honorably for Jesus Christ.

*Waiting.* Once Paul arrived in Damascus and found shelter in the house of Judas ([v. 11](#))—a man about whom the Bible tells us nothing—he had to wait three days before Ananias showed up and Paul got active again. Paul was a man of activity. He was not one to sit for long. When he was a little boy, he was probably like some children who simply cannot sit still very long. But here, after the astounding and dramatic revelation of Christ, he is forced to just sit and wait.

This waiting will really test Paul's resolve. Few things are harder than waiting *for* the Lord. It is harder to wait *for* the Lord than to wait *on* the Lord. Waiting *on* the Lord can be a time of great activity. But waiting *for* the Lord is a time of inactivity—and it generally comes at a time when the soul cries out to be on the move. But treat those waiting *for* times with much respect. They are just as important as the waiting *on* times. In fact, few things show our faith quite as well as patiently waiting *for* the Lord. And few things show our rebellion so much as not waiting. The Saul of the Old Testament could not wait for the Lord and this eventually cost him his kingdom ([1 Samuel 13:8–14](#)). Surely that shows the importance of waiting for the Lord. Yet, many will not wait for the Lord. They will not wait God's time. Be it in the matter of morals, marriage, or training for service, people often rush ahead of God. But oh, at

what great cost.

A bit later we will note that during the waiting period Paul learned some good news—God told him in a vision that Ananias would come and he would have his eyesight healed. We will note later the lesson here about obedience increasing our learning. Here we want to note that the vision tells us that God tempers our waiting periods with encouragements. Hard as it was to wait, the Lord gave Paul this vision to help him wait. God is always encouraging us to do His will, even when His will is for us to just wait.

*Abstaining.* “Neither did [he] eat nor drink” ([v. 9](#)). The revelation of Christ had such an effect on Paul that he simply did not eat or drink for three days after the experience. This action of Paul does not mandate that every new convert should go without food and water for three days after their conversion. What it does say, however, is that when one is truly saved, he will show it by giving more honor to spiritual matters than to physical appetites. The early church fasted and prayed. Today’s church feasts and plays. There is a world of difference between the spirituality of the early church and today’s church. Today’s church is dominated by the appetites of the flesh, but the early church certainly was not. All of this says today’s church does not evidence much genuineness in their faith.

*Praying.* “He prayeth” ([v. 11](#)). When the Lord spoke to Ananias about going to see Paul, He reported that Paul was praying. This was private prayer, prayer that only God can see. Therefore, it was real prayer. Much prayer done in public is not real prayer. Too often public prayer is done for public praise. Sometimes public prayer is even used to inform others of situations, events, bad news, or the like. It can even be a form of gossip, sad to say. But when a person prays in private, he is truly praying. That is why the Lord said Paul was praying; and as Herschel Ford says, “When God says a man is praying, it is real prayer.”

A mark of real conversion is real prayer. New converts may not be able to pray well in public because of their nervousness and awkwardness in front of people. But new converts will pray in private. Now that they know the Lord, they will speak with Him. Check your private prayer life, it will reveal just how good or bad your fellowship is with God.

*Learning.* “Hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight” ([v. 12](#)). Obedience enhances

our learning as we noted a bit earlier. Paul had gone into the city of Damascus as instructed; and now, as a result, he learns more from God. God told him that in the city he would be told more. During those three days of waiting, he did not remain in total ignorance. God began to illuminate him. It was a simple learning experience here but one that Paul would certainly delight in. God revealed to him that Ananias would come and Paul would get his eyesight back.

Over and over in the Scripture we learn about this truth that obedience controls our spiritual learning. Disobey and you will remain in the dark. Obey and you will learn wonderful truths. It is fine to attend school, to study the languages to help in the study of the Scripture. But if you lack obedience, the Scriptures will not open up well at all. But practice obedience and you will see wonderful truths in the Word whether you have a lot of schooling or not.

### C. THE ROLE OF ANANIAS

Paul's conversion experience included the ministry of a man by the name of Ananias, a believer that lived in Damascus. Though the role of Ananias in Paul's conversion experience was very important, it was a brief work and consisted of only one meeting with Paul. After that we never hear of Ananias again except when Paul is retelling his conversion experience to a mob of people in Jerusalem ([Acts 22](#)). So Ananias came into the spotlight for just a brief moment. His part in Paul's life was not a lengthy part but a short part. But though short his part, he, however, played it with excellence.

We do not all have major parts and offices in Christian service; but what ever part we have, we need to put our very best into it. Perform the part well that God gives you whether the part is a major character or minor one. The vital thing that God looks for is not whether you are a main character or a minor one but how you did your job (cp. [1 Corinthians 4:2](#)). Ananias, though only in Scripture for a few verses, has endeared himself to Christians everywhere because he did his job faithfully.

From our text we want to note five things about Ananias which have to do with his ministry to Paul. They are the character of Ananias, the call of Ananias, the concerns of Ananias, the communication for Ananias, and the compliance by Ananias.

#### 1. The Character of Ananias

There are three men in Scripture with the name Ananias. This is the only one of

the three with good character. The first Ananias we read of in Scripture conspired with his wife to lie to the church about their giving ([Acts 5](#)). God stuck them dead for their deceitfulness (it is a good thing God does not do that today, or a number of churches might lose some of their influential members and leaders). The third Ananias in Scripture was the high priest whose actions against Paul were despicable ([Acts 23:2, 24:1](#)). The second of the three men named Ananias is the one in our text, and what a different man he was from the other two. Three things are told about him in Scripture which show his good character: he was a disciple of Jesus Christ, a devout man according to the law, and a distinguished man among the Jews.

*A disciple of Jesus Christ.* “And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias” ([v. 10](#)). Being a disciple of Jesus Christ says much about the character of a person in any day. But being a disciple of the Lord in the day when Paul was coming to Damascus to persecute them would especially speak well of a person’s character. Ananias was no “Sunday-morning-only” Christian as we would say today for those who lack dedication and loyalty. He would be in all the services regardless. He was the kind that stood firm in the midst of the darkest times.

*A devout man according to the law.* Scripture says Ananias was “a devout man according to the law” ([Acts 22:12](#)). This does not mean Ananias was a legalistic Pharisee who strained at a gnat but swallowed a camel and who majored on minors and minored on majors. This statement means that when his life was measured by the holy law of God, he would be commended. Many are devout but not according to the law of God. They are devout according to their friends’ flattering testimony, or according to some fawning person who is trying to solicit money or other favors from them, or according to some political persuasion. Many wicked people are said to be religious and good. But the standard used is certainly not the righteous standard of God’s law. Ananias, however, could be measured by the law and be commended. Excellent character indeed!

*A distinguished man among the Jews.* “Having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there” ([Acts 22:12](#)) indicated Ananias had lived a faithful life before his own people. They could not condemn him. That he had a good report among all the Jews in Damascus does not mean that he rejected Christ or that he tried to please all men. It simply means he lived a consistently good life before them.

Would that we had more church members who would live such good lives

before mankind that no one in their community could factually condemn them of evil. Unfortunately, too many of our church members live such poor lives before the public that they can be justifiably condemned. They do not pay their bills, they do not put in a full day's work but loaf like everybody else, they do not live any different morally than the world but have their affairs and divorces, they cheat on their income tax, buy lottery tickets, are unkind and lack courtesy, and have a bad mouth. Such behavior surely is not good advertisement for the church that is trying to reach the community with the Gospel of Christ. It is not more newspaper, radio, and TV ads which the church needs; nor does the church need more special meetings in order to reach the world with the Gospel. These things are fine in their place; but what the church needs more than these things are members who will live righteously before the world. This is the best testimony any church can have. It will greatly aid the advancing of the cause of Christ.

## **2. The Call of Ananias**

The Lord said, "Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man, named Ananias, coming in and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight" ([vv. 10–12](#)). We will examine three features of this call. They are the readiness of Ananias, the directives for Ananias, and the encouragements for Ananias.

*His readiness.* When God called, "Ananias," Ananias answered, "Behold, I am here" ([v. 10](#)). This was a noble answer. It signified that he was ready to serve. It is the language of an attentive servant who is standing by waiting for the summons from his master.

One of the main reasons folk miss out on service is that they are not ready to serve. When God calls, they aren't listening because they are absorbed in some other interest of life forgetting that their primary responsibility in life is to do God's will, not their own. These folk are always fretting because of lack of opportunity. But it is not lack of opportunity that keeps them from serving, it is lack of readiness. We need to concentrate on being ready and let God take care of the opportunity. Opportunity is God's part, readiness is our part. God does not leave vessels unused and sitting on the shelf that are ready for His service.

*His directives.* Ananias' directives were threefold. He was told where to go, whom to see, and what to do. The directives were not appealing to the flesh, as we will see when we examine each one, but the flesh never is very excited about doing God's will.

First, he was told *where to go*. "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus" ([v. 11](#)). God made it very plain exactly where Ananias was to go. He told Ananias what street and what house. God always makes it as plain as necessary where our place of service is. We may not be instructed by a vision like Ananias; but our place of service will be made known to us through such things as unusual providence, prolonged burden of the heart, obvious endowed ability, and the serious and deliberate request of others such as a church calling a pastor. If we are really sincere in wanting to serve the Lord, we will not be lacking in knowledge of where we are to serve. Those who are always saying they do not have much definiteness in where God is calling them are those who are not listening well or who are not wanting to accept the plain leading of the Lord.

The place where God told Ananias to go did not seem to human eyes like a special or significant place. It was just a street and a house in the city where Ananias lived. We like to be told to go to impressive and important places. Ministers like to pastor in large and prestigious churches. Many places, like the street called Straight and Judas' house, may to the human eye lack luster; but you go where God tells you to go and you may be very surprised how someday that place turns out to be a much more important and impressive place than you could have ever imagined. So don't worry about how impressive or unimpressive a place seems to be to which you are called. Rather, be primarily concerned about going where God tells you to go, and you will not be disappointed.

It is interesting and instructive to note that the street called "Straight" in Damascus, which is said to still be in existence today, gained all its fame because of Apostle Paul coming to Christ. Like Tarsus, Paul's home town, it is Paul's conversion that brought lasting fame to that street. This reminds us that in eternity, it will be matters of the soul that will be most significant matters. All other matters will fade into oblivion. This truth ought to help us get our priorities right.

Second, he was told *whom to see*. "Enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus" ([v. 11](#)). This directive told Ananias that he would need much courage to obey his call. He is summoned to see the last man in the world that he would want to see. He is asked to go see the man who is well known as a vicious, bloody persecutor of Christians—and Ananias is a Christian, hence, a potential target of the bloody persecutor.

It always takes courage to serve the Lord. One of the most ridiculous lies of the devil is that Christianity is just for weaklings. But the world buys the lie and mocks Christians as being the faint-hearted. But we notice the worldlings do not have the courage to stand up and live righteously when with their unholy crowd. It is the ungodly who are the cowards, not those who would dare to live for Jesus Christ.

Third, he was told *what to do*. “Hath seen in a vision a man, named Ananias, coming in and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight” ([v. 12](#)). Restoring Paul’s sight was one of the tasks Ananias was to do. We learn in other passages in chapters [9](#), [22](#), and [26](#) of Acts that Ananias also did other things in ministering to Paul. But here we are told about a work Ananias was to do for Paul that many would consider an impossible task. Ananias is commanded by God to bring about the healing of the blind. Many of us would have thrown up our hands at such a command and said we are not able to do that. But God never calls us to do something we cannot do. If we do not possess the ability at the time of the call, the call will give us the ability. In fact, having the ability at the time it is needed is often a very good confirmation that we have been called. Some people in fleshly pride are self-called, and the evidence of it comes quickly when they try to do the task they claim they are called to do.

*His encouragements.* The initial call given Ananias by God to go see Paul was accompanied by at least three encouragements. These encouragements included the praying of Paul, the revelation for Paul, and the blindness of Paul.

First, the *praying of Paul*. God said, “Behold, he prayeth” ([v. 11](#)). That should have really encouraged Ananias, for praying men are not nearly as threatening as persecuting men. There was no question that Paul was really praying, for it was God who said Paul was praying, and, as we noted earlier, when God says a man is praying, that man is praying.

Second, the *revelation for Paul*. God told Ananias that Paul had a vision about Ananias visiting him. Hence, Paul was expecting Ananias to visit him. The vision and circumstances would indicate that Paul was, therefore, not hostile about the coming of Ananias nor that he posed a danger to Ananias. That should also be a great encouragement for Ananias.

Third, the *blindness of Paul*. The fact that God said that Paul was blind meant that Paul was greatly hindered from attacking anyone. Ananias, therefore, should be encouraged to not be so fearful of Paul attacking him.

God will encourage us in our duties. The more difficult or more dangerous or more unusual our calling, the greater will be the encouragement. Pay attention

to these encouragements. They may not be big happenings or circumstances, but simply a number of little things. Those anxious to do the will of God will be careful to take note of these things. Those not interested in doing the will of God will, of course, see no encouragement to do their duty even though the encouragements are written in large blazing letters across the sky for all to see.

### 3. The Concerns of Ananias

“Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem; And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name” ([vv. 13, 14](#)). Ananias, though called by God and given encouragements to see Paul, was still apprehensive about the task. So he spoke to the Lord about his concerns. We note the particulars of his concerns and the piety of his concerns.

*The particulars of his concerns.* Ananias had two main concerns about this call from God. They were the meanness of Paul and the mission of Paul.

First, the *meanness of Paul*. “Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints in Jerusalem.” Paul’s meanness is emphasized in two ways in Ananias’ statement. One way it is emphasized is in the fact that many knew about it (“I have heard by many of this man”). Paul was a well known persecutor. He was very notorious. Another way his meanness is emphasized is in the fact that he did much evil (“how much evil he hath done to thy saints”). We covered the extent of Paul’s evil in our last chapter and noted how great and terrible it was.

Second, the *mission of Paul*. “He hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.” Paul’s purpose in coming to Damascus was extremely hostile. It was not just a few Christians Paul was going to bind in Damascus, but *all* of them. Hence, Ananias was included—and, thus, he was very understandably concerned.

*The piety of his concerns.* Was Ananias rebelling against God’s call when he voiced these concerns? We think not. There are, of course, times when bringing up the perilous circumstances of a call reflect nothing but rebellion. Such was the case of the ten spies regarding the Promised Land. But there are other times when bringing up the perilous circumstances does not condemn one. How do we know the difference in these voiced concerns? For one thing, it is to whom the concerns are voiced. Ananias took his concerns to God in prayer. The spies voiced their concerns only to man. For another thing, Ananias obeyed his call when God answered his concerns. The spies did nothing of the sort when they heard through Joshua and



Caleb God's message of assurance.

When given especially dangerous or unusual assignments from God, it is not wrong to seek God for extra assurance as long as there is a willingness to do the task when the extra assurance is given. Some, however, are like those in Christ's day who were always insisting they needed another sign if they were going to believe, but who were not sincere in their requests. Ananias was not of that kind, however, for he was sincere. Yes, some would say he should have believed when God gave him those earlier encouragements. But going to see Saul was a very unusual and very perilous task. In such times, it is not wrong to make very sure that what we are doing is indeed God's will. When we seek God with that purpose in mind instead of with rebellion in our heart, we will not be condemned. Rather, God will give us the added confirmation that we need just as He did with Ananias. We will note the added confirmation next.

#### **4. The Communication for Ananias**

The additional information God gave Ananias to confirm the call to see Paul spoke about Paul's future service for God. He told Ananias of the glory and groaning of Paul's coming service. All service for God will have these two experiences.

*The glory.* "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" ([v. 15](#)). The glory of Paul is seen in two ways in this verse. There is the glory in the choosing and the glory in the commission.

First, the *glory in the choosing*. To be chosen of God is glory unsurpassed by the world. We feel honored when some important person of the world chooses us for some task. How much more are we honored when God selects us. The more important the person is who does the choosing, the greater the glory for the chosen.

Second, the *glory in the commission*. Paul was given a select task. He was to "bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Paul had some prestigious assignments. Especially can the human eye see this in his going before "kings."

*The groaning.* Service does indeed include glory. But serving God also involves groaning. "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" ([v. 16](#)). The problem with many who fail in service is that all they see in serving the Lord is the glory of the task, never the groaning. They see the acclaim but never the

animosity. They see the prestige but never the pain and problems. They want to be a preacher, for it really looks exciting and glamorous to be in front of multitudes preaching. But they never see the problems that preachers have to live with because of cantankerous deacons and other church officers and members. They want to be a missionary, for when missionaries come to church, they have really exciting stories to tell, and they are the honored ones in the service. But the aspiring missionary prospect never sees the great struggles missionaries experience in health, language, living conditions, and hostilities from the people to whom they are ministering. This text about Paul will put true perspective on things, however.

Paul suffered a great deal after his conversion. We note two reasons for this suffering.

First, he suffered because of *the enemy of his work*. He was in God's army fighting against the enemy. Anyone who is in God's army and in the front lines of battle, as Paul was, is going to have painful wounds and plenty of scars. The idea you can go forth to battle for Jesus Christ and have an easy time of it is a myth of great proportions. There is more to military service than an impressive dress uniform and exciting parades. There is the battle uniform and the sweat, blood, and tears of war.

Second, Paul suffered because of *the evil of his past*. This reason for his suffering is one the average reader of Scripture seldom recognizes. Joseph Parker said, "'Be not deceived, God is not mocked,' Adonibezek said, 'As I have done, so God hath requited me.' Samuel said to Agag, 'As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women' . . . Saul [Paul] was in *this* succession . . . a student in that school of compensation . . . Saul was now made to feel how exactly true these terms were." Paul's sufferings were indeed very great as he reaped what he had sown. He who "beyond measure . . . persecuted the church of God" ([Galatians 1:13](#)) was whipped "in stripes above measure" ([2 Corinthians 11:23](#)). He who was "injurious" ([1 Timothy 1:13](#)) in his treatment of others was himself treated injuriously ([1 Thessalonians 2:2](#), the word "shamefully" in this text is the same word translated "injurious" in the 1 Timothy text; and, significantly, these are the only two places this word is found in the Greek New Testament). He who had put Christians in prison ([Acts 8:3](#)) was himself imprisoned ([Acts 16:23](#)). He who had dragged people off to the magistrates to be punished ([Acts 8:3](#), "haling" means to drag) was himself dragged to the magistrates to be punished ([Acts 16:19-23](#), "drew" in [v. 19](#) means dragged). He who went to foreign cities to chase down Christians ([Acts 26:11](#)) was himself chased from city to city ([Acts 14:19](#), [17:13](#)). He who bound believers ([Acts 9:2](#)) was himself bound ([Acts 22:25](#)). He who approved with gladness the stoning of Christians ([Acts 8:1](#)) was himself stoned ([Acts 14:19](#)). And he who had seen to it that

Christians were put to death ([Acts 9:1](#)) was himself martyred for his faith ([2 Timothy 4:6](#)). What a warning this is regarding sin. Yes, the Lord forgives us our sin in regards to eternity in heaven. But what few seem to realize or recognize is that though forgiven, you may still reap much for what you have sown in this life. Never take a light view of sin! Scripture will not permit it: “Thou wast a God who forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions [evil exploits]” ([Psalm 99:8](#)).

The promise that “I will show him how great things he must suffer” was not only fulfilled by Paul personally experiencing sufferings but also by his being shown by prophetic utterances what he was to suffer. As an example, Paul said, “The Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide [await] me” ([Acts 20:23](#)). Another example is found later in Acts: “A certain prophet, named Agabus . . . took Paul’s girdle [belt], and bound his own hands and feet and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle” ([Acts 21:11](#)). Suffering was very much a part of Paul’s ministry—both because one who serves the Master will be opposed by the enemy and one who caused much evil upon Christians will reap evil for his evil deeds.

## **5. The Compliance by Ananias**

After God’s enlightening communication to Ananias about Paul’s future, Ananias immediately complied to God’s call and went to see Paul. We especially note Ananias’ compliance to God’s call in the going to Paul, the greeting for Paul, the assuring of Paul, the healing of Paul, the filling for Paul, the instructing of Paul, and the baptizing of Paul.

*The going to Paul.* “And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house” ([v. 17](#)). Ananias went where God told him to go even though to human thinking it was not a very nice place to go. God does not always give us nice places to go. God does not send us to easy places but to difficult places. God sends us where there are problems to be solved. If He sends us to where problems need to be solved, then we should not expect it to be a place that does not have problems. A number of preachers want to go to a church that does not have problems. You are not likely to get a pastorate if you insist on that situation. God’s servants are in a battle. We are told to put on the whole armor of God ([Ephesians 6](#)). When we are told to put on armor, it means we are going to battle, not a banquet. God’s service is not a place for those who want luxury and easy duties.

*The greeting for Paul.* “Putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul” ([v. 17](#)). Some comply to their call but not with a good spirit. They go where God tells them to go but pretty soon they evidence it was not with a warm heart. They fulfill the letter of the call but not the spirit. Ananias, however, showed by his “Brother Saul” greeting that his compliance to God’s will was with a good attitude. “Brother Saul” is warm, accepting, and believing not only of Paul but of what God said about him. We need more obedience today that is accompanied by a good spirit.

*The assuring of Paul.* “The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest” ([v. 17](#)). We all need encouragement in the faith. The flesh is always attacking with doubts. Paul thought he had seen Jesus. But the three days of waiting provided plenty of time and circumstances for doubts to arise. Ananias, however, assured Paul in those few words that Paul had indeed seen Jesus Christ. Ananias had been encouraged by God when Ananias needed it, now Ananias gives Paul encouragement when Paul needs it. We receive blessings from God that we might bless others. Paul understood this truth and later wrote about it in his second epistle to the Corinthians: “Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted of God” ([2 Corinthians 1:4](#)).

*The healing of Paul.* “Hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight . . . And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight” ([vv. 17, 18](#)). God had promised Paul in a vision this would happen. Now Paul learns that God’s Word abides faithful. What a relief this had to be for Paul to get his eyesight back. And what a blessing it was that when his eyesight returned that the first person he saw was godly Ananias.

*The filling for Paul.* “That thou mightest . . . be filled with the Holy Ghost” ([v. 17](#)). Laying hands on a person in regards to the Holy Spirit, as Ananias obviously did, was a transitional practice when the church began. Thus, it is not needed today. Today the Holy Spirit indwells every believer upon receiving Christ. Sometimes, as we believe is the case here, the indwelling is called filling. There is a sense, however, in which filling differs from indwelling. In this sense, filling refers to the enabling of a person for a Divine task. [Exodus 31:1–5](#) is an Old Testament example of this filling. The builders of the Tabernacle were filled with the Holy Spirit to enable them to do all the skillful work required. [Acts 2:4](#) is a New Testament example of this filling. At

Pentecost, the disciples were filled by the Spirit to enable them to speak the Gospel in languages they previously were unable to speak.

What a great blessing to be “filled with the Holy Ghost,” to be given Divine enablement to serve Him. But few seem interested in being filled with anything spiritual today. Our churches and ministers certainly will not fill us spiritually. We have a dab here and a dab there of spiritual instruction or exercise—then we play ball or have a picnic or a fellowship or like activity. Folk today seem to have a phobia about getting too much in regards to spiritual things. So we hear complaints about such things as sermons being too long or that too much time is spent in teaching Bible in our Christian schools. May God help us to want to be “filled” in spiritual matters. We desperately need it!

*The instructing of Paul.* In another account of Paul’s conversion, we discover that Ananias had more to say than what is recorded in [Acts 9](#). In [Acts 22](#) we read that Ananias also said, “The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard” ([Acts 22:14,15](#)). In [Acts 26](#) we find that even more additional instructions were given Paul. The way it is reported in [Acts 26](#), the instructions could have come straight from the Lord during the revelation of Christ to Paul. But some of the instructions overlap what Ananias told Paul; this can easily mean that the entire instructions given in [Acts 26](#) were from Ananias as God’s spokesman. We will examine the instructions in [Acts 26](#) in a later study. Here we will look at the [Acts 22](#) text at what is specifically stated to come from Ananias. In that text, Ananias informs Paul that he was “chosen” by God for at least four reasons.

First, “That thou shouldest know his will” ([Acts 22:14](#)). What a privilege to know God’s will, and how essential it is to know the will of God. We cannot live our life pleasing to God if we do not know His will. Unfortunately, many professing Christians, as well as the myriad of unsaved people, are more interested in knowing the latest lottery drawing numbers or how their favorite sports team did in their last game or what the latest gossip is than in knowing what the will of God is for their life.

Second, “That thou shouldest . . . see that Just One” ([Acts 22:14](#)). That was a confirmation of his experience. What a blessing to see Jesus Christ. While we may not see Him visibly in this life, we can certainly see Him in many ways in the Scriptures. Yet, most people—and this includes most professing believers—are more interested in seeing some bit of trash on TV than in seeing Jesus Christ in the Scriptures. What we are anxious to see reflects the character of our heart.

Third, “That thou shouldest . . . hear the voice of his mouth” ([Acts 22:14](#)). This is another confirmation of what Paul had just experienced. Paul heard the Word of God in the revelation of Christ. To hear, to have, and to read the Word of God is another tremendous blessing. Would that professing Christians realized the blessedness of having the Word of God in their hands. But obviously few do, for the big sellers in our Christian book stores are often fiction books, not Bibles or Bible study books.

Fourth, “Thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard” ([Acts 22:15](#)). In short, Paul was to proclaim the Gospel. Many church members forget this is the primary mission of the church. They have so many other programs they want in the church. They want the church to be a social organization, a religious country club, or a recreational center. But the great purpose of the church is the proclamation of God’s Word.

*The baptizing of Paul.* “He . . . arose, and was baptized” ([v. 18](#)). In [Acts 22](#) we find more about the baptism of Paul than what we have here in [Acts 9](#). In [Acts 22](#) we are also told about Ananias exhorting Paul to be baptized. “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized” ([Acts 22:16](#)). You will note that Ananias did not tell Paul to think it over or pray about being baptized. He exhorted him to have the baptism taken care of right away. Years ago, when we were in a church service at Highland Park Baptist Church of Chattanooga while attending Tennessee Temple, a lady who came forward for salvation put on her decision card that she was praying about being baptized. When Dr. Lee Roberson was reading the decision cards, as he always did at the end of every service, and came to her card and read what she said about baptism, he stopped abruptly and looked at her and said in a very forceful way, “You don’t have to pray about being baptized!” Then he went on to tell her plainly that baptism was commanded by God for every convert. He was right. Converts need to be baptized. Paul needed to be baptized, and Ananias was quite frank in telling him so.

Paul’s baptism took a good deal more courage than the average baptism today. Baptism in those days really made you a marked person. Baptism showed everyone whose side you were on. It let everyone know where you stood regarding Jesus Christ. So many today who claim to be a Christian seem just the opposite. They don’t seem to want many others to know they are Christians. Paul was different. By being baptized, he cut the cords of approval by Jewish leaders, severed ties of friendship, and in general burned the bridges behind him. Few have paid such a great price for being baptized. But no price is too great to show that you stand with Jesus Christ.

# III. PREPARATIONS FOR SERVICE

[ACTS 9:19–31](#); [GALATIANS 1:15–21](#)

PAUL IS GOING to be a great missionary. But before he gets into his life's work, much preparation must take place. He will receive some intensive training to prepare him personally for his work. God always trains His servants; and the more critical their task, the more intensive the training. He does not send men into the thick of battle without their being duly prepared. He does not employ men in important service for Him without preparing them adequately for that particular task. Hence, Paul will experience some important training before he begins his great work of carrying the Gospel to many cities in the Mediterranean area.

But not only does this preparation for service include the preparing of Paul personally for his calling, it also includes preparing the way before him. We seldom think of that need in regards to preparation for service. But it is just as vital as the other preparation. Not only must the person be prepared to sow, but the soil must also be prepared to receive the seed. Both preparations for service will be seen clearly in this chapter regarding Paul.

To study this time of preparation for service in Paul's life, we will consider the seclusion in Arabia ([Galatians 1:15–17](#)), the sojourn in Damascus ([Acts 9:19–25](#)), the season in Jerusalem ([Acts 9:26–31](#); [Galatians 1:18,19](#)), and the stay in Tarsus ([Acts 9:30](#); [Galatians 1:21](#)).

## A. THE SECLUSION IN ARABIA

Part of Paul's preparation for his life's work included a period of seclusion in the wilderness of Arabia. We would not have known about this experience in Paul's life had he not mentioned it in the first chapter of Galatians. He did not write much about it, but he wrote enough about it for us to see the importance of the trip.

Concerning his seclusion in Arabia, we will note when he went to Arabia, where he went in Arabia, and why he went to Arabia.

### 1. When He Went to Arabia

This period of seclusion in Arabia occurred sometime during the first three years

after his conversion. Paul tells us this fact in Galatians when he says, “I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then, after three years I went up to Jerusalem” ([Galatians 1:17,18](#)). When the context of these verses is considered, it will be seen that “after three years” refers to the time from his conversion, not to the time from his return to Damascus from Arabia.

Scripture is not specific about when during those three years Paul went to Arabia. After his conversion, Scripture says, “straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues” ([Acts 9:20](#)). This would not encourage us to believe Paul left immediately for Arabia after his conversion, as some think he did. He could have, and the “straightway” would then refer to what he did right after he returned from Arabia. But that strains the context of the Scripture in that passage in Acts. A more satisfactory explanation is that after he had preached and testified for awhile in Damascus, he then went to Arabia. Scripture that would support this is found in [Acts 9:22](#) which says, “But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.” The “increased more in strength” refers not to physical strength, of course, but to spiritual strength. His trip to Arabia certainly increased his spiritual strength, as we will note shortly; and, therefore, the trip to Arabia would fit well between [verses 21](#) and [22](#) of [Acts 9](#). “He had confounded the Jews before he went into Arabia, and now with still greater power he was ready to continue his God-given message” (A. C. Gaebelein).

Bible critics like to gather at these passages where there is some indefiniteness and then make a lot of noise trying to discredit the Word of God. But we must not let the critics get us all upset when they do that. As in this case here, the indefiniteness does not contradict any Scripture, is not a problem in learning the important truths the texts would teach, is not necessary to solve, and is not quite so great as the critics would have us believe. God’s Word is no match for the critics.

## **2. Where He Went in Arabia**

Scripture says Paul went to “Arabia.” That is all it says. It does not say where in Arabia. Paul could have gone to a number of places, each far removed from the other; for Arabia is a big place. “The word Arabia was the term applied by Greek writers from Herodotus down, to the whole or various portions of the base peninsula between the Red Sea on the southwest, the Persian Gulf on the southeast, and the Euphrates River on the northeast” (Wuest). Arabia included Mount Horeb, but it also came close to the outskirts of Damascus which is three to four hundred miles from Mount Horeb. Some want to make the location Paul went to in Arabia to be Mount Horeb where both Moses and Elijah spent time alone. But there is more



sentimentalism than Scripture to justify that conclusion. It was unnecessary for Paul to have gone to Mount Horeb. Distance, as we noted, would be against the trip; and “The journey was at all times dangerous for travellers without armed escorts, and in A.D. 37, the most probable year of Paul’s conversion, a war between King Aretas and the Romans was in progress, which fact would have made such a journey doubtful” (Wuest). To get to the solitudes of Arabia, Paul would only have to walk a short ways east from Damascus, which is probably what he did. He would have no occasion to do otherwise. He just wanted to be alone for awhile and so went into the wilderness far enough to gain the needed solitude. After being awhile in seclusion, he could return easily and quickly back to Damascus where he was known by a number of Christians.

Paul was not the only choice vessel of God to spend time in the wilderness. As we noted above, Moses and Elijah also spent time in the wilderness. So did John the Baptist and Christ. The wilderness is certainly not a plush location compared to all the modern conveniences we have in life. But these great ones of God survived well and, in fact, gained many spiritual blessings in their desert solitude. You don’t need material ease and comfort to grow spiritually—a truth some haven’t learned yet, especially those who cannot be faithful in church attendance even when there are nice paved highways to church, air-conditioned cars to travel in when going to church, padded pews, air-conditioned auditoriums, and other modern conveniences at church.

### **3. Why He Went to Arabia**

Anyone who has ever had a traumatic experience, which shakes them to the depths about what they believe regarding some people or principles, knows the desire and the value of just getting alone for awhile and thinking things through. How well this would be true of Paul after his conversion. “He needed to be alone with God. He needed time and isolation in order to think. The revelation of the Son of God had blasted away the foundations of the Pharisaic thought structure which he had been building up with such consummate skill and zeal, and it had come tumbling down in ruins about his head. This revelation also furnished him with another foundation upon which to build a new theological structure. But the replacement of the ruined structure with a new one could not be the work of a day or a month” (Wuest).

There in the solitudes of the Arabian desert, Paul learned the great doctrines about the Gospel: “When it pleased God . . . To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen . . . I conferred not with flesh and blood . . . but I went

into Arabia” ([Galatians 1:15–17](#)) where with the advantage of extended solitude, he could confer at length with the Lord Himself. Lehman Strauss rightly says, “Paul did not conceive his gospel, he received it.”

Paul’s spending some time in Arabia involves a principle that applies to all. F. B. Meyer said, “We all need to go to Arabia to learn lessons like these. The Lord Himself was led up into the wilderness. And, in one form or another, every soul which has done a great work in the world has been passed through similar periods of . . . solitude.” Preachers need to practice a bit of Arabia every week if they are going to have something worthwhile to say on Sunday. They need to get away from people and other distractions and then get earnestly into the Word of God. Preachers cannot be pronouncing an invocation here and a benediction there at all the various meetings in the church and in those going on around town, spending hours on the telephone each day gabbing to people, frequenting eating places to hunch over a cup of coffee talking with more people, or spending every afternoon on the golf course and still come up with food in the pulpit on Sunday. Don’t cross Arabia off your schedule. Paul would have been very handicapped without it.

## **B. THE SOJOURN IN DAMASCUS**

After his conversion, Paul stayed in Damascus for some time. His only excursion away from Damascus during the first three years of his new life in Christ was his time in the Arabian wilderness. In examining his time in Damascus, we will note the people of Paul, the preaching by Paul, and the persecution against Paul.

### **1. The People of Paul**

“Then was Saul certain days with the disciples who were at Damascus” ([Acts 9:19](#)). Paul’s conversion changed his associations dramatically. He now associated with believers rather than assaulted believers. The people of Paul were now the believers in Jesus Christ, not the persecutors of Christians. He left his old crowd and cronies. Curiosity would like to know what happened to those who accompanied Paul on this trip to Damascus from Jerusalem, but Scripture says nothing specific about what happened to them. It’s silence does imply, however, that none of Paul’s companions took advantage of the spiritual opportunity afforded them through Paul’s conversion.

The crowd we are most comfortable with reveals our real heart. The adage “Birds

of a feather flock together” has a lot of substance to it regarding Christian fellowship. True Christians will want to be with true Christians. When we see someone profess salvation but then have little interest in being with God’s people, we are justified in doubting their salvation experience. Those who gravitate to the ungodly crowd give away their true heart. On the other hand, when we see an ungodly person profess Christ and then change his friends and associations from the ungodly to the godly, we have good proof of a genuine salvation experience. Does the type of people you have for friends and companions declare your faith?

## **2. The Preaching by Paul**

Paul got into the preaching act in Damascus after he was saved. At least eight things are said about Paul’s early preaching in Damascus. They are the zeal, subject, correctness, boldness, place, amazement, power, and skill of his preaching.

*The zeal of his preaching.* “Straightway he preached” ([v. 20](#)). Paul hit the ground running when he was saved. “Straightway” tells us that fact. He did not have to be begged and pleaded into giving his testimony or doing some other act of service. No, Paul immediately went to preaching. He who had with great zeal persecuted the church is now, after his salvation, preaching Christ with just as great a zeal. The word “preached” is in the imperfect tense which means it was continuous action. Paul did not just preach once. Rather, he preached again and again which emphasizes the greatness of his zeal.

Some who claim to be saved never give much evidence of their salvation in their zeal to serve. If one has to be begged, pleaded, and practically coerced into serving, that person either isn’t saved or has serious spiritual problems. What terrible ungratefulness it is for a soul who has been saved from the eternal horrors of hell to the eternal bliss of heaven not to want to serve the One Who saved him. All the redeemed may not be preachers like Paul, but there is a place for each one to serve, and a new convert does not need to wait long before he can perform some kind of service for God.

*The subject of his preaching.* “He preached Christ” ([v. 20](#)). Unlike many modern pulpits, the main subject of Paul’s preaching was Jesus Christ. And this never changed throughout the rest of his life. In preaching Christ, Paul had a message of hope and salvation for mankind. If we are not going to preach Christ, we need to shut up and sit down; for we have no message of worth for the souls of men. Many churches,

therefore, ought to close their doors and stop masquerading as churches; for they do not preach Christ. Rather, they discredit Him and deny Him.

The subject of Paul's preaching certainly emphasized how Paul's conversion resulted in a great reversal of his actions. Instead of persecuting Christ, he preached Christ. What a dramatic change conversion brought to him just in this fact.

*The correctness of his preaching.* "He preached Christ . . . that he is the Son of God" ([v. 20](#)). Not only did Paul preach Christ, but he preached Him correctly. The correctness of his preaching about Christ is manifested in the three words, "Son of God." This term means that Jesus is Divine. It declares plainly the Deity of Jesus Christ.

Many pulpits speak of Christ, but they do not speak of Him correctly. Instead of declaring His Deity, they deny it. Such pulpits love to emphasize the humanity of Christ to the extent that He is brought down to the level of man and made to be nothing more than a teacher, example, or martyr. Unless He is God, however, Christ cannot save. Furthermore, if Christ is not God, then Christ is a very bad man; for Christ claimed that He was God's Son. Those who would deny the Deity of Christ and yet call Him a good man certainly are a mixed-up bunch.

*The boldness of his preaching.* "He had preached boldly at Damascus" ([v. 27](#)). The word "boldly" means to speak freely, not hesitantly, not guardingly, not reservedly, but to speak out bravely in speaking the truth. This is not the speech of a politician who is careful to say nothing that would offend the voters. It would surely take great boldness for Paul to preach Christ as the "Son of God," for this view of Christ was very unpalatable to many Jews (cp. [Matthew 26:63–66](#)). Hence, Paul spoke of Christ not to an approving crowd but to an hostile crowd. But that did not deter his preaching; it just required greater boldness. Again we note, as we noted in our last chapter about Ananias' call, that Christianity is not for the weak of heart, as the devil would have us believe. The same men who will jump off cliffs, drive a race car at perilous speeds, and do other dangerous deeds, will often cower when it comes to standing up for Christ. Living for Christ takes more courage than most realize.

*The place of his preaching.* "He preached Christ in the synagogues" ([v. 20](#)). The place of his preaching not only underscores the boldness of Paul in preaching Christ but also the wisdom of Paul in reaching people. Paul used a most effective means of that day to reach people with the Gospel. The synagogue services gave time for folk

to speak. Guests were especially given opportunity to speak (cp. [Acts 13:15](#)). Paul capitalized on this practice and went to the synagogues and proclaimed Christ. As we will learn from his missionary journeys, many Gentiles were also in the services of the synagogues; and so the Gospel could be carried to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews through the synagogues.

The lesson here from the place of Paul's preaching is that Paul capitalized on his opportunities. Every location does not have the same opportunities. We do not go to synagogues today as Paul did. The opportunity is no longer there as it was in Paul's day. Therefore, do not get locked into some method or program that requires particular opportunities and situations; but look over your situation and use the opportunities that are present. In later chapters, we will note more on this synagogue habit of Paul and the lesson it teaches.

*The amazement at his preaching.* "But all that heard him were amazed, and said:-Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?" ([v. 21](#)). One can readily understand why the people were amazed and spoke as they did. We would have done the same. The man preaching Christ was formerly the great persecutor of Christ and His followers. Paul was no obscure figure. His persecuting of the followers of Christ had been so great that he was a household name. Now to hear him zealously preaching Christ will justifiably leave the listener utterly amazed.

This amazement at Paul's change of conduct underscores the fact that when a person is genuinely saved, it will definitely show in his or her conduct. While it is true that Paul's evil before his conversion was so great and notorious that his preaching the Gospel would reflect a more astonishing change than it would in others, yet anyone who is genuinely saved will give substantive evidence of some sort. Failure to show noticeable change—a failure seen in many folk who claim to be saved—is a good indication that conversion has not really taken place. We will note more about the evidence of our faith when we study Paul's experience in Jerusalem.

*The power of his preaching.* "Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus" ([v. 22](#)). As we noted earlier, "increased the more in strength" does not mean physical strength but spiritual strength. Paul's preaching became more and more powerful spiritually.

We need to hear more about spiritual power today. Instead, however, all we

seem to hear about are methods. We are told what sort of tricks and gimmicks we can use to put one over on the crowd. We are told what techniques work best to get people down the aisle (whether they are convicted or not) and how to get the unconvicted converted. If the church knew anything about power, they would not need all these assorted and worldly methods. Of course, power does not come where there is not purity. And churches are obviously not very interested in purity, for they are ever busy lowering the standards instead of raising the standards.

*The skill of his preaching.* “Proving that this is very Christ” ([v. 22](#)). Paul spoke with such skill that he was able to discredit the arguments of the Christ rejecters and prove that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Christ, the Messiah of Israel. This skill of Paul was not the sort of skill that substituted the slight of hand for the lack of substance. This skill was skill in handling the Word of God; a skill that is greatly needed in our day. Paul especially needed this skill, for he was dealing with Jews. We have always been impressed with how much skill a Jewish missionary must have in handling the Word of God in order to speak with Jews. You cannot be a dummy in the Word and get far in speaking with the Jews. For that matter, you will not get far with anyone if you are not skilled in handling the Word of God. No matter who you are—a preacher or simply a parishioner—you need to know the Word of God well if you are going to declare it skillfully. And we must ever strive to declare it as skillfully as possible if we would honor the Word in our declaring of it.

### **3. The Persecution Against Paul**

The preaching of Paul in Damascus eventually stirred up persecution against him. This should not surprise us, for hostility against holiness is as common as the sun coming up in the east. Scripture shows us this fact again and again in the lives of the saints of God, history abundantly evidences the same truth, and Paul, himself, warns us that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” ([2 Timothy 3:12](#)). So for Paul, the zealous Christian and skillful preacher of the Word, to become a hated man is not unexpected.

Great preaching and faithful living will not impress the world so much as it will irritate it. We have a tendency to think that if we do well for God that the world will treat this success the same way they treat success in matters of the world. But not so. Though Christians live better lives and, thus, are a better asset to society than the ungodly (Paul is no longer breaking up homes, beating people, imprisoning people, and sending people to their deaths), and though Christians have the most helpful

message of all for mankind and can proclaim it with great skill (Paul is preaching with great skill the glorious Gospel of Christ that can give man eternity in heaven), yet it is common for God's people to experience more brickbats than bouquets in this world. This does not discredit God's people and their performance, but it does disclose how wicked this world is.

To examine this persecution—the first of a myriad of persecutions Paul suffered and the first fulfillment of the “I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake” ([Acts 9:16](#))—we note the deadliness of the persecution, the design of the persecutors, the diligence of the persecutors, the discovery in the persecution, and the deliverance from the persecutors.

*The deadliness of the persecution.* “The Jews took counsel to kill him” ([v. 23](#)). This persecution of Paul was not a trivial matter. The persecutors wanted to kill Paul. Evil ever wants to destroy good. Cain killed Abel, and many have been the righteous men since that time that have been killed by the unrighteous. The devil means business when attacking Christianity. Unlike many church members, he is not playing games. Hence, if we are going to fight evil, we must fight it very forcefully and aggressively. We must preach against sin earnestly—which, of course, is more than many folk in church can stomach. We must punish criminals with due severity. We must fight to win in wars. We must deal firmly with church dissidents. And we must take disobedient children to the woodshed when they are bad. All counsel to the contrary is of no help in overcoming evil.

*The design of the persecutors.* “They watched the gates . . . to kill him” ([v. 24](#)). Cities in Bible times were, as Bible students know, enclosed by walls with openings (gates) periodically in the walls to allow people to go in and out. Therefore, the enemy understandably felt that by setting up watches at the gates of the city, they would catch Paul when he chose to leave the city. To make sure the guarding of the gates was done with discipline and firmness, those employed to guard the gates to catch Paul were military men. We learn this fact (about the guards being military men) from one of Paul's epistles, not from the book of Acts. “In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me” ([2 Corinthians 11:32](#)). The Jewish religious leaders in Damascus had evidently gotten in favor with Aretas, who was the king of Petra in Arabia; and he obliged them by furnishing the military guard. Aretas having control of Damascus at that time is doubtless related to the divorce of Herod Antipas from Aretas' daughter.

Herod divorced her in order to marry Herodias—the marriage which John the Baptist condemned and was killed for so doing. Herod dumping Aretas' daughter as his wife did not sit well with Aretas, and he made war with Herod and nearly destroyed all of Herod's army. As a result of his victory over Herod, Aretas gained influence even as far as Damascus even though Damascus was not under Herod's government.

How typical it is that the enemy of the Lord and His followers often have the government on their side. Aretas gave help to the enemy of God's people, not to God's people. Seldom does the government defend Christians against their attackers. We are seeing this fact more and more in our own country. It is those who oppose prayers and the Bible in schools who are defended by the courts. It is those who insist cities cannot put up Christmas decorations about Christ that are defended by the government. And, as the days go by, we will see the government defend homosexuals in their vicious attack on the church. But though governments are not on our side, we still have God on our side; and that is what really is important. Governments will not help us in eternity, but God will. When you are looking for real and lasting help, look for that which can help you eternally.

*The diligence of the persecutors.* The soldiers of Aretas watched the gates “day and night” ([v. 24](#)). What diligence the enemy evidences in pursuit of their goal. How this shames many Christians. The enemy will go twenty-four hours a day in its opposition against righteousness. But if a sermon goes much beyond twenty-four minutes, many in church will complain. The rebuke Jesus gave Peter, James, and John with the question, “Could ye not watch with me one hour?” ([Matthew 26:40](#)), shows the same problem. Try to get Christians to give a little extra time to attend a few extra services at church, and you would think you have asked for sacrifice above and beyond all call of duty. No wonder evil gallops around the globe while truth trudges slowly.

*The discovery in the persecution.* “But their laying await was known by Saul” ([v. 24](#)). Paul found out about the plot against him either by Divine revelation or by a human informer or both. Several lessons are evident in this discovery of evil.

First, we are instructed by this discovery that evil cannot be hid. Sin will be exposed sooner or later. Wickedness cannot cover all its tracks. “Be sure your sin will find you out” ([Numbers 32:23](#)). We will see this same lesson shortly in Paul's experience in Jerusalem.

Second, we are instructed by this discovery that God keeps His servants informed



for their protection. One way or another God will show His servants what they need to know about their circumstances so they can make needed adjustments. This was demonstrated in the case of Elijah when King Ahaziah wanted to kill him ([2 Kings 1](#)) and in the case of Elisha when King Jehoram sent executioners to kill him ([2 Kings 6:30–33](#)). Discouraged pastors and other servants of God who are being plotted against by the unscrupulous and unconscionable can console themselves in the fact that God will keep them informed of what they need to know.

*The deliverance from the persecutors.* “The disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket” ([v. 25](#)). Deliverance came by two means: the brethren and a basket.

First, it came *by the brethren*. Fellow Christians (“the disciples”) went to the aid of Paul and helped him escape. Notice that no names are mentioned. Some church members in our day would be upset if they didn’t get their names mentioned, for they do service to be noticed of men. But though these names were not mentioned, God knew everyone of them; and they will receive their due reward for this service.

Second, it came *by a basket*. “The disciples . . . let him down by the wall in a basket.” The method was simple and even humbling ([2 Corinthians 11:33](#)), but it did the job. God does not have to use spectacular things to outmaneuver the enemy. In fact, He often uses simple things in order to show the enemy how easy it is for God to defeat the enemy. Paul later wrote about this truth when he said, “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” ([1 Corinthians 1:27](#)). This should encourage God’s people. It is not necessary for us to have impressive means at hand to experience deliverance. We need not throw up our hands in despair because the great and mighty of this world are not available to help us. With God we have all we need for deliverance.

### C. THE SEASON IN JERUSALEM

After his escape from Damascus, Paul headed for Jerusalem where he spent a season of time. This is Paul’s first trip back to Jerusalem since he left it three years earlier on his journey to Damascus with authority to bind Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem. How different indeed was his return to Jerusalem than what he anticipated.

In examining the experiences Paul had in this short time in Jerusalem, we will consider the fear, friend, faithfulness, and foe of Paul.

## 1. The Fear of Paul

“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed [tried] to join himself to the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple” ([v. 26](#)). Paul, in his initial reception in Jerusalem, was like a man without a country. He was no longer in favor with the Christ rejecters, as evidenced by his persecution in Damascus; and the Christians did not take well to him either. But the believers’ lack of confidence in Paul’s conversion claim is certainly not surprising, for Paul had done “many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” ([Acts 26:9](#)). A good number of the believers in Jerusalem would have some very bad memories of Paul. Not only would they remember how he had evilly treated them; but surviving members of destroyed families would also remember all too keenly how he tortured their loved ones, broke up their homes, and took away family members to be imprisoned or killed. So the acceptance of Paul is not going to be instantaneous, and Paul would be unjustified in expecting it to be so.

New converts need to remember that while salvation is instant, change of reputation is not. God sees the heart and, therefore, knows when salvation is genuine. But man only sees the outward deeds and is not convinced by a few days change in behavior. Therefore, let new converts not complain if they are not accepted as quickly as they would like to be; but let them continue to live faithfully day by day. Eventually, their faithful living will confirm the genuineness of their conversion to the satisfaction of others.

This same principle needs to be applied to those who have fallen into some serious sin and who are quick to complain if after they have acknowledged their sin they are not restored immediately by the church. If they were really repentant, however, they would accept the lack of immediate restoration with patience; and they would endeavor through consistent living to give the needed evidence of their repentance.

## 2. The Friend of Paul

“But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” ([v. 27](#)). This is the first mention of Barnabas in the life of Paul, and it is a noble one; for Barnabas used great

wisdom in bringing about the acceptance of Paul by the disciples in Jerusalem. We can see this wisdom especially in his protocol and his proof.

*The protocol of Barnabas.* Barnabas did not take Paul to some group of believers or to the assembly at large. He took Paul to the leaders of the church, “to the apostles,” which we learn in Galatians were two in number—James, the Lord’s brother, and Peter ([Galatians 1:18,19](#)). Practicing the protocol of taking Paul to the leaders first was wise for a number of reasons. First, it was wise in that it showed respect for the leaders. Showing respect for the leaders is always essential if a church is to solve its problems successfully. Second, it was wise in that his approach was not divisive. Had Barnabas gone to a small group or even to the assembly at large, he would have provided much opportunity for dissension to occur among the church people. A small group would provide opportunity for people to get upset about playing favorites. Going to the assembly at large would provide opportunity for emotions to become turbulent and for the immature to erupt in uncontrolled shouting, etc. Under those circumstances, Barnabas would not have been able to finish speaking about Paul’s conduct, and so matters would have gotten worse rather than better. But with respected leaders of the church convinced, they could inform the entire church under much better situations. Third, it was wise in that it recognized that the leaders were more gifted in discernment than the church at large and, therefore, could discern Paul’s situation better. Fourth, it was wise in that it provided opportunity for the leaders to make judicious inquiry in a calm private situation. That would not have been possible taking it to the assembly at large.

*The proof from Barnabas.* Barnabas gave good substance as to why Paul should be received. Barnabas “declared unto them how he [Paul] had seen the Lord in the way, that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” ([v. 27](#)). Barnabas did not beg the apostles to be charitable and give Paul a chance. That sounds nice, but proof was what was needed, and Barnabas gave them good proof. It was threefold: Paul had seen the Lord, Paul had spoken to the Lord, and Paul had spoken for the Lord. Especially would the last proof be convincing, for many in Damascus could personally attest to Paul’s preaching of Christ

Any claim of Christianity ought to be supported by good proof. “He showed himself alive after his passion by *many infallible proofs*” ([Acts 1:3](#)) is the example. Those who claim to be converted ought to show it in such things as their conduct,

their conversation, their clothes, their companions, their creed, and their comfort in time of trial. True Christianity is not skimpy in giving proofs. If a claim of Christianity comes with few proofs, its genuineness is indeed suspect.

### **3. The Faithfulness of Paul**

Paul conducted himself faithfully in Jerusalem which would greatly support his claim of being a follower of Christ. His faithfulness is seen in his association and in his activity.

*Association.* When Paul came to Jerusalem, his first act was to look up the believers and endeavor to associate with them. Then when he was accepted by them, “he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem” ([v. 28](#)). Unlike those who make a big fuss over joining the church but then are seldom seen again at church, Paul kept regular company with the saints. This was his crowd now that he was a convert.

When Christians move to a new community, one of their first actions ought to be to seek out other believers; that is, they need to find a good church to attend. However, many are so busy with their business and recreation that finding a good group of believers is not very high on their agenda. Such does not reflect well on their spiritual condition. It indicates they need revival.

*Activity.* “He spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians [Greek speaking Jews from foreign countries—Paul himself being a Grecian]” ([v. 29](#)). Barnabas had told the apostles that Paul boldly spoke of Christ in Damascus. Paul backed up the claim by doing the same in Jerusalem. He was what Barnabas said he was—oh, that all Christians were what they said they were.

Paul was an active church member. He did not come to town to sit in the back pew and be a do-nothing as is the case of many saints. Once accepted by the church, he got to work in proclaiming Christ—which is the work of the church in case some have forgotten; and it is obvious that many have forgotten.

### **4. The Foe of Paul**

“But they went about to slay him” ([v. 29](#)). It didn’t take long before Paul was again attacked by the enemy. We note the desire of the foe, the discerning about the foe, and the deliverance from the foe.

*The desire of the foe.* “They went about to slay him” ([v. 29](#)). Like the enemy in Damascus, they were a vicious bunch. They wanted Paul killed! But Paul, of course, could not complain. He was only getting some of his own medicine, for he used to be after the blood of Christians himself.

Paul’s faithfulness was followed by the foe. This is always so, for your faithfulness opposes the work of the foe. You will not have much trouble with the foe if you are not faithful. But Paul was faithful in his Christian life in Jerusalem, and that will always bring the foe. The devil does not waste his time attacking the unfaithful believer because he is no threat to the devil’s program. In fact, the believer’s unfaithfulness is a help to the devil.

As we noted earlier, Christians may think their faithfulness will be followed by acclaim, not animosity. But in this world, that is not always the case. In eternity, faithfulness will always be followed by praise; but in this wicked world, it will oftentimes be followed by persecution. The world has a difficult time recognizing true greatness. So Paul will be targeted for death; but some corrupt, immoral entertainer will be given great honor. How often we see this even in our day. The godly are scorned, but the ungodly are given all sorts of honors.

*The discerning about the foe.* As it was in Damascus, so it is here in Jerusalem—the desire of the foe was exposed. The enemy plotted, but they were not able to keep their plans from Paul and the disciples. The learning of the plans about the plotting against Paul came chiefly by Divine revelation. We do not learn this in our text in [Acts 9](#), but in [Acts 22](#) where Paul is relating his conversion experience before the mob in Jerusalem. There he gives us some details about how he learned of the desire of the foe. “And it came to pass that . . . while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance, And saw him [Christ] saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem; for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me” ([Acts 22:17,18](#)). It was while Paul was praying that he found out about the murderous plans of the foe. Prayer gives discernment. Praying men will be more discerning of the world than non-praying men. Prayer may not put you in a trance like it did Paul, but it will still help your discernment.

The enemies of Paul may have been able to keep their plans from Paul and the other believers, but they could not keep them from God, and God told Paul. As we noted earlier, sin can never conceal itself from discovery. When God knows—and He always knows all the intentions and plans and plots of man be they good or evil—the whole world can be informed. Never play the fool and think you can sin

and keep it a secret.

Also, as we noted before, God will see to it that His servants are kept informed as necessary about their enemies' plottings. It may not be by special Divine revelation, as it was here; for it may be by various other means instead. But whatever the means, God is behind it all.

*The deliverance from the foe.* "When the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus" ([v. 30](#)). God had ordered Paul to leave the area; and when the brethren found out, they assisted him by escorting him to Caesarea so he could head for his home town of Tarsus. Divine revelation will not do us much good if we do not act upon it. Paul had been informed by a special revelation from God of the plot to take his life. But the warning came with a command; and had that command not been followed, the revelation would have been of no profit to Paul.

Scripture is the same way. It is God's revelation given us. We may buy the nicest Bibles and read them regularly. But if we do not heed the Bible, we will still go straight to hell. Divine revelation is given for human application.

We need to make a note here regarding what is said in the verse which follows the report of Paul leaving Palestine and going to Tarsus lest the leaving be interpreted in a negative way concerning Paul. Right after Scripture reports that Paul left the area, it says, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" ([v. 31](#)). On the surface that sounds as if getting Paul out of Palestine (like getting dissidents out of a church congregation) really was a help to the churches. But be careful how you read this. The problem was not Paul, but the persecutors. When Paul left, the chief object of the persecutors was gone; and so they backed off for awhile. Also, there were political events taking place at that time which distracted the persecutors from attacking the church. Hence, the church had a period of time right after Paul went to Tarsus in which it enjoyed some respite from the persecutors.

#### **D. THE STAY IN TARSUS**

From Caesarea on the coast, Paul would take a ship and go to his home in Tarsus. He evidently did not take a direct cruise to Tarsus but went up the coast to Tyre

or Seleucia or another nearby seaport; then he went the rest of the way by foot. This explanation best fits Paul's statement in Galatians about where he went after leaving Jerusalem: "I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia" ([Galatians 1:21](#)). Cilicia, of course, being the province where Tarsus was located. Syria would be right on the way to Cilicia for Paul in his going north from Caesarea. Going via Syria to Cilicia would mean he went part way to Tarsus from Caesarea by foot.

The time Paul stayed in Tarsus is not stated specifically in Scripture. It is normally estimated to be several years at least. Some, such as Stalker, believe Paul stayed as long as eight years before he came back into the spotlight and his life's ministry began when Barnabas came and sought Paul to help in the ministry at Antioch ([Acts 11:22–26](#)). The long wait in Tarsus was certainly not delinquency on Paul's part but was necessary to set the stage for his life's ministry. This was just as much a time of preparation for Paul's ministry as was his time in Arabia, Damascus, and Jerusalem. But the Tarsus' experience is a preparation not easily accepted by the flesh, for it involves an indefinite waiting period. "Paul was now in possession of his gospel and was aware that it was to be the mission of his life to preach it to the Gentiles; but he had still to wait a long time before his peculiar career commenced" (Stalker). But let not the saint be discouraged in these waiting times "because waiting is a common instrument of providential discipline for those to whom exceptional work had been appointed" (Stalker).

Paul had learned his theology in Arabia and had some valuable experience in Damascus and Jerusalem, but more preparation was still needed before he could begin his life's work. This preparation covered two very important areas: his acceptance and the Gentiles' acceptance.

## **1. The Acceptance of Paul**

Paul had quite a reputation as a brutal persecutor. Such a reputation does not fade quickly. After his conversion he had trouble being accepted by both believers and unbelievers. He was just too "hot" the first few years after his conversion to be anything but a source of disturbance wherever he went even though he was truly a new man. Memories of Paul's brutal persecution deeds were still too fresh in the minds of many believers for Paul to be well accepted by them, and his conversion was still too repugnant to his former allies for him to be anything but continually hounded by them. He could not have much of a ministry under these circumstances.

Preparation not only includes instructing and training the person who is called, but it also includes preparing the place to where one is called. It is often necessary that considerable time pass by before a person can move onto the scene of his

ministry with the acceptance needed. One may be truly saved, called, and full of great zeal; but the place to where he is going may not be ready to receive him.

Moses had the same problem as Paul. In fact, his situation required a good deal more time to correct than it did Paul's situation. Paul only had to wait in Tarsus upwards to eight years before he could come back into the limelight. But Moses had to wait forty years before God could say, "Go, return into Egypt; for all the men are dead who sought thy life" ([Exodus 4:19](#)). Other preparations in the attitude of the people were made during that time, too. But Moses did have to wait until he would be accepted; for when he fled Egypt, he was rejected by both his people and the Egyptians ([Exodus 2:14,15](#)).

We need to realize that though we know our heart is right with God and ready to serve God, others to whom we are to minister may not be ready to accept us yet. They will not give the needed respect and position to us until some time has passed and we have in their eyes proven ourselves, matured, and in general become ready for the job. Failure to understand this truth will cause us to push in doors that God has closed for the time being; and instead of serving the Lord, we will only cause trouble for the Lord. Let not fleshly pride cause us to become impatient about our acceptance by others.

## **2. The Acceptance of the Gentiles**

It is very significant that during the time Paul was in Tarsus, a tremendous change took place regarding the Gentiles and the dealings of God. "In this interval took place that revolution—one of the most momentous in the history of mankind—by which the Gentiles were admitted to equal privileges with the Jews in the Church of Christ . . . It was a necessary preliminary to Paul's mission work" (Stalker). Heretofore, the spiritual blessings of God had been almost exclusively Jewish. The Jews were God's chosen people. They had many spiritual advantages which the Gentiles did not have. The advantage of this exclusiveness of the Jews was spoken of by Paul when he said, "What advantage then hath the Jew? . . . Much every way, chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God" ([Romans 3:1,2](#)). Unfortunately, the Jews prided this spiritual exclusiveness to a sin. Gentiles were considered dogs, outcasts, and outside the fold of God. This attitude was found in the early church also—though not as uncharitable as the unconverted Jews held the attitude. But the attitude was still there. Paul was called to be a minister to the Gentiles ([Acts 22:21](#)). But his ministry would never have been accepted by the church had he begun it at the time he left Jerusalem. Hence, while Paul was in Tarsus, it was through Peter that this change was revealed ([Acts 10–11:18](#)). The church did not quickly accept



Peter's message about the change, but they did accept it. Had Paul tried to convince the church of the change, the church would not have accepted it. Paul would have been viewed as a radical in need of much instruction. But Peter was universally accepted by the church. He could do what Paul could not do regarding the change towards the Gentiles. After this change had occurred, then Paul could come on the scene and his ministry to the Gentiles would not be challenged by the church. The way had been prepared for him to fulfill his ministry.

Before seed can be planted into the soil, the soil must be prepared. So it is in God's work. So it was in Paul's ministry. The Gentiles must be accepted in the church before Paul could begin his life's work. And when they were, we soon read in Scripture of Barnabas going after Paul to bring him back into the work. The time was then acceptable for Paul to commence his great career. Preparation had been thorough and successful.

## IV. PLACEMENT IN SERVICE

[Acts 11:19–30](#); [12:25](#)

THE PEOPLE TO which Paul was particularly called to minister the Gospel were the Gentiles. Paul learned of this calling soon after his conversion; for God told Paul through Ananias, several days after Paul's conversion, that one of the things Paul would do was "bear my name before the Gentiles" ([Acts 9:15](#)). The call to minister to the Gentiles was repeated to Paul some three years later when he was praying in the Temple. During his praying, God warned Paul to flee Jerusalem and then added, "I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles" ([Acts 22:21](#)).

But though Paul had received his calling to minister to the Gentiles, Paul was not immediately placed in this service. As we noted in the last chapter, before he could be placed in this calling some things had to take place—Paul had to be duly prepared for serving God, the acceptance of the Gentiles in the church had to take place, and the memory of Paul as a persecutor had to diminish. When these things had taken place, Paul was then placed into his life's calling of ministering to the Gentiles.

In this study which focuses on the placement of Paul in his God-called service of ministering the Gospel to the Gentiles, we will note the seeking for Paul in Tarsus ([Acts 11:19–26](#)), the serving of Paul in Antioch ([Acts 11:26](#)), and the sending of Paul to Jerusalem ([Acts 11:27–30](#); [12:25](#)).

## A. THE SEEKING FOR PAUL IN TARSUS

Our last chapter ended with Paul going to Tarsus to wait there until the stage was fully readied for him to commence his life's calling. Here we will see the end of Paul's wait in Tarsus. Paul is sought out in Tarsus by Barnabas and brought to Antioch of Syria to help in the great work of the Gospel going on among the Gentiles in that wicked city. We will note the circumstances resulting in the seeking of Paul and the consecration revealed in the seeking of Paul.

### 1. The Circumstances Resulting in the Seeking of Paul

Two main circumstances resulted in the seeking of Paul: the spreading of the Gospel in Antioch, and the sending of Barnabas to Antioch.

*The spreading of the Gospel in Antioch.* "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, traveled as far as Phenice [Phoenicia], and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord" ([Acts 11:19–21](#)). Persecution sent the saints fleeing from Jerusalem. But it did not cause the saints to recant their faith; for wherever they went, they proclaimed the glorious news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Persecution, as here, often results in promoting the work of God. Prosperity, which we would think would really help the work of God, is too often a bigger hindrance to the work of God than persecution.

At first, the persecuted believers took the Gospel only to the Jews. But then some went to Antioch of Syria and "spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus" ([Acts 11:20](#)). The response by the Gentiles was great. "A great number believed, and turned unto the Lord" ([Acts 11:21](#)). This provided the circumstances for Paul to begin his calling of ministering to the Gentiles, for when he came to Antioch to minister, he would be ministering to a great group of Gentiles.

Antioch's wonderful response to the Gospel should encourage us regarding the salvation of even the wickedest of folk, for Antioch was a vile city. Though it, along with Rome and Alexandria, was one of the three main cities of the Roman Empire at that time, it was a city woefully short of character. "The population of Antioch was a rabble of all races; but the Greek element predominated, with its licentious rites, its vivacious, sparkling intellect, its marvelously elegant and subtle tongue, its passion

for the theater, the arena, and the racecourse” (F. B. Meyer). It was so wicked that J. S. Howson said, “If any city, in the first century, was worthy to be called the Heathen Queen and Metropolis of the East, that city was Antioch.” Yet, like Nineveh of Jonah’s day, it gave great response to God’s message. Truly the Gospel has the power to save anyone. Antioch and Paul demonstrate that fact well.

This great response to the Gospel by those in Antioch brought Antioch into much prominence in early church history. “Antioch, a city of half a million inhabitants, became the headquarters of Christianity instead of Jerusalem” (Stalker). It was Antioch—not Jerusalem—that was the city from which Paul was later sent on each of his three missionary journeys. The lesson here from Antioch’s response to the Gospel and its resulting prominence in God’s work is that our response to God has much to do with our involvement in God’s work. This explains why many are not used much by the Lord. They simply do not respond well to God.

*The sending of Barnabas to Antioch.* “Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem; and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch” ([Acts 11:22](#)). News of the great reception of the Gospel in Antioch was soon heard by the church leaders in Jerusalem. The apostles in the church in Jerusalem wanted to validate what they had heard; so if the reports were true, they could give due recognition to the church in Antioch and encourage and instruct them in the Lord. So Barnabas was sent by the Apostles to check out the reports about Antioch. His trip to Antioch was like the trip Peter and John made some years earlier to Samaria ([Acts 8:14](#)) when many there responded to the Gospel under the preaching of Philip.

We will note five important features of Barnabas’ trip to Antioch: the choice, rejoicing, exhorting, effect, and perception of Barnabas.

First, the choice of Barnabas. Barnabas was an excellent choice to send to Antioch. Scripture says he “was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith” ([Acts 11:24](#)). Churches need to look for these credentials when looking for a pastor or when examining a missionary candidate. We too often look for talent, looks, and personality but ignore the fact that righteousness, spirituality, and soundness in the faith are the great essentials for serving. Talent and looks and personality are not to be necessarily despised, but you can have those things and still be an ungodly wretch. Hollywood proves that fact abundantly!

Second, the rejoicing of Barnabas. “When he came [to Antioch], and had seen the grace of God, was glad” ([Acts 11:23](#)). You do not rejoice in revival and spiritual awakenings unless you are a person in good spiritual condition. We would think

all people would rejoice when men are saved and begin to live better. But such is not the case. Evil men do not rejoice in the salvation of souls. Furthermore, carnal Christians do not get thrilled either when a church besides their own is prospering or doing better than they are. Barnabas, however, was a godly man; and, therefore, what he saw in Antioch brought rejoicing to him.

Third, the exhorting of Barnabas. “He . . . exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” ([Acts 11:23](#)). The word “exhorted” is “the same word with that by which the name of Barnabas is interpreted ([Acts 4:36](#))” (Matthew Henry). It means to call to one’s side to help, to encourage, to give wise instructions. Barnabas certainly did this to the saints in Antioch. We noticed this particularly in the instructions he gave them. He instructed his listeners to have purpose and persistency in this matter of following Jesus Christ. The purpose, like Daniel’s purpose ([Daniel 1:8](#)), was to be in their heart. This would insure persistency in following the Lord (“cling to the Lord” means to “abide with the Lord” which is the language of being steadfast and persistent in following Jesus Christ). If the purpose is not in the heart, it will not last. Many purpose to follow the Lord, but they do not purpose in the heart, and, hence, they do not follow Him faithfully.

Fourth, the effect of Barnabas. “And much people were added unto the Lord” ([Acts 11:24](#)). Unlike many church raiders today who move into a town and raid a fundamental church to start their own church, Barnabas worked with the present church in Antioch; and it resulted in many souls being saved. His message and manners were both excellent. Some church raiders preach the Gospel, but their manners regarding other Bible-believing churches reek to high heaven. A lot more good would be done if these zealots would roll up their sleeves and work with the church in the area that is already preaching the Gospel.

Fifth, the perception of Barnabas. With many Gentiles coming to Christ, help was needed in Antioch. “Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul” ([Acts 11:25](#)). Barnabas perceived who would especially be the right person to help out in Antioch. Called of God to the Gentiles, Paul was just the right man to come to Antioch and help in this great turning of many Gentiles to the Lord. So Paul now re-enters the scene in Scripture and is placed in the service to which he was called by God.

Barnabas was the logical one to seek Paul to help out in the work in Antioch, for he was the one who had befriended Paul in Jerusalem ([Acts 9:27](#)) and caused the church to understand that Paul was a genuine believer. Barnabas had a special affection for and understanding of Paul. Obviously directed by the Spirit (he was “full of the Holy Spirit” as we have just noted—and such people are directed and controlled by the Spirit), Barnabas deems it time to get Paul back into circulation.

## 2. The Consecration Revealed in the Seeking of Paul

“Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch” ([Acts 11:25,26](#)). Both the diligence of Barnabas and the dedication of Paul are revealed in this seeking of Paul in Tarsus to come to Antioch to help in the work of God.

*The diligence of Barnabas.* Barnabas’ diligence is found in the word “seek” in [verse 25](#). “The verb translated *seek*, in the only other place where it occurs ([Luke 2:44](#)), denotes a diligent and anxious search” (J. A. Alexander). It had been some time, upwards to as much as eight years, since Barnabas had seen Paul. Barnabas would have some concern about Paul’s whereabouts but was determined to find him though it would involve some searching. Barnabas was wise in this attitude. It pays to diligently search for the right one. Paul was worth all the time and effort required to find him. The same is true with churches looking for a pastor, with young people looking for a mate, and with employers looking for employees. Do not take just anything that comes along. Search until you find the right one.

*The dedication of Paul.* After Barnabas found Paul, he was able to bring Paul to Antioch; and Paul served well in Antioch. All of this speaks well of Paul. Through all his time in Tarsus, he had not forsaken his devotion to the Lord. His dedication to the Lord and His service was still strong. Therefore, when Barnabas found Paul, Paul was ready and willing to serve the Lord.

The genuineness of our dedication to the Lord really evidences itself when we remain faithful even though we are for a time taken away from the action and put in a place of humble obscurity. That Paul was in humble obscurity in Tarsus is emphasized by the fact that Barnabas had to search for Paul. Had Paul been in prominence, it would not have required much searching.

Humble obscurity often discourages many saints into thinking they cannot be of much use to God. But humble obscurity will never hurt your usefulness for God. God knows where you are. You stay ready to serve Him; and when your time has arrived, He will take you out of obscurity, as He did Paul in Tarsus and Joseph in the prison in Egypt, and put you in the place where He wants you to serve Him.

## B. THE SERVING OF PAUL IN ANTIOCH

“And it came to pass, that a whole year they [Paul and Barnabas] assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” ([Acts 11:26](#)). Before Paul enters into his missionary labors, he has his first opportunity to minister to Gentiles. We note the time, teaching, and titling in Antioch which were involved in Paul’s serving the Lord there.

### 1. The Time In Antioch

For “a whole year they assembled themselves with the church.” Paul did not come to Antioch just to spend a weekend or just a month or so like some church people do in helping out mission endeavors. He came committed to staying as long as necessary. When he did leave, it was only at the leading of the Holy Spirit when he and Barnabas were sent out on missionary work to other cities in the Mediterranean area.

It is not wrong to spend just a weekend or other small time in helping out a work (Paul also had those times in his missionary work), but too often this short time span reflects our lack of interest in the Lord’s work. Today our attention span to spiritual matters is getting shorter and shorter. This is seen not only in our complaint about the length of sermons but also in our lack of interest in serving for a lengthy period of time. Few want to be committed to a spiritual responsibility for an indefinite time. But if one is going to do a good work for God, there must be a willingness to give unending commitment to the work.

### 2. The Teaching in Antioch

“And taught much people.” This teaching would include both the instructing of sinners regarding salvation and the instructing of saints regarding Christian growth and knowledge. Or as Matthew Henry says it, “Preaching not only for the conviction and conversion of those that are without, but for the instruction and edification of those that are within.” This teaching can be done in various situations. It can be done on an individual basis, it can be done in a classroom situation, or it can be done in a preaching situation. But whatever the situation, the important point is that spiritual teaching occurred. Paul, along with Barnabas, gave himself to instructing the people in Antioch concerning the things of God.

We are in great need of increased emphasis on this teaching work today. So often in church we are not taught. The Sunday School teacher comes with a poorly

prepared lesson and gives precious little substance. The preacher likewise comes with a poorly prepared sermon and attempts to cover up his lack of substance by filling in his sermon time with entertaining stories and antidotes. If you read a number of sermons in Christian magazines today, you will discover they are mostly chaff. Yes, the stories are entertaining; but they do very little in the important work of opening up the Scriptures. Furthermore, the entertaining stories seem more to exalt the one telling the stories rather than God and His Word. As a result of all this lack of teaching in the church, Christians are easily taken in by false doctrines of strange religions and by the evil philosophies of the world. Do not despise “teaching.” If our preaching services, Sunday School classes, and personal work are to be valid, we must instruct well in Divine truth.

### **3. The Titling in Antioch**

“The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” Paul was on the scene when the name “Christian” was coined. This name, which has had universal use for nearly two millennia, did not exist until that year Paul spent in Antioch helping the new work of God in that city.

To examine the coining of this new name for believers, we will note who were called Christians and who coined the name Christian.

*Who were called Christians.* Scripture makes it plain who were called “Christians.” It was “the disciples” of Jesus Christ who were given that name. Today we give that name to a host of things—many which have nothing to do with Christian. A good many folk believe that if they are an American, it means they are a Christian. Others believe if they are not Moslems, Hindus, or Shintoists, they are Christians. But all such thinking is definitely not a correct understanding of the word at all.

The correct application of the name belongs only to those who are followers of Jesus Christ. They are followers to the extent that they believe He is the Savior from sin and have called upon Him to save their souls. This is what the name meaning is all about. The Word is composed of two parts—“Christ” and “ians.” We understand the first part—it refers to Christ. The “ians” part means a follower. Hence, a Christian is one who is a follower of Christ. A similar two part name is Herodian. They were followers of Herod.

*Who coined the name Christian.* The name was not given by the believers themselves. They called themselves “believers,” “brethren,” “saints,” “the elect,” or

“the disciples” but never “Christian.” In fact, only three times in the Bible do we find the word “Christian” ([Acts 11:26](#), [26:28](#); [1 Peter 4:16](#)).

The name was also not given by the unbelieving Jews. They did not recognize the Lord Jesus as the Christ. Christ, of course, refers to Jesus as being the Messiah. Hence, no unbelieving Jew would sanction the name Christian. It would be repulsive to them to call believers in Jesus that name, for it would give recognition to the claim of Christ as being the Messiah. They utterly abhorred that claim.

So who did coin the name? Obviously, the unbelieving Gentiles in Antioch coined the name. “The people of Antioch were notorious for inventing names of derision and for turning their wit into channels of ridicule” (J. S. Howson). This instructs us that the name was not given in commendation but in contempt. It was a name of derision. Tacitus, a Roman historian, writing in the first century, said, “The vulgar call them Christian.”

Though the name “Christian” was given in contempt, it was still a commendation to those who were called the name. It said they lived their faith well. Folk knew where these followers of Christ stood. They knew what the “Christians” believed. This is a contrast to so many professing believers today who live such a compromising life that no one would ever think of calling them a name which would indicate they are a follower of Christ. Oh, let all of us who profess Jesus Christ as our Savior live in such a way that the name “Christian” will describe us well.

## C. THE SENDING OF PAUL TO JERUSALEM

While Paul was in Antioch, a famine was prophesied. Its coming would especially work hardship upon the believers in Judea. The church at Antioch, which was made up of many Gentiles, sought to help the believers in Judea who for the most part were Jews. All of this would involve Paul in a significant way. We will consider the prophecy about the famine and the providing for the famished.

### 1. The Prophecy About the Famine

“And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them, named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world, which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar” ([Acts 11:27,28](#)). We note where the famine occurred, when it occurred, why it occurred, and who predicted it would occur.



*Where the famine occurred.* Agabus predicted the famine would come to “all the world.” The famine may have indeed encompassed the entire globe, but sometimes “This phrase [“all the world”], though strictly universal in its import, is often used in a restricted sense. The Greeks, in their peculiar pride of race, applied it to their own country; the Romans, in like manner, to the empire [compare [Luke 2:1](#)]" (J. A. Alexander). But whether the famine encompassed the entire globe or just a region of the globe, Agabus said the famine would be a “great” famine. Any definition or usage of “world” in this text represents enough region to indeed make it great. Agabus was not crying “wolf.” He had a serious message that required serious attention. Whenever God gives us warnings, we need to get serious about them.

*When the famine occurred.* Our text tells us when the famine occurred. It “came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.” A. C. Hervey states that from historical accounts, we learn that Judea experienced a famine “which began in the fourth year of Claudius Caesar (A.D. 44) and lasted till A.D. 48.” History reports others famines at other times in the various countries of the Roman Empire during the reign of Claudius which means all countries were evidently not affected at the same time. Agabus focused on Judea, and that is when Judea was hit hard with a famine during the reign of Claudius. The dates given above for the famine in Judea would mean that it occurred quite soon after Agabus made the prediction. If the disciples were going to help the saints in Judea, as we will learn shortly that they did, they would need to act with haste. When God gives special warning, it is time to be on the move. Delay can be disastrous.

*Why the famine occurred.* Famines, droughts, destructive storms, earthquakes, and the like are all controlled by God and do not come without reason. Of course, much of the world does not subscribe to that understanding of these disasters. But whether they subscribe or not, it is still true. And if we are going to understand these disasters and profit by them, we must subscribe to this basic understanding regarding their occurrences.

So why did God send this famine? The answer is rather obvious. “God sent them the bread of life [Jesus Christ], and they rejected it, loathed the plenty of that manna; and therefore God justly broke the staff of bread, and punished them with famine” (Matthew Henry). A number of disasters happened in the world and in Palestine in the years following the crucifixion of Christ. No wonder! The surprising

thing is that more disasters did not happen. You cannot reject Jesus Christ and come up a winner.

The fact that the famine did not come until some ten to fifteen years after the crucifixion emphasizes the grace of God. God could have wiped out every enemy of Christ at the moment Christ died on Calvary. But God is gracious and gives man an opportunity—yea, many opportunities—to repent before He brings judgment upon them. This explains why wicked people are not stricken down the moment they sin but are allowed to live on for years. God is simply exercising grace. And we must not complain, though we fret at the prosperity of the wicked, for we are all recipients of grace. But for the grace of God, none of us would be saved.

*Who predicted it would occur.* Agabus, one of the “prophets from Jerusalem [who came] unto Antioch” ([Acts 11:27](#)), was the prophet who predicted the famine. We know nothing about him except that he was a prophet and that he is recorded in Scripture as making two prophecies. The other prophecy also involved Paul; in fact, it was given specifically to Paul. He predicted that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem ([Acts 21:10,11](#)).

Though little knowledge is given us about this prophet who crossed Paul’s trail twice, enough is given to make us think highly of Agabus—for at least two reasons. First, he was a true prophet. Both of his predictions came to pass. Second, he was a faithful prophet. He faithfully delivered God’s message even though the messages he had to deliver were definitely not pleasant. Agabus was concerned about proclaiming the truth more than he was about pleasing mankind. But though his messages were not pleasant to the ear, it needs to be pointed out that they were given for the well-being of mankind. The famine message was given so the Antioch Christians could aid the Judean Christians. And the warning to Paul was given to help Paul avoid being bound in Jerusalem by his enemies—Paul, however, did not heed the message. The lesson in Agabus’ faithfulness in proclaiming the messages given him of God is that even though the messages seem unpleasant, in the long run, it is to make things more pleasant for man. Remember that the next time a preacher makes you uncomfortable with his sermon.

## **2. The Providing for the Famished**

“Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea; Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” ([Acts 11:29,30](#)). Note the determination

to give, the direction of giving, and the delivering of the gifts.

*The determination to give.* The prophecy of Agabus did not fall on deaf ears. The saints quickly made personal application of the message to their own lives—something not many listeners to sermons do. Prophecy is not given to entertain and excite; it is given to exhort to duty. God never intended that any preaching be simply for entertainment and excitement. God intended that preaching be done to affect people's lives as they apply the message to their lives.

"Every man" determined to give. The church in Antioch was not filled with a bunch of misers. Note the Scripture says they determined to give "according to his ability." God does not expect us to give what we are not able to give. We are simply required to give as we can. The problem is never lack of ability to give but lack of willingness. The widow gave two mites ([Mark 12:42](#)), but most can give much more than that. She could not but others certainly can, though many of those who can are not willing.

*The direction of giving.* The saints in Antioch determined to send relief "unto the brethren who dwelt in Judea." This raises a question. If the famine was to be in all the region, why send help to the brethren in Judea? Would not the brethren in Antioch need help also? The answer to that question is that the famine would indeed affect all Christians, but the saints in Judea would especially be affected. They were in much harder circumstances than the saints in many other areas, particularly Antioch. They, unlike the saints in Antioch, had been hit with very severe persecution which resulted in such things as confiscation of goods and properties and the loss of jobs.

Surprisingly, some commentators (and we once heard a preacher speak likewise) suggest that the reason the saints in Judea were so poor was that after Pentecost they pooled their resources ([Acts 4:34–37](#)). Thus, the saints are criticized for this unselfish conduct after Pentecost. But this thinking is all so unintelligent and uncharitable. Pooling resources did not bring poverty. It alleviated poverty. Many believers in Jerusalem were in poverty right after Pentecost, but the generous sharing by well-to-do Christians eliminated the poverty of many. However, a number of years have passed since that had been done; and much persecution had taken place since then which had taken much from the saints and left them in dire need even though the pooling of their resources had at one time made it so that "neither was there any among them that lacked" ([Acts 4:34](#)). The problem in Judea was not

a result of Christian charity—how foolish to think that—but persecution. A famine would thus make things much worse; therefore, the saints in Antioch sought to help the believers in Judea.

There is another lesson here about the direction of giving we need to note before we move on. The church in Antioch gave their gifts to fellow believers. Fellow believers have a preference above others to be given help. “Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” ([Galatians 6:10](#)). We have many professional beggars coming to the church for a handout. Do not be so quick to help them. Giving to them may not be helping them. Too often the money is used for booze or drugs or other evil pursuits. Save your gifts for God’s people who are in dire need. God’s people normally have better manners than the professional beggar and will not come to the church begging for help. Furthermore, they will honor God by their lives; and our charitable gifts ought to be given where God is honored, not where He is not honored. This does not criticize rescue missions and other like works who are trying to reach the down-and-outers for Jesus Christ. It simply exhorts Christians and churches to give their charity with God’s honor in mind.

*The delivering of the gifts.* The church in Antioch sent the gifts “by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” ([Acts 11:30](#)). “The appointment [of Barnabas and Paul to deliver the gifts] shows the light in which these two men were regarded by the church of Antioch, and also the importance which they attached to the commission itself. It is worthy of remark that the highest qualifications were required in those who were entrusted with the charities of the church in apostolic times” (Alexander). Paul has come a long way in the eyes of believers. The former great persecutor is now so trusted and accepted that he is chosen to help carry the monetary gift to Jerusalem for the saints.

Many church troubles would be nipped in the bud if churches would insist on high and holy qualifications for those who handle church money. Paul and Barnabas delivered the gifts and returned to Antioch ([Acts 12:25](#)). Many church treasurers in our day would not have done so well. Even many pastors can not be so trusted. We need people with good bookkeeping savvy to take care of the money of churches and Christian organizations. But more importantly, we also need people with excellent character for our bookkeepers. Many folk are voted into church office simply because they have been in the church a long time or are popular. Character is ignored. Such breeds big troubles indeed.

Traveling together with Barnabas in this assignment was a prelude of Paul’s next

assignment in God's service; for in his next assignment, he and Barnabas will be chosen by God to serve together in an extended missionary endeavor that will reach many Gentiles in other lands with the Gospel. Paul's early work in ministering to the Gentiles had proven him a faithful and trustworthy servant. This is the kind of person God uses and whose ministry God enlarges.

## V. PREMIÈRE OF MISSIONS

### Acts 13:1–13

THE APOSTLE PAUL is considered the great pioneer missionary of the church. One has but to read the book of Acts where his great missionary endeavors and exploits are chronicled to see that he is certainly entitled to that honor. The record of Paul's missionary work given in Acts is centered around three very significant, exciting, and challenging missionary journeys. The reporting of these journeys takes up approximately one quarter of the book Luke penned. In this study we come to Paul's first missionary journey. It is the beginning of organized missions and can thus be termed the première of missions. This is the first time men have been both specifically called by God and formally sent out by a church to carry the Gospel to distant lands.

In this study we will consider the important events connected with Paul's first missionary journey. They are the summons in Antioch ([vv. 1–4](#)), the start in Salamis ([v. 5](#)), the sorcerer in Paphos ([vv. 6–12](#)), and the shirker in Perga ([v. 13](#)).

### A. THE SUMMONS IN ANTIOCH

Missions begin with a call from God. After Paul's return with Barnabas from their journey of charity to Jerusalem, a summons from God made it plain for Paul, along with Barnabas, to carry the Gospel to other regions. When God sends us into His vineyard to work, He provides an adequate summons or call or commission, whichever you want to call it, to make clear what our duty is to be.

In regards to the summons for Paul and Barnabas, we note the declaring of the summons, the discerning of the summons, and the dispatching according to the summons.

## 1. The Declaring of the Summons

The Holy Spirit was the specific one of the Trinity who made known the Divine summons for service. “The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work wherewith I have called them” ([v. 2](#)). We need to add here that the Holy Spirit not only made known the call, but He also made known the steps to be taken to fulfill the call as is seen in “So they being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia . . . ” ([v. 4](#)). The leading of the Holy Spirit in our calling is a lost note in our lives and churches today. We are so busy taking personality tests and getting analyzed psychologically in order to figure out what our calling is and what we should be doing that we ignore the fact that the Holy Spirit takes care of this business—and a whole lot better, too! We need to stop listening to all the ballyhoo about these tests which have been created and propagated by psychologists and psychiatrists and get back to the Word of God which will inform us about the Spirit of God and His directing work. A. C. Gaebelien fittingly said, “Alas! all that which is so prominent in our modern day Christian activities is entirely absent in this great book of beginning of the church on earth; and that which is most prominent in the divine record, dependence on the Lord and definite guidance of the Holy Spirit, is almost entirely absent today. In our present day great movements, we hear men, money, and methods emphasized, and, in great banquets and conventions, an enthusiasm is stirred up, which is but the expression of self-confidence and self-reliance.”

How instructive it is that right at the beginning of this missionary endeavor, the leading of the Holy Spirit is mentioned. In practice, we need to acknowledge and submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of any endeavor. Waiting until we have already begun the endeavor is not the time to suddenly stop and think about what the Holy Spirit is telling us to do. But many folk are like that. They decide in themselves what they want to do, then later down the road they start thinking about God’s will and the leading of the Spirit. By then they are far from where God wants them and have wasted much of their life. Seek the Lord’s leading at the beginning if you want to amount to much for God.

To emphasize the authority of the Holy Spirit in this mission, it is helpful to point out the difference in meaning of the words “sent” in [verse 3](#) and in [verse 4](#). The word “sent” in [verse 3](#), which is spoken of regarding the church sending the apostles on their way (we will see this work of the church shortly), is translated from a word meaning to simply “release.” Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, gives an informative note concerning this word and our text when he says, “The sending is not that of commissioning, but of letting go, intimating that they [the church of Antioch] would gladly have retained them.” The word “sent” in [verse 4](#),

which is spoken of regarding the Holy Spirit, means to commission (Vine), to send forth. J. A. Alexander said, “They were dismissed or let go by the church, [but] their divine legation [ambassadorship, mission] is again asserted to prevent mistake. [They were] Being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, not merely by their associates at Antioch.”

All of this underscores the importance of Divine authority in our call. We must not be negligent in obeying our call, but neither must we be presumptuous in assuming a call without a Divine commission. We have no business pursuing some endeavor on our own. We must first get orders from God. If the Holy Spirit is not in it, it is not of God. Scripture makes it clear Paul was heading out on this missionary journey under the orders and direction of the Holy Spirit. May we also be found submitting to the Holy Spirit’s leading.

## **2. The Discerning of the Summons**

“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers, as Barnabas, and Symeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod, the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work unto which I have called them” ([vv. 1, 2](#)). It is instructive to note what Scripture says about the discerning of the will of God regarding this missionary calling of Paul and Barnabas. We will note two important aspects about the discerning of the will of God here. They are who discerned the will of God and when the will of God was discerned.

*Who discerned the will of God.* God not only revealed His will to Paul and Barnabas about where to carry out their next work, but He also revealed it to the spiritual leaders of the church in Antioch. They, as well as Paul and Barnabas, needed to know what God was planning regarding the two men, for here the church must carry out the action necessary to separate the two men to their missionary service. There are times when it is only necessary to reveal to the person called what the will of God is regarding that person’s life. But when others are significantly involved and required to assist in the calling, God wisely reveals His will about the person to them, too. So it is in the calling of a pastor. A man should not assume a pastorate of a church on his own. Taking a pastorate not only includes the pastor himself learning the will of God about the pastorate, but it also includes the church learning this fact.

A significant and encouraging confirmation of the will of God for a person is when

other faithful and respected saints of God recognize and sense the same orders or calling for that person, too. And the three leaders in the church mentioned in our text to whom God revealed His plans for Paul and Barnabas were indeed outstanding saints. They are listed as “certain prophets and teachers” ([v. 1](#)) which gives them high spiritual respect. And the few personal notes given about each also speaks highly of them. They were special men of God whose lives manifested the marvelous work of the Gospel. Symeon, by virtue of the fact that he was also called “Niger” indicates he was probably a black man. He may have been black outside, but his heart was not black inside. He did not let the fact that he was from a downtrodden race hinder him from growing greatly in the faith. Our text says Lucius was from the Egyptian city of Cyrene—the same city the man who carried Christ’s cross was from. Persecution is thought to have driven Lucius to Antioch. Then what thoughts the description of Manaen inspire. Here was a man who was raised up with Herod, the one who killed John the Baptist (“tetrarch” identifies the particular Herod). Two men who at one time played together side by side certainly went in opposite directions. More is written in Scripture about Herod than Manaen. But better to have less said and have it good than have a lot said and have it all bad. Herod had his glory on earth, and it was only temporary; but Manaen will have his in heaven, and it will be eternal.

The Holy Spirit revealing the will of God to these leaders in the church reminds us that God works through church leaders in leading the church. Every church has its dissidents who seem to think that church leadership is meaningless (unless, of course, they are in the place of leadership). They neither recognize nor duly respect the properly appointed leaders in the congregation. But God is not a God of chaos. We can learn from the organization of the camp of Israel during Moses’ time that if a large group of people is going to function orderly and effectively, they must have leadership and delegation of authority. This does not justify the papacy or other like unwarranted assumption of authority. But it does pay respect to the fact that leadership is essential in the church. If the church is going to be effective, this leadership must be duly respected—God respects it.

*When the will of God was discerned.* The key to “when” is in the word “As.” The will of God was learned “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted” ([v. 2](#)). Neither the ministering part nor the fasting part will appeal to the flesh, but these two things have much to do with learning the will of God.

First, ministering to the Lord means they were serving the Lord. They were faithfully being about the Master’s work. Such a servant will hear well the voice of His Master directing him to various actions. An unfaithful servant, one who is



delinquent in abiding by his task, will not do well in hearing the Master's orders. While God can make Himself heard anywhere, He often limits the hearing of His voice to the place of duty. Thus, the disobedient are ever wandering around trying to figure out God's will but never succeeding.

Second, fasting means they were earnest concerning the Lord's work. Most moderns will pass off fasting as something for people in Bible times but not something for people today. True, some fasting regulations in Israel's law are not applicable today. But the church in Antioch was not fasting because of some Jewish law (they were mostly Gentiles, remember). Their fasting simply emphasized their earnestness in their present spiritual duties. Their fasting was the setting aside of legitimate appetites and activities in order to give more attention to the work of God.

Today our churches are frequented with feasting, not fastings. We set aside the Lord's work so we can pursue our picnics, recreational activities, and other pleasures rather than setting aside these things to pursue the work of God. This fasting does not condemn all eating times at church, but many people are chiefly interested in food for the stomach and not food for the soul. When you walk into a Sunday School class and see coffee and doughnuts, you know they have a spiritual problem. Many of the fundamentalist churches are so sick today they cannot even "fast" in regards to the Super Bowl football game. On Super Bowl Sunday night, these churches set up a TV (with all its beer advertisements) at church so folk can watch the Super Bowl game instead of having their regular Sunday night church service. No wonder our churches are so anemic today and have so little wholesome influence on society.

### **3. The Dispatching According to the Summons**

"And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" ([v. 3](#)). God had ordered the church to "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work unto which I have called them" ([v. 2](#)). Now the church does what God commanded, and they release ("sent"—see above) Paul and his co-laborer, Barnabas, so they can pursue their Divine calling. The church had a special occasion—we would call it a commissioning service—to formally acknowledge the call of Paul and Barnabas and to express their support for it and their blessings upon it. "Some have thought of this [laying on of the hands] as the ordination of Barnabas and Saul as gospel ministers. That is absurd . . . Both had been preaching the gospel many years. This laying on of the hands was an expression of the fellowship of the Antiochian church with these men as they started the work of world evangelization" (Ironsides).

You will note that fasting is also mentioned in the sending forth of Paul and Barnabas as it was during the learning of the will of God for these two. But today when we have a special service to formally send out missionaries, we pray, but we do not fast as they did in Antioch when sending out Paul and Barnabas. We generally have a big meal of some sort for the occasion. That is not necessarily evil. But again we must note that the fasting emphasizes the great spiritual seriousness which characterized the church in Antioch. They meant business for God. Would that we were as serious about the things of God. Much of our feasting gives away our lack of earnestness. I doubt many Christians would be willing to forego the big meal at a commissioning service and give the meal time to earnest prayer for the work of the missionary. In fact, we probably would have trouble getting many missionaries to do that today, too.

## **B. THE START IN SALAMIS**

The first place where Paul and Barnabas began their missionary work was in the city of Salamis on the east edge of the island of Cyprus, the island that was the native land of Barnabas ([Acts 4:36](#)). Some evangelization had already taken place in Cyprus ([Acts 11:19,20](#)). This was done before the Gospel was taken to Antioch; and, interestingly, some who took the Gospel to Antioch were from Cyprus ([Acts 11:19,20,22-24](#)). Now, however, things are switched. Antioch is sending out missionaries who will preach the Gospel in Cyprus.

To get to Salamis, Paul and Barnabas sailed from Seleucia ([v. 4](#)). Seleucia was the seaport of Antioch and was about fifteen miles from Antioch. The island of Cyprus was about a hundred miles from Seleucia “and on a clear day, visible from it” (A. C. Hervey). Once in Salamis, they went to the synagogues to start their missionary work of proclaiming the Gospel.

In examining their ministry in Salamis, we will note the speaking of the Word of God and the servant of the men of God.

### **1. The Speaking of the Word of God**

“And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews” ([v. 5](#)). Note the word “synagogues” is in the plural. Salamis had a large population of Jews; and, therefore, they had more than one synagogue in the city. Generally, in other Gentile cities, only one Jewish synagogue would be

present. But because of the great number of Jews in Salamis, there were more than just one synagogue; and Paul would preach the Word in all of them. Going to the synagogues did not mean Paul was forsaking his calling of going to the Gentiles. Rather, going to the synagogue was a good place to begin his outreach to the Gentiles, for many Gentile proselytes were in the synagogue congregations. These Gentiles had rejected idolatry and looked for a purer religion which they found in the synagogues. Also, attending the synagogue would help them become acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures and thus prepared them for Paul's message on salvation. Their reception of the Gospel message was generally much better than that of the Jews.

"They preached the word of God" is such a noble statement. That is what ministers of God ought to be doing. Paul told Timothy some years later, "Preach the Word" ([2 Timothy 4:2](#)). Wherever the Holy Spirit is working, you will find a strong emphasis on the Word, for the Word is the "sword of the Spirit" ([Ephesians 6:17](#)). Many a work, that talks much about the Holy Spirit, has little emphasis on solid preaching and teaching of the Word and is, therefore, a bogus outfit. If the Holy Spirit were really in their work as they say, there would be a great emphasis on the Word. But the lack of the emphasis on the Word exposes the work as of man, not of God.

It is so important to have the Word of God front and center if a ministry is to be accredited. Take the Word out of your ministry, and you no longer have a ministry. The church may have a multitude of activities so that there is something for everyone throughout every day of the week. But if the Word of God is not front and center in these activities, these activities are nothing more than the spinning of wheels. They aren't going anywhere for God. Oh, to get the church back to preaching the Word of God as its main business. What a help it would be to mankind.

## **2. The Servant of the Men of God**

"They had also John to their minister" ([v. 5](#)). When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from Jerusalem, after they had delivered the gifts to the believers in Judea to help them through the coming famine, they brought back with them a young man by the name of John Mark ([Acts 12:25](#)). John Mark was the son of a fine Christian woman named Mary, who lived in Jerusalem. Scripture describes her situation in terms that makes it obvious she was also well-to-do ([Acts 12:12ff](#)). Being a fine Christian and well-to-do, she opened her large house to the believers in Jerusalem as a meeting place. As an example, the night Peter was rescued from prison by an angel, he went to her house where many saints were gathered praying for his

deliverance (Ibid.). Having a fine Christian mother and having his home frequently filled with dedicated Christians would be an encouragement for John Mark to enter the Lord's service. The fact that he was a relative of Barnabas ([Colossians 4:10](#)) would also provide encouragement for service plus opportunity for him to serve the Lord with Paul and Barnabas.

In our text, we learn that John Mark not only went with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, but he also accompanied them on this first missionary journey of Paul. Scripture says he was their "minister." The word translated "minister" will cover many tasks. Mark could do a number of helpful tasks that would permit Paul and Barnabas to give more time to ministering the Word to others. We need more helpers like this in the church today. Too often the pastor of a church is burdened down with detail work that other members of the church could and should do. If the members would do the work, it would then permit the pastor to be busy doing the work only he can do and to which only he is called. Let churches be attentive to this matter. Let them be careful not to burden down the pastor with unnecessary and distractive work by requiring him to do such things as janitor the church building, mow the church lawn, clear the church's sidewalks of snow, be the general repairman for the church building, be the church mimeographer, and other such tasks. Many pastors out of necessity have to do these things, but it is a disgrace to the church that they allow and even insist he do these things. It shows a great disrespect for the ministry and for the work of God.

Many in the church are so hypocritical here. They insist the pastor has to do all these things, but they are the first to complain if he is unable (because of being bogged down with these tasks) to do the more important tasks as readily and as well as they demand. John Mark is needed in the Lord's work. Let church people be alert to doing these tasks as they are able. But, of course, many folk have to be "big shots" in church; and such are just not willing to stoop to being a helper like John Mark. The gift of "helps" ([1 Corinthians 12:28](#)) is not one they want.

John Mark, though he started out in lowly position in service, made quite a mark (pun intended) in the Lord's work. Most significant of his achievements in the Lord's work is the authorship of the Gospel of Mark. But all that Mark did was not praiseworthy, however. Before we complete this chapter, we will be forced by Scripture to note his worst recorded failure. As one will note many times in Scripture, the Bible does not whitewash people. Failures as well as successes are recorded for our instruction and warning.

## C. THE SORCERER IN PAPHOS

The main episode reported in this first segment of the first missionary trip of Paul had to do with a sorcerer in the town of Paphos. Paphos was located on the western edge of Cyprus making it to be on the opposite end of the island as Salamis. Paphos is about a hundred miles from Salamis.

Paphos was the seat of Roman government for the island of Cyprus. Paul and Barnabas, in dealing with the sorcerer, will have much to do with the head government official there. Paphos, while important politically, was a wretched town morally—not an unusual association even in our day. “Paphos was the seat of the worship of Venus, the goddess of love . . . her worship was carried on with the wildest licentiousness” (Stalker).

In studying this experience of Paul and Barnabas with the sorcerer, we will note the identification of the sorcerer, the profession of the sorcerer, the association of the sorcerer, the opposition from the sorcerer, and the condemnation of the sorcerer.

### 1. The Identification of the Sorcerer

“And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus [and] . . . Elymas, the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation)” ([Acts 2:6,8](#)). We note two things here about the sorcerer’s identification: his race and his names.

*His race.* The sorcerer was a Jew. Being a Jew showed to what depths he had gone by becoming a sorcerer and false prophet. God had given the Jews great spiritual advantages ([Romans 3:1,2](#)). But spiritual advantages, though great they may be, are not enough. They must be used properly if they are to benefit one spiritually. You may be raised in a fine Christian home and have excellent tutelage in the things of the Lord and yet miss it all. You may attend the finest of churches and hear the finest of preachers week after week yet miss it all. You may get your schooling in the best of Christian schools and yet miss it all. Every age is filled with reprobates who had great opportunity to be something far different but were not because they chose to go the way of sin.

*His names.* Scripture indicates that the sorcerer had at least two names. First,

he was called “Bar-jesus,” which is certainly a misnomer. The name means “son of Jesus.” The “Bar” part of the name means “son.” Other name combinations found in Scripture with “Bar” in them include Bartholomew (son of Tolmas), Barjona (son of Jonah—Christ called Peter this name), Bartimeus (son of Timeus), Barsabbas (son of Sabbas, or son of rest—Sabbas corresponds to Sabbath), Barabbas (son of Abbas—the man released when Christ was crucified), and Barnabas (son of exhortation or son of consolation). Ironside said, “He undoubtedly had heard of the Lord Jesus Christ and His miracles; how He had healed the blind and unstopped the ears of the deaf. Mention of that name had been heard here and there throughout the world. He said, ‘I am the son of Jesus and I am able to work wonders, even as he did.’”

The other name he carried was “Elymas.” This name is the equivalent of “sorcerer.” That is why Scripture says, “for so is his name by interpretation” ([v. 8](#)). The name “sorcerer” means “wise man.” So the meaning of the two names indicates the sorcerer had some pretty high sounding names. People are impressed with high sounding names and titles. And the proud tout their impressive names and titles very conspicuously. They let you know how many doctorates they have, how many honors they have. Their trophies and awards and honors are displayed as conspicuously as possible, and they hesitate not to point them out frequently. But, as was the case of the sorcerer, the names mean nothing if there is not substance to back them up. The sorcerer certainly did not act like a son of Jesus (as we will note later, Paul fittingly called him a “child of the devil” [[v. 10](#)]), and he certainly did not act wisely but acted as a fool. Do not be worried about having important sounding names or titles. Be more concerned about what you are than what you are called. It is not the label but what’s in the package that counts.

## **2. The Profession of the Sorcerer**

“A certain sorcerer, a false prophet” ([v. 6](#)). What a devilish combination for a profession. We will look at these two evil practices separately.

*Sorcerer.* The word sorcerer is translated from the Greek word magus. It can be used in both a good and evil sense. This word is translated “wise men” in [Matthew 2:1](#) which shows the word in a good sense. But here and also in [Acts 8:9](#), it has a bad sense. “It is a Persian word, and in its original use designated a Persian religious caste, famous for their knowledge, wisdom, and purity of religious faith. They were attached to the court of the Babylonian monarchs, and were deemed to have great skill in astrology, in interpretation of dreams, and the like (see [Daniel 1:20](#), [4:7](#)) . . .

But in the process of time, the word ‘magus’ came to mean a sorcerer, a magician, a practiser of dark arts” (A. C. Hervey). While the “wise men” who came to see Jesus were indeed a most respectable group, this Bar-jesus certainly was not. Obviously, he had personal gain and fame in mind in making this his profession rather than sincere interest in learning truth and in helping people.

Quacks who claim to be able to prognosticate from the study of stars are not extinct. They not only plagued society in Paul’s day, but they are so prevalent in our day that practically every major newspaper in the country dares not go to press without carrying the daily horoscope column. But the Word of God is against all this business. Sorcery, astrological predictions, witchcraft, diviners, mediums, and spiritists are all forcefully condemned in the Scriptures.

*False prophet.* Elymas was a false prophet as well as a sorcerer. We could also say he was a false “wise man” too, compared to the “wise men” who came to see Christ. Being a false prophet, he was doing what the Old Testament law strongly forbid and ordered the death penalty for doing ([Deuteronomy 18:20](#)). This was no gray matter in which Scripture did not speak plainly. It was a sin condemned in the plainest of language. But when the heart is adamant against God, as was this sorcerer’s heart, the plainest of Scriptures means nothing. A man does not do wicked deeds because he does not understand the Scripture. He does wicked deeds because he *wills* to choose evil instead of righteousness, he *wills* to drink alcohol instead of refraining from it, he *wills* to live immorally instead of morally, he *wills* to choose greed instead of God, and he *wills* to reject God’s way instead of following it. Men ever try to excuse their evil, such as homosexuality and alcoholism, on the basis that it is not their fault, for it is just the way they are made. Also, when they commit some violent crime, they often try to get out of it by pleading temporary insanity. But the truth of the matter is they all chose, by an act of their own will, to do what they did. How men love to excuse their sin. But it will be to no avail, for every mouth will be stopped and all the ungodly will be guilty before God (cp. [Romans 3:19](#)).

### **3. The Association of the Sorcerer**

The sorcerer “was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus” ([v. 7](#)). From this text about the association of the sorcerer, we will note the corruptness of government advisors and the credibility of Scripture authors.

*The corruptness of government advisers.* The sorcerer was not just in private

business. He was an advisor to Sergius Paulus, the head governing official on the island of Cyprus. What a curse this was to Sergius Paulus. The sorcerer could not give good advice. It would be against truth and righteousness; and as we will note shortly, it was also against the Gospel. He was one person Sergius Paulus did not need to listen to and should not listen to. Yet, unfortunately, he was “with” Sergius Paulus; and that would only be bad for the the government.

Sergius Paulus is not the only government official to have the worst of people for advisers. Since time began, governments have been cursed with the worst sort of people giving them advice. We may think witchcraft and the like are things government people do not seek counsel from today. But think again. We have had several presidents who counselled with Jeanne Dixon, the famed false prognosticator. Other presidents have consulted with astrology. Still others have simply consulted with men of vile character. Hardly can we expect government to exhibit character when they are so degraded as to counsel knowingly and purposefully with such folk. Sergius Paulus was said to be a “prudent man” ([v. 7](#)), and so, to his credit, he rejected the counsel of this sorcerer as we will see a bit later. Would that our government officials would be prudent enough to reject the rotten counsel they get from men of vile character today.

*The credibility of Scripture authors.* The words in our text translated “deputy of the country” are from one Greek word which means “proconsul.” The word “deputy” in [verses 8](#) and [12](#) comes from this same Greek word. That word is a particular Roman government office title. It indicated that the island of Cyprus was at that time under the rule of the Roman senate, not Caesar. The provinces of Rome were either an imperial province or a senatorial province. If they were under Caesar, they were an imperial province. If they were under the control of the senate, they were a senatorial province. The governments of the two provinces were not the same. If it was an imperial province, it was governed by a procurator who was appointed for an indefinite time by Caesar. To help support his rule, the procurator was given a contingent of the Roman army to be under his command. Pilate, Festus, and Felix were procurators (translated “governor” in the KJV) spoken of in Scripture. If it was a senatorial province, it was governed by a proconsul. The proconsul was chosen by lot by the Senate for a one year term. Unlike the imperial province, the senatorial province did not have military support. These provinces were deemed to be peaceful enough not to require the support of arms. Sergius Paulus in our text and Gallio of Achaia ([Acts 18:12](#)) were proconsuls spoken of in Scripture.

Now for many years, Bible critics have jumped on this text in Acts to show that



Luke was not correct in calling Sergius Paulus a “proconsul.” Historical accounts indicated that Cyprus was an imperial province, not a senatorial province. Today, however, we know from archaeologists’ discoveries that Cyprus was not always an imperial province. It was at one time a senatorial province. One of the Caesars agreed (obviously for political advantage) with the Senate to exchange Cyprus for another province. It was during the time it was a senatorial province that it was visited by Paul as recorded in our text. So the text which the critics tried to use to discredit the Bible becomes instead a text which gives important credibility to the Bible. As J. A. Alexander said, “We have here a striking instance of a supposed error becoming a conclusive proof of accuracy [of the Bible] even in the minute points.” Bible critics make a lot of noise, but time will always silence them!

#### **4. The Opposition From the Sorcerer**

“Sergius Paulus, a prudent man . . . called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer . . . withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith” ([vv. 7, 8](#)). We note the anticipation and ardency of this opposition from the sorcerer.

*The anticipation.* We should not be surprised that a man who is a false prophet opposes the preaching of the truth. We should not be surprised that a man who is a sorcerer working with evil spirits opposes the work of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, we should not be surprised that in the church carnality will be resistant to spirituality. Griffith Thomas said, “When you open heaven, you also open hell.” Whenever God is about to do a work, the devil will be right there to oppose it; for God’s work is damaging to the devil’s work. Herschel Ford spoke of this problem of opposition to the Lord’s working in our church services when he said, “It often happens that when the Spirit works with a man, Satan steps in and seeks to divert that man and to keep him from being converted. A man hears a sermon, the Spirit convicts him and when the invitation is given, someone sitting next to him decides that it is time to leave. He pushes out and the man’s attention is diverted, his line of thought is broken. The invitation is soon over, and he goes back into the world, lost. Or a man may be listening to a sermon, and as the Holy Spirit seeks to convict him, someone near him begins to talk, and he is diverted.” Yes, this is a common experience in the church. But let a preacher call down a disturber, and a disgusting number of the church people are ready to dress down the preacher after the service for being so rude. How few hearts are right with God in our churches.

*The ardency.* The sorcerer's opposition to the proclaiming of the Gospel to Sergius Paulus was very ardent. He "withstood them [Paul and Barnabas], seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith" ([v. 8](#)). Of the word which is translated "to turn away" (Ibid.), J. A. Alexander says it is a "very strong Greek word, used in the classics to denote the act of twisting or distorting . . . It here means to divert attention or withdraw the mind, but with an implication of violence or great exertion."

Opposition to the Gospel, to the Word of God, to truth and righteousness will not be mild. Those opposed to godliness do so with great energy. The devil is not playing games. He may disguise his opposition under nice sounding ventures, but that does not take away from the ardent character of his efforts to oppose the work of God. Hence, the ACLU is not a passive movement. Hollywood and TV are aggressive moral polluters who will go to court to fight opposition to their unholy ways. Apostate religious leaders want to be thought of as benevolent church leaders, but they lobby the government to pass laws that will obstruct and hinder the work of fundamentalists. Liberals are the same way. They oppose conservatives with a vengeance. If we who embrace and proclaim the truth want to have much success against the enemy, we are going to have to be just as ardent in proclaiming the truth as the enemy is in opposing the truth. The average church member today, however, is so passive spiritually that he is a pushover for the enemy. This explains why our churches are succumbing rapidly to the invasion of worldly philosophies and unholy doctrines.

## **5. The Condemnation of the Sorcerer**

"Then Saul (who also is called Paul), filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand" ([vv. 9–11](#)). In examining this condemnation, we will consider the person giving the condemnation, the passion in giving the condemnation, the particulars of the condemnation, the penalty in the condemnation, and the product of the condemnation.

*The person giving the condemnation.* Paul was the one of the missionary group who took the lead and did the condemning of the sorcerer. Scripture prefaces the

condemnation of the sorcerer with two significant statements about Paul. It tells us about the second name of Paul and about the fact that Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit when he declared the condemnation. We will look here at both the name and filling notations about Paul.

First, the *name of Paul*. “Saul (who also is called Paul)” ([v. 9](#)). This verse informs us that Saul was also named Paul. Prior to this text in Scripture, Paul is always called Saul. Then in this verse, the notation is made that Saul is also called Paul; and from then on in Scripture, including Paul’s epistles, the name Paul is always used—except when Scripture records Paul reporting his conversion experiences on several occasions in the latter part of the book of Acts.

Various explanations have been made about his name change and why it appears here. Three main explanations exist as to where he got the name and why it is now brought front and center in the Scripture. (1) He took the name himself in commemoration of the conversion of Sergius Paulus (“Paulus” is the same as “Paul”). There is not a hint in Scripture, however, supporting that idea, nor does such an act fit the character and practices of Paul at all. (2) He took the name Paul in order to show humility, for the name Paul means “small.” Again there is no hint in Scripture to support this idea. Furthermore, with the proconsul having the name Paul, the name is associated with high position, not humility. So though it meant small, the association would tend to pride, not humility. (3) The best explanation is that like many Jewish boys born in Gentile countries, Saul was given both a Jewish name (Saul) and a Gentile name (Paul). His double name could be stated Saul Paulus just as the proconsul’s double name was stated Sergius Paulus. Bringing the Gentile name of Paul forward at this juncture in the missionary trip is most appropriate, for Paul’s Divinely appointed ministry to the Gentiles is now coming into the spotlight (Sergius Paulus was a Gentile), so the Gentile name will now be used exclusively.

A most important lesson about the name Paul, regardless of how one thinks he got the name, is that the Apostle gave the name a great reputation. Because of his great dedication to Christ, the name Paul is still used today in great honor in naming people, churches, and even the pope. Would that all of us so lived that we would give the name we bear a great reputation.

Second, the *filling of Paul*. Scripture makes a special notation to say that Paul was “filled with the Holy Ghost” when he issued the severe denunciation upon the sorcerer. This really sanctions the severity of the condemnation, a truth which we will note shortly. But here we want to emphasize the significance of being filled with the Spirit.

As we noted in [chapter 2](#) of our book, the filling of the Spirit has to do with enabling, empowering, and endowing for service. Stating here that Paul was filled

with the Holy Spirit means he was Divinely enabled to give the proper rebuke to the sorcerer. The filling of the Holy Spirit here gave Paul the ability to discern the condition of the sorcerer's heart, the ability to discern the enormity of his wickedness, and the boldness and forcefulness needed to give the rebuke to the sorcerer. If we walk in the will of God, we will discover that God will give us the enabling we need to do whatever task He asks us to do. As we noted in [chapter 2](#), a plainly stated example of this encouraging truth is found in the book of Exodus where God told Moses that He had "called by name Bezaleel . . . and I have filled him with the Spirit of God . . . To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship" ([Exodus 31:2-5](#)) in the building of the Tabernacle.

*The passion in giving the condemnation.* [Verses 10](#) and [11](#) record some very strong language. Paul condemned the sorcerer in the strongest of terms. To speak out like that today against evil in our churches or in our society will bring the wrath of people everywhere upon you. You will be charged with being terribly uncouth, having a great lack of love for people, and "shooting-from-the-hip." The critics will get so upset with you that they will completely ignore the devilish deeds of the degraded sorcerer in their concentration upon your alleged evil of being so harsh in the condemnation. But the great passion behind Paul's condemnation is totally justified. Our text ([verses 10](#) and [11](#)) will give us at least three excellent and important reasons which really justify the severity of the condemnation: the filling of the Spirit, the salvation of Sergius Paulus, and the vileness of the sorcerer's character.

First, *the filling of the Spirit*. As we have noted above, just before Paul made this passionate and powerful condemnation, the Scripture says he was "filled with the Holy Ghost." That ought to silence every critic who criticizes the forcefulness and passion of the condemnation. The Holy Spirit was behind it all! And please note it was the "Holy" Spirit. The problem today is that people are not filled with anything that is "holy"; therefore, they do not have a great deal of enthusiasm for condemning that which is unholy. But those filled with the "Holy" Spirit of God will strongly condemn sin. They will have much better perspective than those filled with the spirit of the world.

Note the contrast here between Paul and the sorcerer in this regard. Both are said to be filled. Paul is filled with the Holy Spirit, but the sorcerer is filled with "all subtlety and all mischief." What are we full of?

Second, *the salvation of Sergius Paulus*. Before you get too critical of Paul (and of the Holy Spirit), ponder why Paul so severely indicted the sorcerer. The reason he

so severely indicted the sorcerer was that the sorcerer was trying earnestly to “turn away the deputy from the faith” (v. 8). In plain, simple language, he was trying to send the deputy to hell! Now in view of that, do you still think we ought to denounce the sorcerer in mild words? You had better not, or you will be in big, big trouble with God Almighty!

We need to get upset with sin because of what it does to mankind. As G. Campbell Morgan says, “Why the fierceness of these words? The answer is that another man was involved, Sergius Paulus.” Today, however, we forget about Sergius Paulus when the preacher is denouncing sin with a passion. Also, the same problem is seen in our courts today. We forget about the victim when we are dealing with the criminal. The focus seems to ever be on the poor criminal and how awful to inflict much punishment on him. Precious little is said about the hapless victim. But away with this soft attitude on sin. Let us listen to the “Holy” Spirit and what He says about sin instead of listening to all the unholy spirits of the world.

Third, the *vileness of the sorcerer’s character*. Under our next heading, we will deal in detail with the evil character of the sorcerer. Here we emphasize that a man who is “full of all subtilty and all mischief,” who is a “child of the devil,” who is an “enemy of all righteousness,” who would continually “pervert the right ways of the Lord,” and would send people to hell (“seeking to turn the deputy from the faith”) is a very vile person and, hence, not one we should deal with gently. Such a character needs to have the book thrown at him in judgment. This is not a trivial case. This man is guilty of gross wickedness. He deserves the strong denunciation he got from Paul. But the critics of Paul’s severe denunciation of the sorcerer do not get very upset by evil even though it is so great. And many folk are that way in every area of life. A criminal may have a lengthy crime record, but the courts and judges pay little attention when giving him a sentence that will put him on the street in a short time able again to cause more trouble. A student in school may be a habitual and serious troublemaker, but try disciplining the student even a little bit, and parents and psychologists and others will complain. The same is also true in church regarding church dissidents. They can stymie the work of God with their incessant and belligerent opposition, but few are the churches that get stirred up enough about it all to take strong enough action to stop the dissidents’ evil. If Sergius Paulus was in our churches today, he probably would not get saved; for few are the churches that would deal strongly enough with the dissident, trouble-making church member to bring about the salvation of Sergius Paulus.

*The particulars of the condemnation.* “O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou

child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" ([v. 10](#)). Paul stated four condemning things about the sorcerer. Paul gave him four "F's"—the lowest grade we could get when we were in school. He said the sorcerer was *full* of evil, was of the *family* of the devil, was a *foe* of righteousness, and a *falsifier* of God's ways. As we have just noted, what a wretched, evil man the sorcerer was and how very deserving he was of condemnation by Paul.

First, *full of evil*. "O full of all subtilty and all mischief" ([v. 10](#)). "Subtilty" and "mischief" are not nice things, to say the least. "Subtilty" is a translation of a Greek word which is also translated "craft" and "guile" in other Scriptures. "The Greek word primarily means a bait for fish; then any deception; then a desire or disposition to deceive" (J. A. Alexander). "Mischief" is translated from a word which means "unscrupulousness, recklessness, facility [ready ability, skill, dexterity] in doing evil" (*Ibid.*).

To add to the greatness of the two evils mentioned here, two words in our text need to be considered—"full" and "all." Paul said the sorcerer was "full" of these two things: deceit and mischief. "Full, not merely tinged or tainted with these qualities, but full of them, composed of them" (Alexander). Paul also said the sorcerer was full of "all" deceit and mischief. "*All*, before these nouns, denotes both quality and quantity, variety and high degree" (Alexander). What a wretched, degraded, wicked man. Yet some people still get upset about the strong language Paul used to condemn him—which only reveals the critics own spiritual sickness.

Second, *family of the devil*. Paul called the sorcerer, "Thou child of the devil" ([v. 10](#)). The sorcerer, going by the name "Bar-jesus," said he was the son of Jesus. But in truth he was the son of the devil. Paul saw through him and revealed the family the sorcerer was really from. We see very little of that discernment today even among professing Christians in our churches. They think Christian rock is good music, that divorce is acceptable, that many of the vile politicians are good people, and that the so-called Christian psychologists are giving out a good message. They cannot tell the difference between an apostate and a fundamentalist. But Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit and could discern a lot better than that! Most Christians today are operating by the spirit of the world and not by the Holy Spirit, and their poor discernment verifies it.

Third, *foe of righteousness*. "Thou enemy of all righteousness" ([v. 10](#)). The sorcerer was a friend of evil and a foe of righteousness. And note it is "all" righteousness. He did not like anything that was godly, pure, holy, true, and heavenly. Folk like that are all around us today. They are the ones who support abortion, homosexuality, divorce, gambling, the anti-god attitude that takes prayer out of school and Christmas

decorations out of city parks and schools, and who fight many other righteous causes and philosophies. Such folk fill the halls of Congress, make up most of the teachers in our schools, and comprise a surprisingly large portion of the membership of many churches. They never try to raise the standard of conduct but are always trying to lower the standard. They are the ones who help pass laws that legalize all sorts of evil.

Fourth, *falsifier of God's ways*. "Wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" (v. 10). "Pervert" here means to distort, twist, and hence to misrepresent, misapply. The sorcerer would slander God and His ways. He would tell us such evil things as Christ is not God, that God's ways take all the joy out of life, that the Bible is nothing but myths, and that the commands of God given in the Scripture are antiquated and ridiculous. This falsifying about God and His ways is the language of many college professors as well as that of the apostates in modern pulpits. Such folk, if unrepentant before they die, will wish they never had a tongue when they enter eternity and suffer the awful punishment of hell fire.

*The penalty in the condemnation*. When Paul finished condemning the evil of the sorcerer, he then told him what his penalty was going to be for hindering Sergius Paulus from being saved. "And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand" (v. 11). We note the specifics, season, similarity, suitableness, and symbolism of the penalty inflicted upon the sorcerer for his evil.

First, the *specifics of the penalty*. The sorcerer was blinded, and it was a thorough blindness, for "not seeing the sun" indicates he could not see the brightest of objects. He entered a severe darkness. The word "mist" is a medical term "common in Hippocrates to express a darkening and dimming of the eyes" (A. C. Hervey). The use of the word here reflects the fact that Luke, the writer of Acts, was a physician. The sorcerer's judgment shows what great darkness folk experience when they reject the truth.

Second, the *season of the penalty*. The penalty was severe, but mercy was involved, for the blindness was only "for a season." Those who are so critical of Paul here need to ponder the "for a season" statement. The chastisement was intended to be remedial, not final. God's grace shines wonderfully through it all. It would give the sorcerer time to repent. How gracious God is to give any of us time to repent.

Third, the *similarity of the penalty*. One cannot read about the penalty on the sorcerer without seeing how it is so similar to what Paul experienced at his conversion



on the road to Damascus. The sorcerer's blindness, like Paul's, was only for a season. And the sorcerer, like Paul, had to be led about by another. This experience in Paphos surely caused Paul to reflect, with gratitude to God, on his own blindness and on how the mercy of God was so great to him who had persecuted the church so terribly. He, like the sorcerer, had opposed the Gospel with great fervor.

Fourth, the *suitableness of the penalty*. The blinding of the sorcerer really fit his situation. It would be a "forcible interruption upon those observation of the stars and clouds by which the magician pretended to foresee the future" (Alexander). Furthermore, as Matthew Henry pointed out, the sorcerer, being an agent for the one who "hath blinded the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" ([2 Corinthians 4:4](#)), is now in fitting justice blinded himself. We sow and we reap, and we reap what we sow. It is a solemn lesson that ought to cause people to turn quickly from their evil.

Fifth, the *symbolism of the penalty*. A. C. Gaebelien compares the blindness of this Jewish sorcerer to the blindness of Israel for their rejection of the Gospel. Particularly he notes that the blindness was only for a season. "Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in" ([Romans 11:25](#)). The sorcerer, like the Jews, had rejected Christ and vigorously opposed His ministry of redemption for the souls of sinners. As a result God blinded his eyes, as he did the Jews' eyes, to the truth of the Gospel while He opened the eyes of the Gentiles (here it was Sergius Paulus) to the Gospel. But the blindness is only temporary, for the day is coming when the Jews will have their eyes opened to the glorious fact that Christ is indeed their Messiah, their Redeemer. May that day hasten in its coming.

*The product of the condemnation.* "Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord" ([v. 12](#)). All the critics of Paul's severity here and of strong preaching against sin by preachers need to dwell on this fact of the salvation of the deputy. The result of the severe condemnation was the conversion of a soul. We do not help the cause of the Gospel by treating sin gently. To the sinner, that only seems to lessen the need of Divine salvation. Sin needs to be exposed for all its terribleness so men will see clearly their need of salvation.

Earlier, we noted that Scripture says Paulus was a "prudent man" ([v. 7](#)). He certainly demonstrated it in several ways regarding Paul and his message. First, he demonstrated it in that he "desired to hear the word of God" (Ibid.). What wisdom that is! Few want to hear the Word of God today; even many church members



become very disinterested when church time turns to preaching the Word. But Paulus, unlike those church members, was wise; for he wanted to hear the Word. Second, he demonstrated his wisdom in that after he saw what happened to the sorcerer, he believed. Unlike many, who can look a truck load of evidence in the eye and not see a thing and who can experience the judgment of disasters one after another (such as earthquakes, fires, draught, floods, and storms) and never see God in it, Paulus quickly saw God in all of this and turned to the Lord for salvation. He was “astonished” at the doctrine of the Lord. It impressed him indeed. Yet, a good number can yawn their way through church and have little excitement over Divine truth (but then they go home and go bananas over some ball game). However, in contrast, Sergius Paulus was “prudent.” Not so this other kind!

#### **D. THE SHIRKER IN PERGA**

After their ministry in Paphos, which featured the conversion of the proconsul Sergius Paulus, Paul and his missionary companions took a ship and headed northwest from Paphos for the mainland: “Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia” ([v. 13](#)). Pamphylia was a Roman province in what is now part of southwest Turkey. It is a rugged area composed of mountainous terrain once you travel a few miles from the seacoast. Perga was the capital of Pamphylia. It was about seven and a half miles in from the actual sea coast of the Mediterranean Sea, but because of the Cestrus River, it was a seaport. There was much contact between Perga and Paphos which would make traveling by ship between the two cities quite convenient for Paul and those in his missionary company. Perga was famous for the worship of Diana. Paphos, as we have already noted, was a center of worship for Venus. Diana was the goddess whom the Ephesians also worshiped with much zeal, and whose worship Paul’s ministry hindered when he was in Ephesus, something we will note in later chapters of our book.

We need to note here in the introduction of this point that in referring to the missionary group in this text, Scripture speaks of it as “Paul and his company.” This is a change. It formerly had been “Barnabas and Saul [Paul].” Now Paul will be listed first in Scripture except in [Acts 14:14](#), [15:12](#), and [15:25](#). Paul is now the leader of the group. He had demonstrated that fact in dealing with the sorcerer and will continue from now on to demonstrate the leadership character of his calling and personality.

The event in Perga which Scripture focuses on in our text is the failure of John Mark. This event will be the one we think about the most when we think of Perga. “And John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem” ([v. 13](#)). We will study here the shirking of duty by Mark. We will note the character, the cause, and the cost of his departure from Paul and Barnabas.

## 1. The Character of the Departure

Just reading the text would indicate to the casual reader that Mark’s departure did not look good. But the words used to describe his departure make it very certain that the character of the departure was bad. J. A. Alexander said the word translated “departing” indicated “not mere local separation, but secession or desertion, being elsewhere used in an unfavorable sense ([Matthew 7:23](#), [Luke 9:39](#)).” Paul later described the departure with a stronger word—though still translated “departed”—when he argued with Barnabas about taking Mark on the second missionary journey. The word that Paul used is so strong that in other Scripture texts it is used to speak of falling away and apostasizing from the faith (e.g. [1 Timothy 4:1](#) and [Hebrews 3:13](#)). Three things, therefore, can be said about the character of Mark’s departure. It was unfaithful, unkind, and unspiritual.

First, it was *unfaithful*. He broke his word. He had obviously agreed and gave his word that he would go with Paul and Barnabas and be their helper. But now he quits. He only lasted through the Cyprus ministry and the trip across the sea to Perga. Faithfulness is the prime qualification for the servant of God. “Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful” ([1 Corinthians 4:2](#)). Mark was not faithful, neither are many professing saints. How often the Lord’s work is plagued with such quitters.

Second, it was *unkind*. Quitting abruptly left Paul and Barnabas short of help when they were about to venture into some tough situations both in traveling and ministering. This was most unkind to Paul and Barnabas. But quitters in the Lord’s work will be found to be most unkind. They do not seem to care about others but seem only to care about themselves and their own interests regardless of how it may hurt others.

Over the years, it has been our observation that the first people to accuse the pastor or the congregation of being unkind are the unkind people of the church who are the ones who never stick to anything and who are always doing things in the church which work hardship on others. You cannot count on such folk to serve faithfully; but if they need the services of the church and do not get it immediately and in the highest quality, they will complain loudly and long. Do not be a part of

that detestable hypocritical bunch.

Third, it was *unspiritual*. There is nothing in his departure that reflects spirituality. It is all carnality. God is not in it. He is not leading Mark. It is nothing but the flesh acting. We need to examine our decisions and actions to see if they reflect spirituality or carnality. This examining will probably prove embarrassing if we are honest, for we do so much in the flesh and hardly anything in the Spirit. We rationalize according to the flesh, make decisions according to the flesh, and react to various situations according to the flesh. Little do we show any spiritual thinking in our mind, mouth, and manners.

## **2. The Cause of the Departure**

Why did Mark quit? Some think he quit because he was upset that Paul was now the leader instead of Mark's relative Barnabas. Pride sometimes does cause people to get mad and quit. But we think the big problem with Mark was a lack of courage. The situation before him really required a lot of courage, in fact, so much courage that the problem of Paul now being the leader would seem quite trivial. After all, Mark did sail to Perga. But at Perga he could get a look at the fearful prospects of the journey just by looking at the mountains that led away from the coast. Stalker sums it up well when he says, "It may be that the new position assumed by Paul had given him offense . . . But it is more likely that the cause of his withdrawal was dismay at the dangers upon which they were about to enter. These were such as might well strike terror even into resolute hearts. Behind Perga rose the snow-clad peaks of the Taurus Mountains, which had to be penetrated through narrow passes, where crazy bridges spanned the rushing torrents, and the castles of robbers, who watched for passing travelers to pounce upon, were hidden in positions so inaccessible that even the Roman armies had not been able to exterminate them. When these preliminary dangers were surmounted, the prospect beyond was anything but inviting: the country to the north of the Taurus was a vast tableland, more elevated than the summits of the highest mountains in this country [country just north of Perga], and scattered over with solitary lakes, irregular mountain masses and tracts of desert, where the population was rude and spoke an almost endless variety of dialects. These things terrified Mark, and he drew back. But his companions took their lives in their hand and went forward. To them it was enough that there were multitudes of perishing souls there, needing the salvation of which they were the heralds."

Serving the Lord is not for weak hearts. Many times God's servants are asked to enter difficult situations which cause even the strongest hearts to quail and quake. Do not feel badly if you tremble at the difficulty of the assignment facing

you in God's work. It is not a sign of weakness of character. What is a sign of weak character, however, is when you refuse to trust God to enable and see you through the difficulty. If God has ordered you into a difficult assignment, He will see you through. Our trembling can be countered by the truth that the difficulty of the assignment only means that we are going to see a great display of God's power.

### 3. The Cost of the Departure

Failure always costs. As we learn later, Mark did improve his act and got back into the service of the Lord. Paul indicates this when he said some years later, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for the ministry" ([2 Timothy 4:11](#)). Further proof of his improvement in his spiritual dedication is given in the fact that he wrote the book of Mark. Mark failed, but he did not fail to get up and try again. The greatest failure is the failure to try again.

But though he did finally succeed in the Lord's work, we want to note that the failure was still very costly. He lost privilege, opportunity, and respect as a result of his failure.

First, he *lost privilege*. He gave up traveling with the greatest Apostle of all time. I am sure that many times later on, he was filled with great regret at giving up such a tremendous privilege. At the time, the privilege may not have looked so great, but faith sees better than the flesh. Mark, of course, was not walking by faith when he quit. Let us learn from this. We may not always see the great privileges we have in our service because our service seems to be unnoticed and difficult. But if it is God's service, we must never discount the privilege. Eternity will greatly embarrass us if we do.

Second, he *lost opportunity*. Leaving Paul took away many opportunities of service for Mark. Instead of serving with Paul, he sat at home in Jerusalem for awhile. If he was like a lot of saints today, he would have complained when in Jerusalem that he lacked opportunity to serve. How often it is that those who complain about lack of opportunity in service are those who have squandered away opportunity by quitting a task God had previously given them.

Third, he *lost respect*. For years he lost the respect of the Apostle Paul. In [chapter 15](#) of Acts, Paul really spoke harshly about Mark when Barnabas wanted to take him along on the trip. To have such disrespect from a great man of God had to hurt. Do not worry if the world disrespects you, but if godly saints disrespect you—you have lost valuable blessings. Mark has also lost respect of the saints down through the ages. His quitting, though he was restored, is a blot on his record that ever lessens the respect of others for Mark even though it may be too harsh a disrespect to be

justified.

Quitters lose so much. Think about that the next time you are tempted to quit a job God has given you to do. This, of course, does not mean that you should never resign from some task to move on to other tasks. God does indeed lead in that sort of action at times. What we are talking about here is quitting an assignment you ought to continue doing. Quitting may seem like the easy way out. But, as Mark discovered, it always makes things harder; for what he lost by quitting made his life much harder than it would have been had he not quit. Quitting is always a losing adventure.

## VI. PREACHING IN PISIDIA

[ACTS 13:14–52](#)

AFTER JOHN MARK left the missionary endeavor and went back home to Jerusalem, Paul and his co-worker Barnabas did not give up, but they continued on faithfully and energetically in their missionary work. It had to be discouraging to them when John Mark quit; but unlike many professing Christians today, these men did not let the failure of others keep them from serving the Lord. So many folk serve only if others will also serve. If others do not hold up their end of the work, these folk pout and also quit. Then they try to justify their quitting by saying that if so-and-so isn't going to serve then they aren't going to serve either. But these quitters are so spiritually small in their thinking. They forget that their service is not to be based on what others do but upon what God commands. John Mark may quit, but Paul and Barnabas have a calling from God, and they will carry it out whether others quit or not.

To continue their missionary work, Paul and Barnabas traveled north from Perga across the province of Pamphylia to the northern edge of the province of Pisidia. There they stopped in Antioch of Pisidia. As we noted in our last chapter, the traveling from Perga of Pamphylia to Antioch of Pisidia was anything but easy. It required a strong commitment to the Lord's work. It was a journey of about one hundred miles over a "difficult [they had to go up some 3,500 feet to get to the plateau area where Antioch of Pisidia was located] and dangerous road, infested with robbers . . . mountainous, rugged, and passing through an untamed and half-savage population" (A. C. Hervey). But God saw them through the trip; and once in Antioch, they commenced their zealous and excellent proclamation of the Gospel.

The report given in the book of Acts of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in

Antioch of Pisidia is largely a record of the message Paul preached in the synagogue the first Sabbath they were in Antioch. It is the first of Paul's sermons to be recorded in the Scriptures. He, of course, preached many times before this experience in Pisidia; but this is the first time Scripture records in detail what he preached. In this chapter we will consider the place of the preaching ([vv. 14, 15](#)), the particulars of the preaching ([vv. 16–41](#)), and the people and the preaching ([vv. 42–52](#)).

## A. THE PLACE OF THE PREACHING

“When they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down” ([v. 14](#)). We note here both the city and the synagogue where the preaching occurred.

### 1. The City of Antioch

Antioch is already a familiar name in our study of Paul, for it was in a city named Antioch that Paul began his ministry with the Gentiles and from where he was recently sent out with Barnabas on this missionary journey. That Antioch was in Syria. This one, however, is in Pisidia, over three hundred miles northwest of the Antioch in Syria. There were a number of places named Antioch at this time. Antioch in Syria, of course, was the most famous and well known. Most of the Antiochs were not well known.

The name Antioch comes from the name Antiochus which was a favorite name of the Seleucid kings of Syria from about 280 B.C. and on. These rulers descended from Seleucus I, one of the four associates of Alexander the Great among whom Alexander's kingdom was divided when he died. Seleucus I became ruler of the part of Alexander's empire that included Syria and Babylon and then later on, via war, also Cilicia and Asia Minor. The Seleucid kings named (and also founded some, including this one in Pisidia) the various “Antioch” cities after themselves, their fathers, and, as some report, even their sons.

Antioch of Pisidia is one of those locations in the world whose fame would have completely disappeared had it not been for the entrance of the Gospel into the city. How little did the citizens of that city realize when Paul and Barnabas walked into their midst that these men through the ministering of the Word of God would bring lasting attention to this city. But how little do people anywhere esteem the ministry of the Word of God as that which brings endurance to anything. When it is all over,

however, all the bright lights of the world will fade into oblivion; but the Word of God will shine on forever. “Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away” ([Mark 13:31](#)).

## **2. The Synagogue of Antioch**

Antioch of Pisidia had a large enough contingency of Jews in its midst to have a synagogue in it. Paul and Barnabas began their public ministry in Antioch of Pisidia in this synagogue. This isn't the first time or the last time Paul will begin a ministry in a city by going to the synagogue. Beginning a ministry in a city this way was a habitual practice and method of Paul. Besides going to the synagogue here in Antioch of Pisidia, the book of Acts records Paul going to the synagogues in Salamis ([Acts 13:5](#)), Iconium ([Acts 14:1](#)), Thessalonica ([Acts 17:1,2](#)), Berea ([Acts 17:10](#)), Athens ([Acts 17:17](#)), Corinth ([Acts 18:4](#)), and Ephesus ([Acts 19:8](#)).

There are at least two good reasons why Paul would frequently begin his ministry in a city by going to the synagogue of the city. They are the character of the service in the synagogue and the composition of the congregation in the synagogue. Both provided good opportunities for Paul to give out the Gospel in the fulfilling of his calling.

*The character of the service.* The character of the service in the synagogue provided for a very effective situation and opportunity for giving a good presentation of the Gospel. The service in the synagogue was generally divided into four main parts: prayers, reading of the law, reading from the prophets (both the reading of the law and of the prophets was often followed by a short interpretation of the passage read), and then the sermon or as, it was called here, the “exhortation” ([v. 15](#)). The sermon time, the last part of the service, was often given over to visiting guests whom the rulers of the synagogue deemed worthy to permit to give an exhortation. When Paul visited a synagogue, he was usually invited to speak, as he was here. “And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on” (Ibid.). So the character of the service in the synagogue did indeed provide a very good situation for speaking to people about the Gospel, for it was one of devotion and Scripture. And it provided a great opportunity for Paul to speak to folk about the Gospel, for visitors were often asked to speak in these services.

*The composition of the congregation.* The composition of the congregation in

the synagogue provided for an excellent opportunity to reach the very people Paul wanted and needed to reach with the Gospel. The typical synagogue congregation in the countries Paul went through on his missionary journeys would not only have Jews in the congregation, but it would also include a number of Gentile proselytes. The gross licentiousness of paganism caused a number of Gentiles to turn away from paganism to the more sanctified religion of the synagogue. With both Jews and Gentiles in synagogue congregations, Paul would have opportunity to give the Gospel to both his own people, whom he greatly desired to be saved ([Romans 9:2,3,23](#); [10:1](#)), and also to the Gentiles, the very people to whom he had a special Divine calling to evangelize ([Acts 22:21](#)).

Paul's practice of using the synagogues to introduce the Gospel to a city is a good lesson about wisely assessing our opportunities in an area and then capitalizing on them to get out the message of the Word of God. In Paul's day, the synagogue provided a great opportunity to introduce the Gospel to an area. Today, of course, the synagogue method Paul used is no longer available. But there are many other opportunities available—and opportunities which Paul never had—such as radio programs, newspaper advertisements, mailings, and door to door literature distribution. Churches need to earnestly look over their situation to see what opportunities are present and then use these opportunities to the fullest. Every area does not have the same opportunities, but all areas have some opportunities and ought to use them.

Church leaders will often run into a problem, however, in trying to capitalize on a church's opportunities; for many diehards in the church membership will not take kindly to doing anything new in the church. Though some long-used program is no longer practical, these diehards will insist it is commanded of God in the Scripture and to forsake it for another outreach program is to virtually forsake Scripture. There are some methods, of course, which should never be forsaken, such as, preaching. Those who are looking critically at preaching today and trying to replace it with something else do indeed have a serious spiritual problem. But while some methods do not change, we must not close our eyes to changing other outreach methods to capitalize on legitimate opportunities for getting out the message of the Word of God.

As a word of warning here, we want to note that all of this emphasis on adapting the church's ministry to the opportunities available does not sanction the use of worldly methods which are so popular in many of our churches today. In checking the validity of a method, check whether the method is used to get a crowd or to provide for a quality presentation of the Word. Having a so-called "Christian Rock" concert or a Super Bowl Sunday are not sanctified methods in the least. They may bring a



crowd, but they most certainly do not provide a good situation and atmosphere for a quality presentation of the Word of God. The carnal will insist these things are great opportunities for reaching people but fail to see that they are instead a great opportunity for the devil to carnalize the church service. Beware you do not mistake the devil's opportunity for the Spirit's opportunity.

## B. THE PARTICULARS OF THE PREACHING

The invitation to give the message at the synagogue service was immediately accepted by Paul, and he preached a great message. We will note the readying for the preaching, the reviewing in the preaching, the reporting in the preaching, and the relating of the preaching.

### 1. The Readyng for the Preaching

"Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience" ([v. 16](#)). Three actions were taken by Paul in his readying of the assembly for the preaching of the Gospel: standing, beckoning, and exhorting.

*Standing.* "Paul stood." A. T. Robertson said, "Sometimes the speaker sat when addressing the synagogue assembly. As an example, Christ is recorded as sitting when speaking to the synagogue in Nazareth. However, His task in that case was the reading of the prophets, the third part of the service. He stood up to read the Scripture but sat down to give the interpretation [[Luke 4:16,20](#)]." Paul's task was the final part of the service, namely, the sermon. Standing was most appropriate whether it was a frequent practice or not. Standing made it possible for him to be heard better and for folk to know who was doing the speaking so they could direct their attention to him.

Paul's standing was not just physical, The words "Paul stood" represents even more his spiritual standing regarding the truth of God. He stood up for the Gospel of Jesus Christ in this synagogue. When given the opportunity, he did not hesitate to let people know where he stood regarding Jesus Christ. Would that all professing saints did likewise.

*Beckoning.* “Paul . . . beckoning with his hand.” The use of his hand here denotes “A dramatic gesture [of the hand] for quiet and order” (A. T. Robertson). [Acts 21:40](#) and [26:1](#) also record Paul using his hand in the same manner before he addressed a multitude. Paul wanted and needed to gain the undivided attention of the people to whom he was going to speak. This action underscores the respect that needs to be given to the preaching of the Word of God. It is not a time to be talking with one sitting next to you or doing some other thing. It is time to give your attention to the preaching of the Word of God. Some church members get upset when the pastor calls down someone in the congregation for causing distraction in the service by making noise or doing something else to distract listeners from hearing the message. But these critics have little respect for the message of God, or they would not criticize God’s preachers for stopping distractions during the service.

*Exhorting.* “Ye that fear God, give audience.” The word translated “give audience” in our text is also translated “hearken.” The word “hearken” means something more than just hearing. It also means to heed. That is the sort of listening that is being urged here. It is the sort of listening we need to have regarding the preaching of the Word of God. We need to hear to the extent that we heed. Any other kind of listening lacks profit. “Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only” ([James 1:22](#)) is the exhortation.

## **2. The Reviewing in the Preaching**

A considerable portion of the message which Paul preached to the synagogue audience was a review of the Old Testament record of the Israelites. This laid the foundation for climaxing the message by focusing on Christ and the Gospel, for this review skillfully led up to the promise and fulfillment of Christ as the seed of David. The second major part of the message was a reporting of the coming and ministry of Christ upon the earth and His crucifixion and resurrection. Once Paul got to Christ in the reviewing, he then in the reporting part, enlarged upon the work of Christ. It was no longer a review but the reporting of current events. Here, in this section, we will deal with the reviewing of the Old Testament record of God’s dealing with the Israelites and how it leads to Christ.

To examine this part of the message, we will divide it into eleven parts: choosing, exalting, delivering, forbearing, destroying, allotting, ruling, insisting, removing, replacing, and fulfilling. Besides seeing how this all leads to Christ, we will also be seeing many practical instructions in this part of the message.

*Choosing.* “The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers” ([v. 17](#)). Paul begins the message about Christ by beginning with the choosing of the people through whom Christ was promised to come. Paul’s method of preaching here is, therefore, inductive. He does not state his conclusion until after he has given a number of facts.

By beginning with the choosing of Israel, he will quickly gain the Jewish listeners’ ears, for they especially delighted in the fact that they were a chosen people. It is a great honor and blessing to be chosen of God. But, unfortunately, Israel, like many others today, often forgot the reason and the responsibility in the choosing—both of which are carefully and plainly stated in [Deuteronomy 7](#).

First, the *reason*. “The LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people. But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers” ([Deuteronomy 7:6–8](#)). This text gives two reasons why Israel was chosen. They are the love of God and the faithfulness (“would keep the oath”) of God. Hence, the choosing was all of grace! As it is in the matter of salvation, the choosing was not of merit. It is not what we are but what God is. Be glad God chooses not on what we are but on what He is. It is not our merit but His mercy. If He chose on our merit, none of us would be chosen!

Second, the *responsibility*. “Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them” ([Deuteronomy 7:11](#)). The Jews’ attitude regarding their being chosen of God was too often that of pride, not that of responsibility. They gloated in their being chosen and looked down on others. But they ignored the responsibility that comes with the privilege. Their choosing obligated (“therefore”) them to obey God. They were chosen to serve Him, to honor Him. But they generally forgot that and only looked at the choosing in terms of their own honor. When God favors us in some way, it is primarily for us to be better able to honor God, not to honor ourselves. If we were to look upon our blessings in this manner, how much better would we use our blessings. People who have trouble tithing, as an example, have never caught on about their responsibility regarding what God gives them; otherwise they would never have trouble tithing.

*Exalting.* “God . . . exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land

of Egypt” (v. 17). In this sentence, Paul gives a very encouraging truth for all of God’s people. God’s honor is not dependent upon man’s honor. Joseph, the first of Jacob’s family to dwell in Egypt, was greatly honored though he had been so dishonored by man that he was terribly slandered and then put in prison. Later when the entire family of Israel moved to Egypt and had become a great multitude of people, they were honored of God even though they were scorned and mercilessly enslaved by the Egyptians. Egyptians treated them like dirt on the ground, but God still honored them because they, through Moses and Aaron, honored Him. Moses and Aaron, representing Israel, gave great honor to God Almighty before Pharaoh. And “them who honor me I will honor” (1 Samuel 2:30) is God’s habit. Hence, Israel was honored. Let us learn from this. Do not be concerned about whether you gain the world’s honors or not; be primarily concerned about gaining God’s honors. Adjust your manner of life to that end. God’s honors are the most lasting and the most blessed of all honors, and they are not dependent upon one’s earthly situation. You can be terribly despised in this world and still gain Divine honor.

*Delivering.* “And with an high arm brought he them out of it” (v. 17). Paul now speaks about the great power of God. The term “high arm” means with great power. God demonstrated His great power in Egypt. He demonstrated His power over the false gods (the plagues showed the powerlessness of the idols that Egypt worshiped), over the might of earthly powers (Pharaoh and Egypt were a mighty nation at that time), and over circumstances (the Red Sea situation is a good illustration of this). God ever delights to show the muscles of His arm in working blessings for His people. As a man sometimes raises his arm to show his muscle, so God also raises His arm (“high arm”) to show His muscle on behalf of His people. How encouraging it is for His people to know that God is all powerful. Let this truth encourage us to trust God more and to do more for Him.

*Forbearing.* “About the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness” (v. 18). Paul next addresses the shameful part of Israel’s history which occurred during Moses’ time. The “manners” of Israel were pretty bad in the wilderness. Ever complaining about God’s care for them, frequently rebelling against Moses’ authority, and generally being more interested in fleshly things than in spiritual things, the Israelites really exercised God’s patience. Many, in fact, never made it into the promised land; their God-dishonoring and conduct-defiling unbelief resulted in Divine wrath justifiably slaying them. All of this underscores the

grace of God in Israel's history. They did not deserve the blessings they gained. As a nation, they should have been destroyed in the wilderness. In fact, God threatened that once ([Numbers 14:11,12](#)). But God manifested abundant grace to them, and they survived as a nation. In like manner, this is how God has dealt with us. We fail repeatedly. Yet, in mercy He patiently chastens and puts us back on the right path. All of this leaves no room for boasting about how good we are, but it only exhorts us to humble acknowledgement of our failures and to increased pleading for His mercy.

*Destroying.* "When he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he divided their land to them by lot" ([v. 19](#)). These seven nations were "the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites" ([Deuteronomy 7:1](#)). We learn later on in [Deuteronomy 9:5](#) and [18:9-12](#) that these nations were cast out because they defiled the land through unholy living. Israel also experienced a casting out from the land because of wickedness. God in grace permitted a number of Jews to return after the seventy-year captivity, but many Jews did not return. Even in Paul's time, a multitude of Jews were still living in foreign countries; and in not too many years from that time, Jews would again be driven from Palestine because of their sin of rejecting Jesus Christ.

Not many understand history from the standpoint of God's judgments upon nations for their sin. You will not read this truth in the world's history books, that's for sure. But unless you understand this truth, you will never understand history well.

*Allotting.* God not only drove out the wicked Canaanites from the land of Palestine, but He also gave it to the Israelites. He "divided their land to them by lot" ([v. 19](#)). The details of this dividing of the land can be found in the book of Joshua. That it was divided by "lot" does not, of course, sanction gambling. The difference between the two is as great as day and night; but the ungodly, being blind to the discernment of right and wrong, cannot distinguish the difference though great it may be.

*Ruling.* "And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel, the prophet" ([v. 20](#)). Paul continues to move on through Israel's history and is now narrowing down the focus so it will soon fall on David and his seed Jesus Christ. This text is the one that informs us of how many

years Israel was under the system of judges. This period was not a very honorable period in Israel's history. A non-progressive cycle of national experience continued to take place at that time. Israel would have peace and prosperity then they would backslide and this would lead to oppression. Then they would finally come back to God and confess their sin and cry for deliverance. God would then send a deliverer, called a judge, who would give Israel freedom again and rule them for a time. After some years passed, the cycle would repeat itself. How fickle man is. He cannot endure prosperity, for it frequently causes him to backslide and depart from God. God has often to bring affliction to get mankind to confess his sin and come back to God. Our problem today is that we explain away the chastening affliction as something other than God's chastisement upon man for his sins. Few see God's hand in the floods, earthquakes, devastating storms, disease, and other destructive forces that are coming upon man with great fury.

*Insisting.* "Afterward they desired a king; and God gave unto them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years" ([v. 21](#)). When Israel desired a king in Saul's day, it was not a sanctified desire. Israel wanted a king but for all the wrong reasons. They wanted a king to be like the world, they wanted a king who was impressive to the flesh, and they wanted a king before God's time. And they insisted so much in their own will about a king that God, in punishing them for their evil insistence, gave them a king according to their desire; He gave them Saul the Benjamite. Saul looked very impressive and appealing to the Israelites. He was a tall and handsome man. But oh what a disappointment he was. Though after his anointing, he did do some good things which would bring rejoicing to Israel and make them think their way wasn't so bad after all, the disappointment soon took over. Saul lacked character; and his reign resulted in Israel being made weak, unequipped for battle, defeated, confused, and scattered. So it always is when we insist on our way over God's way. How often we see this in the lives of people. In marriage, as an example, people often will not wait for God's choice or time but insist on having their own way. But soon they discover that their choice turns sour and brings great sorrow and loss.

*Removing.* "He . . . removed him" ([v. 22](#)). This is the language of judgment. Saul was unacceptable to God, and finally God removed him from the throne and in a way that fit his dishonorable life. Saul was killed in battle by the Philistines, and his corpse was treated ignominiously by the Philistines. It was a day and time of great

shame and sorrow for Israel. But when we go against God's will and insist in our own rebellious way, sooner or later this will be our experience.

*Replacing.* "He raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will" ([v. 22](#)). David was God's choice; and the testimony God gave of David, as recorded in our verse, makes it easy and logical for Paul to move the subject to Jesus Christ, Who is of the seed of David (as noted in the next verse) and of Whom David is a wonderful type. "Man after mine own heart" certainly describes Jesus Christ even more than David. And "Which shall fulfill all my will" also describes Christ even more than David. [Psalm 40:8](#), speaking prophetically of Christ, said, "I delight to do thy will, O my God." And Christ, in fulfillment of that Old Testament text, said, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me" ([John 4:34](#)), and "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" ([John 6:38](#)). If we claim to be followers of Christ, we ought to also be earnestly and continually concerned about doing the will of God in our lives. To pay little attention to the will of God and yet profess to be a follower of Jesus Christ is to declare by our actions that our profession is just words. It is not real.

*Fulfilling.* "Of this man's seed hath God, according to his promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus" ([v. 23](#)). Having skillfully prepared the way to speak of Christ, Paul now begins to do just that. And the first reference to Christ in Paul's message is an excellent one. The excellence of this speaking of Christ is seen in three ways in our text: it was a Scriptural message, a resurrection message, and a saving message.

First, it was *a Scriptural message*. Paul's first reference to Christ in this message is that He is a fulfillment of Scripture. Paul says Christ was raised from the dead "according to his [God's] promise." Thus Paul's message on Christ will be supported by Scripture. This makes his message valid. If we cannot support our preaching on Christ by the Scriptures, we have no validity to our message.

Second, it was *a resurrection message*. The fulfilling of the promise Paul referred to had to do with the resurrection of Christ. God according to His promise "raised" Christ from the dead. Paul will speak more about the resurrection of Christ a bit later. Suffice it to say here that just as the message must be Scriptural to be valid, so it must also declare Christ is risen to be valid.

Third, it was *a saving message*. The message about Christ spoke of Christ as the Savior. Jesus Christ is a great teacher, a great example, a great leader, a great

prophet, a great healer, etc.; but the important truth is that Jesus Christ is the Savior of man. Christ is the Messiah, the King of Israel; but more importantly, He is their Savior, too. The Jews in this synagogue in Pisidia, like the Jews everywhere, would be more excited if the emphasis was on Christ the King—especially the King Who would destroy all of Israel's enemies and set Israel up as the greatest nation of all. But the message of salvation is what is needed first and foremost. And this message was also a fulfillment of Scripture just as Christ being Israel's Messiah was a fulfillment of Scripture.

### **3. The Reporting in the Preaching**

Now that Paul has given a quick review of Israel's history up to David in order to focus on Christ, he begins reporting about recent and significant events concerning Jesus Christ. To examine this part of Paul's message, we will divide it into six parts: heralding, completing, identifying, condemning, controlling, and raising.

*Heralding.* "John had first preached, before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel" ([v. 24](#)). The words "first preached" are one word in the Greek and mean to go before ("first") to herald ("preached"). John came on the scene as a herald for Christ. His heralding was to announce the coming of Christ in order to prepare the people to receive Christ. This is always the job of a herald who goes before a high official to announce his coming. And how instructive to note that in preparing the people to receive Christ, John preached "repentance." He did not preach soft sermons on the fact that God loves you and will love you in Jesus Christ. True and wonderful as that truth is, the people needed something else to prepare their hearts for Christ. They needed to be brought face to face with their sin. It is always this way in regards to preparing people to receive Christ. Unless man realizes his sinfulness, he will see no need of Christ as a Savior. Note that the message was repentance "to all" the people of Israel. Everyone needed to repent in Israel. And everyone needs to repent in the world, too.

*Completing.* "John fulfilled his course" ([v. 25](#)). "Fulfilled" here means John the Baptist completed his work, which is spoken of as his "course." Paul, near the end of his life, would say a similar statement about himself when he said, "I have finished my course" ([2 Timothy 4:7](#)). Many who start never finish. In running—and the word "course" here can refer to a running track or other course which runners were to follow—some runners have a DNF after their name when a written report is given



of a race. DNF means “Did not finish.” DNF is usually caused by lack of dedication. The runner has not been dedicated enough to prepare adequately to finish the race. Hence, during the race, he runs out of energy and enthusiasm as the race taxes his body to the limit. He cannot handle the oxygen debt, the pain, and the other stresses that come upon a runner running a race. In spiritual matters, many Christians are DNF. They never finish what they have been called to do. The reason this is so is that they, too, like the DNF runner, lack commitment. They are not committed enough to prepare adequately so they will finish the course. Hence, they cannot endure the suffering and sacrifice required to complete the task for Christ. But it doesn’t have to be that way. We do not have to be a DNF Christian in our service for God. We can be prepared adequately through diligently pursuing the Scriptures, prayer, and an obedient life of holiness.

*Identifying.* “John . . . said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose” ([v. 25](#)). It is so vital to be able to identify people. Especially is this so in spiritual matters. We need to be able to identify true and false preachers. Most importantly we need to be able to correctly identify Jesus Christ. Paul in making certain the identity of Christ in his message, refers to the concern John the Baptist had that the people would properly identify Christ. He wanted no one confusing himself with being the Christ—unlike some self-appointed Messiahs which have shown up in every age. To help identify Christ, John described Christ in very glowing—but most justified—terms: “the shoes of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.” John the Baptist was no modernist who would deny the deity or sinlessness of Christ. He put Christ above all. So must we in both our doctrine and duty.

*Condemning.* “They that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain” ([vv. 27, 28](#)). Christ was condemned—what a terrible thing! The One person Who should never be condemned was so severely condemned that He was “slain.” What a travesty of justice the crucifixion was! How wicked was man’s thinking. There are four truths which Paul spoke about this condemnation that we want to emphasize here.

First, this condemning showed the great peril of deficiency in spiritual knowledge. “They knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets” ([v. 27](#)) was a condition

with very serious consequences. Ignorance encouraged people to crucify Christ. You can be deficient in many areas of knowledge and not be hurt, but you cannot be deficient in spiritual knowledge without serious loss.

Second, this condemning showed the great peril of ignoring our spiritual opportunities. The Scriptures, which could have informed them of Christ, were “read every sabbath day” ([v. 27](#)) in the Temple and synagogues. Yet, like today, people did not avail themselves of the opportunity they had for spiritual instruction. They have no excuse. God gave them adequate opportunity to receive Christ as He does for everyone. One of the great sorrows of every lost person in hell will be the sorrow over the poor stewardship of their spiritual opportunities.

Third, this condemning showed that those in high position in society are often involved in condemning Christ. “And their rulers” ([v. 27](#)), which included Pilate who is mentioned in the next verse, were involved in condemning Christ to be crucified. Much condemning of Christ comes from high places in the land in every age. In fact, the high places of the land seldom give much support to the honoring of Christ but mostly support the condemning of Christ.

Fourth, this condemning shows that men do not need facts to condemn truth. “They found no cause of death in him” ([v. 28](#)), yet He was condemned to be crucified. Repeatedly in the trial of Christ and during His crucifixion, the innocence of Christ is bought out in the Scripture. Pilate twice said, “I find no fault in him” ([John 19:4,6](#)); Herod also found no fault ([Luke 23:15](#)); one of the thieves who was crucified with Christ said of Christ, “This man hath done nothing amiss” ([Luke 23:41](#)); and the centurion, who was in command of the soldiers at the cross, said, “Certainly this was a righteous man” ([Luke 23:47](#)). But though He was sinless, yet He was still accused as a man guilty of so much evil that He should be crucified. Do not be surprised if when you live faithfully for Jesus Christ, people still accuse you of evil and represent your character as worthy of severe denunciation and punishment. Many pastors can take courage from this truth. They may be most faithful to the Word, give more hours of dedicated service to their job than anyone else gives to their job, and sacrifice more for the work of the Lord than anyone else in the church; yet, in spite of this, church members will rail on them and accuse them of lack of love, of lack of dedication, and lack of concern for the Lord’s work.

*Controlling.* In reporting the crucifixion of Christ, Paul said of those who condemned Christ to be crucified that “they have fulfilled them [the prophecies]” ([v. 27](#)). This is a strong reminder that God is still running the show. The enemy did not overpower God in crucifying Christ. They simply fulfilled the prophecies in the Word

of God. Matthew Henry, in referring to this text, said, “It is possible that men may be fulfilling scripture prophecies, even when they are breaking scripture precepts.” We need to remember, for our own encouragement, that though the enemy seems to hinder and even stop the work of God by his evil, the enemy’s evil actions may often be unwittingly helping God accomplish His purpose. The enemy will not, of course, receive reward for helping the purpose of God. The enemy will be judged for what the intents of his heart were, namely, to hinder the work of the Lord.

*Raising.* “But God raised him from the dead” ([v. 30](#)). “But God” is such a great and powerful phrase. Men rant and rave and seemingly defeat God and His people; then “But God” comes on the scene and the entire picture changes dramatically. Men had put Christ on the cross and appeared to have triumphed over God, “But God” stepped in and raised Jesus Christ from the dead. How that changed things! The apparent victors at the crucifixion are now the vanquished.

This short but powerful verse begins an extended section ([vv. 30–37](#)) in Paul’s message on the important subject of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We will look at four important truths about Christ’s resurrection which Paul addressed.

First, the resurrection is the great pillar of the Gospel. Paul spends more time on the resurrection truth in this message than on any other truth. Approximately one-third of the message, as it is recorded in Acts, centers on the resurrection. This emphasis underscores the fact that without the resurrection the validity of the Gospel is gone. As Paul said later in one of his epistles, “If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” ([1 Corinthians 15:14](#)).

Second the resurrection is abundantly attested. “He was seen many days of them who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people” ([v. 31](#)). “Many” underscores the truth that our faith is supported by a great amount of evidence. No one has the evidence like Christianity. “He showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs” ([Acts 1:3](#)) is another testimony to that fact. We who build our hope of salvation on Jesus Christ are putting our trust on the most authenticated and proven religious creed anywhere.

Third, the resurrection is joyful news. “We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again” ([vv. 32, 33](#)). “Glad tidings” is translated from one word from which we get the words evangel, evangelize, evangelist, evangelical, etc. The Gospel is the best news in the world. It is the news that God kept His Word and raised up Jesus from the dead thus providing us the way of salvation. Without the resurrection in our theology, we have no message that will

bring lasting joy to people.

Fourth, the resurrection is supported by Scripture. Paul quotes three Old Testament Scriptures to support the resurrection. These are some of the promises which God fulfilled in raising Christ. The three verses are [Psalm 2:7](#), [Isaiah 55:3](#), and [Psalm 16:10](#). Paul first quoted [Psalm 2:7](#): “As it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” ([v. 33](#)). As the context indicates, “begotten” here refers not to the birth of Christ but to the resurrection of Christ. But the birth and resurrection are similar in that Christ was born from a virgin womb and Christ was raised from a virgin tomb ([Matthew 27:60](#), [Luke 23:53](#), [John 19:41,42](#)). The second text Paul quoted was [Isaiah 55:3](#): “I will give you the sure mercies of David” ([v. 34](#)). Again the emphasis is on salvation by grace. Note it is the “sure” mercies, not “swift” mercies. The flesh would like it always to be “swift,” but faith is satisfied with “sure.” The third quote from the Old Testament by Paul is the one from [Psalm 16:10](#): “Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” ([v. 35](#)). Some think this promise applies to David; but Paul, to make sure the folk in the synagogue did not apply the text to David, emphasized that David “fell on sleep [died], and was laid unto his fathers [put in a sepulcher], and saw corruption; But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption” ([vv. 36, 37](#)).

This support from the Scripture for the resurrection reminds us that if Scripture does not support the creed, the creed is not valid. We have a lot of creeds today embraced by society which not only do not have Scriptural support but, in fact, also contradict Scripture. Time will, however, expose the fallacy of all unscriptural creeds, regardless of how popular they are with mankind.

#### **4. The Relating of the Preaching**

Paul is careful to relate his preaching to the lives of his listeners. He is not like so many modern preachers who with eloquence give many interesting facts and observations but who never make application to the lives of their listeners. Of course, not making application to people’s lives means the preacher will not be stepping on people’s toes and will, therefore, not be attacked by the people. But Paul is different, for he unhesitatingly and courageously applies his message to the congregation in very plain and earnest language. He stops to make a short application ([v. 26](#)) after he reviewed the history of Israel from the Old Testament, then he stops again ([vv. 38–41](#)) for a lengthier application after reporting on the recent and significant events regarding Christ. To emphasize that the message applies to these people, there is an increased use of the personal pronoun “You,” “your,” or “ye” in these verses. In the rest of the message, he only uses the personal pronoun several times. But now

in the relating of his preaching to the people, he uses it repeatedly, in fact, a total of ten times—[verse 26](#) (twice), [verse 38](#) (twice), [verse 39](#) (once), [verse 40](#) (once), and [verse 41](#) (four times).

In relating the message to the lives of his listeners, Paul's message involves sending, forgiving, justifying, and warning.

*Sending.* "To you is the word of this salvation sent" ([v. 26](#)). These words certainly make plain that the message Paul preached was for the people. Hence, they were responsible to act on the message. So is everyone. The Gospel message is sent to all mankind everywhere which means all people are obligated to act on it. Failure to give proper attention to the Gospel message will send one to eternal hell fire. And with the little attention given to the Gospel message today, one can justifiably conclude that most folk are going to hell. It is a terrible fact, but a truthful one.

*Forgiving.* "Be it known unto you . . . that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" ([v. 38](#)). What great news and what important news. Man's greatest need is to have his sins forgiven. The Gospel message tells how they can be forgiven. It is "through this man." "This man" is none other than Jesus Christ. Christ is the only means of forgiveness, and He is the all sufficient means for the forgiveness of sins. All must come to Him if they want forgiveness of their sins, and all who come to Him for forgiveness of sins will obtain this blessing of blessings.

*Justifying.* "And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" ([v. 39](#)). Paul informs the congregation in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia of the important fact that the law cannot save. Only Christ can save. Through Him we not only gain the forgiveness of sins, but we are also justified. Justified means to be declared righteous. And this declaration will be by Divine decree. What a tremendous thought to know that when we come to Christ for our salvation, God will declare us righteous. Others may declare us righteous, but that will not do us one bit of good in regards to our salvation. God must declare us righteous if we hope to spend eternity in heaven. And He will do so when we come to Christ for our salvation.

*Warning.* "Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in our

days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you” ([vv. 40, 41](#)). Now that Paul has given them the wonderful news about the Gospel, the warning follows. Paul warns them about unbelief. He cites the rebukes the prophets gave Israel generations before concerning their unbelief in the declared Word of God. Unbelief will bring Divine judgment. God is marvelously gracious to send Christ to be our Savior. But reject this message and Divine wrath will be your portion. This is a warning we need to give when we give the Gospel. Yet, how often men try to present the Gospel without giving the consequences for rejecting the Gospel. We tell people that God loves them and wants them saved, then we stop. However, don’t stop there! Finish the message and tell folk that if they do not respond to God’s offer of salvation, they will perish in their sins and go to hell for eternity. Many will complain that such plain talk about hell is crude and undignified preaching. But pay no attention to such wicked talk; but in the plainest of terms, warn souls of hell.

## C. THE PEOPLE AND THE PREACHING

The response of the people to Paul’s preaching was quick in coming. We will study the response of the people of Antioch of Pisidia to the Gospel message under the headings of the congregation ([vv. 42–44](#)), the critics ([Acts 13:45–47, 50, 51](#)), and the converts ([Acts 13:48, 49, 52](#)).

### 1. The Congregation

We note three things about the congregation in the synagogue where Paul had just preached the Gospel: the interest of the congregation, the instruction for the congregation, and the increase in the congregation.

*The interest of the congregation.* “And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath” ([v. 42](#)). This verse speaks of the response of the congregation (Jews as well as Gentiles as seen in [verse 43](#)). It is the initial response to the message. They simply wanted to know more. This was startling news to them. So they wanted Paul to be sure to preach again the next Sabbath.

Interest is important. It, of course, does not signify conversion. But if there is no

interest in the message, there certainly will not be conversion. Our churches have very few in them today who show much interest in the message of the Word of God. Few would stop the preacher after the service and beg him to bring another message next Sunday. There are a few here and there who are hungry for the Word, but very few. This lack of interest is one of the great reasons for the spiritual and moral decline in our churches and country today.

*The instruction for the congregation.* “Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes [Gentiles] followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God” ([v. 43](#)). This verse reveals the continued interest of a number of the congregation who not only expressed their interest at the synagogue but also showed their interest by following Paul and Barnabas down the street. They did not want to wait until the next Sabbath to learn more. They wanted to learn more now. So Paul and Barnabas engage in some personal work. Both speak to those about them. The sum of their exhortation to the interested people was to “continue in the grace of God.” This does not mean the people were then saved, but rather it indicates that Paul and Barnabas encouraged (even “persuaded”) the people to continue to pursue this interest in God’s grace as revealed in the Gospel.

This is something to be interested in, something to give one’s attention to with earnestness. Most people today have little interest in the Gospel. They are not interested in their soul’s destiny. Their interest is in this world. The things they are so very interested in are things which are trivial, which do not last, which will not mean a thing in eternity. Oh, how quickly this bankrupts the soul and seals its eternal destiny in hell fire.

*The increase in the congregation.* “And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God” ([v. 44](#)). The interest of many folk in the message of the Word of God has indeed continued and so much so that they told many other folk about the preaching to be heard at the synagogue. This resulted in a great crowd the next Sabbath.

This is the right way to get a crowd. Evangelists and pastors today often trot out some carnal entertainment or some contest in order to increase the crowd. But all of those practices only make the church more carnal. Disinterest in spiritual things does not give us a mandate to prostitute the truth by injecting carnal programs and methods into the church program in order to get a crowd at church. If people do not

come through the right methods, we have no justification for using wrong methods. Obviously, some have not learned this important truth yet.

## 2. The Critics

Again the opposition to the Gospel shows its ugly head. But that only indicates that God is working in this town of Antioch of Pisidia. Opposition, regardless of what form it appears, does not waste time going where it is not needed. But here in Antioch of Pisidia, the Spirit of God was moving; and this was not good for the devil's program. He was about to lose a number of his people. Hence, he gets his troops (the critics) together to oppose the work of God.

We note the attitude of the critics, the attack by the critics, and the anathema for the critics.

*The attitude of the critics.* "But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy" ([v. 45](#)). It is important to note the attitude of the critics in order to understand one of the main reasons why they got upset and attacked the work of God. The attitude that motivated them to their evil was "envy." When a great crowd of people came to hear Paul speak, that was too much for the pride of the enemies of God; and their jealousy quickly showed itself. The crucifixion of Christ was also promoted by envy. Scripture said that Pilate "knew that the chief priests had delivered him [Christ] for envy" ([Mark 15:10](#)). This problem is still very prominent today; and if the truth were known, it is behind a vast majority of church problems. Members envy members who have position in the church which they want. Other members envy the pastor, for they want the authority he has and the respect people give him. No church can grow in numbers without envy causing criticism. No person can rise in status in Christian circles without envy criticizing.

We, of course, need to be careful here that we do not accuse every critic of a church or popular religious figure of being envious. There are many churches who have grown rapidly who have done so because of carnal reasons, and they need to be exposed. There are many men who have risen in fame within the church who are corrupt men, and they need to be exposed. Here, however, that was not the problem. Paul and Barnabas were good men and the crowd came for a good reason.

*The attack by the critics.* The critics focused their attack on the message and on the messengers. This is a typical procedure for the enemies of the Word of God.

First, they *attacked the message*. "The Jews . . . spoke against those things



which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming” ([v. 45](#)). These critics, like the sorcerer in Paphos, would “pervert the right ways of God” ([Acts 13:10](#)). They would argue against the truths Paul preached by trying to contradict them, but they would not do it honestly. They would, like all critics of the Word, twist and pervert the Word in order to deny the truth. Then they would get into name calling and character assassination which is what is involved in “blasphemy.” They would give dishonorable names to Christ instead of honoring Him as the Son of God. They would describe His character in degrading ways. So it ever is with the critics of the message of the Word of God. The critics cannot fight with facts, for the facts are all for the Word of God.

Second, they *attacked the messengers*. “The Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts [area]” ([v. 50](#)). The critics not only attacked the message, they also directed their attacks at the messengers. And the attack in Antioch of Pisidia upon Paul and Barnabas was a very forceful one. Scripture characterizes it by the word “persecution” and says they “expelled them [Paul and Barnabas] out of their coasts [area].” They treated them harshly and then ran them out of town.

All of this sounds like the way a lot of our churches treat their pastors. They treat them harshly by giving them poor pay and long hours, then they run them out of town. When this happens, we need to take a good look at the attackers’ claim of being followers of Jesus Christ and His Word. Those who attack God’s messengers give away the phoniness of their own profession of faith.

In attacking the messengers, the critics sought and gained the help of people who were well respected and who were very religious and who held high positions not only in religion but also in the government of the city. So “devout and honorable women” and “the chief men of the city” joined in the attack against Paul and Barnabas. This tactic is typical of evil. Having these kind of people supporting the attack on the work of God gives the attack considerable validity and respect in the eyes of the innocent. But high and respected position in the eyes of men does not make false true and true false nor does it make good evil or evil good. The devil may dress evil in the finest apparel, but it is still evil. Saints of God need to study the Scriptures faithfully and earnestly and pray continuously for discernment so they can see through the clever disguises of evil lest they are beguiled regarding the true men of God in the church. Many a faithful preacher has been lambasted falsely and run off by this high and respected group because many innocent ones are too naïve spiritually to see the falseness of the attack.

It is not difficult for the devil to get men and women of rank to help promote evil,

for such folk are generally more interested in their own honor than in God's honor and in being honored by man more than in being honored by God. Furthermore, high rank in life seldom helps one to stand better for the truth. Generally it causes one to take a softer stand on evil. Folk of high rank who, like these in our text, have used their rank with its power and influence to aid evil rather than good, will have much to answer for at the judgment bar of God. We all need to pray earnestly that we will not use any influence or power we may have to encourage evil rather than good.

*The anathema for the critics.* Those who oppose the work of God will be opposed by God. The critics were given a Divine anathema for their opposition to the Gospel in Antioch of Pisidia. The anathema was expressed in two forms: by a declaration and by a demonstration.

First, the *declaration*. "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed [became] bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us" ([vv. 46, 47](#)). The Jews in Antioch of Pisidia had been given great spiritual privilege, for they were given the glorious message of the Gospel. But they did not want the Gospel. Rather, they opposed it. Hence, God will take away their privilege. They will get what they wanted, for He will leave them.

Reject God's blessings and He will take them away from you is the basic declaration here. It is a solemn and sobering truth. Today, we are losing spiritual privileges left and right because we have not given them proper honor. Governments are making more and more laws which limit religious freedoms in our land, and this we can blame in a large part upon the fact that we have not given due honor to these freedoms. Instead of worshipping on Sundays, we go off playing someplace. Instead of setting aside Sunday to hear the Word of God, we schedule something else to do. Such conduct predicts the loss of religious freedoms and privileges we have.

Second, the *demonstration*. "But they [Paul and Barnabas] shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium" ([v. 51](#)). This symbolic deed was commanded by Christ when He sent out His disciples ([Matthew 10:14](#), [Mark 6:11](#), and [Luke 9:5](#)). The act indicates "unwillingness to have the least communication or connection with the place [or people]" (J. A. Alexander). Today, many folk who go soft on evil would condemn Paul and Barnabas for such an act. Paul and Barnabas would be accused of being terribly unloving and unforgiving. But those who would condemn this action of Paul and Barnabas forget the judgment side of life. Furthermore, those

condemners are not in any position to accuse Paul and Barnabas for lacking love and forgiveness. Paul and Barnabas sacrificed more to spread the Gospel than any of those condemners will ever do, and they showed more love and forgiveness than any of those condemners have. But Paul and Barnabas will show the wrath of God against evil, too—something those condemners know nothing about, for they do not possess enough holiness to get upset about sin.

### 3. The Converts

The response to Paul's preaching was certainly not all negative. There was much positive in the response. Not all rejected the Gospel, but many accepted the Gospel message. Many were the critics in Antioch of Pisidia; but many were the converts, too.

Five things are said about the converts: they glorified God, they gained eternal life, they spread the Word of God, they rejoiced, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. What a contrast between what is said of them and what is said of the critics. But there will always be a great contrast between those who receive Christ and those who reject Him.

*They glorified God.* "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" ([v. 48](#)). Do not separate the glorifying from the believing. If you want to really glorify God, believe what God says in His Word. And by believe, we mean you do more than give mental assent to the Word; but you guide your behavior accordingly. Unbelief does not glorify God like faith does. The critics are not said to glorify God. They dishonored God ("blaspheming" [v. 45](#)). But faith "glorified" God and His Word.

*They gained eternal life.* "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" ([v. 48](#)). The greatest gain anyone can experience is to gain eternal life. The world, however, will not appreciate this fact; for they only measure gain in terms of material gain. But "what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" ([Mark 8:36](#)).

Eternal life refers to spending eternity in heaven in the presence of God. While eternal life is a contrast to the experience of unbelievers, it does not mean that unbelievers will be annihilated or made unconscious for eternity. All souls will exist in full consciousness for eternity. Eternal life refers to great blissfulness for eternity. The unbeliever will experience "everlasting punishment" ([Matthew 25:46](#)) in the

lake of fire. That is not life! That is the worst, most horrible existence anyone can ever experience. Though it is called the “second death” ([Revelation 21:8](#)), it certainly is not the end of consciousness.

“As many as were ordained to eternal life believed” is a phrase that many Arminians would like to skip over and on which many Calvinists would like to spend all their time. It is a simple statement made almost in passing by Luke; but though just a simple statement, it states a most important and undeniable truth, namely, God is running the show. Election and predestination cannot be eliminated from Scripture, as some would do; but neither is it the only doctrine in Scripture, as some seem to indicate by their messages. Election and predestination do not mean we are not to give invitations or speak earnestly and persuasively to people about receiving Christ. Election and predestination do not nullify the “whosoever” texts in Scripture. But neither do the “whosoever” texts nullify the election and predestination texts. Men do not have the mind to understand adequately how “whosoever” and “ordained to eternal life” can be combined. They seem like two opposites. But we do not have to understand it. We simply have to do what God says to do, namely, preach the Word of God to the souls of men and urge them to come to Christ.

*They spread the Word of God.* “And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region” ([v. 49](#)). This is the duty of believers, and the believers in Antioch of Pisidia did a good job of it.

This verse is a good place to note another excellent practice of Paul in evangelizing. At the beginning of this chapter, we noted that one of his wise practices was to go to the synagogue of a city to begin his proclaiming of the Gospel message in a city. Now we note another wise practice of Paul. He would go to strategic cities to preach the Gospel. Then the people of the city would take the Gospel into the various areas around the city. It was an effective use of manpower. Paul could reach many people in the city in quick order. To go into the “bush” to reach a few people here and there would not have resulted in the rapid spreading of the Gospel as it would by his going to strategic cities. In the cities where he visited, many would be visiting who would be from the regions around the city. They would hear the Gospel and then carry the Gospel to all these places. Thus all these places would be reached with the Gospel shortly after Paul came to the city. This would never have happened had Paul tried to go to each of these places himself. This does not negate the fact that God may call some to labor in the “bush” as missionaries. But the wisdom of proclaiming the Gospel in cities where such a ministry can touch the lives of people from a host of regions in the areas around the city, cannot be challenged. It is a wise practice.

*They rejoiced.* “The disciples were filled with joy” ([v. 52](#)). Nothing brings joy like salvation. The world has nothing to offer which can give the genuine joy in the heart of man as the Gospel gives. The critics were not rejoicing. But God’s people were. It is interesting to look at some other passages in Acts to also see this contrast of who is happy and who is not happy. [Acts 5:41](#), as an example, shows the contrast well: “They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.” The council was upset because of the Gospel, but the disciples had so much joy from the Gospel that they could rejoice in persecution. [Acts 12:14](#) is another example of the contrast: “She opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.” We smile at the maid’s actions here, but her gladness is representative of the great contrast between believers and unbelievers in that situation. The prison guards that were keeping Peter prisoner were unhappy because they had lost their prisoner which meant death to them, and it came to them shortly. Herod was unhappy because Peter was free. But the believers were happy. Unbelief may have its day; but when it is all said and done, there will be eternal rejoicing for the believers in heaven but eternal “weeping and gnashing of teeth” ([Matthew 8:12](#), [24:51](#), [25:30](#)) for the unbelievers in hell.

*They were filled with the Holy Spirit.* The disciples were not only filled with joy but also “with the Holy Ghost” ([v. 52](#)). We have spoken about this great blessing earlier in this chapter. It involved Divine ability to live and serve in the faith. It explains why a believer who could not overcome evil habits suddenly has the strength to stop them overnight. It explains why one who could not understand the Scripture at all suddenly has his eyes opened to see wonderful truths in the Word of God. It explains why some can serve in capacities they were heretofore unable to do. It explains why a wicked, sinful person suddenly has high and holy convictions and can discern between right and wrong as never before. When the “Holy” Spirit indwells us, it will help us to be holy in our thoughts, words, and deeds. It will cause us to earnestly oppose that which is unholy.

## VII. POLARIZATION IN ICONIUM

[ACTS 14:1–6](#)

THOUGH EXPELLED FROM Antioch of Pisidia, Paul and his fellow missionary Barnabas continued their missionary work by journeying some sixty miles east to Iconium, a large and wealthy city about 120 miles north of the Mediterranean Sea. Typical of Paul's practice of carrying the Gospel to strategic cities, "Iconium was a well-chosen place for missionary operations" (Peloubet). The name "Iconium" means "image." It is the same as "icon," a familiar word to those who use computers.

The effect of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium is summed up well in these words of verse four: "the multitude of the city was divided." Today, society often uses the term "polarization" to describe a dividing of people over some issue. Society especially likes to use the word in a derogatory sense when they are speaking about fundamental, Bible-believing Christians. If we stand strong on some moral position—such as being against abortion or homosexuality or for sex only after marriage—the liberals get upset and try to condemn us by saying we are "polarizing" society in propagating our views.

But the liberals' criticism does not condemn us, for preaching the truth always divides. Christ polarized society wherever He went. In fact, He said He would bring "division" ([Luke 12:51](#)) upon the earth. He is the great divider of men. He puts men in one of two groups—saved or lost. Men will especially be divided by Christ regarding their eternal destiny. Draw a line from the cross to the empty tomb and you have the dividing line of dividing lines of men. Speaking of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in preaching Christ in Iconium, Matthew Henry said, "Before they came the city was united, and now it was divided; for it is better that part of the city go to heaven than all to hell."

The world does not like the fact that Christians divide; they want all the world to stay in the world. But when Christians proclaim the truth, some will leave the camp of the world to follow the truth. That is the kind of division Christianity brings and ought to bring. Let the world scornfully call it "polarization" but the rescued will call it "salvation."

To study this text about the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium, which really divided the city, we will consider the ministry of God's servants ([Acts 14:1,3](#)) and the menacing of God's servants. ([Acts 14:2, 4–6](#)).

## A. THE MINISTRY OF GOD'S SERVANTS

Paul and Barnabas carried on an excellent ministry in Iconium. The excellence of

the ministry of Paul and Barnabas has already been seen in such places as Antioch of Syria, Salamis and Paphos on the island of Cyprus, and in Antioch of Pisidia. In examining their excellent ministry in Iconium, we will note the partnership of their ministry, the preaching in their ministry, the proof for their ministry, and the perseverance of their ministry.

## 1. The Partnership of Their Ministry

“And it came to pass in Iconium that they went both together into the synagogue” ([v. 1](#)). As we noted in our last chapter, going to the synagogue to start a ministry in the city was the frequent practice of Paul throughout his various missionary journeys. Iconium proved to be no exception as Paul and Barnabas headed for the synagogue to begin their ministry there.

While the phrase, “they went both together” seems to give only a simple matter-of-fact report of the two men going together to the synagogue service, yet the phrase also underscores the strong, noble partnership of two very dedicated believers in serving the Lord. John Mark had, in lack of dedication, quit the group some time earlier in Perga. But Paul and Barnabas stayed together to proclaim the Word of God. “They went *both* together” in spite of being shorthanded since Mark had left them, for they had a strong partnership in the work of God on this first missionary journey of Paul.

We read in the Old Testament of a similar partnership between Elijah and Elisha as they traveled together on the day Elijah was swept up into heaven by a whirlwind. In [Second Kings 2](#), Scripture repeatedly (a total of seven times) notes their partnership. “They went down to Bethel” ([v. 2](#)); “they came to Jericho” ([v. 4](#)); “they two went on” ([v. 6](#)); “they two stood by Jordan” ([v. 7](#)); “they two went over on dry ground” ([v. 8](#)); “they were gone over” ([v. 9](#)); and “they still went on” ([v. 11](#)). We need to see more of this dedicated partnership in many areas of life today. Especially do we need to see more of this in marriage and in the Lord’s work. There must be faithfulness by each partner in marriage if the marriage partnership is going to succeed, and there must be faithfulness by each member in the church in doing the Lord’s work if the church is going to produce much fruit for the honor and glory of God.

## 2. The Preaching in Their Ministry

From this Iconium passage in Scripture, there are at least four significant things noted about the preaching of Paul and Barnabas, the preaching that so divided the city. They are the power, boldness, message, and fidelity of their preaching.

*The power of their preaching.* “They . . . so spake, that a great multitude . . . believed” ([v. 1](#)) emphasizes the power of their preaching. Matthew Henry said, “There seems to have been something remarkable in the manner of the apostles’ preaching here, which contributed to their success.” That remarkable aspect of their preaching was that they spoke in power. But the power in their preaching was not in clever and persuasive rhetoric. Paul said, “My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power” ([1 Corinthians 2:4](#)). The power was that of the Holy Spirit, a power few are acquainted with in our modern age. Many churches, far from relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, rely on their promotional schemes to get multitudes in the church and down the aisle. Some gimmick, contest, or other carnal trick gets folks to church; then the ushers have clever little tricks they use to get the people down the aisle at invitation time. These churches boast of many decisions, but few are genuine. That, however, is not what went on at Iconium! The multitude of professions of faith there were genuine professions of faith, and it was all a direct result of the power of the Holy Spirit.

If we want this power (and we had better want it, for without it we will just be spinning our wheels going no where for God), we must do as Paul and Barnabas did, namely, preach the Word of God; for the Holy Spirit works in conjunction with the Word of God. Leave out the Word of God, “the sword of the Spirit” ([Ephesians 6:17](#)); and you will not see much working by the Holy Spirit. Take His sword away and you have disarmed Him. The de-emphasis on the Word of God and preaching time in our churches virtually removes the spiritual power from our churches.

We need to note here, lest many preachers become very discouraged at reading this, that this text does not mean that whenever you speak in the power of the Holy Spirit you will see multitudes getting saved. If multitudes are going to truly be saved through our preaching, we must, of course, preach the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit. But there are times when you can indeed preach in the power of the Spirit of God and see no converts! When Christ was upon earth, it was said of Him in Nazareth that Jesus “did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” ([Matthew 13:58](#)). If there was anyone who could “so speak” that multitudes would be saved, it was Jesus Christ. Yet, He did not have success in some areas because of strong unbelief. We should not be surprised if we experience the same. We live in a “Nazareth” age today, described by Paul in 2 Timothy as anything but an age of faith. The end times are characterized not by revival, but by apostasy and hardness of heart regarding the Gospel. However, let preachers continue to be diligent in living a godly life and in studying the Word of God so they can still preach well in



the power of the Holy Spirit. Let them not throw in the towel and quit or change the message in order to get numerical results when their faithful preaching does not product results like Paul and Barnabas got in Iconium. We must preach faithfully whether multitudes are converted or not. Paul was faithful in preaching the Word even though he did not always get good results. Likewise was Noah, Jeremiah, Amos, and other great men of God. We always need to “so speak” so that souls *can* be saved, but the best of sermons often fall on deaf ears and hard hearts. Our text does not nullify that fact.

*The boldness of their preaching.* “They speaking boldly in the Lord” ([v. 3](#)) emphasizes the boldness in the preaching of Paul and Barnabas. H. C. Hervey said, “It was the special prayer of the Church that God would ‘grant to his servants that they might speak the Word with all boldness’ [[Acts 4:29](#)], and in answer to that prayer they were enabled to speak ‘the Word of God with boldness’ [[Acts 4:31](#)].” And in the [Acts 4:31](#) text, we are informed that it was through the work of the Holy Spirit that they had boldness to speak. It was not something they worked up in themselves. “They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and [then] they spoke the word of God with boldness.”

Declaring the Word of God should never be done timidly. It should be done forcefully. This, of course, takes boldness, especially in a hostile situation such as Paul and Barnabas were in at Iconium. The flesh too often wilts at delivering the message of the Word of God forcefully and would often prefer to do it apologetically. But the Holy Spirit can give us the boldness to stand and preach earnestly the Divine Word of God.

*The message of their preaching.* The message Paul and Barnabas preached in Iconium is described here as simply “the word of his grace” ([v. 3](#)). But what an excellent way to describe the Gospel message. There is a significant threefold description of the Gospel in that phrase.

First, the Gospel *speaks of the Word*. It is the “word” of His grace. The Gospel message is rooted and grounded in the Word of God. Paul and Barnabas preached the Word. You will not preach much Gospel if you do not preach the Word. Second, the Gospel *speaks of Christ*. It is “his” grace. The antecedent of “his” in our text is “the Lord” which refers to Christ. Christ is the Savior of Whom the Gospel is all about. Third, the Gospel *speaks of grace*. It is the word of his “grace.” Salvation is not dependent upon our works but upon His grace. This leaves out boasting, as

Paul said in [Ephesians 2:9](#), but it does not leave out any soul in its offer. Grace says anyone can be saved.

Though the message is of grace, yet it really divided the people in Iconium. You would think such a great message would be received with much gratefulness by mankind. But to the contrary, such a message is often not received well at all. Scripture reports this fact even when Christ spoke. Early in His earthly ministry in the synagogue in Nazareth, His message was described as “gracious words” ([Luke 4:22](#)). But those “gracious words” caused many to be “filled with wrath” ([Luke 4:28](#)). Let preachers remember this fact so they can better understand opposition to their ministry. Sometimes when people flare up in church and go after the preacher, the preacher wonders what terrible thing he has done or said to bring on such a strong attack. But he does not have to do or say anything terrible. All he has to do is preach the blessed Gospel of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it will stir up the enemy, for this message is a great assault on the devil’s work.

*The fidelity of their preaching.* Paul and Barnabas preached the same message wherever they went. Unlike politicians who have a different tune for every audience, these men were men of fidelity and showed it by faithfully proclaiming the same Gospel and the same Savior everywhere they went even though it divided mankind. Many would have changed their message to try to keep from upsetting and dividing the people. But Paul and Barnabas would not change the message. Changing it would cease to make it of value. Let us emulate their fidelity concerning our preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

### **3. The Proof for Their Ministry**

The “Lord . . . gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands” ([v. 3](#)). God wants His work to evidence much validity. Unlike religious frauds, God has nothing to hide and will provide much proof to substantiate the genuineness of His work. As an example, God saw to it that the resurrection of Christ was accompanied by an abundance of proof. So “He showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs” ([Acts 1:3](#)). In like manner, God wanted the ministry—particularly the message part—of Paul and Barnabas to be accompanied by good proofs that it was truly of God. When a message divides the people as it did in Iconium, the critics want people to conclude that the message is not valid and is not of God. But the message was of God. The division came about because of unbelief in the message, not because the message was not truly God’s

message.

To help validate the message which Paul and Barnabas preached, God “granted” Paul and Barnabas the ability to work signs and wonders in Iconium. The miracles which Paul and Barnabas worked were, therefore, not to entertain but to enlighten. They were not performed in order to attract people but to affirm the Divine message of the Gospel. Yes, if some of the miracles were healings, it would also alleviate suffering as it did when Christ healed. But the main reason for these signs and wonders here in Iconium was to confirm that the message which Paul and Barnabas preached—the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ—was indeed God’s message.

To have good proof of their ministry would show that Paul and Barnabas were a distinct contrast to the many frauds running around the country at that time making out they were somebody when they were not. We noted when Paul and Barnabas were on the island of Cyprus that one of these frauds, Bar-jesus, was doing this. But frauds do not have good proof of their claims, and they cannot stand to be examined very closely or their fraudulent character will be quickly exposed. However, those called of God have a ministry that is far different. It has plenty of evidence to show its validity, and it can be thoroughly examined without any fear of finding it a fraud. Today, unlike in Paul’s day, we do not need miracles to give validity to the message we preach; for we have the written Word of the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament, which can be substantially proven without the need of signs and wonders.

We have an encouraging principle here; namely, God always validates His work. If you are called of God, ample proof will be evident concerning your calling so that, unless you are disobedient and backslidden, your calling will be evident to others. Decisions we make regarding the will of God will also be confirmed in evident ways. Miracles are not necessary in these confirmations, for providence and enabling skills will be most sufficient to confirm the will of God.

#### **4. The Perseverance of Their Ministry.**

A “long time, therefore, abode they speaking boldly in the Lord” ([v.3](#)). This abiding a long time in Iconium indicated that Paul and Barnabas had a lot of dedication. This is something we have continually observed of these two men on this missionary journey. They would keep going no matter what. In Perga, John Mark quit. But Paul and Barnabas kept going on in their missionary journey even though they were short-handed and their trip from Perga took them through some very rugged roads. In Antioch of Pisidia, they were attacked verbally and then “expelled” ([Acts 13:50](#))

from the city. Yet, they kept going on in their work and traveled some sixty miles to Iconium. Now in Iconium, in spite of the fact that “the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren” ([v. 2](#)), they still hung in there preaching the Word and did so for a long time. They not only continued to preach the Gospel in spite of the opposition, but the “therefore” says they also continued preaching the Gospel because of it. That is the emphasis of our text. With the enemy evilly affecting the minds of the people, it was important that Paul and Barnabas continue on as long as possible in order to counter the work of the enemy. This they did in spite of putting themselves in considerable peril. Finally, of course, things got so bad they had to leave. But the fact that they stayed on so long under those circumstances reveals what great dedication they had in their work.

When we observe the service of modern-day Christians, few have the dedication to carry on like Paul and Barnabas. At the first sign of fatigue, difficulty, danger, or criticism, most professing Christians want discharged from God’s army. Some saints have so little stamina they cannot stand for a sermon to go over twenty minutes. Few saints have the dedication to take time out of each day to read a good portion of Scripture. Somehow or other they can spend a “long time” in the newspaper and a “long time” watching TV; but when it comes to spiritual things, they have no acquaintance with a “long time” in commitment. No wonder they never grow much in the faith and our churches are so anemic.

## **B. THE MENACING OF GOD’S SERVANTS**

As we have noted above, Paul and Barnabas experienced some rugged opposition in Iconium. We will look at it in more detail here. Experiencing opposition to his ministry will be the habitual experience of Apostle Paul as we follow him through the book of Acts. As Paul said in one of his epistles, “A great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries” ([1 Corinthians 16:9](#)). Anyone who gets down to business for God will stir up a hornets’ nest of opposition. He will divide the camp in two. It will be friends of God on one side and the enemies of God on the other side.

In focusing in detail on the enemy of God in Iconium, we will examine the prejudice of the enemy, the polluting by the enemy, the plotting by the enemy, and the preservation from the enemy.

## 1. The Prejudice of the Enemy

A prejudiced person is one who forms judgment regardless of the facts. So it was with the enemy in Iconium. Though Paul and Barnabas gave signs and wonders to substantiate their ministry ([v. 3](#)), the enemy paid no attention but got even more hostile in their opposition to the extent they wanted to stone the missionaries ([v. 5](#)). The enemy of God's servants and God's work will not be influenced by facts. They have made up their minds without considering evidence and will not open the case to consider any new evidence because their heart is filled with hatred for God.

We can apply this truth about the prejudice of the enemy of God to many things. As an example, Divine creation of the universe is not just a Scriptural record, it is that which has the overwhelming best evidence of any explanation for creation. But unbelievers reject it anyway and instead embrace evolution with tenacity, though evolution is without fact one. Atheism is the same way. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork" ([Psalm 19:1](#)), but the atheist is intentionally blind to the tremendous evidence creation continually gives of God's existence. Church dissidents also are this way, for they can be shown plain and forceful facts, yet they will not bend their stubborn wills but will keep attacking proposed church programs, the pastor, and other church leaders. Pharaoh of Moses' day is another example of this prejudice. He saw a repeated and great demonstration of God's power that ought to have brought him quickly to his knees and caused him to let Israel go and with his blessings. But he refused to see. He shut his eyes to the truth just like multitudes all around us shut their eyes to the fact that God is dealing with us as a nation when we experience devastating disaster after devastating disaster in our land. It is a terrible thing when man persists in hardening his heart against Divine truth, but many have done it, and they will suffer for all eternity because of it.

## 2. The Polluting by the Enemy

"But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren" ([v. 2](#)). The words "made" and "evil affected" are translated from one Greek word which means "to embitter, to exasperate" (A. T. -Robertson). By telling untruths regarding Paul and Barnabas and their message and converts, the enemy in Iconium got the people embittered at and exasperated with Paul and Barnabas and the converts. "They soured and embittered their spirits against both the converters and the converted" (Matthew Henry).

The enemy of God is ever polluting the minds of the people. Hollywood pollutes

the minds morally, schools pollute the minds philosophically, and apostate churches pollute minds theologically. Church dissidents pollute the minds of fellow church members with lies. A pollution and a very subtle one, going on in Christian circles today is that done by so-called Christian psychologists. The philosophies they teach are often subtly sinful and unscriptural, yet they pass as wise counsel from professional Christian counselors.

All of this pollution turns people against God, His Word, His work, His people, and His servants. It causes men to attack that which is good and support that which is evil. It causes men to believe the lie and spit out the truth. It causes the devil to be honored and God to be dishonored. It causes many people to go to hell instead of heaven. Oh, beware of the polluting of the enemy of God.

### **3. The Plotting by the Enemy**

“When there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, They were ware [aware] of it, and fled” ([vv. 5, 6](#)). “When there was an assault” needs to be understood in the future tense, not present or past tense. It was still in the plotting stage. The assault could not have already been made or the statement, “they were ware [aware] of it and fled,” would make no sense. What we have here is a vicious plot by the enemy of God’s work to slay Paul and Barnabas.

This vicious plot followed verbal assault. This is generally the pattern of the enemy of God’s servants. First, the enemy gets to talking and gets others talking in derogatory ways. Once the words get really heated up and have conditioned the minds of the people for action, the enemy moves in with a plan for cruel action. Here it was to stone Paul and Barnabas.

Again we learn the enemy is serious about stopping God’s work. The forces of evil are not like so many Christians who simply play church or go through the motions. Evil is energetic, aggressive, and goes all-out to accomplish its goal. If Christians did that, the church would quickly be doing a lot more than it is. But sad to say, most church members in our churches are easy pushovers for the enemy. They offer hardly any opposition at all. Church dissidents, as an example, can cause all sorts of damage; but few in the church will vote to take any substantial action against them. So the church dissidents keep doing their evil and cripple the church and make it very difficult for the servants of God to get anything done.

### **4. The Preservation From the Enemy**

“They were ware [aware] of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia” (v. 6). Preservation involves two things here. First, it involves information. Second, it involves application. Paul and Barnabas learned about the plot, and then they applied the information they had learned about the plot to their situation, and this resulted in their fleeing the area. We will look more in detail at these two aspects of their preservation.

*Information.* In Damascus, men plotted to kill Paul; but “their laying await was known of [by] Saul [Paul]” (Acts 9:24) and he escaped. In Jerusalem, “they went about to slay him” (Acts 9:29); but God warned him to “Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem” (Acts 22:18). Now again men plot to destroy his life and also the life of Barnabas; but they were aware of it, and fled the area. The enemy had been opposing Paul verbally for some time. Now the opposition is going for blood, but Paul and Barnabas are informed in time to escape.

That Paul and Barnabas were aware of the plotting shows how wonderfully God takes care of His servants. We noted this earlier in Paul’s life regarding the Damascus and Jerusalem plots to kill him, but it is worthy to note again. Veteran pastors will all testify that no matter how the enemy plots, somehow, through one means or another, the plotting becomes known to God’s servant so he can take proper action.

*Application.* It is one thing to be informed; it is another thing to act upon the information. Illumination will do us no good if we do not take action upon what we have learned. When God gives us information, we had better be diligent in the application of that information to our lives; or the information will do us no good.

The action Paul and Barnabas took was to flee Iconium. This may appear as weakness to some, but it was not weakness. It was wisdom. They had proven their mettle by abiding a “long time” even though hostilities were constant. But now the hostilities are turning violent, and it is time to leave. At times, “The hour comes when continuance in peril is not faithfulness, but foolhardiness; not commendable martyr-zeal, but censurable indiscretion” (W. Clarkson). Fleeing can be weakness, but it also can be wisdom. It was certainly wisdom here.

One of the considerations which determines whether one should leave an area or stay in an area when opposition is present is to ascertain if one’s ministry can continue on in the area in view of the opposition. Obviously, Paul and Barnabas had come to that point where they no longer could continue ministering in Iconium.

Hence, they needed to leave just as Christ retired from some threatening situations ([Matthew 12:14,15](#)). When opposition first broke out in Iconium it was only verbal; and though provoking, it did not prevent Paul and Barnabas from conducting a fruitful ministry in the city. But with the plot, things got to the point where to try to keep going in the area would be fruitless and would, in fact, jeopardize the lives of new Christians in the area also.

When to leave and when not to leave is often a difficult question for pastors to answer when opposition arises. A good pastor does not want to be a quitter just because a bit of opposition has risen its head to provoke. But when the opposition in the church becomes so great that the pastor can no longer carry on an effective ministry to either the church or the community, it is time to move on. Moving on is not an admission of fault, as the opposition will falsely say is the case. But it is wisdom which has concluded that even though the pastor is right, he no longer can minister in the area; and he will, therefore, look to the Lord for other open doors. Be confident God does lead in these situations—both regarding leaving and going elsewhere or in staying put.

## VIII. PROBLEMS IN LYSTRA

### [Acts 14:6–20](#)

WHEREVER THE SERVANT of God ministers, there will be problems. The world we live in is full of sin, and that guarantees problems. Preachers looking for a church without problems are looking for a church that does not exist. God did not send His Son nor any of His servants to a problem-free ministry but to a problem-solving ministry. Until we accept this fact, we will not serve the Lord very well.

In his first missionary journey, Paul continually ran into problems. He met opposition in the island of Cyprus, had one of his group quit in Perga, had to travel over most difficult and dangerous roads to get to the various cities where he proclaimed the Gospel, was expelled from Antioch, was plotted against in Iconium, and now in Lystra he runs into more problems.

In this chapter we will look at the three main problems which Scripture reports Paul experienced in Lystra. They are the health problem ([vv. 6–10](#)), the honor problem ([vv. 11–18](#)), and the harassment problem ([vv. 19, 20](#)).



## A. THE HEALTH PROBLEM

After leaving Iconium, Paul and Barnabas traveled about twenty-five miles south to the city of Lystra. Unlike Iconium and Antioch and most other cities visited by Paul in this first missionary journey, there were not many Jews in Lystra. This meant there was no synagogue in the city. Hence, Paul “preached the gospel” ([v. 7](#)) in the streets instead of going to the synagogue to begin his ministry to the city. In the group listening to Paul preach one day “sat a certain man . . . impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother’s womb, who never had walked” ([v. 8](#)). This cripple was the health problem that confronted Paul in Lystra. To study the health problem, we will note the condition, concern, and curing of the cripple.

### 1. The Condition of the Cripple

The cripple was a pathetic case. This is especially seen in two things Scripture says about his crippling condition: the disability in the crippling and the duration of the crippling. Both of these aspects of the crippling not only show the pathetic case before Paul but also, in a symbolic way, show the condition of every lost soul.

*Disability.* Scripture says the man with the health problem was “impotent” in his feet. The word “impotent” in our text is translated from the Greek word which means “impossible.” This man was not partially lame. He was not one who could hobble around some as a number of crippled people can. This man could not walk at all. A walker or a cane would not help him one bit. Anywhere he went, he had to be carried; for it was simply “impossible” for him to walk.

The physical condition of this man in Lystra certainly pictures the condition of the unsaved soul. Spiritually the unsaved cannot walk. God has commanded man to “walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you” ([Deuteronomy 5:33](#)). But the unsaved soul cannot do this. It is “impossible” for him to walk in God’s ways. As Paul said in [Romans 5:6](#), the unsaved soul is “without strength” to walk as God commands. Therefore, he needs help outside of himself to be able to walk. That help is Jesus Christ. He can, through salvation, make a person able to walk well in God’s ways. But leave out Jesus Christ and substitute a cane or walker theology of human works, and you will never get the spiritual cripple walking for God! The soul without Christ is as impotent in regards to spiritual life as this man’s legs were impotent in regards to walking.

*Duration.* The crippling condition had existed the entire life of this man. He “never had walked”; he was “a cripple from his mother’s womb.” The older he got, the more the crippling problem became evident. As a young babe, the crippling condition may have been suspected; but it would not be nearly as noticeable as it was a few years later and during the rest of his life. The same is true spiritually for mankind. All men are born spiritual cripples. As the Psalmist says, “Behold, I was shaped in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” ([Psalm 51:5](#)). The older a person becomes, the more it shows. In fact, it does not take long for a new born child to evidence that he was born a sinner. “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” ([Genesis 8:21](#)). Of course, there are many who do not like the idea that we are born sinners. And the so-called experts in child behavior certainly do not speak of a child being born a sinner when they try to deal with the child’s behavior problems—which is why they do not do well in dealing with children’s behavior problems. But every soul is born a sinner and will show it by their sinful behavior.

## **2. The Concern of the Cripple**

“The same heard Paul speak” ([v. 9](#)). The cripple was one of those who heard Paul preach the Gospel. Unlike many of Paul’s listeners, the cripple was very concerned about what Paul was saying. Hence, the attention he gave to Paul’s preaching was something more than mere curiosity. He listened intently enough to gain “faith to be healed” (*Ibid.*).

Listening attentively and respectfully to the Word of God being preached does indeed bring benefits. The cripple is proof of that fact. The greatest benefits are spiritual, of course; but the cripple discovered that giving due respect and attention to the preaching of the Word also brings benefits in other areas of one’s life. In the cripple’s case, it brought benefits in the physical realm of his life. It resulted in his being healed of his crippled condition. Had he not been concerned enough about spiritual matters to give good attention to the preaching of the Word, however, he would have been a cripple all of his life.

We have many concerns in our lives. But one concern that needs to be above all concerns is our concern about spiritual matters. The cripple had many concerns because of the fact that he was crippled. But he did not let those concerns keep him from giving due attention to the preaching of the Word. Folk who let the concerns of their life keep them from attending to spiritual matters will discover that their concerns will become bigger burdens, not smaller. But when you “seek . . . first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness [then] . . . all these things shall be added

unto you” ([Matthew 6:33](#)). There is nothing necessarily wrong in pursuing the many concerns that folk have in life. The problem is that we let these concerns be the ones that occupy us so much that we do not have time to give attention to our spiritual concerns. Men get so busy in business they neglect hearing the preaching of the Word. Others are so busy with family affairs, they seldom show up in church to hear the Word preached. Still others become so interested in their daily needs that they neglect to give due attention to their spiritual needs. But Jesus told us in the [Matthew 6:33](#) text that we need to give our first attention to spiritual things; and when we do, our other concerns will be taken care of much better. This was certainly true with the cripple in Lystra.

### 3. The Curing of the Cripple

Through the ministry of Paul, this cripple of Lystra had the wonderful experience of being healed. We note six important features about this dramatic and blessed curing of the cripple. They are the contemplation for the curing, the confidence for the curing, the command for the curing, the conspicuousness of the curing, the completeness of the curing, and the conduct after the curing.

*The contemplation for the curing.* The statement “Paul . . . steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed” ([v. 9](#)) speaks of the contemplation for the curing. Most commentaries conclude that this statement indicates Paul had supernatural ability to discern that the cripple had faith. We would not argue against this conclusion. Paul obviously did have some special God-given discernment abilities which others do not have. But discerning that another person has faith is not necessarily limited to some special endowment of God, for faith shows in obvious ways. The word translated “perceiving” in [verse 9](#) is also translated “observed” or “saw” in other Scripture. The cripple was evidencing his faith in some way or ways as Paul preached. When Paul contemplated the cripple, he observed it; he saw it plainly.

People evidence their faith in many ways. Faith shows in our conduct, in our conversation, in our clothes, in our compassion (where it is and where it isn’t), in our convictions, and in our creed. Even the world can tell if a person is a believer or not because faith shows in obvious ways. If it doesn’t show, we are justified in concluding the person does not have faith. Therefore, we need to stop calling people saved whose faith does not show. Oftentimes politicians and professional athletes and other famous people are said to be Christians. We put little stock in

most statements of that kind, however; for these famous folk give scant evidence of being saved but much evidence of not being saved. Calling things Christian that are not Christian is a bad practice. It only promotes evil under the guise of good.

*The confidence for the curing.* “He had faith to be healed” ([v. 9](#)). The cripple believed what Paul preached. Paul preached the “gospel” ([v. 7](#)); and this man saw that if Christ had the power to save the corrupt, He also had power to heal the cripple. The cripple was confident that he could be healed.

The cripple’s faith is a rebuke to many of us who believe Christ can save the soul but who do not seem to have much faith to believe that Christ can help us in lesser areas of our lives, too. We seem to be able to believe Christ can solve the biggest of all problems—the sin problem, but we do not seem to be able to believe Christ can solve much smaller problems—our everyday trials. God help us to be consistent in our faith, to apply our faith to every facet of our life. Not to do so is to limit God’s power which dishonors Him.

We would mention hear that while the cripple was healed, it does not mean that if one has faith to be healed, God will always heal the one who has such faith. Our faith in God’s power must not be separated from our faith in God’s will. God has the power to do many things which He does not will to do. That does not nullify our faith, but it tests our faith to see if it will be in submission to His will. Sometimes the greatest test of faith isn’t in trusting God to do some great work but in trusting God when He does not do the great work we want Him to do. We all need to have faith in God’s power, but we all also need to have faith in God’s will. When He does not do what we want or expect, we must have faith to believe that His will is best. Paul left Trophimus at Miletus sick ([2 Timothy 4:20](#)); and he, himself, did not have the “thorn in the flesh” removed as he had repeatedly requested ([2 Corinthians 12:7,8](#)). But that does not mean there was a lack of faith in these cases. It simply means that it was not God’s will to heal in these situations. Faith can be demonstrated in these cases by humbly accepting God’s will.

*The command for the curing.* Under the obvious direction of God, Paul said to the cripple, “Stand upright on thy feet” ([v. 10](#)). To the world this sounds like a very stupid command. After all, the man had never walked. He was “impotent in his feet” ([v. 8](#)) which meant it was impossible for him to stand, let alone walk as he was about to do. But the world never understands that when God commands, He also enables. The faith of this man was evidenced in that he did not question the command or

complain about the command. As soon as the command was given, he obeyed. He went about doing what he was told to do; and lo and behold, he could do it!

God tells us to do many things today which we do not do because we claim we cannot do them. God tells us to be honest, yet the salesman says it is impossible to be honest and still make sales. God tells us to give of our substance to His work, yet the self-centered person says he cannot do it because his expenses are too great. God tells us to live pure lives, yet folk complain that this will take all the pleasure out of living. God tells us to meditate on the Scriptures, yet many argue that they are so busy with life's activities that they just do not have time to get into the Word as they ought. On and on it goes. Excuses after excuses. But all the excuses are vain. The cripple offered no excuses. He simply obeyed the command and discovered that when he did, the ability to do as commanded was present. All of this is a great encouragement to the dedicated and a great rebuke to the excuse makers.

*The conspicuousness of the curing.* "Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked" ([v. 10](#)). This healing incident in Lystra was not like the typical healing campaigns of our day in which phoniness and lack of evidence abound. Everything here was done in a way that all could plainly see the power of God. Paul's command was "loud" so all could hear and be alert to what was about to happen. And the cripple's leaping and walking were such obvious actions that no one had any trouble affirming the healing miracle. As another has said, "The circumstances in which the miracles of the gospel were performed leave no room for suspecting that they were dexterous impositions on the credulity of mankind. They were not done in a corner, but in the chief places of concourse. The juggling tricks of heathenism need only to be strictly examined to be rejected with contempt; whereas the miracles of Christianity are displays of omnipotent power, which will be the more admired the more closely they are considered" (J. Dick).

We have already touched on the subject of evidence in this case when we noted that the cripple's faith was evident enough to be observed by Paul. Here again we have the same subject emphasized. We see the truth that if a work is of God, we will not have to get a magnifying glass to discover the fact. Be it the salvation of a soul or be it some other work of God, the evidence will be there for all to see. As we noted above, some tell you they are saved; but they give no evidence of it in their life. They do not walk in the ways of God. Spiritually, they, as did the cripple physically before he was healed, can only sit, not stand and walk. And they have to be carried by others wherever they go. Our churches are filled with this kind who profess to be Christians but who are not truly saved.

Also, as we have noted previously in this chapter, God's work so abounds with evidence that unbelief has no excuse for rejecting the truth. The Word of God abounds with great evidence, and the claims of Jesus Christ were accompanied by overwhelming evidence. Also, God's judgments upon us today are ever so plain. But in spite of all the plain-to-see leaping and walking of evidence, men still will not believe. Failure to believe, therefore, does not mean the evidence is lacking but that the will to believe is lacking. The reason men do not believe is that they do not want to believe. They may disguise it as lack of evidence. But the disguise only shows how foolish and how willfully rebellious unbelief is.

*The completeness of the curing.* "And he leaped and walked" (v. 10). The healing of the cripple was not partial healing. It was not a curing that enabled the man to stand up but not walk. It was not something that only helped one leg but not both of them. It was not a healing that permitted the man to walk but with a limp or only with the aid of a cane or walker. It was not a remedy that gave him only semi-normal strength. No, this healing was complete—the man could leap and walk.

The completeness of this curing is a good illustration of the complete job Christ does in saving the soul. Christ is sufficient for man's salvation. He will do all the saving a person needs. Many are not so sure, however. Some want to add church membership or baptism or purgatory or confirmation or good deeds or other things to the requirements for salvation. But all these things are totally unnecessary to aid in the salvation of the soul. When this cripple leaped and walked, he did not need a wheel chair, a cane, or crutches to help him do it or to continue it. His cure was absolutely complete without all those aids. And when you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are as saved as you will ever need to be!

*The conduct after the curing.* "And he leaped and walked" (v. 10). Vincent informs us that "leaped" in the Greek is in "the aorist tense, indicating a *single* act, while the imperfect [tense], *walked*, denotes *continuous* action." Leaping is sensational, dramatic, and exciting. Walking is just plain ordinary. Yet, it was in the continuous walking that the cripple best demonstrated the quality of his healing. Had he leaped a few times and startled the people and then been unable to walk, the healing would have been very disappointing and also very impractical. The continuous walking part was the most needed part to make the miracle a great miracle.

This truth is most applicable in regards to salvation. Some souls may have a dramatic conversion in a church service or in some other occasion. But that which

really attests to the genuineness of their salvation is their daily walk. The world is ever pointing to new Christians and saying, “It won’t last.” But when the new believer continues to walk day by day in a godly way, it will do more to demonstrate genuineness of faith than any dramatic performance at church or at some other occasion. Don’t feel you have to continually be sensational, ever attracting a lot of attention, or continually be doing the unusual in order to demonstrate your faith. Just live your faith in your ordinary round of life day after day, and you will demonstrate your faith in a real qualitative way.

## B. THE HONOR PROBLEM

The healing of the cripple produced the honor problem for Paul and Barnabas. The people’s response to the healing was to deify these two missionaries. This was not the usual problem Paul and Barnabas faced in their missionary travels. The usual problem was being dishonored by the people, not honored.

To examine this problem, we will look at the declaring of the honor and the denouncing of the honor.

### 1. The Declaring of the Honor

In two ways the people of Lystra declared the honor of deification they gave Paul and Barnabas as a result of the healing of the cripple. These two ways were the saying of the people and the sacrifice of the priest.

*The saying of the people.* “And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker” ([vv. 11, 12](#)). The healing of the cripple caused the people of Lystra to conclude that Paul and Barnabas were incarnations of two of their gods. In the city was a temple of the god Jupiter, so it was easy for them to think that Jupiter had shown up in the form of a man. That Mercury was the other incarnation was also easy for them to conclude—especially for two reasons. First, Mercury was depicted in mythology as the companion of Jupiter; and Paul was Barnabas’ companion. Second, Mercury was considered the messenger and spokesman of the two; and Paul was the main speaker of the two.

In the Greek text, the names for these two gods are Zeus and Hermes. Of special interest to preachers is the fact that we get the word “hermeneutic” from the word “Hermes.” For those not acquainted with the word, hermeneutics is the science of interpretation; and the word is generally used in reference to the work of interpreting Scripture. Calling Paul “Hermes,” as the people did, was a more fitting name for Paul than they realized.

We need to note here that the idea of an incarnation of deity was not unknown to folk in those days. Howson said, “It was the common belief among the ancients that the gods occasionally visited the earth in the form of men.” This attitude of the people would mean that the incarnation of Christ was not an arrangement people would reject as impossible or as some strange idea. They would be prepared in their minds for accepting this great truth about Jesus Christ.

The folk of Lystra certainly had poor spiritual discernment as to the source of their blessings. But our age cannot boast of doing any better. In fact, our age is even worse. At least the folk in Lystra attributed the blessing to that which they thought was divine. Our age wants to leave out God entirely. We attribute blessings to luck or skill or some other non-God reasons. With all our boasted education, we aren’t any better than the pagans of ages past. But leave out God in your thinking, and you do not make progress in education where it counts the most.

*The sacrifice of the priest.* “Then the priest of Jupiter, whose temple was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people” ([v. 13](#)). Not only did the sayings of the people declare the deification honor for Paul and Barnabas, but so did the actions of the priest of the temple of Jupiter. The priest of the temple of Jupiter felt it was incumbent upon him to offer a sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas. Quickly some oxen were readied for the sacrifice and garlands were brought along either to decorate the sacrifice, as was often done, or to decorate the two men being honored.

While what the priest was doing was wrong, yet how his actions rebuke those of us who know the truth. When God greatly blesses us, we seldom respond by making a great sacrifice to Him. If God prospers us materially, we greedily look at it all in terms of selfish interest and wants—seldom thinking about sacrificing some of it to God. The priest recognized that sacrifice and honoring of God go hand in hand. But most people, and this includes many professing Christians, do not honor God by sacrifices. They sacrifice for self but not for the Almighty.



## 2. The Denouncing of the Honor

When Paul and Barnabas “heard” ([v. 14](#)) what was going on, they immediately denounced it. When the deification idea began, Paul and Barnabas were obviously not immediately aware of it; or they would have denounced it sooner. One probable reason for this unawareness was that the people of Lystra spoke in “the speech of Lycaonia” ([v. 11](#)) about Paul and Barnabas being Jupiter and Mercury. The people spoke and understood Greek which Paul spoke when preaching to them; but during the excitement after the miracle, they spoke in their native tongue which is not an unusual practice of bilinguals when they get excited.

In studying this denouncing of the deification honor, we will note the wisdom in the denouncing and the words in the denouncing.

*The wisdom in the denouncing.* Paul and Barnabas were very wise to denounce this deification of themselves by the folk of Lystra. Such an honor is blasphemy to God and ruinous for man. Wise men will not give one second to any unsanctified honor (especially deification) that comes their way. They will immediately and vigorously oppose all such honors. This is exactly what Paul and Barnabas did. When they heard of the honor, “they rent [tore] their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out” ([v. 14](#)) their protest of this deification.

Honor can be as great a hindrance to our serving God as dishonor. The praise of men can hurt us as much as the persecution from men. In fact, honor from men can often hurt us even worse than harm from man. G. Campbell Morgan speaks of this peril when he said in reference to our text, “The gravest peril threatening these men was that which came to them in the hour when men suggested that they should worship them. That is the supreme peril of the Christian worker.” But as perilous as honor can be, it is very hard for the flesh to see the peril in honor as easily as they see it in harm when it comes to serving the Lord and remaining true to Him. Honor looks so attractive, and it even looks helpful. The thinking of the flesh would reason that if Paul and Barnabas would accept this honor, think of the command they could have over the people. Yes, but what could they do with this command? They certainly could not turn men to the truth. So it is with so many honors that are given by men today. They will only cause compromise and corruption for the servant of God if he accepts them. Hence, if we would serve God faithfully, we must shun all honor that is contrary to truth and to His honor. The honor of men can put velvet on our tongues and water down our message. Thus, the truth is gone from our preaching; and God is no longer properly honored.

*The words in the denouncing.* To stop the deification, Paul and Barnabas had to do some fast and earnest speaking. With urgency, they presented their case against the deification. To examine what they said, we divide their short but pungent message into five parts: the passions of Paul and Barnabas, the preaching of Paul and Barnabas, the power of God, the patience of God, and the proof of God.

First, the *passions* of Paul and Barnabas. “Why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you” ([v. 15](#)). Paul and Barnabas begin their verbal denunciation of the deification of themselves by earnestly emphasizing that they were but human beings. They wanted no misunderstanding regarding that fact. How this noble attitude and action contrasts with one of the Herods of that time when he made a great speech in Caesarea. When making the speech, he, to exalt himself, was arrayed in “royal apparel” ([Acts 12:21](#)), a gown described as intertwined with silver threads giving it a shimmering, shiny, and sensational appearance in the sun when he spoke in the outdoor amphitheater in Caesarea. The reaction of the people to Herod’s performance in Caesarea was similar to the reaction of the people in Lystra to the miracle performed by Paul and Barnabas; for “the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of man” ([Acts 12:22](#)). Unlike Paul and Barnabas, however, Herod did not denounce that praise. Like many rulers in every age, deification was something they sought and enjoyed. But “immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost” ([Acts 12:23](#)). Woe be he who seeks and encourages honors he does not merit and which belong to God.

Second, the *preaching* of Paul and Barnabas. “We . . . preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God” ([v. 15](#)). This argument against the deification honors says that if Paul and Barnabas accept the deification honors, they will be contradicting the very thing they had been preaching to those in Lystra. In their preaching they had condemned the pagan idols, such as Jupiter and Mercury, and pointed men to the living God. Paul and Barnabas had rightly called the pagan idols “vanities,” a word that means worthless and profitless. Hence, to accept the deification honor would simply have cancelled out their message.

Those deifying Paul and Barnabas had not listened well to their preaching obviously. But every preacher will find many in his audience like this. Shortly after a sermon they will propose some program or insist on doing something that flies right in the face of what the sermon said. It is a test for the preacher when this happens. Is he going to be consistent? Is he going to practice out of the pulpit what he preaches in the pulpit? So many preachers fail in this. They preach nice things in the pulpit, but once out of the pulpit they do not practice it at all. Paul and Barnabas were a different sort, however.

Paul's preaching at Lystra about turning from idols to the living God was the same preaching he did in Thessalonica. We learn this from his first letter to the Thessalonians in which he wrote, "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" ([1 Thessalonians 1:9](#)). Paul's message did not vary. He faithfully proclaimed the truth wherever he went.

Third, the *power* of God. "God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them" ([v. 15](#)). The God that Paul and Barnabas tell the people of Lystra to worship is not Jupiter or Mercury, but the One who had the tremendous power to create the universe. Creation certainly demonstrates and honors God's power. A proper view of God eliminates any ideas of evolution! Those who embrace evolution may have many degrees behind their name and have high positions in prestigious schools and other institutions, but their understanding of God is as pagan as the uneducated heathen.

Fourth, the *patience* of God. "Who in times past suffered [allowed] all nations to walk in their own ways" ([v. 16](#)). One cannot speak of the true God without soon speaking of His matchless grace, which is what God's patience is all about. Paul and Barnabas remind those of Lystra, as people need to be reminded today, that if men have not yet been cut down for their evil conduct, it does not mean God is weak or that He condones the evil. God's patience is simply His grace giving men time to repent. Hence, though the people of Lystra were worshiping false gods, they were not cut down; but God in grace continued to give them life so they had opportunity to repent.

Fifth, the *proof* of God. Paul said, God "left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" ([v. 17](#)). Again Scripture emphasizes the fact that man has no excuse for unbelief and for rejecting the true God. We noted earlier in this chapter that God gives plenty of proof to man to produce faith. Lack of faith is not a result of lack of evidence. Here Paul and Barnabas show us that the goodness of God in providing rain, fruitful seasons, etc. are evidences which should cause us to worship Him. Blessings should promote worship and service. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul spoke of this truth when he said, "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" ([Romans 2:4](#)). But how often people pervert the goodness of God. When men prosper they frequently turn away from God instead of to Him. Prosperity causes more people to miss church than poverty.

## C. THE HARASSMENT PROBLEM

The third problem Paul and Barnabas faced in Lystra was a problem they had faced before in both Iconium and Antioch. It was the problem of being harassed by the enemies of the Gospel. We will examine the character of the harassment and the conquest over the harassment.

### 1. The Character of the Harassment

Six things can be noted about the character of the harassment of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra. They are the earnestness, timeliness, persuasiveness, falseness, viciousness, and lawlessness of the harassment.

*Earnestness.* “And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium” ([v. 19](#)). The ministry of the Gospel had greatly upset the unbelieving Jews in Antioch and Iconium. As a result, Paul and Barnabas were “expelled” ([Acts 13:50](#)) from Antioch and forced to leave Iconium when plans were made to stone them there ([Acts 14:5,6](#)). But the enemies of the Gospel were not satisfied to rid their cities of these two missionaries. They were so earnest in their opposition to the proclamation of the Gospel that they pursued Paul and Barnabas to Lystra to continue harassing them. They would travel many miles and over rough terrain in order to continue their attack upon God’s servants.

Once again we are made aware from the Scriptures about the earnestness of the enemy of righteousness. They will travel many miles, make great expenditures, work day and night in order to fight God’s work. We must never look casually at the work of evil and brush it off as nothing to be concerned about. Be it a temptation in our personal lives or a devilish organization like the ACLU or a dissident in the church, we must treat these efforts of the enemy with seriousness and oppose them with earnestness; for the enemy of righteousness is very earnest to destroy our testimony, stop our service for God, and hinder the work of God.

*Timeliness.* “And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium” ([v. 19](#)). The arrival of the harassers in Lystra could not have come at a better time as far as the work of harassment was concerned, for the crisis of deification had just occurred. This crisis had left the city unsettled, thus making it ripe for someone to come in to stir up trouble. Stopping the deification procedures would not make the

people happy with Paul and Barnabas; therefore, it was an opportune time to turn people against Paul and Barnabas. The devil knows when to attack. He does not miss many opportunities.

How often we see this timing in the church. A problem of some sort comes to the church and as efforts are being made to overcome it, another problem develops which gains strength because of the first problem. Satan attacks from one direction to make it easier for him to attack from another direction. It is like one disease following another in attacking the physical body. Weakness from the first disease makes the body more vulnerable to the second disease. A missionary or pastor takes a good stand against some evil which necessitates some disciplinary action in the church. Then on the heels of that upsetting crisis, a cult moves into the area and begins to visit the people of the church and cause many to leave. Sometimes it is not a cult but some preacher who comes to town to start a new work by raiding other churches, and who is not above using the problems in one church to gain members for his church—though both churches are professed Bible-believing churches. All of this upsets and hinders the work of God. It also shows how evil the action is of the preacher who, instead of helping a sister church recover from her problems, uses her problems to help his church to grow in numbers. Unfortunately, we have a number of men in the ministry like that.

*Persuasiveness.* The Jews from Antioch and Iconium “persuaded the people” ([v. 19](#)) against Paul and Barnabas. The harassers from Antioch and Iconium were a clever bunch. They were able to persuade the people to turn against the two men they had tried to deify. Error is clever and, hence, persuasive. It can advance some very subtle arguments against truth which the naïve swallow hook, line, and sinker. We see it today in how evil cleverly argues that our nation’s Constitution forbids prayer in school, that homosexuals are victims of their heredity, that gambling is good for a community, that TV violence does not cause violence in society, that the disasters which come upon us in the forms of floods, earthquakes, and the like are not judgments for our sin, and that anti-abortionists are the bad people, not the abortionists. This cleverness does not negate the truth, of course, but only shows the ability of error to cleverly persuade people.

The fact that the people of Lystra were persuaded not only attests to the skill of the harassers, but it also attests to the fickleness of the hearts of the people of Lystra. They who had just hailed Paul and Barnabas as gods now turned quickly to crying for their blood. They are like those who cried, “Hosanna” for Christ on Palm Sunday; yet before the week was over, they were crying, “Crucify Him.”

Wise men know that those, like the folk in Lystra, who are excessive in their compliments are people who are not trustworthy. Preachers will discover soon in their ministry that the person who slobbers with compliments over their sermon or performance will often be amongst the first to turn against the preacher when a crisis comes. Hence, treat such compliments with a grain of salt. Don't put much stock in them, but rather let these compliments prompt caution in dealing with those who are excessive in compliments.

*Falseness.* “Who persuaded the people, and . . . [they] stoned Paul” ([v. 19](#)). Truth would never stone Paul. Truth would honor Paul. But the harassers of the enemy of righteousness do not speak the truth. What lies they must have told in order to convince the people that Paul was not only evil but so evil he needed to be immediately stoned.

We live in a day when lies are abundant in society. Politicians lie continuously. Salesmen lie to sell their product. Teachers lie when teaching in school. Gambling promoters lie about how good gambling is for a community. Abortion advocates keep repeating the terrible lie that murder is not murder. The lies about homosexuality are huge. Alcohol and tobacco advertising is nothing but a big lie. A race track in the Chicago area advertised that it was the place where everybody won which is as bold a lie as there is. The news media is just one great big lying business. TV newscasters tell the news like they want it to be, not like it is. Newspapers and magazines so twist and bias the news that good looks evil and evil looks good. Good people have been so vilified by the news media that society scorns these people. Yet, bad people have been so exalted that society nearly worships them—so the religious right is mocked while a Michael Jackson or Elvis Presley or some other vile worldling is idolized, and wicked people are elected to high offices in our land while good people are not even given an opportunity to run for election. Lies also abound in church, sad to say. Dissidents continually spread untruths about godly ministers in order to turn people against these ministers whose preaching makes the dissidents squirm.

*Viciousness.* The people of Lystra, “stoned Paul” ([v. 19](#)). The enemies of God's servants are a vicious lot. They are not satisfied until they have dealt a lethal blow. Paul must be stoned. They had plotted the action in Iconium, now they come to Lystra to continue pursuing it.

History ever demonstrates this character of the enemy of God's servants. Jezebel killed God's prophets, some of Israel's kings did likewise, and rulers in every age

have especially sought to imprison and kill the true ministers of the Word. While troublemakers in our churches do not kill the pastor, yet they are so cruel as to insist the pastor be put out of the church, out of the parsonage, and out of a job in as short a time as possible. These people, who are the first to accuse the pastor of lack of love and compassion, demonstrate no love and compassion when it comes to attacking him and trying to run him off. The experience of Paul and Barnabas with harassers is an experience that every true minister of God will experience in some measure sooner or later, for evil hates righteousness.

*Lawlessness.* They “stoned Paul, [and] drew him out of the city” ([v. 19](#)). Paul was a Roman citizen. Accordingly, a fair trial should have been given him; but, of course, it was not. It was mob rule that prevailed; justice was trampled under foot. It is ever this way when evil attacks righteousness. Evil men have little respect for the law, but only use it when it helps their cause. Criminals scorn the law in doing their criminal actions; but when arrested and in court, they suddenly become very interested in and respectful of the laws which govern their arrest and trial. The Pharisees professed to be so devoted to the law of God but unashamedly trampled all over it in crucifying Jesus Christ. Church troublemakers can be like lawyers in using the church constitution to hinder or stop the church from dealing with some dissident member; but when they want to throw out the pastor or do some other similar deed, they pay no attention to the church constitution.

## **2. The Conquest Over the Harassment**

There was triumph in Lystra even though Paul was stoned. The harassers did not win. Truth triumphed. After the people had stoned Paul, they “drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city” ([vv. 19, 20](#)). The enemy thought they had won. They thought they had stopped the work of Paul in preaching the Gospel. But before the celebrating had hardly begun, Paul was back in business. A Divine miracle occurred, and Paul rose up and came back into the city. This had to be very disconcerting to the enemy but very encouraging to the people of God. God’s power is always that way. It upsets the enemy plenty, but it brings great rejoicing to His people.

The enemy is powerful, no question about it. But let us not forget that we serve a Master Who is all-powerful. The very best the enemy can do is easily overthrown by God. We who serve God do not serve a Master limited in strength. No circumstance

is too much for Him. Paul can be down and counted out by the world, but God can raise him up renewed in strength to keep preaching the Gospel.

Some may think that a Divine miracle really did not occur. They think that Paul did not die but just passed out from the stoning and then revived after laying awhile outside the gates. But whether Paul was dead, as some believe, or stoned into unconsciousness, as others believe, a Divine miracle had to occur in order to enable him to suddenly arise and go on his way. To be stoned into a condition that caused the stoners to believe he was dead and then to recover so quickly and so well that he could walk back into Lystra and the next day start on a trip to another city was certainly a result of the power of God.

This stoning is the one Paul referred to in [2 Corinthians 12:1–4](#) and must have reminded him of the times he was involved in stoning Christians and also in dragging them hither and yon (“drew” in [verse 19](#) means to drag forcibly, violently, and is translated from the same word as “haling” in [Acts 8:3](#) which there describes Paul’s behavior when he was a persecutor of Christians).

We can learn a helpful lesson here about the different ways God deals with His own. Sometimes He delivers them from stoning, as He did Paul in Iconium. Other times He permits the stoning. But in each case He still brought deliverance. Scripture says so: “Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra, what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me” ([2 Timothy 3:11](#)). Yes, Paul was delivered in “all” cases—even the stoning at Lystra. But in the stoning, God’s power was shown in a greater way than in the deliverance in Iconium. God sometimes allows our circumstances to get very bad in order that He might better show His power. He can deliver us *from* difficult times, but He can also deliver us *in* difficult times, the latter often showing God’s power much more than the former. The flesh, however, much prefers the “from” to the “in”; but the glory of God is often best seen in the “in” situations.

## IX. PROCEEDING TO COMPLETION

### [Acts 14:20–28](#)

THOUGH THE ENEMY of God’s work had tried again and again to stop Paul and his companion Barnabas—the stoning in Lystra surely looked like it would stop Paul—our text finds them proceeding on to the successful completion of their missionary journey. They were battered and bruised, but they were not beaten. Or as Paul would say it, they were “cast down, but not destroyed” ([2 Corinthians 4:9](#)). Hence,



in spite of the opposition to their work, they still continued to preach and teach the Word of God. Through a combination of the great power of God (which, as an example, was seen in the miraculous raising up of Paul from the stoning in Lystra, which we studied at the end of our last study) and the great dedication of God's two missionaries, the enemy was unable to stop them from proceeding on to a successful completion of their missionary journey.

In this study, we will cover more of Paul's first missionary journey than we have covered in all the previous studies combined of this journey. We will cover the end of the first half of this first missionary journey plus the entire last half of the journey. We will divide this study into three main parts: the furtherance of the Gospel ([vv. 20, 21](#)), the follow-up of the converts ([vv. 22–25](#)), and the furlough of the missionaries ([vv. 26–28](#)).

## A. THE FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL

From Lystra, Paul “departed with Barnabas to Derbe” ([v. 20](#)) to further the spreading of the Gospel. This will be the farthest extent of their trip. From Derbe, they will turn around and retrace their steps back to Antioch of Syria from whence they began their missionary journey. Derbe, which was about thirty miles southeast of Lystra, was an oasis in the desert of persecution. Scripture gives us no record of Paul and Barnabas being harassed in that city. God does indeed provide times in our ministries when there is a reprieve from the attacks of the enemy. But these times are not times to sit around and twiddle our thumbs and do nothing. Rather, they are most advantageous times for doing much work for God. Make hay while the sun shines and strike while the iron is hot illustrate this principle. Paul and Barnabas did just that. They took advantage of their situation in Derbe and used the time of reprieve from persecution for a good time of evangelizing the city and of educating the converts.

### 1. Evangelizing the City

Scripture says Paul and Barnabas “preached the gospel to that city” ([v. 21](#)). The words “preached the gospel” come from one Greek word from which we get the English word “evangelize.” It means “to bring or announce glad tidings” (Vine). “Glad tidings” is a great description of the Gospel. What glad tidings the Gospel is to the sin-burdened soul.

The faithfulness of Paul and Barnabas to keep preaching the Gospel is so commendable. Just about everywhere they went, the Gospel message and messengers were vehemently opposed and attacked. But in spite of the repeated attack upon the message and upon themselves, Paul and Barnabas continued to unhesitantly and unashamedly proclaim the Gospel. Even though Paul had just been stoned, the two missionaries head for another city and keep preaching the same message.

We need more men like them today who will declare with fidelity the Gospel message. But because the Gospel message is not popular, few ministers declare it with fidelity. They are more interested in keeping their posh pastorates and their popularity with the people than in preaching the Gospel. But great will be the judgment for these ministers.

Though unpopular, the Gospel message is needed. It is, in fact, the message men need most to hear. It is the message that not only can bring salvation to the souls of men, but it also can do more to help solve the ills of our society than any other message. Some say the Gospel message is outdated and, therefore, is not for our modern society. But they are wrong. You will note that no matter where Paul went in his travels, he preached the same Gospel. He was in very different cities in his ministry, yet the Gospel fit every city. The Gospel is applicable and pertinent to any culture, any country, any city, and any civilization. One never needs to be concerned about the Gospel message being out of date or irrelevant.

Later in the book of Acts, we learn about one of the converts of Derbe. He was a man by the name of Gaius. In [Acts 20:4](#) he is named with six other outstanding saints of God who accompanied Paul for awhile on Paul's third missionary journey. There are other men named Gaius in the Scriptures, for Gaius was a common name; so common, in fact, that it was used in Roman law books as a "John Doe" name. [Acts 19:29](#), [Romans 16:23](#), and [1 Corinthians 1:14](#) mention other men by the name of Gaius with whom Paul had acquaintance. The first verse of Third John also mentions a Gaius but gives no hint as to whether he is one of the men named Gaius that Paul knew.

## **2. Educating the Converts**

Paul and Barnabas not only "preached the gospel" ([v. 21](#)) in Derbe, but they also "taught many" (*Ibid.*) in Derbe. The word "taught" comes from the Greek word meaning "discipled." Discipling comes after evangelizing. Paul and Barnabas were not only involved in the salvation of souls (evangelizing) but also in the strengthening of souls (discipling). In the great commission, there is both evangelism ("Go ye into

all the world, and preach the gospel” [[Mark 16:15](#)]) and discipling (“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”-[\[Matthew 28:20\]](#)).

Though very important, discipling is not a very popular work even among fundamental, Bible-believing preachers. Preachers like decisions, for that shows up in the adding machine and can be bragged about at the next preachers’ meeting. But it is not easy to put into the adding machine the work of discipling. It is not easy to put in terms of numbers how a Christian has grown. But this work is very vital in the work of the Gospel. Babies are not just to be born; they are to be taken care of and fed and helped to grow up to be mature people. Today, many women who have babies are not willing to take care of them. They want to go back to their job and “career” and let someone else take care of their baby. In fact, taking care of babies and helping them to grow up is so looked down upon by society today that a woman who decides to stay home and be a mother to her children is considered second rate. So it is in the church. Pastors who labor in teaching the Word to their congregation are often subject to much criticism and are looked down upon. They are accused of not being evangelistic. Their lack of decision numbers are used to discredit their ministry of teaching. And their own church often kicks them out of the pastorate if the Sunday School attendance board does not shoot up to record attendance in short order. But these folk have little concept of the value of spiritual growth and its relationship to the advancing of evangelism. As a result we have churches full of decisions who know little about the Word of God and who, in a generation or so, make the church a prime target for doctrinal problems and apostasy. This greatly hinders the work of evangelism in the future for these churches.

## **B. THE FOLLOW-UP OF THE CONVERTS**

From Derbe, Paul and his fellow worker Barnabas, turned around and went back through the cities they had already visited. This they did in order to do some follow-up work with their converts in these cities. This return to these cities shows the great heart Paul and Barnabas had for their work. They could have gone east from Derbe on a much easier and much shorter route back to Antioch of Syria instead of turning around at Derbe and retracing their steps through the cities they had previously ministered in. Going east from Derbe would have taken Paul and Barnabas through Paul’s home town of Tarsus. “It would certainly have been the more desirable course, ‘after the flesh,’ to go through the Cilician Gates, and so home to Antioch, rather

than return and face the enraged populace from whom they had been obliged to flee” (Clarkson). But Paul and Barnabas chose to take the long circuitous trip, which was three times or more farther and many times more dangerous, in order to do some helpful follow-up work with the new converts in the cities they had ministered to earlier on this missionary journey.

At least five things were involved in this follow-up ministry of Paul and Barnabas in these cities. They were confirmation, exhortation, explanation, organization, and propagation.

## **1. Confirmation**

The first thing Scripture says was involved in this follow-up ministry was the “Confirming the souls of the disciples” ([v. 22](#)). The word “confirming” means to strengthen. In the context of the passage, it means to strengthen in the faith. The word is not to be confused with religious ceremonies by that name, such as the one which Lutherans practice. This confirmation in Acts was “not a ceremony but a process” (R. A. Redford). The word “confirming” here is translated from the same word translated “strengthening” in [Acts 18:23](#), a text which speaks of Paul doing the same follow-up work he and Barnabas were doing here: “He [Paul] . . . went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.”

Believers need to be made strong in the faith so they are not “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” ([Ephesians 4:14](#)). Today, we are plagued with the earnest propagation of a host of clever and crafty philosophies. Unless you know the Word of God well, you will be taken in by these philosophies to the ruin of your character and of your testimony. The so-called Christian psychologists and psychiatrists are ever injecting more worldliness into their thinking and rationalizing. Cults and isms of stranger and stranger ideology are deceiving more and more people. And the twisted philosophies of atheists, abortionists, gambling promoters, divorce justifiers, homosexuals, and others of like character are being so cleverly perpetrated that even professing Christians are being taken in by the wretched conclusions of these Satanic philosophies. Yes, believers need to be ever strengthened in their faith. To help strengthen believers’ faith, pastors and teachers in the church must do as Paul did throughout his ministry, namely, preach and teach earnestly and excellently the Word of God. Believers can also help themselves to be strong in the faith by being diligent in their own personal study and devotion to the Word of God. Only the Word of God will give one a clear mind to think straight and keep from being seduced by the clever creeds of corruption.

## 2. Exhortation

The second thing the follow-up work of Paul and Barnabas included was the “Exhorting them [the new converts] to continue in the faith” ([v. 22](#)). This exhortation while being simple is very important. When the initial excitement of anything passes, the temptation to discontinue a pursuit is often very strong. After a revival meeting, people attend church with renewed vigor for awhile, then they begin to be lax in their attendance. When one takes a new office or teaching assignment in church, enthusiasm is generally very strong the first few weeks. But soon the enthusiasm wanes and the new officer or teacher ceases to be faithful to their task. Continuance in the faith is necessary for a number of good reasons.

First, continuance in the faith is necessary to have a good testimony to the world. As we noted in our last chapter, the world’s frequent comment about new Christians is: “They won’t last.” But when the new converts continue to live outwardly that which has occurred in them inwardly, the world will not be able to deny the reality of the experience. This makes the witness of the new believers more valid and more effective to the world.

Second, continuance in the faith is necessary to possess a strong assurance of salvation. Satan loves to attack the believer about the reality of his salvation. If Satan can get the believer to wallow in doubts about being saved, he has taken the joy away from the believer and greatly hindered his service and testimony. But when one continues faithfully in the faith, the doubts are not nearly as strong as when one drifts away from the Lord. Disobedience increases doubts. But obedience diminishes them.

Third, continuance in the faith is necessary to be used in the Lord’s work. If you do not continue in the faith, you will not be used of God. Service is a great blessing to the saint. But God puts a premium on the qualification of faithfulness before He employs us in His service. Continuation in your devotion to Him is vital to employment by Him.

Fourth, continuance in the faith is necessary to grow in the faith. You will not improve your spiritual knowledge of God and fellowship with God without continuing to walk with Him. A good many saints have never grown much in the faith because they stopped being active in the things of the Lord. They did not continue to study the Word, pray, or attend church. Yes, they are still saved. But they discontinued their devotion to the Lord, and the result has been a very stunted spiritual growth. You must continue at anything if you are going to develop and improve in it. So it is in the faith.

### 3. Explanation

An important part of the follow-up work was to explain to the new converts some important truths about tribulations. Paul and Barnabas told the new converts, “We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” ([v. 22](#)). This explanation about tribulation is related to the exhortation about continuation. It is not easy to live the Christian life in this old world. The new converts needed, therefore, to be encouraged to keep going in spite of the troubles that beset them because of their faith. The reception of the Gospel in these towns where Paul and Barnabas had ministered was often very hostile. After Paul and Barnabas were gone from these cities, the enemy, being no longer able to attack them there, would then shift the attack toward the new Christians in these cities. Attacks could include such things as loss of jobs, loss of friends, loss of respect, loss of properties, and verbal and physical abuse. These experiences would be very difficult for the new converts and could cause them to be very perplexed and also to wonder whether it was worth it to keep living a Christian life. Therefore, they needed this explanation about tribulation. Four important facts were given about these tribulations.

First, these tribulations are expected. The new converts were not told, as some are told in our day, that when you become a Christian, all your troubles vanish away and prosperity and good health will be your portion for years to come. No, they were told the truth. They were told that it is the common lot of every believer to experience tribulations. It is “we” not just you. This verse reminds us of one in Paul’s epistles which says, “Yea, and all that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” ([2 Timothy 3:12](#)). Of course, some will say we ought not to tell new converts such distressing news. But to the contrary, they need to know so they can be prepared. We do no one any good to keep them in the dark about persecutions.

Second, these tribulations are productive. Tribulation helps to give us a backbone. Without these experiences our faith would be weak and unable to do much. Athletes do not become stronger and faster without rigorous training. So it is with the saint and tribulations. Therefore, we “must” experience them.

Third, these tribulations are many. The new converts were told they would experience “much tribulation.” Not just a little, but much. “Much tribulation . . . expresses not mere quantity or number but variety” (Alexander). “*Many* are the afflictions of the righteous” ([Psalm 34:19](#)) is the way the Psalmist expresses it. We may not experience trouble every day of our lives, but we will continue to experience these tribulations all the way through life. And they will be of great variety, too; for the devil attacks in many different ways.

Fourth, these tribulations are faith-related. Everyone has troubles be they saved

or unsaved. But the troubles Paul and Barnabas are talking about are those that come because of the saints' faith. The unsaved do not experience these particular troubles. The new converts need this explanation, otherwise they will be really puzzled as to why the devil's crowd seems to get off easy while they as God's children often have a much tougher time in life. If we understand our tribulations, it is easier to experience them; and in regards to the faith, it helps us to keep going instead of quitting. True, some of our great trials are a mystery; and this tests our faith. But many of our troubles are explained by the Word of God, and these explanations are great encouragements to steadfastness in the faith.

#### 4. Organization

"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" ([v. 23](#)). Organization is needed amongst believers in order to promote worship, spiritual growth, fellowship with the godly, and the advancement of the faith among others. Therefore, God has given us the institution of the church. On their return to these cities, where they had ministered earlier, Paul and Barnabas set about to organize the believers by appointing elders. The word "elder" is translated from the word we get Presbyterian. The word is interchangeable with the word "bishop" which is translated from the word we get Episcopal. It means overseer or ruler. Organizations require delegation of authority if the organization is going to function with any degree of efficiency. This authority business is where a lot of saints in our churches have trouble. They do not like to submit to any authority, and they show it by their disrespect for the pastor and other officers in the church.

Why didn't Paul and Barnabas take care of this organizing when they were first in these cities? The answer is twofold. First, they may not have had time to get things organized before persecution drove them from the cities. Second, "It was not done when the apostles had first labored in these places, for time was necessary to show who was gifted and qualified for office of an elder" (Gaebelein). We must not be too quick in appointing men to this office. Paul warns us about this in one of his epistles when he says, "Lay hands suddenly on no man" ([1 Timothy 5:22](#)). Many church problems could be avoided if churches were more careful to follow the Scripture guidelines about who is and who isn't qualified to hold church offices. So often the unqualified get into church office, and that is ruinous for the individual and also for the church.

You will note that praying and fasting accompanied these appointments. Oftentimes, annual church election meetings are preceded by a meal in the church

basement. While eating in the church basement is not necessarily evil, it would do a whole lot more good if the saints, instead of eating, spent that time in earnest prayer. Of course, this idea will not fly in most churches, but then most churches are pretty carnal, too. Scripture, however, will support such a practice. The character of our churches and their officers ought to cause our churches to want to try fasting and praying before the annual election instead of what they do practice before the meeting.

## 5. Propagation

“After they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And . . . preached the word in Perga” ([vv. 24, 25](#)). The propagation (“preached”) work may have been more than just a follow-up ministry; for where it was done (Perga), we have no record of a previous ministry there by Paul and Barnabas. Though they had been there earlier, the only notation about their previous visit to Perga was that John Mark left them there to return home. That this was the only report of their previous visit does not necessarily mean they did not have a short ministry in Perga, however. So their return visit to Perga could very well have included some follow-up work as well as evangelism. But whatever the case, their return to Perga resulted in the noble work of proclaiming the Word of God.

The word translated “preached” in our text does not involve just the idea of preaching as we know it today. It can also involve the general speaking of one person to another person. Paul and Barnabas may not have had a synagogue audience in which to “preach,” but they were able to speak the message of the Word of God to groups in the streets as these folks were gathered together in general society in the streets of the city. Paul and Barnabas used the opportunities available to them and whether through preaching sermons to large groups or through speaking to small groups, they proclaimed the Gospel. Would that all Christians were as interested in spreading the Gospel as these two missionaries were. We have a number of Christians who are more interested in spreading gossip than the Gospel. They have an unholy itch to spread that which is alleged (gossip) instead of that which is affirmed (Gospel). Spreading gossip hurts people, but spreading the Gospel helps people.

## C. THE FURLOUGH OF THE MISSIONARIES



“When they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia, And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled” ([vv. 25, 26](#)). The ministry in Perga was the last ministry Paul and Barnabas had on this missionary trip. After Perga they headed for their sending church in Antioch of Syria. They did not sail from Perga as they had sailed into Perga from Cyprus; but they went to the town of Attalia, a city about ten miles or so from Perga, to take a ship to Antioch. Like going where you can get the right plane connections, they doubtless heard that a ship in Attalia was headed for Antioch whereas none in Perga were going that way, so they went to Attalia.

We will look at three things related to this furlough. They are a good record, a good report, and a good rest.

## **1. A Good Record**

A furlough is a good time to assess what a missionary has done. Have they done according to their commission? Have they abided in their calling? Paul and Barnabas certainly did. They did as they were commissioned, and they abode in their calling. Scripture describes their record this way: “the work which they fulfilled” ([v. 26](#)). The word “fulfilled” is translated from the word which means to make full, hence to complete, to finish. The same word was used in [Acts 13:25](#) to describe the ministry of John the Baptist (“John fulfilled his course”). As we noted when we studied that text in a previous chapter of our book, it is a word which highly commends a person when it describes a person’s performance regarding his duty. Paul and Barnabas had a lot of reasons which in the eyes of men would have justified their not finishing their trip. It was a very rough trip. Roads were perilous and difficult to traverse. Persecution was brutal, and they were driven out of some of the towns. Yet, they stayed on course and completed it.

Any worthwhile work will face many difficulties that will cause lesser folk to quit. Spiritual ministries especially will struggle because of Satanic opposition. But though difficult, the work can be completed if God is in it. If He has called one to the work, as He did Paul and Barnabas, He will give the grace and the strength to keep going even when normally a person could not keep going. Make sure of your calling, then make sure you fulfill your calling. You will not get a full reward if you only do part of your job.

## **2. A Good Report**

“And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they

rehearsed [reported] all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” ([v. 27](#)). Here is what we could call the first missionary conference ever held. The conference consisted of but two missionaries; but though not as many missionaries in number as in most conferences, these two surely made up in quality what the conference may have lacked in quantity. What a grand and inspiring conference it had to be.

The report Paul and Barnabas gave to the church in Antioch spoke of a number of things. We will consider six of them: glorification, association, cooperation, dedication, obligation, and salvation.

First, the report spoke of *glorification*. “They rehearsed [reported] all that God had done.” The emphasis here is on God’s greatness in regards to the great accomplishments of the journey. Hence, God was being glorified in the report. In contrast to many reports preachers and missionaries give today, God was given the glory and not man. So many reports today are nothing but exalting of self.

Second, the report spoke of *association*. “All that God had done with them.” The word “with” gives us three instructive thoughts. We will note the first one here (the other two will be noted in the following points); namely, it spoke of God associating with them. God was “with” Paul and Barnabas during their missionary journey. The great encouraging promise in the Great Commission is the promise that “I am with you always” ([Matthew 28:20](#)). It is extremely comforting to know that God is with us. Such knowledge helps to remove fear. Also His presence makes possible our performance even amidst great difficulties. Moses so valued the presence of God that he did not want to leave where he was unless God went with him ([Exodus 33:15](#)). Would that we all felt that way. It would not only help our service (we would go where God is going to be), but it would also help our sanctification (we would not be going into evil places).

Third, the report spoke of *cooperation*. The word “with” suggests cooperation as well as association. They were “laborers together *with* God” ([1 Corinthians 3:9](#)). Some people cannot work with anybody, not even God. But in Christian service you had better learn to work with God, or you will never do anything for God. Paul and Barnabas worked well with God.

Fourth, the report spoke of *dedication*. “All that God had done with them.” The word “with” also shows us dedication in Christian service. Here it shows us the dedication of Paul and Barnabas. God could do something “with” them. They were useful instruments in His work. J. A. Alexander says, “One is said to travel with a sword, and to fight with a sword, the first *with* denotes merely that the sword is in his company, the second that he uses it.” We not only need to be in the company of God but also in the service of God. We need to ask ourselves, “What can God do

with us?” Can He use us or are we so stubborn or defiled or lazy or stingy or hesitant or disinterested that He cannot do anything effective in His service with us. When this is the case, He sets us aside, puts us on the shelf, and does not use us. Many Christians are in that category. It is not a happy category. How we need to make sure that God can do much with us.

Fifth, the report spoke of *obligation*. “He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.” The open door spoke of spiritual opportunity for the Gentiles. Opportunity brings obligation. When God opens a door for us, we are obligated to walk through that door. In the first missionary journey of Paul, God was in a very obvious way demonstrating that He was now opening the door of spiritual blessings for the Gentiles. Heretofore, the Jews had enjoyed nearly exclusive spiritual rights. Now the door was being opened for Gentiles to also enjoy them. Another writer puts it in a good way when he says, “The special favor of God had been enjoyed by the Jews, and in a manner limited to them. They had been, as it were, shut up with God in his house, none else might come in, for the door was shut. But now, in the greatness of God’s mercy to men, he had opened the door, made a new and most gracious condition of admission, and invited ‘whosoever would’ to enter in” (R. Tuck).

The term “open door” is one Paul uses again in his epistles ([1 Corinthians 16:9](#), [2 Corinthians 2:12](#), and [Colossians 4:3](#)). These open doors all spoke of opportunities—hence, obligations—for speaking the Word of God. The “open door” in our text in Acts speaks of opportunity for salvation, those in Paul’s epistles of opportunity for service. Whether in salvation or in service, God provides us ample opportunity so that if we fail, we have no excuse. Be quick to use your spiritual opportunities. Some doors do not stay open very long. Delay will see many doors close.

Sixth, the report spoke of *salvation*. “He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.” The report of the missionaries talks about salvation that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. It was a door of faith, not works. “The Jew thought that birth and the rite of circumcision were the door, but the ‘rehearsing’ [‘reviewing’] of the experiences of Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary tour shattered that notion” (Maclaren). Paul and Barnabas were certainly good missionaries in contrast to some who go out today to speak another message.

### **3. A Good Rest**

“There they abode long time with the disciples” ([v. 28](#)). Furloughs and vacations are necessary (unless, of course, they are, as some furloughs and vacations, harder on the person than their regular work). They provide needed rest and revitalization for the laborer. We are not made to go full speed ahead twenty-four hours a day.

God made us in such a way that we need rest. This is not only true physically, but it is also true spiritually. Physically Paul and Barnabas needed considerable rest. They had covered a lot of miles on some pretty rugged roads. Also, Paul had been stoned severely. He came back to Antioch a battered soldier in need of physical repairs. Spiritually they needed rest, too. The two missionaries had engaged in some rough spiritual warfare with the enemy of men's souls. That takes a toll on one's dedication and enthusiasm just as a rough physical experience takes its toll on one's physical energy and strength. Hence, the need for refreshing times of prayer and study of the Word. Many of these times would come with the saints in the church at Antioch. The church at Antioch would be a great encouragement to them. While they had dedication above the rest of us, Paul and Barnabas still needed to have that dedication refreshed and renewed. No one ever gets to the place where they do not need their dedication refreshed.

Notice that "they abode with the disciples" on their furlough. Birds of a feather flock together. Whom we prefer to associate with gives away our spiritual temperature and condition. God's people will want to associate with God's people. Of course, we need to point out that some of God's people are so carnal that the faithful do not want to associate with them. Faithfulness wants to associate with faithfulness, not with unfaithfulness. Those Paul and Barnabas associated with were out-and-out Christians. They were "disciples." The generic meaning of the word "disciple" means learner. The usage in Acts regarding the disciples of Christ indicates one who is a follower of another's teaching, namely, the teaching of Jesus Christ. Hence what Vine says expresses the description of a disciple in our text well, "A 'disciple' was not only a pupil, but an adherent." May we all, who claim to be saved, be that kind of a disciple and want to fellowship with that kind of disciple.

## **X. POLEMICS ABOUT LEGALISM**

[ACTS 15:1-35](#); [GALATIANS 2](#)

DURING THE TIME between Paul's first and second missionary journeys, serious doctrinal error regarding salvation began to be propagated among Gentile believers. It was the intrusion of legalism into the Gospel message. It resulted in a great dispute. The polemics centered around circumcision. It was a controversy which Judaism never let die. The controversy became very disruptive for Paul. In our texts it involved him in a lot of heated disputing in Antioch, necessitated his making a special trip from Antioch to the city of Jerusalem for a meeting with the apostles and

elders there, and resulted in him rebuking Peter with a very strong but necessary rebuke. The polemics about legalism did not stop with our texts but continued to dog Paul off and on throughout the rest of his life and left such an impact that one epistle, the epistle to the Galatians, is practically a commentary on it.

After many rugged experiences on his first missionary trip, we would think it would be nice for Paul to be able to relax and not have to engage in battle for awhile. But the enemy never leaves God's servants undisturbed for long. As an example, after the great temptation attack on Christ, Satan did not leave Christ permanently. He only "departed from him for a season" ([Luke 4:13](#)). Satan stopped attacking for awhile, but soon he was back attacking again. Paul found this experience also to be true in his life. There was some reprieve in Antioch from the Satanic attacks of the first missionary endeavor, but soon the enemy showed up again to make trouble. This time the attack was not upon the physical body of Paul, as was much of the attack upon Paul during his first missionary journey; but it was an attack upon the message of Paul. Legalism opposed the Gospel message of grace which Paul preached. However, the enemy outwitted himself here; for all the trouble he caused over this issue helped Christianity to define the doctrine of salvation more clearly than it had before.

In our study of the polemics about legalism, we will consider the contenders for legalism ([Acts 15:1,5,24](#); [Galatians 2:4](#)), the conference about legalism ([Acts 15:2–21](#); [Galatians 2:1–3](#)), the communication against legalism ([Acts 15:22–31](#); [Galatians 2:7–10](#)), and the censure involving legalism ([Galatians 2:11–21](#)).

## A. THE CONTENDERS FOR LEGALISM

The dispute regarding legalism flared up when some Judaizers from Jerusalem travelled to Antioch of Syria and taught the believers there the legalistic doctrine about circumcision being required for salvation. They said, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" ([Acts 15:1](#)). Both the creed and the character of the legalists were bad. From their work in Antioch and in Jerusalem, we will examine both.

### 1. The Creed of the Legalists

Legalism is a cursed thing. Its doctrines are derogatory to everything connected with the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. We will consider three of its significant and

despicable beliefs which confronted Paul: legalism denied the grace of salvation, devalued the work of Christ, and discredited the ministry of Paul.

*Legalism denied the grace of salvation.* “Certain men who came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” ([Acts 15:1](#)). This teaching of the legalists plainly said that you were not saved by grace alone but also by works. However, salvation is either of grace or of works. It cannot be both at the same time as the legalists would teach. If circumcision is necessary for salvation, then salvation is no longer of grace but of works. If salvation is of grace, then circumcision is absolutely not necessary.

We need to understand that circumcision was not the only thing insisted upon here for salvation by the Judaizers. “Circumcision is here put for the whole law, as the cross is sometimes put for the whole Gospel ([1 Corinthians 1:18](#); [Galatians 6:12,13](#); [Philippians 3:18](#)), and the baptism of John for his whole ministry ([Acts 1:22](#))” (J. A. Alexander). Circumcision was the touchstone of the law and thus representative of all the law. But if only circumcision is involved here, then it leaves a great question about how the legalists believed women were saved. They certainly were not teaching that women were saved by grace but men were saved by works. No, they were teaching in substance that the law had to be kept if one wanted to be saved. They simply used circumcision as the point of reference as it was such an important ritual with the Jews. Circumcision had been given to the Jews back in Abraham’s day ([Genesis 17:9–14](#)), and it was prominently recorded in the law of Moses. Most Jews missed the spiritual teaching of circumcision (it spoke of the corruption of the flesh) and only saw the letter of the law. The proof that circumcision was not the issue in itself but simply the representative of the larger issue is found in [Acts 15:24](#) which plainly states these legalists taught that the whole law was involved. They said, “Ye must be circumcised, *and keep the law.*”

Like most doctrinal error, this error was cleverly stated. It did not say that Gentiles could not be saved (though many Jews did not like the fact that Gentiles were now given spiritual blessings equal to the Jews). Rather, it just stated that the Gentiles were basically required to be Jews in observance of the law if they wanted to be saved. The debate was not whether Gentiles could be saved—that was accepted by all concerned. But the debate was about how they were saved. Was it by faith alone or did the Gentiles have to abide by Jewish religious laws?

Harry Ironside correctly said, “One of the hardest things for these poor minds of ours to grasp is the freeness of God’s salvation . . . But always there have been found those who because of their legalistic minds thought it too good to be true that men

could be saved by grace alone and [therefore] attempted to add something else to the gospel.” Today men add baptism, confirmation, church membership, penance, good deeds, and other things to the requirements for salvation. Those who do not believe in the security of the believer are also guilty of adding works to salvation just as much as these Judaizers were in Paul’s day. If after Christ saves us we can by our sin be lost again, then the only way we can stay saved is by being good. That is salvation by works! It is not salvation by grace! But grace saves us and keeps us saved. We are not saved by grace then kept by works as those who deny eternal security believe. Paul attacked that legalistic belief when he said, “Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” ([Galatians 3:3](#)). Paul’s comment on being saved by works, which is the same idea of having to keep the law to be saved, is summed up in [Galatians 2:16](#) where he said, “By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

*Legalism devalued the work of Christ.* The second thing we note about the creed of the legalists is that it devalued the work of Christ in regards to salvation. Legalists do not believe that the work of Christ in dying on the cross is sufficient to save souls. They did not come right out and say that in our text, but they said it indirectly by saying you cannot be saved unless you are circumcised. If you have to be circumcised before you are saved (as the Judaizers insisted), then obviously Jesus Christ cannot by Himself save you. If circumcision is necessary for salvation, then the work of the cross is not enough to save sinners. As Paul says, “If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” ([Galatians 2:21](#)).

To deny the sufficiency of Christ in salvation is a cursed doctrine that greatly dishonors Christ. Anytime you add anything to salvation besides Jesus Christ, you are dishonoring Christ. Church creeds that insist on baptism or membership or penance or other things for salvation are teaching a devilish doctrine that terribly dishonors Jesus Christ and will send men to hell.

*Legalism discredited the ministry of Paul.* This dispute about circumcision and salvation was another attack upon the ministry of Paul. If the legalistic teaching of these Judaizers was right, then Paul’s missionary journey was a failure. If the Judaizers were right, then Paul’s whole ministry was discredited. And don’t think these Judaizers did not know that this conclusion was involved in their teaching of legalism. These Judaizers were not supporters of Paul’s ministry, and they would be happy to discredit it as much as possible. If they could convince people that what



Paul was teaching was wrong, then they could effectively stop his work and gain his converts to be their own disciples. Error ever seeks to take the converts of gospel ministers and make them their own followers.

Those who preach the truth will often experience bitter attacks upon their message. Though the message is true, though it is greatly beneficial for mankind, and though it honors God, it will still be subject to much attack. But let preachers continue to preach the truth anyway. Let them not compromise and change their message to one that the world will approve. Preach the message that God approves. It is the only one worth preaching.

## **2. The Character of the Legalists**

Some who have written and preached on this text go soft on these disciples of legalism in Paul's day. They tell us these folk were honest men (Scripture says just the opposite, as we will note a bit later); and since they did not have the New Testament as we have it today, we should be gentle in our criticism of them. That soft approach sounds nice to those who do not take strong stands against evil and to those who do not examine the Scriptures very well. But it is not an approach that can be justified, for Scripture tells us these advocates of legalism were bad men. Luke (in Acts), James (in Acts), and Paul (in Galatians) all point out the evil of these legalists. We note from Scripture eleven ways in which the legalists were bad men: they were defiant, dedicated, defectors, disturbers, destroyers, dishonest, devious, disrespectful, defiled, defrauders, and discouragers.

*They were defiant.* These advocates of legalism insisted on teaching legalism even though they had been plainly shown it was not required. Thus they acted in defiance of the truth when they advocated legalism. Even though they did not have the New Testament, they had ample instructions and illustrations regarding salvation and the grace of God which showed them plainly that the law was not required for salvation. But they defiantly rejected the light they were given. They had especially been shown by Peter's experience with Cornelius that legalism had no part in salvation ([Acts 11:1–18](#))—we will note more of this in detail later. So their not having the New Testament was no excuse for their legalism. And anyway, even having the New Testament would not be a guarantee they would not reject the truth. Though we have the entire New Testament today, plus many helpful books which make plain that salvation is all of grace, we still have a multitude of people and churches doing like these Judaizers by insisting on works for salvation. In fact,



it is only a minority in religion who teach salvation by grace. Therefore, lacking the New Testament cannot excuse the Judaizers for their insistence on legalism. They knew the truth just as they did regarding Jesus Christ Whom they crucified. But they chose to reject the truth and in defiance of it to teach legalism. All of that certainly does not speak well of these legalists. Their character tells us they are not to be excused but condemned.

*They were dedicated.* Dedication of the legalists is especially seen in those who went to Antioch to teach the damnable doctrine of legalism. The dedication of these legalists can be seen in two ways in [Acts 15:1](#). It is seen in both their traveling and their teaching. It is not necessarily wrong to be dedicated, of course. The wrong comes when you, like these teachers of false doctrine, are dedicated in doing evil.

First, the *traveling*. “And certain men who came down from Judea.” Without cars and buses and planes that we have today, a trip from Jerusalem to Antioch was not an easy trip. It was a trip of nearly three hundred miles which was normally made on foot over rough and dusty roads. We will learn later on ([Acts 15:23](#)) that these teachers did not stop just at Antioch, but they also went into other parts of Syria and even farther on to the province of Cilicia. Hence, dedication is seen in the traveling of these teachers of legalism; for they did not let hard and long trips stop them from going to Antioch and to other places to spread their evil teaching.

We would make a note here about the word “down” in the [Acts 15:1](#) text. We normally say that when one goes north (Judea to Antioch), he is going “up” not “down.” We say “down” when one is going south. But in our text, going “down” involves a trip north from Judea (specifically from the city of Jerusalem in Judea) to Antioch. “Down” comes from the fact that Jerusalem was “up” some twenty-five hundred feet in terms of elevation compared to Antioch which was down in a valley. “Down” not only describes the geographical character of the legalists’ trip, but it is also a fitting word to describe the spiritual character of the legalists’ teachings, for “down” describes symbolically the evil the legalists were doing in teaching their wretched beliefs. They were not lifting anybody to new heights spiritually.

Second, the *teaching*. The word “taught” in [Acts 15:1](#) “is in the imperfect tense, [and] implies something more than a mere transient visit or occasional address” (J. A. Alexander). These teachers were incessant in their teaching of legalism. They went to Antioch not to stay for just a few days but to carry on a lengthy period of teaching.

The followers of error often put the followers of truth to shame by their dedication. Especially do the followers of error put to shame a great portion of

the Sunday morning church crowd. Little dedication is evidenced today among professing Christians. They cannot give of their time or talents or tithe to God's work. Christ gave His all for their salvation, but these professing saints hardly give at all for His service.

*They were defectors.* "But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees, which believed, saying, that it was needful to circumcise them" ([Acts 15:5](#)). Some of those who ardently embraced legalism regarding circumcision and salvation were in fact believers. But their protest against the doctrine of salvation by grace made them defectors from the faith. In doctrine they were turncoats. To them Paul could say the same thing he said to those in the Galatian churches who got mixed up with the legalistic error: "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" ([Galatians 3:1-3](#)).

The attack by these believers was doubtless the most stinging of the attacks in the polemics about legalism. It is one thing to be attacked by unbelievers, it is another thing to be attacked by believers who have rejected their faith in attacking you. These Pharisees had not grown well in the faith. They could have, of course. They had been taught better (cp. [Acts 11:1-18](#)), and so they knew better. But because of such things as pressure from friends and peers (cp. [Galatians 2:12](#)), they went back to embracing legalism. Like a number of professing Christians, they would not let go of their past ways after they were saved. As a result, they got themselves all mixed up regarding the things of the Lord. They became enemies of those with whom they should have been the best of friends.

*They were disturbers.* "Certain which went out from us have troubled you with words" ([Acts 15:24](#)). "Troubled" here means "to agitate, to make the heart palpitate" (A. T. Robertson). The disciples of legalism were not bringing peace to anyone's hearts. Error never does. Truth will bring peace, but not false doctrine. Note that the troubling was accomplished by "words." How much trouble people cause others by the use of their tongue. The tongue, if not used right, can become a mean weapon. The tongue can become "a fire, a world of iniquity" ([James 3:6](#)). These teachers of false doctrine were using their tongues to harm many people. Let this forcefully remind us to use our tongues in the interest of truth.

*They were destroyers.* The teachers of legalism were guilty of “subverting” ([Acts 15:24](#)) the souls of the believers in Antioch. The word “subverting” in our text is translated from the Greek word which means to literally “pack up baggage . . . hence, from a military point of view, to dismantle a town, to plunder” (Vine). In summary, it means to destroy. These teachers of legalism were not dismantling and plundering the believers in Antioch of material things, but they were subverting the “souls” of these believers. They were by their false teaching literally dismantling the faith of the believers. It is bad enough to destroy materially, but to do it spiritually is the worst subverting of all. Christ spoke a great anathema on those who would endeavor to destroy the faith one has in Him ([Matthew 18:6](#)).

*They were dishonest.* The dishonesty of the disciples of legalism was quite evident. We note two ways in which it was demonstrated: their pretended authorization and their pretended salvation.

First, the teachers who went to Antioch to teach legalism *lied about their authorization*. “We have heard that certain who went out from us . . . saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law, to whom we gave no such commandment” ([Acts 15:24](#)). “To whom we gave no such commandment” indicates that these legalist teachers were claiming to have been sent by the church at Jerusalem and, therefore, have an apostolic message. They made it appear they were authorized by the church in Jerusalem to teach Gentile believers that they needed to be circumcised to be saved. As is often the case with teachers of error, they represented themselves dishonestly.

We have had fakers in every age who have claimed to be speaking for God and have a message from God’s Word though it does not agree with God’s Word. The Book of Mormon, as an example, belongs in that category. Joseph Smith was grossly dishonest in claiming he was getting his message from God when it was simply invented by himself. The falseness of his message is evident in a number of ways. Two important ways are in the fact that his message is not in accord with the Word of God and it is not supported by archeology. Archeology is an important attestation of writings. Scripture, in contrast to the Book of Mormon, is abundantly substantiated by archeology.

Second, some advocates of legalism *lied about their salvation*. They claimed to believe in Christ, but Paul said in Galatians that they were “false brethren” ([Galatians 2:4](#)). They claimed to be Christians when they were nothing of the sort. They were thus very dishonest in representing their beliefs. Their faith was nothing but a

disguise; it was not real.

Satan is ever disguising himself as a good guy. Paul said in his second epistle to the Corinthians that Satan sometimes transforms himself into “an angel of light” ([2 Corinthians 11:14](#)). The news media shows this tactic of Satan by its constant building up of evil people as though they were really good people. Then when that has been accomplished, folk listen to the evil philosophy of these wretched people and think it is all right. Corrupt politicians, the immoral Hollywood crowd, and others are often portrayed as really good people. This puts their unholy lifestyle and wicked philosophies into an acceptable category. On the other hand, the news media viciously attacks good people so that how good people live and what they advocate will be viewed with utter contempt. Get earnestly and prayerfully into the Word of God lest you are beguiled by Satanic disguises.

*They were devious.* Some of these legalists “came in privily [deviously]” ([Galatians 2:4](#)) to some gathering of believers. What sort of situation they “came into privily” is not distinctly stated. What is stated is that they obtained entrance into the gathering of believers by a devious way. They came in through the side door so to speak, for that is the idea of the meaning of the phrase “came in privily.” That phrase is translated from one Greek word which means “brought in by the side, and so insidiously, illegally” (Vincent). Hence, they were devious. They did not come in by the right way. They deviated from the proper way of entrance.

This is a habitual tactic of evil. To use the figure of sports, they do not come through the regular ticket gate and buy a ticket as they should; they crawl over the fence or slip through some door or opening in the stadium to get into the game. Jesus spoke of this practice of the enemy when He said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber” ([John 10:1](#)). The deviousness of the disciples of legalism is another action which shows their poor character and keeps us from concluding, as some do, that they were good people who just had some honest doctrinal difficulties.

*They were disrespectful.* The phrase “came in privily” not only shows the deviousness of these advocates of legalism, but it also shows the general disrespect that permeates their character. They did not belong in the group or meeting they were in, but they came in anyway. They had no respect for privacy. This kind scorns “no trespassing” signs. They are like those in our day who insist on their rights but

trample on yours. Throughout the whole polemics about circumcision, their lack of respect for others permeates their actions and attitudes.

Disrespect always characterizes troublemakers in the church. They will be rude to church leaders and unmannerly and disruptive in church business meetings. Yet, they will be the first ones to complain if they think someone has not treated them with utmost respect. Such folk are a curse to a church, a tool of the devil; and their evil ways need to be exposed and condemned just as the false teachers were exposed and condemned in this circumcision dispute.

*They were defiled.* Paul said these disciples of legalism who desired to corrupt the Gospel message, came in secretly to “spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus” ([Galatians 2:4](#)). There is nothing nice about the spying these rascals did. The target in this case was probably Titus. Paul had brought him along on the trip from Antioch. Titus was a Gentile convert who was an outstanding Christian. The advocates of legalism obviously wanted to see if he was circumcised or not. If these spies had discovered Titus was circumcised, they would have accused Paul of being inconsistent in that he was advocating freedom from the law yet requiring a Gentile to obey the law. If Titus is not circumcised, then these evil men would claim that Titus is not saved. Either way they would make trouble for Paul and did.

To use present day situations to describe the vileness of their spying, these spies would sneak into the rest room and wait for Titus to come in, then they would get themselves into a location where they could spy (“peep” probably better describes their despicable action) to check out his circumcision status. Their spying was reprehensible, but these spies were not the only ones to do vile things of this sort. There were those in Jesus’ day who acted the same. They were the ones who brought “a woman taken in adultery” to Him ([John 8:3](#)), and they made sure He knew that she was taken in adultery “in the very act” ([John 8:4](#)). What they did not realize, of course, was that telling Christ she was caught in the very act only exposed how defiled they themselves were. To catch a woman in the very act of adultery meant they either set up the situation or were very good at peeping. The fact they did not bring the man indicates it was probably a set-up deal. But whether they set up the situation or simply knew where to peep (both of which they were obviously skilled at doing) to take a woman in the act of committing adultery only showed their own defilement.

False doctrine does not improve conduct. It defiles it. Those who teach salvation by works will, in fact, defile the character of man, not purify it. We will see more on this later when we examine the text which says “purifying their hearts by faith”

([Acts 15:9](#)).

*They were defrauders.* The object of those who embraced and propagated legalism was to “bring us into bondage” ([Galatians 2:4](#)). They would through their deceptive teaching and conduct rob the believers of the freedom they had from the law. In being disturbers, which we noted above, they would rob people of peace. Here, in being defrauders, they would rob believers of freedom from the burdensome yoke of the law.

There are always some, be they false teachers or just cantankerous church members, who are always robbing believers and churches of good things. They will not let God’s people have a moment of peace, and they will restrain and restrict the work of God through their devilish deportment. Such people are a detestable lot, and God’s judgment will be great unless they repent.

*They were discouragers.* When Peter spoke to the assembly in Jerusalem that met to consider this matter, he spoke of this doctrine of keeping the law in order to be saved as “a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear” ([Acts 15:10](#)). The legalistic teaching that Gentile believers must obey the law if they want to be saved was not an encouraging teaching. It would add a heavy burden to people’s hearts. No wonder the people “rejoiced for the consolation” ([Acts 15:31](#)) when they received news that the apostles and elders in Jerusalem denounced this circumcision teaching by the Judaizers. They were greatly encouraged. But this legalism did not bring true encouragement.

There are many in society and even in the church who, like these legalists, are nothing but a discouragement to others. God help us to not be that way but to so live our faith that instead of discouraging others we will encourage them. Especially should we live a life that encourages others to follow Christ, to honor God and His Word.

## **B. THE CONFERENCE ABOUT LEGALISM**

A very importance conference was held in Jerusalem to deliberate on this legalistic doctrine that said circumcision was necessary for salvation. The conference and the happenings associated with it are reported in both [Acts 15](#) and [Galatians 2](#). The

[Acts 15](#) account of the conference is given by Luke while the [Galatians 2](#) account of the conference is given by Paul. We will note the prompting of the conference, the participants sent to the conference, the path to the conference, the preliminaries to the conference, and the particulars of the conference.

## 1. The Prompting of the Conference

“When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question” ([Acts 15:2](#)). At least three significant reasons can be stated from our text which prompted the conference in Jerusalem about this dispute over circumcision and salvation. They are the commotion caused by the dispute, the challenge in the dispute, and the city initiating the dispute.

*The commotion caused by the dispute.* The teachers from Jerusalem were causing “no small dissension and disputation” ([Acts 15:2](#)) in Antioch by their insistence that circumcision and keeping the law were necessary for salvation. The word “dissension” comes from a Greek word meaning “rising in rebellion, insurrection . . . once translated uproar [[Acts 19:40](#)] . . . thrice sedition [[Acts 24:5](#); [Luke 23:19,25](#)] . . . here denoting violent contention and commotion” (J. A. Alexander). The word “disputation” comes from a Greek word meaning “seeking, search, investigation, but always applied in the New Testament to that of a polemic kind” (Ibid.).

This dispute had become very disruptive in the church at Antioch. Instead of having a ministry of reaching the lost, Paul and Barnabas and others in the church in Antioch were now occupied with this dispute. It was so unsettling to the church that it was decided a conference in Jerusalem was the only way to stop the commotion. When trouble becomes this big, something drastic must be done. Churches cannot continue on under such conditions and be productive.

Troublemakers in church cause similar problems as did the legalists in Antioch. Whatever the issue is, they become so demonstrative and cantankerous in their behavior that it takes away from the church’s main work. Many churches simply go from one heated dispute to another and never do get around to really doing something for God. Let the church and pastors take a lesson from the Antioch church and not hesitate to take drastic action if needed in order to stop the disruption in church. The drastic action may not be a conference in Jerusalem but the dismissing of dissident members.

*The challenge in the dispute.* The dispute was, as we noted above, attacking some very vital things in the church. It was attacking the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, it was attacking the value of Christ's work on the cross, and it was attacking the validity of Paul's ministry. When these things are being aggressively challenged, God's people cannot stand passively by. They must take some serious action if they have any respect for the things of God. When vital doctrine is attacked, God's people must fight hard for the truth. When God's servants are being attacked, God's people must fight hard to defend them if they want God's blessings upon their work.

*The city initiating the dispute.* B. H. Carroll instructively asked, "Why didn't Antioch, being an independent church, settle that question itself? The answer is that the men who were making this issue came from a similar church in Jerusalem. Hence, there was a propriety that could not be disregarded, viz., that this matter should be referred to that Jerusalem church and to the apostles. Their questions were, Did you give these men any such permission to come to us? Are they representatives of you, or are they just representing their own devilry?" Once it was learned that the teachers of false doctrine were on their own, the dispute would lose its weight, for the church in Antioch would know that these teachers of false doctrine were a phony bunch of teachers.

It is wise to insist on some investigation (which the conference in Jerusalem was all about) in these disruptive church disputes. If we do even a little investigating in church troubles, we will often quickly discover the real source of the problem. Church troublemakers like to appear that they are representing more folk than they are. They often act as though their attitude is that of the entire church when in truth they may be the only ones thinking like that. We heard of a pastor who was once told by a dissident member that the people wanted him to resign. During the next Sunday morning service, the pastor asked the people who wanted him to resign to raise their hands. When no one raised their hand, the pastor then exposed the dissident by telling him to raise his hand (the dissident had not raised his hand when he saw that no one else was raising their hands) since he was the one telling the pastor that folk wanted him to resign. This stopped the problem. The dissident, to his great shame, was exposed for what he was. He could no longer stay around and cause trouble. Yes, some wise investigation can do much to help folk deal effectively with church problems.



## 2. The Participants Sent to the Conference

The church in Antioch “determined [assigned, appointed] that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question” ([Acts 15:2](#)). We are not told in Scripture exactly how many from the church in Antioch went to the conference in Jerusalem, but we do know the names of three. The Acts’ text names Paul and Barnabas while the Galatians’ text about this conference adds Titus ([Galatians 2:1](#)) to the group. The important thing to note here is that Paul and Barnabas were certainly the right ones to send to the conference; in fact, they were the most important ones to be sent to the conference. Titus was a good one for the conference also, for he was a Gentile believer who was a real dedicated saint and, therefore, would make for a good exhibit to the Judaizers that one can be saved without being circumcised. But if only two could go to the conference, it was vital that Paul and Barnabas be the two. They were the ones most involved in the dispute with the legalists, and they were the most knowledgeable in the matters regarding the dispute.

Churches can learn a lesson here about choosing delegates to represent a church at various meetings. How often we have seen the wrong members of a church being sent to various conferences and board and committee meetings. Like the poor selection of people for church officers, appointed representatives are often most unqualified for their post. When a denomination is voting on some important issue at a major conference, only members who understand the issue involved should be given voting credentials by the church. When the church is requested to have a representative for some board or organization, the church should only send one who is capable of fulfilling the task. Often people who are wholly unqualified for being church representatives are most eager to represent the church at conferences or on boards. But their eagerness does not make up for lack of qualification. And lack of qualification only causes conferences and other like meetings to have more problems than remedies. Many problems with Christian colleges and other Christian organizations are a result of incompetent men being put on boards and committees.

In [Galatians 2](#), Paul tells us another reason which sent him to Jerusalem. Not only did the church select him to go, but also God instructed him to go. Paul said, “I went up by revelation” ([Galatians 2:2](#)). This double reason is not an uncommon thing. When a church calls a pastor, the pastor not only acts on the basis of what the church says but also on the basis of what God says to him. This double reason is seen elsewhere in Scripture regarding Paul. When Paul left Jerusalem early in his Christian life to go to Tarsus, it was both by Divine revelation ([Acts 22:18](#)) and

human direction ([Acts 9:30](#)). When ascertaining the will of God, make sure human invitation, direction, and wishes correspond with Divine direction.

### 3. The Path to the Conference

“And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice [Phoenicia] and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy unto all the brethren” ([Acts 15:3](#)). Scripture reports on the experiences Paul and his group had on their way to the conference. Not much is said—just this one verse is all—but there are good lessons in the verse. We note two of them: the support of the delegates and the services conducted by the delegates.

*The support.* “And being brought on their way by the church” ([Acts 15:3](#)) shows the support the church in Antioch gave Paul and Barnabas and the others for this trip. The phrase “being brought on their way” in this verse is one word in the Greek text and “has two distinct though allied meanings: one is ‘to conduct a person on his way,’ as in [Acts 20:38](#) and [21:5](#); the other is ‘to help a person on his way, by supplying him with all necessities for his journey,’ as in [Rom. 15:24](#); [1 Cor. 16:6](#); [2 Cor. 1:16](#); [Titus 3:13](#); [3 John 6](#). This last is the meaning here. Being the messengers of the Church, they travelled at the Church’s expense” (A. C. Hervey). This, of course, demonstrated that “The sympathy of the Church in Antioch was with them, not with the Judaizers” (William Jacobson). That their sympathy was with Paul and his group was demonstrated even more later on when the believers in Antioch rejoiced over the decision made at the conference.

We have known of churches who insisted their pastor attend denominational conferences but who did not supply the means for him to attend. With the meager salaries that most pastors receive, such an attitude by church members is really sick. If the church wants their pastor to attend conferences at some distance from the church, it is only reasonable that they pay the pastor’s way. The church of Antioch helped Paul and his group on their way. We should do nothing less.

*The services.* On the way to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas had services or meetings with other churches on the way and told them about the results of their missionary journey. They made good use of their time and means. The reports “declaring the conversion of the Gentiles [on their missionary journey] . . . caused great joy unto all the brethren” ([Acts 15:3](#)). Causing great joy among the brethren was not what the legalists were doing, however. Their teaching only caused problems and created

heavy burdens (cp. [Acts 15:10](#)).

But, strange as it may seem, even the report of souls being saved does not always make all professing Christians happy. The world is certainly not going to rejoice when souls are saved; but sad to say, many cantankerous saints, backslidden and carnal, also find little rejoicing in the salvation of souls. They demonstrate this attitude by such things as their disinterest in special meetings and by their lack of faithful attendance at church services. New souls are saved and a baptismal service is planned, but these folk stay home and watch television instead. They show more delight in seeing their favorite sports team win than in seeing someone saved. No wonder such folk are a pain in the neck of a church.

#### **4. The Preliminaries to the Conference**

When one compares [Acts 15](#) with [Galatians 2](#), he will discover that some meetings and incidents took place prior to the formal conference meeting regarding legalism in which “the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter” ([Acts 15:6](#)). These meetings and encounters certainly helped to show the need of a conference on the issue of legalism. Exactly how many meetings and separate encounters there were is difficult to ascertain, for where some see two or three separate meetings, others see only one or two with several incidents in each. But it really makes no difference as to exactly how many meetings and incidents took place before the main conference meeting, for the lessons will still be the same.

To see some of these lessons, we will look at five things which happened before the formal conference took place. They are the report of the missionaries, the response of the Pharisees, the rascality of the antagonists, the resistance to circumcision, and the reception by the leaders.

*The report of the missionaries.* When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem with the others accompanying them, “they declared all things that God had done with them” ([Acts 15:4](#)). This was obviously a report of their missionary journey. The report glorified God and showed their humility in the same way their report to the church at Antioch did when they first returned from the missionary endeavor, for it also reported all that “God had done with them” ([Acts 14:27](#); cp. [15:4](#)). Paul and Barnabas had been reporting their missionary trip to the Gentile believers on their way to Jerusalem. Now they continue to do the same once in Jerusalem. This report will be made again at the main conference meeting, for the report had much to do with the polemics about legalism. It demonstrated that God was working apart from

circumcision. The more that people heard the report, the more this truth would be driven home to them.

*The response of the Pharisees.* “But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, that it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses” ([Acts 15:5](#)). The Pharisees did not rejoice at the report of Paul and Barnabas, So they “rose up” and spoke out about the necessity of circumcision for salvation. This would throw a wet blanket on any rejoicing going on in the meeting or amongst believers. But there are always those in every church who can douse out the flame of joy and enthusiasm in God’s work by a few sentences from their mouths.

*The rascality of the antagonists.* The rascality of the antagonists was not just one incident. They were continually being a problem to Paul. Nothing these antagonists did was nice. As we noted earlier, they were defiant, disguised, devious, disrespectful, deceitful, defiled, defrauders, and discouragers in all of this. What a degraded bunch were these Judaizers. Doubtless the most provoking incident was the one Paul wrote about in Galatians in which the legalists “came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus” ([Galatians 2:4](#)). We have already covered the spying business and pointed out how foul these legalists were. But we mention it again here, even if only briefly, to show some of the preliminaries (and upsetting experiences for Paul) which occurred prior to the conference meeting. Many preachers can attest to these disruptive experiences prior to meetings and services which can become so aggravating it is difficult to perform well at the meeting or service.

*The resistance to circumcision.* The evil of the advocates of circumcision for salvation put a lot of pressure on Paul. But he did not yield one iota. “No, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” ([Galatians 2:5](#)). Before the formal conference on legalism, Paul met privately with the leaders of the church in Jerusalem and “communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles” ([Galatians 2:2](#)). His concern was “lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain” (Ibid.). One can hardly conclude that Paul was unsure of his message; but he was willing to talk with the leading apostles who preached the Gospel to compare notes, so to speak, to make sure he was not off track in some area. But when it came to the legalists, Paul had no time for their teaching. His resistance to circumcision for salvation was so strong that as G. Campbell Morgan said, “We

cannot read Paul's account of the council, and of its findings, without seeing that had they been other than they were, he would not have obeyed them. He was not seeking the authority of the Church at Jerusalem . . . and had the finding been one that put the Gentiles into bondage, he would have broken with Jerusalem and all the apostles in the interests of truth." We need to know our message so well that we can take such a stand and not be swayed by error.

*The reception by the leaders.* "When James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the heathen [Gentiles], and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward [diligent] to do" ([Galatians 2:9,10](#)). This reception by the pillars of the church doubtless occurred during the private meeting Paul had with them prior to the formal conference meeting. As we will note later, the big three in the church at Jerusalem—James, the brother of Christ, Peter, and John—also cast their lot with Paul in the conference meeting. This had to be a great encouragement to Paul. His past as a persecutor and his present stand against circumcision for salvation did not make him the most popular man in town with either side. Hence, for the main leaders of the church to give him such a good reception could only be a great help and encouragement to him.

When we walk in God's way, He will see to it that we experience ample support and encouragement. It may not necessarily be from church and denominational leaders, but it will come from somewhere. We get plenty of discouragement from the world and carnal Christians, and sometimes it seems that all we get is discouragement. But God is faithful and will provide us with the support and encouragement we need to keep on the right path. Let us focus on that help from God. Some only focus on discouragement and pay little attention to the encouragement. They only see the opposition, never the support. Paul made note of the encouragement he received; so should we.

## **5. The Particulars of the Conference**

"The apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter" ([Acts 15:6](#)). After Paul and his party from Antioch had been in Jerusalem a while, a meeting was called to especially deal with this issue of legalism. This conference was not a large public meeting but was a specially called meeting of the leaders of the church. From this meeting came the important decision regarding where the church leaders would

stand on the issue of law and grace. The meeting was an extremely important one in the early church. Had it resulted in a different decision on the issue than it did, untold harm would have come to the early church. It would have split the church into law and grace parties—or Jewish and Gentile parties—and the preaching of the Gospel would have been greatly hindered. But the grace of God controlled the outcome of this meeting; and it proved to be a great help, not a hindrance, to the work of the Gospel.

In examining this conference of church leaders on the issue of legalism, we will look primarily at the three main speeches (technically four speeches, for the second speech was probably two speeches, for both Paul and Barnabas spoke) given in the meeting. They were preceded by much informal “disputing” ([Acts 15:7](#)) about the issue of circumcision and salvation and whether the Gentiles could be saved and come into the church without keeping the law. The three speeches consisted of the reminding by Peter, the reporting by Paul and Barnabas, and the responding by James.

*The reminding by Peter.* “And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them . . . ” ([Acts 15:7](#)). As others have pointed out, Peter evidenced a good deal of patience here in biding his time before he spoke. In earlier days he was generally the first to speak and often spoke so quickly that he spoke before he thought. But things have changed. Peter has grown a great deal in grace. Now he waits patiently till others have exhausted their arguments.

It is fitting that Peter should be the first to speak here, for he was both the one chosen to break the barrier about taking the Gospel to the Gentiles ([Acts 10](#), [Acts 15:7](#)) and the one designated the apostle of circumcision ([Galatians 2:7](#))—that is, he did not advocate circumcision but was the one who took the Gospel to the Jews in contrast to Paul to took the Gospel to the Gentiles who were the uncircumcised.

Peter’s speech reminded the group of his experience of breaking the barrier in taking the Gospel to the Gentiles. “Ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe” ([Acts 15:7](#)). They could hardly forget that experience. After Peter’s encounter with the Gentile Cornelius and his household, “they that were of the circumcision contended with him” ([Acts 11:2](#)). But Peter gave a good answer to to the contenders in Jerusalem ([Acts 11:4–18](#)), and that silenced their contending with Peter. This renewed contending for legalism indicated some strong reminding of the past was needed.

This reminding emphasized four reasons why the Gentiles are saved without

circumcision or other keeping of the Jewish law. These four reasons are the giving of the Holy Spirit, the equality of people, the weakness of the flesh, and the sufficiency of grace.

First, the *giving of the Holy Spirit*. “And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us” ([Acts 15:8](#)). A strong argument against those who taught that the Gentiles must be circumcised to be saved was the fact that when the Gentiles believed, God gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit just as He did when the Jews believed. The giving of the Spirit to the Gentiles could not be disputed. From the very first when Peter preached to the Gentile Cornelius and his household, the gift of the Spirit came upon the Gentiles in a most evident way ([Acts 10:44–46](#)). Peter said this was God bearing “witness” ([Acts 15:8](#)) of their salvation. This was proof from God that they were truly saved. Peter reminded the group that because “God . . . knoweth the hearts” (ibid.) whether one is truly believing or not, He certainly would not give the Spirit to anyone who did not believe. So if God gave the gift of the Spirit to the Gentiles to signify their salvation, why would they need to be circumcised? The answer is obvious—they did not need to be circumcised to be saved, for they had been saved apart from circumcision.

The giving of the Spirit is still proof of salvation. Scripture says, “After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise” ([Ephesians 1:13](#)) and “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” ([Romans 8:9](#)). When you receive Christ as your Savior, you do not have to pray and pray and pray to receive the Spirit. That comes automatically. Faith in Christ is the requirement for receiving the Spirit, not “praying through” as some erroneously teach.

Second, the *equality of people*. “And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” ([Acts 15:9](#)). One of the first things Peter said to Cornelius and his household when he visited them was that he perceived “that God is no respecter of persons” ([Acts 10:34](#)). He learned this from the vision God gave him while at Simon the tanner’s house in Joppa ([Acts 10:9–16,28](#)). Here at the conference about legalism, Peter repeats this truth with his “no difference” statement. This statement says both Jews and Gentiles are saved the same way, namely, by faith, not by the law. It was a strong argument against the legalists. Salvation had nothing to do with circumcision or keeping any other part of the law. Therefore, it must not now be made a part of salvation for the Gentiles.

Note in this “no difference” statement that Peter speaks of the “purifying” of the “hearts” by faith. This speaks of what primarily needs to be cleansed for salvation—the heart, and it speaks of what produces virtue—faith. In regards to what primarily needs cleansed in the matter of salvation, F. C. Cook says, “The real uncleanness of the Gentiles was not in the body, as the Jews thought [and expressed by demanding



circumcision for salvation], but in the heart.” In regards to what produces virtue, Joseph Parker says, “Faith refines the heart; faith chains up the passions like so many dogs that may be excellent servants but bad masters; and says ‘Walk behind; I lead.’ The man of great faith cannot be vulgar; he who has sublime faith has sublime refinement.” Two great truths these are from Peter’s statement; truths which many need reminding about today.

Third, the *weakness of the flesh*. “Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” ([Acts 15:10](#)). The law did not save; it only cursed. Man could not keep the law because the weakness of the flesh made it impossible. Hence, the law was a “yoke,” a heavy burden which only condemned. Peter’s argument here is a concise statement of what Paul elaborates on in the book of Galatians. We are not saved by the works of the flesh but by the grace of God.

Peter argues rightly that demanding circumcision and other deeds of the law as a requirement for salvation is to “tempt . . . God.” J. A. Alexander said that the tempting of God here means to “try his patience and forbearance, by requiring further evidence of what he has already made so plain . . . When God had so explicitly declared that faith, with its effects, entitled men to be received into the church, it would be tempting him to look for other evidence or prescribe other terms of admission.” Unbelief and disobedience are continually asking for more proof when adequate proof has already been given.

Fourth, the *sufficiency of grace*. “We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” ([Acts 15:11](#)). Peter finishes his attack upon legalism by making it crystal clear that salvation is all of grace and that grace is sufficient to save any soul be that soul Gentile or Jew. This too, like the other statements he has made in his speech, means that circumcision or adherence to other parts of the law, are not necessary for salvation.

*The reporting by Paul and Barnabas.* The speeches of Paul and Barnabas were simply a reporting of their past missionary journey. They reported all about the “miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them” ([Acts 15:12](#)). Luke does not record in detail what they said, for he has already reported in detail ([Acts 13](#) and [14](#)) the significant experiences they had on the trip.

To the casual reader, this report may seem incidental to the issue at hand—but it certainly was not. It was a very important addition to the argument against legalism. It was a great exhibit of the proof that Gentiles were being saved apart from the law. In telling about the “miracles and wonders,” the argument which Paul and Barnabas



gave against legalism was, therefore, not philosophical but practical. And making an appeal to miracles and wonders, as being evidence that Gentiles were being saved apart from the law, fit the Jewish thinking well; for “the Jews require a sign” ([1 Corinthians 1:22](#)) in contrast to the Gentiles who “seek after wisdom” (Ibid.). The Jews want the practical proof; the Gentiles want the philosophical proof. In either case, God had plenty of proof. He always does. Man can never complain that God’s ways are not substantiated. Man’s problem is that he will not believe the signs and will not heed the wisdom.

*The responding by James.* James’ speech was the final one of the conference. His speech was basically a response to the deliberations of the conference. It can be divided into two parts: the reference to Peter’s speech and the recommendation to the conference attenders.

First, the *reference* to Peter’s speech. “Simeon [Simon Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets” ([Acts 15:14,15](#)). James makes a great commendation of Peter’s speech. He states that what Peter said is what the Word of God says. Thus Peter spoke the truth. His message was valid. Our messages must conform to the Word of God, or they are bogus messages. Preachers are to “preach the word” ([2 Timothy 4:2](#)). We do not have license to preach something besides God’s Word. We are ambassadors of God which means we are to carry His message. His message is the Word. Woe be to all preachers who are preaching something else.

The prophecy which Peter’s message agreed with was in [Amos 9:11,12](#). This prophecy involves more than the beginning of the church and the allowing of the Gentiles into the fold of God. The prophecy speaks primarily of things yet to come. However, in principle, it speaks of Gentiles receiving blessings from God as well as Jews, an argument opposing the necessity of Gentiles becoming Jews (via keeping the law such as circumcision) to be saved.

Second, the *recommendation* to the conference attenders. Following his comment on Peter’s sermon, James then makes a recommendation that the conference attenders write a letter to the Gentile believers informing them of the attenders’ decision to oppose legalism and also giving them some directives regarding their personal conduct. In our next point, we will examine in detail this recommended communication. Suffice it to say here that James brought a good conclusion to the meeting and conference by his comments. James, who is the Lord’s brother and author of the book of James, was not a believer in Christ until after the resurrection.

But once he believed, he quickly became an able leader in the early church as his work here in the conference verifies. Faith in Christ always makes one useful in God's service. Unbelief renders us useless to serve and honor God. But faith does just the opposite.

## C. THE COMMUNICATION AGAINST LEGALISM

James' recommendation about the group sending a letter to the Gentile believers was well accepted. The group immediately took action to comply with James' recommendation. We will note the contents of the letter, the carriers of the letter, and the consequences of the letter.

### 1. The Contents of the Letter

The letter, as we learned in James' recommendation, would be twofold in content. It informed the churches of the decision regarding legalism, and it gave some directives regarding some matters of conduct.

*The decision.* James recommended "that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God" ([Acts 15:19](#)). That was tantamount to saying that he recommended supporting the doctrine of grace and not the doctrine of legalism. Legalism "troubled" souls (cp. [Acts 15:24](#)). Grace does not. The group at the conference stood for grace, and they will communicate this fact in the special letter to the Gentile believers. Their position was stated in the letter as follows: "Forasmuch as we have heard that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law; to whom we gave no such commandment, It seemed good unto us . . . to send chosen men unto you . . . who shall also tell you the same things by mouth" ([Acts 15:24,25,27](#)).

The communication about the decision not only tells the churches what the decision was, but the language used also tells them how strong the decision was. The language is plain and firm. It condemned both legalism and those who propagated it. The language would be too strong for many in our churches today, of course. But that only shows how weak our churches are in fighting evil. Legalism was a damnable doctrine that needed denouncing in the firmest of language. And those

advocating legalism needed denouncing, too; for they were bad men, as we have noted earlier. You gain nothing by watering down your denouncing of evil.

*The directives.* The directives of the letter said, “Abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well” ([Acts 15:29](#), cp. [15:20](#)). Why were these directives included? For at least three reasons: the consideration of others, the commandments of God, and the corruption of immorality.

First, the *consideration of others*. Paul dealt at length with this subject in [Romans 14](#) and [1 Corinthians 10:23–33](#). It is summed up in “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” ([1 Corinthians 10:23](#)). It was extremely offensive to Jewish people to see or be with one who ate meat that had been offered to idols. The meat, of course, was not polluted and eating it did not pollute one. But the Jews so abhorred idolatry that this greatly bothered them. Christians in a church would eat together at various times. In due consideration of others, the Gentiles were asked to not eat meat from idols.

Second, the *commandments of God*. Commandments given by God in the past were involved in the directives to not eat blood (which also involved eating an animal that was strangled, for it would not have its blood drained from it). As far back as Noah ([Genesis 9:4](#)) this command was given to emphasize the fact that the life of the flesh was in the blood and also, as is seen later in Scripture ([Leviticus 17:10,11](#)), to emphasize the place of the blood in redemption.

Third, the *corruption of immorality*. The Gentile converts had in many cases come from an idolatrous background where fornication was part of their religion. This exhortation against immorality was to keep their morals holy. This directive and the others reminded the Gentiles that though the law was refuted as part of salvation, it did not mean they could live a lawless life regarding morals and manners. Grace does not open the door to lawlessness in conduct any more than freedom opens the door to irresponsible conduct. A good number in our day have gone off track in both cases. Being a new person in Christ, we ought to demonstrate it in a more holy and mannerly lifestyle.

## 2. The Carriers of the Letter

“It seemed good unto us . . . to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the

same things by mouth” ([Acts 15:25–27](#)). The choice of the carriers for the letter was a very wise one. It showed concern for consecration, courtesy, and credibility.

*Concern for consecration.* Paul and Barnabas were “Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That says plenty about their consecration to Jesus Christ. No one puts their life on the line for Jesus Christ who does not have loads of consecration. The other two named carriers were not shy on consecration either. Silas and Judas are said to be “chief men among the brethren” ([Acts 15:22](#)). That is, they were spiritual leaders in the church at Jerusalem which says many good things about their consecration. Being a leader of the church in Jerusalem at that time took much consecration, for you literally risked your life in being such a prominent believer (cp. [Acts 12:1–4](#)). Both are also said to be “prophets” ([Acts 15:32](#)). So the carriers of the letter were certainly men consecrated to service for Christ. Churches can learn much from this. Too often the people they put in office are those who evidence very little consecration to Christ. They may have talent, be somebody in society, and be able to dole out the money for the church. But without being consecrated to Christ, they are a jeopardy to the church when put in church office.

*Concern for courtesy.* Paul and Barnabas were the first named to carry the letter. It was only right and courteous that they should be involved in carrying the letter inasmuch as they were sent to Jerusalem by the Antioch church to confer about this issue. If they had not been included as carriers, the church in Antioch would have suspected something was amiss with their two missionaries, the decision in the conference would have lost much of its meaning, and hard feelings would have resulted.

How often troubles occur in church simply because of a lack of courtesy by the members. Lack of courtesy not only can create much friction among the members but can also drive visitors away and in general be a real hindrance to the ministry of the church. Courtesy is not only needed in the church, but it is also needed in the home. In fact, courtesy needs to start at home or it will not get to the church.

*Concern for credibility.* Silas and Judas would help with the credibility. They would “tell you the same things by mouth” ([Acts 15:27](#)). Their presence would validate the letter. It would protect Paul and Barnabas from being accused of forgery in regards to the letter. Don’t think the enemy would not do such a thing. If only Paul and

Barnabas showed up with the letter, the enemy would have a field day accusing them of forgery. But sending others with Paul and Barnabas brought credibility to the letter by protecting Paul and Barnabas from accusations of lack of integrity.

Today we still need to practice this concern in the church. We learned a number of years ago from an outstanding Christian man, a church treasurer in one of the churches we pastored, the value of protecting people from false accusation. He normally had someone with him when he counted the offering at church each week (and it needs to be counted at church—not taken home by a person and counted). One Sunday, when the usual people who helped him were not present, he asked if we would help him. Our response was that the church trusted him fully and had no fear of his counting the money alone. He then said that he knew he was honest, but having someone else count the money with him protected him as well as the church. He needed protection as much as the church. Having someone else count the offering with him protected him from being accused of dishonesty. The church needs to be protected from thieves, but the church also needs to protect the treasurer from false accusation. Those assembled at the conference not only protected the church by sending good men; but in sending extra men with Paul and Barnabas, they also protected these two good men themselves. It was a wise move.

### **3. The Consequences of the Letter**

“They came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle, Which, when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation . . . Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also” ([Acts 15:30,31,35](#)). The letter did a great work. It brought rejoicing to the believers and rejuvenation to the work.

*It brought rejoicing to the believers.* “They rejoiced for consolation” ([Acts 15:31](#)). Indeed they would rejoice, for their salvation had been put in question by the legalists. They were told that if they were not circumcised and did not keep the law then they were not saved. For young converts, being informed about legalism and what it did to their salvation was anything but joy. But the good news was that this legalism teaching was error. When they believed in Jesus Christ, they were as saved as they could be.

*It brought rejuvenation to the work.* With this issue taken care of, Paul and Barnabas could get back to “teaching and preaching the word of the Lord” ([Acts](#)

[15:35](#)). How well this exposes one of the main underlying purposes of evil. Evil wants to stop the progress of the work of God. So evil causes all kinds of trouble in the church to keep the pastor and people occupied with the trouble instead of being able to concentrate on proclaiming the Word of God. Dissidents give themselves away when they continually fuss and fume and upset the church. It is obvious they are not concerned about the main matter or they would not be always fussing and fuming about other things. But they are tools of the devil to hinder the work of God, and their troublemaking keeps things so upset that no one in the church can give themselves as they ought to the main business at hand.

## **D. THE CENSURE INVOLVING LEGALISM**

Evil does not die quickly. It requires constant vigilance to keep evil in its place. Nations, churches, and individuals have all succumbed to evil when they have not kept a continual guard against it. The conference about legalism dealt the evil work of legalism a severe blow, but the legalists did not quit. They continued their evil; and shockingly, they were effective in influencing such great leaders against legalism as Peter and Barnabas to behave contrary to the decision made in Jerusalem condemning legalism. This all comes out in Paul's letter to the Galatians. It led to Paul giving Peter a very severe censure.

There is some disagreement among Bible students as to exactly when this rebuke took place. Some believe it happened some time before the conference was held in Jerusalem. Others believe it was held after the conference. The chronology of the Galatians' text certainly supports the condemnation happening after the conference—which is when we believed it happened. But whether before or after the conference, the major lessons are the same.

In studying this censure of Peter by Paul regarding the legalism issue, we will note the cause of the censure and the character of the censure.

### **1. The Cause of the Censure**

“When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before certain men came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation

[hypocrisy]" ([Galatians 2:11–13](#)). The inconsistency of Peter and the influence of Peter were the two things which prompted Paul to censure him.

*The inconsistency of Peter.* Peter, for some reason not stated in the text, had come to Antioch to visit the church there. During his visit, he engaged in fellowship with the Gentiles of the church, eating freely with them. In principle, this conduct was in agreement with the decision about legalism made at the conference in Jerusalem. But then some men came from the church in Jerusalem who were sent by James. These men were obviously not fully opposed to legalism. Their presence and influence caused Peter to recant his liberty attitude and to practice some legalism in his fellowship. Such conduct was just plain hypocrisy ([Galatians 1:13](#)).

Why did Peter change? It was because he feared what others would think of him. He stopped eating with the Gentiles because of “fearing them which were of the circumcision [particularly the men from Jerusalem sent by James]” ([Galatians 2:12](#)). When we start fearing man more than God, we will sooner or later be shameful in our conduct. Here the fear of man caused Peter, who, in the case of Cornelius, had been shown plainly by God the wrongness of legalism and who had argued so convincingly at the conference against legalism, to be very inconsistent in his convictions.

Had the Scripture not reported this bit of unsavory conduct, we would not have believed it. But Scripture does report it, and in so doing gives us a very strong warning about keeping a continual vigilance against evil lest we be overcome by it. If Peter, who was truly a great saint of God, could fail so miserably regarding this legalistic issue, then how much more liable are we to fail in areas of temptation in our life. Never underestimate the power of sin. No matter how strong you may be against some evil today, tomorrow you may fail if you do not keep your guard up.

*The influence of Peter.* Another important reason for rebuking Peter was the influence he had on others. Probably the worst thing about his sin is that he caused others to sin. Our text tells us he got others to playing the hypocrite with him, even Barnabas of all people. Peter had a lot of influence. He was a great leader, an outspoken individual whose outspokenness was a great thing when it was for the truth. In the days of the early church, he was greatly and justifiably looked up to and followed. Hence, when he did evil, many others would follow.

We never sin unto ourselves. “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself” ([Romans 14:7](#)). We all have influence. Some have more than others. But

all have some. Therefore, if we sin, we will cause others to sin. If we do good, it will lead others to do the same. And we will learn quickly that more people will follow our evil example than will follow our good example.

We have a double warning here. First, take care that you influence people only to do right. Consider frequently how your conduct will affect others. Do not be selfish and seek your own wants and pleasures. Consider what it does to others. If it causes others to decline in the character of their conduct, you must change your conduct. Second, do not be primarily a follower of men but of God. Some people so idolize their heroes that if their hero does evil, they follow right along. Great men fail. But God does not fail. Great men can be good examples, and we can profit by learning from their good examples. But remember that God's Word is the final judge.

## **2. The Character of the Censure**

Six things can be said about the character of Paul's censure of Peter. It was courageous, strong, face-to-face, public, instructive, and successful.

*Courageous.* "I withstood him" ([Galatians 2:11](#)). It took much courage for Paul to censure Peter. At least two situations about this censure underscore this truth: Paul stood alone in rebuking and Peter stood above in reputation.

First, Paul stood alone in rebuking Peter. It is "I" not "we" in our text. Others, including his good friend and fellow missionary companion Barnabas, had capitulated to Peter's poor influence. Thus Paul had to deal with the situation himself. It takes courage to stand alone. When others stand with us, it does not require near the courage as when we must stand alone. But we should all know the Word of God well enough to have strong enough convictions to be able to stand alone.

Second, Peter stood above in reputation. Peter was not just some ordinary church member. He was the most prominent leader of the church in its earliest days. He was an apostle extraordinary. At the time of rebuke, Peter had a much higher respect and reputation than did Paul. Paul, of course, later became the greater of the two in fame in the Lord's work. But at the time of the censure, Peter was far above Paul in reputation in the church. This fact as well as being alone in the censure would require Paul to have much courage to rebuke Peter. But Paul had that courage. His convictions were so firmly grounded on the Word of God that he could courageously censure the great church leader. When our convictions are grounded on the Word of God, we will have courage to do right.



*Strong.* “I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed” ([Galatians 2:11](#)). This and the other sentences which quote what Paul said to Peter make it plain that the rebuke was a very strong rebuke. It was no secret tap on the shoulder and a whisper in the ear with gentle words. It was a very forthright rebuke. This strong censure of Peter was probably very shocking to those who heard it because it was so strong. But the evil of Peter needed a strong rebuke. It was causing unholy division in the church, and that needs to be strongly opposed.

Many of our churches need to take notice of the rebuke when they are dealing with sinful conduct that divides the church. A divided church is a weak church and will not glorify God well at all. Keeping that fact in mind will encourage folk to deal much more firmly with such sin in the church.

Paul’s censure of Peter demonstrates that a strong rebuke can be made without sinning. We can also see this truth in Christ’s denunciations of evil and in Peter’s dealing with evil in the church such as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. Some, however, seem to think that if we lift up our voice a bit strongly against evil, we are being sinful. But that is not true. It is possible, of course, to be too harsh, too stern, and too strong in rebuking evil. But that is seldom the problem in our churches. Today, the problem in our churches is that they are nearly always too lenient in rebuking evil. One of the great needs of our churches is to start rebuking evil more strongly than they have been doing. The peril of the evil demands it.

*Face-to-face.* Paul censured Peter “to the face” ([Galatians 2:11](#)). While the rebuke was strong and not a pleasant moment for Peter, it was an above-board rebuke. Paul was not like so many of our church members who do most of their censuring behind people’s backs. He came face-to-face with Peter. He did not talk sweet to Peter when he was around him and nasty about him when Peter was not in his company. Paul was faithful; he was not two-faced. We may not like criticism; but if it is face-to-face, we can respect it much more than that which is done behind the back.

*Public.* Paul rebuked Peter “before them all” ([Galatian 2:14](#)). Being a public rebuke had to be highly embarrassing to Peter. Why did not Paul take Peter aside and straighten him out? Why did Paul drag the dirty linens of the church out in full view of others? Isn’t this unChristian and suggestive of retaliation of some sort or of being just plain jealous of Peter and wanting to tear him down in public? No, it was none of these things which are so common among people today. Paul rebuked

Peter in public because Peter's sin was public. Public sin needs public rebuke. Peter's sin being public had caused others to sin. Therefore, the public needed to know that Peter's conduct was wrong. A private rebuke in this case would have been very deficient in dealing with the sin properly. It would not have informed the public that the action was wrong.

In dealing with sin, we must remember that we are doing so for more reasons than just the guilty person. We are also doing it for the education of others. Others need to know what is right and wrong. When sin is exposed for what it really is, the innocent can learn and avoid being ensnared in the same sin. Therefore, a public sin needs a public rebuke.

*Instructive.* Paul's censure of Peter was not some illogical ranting and raving that often occurs in church business meetings. It was not some outburst that was filled with more heat than light. Rather, his censure of Peter was very instructive. It was instructive in both deportment and doctrine.

First, it was instructive in *deportment*. "I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" ([Galatians 2:14](#)). Paul's censure showed Peter how hypocritical his conduct was. Basically, the hypocrisy of Peter, Paul says, indicated that Peter expected more of the Gentiles than he demanded of himself. Many folk are like Peter here. Hypocrites always are. They demand others live better than they themselves live. They exhort new converts to be in all the services at church while they often miss services. They demand others do much at church while they do little. They expect others to carry the load financially while they put only small amounts in the offering plate. They pass the buck to everybody else, but not to themselves. It is a sickly, irresponsible attitude and one that certainly was not typical of Peter. But, unfortunately he was guilty of practicing it for a short time in Antioch.

Second, it was instructive in *doctrine*. It is difficult to know exactly where the Galatians' text leaves off recording what Paul said to Peter and what Paul is saying just to the Galatians. But whether all or part or none of [verses 15 to 21](#) of [Galatians 2](#) belongs in the rebuke Paul gave Peter, Paul supported his rebuke of Peter's deportment by instructive remarks about the doctrine of salvation in regards to law and grace. Doctrine determines our deportment. If Peter believes in grace, he will act differently towards the Gentiles than what he was doing after the men sent by James came to Antioch from Jerusalem. The doctrine of salvation by grace is what frees one from legalism. So Paul says, "A man is not justified by works of the law, but

by the faith of Jesus Christ . . . for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” ([Galatians 2:16](#)). Then he adds that “if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor” ([Galatians 2:18](#)). This is exactly what Peter was doing. He had spoken against legalism—destroyed its claims—now he was practicing it in Antioch by not eating with the Gentiles. Hence, he was a transgressor in this doctrinal matter.

How wise in instruction were Paul’s rebukes. Our rebukes need to be instructive like Paul’s censure of Peter was. We not only need to tell what is wrong conduct; but we also need to point out why the conduct is wrong, what the perils of the conduct are, etc. Doing this gives value to rebukes. Anyone can denounce others, but it takes a wise man to instruct the wrong-doers when he denounces them.

*Successful.* Paul’s censure of Peter got good results. As Peter’s epistles attest, Peter was corrected in practice and in doctrine. And also, as one of Peter’s epistles attest, Peter obviously did not get mad and walk out in a huff and cause friction and division amongst the saints because of this censure. To the contrary, we find Peter later on referring to Paul in one of his epistles as “Our beloved brother Paul” ([2 Peter 3:15](#)). That may surprise some, but the student of the Scripture will not be surprised; for Scripture says, “Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee” ([Proverbs 9:8](#)). Peter had his faults (and no person is without them), but it was obvious that he was generally a very wise person in spiritual matters. Such a character will respond well to justified and well given rebukes, such as the one Paul gave Peter. Dissidents in the church are another story. They do not respond at all to such rebukes. Their incorrigible behavior betrays their great spiritual deficiencies.

## **XI. PARTING FROM BARNABAS**

[ACTS 15:36–16:5](#)

PAUL’S SECOND MISSIONARY journey now comes to the fore. While it accomplished great things through the preaching of the Gospel, it got off to a bad start in the planning stage. After a time of furlough following the first missionary trip—a furlough which included the disruptive and time consuming contention with the legalists—Paul was ready to hit the road again in his missionary work. But when he brought up the subject to Barnabas, his co-laborer in the missionary work, a sharp disagreement occurred. Barnabas again wanted to take Mark, a relative of his, along

as their helper. But Paul would have none of that, for Mark had quit on them early into the first missionary journey. The result of this strong disagreement about taking Mark with them caused Paul and Barnabas to have a parting of the ways. Paul then pursued the second missionary journey with a different crew.

In this chapter we will focus on the beginnings of Paul's second missionary journey which is centered around the parting of Paul and Barnabas and the effects it had on the journey. In doing this, we will consider the concern of Paul ([Acts 15:36](#)), the conflict over Mark ([Acts 15:37–39](#)), the change in associates ([Acts 15:40](#), [16:1–3](#)), and the commencement of traveling ([Acts 15:41](#), [16:4,5](#)).

## A. THE CONCERN OF PAUL

“And some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do” ([Acts 15:36](#)). Strange as it may seem, the expressing of this concern by Paul was that which began the problem that led to the parting of Paul and Barnabas. However, as we will note later, it was not the concern which was the problem in the parting. Paul's concern was a good one, and it spoke well of Paul that he expressed it. We will note these two facts about the concern of Paul by examining the area of the concern and the attestation in the concern.

### 1. The Area of the Concern

The area of Paul's concern was primarily about the spiritual well-being of the new converts in the cities he had visited in his first missionary journey. This is seen in “our brethren . . . where we have preached the word of the Lord.” It is also seen even more plainly in what he did when he eventually went to these cities; for when he visited them, he concentrated on “confirming the churches” ([Acts 15:41](#)) so that they were “established in the faith” ([Acts 16:5](#)). This concern by Paul is a concern preachers should have for their new converts. As Matthew Henry says, “Wherever we have preached the word of the Lord, let us go and water the seed sown.”

The spiritual well-being of a person is the most important area in life to be concerned about. Yet, few folk are concerned about the spiritual needs of anyone including themselves. All we seem to be concerned about today is the physical and material needs of mankind. Our government spends much time and money on health care, creating jobs, housing, education, welfare, etc. But it certainly does not show

any concern about the moral and spiritual condition of the land. To the contrary, it is busy making and passing laws protecting lower morals (such as homosexuality) and prohibiting the mentioning of God in our schools and government. The great increase of laws permitting gambling have all been propagated and encouraged on the basis of the economic help it supposedly will give. The advocates of gambling do not care about morals, which gambling destroys, but about money. Most churches even demonstrate a greater interest in the physical and material well-being of mankind than they do the spiritual. Just look at their programs and listen to their sermons, and you learn this fact quickly. Fundamental churches are included in this guilt; their programs are more and more being filled with eating and playing while preaching and praying are put on the back burner. Many Sunday School classes cannot function now without their coffee and doughnut table in the classroom. These same classes will be found to have precious little food for the soul, however. But we should not be surprised, for the coffee and doughnut table tell us what kind of food they are most interested in. Paul was of a different and refreshing sort. He was chiefly concerned about how folk were doing spiritually. His proposal to get started on the second missionary journey makes that clear.

## **2. The Attestation in the Concern**

This concern spoke very highly of Paul. It attested the sincerity of his ministry. There were many travelers in his day—philosophers and the like—who traveled throughout the lands to propagate their ideology and to gather followers. But most of them were in it for what they could get out of it in terms of fortune and fame, not for what they could do for the people. Thus, their interest in people was feigned and for ulterior motives. Paul's expressed concern in our text attests that he was of a far different sort, however. He was not interested in the people for his own sake but for their sake. He was genuinely concerned about their spiritual well-being. He truly did love them. In his epistles, he spoke again and again of his great affection for the saints, and this concern in our text says the affection was genuine. Unlike the travelers of his day, his love was more than words; it was deeds.

A good number of preachers today reflect more the attitude of the travelers than they do of Paul. They use the people of the church to advance themselves instead of helping the people. Preachers that are in the ministry for themselves will show it by their great concern for their salary, their recognition, and their popularity. They will put a great emphasis on numbers in attendance at the church so their fame will grow while they put little emphasis on the message to help the saints' faith to grow. In public they feign great affection for the people, but it is all show to get the

people to think highly of the preacher. True preachers on the other hand will not be gushy, flattering, and hypocritical in their interest in people; but they will be honest, rebuke when it is necessary, emphasize the Word, and sacrifice much to help those in their care. Yet, they will be accused of being disinterested and unloving while the “traveler” preacher (today that is often the popular radio or TV preacher) will be praised highly.

## B. THE CONFLICT OVER MARK

“And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark” ([Acts 15:37](#)). Paul’s concern to visit “our brethren” in the cities, where he and Barnabas had ministered on the first missionary journey, was met with the strong insistence of Barnabas that Mark be included on the trip. As we noted at the beginning of the chapter, this was something Paul was definitely against. “Paul thought [it] not good to take him with them” ([Acts 15:38](#)). To examine this great conflict between Paul and Barnabas, we will consider the stands in the conflict, the source of the conflict, the separation because of the conflict, and the sequel to the conflict.

### 1. The Stands in the Conflict

There were two positions in this conflict: Paul rejected Mark, and Barnabas accepted Mark as an assistant for the missionaries. Paul stood against Mark being part of the missionary team; Barnabas stood for Mark being part of the missionary team. We will examine these stands separately in detail.

*Paul’s stand.* “Paul thought [it] not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work” ([Acts 15:38](#)). Though Paul had a good reason for rejecting Mark, not many side with him. Some do, however. Luke, the writer of Acts, “sides with St. Paul, and throws the blame of the quarrel, or at least of the separation upon Barnabas” (Hervey). The church sided with Paul, too; for it “recommended” him and his new co-laborer ([Acts 15:40](#)) for their journey but not Barnabas and Mark for their journey. It is interesting and disappointing to read what most others have to say about Paul’s attitude here. The general consensus is that Paul is quite at fault in his rejecting of Mark. His actions are said to be the result of his being such things as hard-hearted, stubborn, too

stern, “impetuous and impatient, and easily kindled to indignation and possible overbearing” (Howson). We believe if people would examine the Scripture closely, they would not make such statements. In fact, we believe people need to start concentrating on what the Scripture says as to the reason why Paul rejected Mark, rather than on their own ideas as to why Paul did what he did. It is not wise to put Scripture in the back corner and spend most of our time expositing our own ideas instead.

Scripture gives good reason for supporting Paul’s actions. It says Mark was rejected because he had “departed from them from Pamphylia [Perga in Pamphylia], and went not with them to the work” ([Acts 15:38](#)). That is a very good reason for rejecting anyone from a future missionary trip. The word “departed” is a strong word and is the word from which we get “apostasy.” It severely indicted Mark for his unfaithfulness in continuing on in the Lord’s work with Paul and Barnabas as he had promised. It made him suspect for future journeys. “Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint” ([Proverbs 25:19](#)); and, as Matthew Henry says, “If a man deceive me once, it is his fault; but, if twice, it is my own for trusting him.” Paul was engaged in some very important and difficult work. He was not interested in again taking one with him on a missionary endeavor who had failed so miserably before. Paul did not want a quitter working with him! One cannot blame him.

But the critics argue that though Mark failed, he could recover and be a better man and, therefore, we need to be considerate of that possibility. Mark did recover, and he recovered well. But at this juncture, more time certainly was needed to substantiate Mark’s change. One guilty of Mark’s unfaithfulness must prove over a good period of time his claim of change in the matter before he has re-established his trust for such an important assignment. Paul did not exclude Mark from every place of service. But he justifiably excluded him from a very tough assignment.

People who have failed greatly in service or in morals should not complain when they are not quickly accepted back into their former standing in the church. Before such an one can be trusted again, he must give good evidence that he is trustworthy. And that evidence will not be reliable until the change in conduct has been demonstrated a good length of time. Many folk who have failed can give an impressive show of reform over a short period of time. But it is the lengthy period of time that says the reform can be trusted.

*Barnabas’ stand.* Barnabas, of course, accepted Mark and saw no reason why he could not be taken on the journey. But you will note that Scripture does not record

Barnabas as giving good support for taking along one who formerly had failed so miserably. Scripture records Paul giving strong reason for rejecting him. But Scripture gives no support for Mark. Some point out that Paul was not being consistent and charitable with Barnabas, for Barnabas was the one that influenced the apostles in Jerusalem to accept Paul when Paul was a new convert. It is true that Barnabas was the one who was instrumental in making Paul acceptable to the saints in Jerusalem; but Scripture points out, as we did in an earlier chapter, that Barnabas gave good reasons why Paul should be accepted. Barnabas “declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” ([Acts 9:27](#)). But Scripture does not report Barnabas giving like quality reasons to justify taking Mark on the trip.

A strong influence in Barnabas choosing Mark was obviously his relationship to Mark. We noted in an earlier chapter that Barnabas and Mark were kinfolk ([Colossians 4:10](#)). Hence, “We see in this choice of Mark by Barnabas the natural partiality of a near relation” (Hervey). It is hard not to deal with bias towards those of our own kin. So often in Christendom we see this partiality. A son or daughter or other relative is given priority in being selected for a position because of their relationship to the one who makes the selection. But faithfulness, not family relationship, is the qualification that should be predominant in selecting one for service for the Lord. Paul stressed faithfulness; Barnabas stressed family relationship.

That which causes many people to water down the negative action of Barnabas and the positive action of Paul, so that Barnabas’ attitude about Mark does not look so bad but Paul’s attitude does look bad, is the fact that later on Paul speaks well of Mark in several of his epistles ([2 Timothy 4:11](#), [Philemon 1:24](#)). The general conclusion by many about Paul’s comments is that Barnabas helped to restore Mark, but Paul did not, for Paul had been too harsh in rejecting Mark, otherwise he also could have helped to restore Mark (by having included him on this journey). But we reject this conclusion for two reasons. First, Paul’s recognition of Mark’s restoration cannot be made to reflect on Paul negatively at all. It does not say Paul is confessing he was wrong in rejecting Mark. All it can be made to say is that after some years Mark became a better man, a person Paul could now trust and commend. Second, Scripture gives more support for Peter than for Barnabas in being the major factor in Mark’s restoration. Peter had considerable to do with Mark. In Peter’s first epistle, he mentions Mark very significantly as “Marcus [Mark], my son” ([1 Peter 5:13](#)). This does not mean Mark was his son in the flesh, but that Mark was his son in a spiritual relationship. It indicates that Peter was like a spiritual father to Mark in that he gave great help to Mark in spiritual matters. Paul called Timothy “my own son in the faith” ([1 Timothy 1:2](#)) for the same reason. As most Bible students know, the influence of



Peter is very evident in the Gospel of Mark, which Mark wrote some years later. Barnabas may have indeed helped in Mark's restoration, but not in such a way that it is critical of Paul's action in rejecting Mark for the second missionary journey. When considering Mark's restoration, give much of the credit to Peter for helping Mark come back from failure. Peter would especially know about failure and restoration; for in denying Christ three times, he himself had also failed greatly. But he was later restored by Christ (though Peter was restored shortly after his failure, it does not, however, discredit what we said about time being necessary for restoration; for the One restoring Peter knew Peter's heart. Men, however, must judge by the outward performance before they can verify a professed change as being real and, thus, have justification for restoration).

## **2. The Source of the Conflict**

Whether we accuse Paul or Barnabas or both of being wrong in the conflict, the lesson we can learn in any case is that the root cause of this conflict was the unfaithfulness of Mark. The contention and parting of Paul and Barnabas would never have happened had it not been for the fact that Mark was unfaithful. This lesson is the plainest one from this text and needs to be emphasized a good deal more than it is.

How many troubles unfaithfulness causes amongst people. In the home unfaithfulness creates a host of problems when divorce parts the husband from the wife. Not only are the children and other relatives troubled by the unfaithfulness, but so is the rest of society. Think how many troubles could be eliminated in society if the unfaithfulness of husband and wife could be eliminated.

Unfaithfulness is also a great problem in the church. It is a great hindrance to the well-being of the church. One who is unfaithful to their post can cause a string of upsetting encounters with many church people. As an example, someone fails to show up to teach their class so a substitute is appointed. The sub is upset because they were not notified in time to get a lesson and because that day they have special guests with them. Leaving suddenly to teach the class upsets the guests who do not like being alone in a strange church. On and on the chain of problems go. And it was all caused by someone being unfaithful. Remember this the next time you are tempted to skip out on some of your responsibilities. God will hold you guilty for all the troubles that you have created. You may think it does not hurt to skip out on your duties once in awhile, but that is never the case. Unfaithfulness multiplies troubles as few other things do. Our text is proof of that fact.

### 3. The Separation Because of the Conflict

“And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other” ([Acts 15:39](#)). The severity of the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas is emphasized in the meaning of the Greek words translated “contention” and “departed asunder.” The word translated “contention” is the word from which we get our English word “paroxysm.” It is used medically (reminding us that Luke, the writer here, was a physician) to describe a sharp increase in the intensity of a disease. Hence, here it means that the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas became so strong that they parted one from another. The word which is translated “departed asunder” means to rend apart, “violent division or forcible separation” (Alexander). The disagreement between Paul and Barnabas resulted in strong actions indeed.

The thing which really indicts Barnabas here is that he would rather travel with Mark than with Paul. There was a big difference between the two men! Mark had proven unfaithful. Paul had proven exceedingly faithful. Barnabas, however, preferred the unfaithful to the faithful. Not a good choice at all. But it reflects a weakness in Barnabas. He had been a great leader in the early church. He had sacrificed much materially to help the church. He had been zealous in preaching the Word. But favoritism for relatives was his Achilles’ heel. This does not mean Barnabas denied the faith and was laid on the shelf and not used again. He was indeed used of the Lord. What it means is that he made a great mistake here in preferring Mark over Paul and, as a result, missed out on tremendous blessings. We can make mistakes and survive, but the mistakes will still take their toll. They can leave big scars and cause one to wonder “what it could have been” if they had not failed.

Some may want to say Paul also rejected the company of a great Christian for inferior company. But to Paul’s justification, he did not reject Barnabas for someone like Mark. The replacement for Barnabas was Silas, a man of excellent credentials. Not only was Silas a much better proven man than Mark, but he was of no less quality than Barnabas. In fact, he was a better man than Barnabas in regards to the issue of legalism. As we noted in our last chapter, Barnabas for a time recanted some of his position against legalism by his actions when Peter was in town. He did not stop his hypocrisy in this matter until Paul rebuked Peter. So Paul cannot be accused of rejecting a good man for an inferior one as can be said of Barnabas.

### 4. The Sequel to the Conflict

The parting of Paul and Barnabas was not the final act in regards to the relationship of Barnabas and Paul and Mark. Here we want to note that though there were some

very serious disagreements between two great leaders in the early church, they did not hold grudges the rest of their lives. This we learn from a few verses in Paul's epistles. Paul's mentionings of Barnabas in [1 Corinthians 9:6](#) and [Colossians 4:10](#) show no lingering animosity. And his mentionings of Mark in [Colossians 4:10](#), [2 Timothy 4:11](#), and [Philemon 1:24](#) speak well of Mark. Howson said, "The severity of Paul may have been of eventual service to his [Mark's] character, in leading him to feel more deeply the serious importance of the work he had undertaken." When we treat unfaithfulness with leniency, we play down the seriousness of unfaithfulness. Paul's ardent rejection of Mark showed Mark that unfaithfulness in the Lord's work is a serious offense. Would that we treated sin more firmly today. Too often we dismiss it as no serious thing, and this only weakens the resolve of others to oppose temptation. After all, if it isn't all that serious, yielding to temptation once in a while won't matter all that much. But that is the wrong message to send to anyone. Paul sent the right message about Mark's unfaithfulness.

In spite of the severe argument between the two men, Paul and Barnabas obviously agreed on splitting up the territory in going back to visit the churches in the places they had been on their first missionary trip. Barnabas took Mark and "sailed unto Cyprus" ([Acts 15:39](#)) where the southern part of the first journey took place. Paul "went through Syria and Cilicia" ([Acts 15:41](#)) and on into the cities of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia which was the northern part of the first journey. Going to Cyprus would not trouble Mark as going the other route would, for he survived the Cyprus journey. It was a much easier place to minister than in the other places Paul and Barnabas had ministered on their first journey. It was when the missionaries got on the continent at Perga that he quit. So Barnabas did not have to worry much about Mark quitting the work on Cyprus.

### C. THE CHANGE IN ASSOCIATES

With Barnabas leaving Paul, it was necessary for Paul to find some new associates for his missionary travels. Paul's vehement rejection of Mark gave evidence that Paul would not choose one to travel with him unless that person had some outstanding qualities in character and service. And he found two men who really fit the bill. To replace Barnabas, Paul "chose Silas" ([Acts 15:40](#)). To replace Mark, Paul chose Timothy: "Him would Paul have to go forth with him" ([Acts 16:3](#)). These two new men for Paul's team were men of excellent and proven qualities which they demonstrated

in their faithful serving with Paul on this second missionary journey. Interestingly, both Silas and Mark served with Peter some years later ([1 Peter 5:12,13](#)) which also underscores their faithfulness in serving Christ. Their association with Peter most likely occurred when Paul was in prison or after Paul died or perhaps at both times.

We will look separately at each of these two new associates of Paul to note what excellent men they were.

## 1. Silas

Our first notice of Silas came when he and another leader in the church, a man named Judas, were appointed by the church in Jerusalem to travel with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to affirm the letter from the conference about legalism ([Acts 15:27](#)). After these men had “tarried there [in Antioch] a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren [Antioch church] unto [to return unto] the apostles [in Jerusalem]” ([Acts 15:33](#)). But “it pleased Silas to abide there still” ([Acts 15:34](#)). Choosing to stay in Antioch was, unknown to Silas, that which opened the door to great opportunity in serving Christ; for it resulted in his being chosen by Paul to go on Paul’s second missionary journey.

What we read of Silas regarding his assignment to accompany Paul and Barnabas from Jerusalem to Antioch and what we read of him throughout Scripture all points to a man of excellence in Christian faith and service. We especially note four important qualities: he was a spiritual leader, a sincere messenger, a seer of God, and a secretary for Peter.

*Spiritual leader.* When Silas was appointed to accompany Paul and Barnabas from Jerusalem to Antioch, Scripture says Silas was one of the “chief men among the brethren” ([Acts 15:22](#)). That means he was a leader in the early church in Jerusalem. This spoke much about his Christian life. Many folk have some interest in church, but Silas had much interest in the church. Church was not just a bit of religious decoration on his lapel. He was very involved in church. But that is not what makes his spiritual leadership so outstanding. What really makes his leadership in the church a great testimony of his spiritual character is that the leaders in the Jerusalem church were targeted for much persecution. It was not popular to be a Christian in Jerusalem in those days, and especially was it not popular to be a leader in the church in that city. Many people like to be a leader in the church today, for it often gives them prestige in society. But in Paul’s day, leadership in the church only made one’s life more threatened in society. But in spite of the peril of being dedicated enough to be a

leader in the church in those days, Silas did not cower. He stood for the Lord openly and unashamedly. He was indeed a good man for Paul's companion!

*Sincere messenger.* Again we look at what was said of him in Scripture when he was appointed to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Antioch. Besides being said to be a leader in the church, he is said to be one “who shall also tell you the same things by mouth” ([Acts 15:27](#)). The attenders of the conference in Jerusalem on legalism sent Paul and Barnabas with a letter for the Gentiles stating the opposition of the conference attenders to legalism. In sending the letter, they also sent some leaders of the Jerusalem church with Paul and Barnabas to confirm the genuineness of the letter by repeating verbally what the letter said in written form. Silas was one of those sent to confirm the letter's contents as being genuine and not being a forgery by Paul and Barnabas. All of this underscores the fact that Silas was a trusted man. He could be counted upon to speak the truth. The church at Jerusalem would not send just anyone along on the trip. Because of the nature of the letter and because of the seriousness of the problem of legalism, they would only send those they could especially trust.

A most necessary qualification for the Lord's service in any day is integrity. If you are going to be God's preacher, you must have the integrity to preach His message without alteration. There are many temptations and strong ones, too, to alter the message in order to be popular with the listeners; so it takes a man of strong integrity to preach the Word. Silas was that kind of man, and Paul knew it.

Unfortunately, there are not many men like Silas around. Pulpits are filled with the untrustworthy. They feign themselves as God's preacher when in fact they only preach what they want to preach. They could never have been trusted to travel with Paul and Barnabas to confirm the letter on legalism. They would have cowered to the Judaizers and said what would make them popular with that bunch.

*Seer of God.* Scripture ([Acts 15:32](#)) also tells us that Silas was a prophet (“seer,” the title of this paragraph, is another word for prophet—see [1 Samuel 9:9](#)). Being a prophet did not mean he only went around predicting the future. Mostly the job of a prophet was that of telling folk what the Word and will of God was. Being a prophet reflected a Divine call and endowment to proclaim the Word of God. What a great qualification for a man to have who would travel with Paul. In Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians, he speaks of Silas proclaiming the Word faithfully when he says, “For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even

by me and Silvanus [Silas] and Timotheus [Timothy], was not yea and nay, but in him was yea" ([2 Corinthians 1:19](#)).

Today, preachers look for super-star athletes, Hollywood starlets, and big names in the entertainment field to accompany them on their evangelistic tours or be with them for a service to help them gain and impress a crowd. But Paul did not look for such things. He looked for a man of God! He was in the business of proclaiming the Word of God, not in show business. If today you expect to speak in a chapel service of some of our Christian colleges or address a large gathering at a church or other religious meeting, you will have to be something other than a preacher. If you have excelled in sports, are somebody in politics, are famous because of your job as a radio or TV announcer, or are a Christian psychologist, you will be much more likely to get an invitation to speak in these places than if you are a Divinely called preacher of the Word of God. We know of a man who when in the ministry was a nobody; but when he went into psychology, he was soon invited to speak in many churches and also at important denominational meetings. Paul, however, was looking for a preacher. And Silas fit the qualification well.

*Secretary for Peter.* "By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly" ([1 Peter 5:12](#)). This last notation about Silas' character is recorded of him after he had served with Paul, but it is worthy to note here, for it reflects some qualities that were doubtless in Silas when he was chosen to serve with Paul. This task of being Peter's secretary surprises us, for we would not normally expect Silas to be a secretary. But doing the job in this case showed several outstanding character traits. First, it showed *his humbleness*. He was willing to serve in any area, even as a secretary to the apostle. Perhaps some who could do this task were not willing or available which is often why a Silas is pressed into such tasks in the church. Pastors should not get bogged down with tasks that take them away from their main work, but there are times when they have to do some humble tasks if the work of the Lord is to be carried on. Second, it showed *his versatility*. He could serve in many areas. Such men are indeed valuable in the church. Third, it showed *his faithfulness*. Peter, in disclosing that Silas was his secretary for the epistle, said Silas was "faithful." (The "I suppose" is a misleading translation. It indicates some doubt is present. But the Greek is not that way at all. It means Peter had concluded that Silas was faithful. He did not doubt it at all.)

These traits in Silas reveal what a good man Paul selected. They would indicate why Silas traveled well with Paul under all manner of adverse situations. He could adjust well, react well, and be faithful. He could also be humble, which meant it

would not upset him that Paul was the leader and that he, Silas, was the number two man.

## 2. Timothy

It was not until Paul and Silas had traveled a bit on the second missionary journey that Paul chose Timothy as an associate on the missionary team. Paul, along with Silas, traveled through “Syria and Cilicia . . . Then came he to . . . Lystra” ([Acts 15:41, 16:1](#)) where Timothy was. G. Campbell Morgan makes an encouraging remark about Paul finding Timothy in Lystra. He says, “How often God’s servants return, after years of absence, to some rough and rugged place of battle, and of blood, and of agony [there Paul was stoned and thought dead], and find fruitage.” Timothy, his mother, and grandmother were fruit from the ministry of Paul. Through Paul’s ministry they came to know Jesus Christ as their Savior. After their salvation, they grew much in spiritual things, for as we will see shortly, Paul highly compliments their faith in Christ.

We want to note four significant things here about Timothy and how they related to Paul: they are his catechizing, consecration, circumcision, and companionship.

*The catechizing of Timothy.* Paul, in his second epistle to Timothy, says Timothy “from a child . . . hast known the holy scriptures” ([2 Timothy 3:15](#)). His instruction in the Scriptures was obviously done by his mother and probably also his grandmother. Our text in Acts says Timothy was the son of “a certain woman, who was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek” ([Acts 16:1](#)). His father is not described as a believer. Being a Greek and unsaved, he would not be one to instruct Timothy in the faith. He may have taught Timothy some trade, but he would not be teaching Timothy the Scriptures. So his mother and also his grandmother would have to do it. Paul speaks well of their faith when he says, “I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also” ([2 Timothy 1:5](#)). Hence, Timothy was taught great spiritual truths by both word and deed. His mother and grandmother by their lives and their lips gave Timothy much instruction in the way of righteousness.

How valuable Christian parents are for a child. Today there is a big emphasis on the Christian day school and on Christian colleges. But as good as the best of them are, they are still no substitute for Christian parents who live their faith before their children and who themselves teach their children the Word of God. If we had to choose between Christian schools and Christian parents, we would be foolish to

choose Christian schools over Christian parents. But the Christian parents must have “unfeigned faith” to do the job. This is the faith Timothy’s mother had. So many mothers (and fathers, too) have a faith that is anything but unfeigned. This sort of hypocrisy is no help in instructing their children in the ways of God.

*The consecration of Timothy.* The name “Timothy” means “one who honors God.” How that fit the life of Timothy. His consecration to the Lord will be evident throughout the book of Acts. It was a consecration that was so great it would go to prison for the Lord’s sake ([Hebrews 13:23](#)).

It is important to note that this consecration was already evident when Paul chose him, for Timothy “was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium” ([Acts 16:2](#)) when Paul came to Lystra on the second missionary journey. If that consecration had been lacking, Timothy would not have been chosen by Paul. Paul did not want weaklings and quitters and compromisers on his team. He wanted those who were really consecrated. Mark would not do, for he had quit on Paul. But Timothy will do, for he has a good testimony that he is doing well in the faith.

We have spoken before of the need of good spiritual character to serve the Lord, and we speak of it again here, for it is in our text, and the exhortation is so needed in Christendom today. Our churches and Christian organizations need to get back to choosing people for tasks in the Lord’s work on the basis of their consecration to the Lord. The reason many are given a task or put in an office is often very carnal and is not based on consecration at all. As an example, many times people are put in church offices or on boards of Christian institutions and organizations because they are popular and are a successful businessman or politician or athlete. But that will never make up for lack of spirituality. We do not need “names” in order to have good officers or boards in Christendom; we need consecration. Timothy had it and, therefore, Paul chose him. Also, many churches have a habit of giving someone an office or job, such as a Sunday School teacher, “to encourage them to be more faithful.” This is totally contrary to the Word. We do not put people in office to make them faithful; we put people in office because they are faithful. And faithfulness must be demonstrated in the lowly before they can be given a higher position. Timothy proved he could serve the Lord in his home church before he was selected to serve in the high calling of traveling with Paul. If you cannot serve in your home church or in your home town or live your faith in your home, you are not ready for service anywhere else.



*The circumcision of Timothy.* After choosing Timothy to travel with him, Paul “took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters; for they knew . . . that his father was a Greek” ([Acts 16:3](#)). Matthew Henry says of this act of Paul, “This was strange.” And he is right, though not many will agree with that statement—even Henry himself a bit later in his commentary justifies the circumcising of Timothy. Most commentators think Paul did the right thing. But there are at least seven strong arguments to the contrary.

First, Timothy did not need circumcision to make him accepted; for Timothy uncircumcised was already “well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium” ([Acts 16:2](#)). And some of those were Jews.

Second, there was no precedence that would indicate that Timothy’s circumcision would help the situation. To suggest that circumcising Timothy would make the Gospel more palatable to the Jews is to forget that to most Jews the Gospel was not palatable even when it was preached to them by Jews who were circumcised and who were well respected in the Jewish community.

Third, Titus was not circumcised in Jerusalem. The Christian Jews in Jerusalem did not demand that Titus be circumcised ([Galatians 2:3](#)), and Paul adamantly refused to give in to the demands of the unbelieving Jews to have Titus circumcised ([Galatians 2:4,5](#)). Titus was all Gentile, but to the Judaizers that did not make any difference. They demanded both Jew and Gentile to be circumcised.

Fourth, Paul later plainly spoke against the idea himself in his first epistle to the church at Corinth. He said, “Is any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing” ([1 Corinthians 7:18,19](#)). This text is certainly an extremely strong argument against the circumcising of Timothy.

Fifth, Paul was called primarily to minister to the Gentiles ([Acts 22:21](#), [Romans 11:13](#)), and they certainly would not insist on Timothy being circumcised. To the contrary, as we will note more about later, having Timothy circumcised could offend the Gentiles and hurt his ministry amongst them.

Sixth, compromising on the issue of circumcision only caused the Jews to demand more compromising (cp. [Acts 21:20ff](#)). The more you give in to dissidents, the more they will demand. Give in to circumcision, and you will be expected to give in on other matters, too. Give in to evil and the more it will demand. As an example, the communists during World War II wanted to be included in China’s government. The government finally gave in and included them. Everyone knows the rest of the tragic story. In the church, if you allow a dissident to teach a class, he will soon want to be an officer. Make him an officer, and he will soon want to be on the board. Allow him on the board, and he will soon insist on being the chairman. Allow him to be

chairman, and he will think he is king of the church, and if troubles have not already multiplied, they will now and quickly.

Seventh, it would offend the Gentiles. The big argument people use for supporting Paul's circumcising of Timothy is that of expediency. That is, Paul circumcised Timothy so he would not be offensive to the Jews. Scripture indeed says Paul did it "because of the Jews who were in those quarters." But that does not make it right. Peter quit eating with the Gentiles in Antioch because of the Jews, but that certainly did not make it right either. Peter was wrong and Paul told him so ([Galatians 2:11–14](#)). However, the expediency argument sounds good on the surface, but the argument of expediency has a serious weakness in that it can be made both ways. As A. C. Gaebelien says, "Paul's act in circumcising Timothy must have produced a stir among the Gentile Christians." With Timothy being half Gentile (his father was a Greek) and with the Gentiles being given the decree from the conference stating circumcision was unnecessary and not required, this act of Paul could be just as offensive to the Gentiles as uncircumcision could be to the Jews. And the Gentiles must be considered, too. Paul himself said, "Give none offense, neither to the Jews, *nor to the Gentiles*, nor to the church of God" ([1 Corinthians 10:32](#)). Circumcising only considered the Jews. In trying not to offend the Jews, he would offend the Gentiles.

The lesson in this expediency problem is that we need to be careful that when trying to not be offensive to one party we do not become offensive to another party, especially good people. Sometimes, and we think it so in this case, we try to please those who are impossible to please and forget about those who are better people. Often we bend over backward to be conciliatory to the dissidents in church forgetting that in so doing we are giving a slap in the face to the good people. An ornery church member is given a class or other position in church to try to pacify him or her—while the good member is not given a class or position and is left to do nothing but fill a pew. Or we delay and set aside some action in a church business meeting in order to calm the dissidents, but in so doing we are giving more honor to the dissidents' illogical and unsavory ways and attitudes than to the good people who advocated and supported the action. In attempting to appease the dissidents, we become guilty of giving favors to bad people at the expense of good people because the good people do not fuss and fume. This business of trying not to offend people and yet forgetting that in trying to appease one group we highly offend another group is also seen in the action taken to stop prayers at school. We are told that prayer offends the atheists. So be it; but not having prayers offends a lot of people, too—and a whole lot more people than the one or two atheists in the school. The argument of expedience has its place, but not when we offend one

group when trying not to offend another group, and especially not when we offend good people in trying not to offend bad people—something Timothy’s circumcision could easily do.

*The companionship of Timothy.* Timothy became a very close companion of the Apostle Paul. B. H. Carroll said, “He was the most beloved, the most faithful, and the most efficient of all Paul’s co-laborers.” It is hard to argue with Carroll’s statement when Paul himself said, “I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state” ([Philippians 2:20](#)) and “He worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do” ([1 Corinthians 16:10](#)). Timothy was with Paul on both his second and third missionary journeys and was with Paul during his first imprisonment. As we go through the book of Acts, we will periodically read of Timothy; and each time it will be complimentary and will show his faithfulness in serving with Paul. The great companionship between the two is also seen by the fact that two of Paul’s epistles (1 and 2 Timothy) were written to Timothy and six of them have Timothy’s name along with Paul’s name in the opening salutation (2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon). Also, Paul spoke of him as “my own son in the faith” ([1 Timothy 1:2](#)), “dearly beloved son” ([2 Timothy 1:2](#)), and “my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord” ([1 Corinthians 4:17](#))—statements which indicated Paul’s great affection for and appreciation of Timothy and that Paul was a spiritual father to Timothy because he had helped Timothy so much in the faith.

When Paul chose Timothy to be part of his missionary team, he certainly made a great choice. We will all make wise choices when we choose associates, friends, a marriage partner, or church officers on the basis of their relationship with the Lord. It will prove a choice of blessing, not of burden.

## **D. THE COMMENCEMENT OF TRAVELING**

After Paul chose Silas to take the place of Barnabas, he was ready to commence traveling on his second missionary journey. This second journey would greatly advance the Gospel ministry in the world. “In his first journey, Paul may be said to have been only trying his wings; for his course, adventurous though it was, only swept in a limited circle round his native province. In his second journey, he performed a far more distant and perilous flight. Indeed, this journey was not only the greatest he achieved but perhaps the most momentous recorded in the annals of the human

race. In its issues it far outrivaled the expedition of Alexander the Great, when he carried the arms and civilization of Greece into the heart of Asia, or that of Caesar, when he landed on the shores of Britain, or even the voyage of Columbus, when he discovered the new world” (James Stalker).

To examine this early part of Paul’s second missionary journey, we will note the commending by the church in Antioch in sending Paul on his way, and the circuit of the churches which Paul traveled.

## 1. The Commending by the Church

“And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God” ([Acts 15:40](#)). The word “recommended” is translated from a word that means to give over, to yield. In the context of our text, it means the church in a public and official way sent out these two missionaries with their blessings and approval. The church of Antioch had done this at the start of Paul’s first missionary journey, too ([Acts 14:26](#)). There is no record in Scripture indicating this was done for Barnabas and Mark. As A. T. Robertson says, “It is clear now [from this recommending] that the sympathy of the church at Antioch is with Paul rather than with Barnabas in the cleavage that has come.” With the church being very close to the contention and thus knowing well the issues involved, the sympathy the church at Antioch had for Paul certainly gives strong support to the position that Paul was in the right and Barnabas in the wrong regarding the dispute over Mark. The church would also have no problem sending out Silas with their blessings either, especially since Silas, like Paul, was very opposed to legalism. Silas was sent by Jerusalem to confirm the decree sent out to declare the position of the church leaders as being opposed to legalism, and he did his job faithfully ([Acts 15:32](#)). Barnabas, of course, had capitulated when Peter had his momentary failure regarding the right attitude towards legalism ([Galatians 2:11–14](#)). This could make the church hesitate about Barnabas.

It is not necessary, of course, to have a church’s blessings upon you in order for you to serve the Lord. Neither does one need denominational connections to be a preacher or a missionary. The call originates with God, not men. It is to Him that we must answer first and foremost. However, it is good when sound churches and denominations can give their approval, for this helps others to distinguish better between the good and the fakers. There are a good many freelancers out there who are neither called of God or of anyone else. These phony ministers would pose as servants of God in order to fleece people of their faith and especially their fortune. When lacking approval of good Bible-believing churches and denominations, these

deceivers can be the more readily exposed.

## 2. The Circuit of the Churches

To start Paul's second missionary journey, Paul and Silas "went through Syria and Cilicia . . . then came he to Derbe and Lystra" ([Acts 15:41,16:1](#)). Unlike Paul's first missionary trip which began by sailing on the sea, the second journey commenced by traveling on foot. In leaving the home church in Antioch, Paul and Silas went north and west to visit churches in northern Syria and in the province of Cilicia—churches most likely established by the general evangelization which occurred right after "the persecution that arose about Stephen" ([Acts 11:19](#)). After leaving Cilicia they began to visit the churches where Paul and Barnabas had been on the first journey. What a joyous and emotional welcome Paul would receive. The reunions in these places would be most blessed indeed. There would, of course, be much inquiry about Barnabas and why he was not with Paul. Curiosity would like to know what Paul told them, but Scripture is silent about that. However, Scripture is not silent about what Paul and Silas did in the churches they visited on the first part of this second missionary trip. Scripture cites two main activities: the communicating of the decrees from the conference on legalism and the confirming of the churches in the faith.

*Communicating of the decrees.* "And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem" ([Acts 16:4](#)). A casual reading of the Scripture will miss the fact that the letter sent by the conference in Jerusalem was to be given to more than just the saints in Antioch of Syria but also to those in "Syria and Cilicia" ([Acts 15:23](#)). Antioch had already been given the decrees; but the decrees had not been carried throughout the rest of Syria nor into the province of Cilicia, the province where Paul's home town of Tarsus was located. Hence, Paul and Silas are completing the work which they had been appointed to do by the Jerusalem conference. This is another mark against Barnabas. He, too, was appointed to this task; but his going to Cyprus with Mark kept him from completing the task with Paul.

Taking the letter to the churches in Syria and Cilicia again reminds us, as we noted in our previous chapter, of the dedication of those who propagate error. They would spread their error over as much territory as possible. They did not stop at Antioch, which was a main center of the early church, but went out into other lands to do devilry in the churches. Oh, that the saints of God in our churches today

would show as much enthusiasm about propagating the Gospel.

*Confirming of the churches.* “And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches . . . And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily” ([Acts 15:41](#), [16:5](#)). We will note two important things about this confirming ministry: first, the work of confirming the churches and second, the results of this confirming.

First, *the work of confirming*. We have seen the “confirming” work in previous studies in our book, noting it was not a ritual but a strengthening of the church in the faith. The word “confirming” in [Acts 15:41](#) basically means to solidify or strengthen. It is a close kin of the word “established” in [Acts 16:5](#), the other text here that speaks of strengthening the churches. In the Greek “confirming” is *sterizo* (from which we get our English word stereo) while the word “established” is *episterizo*. The *epi* meaning upon. These two words tell us *who* Paul and his co-laborers were strengthening (“the church”) and *where* they were strengthening the church (“in the faith”).

The confirming ministry is a much needed ministry in churches if they are to be strong and healthy spiritually. It, however, is often neglected and even despised because it cannot be reported quickly in numerical statistics. But “Ministers are well employed, and ought to think themselves so, and be satisfied, when they are made use of in confirming those that believe, as well as converting those that believe not” (Matthew Henry). B. H. Carroll, in commenting on this text, speaks similarly. He says, “All mission work, in order to become permanent and self-sustaining, calls for general evangelists, not freelancers given to sentimental slush, but men of character, mighty in doctrine, and sound in church polity.”

Second, *the result of confirming*. One of the results of the churches being strengthened in the faith was that they “increased in number daily” ([Acts 16:5](#)). Those who neglect or despise the confirming ministry because it does not give quick results in the numerical area need to pay attention to this verse. A confirming ministry is the key to future growth. The churches in our text first grew spiritually then they grew numerically. This is the proper program for church growth. There are many programs being propagated today for increasing the numerical size of a church, but seldom do we hear about this program anymore. The favorite programs of our churches today are the gimmicks’ programs that overnight often produce record breaking attendances. However, gimmicks make a circus out of a church, fill it with the world, and corrupt it. But if much genuine fruit is wanted, a tree must be healthy. Strengthening a church in the faith makes it healthy so that it can

indeed bear fruit. But most of our churches do not like the spiritual program that begins with the strengthening of the faith. Let them get a pastor who believes in this program of strengthening the faith and who will, therefore, be faithful in preaching the Word and in endeavoring to make the church a spiritual organization instead of a recreational center, and either he will be run off or there will be a large exodus of people from his church. These folks aren't interested in spiritual things. They came to church because of the carnal gimmicks and when these stop, their interest in church stops. But the people in Paul's day were of different character. Their interest in church was spiritual. Thus, when the Word was taught and preached in a "confirming" ministry, they took to the ministry and the churches grew and became good testimonies of God's saving grace to their communities.

## **XII. PLAN OF GOD**

### [ACTS 16:6–15](#)

THIS PASSAGE OF Scripture deals with Paul's learning and doing the will of God during a transitional time on his second missionary journey. The important subject of the plan of God in one's life is, therefore, very prominent in this portion of Scripture. Anyone who has any interest at all in living for God will be much concerned about the plan of God for their life. The world and carnal Christians are, of course, not very interested in knowing God's will. This explains the mess they make of their lives—not a mess in men's eyes perhaps, but always a mess in God's eyes. But for those interested in God's plan for their life, it is a far different story. And for them, the passage of Scripture before us will be of much interest, inspiration, and instruction. But for those not interested in God's plan for their life, this passage of Scripture will, tragically, be of little interest, though it is so vital to their lives.

We will divide our study of the plan of God in Paul's life into three parts: the discerning of God's will ([vv. 6–10](#)), the doing of God's will ([vv. 10–13](#)), and the dividends of God's will ([vv. 10–15](#)).

### **A. THE DISCERNING OF GOD'S WILL**

After visiting the churches which he and Barnabas had established earlier in south

Galatia during Paul's first missionary trip, Paul continued to move in a general westward direction. This signaled that Paul was now going to do more than just "visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do" ([Acts 15:36](#)). He was also going to move on to new territory in an effort to expand the outreach of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We will examine how Paul discerned exactly where God wanted him to go in preaching the Word in new areas. We will particularly note three significant factors involved here in Paul's discerning God's will during this transitional time of his second missionary trip when he went from visiting established churches to establishing new churches: the prohibiting, pleading, and pondering.

## 1. The Prohibiting

"Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed [attempted] to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not" ([vv. 6, 7](#)). In moving westward into new territory, Paul was prohibited from going into certain areas. This reminds us that the will of God is not always revealed to us in positives but oftentimes in negatives. Closed doors as well as opened doors show us His will. We would prefer the positives, for they are generally much easier on the flesh than the negatives. But we must not ignore the negatives or be upset that oftentimes God shuts doors in revealing His will to us.

Closing doors, as God did with Paul at this time, can be real tests for our service. Prohibiting Paul's movement involved three tests: the test of priority, the test of perplexity, and the test of patience.

*The test of priority.* Paul wanted to preach the Gospel in places where God did not want him to preach the Gospel at that time. Therefore, this prohibiting by God tested Paul as to whether his will or God's will would be given priority in Paul's life. This test is one every saint of God will frequently experience. It is extremely important that we pass this test if we would have a place of service in the Lord's work and would truly serve the Lord. A good servant is one who does what his master tells him to do. But so often God's people are self-willed and do what they want to do instead of what God wants them to do. This only leads to problems—many problems and big problems.

This test is not only one which believers experience, but it is a test that all mankind experiences. And by the looks of the world, it is obvious that God's will



does not get much priority. Society could solve so many of its problems if it only junked its own will in favor of God's will. But alas, mankind is in love with his own will and abhors God's will.

*The test of perplexity.* Heretofore, Paul had not experienced the shutting of doors as he did here. Therefore, Paul certainly had to be perplexed as to why God was suddenly stopping him from doing what he had been doing in the past. It seemed logical for Paul to reach out into Asia [the province, not the continent, is the reference here] and Bithynia. He had started preaching the Gospel in the eastern area of what is now our present day Turkey, and he had much success. To now carry the Gospel throughout the area by going in a general westward direction seemed the only logical thing to do. Why stop now? Furthermore, God had not given him other places to go yet, so what was Paul to do? It was a real puzzle indeed.

Our faith is not only tested in being asked to do some difficult task, but at times it is also tested in asking us to accept from God that which seems a real puzzle to us. Faith is not only exhibited in obeying commands to do the difficult but also in accepting what God says even though it is a perplexity to our minds. Faith will recognize that God's wisdom is far above our wisdom and that He does not do anything apart from great wisdom. To show our faith when we are perplexed by God's way, we should do as Paul did. He did not complain, criticize, or fret but just kept moving on a step at a time. If God shuts a door, don't argue with God as though you know more than God. Move on and trust God to know what is best. It will help you to stay in His will and to learn more about His will.

*The test of patience.* In Paul's case, some of the closed doors did not remain closed forever to him. He later carried the Gospel to some of the places where doors were previously shut. As an example, he was here forbidden to preach the Gospel in the province of Asia but was later permitted to do so and with great blessing. Ephesus was in Asia, and there Paul later had a great ministry in which hundreds of souls were saved. Also, while God forbid Paul from going into Bithynia, we know from [1 Peter 1:1](#) that the Gospel was later carried to that Roman province. We do not know if Paul or someone else carried the Gospel there; but while preaching the Gospel there was once forbidden by the Holy Spirit, it later was not. Later "Christianity became so strong in that province at the beginning of the second century that idol worship was seriously affected" (A. C. Gaebelein). And it was in Nice, a prominent city in Bithynia, that the first council was held to oppose the Arians. So in prohibiting

Paul on his second missionary journey from preaching in these areas at this time did not mean the Gospel would never be carried to these areas nor that Paul was necessarily forever forbidden from going to these areas to preach. Rather, the prohibiting by God simply said it was not God's time yet. But it is hard to wait God's time; hence, the prohibitions here were a real test of patience for Paul.

God's time is a very important factor in the will of God. Wise men will be patient and give great respect to God's time. We have noted in an earlier chapter of this book the importance of God's timing in Paul's life. This was seen when Paul was sent to Tarsus a few years after his conversion. The time was not ripe for him to preach and teach in Palestine or to be sent out as a prominent missionary from the church. But a few years later things had changed and Paul then came on the scene with great success.

We can find illustrations of God's timing in many places in Scripture. As an example, God's timing is seen in not putting a new convert into an important church office ([1 Timothy 3:6](#)). The new convert needs time to become strong and wise in the faith before he becomes a leader in the church. Also, God's timing is seen in the maturing and spiritual growing of Moses in the backside of the desert before he became the leader of Israel's emancipation from Egypt. Another illustration in Scripture of God's timing is seen in the life of Joseph. In being a slave in Potiphar's house and then a prisoner in an Egyptian prison for some years gave time and opportunity for him to learn much about the ins and outs of the Egyptian government. He needed this learning to equip him for the high position in Egypt's government which he had to have in order to be the savior of Egypt in the time of great famine. Mankind can really learn from these and other illustrations in Scripture, for he has so much learning to do in the area of God's timing. One area especially in which our society desperately needs improvement in respecting God's timing is in the matter of morals—no sex before marriage. Unless society has patience about that timing in God's will, our society will eventually be destroyed in the cesspool of moral corruption.

## **2. The Pleading**

"And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, and saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us" ([vv. 8, 9](#)). A very significant factor in helping Paul to know God's will regarding where he should continue his missionary efforts is the vision of the man of Macedonia pleading for Paul to come to Macedonia to "help us." In examining this vision, we will note the comfort from the pleading, the condition for the pleading, the commending of the pleading, and the country in the

pleading.

*The comfort from the pleading.* Though the prohibitings would perplex, Paul, as we noted above, did not complain but kept going forward in a westerly direction. However, at Troas, with Aegean Sea stretched out before him, he needed to know more exactly which route to take. Unlike being on land where he could quickly change directions, the sea was a different story. Once on a boat, he had to stay on it until it docked at its destination. If that was the wrong place for Paul to be, it could take some time for him to move and go on a different route. Therefore, if he is going to do God's will, he needed help in knowing which route to take, which boat to seek passage on, etc.

Paul got that help in a timely vision from God which told Paul exactly where to go. This vision had to be a great comfort to Paul concerning his ministry. The vision is also a great comfort to those who truly desire to do God's will. It reminds them that when God's faithful servants are in need of further instruction, God will provide it in due time. God will not leave us stranded in ignorance of His will when we have been faithful in following His will. Paul had been faithful to God in obeying the closed doors. Now God shows Paul the open door. Those, however, who do not submit well to the closed doors will not have this experience. This experience is only for those who walk obediently. The ones who complain about not knowing the will of God and not experiencing the timely revealing of His plan for their lives are only confessing that they have not submitted well to His will in the past when it was revealed to them. If we want the comfort of God's continued guidance, we must submit to present orders.

*The condition for the pleading.* The pleading of the man of Macedonia is a pungent reminder that the best the world has to offer is not satisfying. The Grecians needed help in spite of the fact that they seemed to have everything else. They had their culture, their philosophers (Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle), their champions (Alexander the Great), their athletic games (the Olympics started there), their architecture with the great theaters and stadiums and buildings, and they had religion—Athens, as an example, was full of thousands of gods. But they did not have Jesus Christ. Hence, they needed help.

How like Greece is our land. Our land seems to have everything. We have education, money, luxuries, gadgets, and games with their great stadiums, etc. But our land is still in very bad condition, for so many in our land do not have Jesus

Christ. As did the Macedonian man pleading with Paul, our land needs great help, too.

*The commending of the pleading.* The concern of the man of Macedonia is commendable. He realized he had a great spiritual need and sought to have it met. People are normally very disinterested in meeting their spiritual needs. If they have health needs or material needs or job needs or education needs, they generally pursue them earnestly. And our government goes right along with this and puts great priority on meeting these needs. But the spiritual need of man is all but ignored by most people of our land. Let the soul starve to death is the general attitude. But the Word of God teaches us a far different perspective. It exhorts, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” ([Matthew 6:33](#)). Our most important needs are our spiritual needs. Be most concerned about them; for “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” ([Mark 8:36](#)).

*The country in the pleading.* As we have noted, the pleading in the vision came from a man from “Macedonia” ([v. 9](#)). Macedonia was a Roman province located on the northwestern side of the Aegean Sea. The city of Troas, where Paul was at the time of the vision, was on the northeastern side of the Aegean in the Roman province of Asia. Macedonia was the northern half of what formerly was the nation of Greece before the Romans took over. Achaia (where Corinth was located) was the Roman province that took in the southern half of Greece, a nation that had reached its zenith in world power some three hundred years earlier under Alexander the Great.

In sailing across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia, Paul went from the continent of Asia to the continent of Europe as we divide the continents today. This, therefore, has caused many commentators to view this event of Paul going from Troas to Macedonia as an extremely significant turning point in the spreading of the Gospel. B. H. Carroll said, “It was the most stupendous event in history, apart from the crucifixion of Christ . . . The event revolutionized history.” James Stalker said, “The fate of our continent [North America] was decided when Paul crossed the Aegean.” Though we have much respect for these two men, we do not agree at all with their conclusion. There is no hint in the Scripture that Paul’s going to Macedonia was the turning point of where the Gospel was to be preached. Furthermore, the continent division is only a man-made line which was not in existence in those days. “The narrative gives no ground to think that the passage from Troas to Philippi was ever

thought of by Luke as a passage from continent to continent. A broad distinction between the two opposite sides of the Hellespont, as belonging to two different continents, had no existence in the thought of those who lived in the Aegean lands . . . [they] regarded the sea as the path connecting the Aegean countries with each other . . . [also] the distinction had no . . . existence from a political point of view, for Macedonia and Asia [the province] were merely two provinces of the Roman Empire, closely united by common language and character . . . [also] It is perhaps venturesome to say that the Gospel was now first preached on the continent of Europe, as the good tidings may have reached Rome through the Jews and proselytes who heard St. Peter on the Day of Pentecost” (James Hastings).

We suspect that had not one of the provinces of Rome been named Asia and that it was from that province Paul sailed to go to Macedonia, commentators over the years would not have been so quick to emphasize this idea about the Gospel now going to Europe instead of Asia (the continent). That the Gospel was going to go mostly west instead of east was evident long before Paul went to Macedonia. From the very beginning when Christians were scattered by persecution, the spreading of the Gospel was mostly in a westerly direction from Jerusalem and Palestine. West and east are to be determined by Jerusalem and Palestine, not by Troas and the province of Asia. Paul’s first missionary journey also indicated that the general direction the Gospel was going from the beginning was west. Macedonia was not a turning point but simply a continuation of what was already the general direction of the spreading of the Gospel. Paul was going west all the way when he reached Troas.

While the spreading of the Gospel was predominately west, we do need to note, however, that history informs us that it also went east and south but not very successfully. That which caused the Gospel to spread throughout Europe rather than throughout Asia and Africa had more to do with the acceptance by the people than by Paul’s going from Troas to Macedonia. The reason Christianity is found mostly in Europe and America today is not that Paul had a vision to go to Macedonia, but that those in Europe and America responded better to the Gospel than those in the east and south. Asia and Africa still do not respond well to the Gospel, though many noble attempts have been made to proclaim Christ in those continents. All of this is very instructive for us. It warns us of the perils of rejecting Divine truth when opportunity makes it available.

### **3. The Pondering**

“And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into

Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel unto them” (v. 10). The words “assuredly gathering” are translated from the same word translated “proving” in [Acts 9:22](#). It means to gather things together to consider and compare them in order to come to a conclusion. Here it is the considering and comparing by Paul and his missionary team of the important factors in their situation in order to discern God’s plan for them. The factors they would be pondering would be such things as their present location, their need of knowing just which route to take on the Aegean Sea, the prohibitings of the Holy Spirit regarding preaching in Bithynia and Asia, and the vision which Paul just had. Pondering all these factors together made it very plain where God was leading. Doubts were now cleared up. The perplexities about the prohibitings would be gone; for now they could see that at this time God wanted them to preach the Gospel in Macedonia, not in Bithynia or in Asia.

This pondering of all the significant factors is a most important part in doing the will of God. Too many folk operate on nothing more than emotion or on a few unimportant factors. But learning the will of God requires us to do some thoughtful consideration of all the significant factors in our lives. Sometimes we need to sit down with a pencil and a piece of paper and write down all the important factors involved in a situation to help us determine the will of God. At other times we may need to sit down with those people involved in the decision (as Paul did here) and discuss the factors. Having the people together who are involved in the decision helps to assure the considering of more factors in the case, factors which an individual himself might not be aware of. In taking time to duly consider the factors, we will often see that the will of God is more evident than we thought—and sometimes far different than we thought when we did not take time to duly consider all important factors. If we only consider one or two factors, we will not do well in learning the will of God. We must gather together a number of factors. This is what “assuredly gathering” indicates Paul and his companions did. They took the time to wisely consider all that they had experienced in the last weeks in order to discern just where God was leading them.

## **B. THE DOING OF GOD’S WILL**

Discerning God’s will for your life is not enough, you must also do God’s will. Paul and his fellow missionary laborers did just that, for after they learned what God’s

will was regarding their missionary endeavor, they got busy doing the will of God. We note the promptness, prudence, patience, and piety in their doing the will of God.

### **1. The Promptness in Doing God's Will**

"And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia" ([v. 10](#)). There was no delay in doing God's will in Paul's missionary team. When it was revealed to them that they should go to Macedonia, they "immediately . . . endeavored to go into Macedonia." Sincerity, submission, and safety are found in their action of doing the will of God promptly.

*Sincerity.* The immediate response to doing the revealed will of God revealed the sincerity of Paul and his co-laborers in serving God. Yes, we have already seen their sincerity in their past performance, but once again the genuineness of their professed devotion is evident. Some folk talk a good line about doing the will of God; but when the will of God is revealed, they are not quick to obey. Their sluggishness and procrastination indicate their talk was not sincere but only talk. Unlike Paul and his team, they do not show the enthusiasm for doing God's will that responds quickly to the revelation of His will.

*Submission.* The prompt response of Paul and his fellow laborers to do the will of God also reflected their submission to God. We noted a bit earlier the importance of being submissive to God's will. Paul and his crew had demonstrated submission to God's will when God closed some doors. Now they demonstrate the same submission when God opened a door. They did not complain about the assignment or ask why the open door was Macedonia and not Asia or Bithynia, but they immediately headed for Macedonia. Complaining reveals rebellion, and so does a lot of our "why?" questions. The submissive servant is more interested in doing what God says to do than in complaining about the task or asking why it has to be done. Therefore, when the will of God is revealed, he does not procrastinate doing the will of God by complaining and asking a lot of unnecessary questions.

*Safety.* If we do not submit to God's will promptly, we will open the door to many and great perils. Delay in obedience leads to the perils of missing opportunities, and it also leads to hardness of heart regarding the will of God. "God's calls must be

complied with immediately. As our obedience must not be disputed, so it must not be deferred; do it today, lest the heart be hardened” (Matthew Henry). Scripture warns of this peril of the hardness of heart when it says, “Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts” ([Hebrews 3:15](#)). Some folk have put off doing the will of God so often that they have a calloused heart that is no longer responsive to God’s revealed will. What loss of blessing such folks will experience in this life, and what sorrow eternity will bring to such hearts.

## 2. The Prudence in Doing God’s Will

“We came with a straight course to Samothracia [an island half way between Troas and Macedonia], and the next day to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony” ([vv. 11, 12](#)). Paul demonstrated great prudence in the city he first went to after reaching Macedonia. This is seen in two significant things that are said in this verse about Philippi, which received its name from Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. It was the “chief city of that part of Macedonia,” and it was a “colony.” Both of these descriptions of Philippi show the wisdom of Paul going to Philippi.

*A chief city.* Being a chief city did not mean it was the capital of Macedonia, for Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia. And anyway, the verse only said it was the chief city “of that part of Macedonia.” Some translate “part” as “district,” however, which then makes “chief” refer to all the province of Macedonia. In such a case it would be like the fact that Chicago is the chief city in Illinois; but the capital is Springfield, a much smaller city indeed.

Philippi being a “chief city” helps explain why Paul went to Philippi to begin his ministry in Macedonia. It was Paul’s wise habit to go to “towns of primary importance, in which radiating centers of Christian influence might be established” (Alexander). Paul would begin his ministry with a leading city “because, if the gospel were received there, it would the more easily spread thence all the country over” (Henry). This prudent practice of Paul made for a much more efficient ministry than had Paul tried to go back into all the various hamlets and huts himself. Paul’s practice, as we pointed out in an earlier chapter, does not necessarily discredit those who work in the back areas. But it does show an efficient way to reach folk. Pentecost had this feature, too. The preaching of the Gospel began in Jerusalem when the city was filled with people from many, many nations. These were primarily Jews, who had come for the celebration of the Passover, which occurred during



the crucifixion. When the disciples were given the gift of speaking in the various languages of all these people, these people could hear the Gospel well and then carry it to all the different nations. The disciples could never have reached so many people themselves in all their lifetime.

In reaching out with the message of God's Word, we do well to be as effective as we can in reaching people. Instead of spending an entire afternoon driving many miles over the countryside trying to visit a few people (who often are not at home) to invite them to church, it might be better for a pastor to delegate that work to some of his members who live near these people and he instead spend the afternoon writing up a good sermonette to put in the local newspaper that would reach the entire community. Now, of course, some will get upset here and say we are devaluing individuals. But read again what we have said. We have left no one out; we have only shown a more efficient program for reaching more people in a qualitative way. Philippi may not be a city but a newspaper advertisement, a mailing, a phone ministry, or a radio program.

*A colonized city.* Some cities in the countries Rome conquered were given the "colony" status. "These Roman colonies were organized precisely on the model of the great metropolis as to government, laws, language, and external forms, so that each exhibited a Rome in miniature. To some were granted . . . exemption from all taxes" (Alexander). "All freeman in such a colony were regarded as having all the rights of Roman citizens. It was the same as a little bit of Rome in a distant country. The colony situation provided a picture of the heavenly citizenship Paul spoke of in his letter to the Philippians, when he wrote, 'Our citizenship is in heaven' [[Philippians 3:20](#)]. They would understand that very well, for though they lived in Macedonia [Philippi], their citizenship was in Rome; and though we live in this poor world, our citizenship is in heaven!" (Ironsides).

Being a "colony" city in the Roman empire was another prudent place to proclaim the Gospel in Macedonia, for a "colony" city would have much contact with Rome, and, hence, with the entire Roman empire. Therefore, reaching this city with the Gospel meant the Gospel could reach out in many areas of the Roman empire. In a later study, we will note that Thessalonica, a seaport in Macedonia, where Paul went after Philippi, was also a key city to reach. Through contact with outsiders because of it being a seaport, Paul could later write of the Thessalonian Christians, "From you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad" ([1 Thessalonians 1:8](#)). So again we see the prudence of Paul in going to Philippi and other key cities

to minister the Word.

Before we pass to our next point, we need to note that Philippi being a “colony” came in especially handy for Paul in his Philippi experience. When he was released from prison after the earthquake and asked to depart from the city, Paul, a Roman citizen, gave the magistrates of the city a shock when he said, “They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates; and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans” ([Acts 16:37,38](#)). The rulers of a “colony” city understood all too well the significance of Paul being a Roman citizen, and they heeded his request ([Acts 16:39](#)). We will note more about this incident in our next chapter.

### **3. The Patience in Doing the Will of God**

“We were in that city abiding certain days” ([v. 12](#)). When Paul and his missionary group arrived in Philippi, they abode “certain days” before anything happened. Paul had the vision about the man of Macedonia pleading that Paul would come over and help them; but when they arrived, no one awaited them, no one met them at the dock when the ship anchored, no one had scheduled meetings for them, and no even realized who these strangers were. But Paul did not quit; he did not complain to God that they had made haste to come to Macedonia promptly but now that they are there, it looked like their promptness was unnecessary. No, Paul had patience in doing the will of God, a patience which knew that in due time opportunities would come, doors would be open, and people would be reached for Christ.

The writer of Hebrews (we believe it was Paul) said, “Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise” ([Hebrews 10:36](#)). This is true for all of us. We not only need to be prompt in doing the will of God, but we also need to be patient in doing the will of God. Lacking patience, we will quit before the seed bears fruit, before opportunities present themselves, before doors are opened, and before we get the job completed. Philippi was to become a significant place on the map because of Paul’s ministry there. Besides the experiences he had while there, it resulted in a great book in the Bible. But if Paul had not had patience during the slow beginning and had picked up and left Philippi, what a great loss would have occurred.

Many great works, like that in Philippi, have had humble and slow beginnings; all of which says that patience is very important in doing the will of God successfully. Make sure of where God wants you; then once there be patient for God to begin

working. Do not worry if you are not immediately recognized and great things do not happen shortly after your arrival. Patiently do what you can do, and in time you will see God working in a great way through you.

#### **4. The Piety in Doing the Will of God**

“And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted there” ([v. 13](#)). After “abiding certain days” in Philippi with no action, the Sabbath came, and Paul and his co-laborers, to use present day vernacular, looked for a place to attend church. All they could find was a prayer meeting being held by the riverside just outside of Philippi. There was no synagogue in Philippi, or Paul would have gone there to worship and to begin his work as was his usual practice in cities where synagogues were located. It required at least ten Jewish men to establish a synagogue. Philippi did not have many Jews, hence, no synagogue. But it did have a few pious souls who were not taken up with licentious idolatry. These souls had their own prayer meeting by the riverside on each Sabbath. Having no building, the riverside afforded them the best environment for prayer in the Philippi vicinity. Though a humble meeting and though there appeared to be no men involved (sounds like a lot of our churches who seem to have few men in them), Paul and his group still went to the prayer service; for it was a place where they could publicly worship. We need our private devotions, but we also need public worship as “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” ([Hebrews 10:25](#)) exhorts. At the prayer meeting, they found an opportunity—though it seemed a small one to the natural eye—to present the Gospel. There Paul spoke to the women concerning the Gospel; and, as we will see shortly, some were wonderfully converted. From this humble beginning developed the excellent church of Philippi.

The lesson in this faithfulness of Paul to attend a place of worship on the Sabbath is this: if we want to do the will of God and experience the attendant results that come from doing God’s will, one of the things we must be careful to do is maintain our pious practices. Had Paul and his team decided to skip church that Sabbath, they would have missed an important opportunity in God’s service. As many of our church members would have done, “They could have spent the Sabbath day viewing many historical and beautiful things. But instead, we find them going out by the riverside where a group of good women are holding a prayer meeting” (Ford). Attending the prayer meeting may have seemed like an insignificant thing to do, but it was not. It was the key to beginning the work in Philippi. It was the key to reaching Philippi with the Gospel. Sometimes those called to Christian service get

rather careless about their piety and devotion. They do not have much of a personal time of prayer and Bible study, when on vacation they often skip church services, and when attending conferences, they often wander about the halls and exhibits while the preaching is going on. Such conduct betrays their lack of piety, predicts their lackluster performance in doing God's will, and even predicts their eventual failure to stay in God's will. Hence, beware of being slack in your pious practices, it could ruin you and your service.

## C. THE DIVIDENDS OF GOD'S WILL

The dividends of doing God's will are many and blessed. We note three wonderful dividends Paul experienced in obeying God's call to go to Macedonia. They are the physician for Paul, the push by providence, and the peddler of purple.

### 1. The Physician for Paul

"Immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia" ([v. 10](#)). The "we" in this verse is significant. It marks the first time that Luke, the writer of this book of Acts, includes himself in the action. At Troas, Luke joined up with Paul to be part of his team. There are three "we" sections in Acts ([Acts 16:10–18](#); [20:5–21:18](#); [27:1–28:16](#)). Luke went from Troas to Philippi with Paul; then he apparently stayed in Philippi until he joined up again with Paul when Paul passed through Philippi on his third missionary journey. His stay in Philippi would be of great help to the new church there and could very well have been directed by Paul for that very purpose.

Luke, a physician, was a most faithful and beloved co-laborer of Paul. The faithfulness of Luke is seen in his staying with Paul through the darkest of times as "only Luke is with me" ([2 Timothy 4:11](#)) attests. Paul's great affection for him is indicated in his calling Luke the "beloved physician" ([Colossians 4:14](#)). Luke not only helped in proclaiming the Gospel, but he also could render much help medically to Paul—who needed it, too! How wonderful for Paul to have a man like Luke as part of his missionary team.

Where you walk determines your crowd, and walking in the will of God will certainly determine your friends and associates—and they will be the best and most helpful you can find. If you lack good friends and companions, it very well may be that you are out of the will of God. Luke was found by Paul when Paul was carefully doing the will of God in the obeying of closed doors. Being careful to do the will

of God is the best way to find a Luke or Timothy or other fine Christian friend or co-worker. One important area this truth needs more emphasis is in the matter of marriage. If you want a good mate, walk in the will of God and you will meet the right one. Backslide and be disobedient to God and you will have a hard time in finding a good mate—in fact, you probably won't. Many divorces and bad marriages occur because folk were not walking in the will of God when they courted—so they ended up marrying the wrong person. But walk in the will of God and you will meet the right person at the right time and at the right place.

## **2. The Push by Providence**

“Loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia” ([v. 11](#)). The words “we came with a straight course” are a translation of one Greek word which is a nautical term meaning “sailing before the wind” (Vincent), that is, sailing with the wind at your back. [Verse 11](#) reveals that the trip from Troas took but two days. Later, Paul made the same trip in five days ([Acts 20:6](#)). Thus, the first trip from Troas to Macedonia was a very quick one because the wind was with them. They did not have to zigzag all over the sea to get wind in their sails. With the wind behind their back pushing them forward, they could go quickly in a very straight course to their intended destination.

In serving the Lord, the wind is not always at our back. Sometimes we must sail against the wind. If we always sailed with the wind, we would be spoiled, of course. But the lesson in this text about Paul and his team sailing with the wind is that one of the dividends of doing the will of God is that God at significant times gives special encouragement and help. For a number of weeks previously, Paul had been running into closed doors. Resistance seemed to dog his path for awhile. But now, with their directions made clear, suddenly resistance steps aside and the wind is at his back. These special times of encouragement are a real blessing and help to our service, but you will note that this experience came when Paul was prompt to obey. If he had waited around in the delay mode for awhile, the weather would have changed and no longer would he find the sailing easy and quick. Much of the resistance we experience in doing the will of God is from Satan, but some of it is also a result of our delinquency when we by our failure to obey promptly make it more difficult to do our duty.

## **3. The Peddler of Purple**

“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira .

. . . heard us; whose heart the Lord opened” ([v. 14](#)). Here was a choice dividend of doing God’s will—a wonderful convert. We will consider four things from our text about Lydia, Paul’s first convert in Macedonia. They are the work, worship, winning, and wish of Lydia.

*The work of Lydia.* Lydia was a businesswoman. She was a “seller of purple.” This meant her “occupation may have been the sale of the dye itself, procured from the shell-fish (*purpura murex*), but more probably was that of cloth or clothes dyed with it” (Alexander). The garments dyed with this dye were in much demand by the aristocracy of society. Hence, Lydia would find a good market for these garments in Philippi; for being a Roman colony, a number of government officials as well as a number of wealthy people would be in Philippi. The official toga—outer garments or robe—of Roman officials was made of material dyed with this dye.

Lydia was obviously a good businesswoman; for from what Scripture says of her, she had to be a woman of means. One thing especially which indicates this fact is that she had a large enough house to provide lodging for the missionary team ([v. 15](#)) as well as for her household which would include servants. The description of Lydia’s situation not only shows her business abilities, but also shows she was probably a widow who took over the business when her husband died.

Our text informs us that Lydia was from Thyatira, a city in the province of Asia. This helps to explain why Lydia was in the business of selling purple, for “Thyatira . . . was famous in the ancient world for its purple dye, and old inscriptions have been found there which originated with the Dyers as a craft” (Alexander). Thyatira had another woman that is mentioned in Scripture. Her name was Jezebel. She was certainly a different kind than Lydia. Christ indicted the church of Thyatira because “thou sufferest [allowest] that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols” ([Revelation 2:20](#)). For every Lydia, the devil counters with a Jezebel. Today, unfortunately, we have more Jezebels in our churches than Lydias.

Lydia being from Thyatira meant Paul, though forbidden at the time to preach the Gospel in the province of Asia, gained his first convert in Macedonia in one from the province of Asia. God has interesting ways of encouraging our obedience to Him. No one will be disappointed who obeys His commands.

*The worship of Lydia.* “Lydia . . . worshiped God” ([v. 14](#)). Lydia was not so tied up in business that she forgot God. Business is a curse if it takes us away from worship.

Matthew Henry gave the right perspective on business and religion when he said, “Religion does not call us from our business in the world, but directs us in it.” This, however, is not what our current age thinks. Sunday is the big business day in our society today. Stores often open at about or before church time which means business people have little time for worship. Business people are too often all taken up with wealth, not worship.

Lydia’s worship habits—going to a prayer meeting by the river on the Sabbath with some other women—indicates she had turned away from the licentious idolatry which was so popular in her day. While that did not save her, yet it instructs us in this truth that when you walk in the light you have, you will receive more light. Her light was her conscience, which she obeyed; and one day, as a result, she got more light when Paul came and spoke to her about Christ.

*The winning of Lydia.* “Lydia . . . heard us; whose heart the Lord opened . . . she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul . . . she was baptized, and her household” ([vv. 14, 15](#)). The winning of Lydia to the Lord was the beginning of the church in Philippi. This church was extremely heart-warming and dear to Paul as is seen in “my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown” ([Philippians 4:1](#)) and “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now” ([Philippians 1:3–5](#)). “What was that first day? The day when Lydia’s heart was opened” (G. Campbell Morgan).

From our text, we will note five instructive things said about her conversion. They are the need, power, focus, responsibility, and testimony of salvation.

First, the *need of salvation*. Though Lydia was religious and faithfully attended the prayer meetings on the Sabbath, she was not saved. Though she had turned from wicked idolatry to a much more purer form of worship, she still was not saved. It was not until she heard from Paul about the Gospel of Jesus Christ that she became a saved person. We commend her faithful attendance at those prayer meetings and her turning away from licentious idolatry. But until one turns to Christ, the soul is not saved.

Lydia’s salvation emphasizes that salvation is not only needed by those who are obviously wicked (such as the immoral, the thief, the profane, the gambler, and the drunkard) but salvation is also needed by good people (such as the eunuch who was so devout he was reading Isaiah when Philip the evangelist came along and won him to the Lord, Cornelius the very devout man who Peter won to the Lord, and Lydia in our text). It is not only the down-and-outers that need Christ; it is also the up-and-



outers. But we often see the down-and-outers' need much quicker than we see the up-and-outers' need. The late Stanley Collins illustrated this problem of discerning the need of salvation for all people by telling about taking folk on a tour of both the poverty stricken Watts area in Los Angeles and the nearby wealthy Hollywood area. In the Watts area his guests would bemoan how very needy those folks were. But in the Hollywood area where the wealthy and famous lived, his guests would remark that these people had everything. His guests were not nearly as cognizant of the fact that the wealthy and famous in Hollywood were just as needy in terms of salvation as those in the poverty and crime infested area of Watts. One's material situation does not affect his need of salvation.

Second, the *power of salvation*. "Whose heart the Lord opened" ([v. 14](#)). Paul said the "gospel of Christ . . . is the power of God unto salvation" ([Romans 1:16](#)). We must never forget this when we proclaim God's message. People are not won to the Lord by our charisma, clever arguments, or subtle manipulations at invitation time. They are won to the Lord by the power of God which alone can open the heart of man and make it responsive to the Word. A. C. Gaebelein rightly said, "Unless the Lord goes before and prepares the hearts for the reception of the truth and removes the bars, all efforts are in vain."

Third, the *focus of salvation*. "Whose heart the Lord opened" ([v. 14](#)). Salvation is heart work. It was Lydia's heart that God opened. Our day has lost the focus of salvation. We are trying to change people by putting them in better clothes and better houses, by giving them better jobs and better incomes, and by endeavoring to give them better health. But that is not the salvation which man needs most. That will not change his eternal destiny, and that will not change his character. It will only make a blue collar sinner a white collar sinner. If we want to really change people, change the heart.

Fourth, the *responsibility of salvation*. "She attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul" ([v. 14](#)). We have already looked at God's part in this matter of salvation. Now we look at man's part. Though God "opened" her heart, she still had the responsibility to attend to the message of the Gospel. One of the early church fathers, Chrysostom, said of this statement about Lydia, "The opening of the heart was God's work, the attending was hers." We do not get saved unless we receive, accept, and apply the message of the Gospel. We noted earlier that the reason why the world of the west became Christianized and the east did not was that the people of the east did not accept the message about Christ. God offers a great salvation, but it will not save until the sinner pays attention to the message and receives it.

The "attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul" is not something only Lydia needed to do in regards to her salvation. In principle, this is what everyone



needs to do at all times regarding not only what Paul has written in Scripture but about all the Scripture. One of man's great problems is that he is not attentive to the message of the Word of God. Great sermons are preached in his hearing, but his mind wanders and he does not pay attention or give respect to the message. We hold the Word of God in our hands, but few really give much attention to it. Oh, what blessings came to Lydia because she "attended to" the message. The same can be true of each one of us also.

Fifth, the *testimony of salvation*. "She was baptized, and her household" ([v. 15](#)). Two things are said in this statement about the testimony of Lydia's salvation. It was a public testimony, and it was also a private testimony. Baptism speaks of her public testimony to the fact she was saved. Her household being baptized speaks of her private testimony in the home—which was effective indeed. We need a testimony in both the public and private areas of our life. We must live our faith before the world, but we also must live it before those in our home. We are greatly failing in both areas today.

The fact that her household was also baptized is used by some, including Matthew Henry, to justify infant baptism. Wherever household baptism occurs (such as here and in [Acts 16:33](#)), you will find some who will use the text to support infant baptism. But household baptism no more supports infant baptism than it supports proxy salvation of the household. Those who think they see infant baptism in these texts are unwilling to see that the other reason for household baptism is that through the witnessing of the saved (such as Lydia here and the jailer in [Acts 16:33](#)), the rest of the household came to know Christ, too. Furthermore, nothing in these verses suggest that these households necessarily included infants. Infant baptism is simply not supported by Scripture.

*The wish of Lydia*. "When she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us" ([v. 15](#)). After she was saved, Lydia wished to be of service to the Lord. We note six instructive things about the expression and performance of her wish. They are the concern for service, cost of service, consideration in service, condition for service, the constraining in service, and the commitment in service.

First, the *concern for service*. Service follows salvation and is inspired by salvation. Those who claim to be saved and yet evidence little interest in any kind of service only tell us they just may not be saved. Lydia's salvation was genuine, however. Her wish for Paul and his missionary team to stay at her house demonstrated it.

Second, the *cost of service*. Lydia not only demonstrated the genuineness of her salvation by her concern for serving, but she also demonstrated the genuineness of her salvation by her willingness to give liberally. She volunteered to take care of the entire lodging of Paul's missionary team. This would be costly, for there were at least four men in Paul's team that would have to be put up at the house. And, as we will see shortly, she kept them for some time. True service is not cheap. It costs.

All of this demonstrates that when Lydia was converted, her purse was included. This is the way it ought to be. In fact, we question the salvation of people who claim to have received the greatest gift of all but who are not willing to make much of a gift from their own possessions to help the work of the One Who gave His all for their redemption.

Third, the *consideration in service*. It is obvious that Lydia had the means to provide for Paul and his group otherwise she would not have volunteered to do so. When she volunteered to take care of them, she intended that the care would be sufficient care. If she could not give them adequate care, she should not volunteer to lodge them. This may seem to some as unnecessary to bring up, but we need this lesson in our churches. Any preacher or other Christian worker, such as one in a traveling musical group, knows that sometimes people volunteer to lodge church guests even though they cannot provide adequate lodging. The reason they volunteer is that they are more concerned about the privilege and prestige of having an important person in their house than they are about adequately providing for their guests. We are not criticizing those who are willing to give their all even though it may not be much. But we are criticizing those who volunteer for a task they cannot do properly. The great problem in churches is generally people not volunteering for a service they could do well. But there is also a problem with some who volunteer selfishly.

Fourth, the *condition for service*. In her wish to provide lodging for the missionary team, she stated an important requirement for serving the Lord. She said, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there" ([v. 15](#)). Faithfulness is the great qualification needed for service for the Lord. We have noted this in previous chapters of our book, and it is emphasized again here and needs to be emphasized a great deal more in our churches. "Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" ([1 Corinthians 4:2](#)) ought to be printed on every ballot for a church's annual election. We should not give a person a job, such as a Sunday School teacher, in order to encourage them to be faithful, but we should wait till they are faithful before we give them a task.

Fifth, the *constraining in service*. That Lydia had to constrain Paul and his company to stay with her not only reflects Paul's reluctance to take aid from his new converts lest someone say he was only using the Gospel to pad his own pockets,

but it also showed the sincerity of her request. Some people make large offers of help, but one learns soon that the offer was only window dressing, for when you press them to fulfill their offer, they quickly back out by giving some lame excuse. But Lydia was for real. Her offer was sincere, and finally Paul did accept the kindness of Lydia to take care of this missionary team. And what outstanding Christians she took care of in her house—Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke. Little did she realize that she was entertaining men who would become some of the most famous and gallant Christians in the history of Christianity. But when we are faithful in service, God will duly honor us.

Sixth, the *commitment in service*. Lydia's desire to serve the Lord by helping the missionary team was not a momentary desire which came about because of a moving experience and then wore off after the excitement diminished. She kept the team for an extended period of time, for Paul and his crew ministered in Philippi "many days" ([Acts 16:18](#)). This is the kind of commitment in service that is so lacking in many professing believers today. They can get all excited for a Sunday or two, but then because their spirituality has so little depth, their dedication wanes quickly and the interests of the world take over. Give these folk a job and they will do it for a Sunday or two, but then they will quit.

Lydia's commitment to service did not stop with the keeping of Paul and his fellow co-laborers. It was a commitment that lasted for years. Later on in Paul's epistle to the Philippians, he mentioned how much the church at Philippi had helped him. Much of the help obviously was due to Lydia's influence and affluence. "How much this large-hearted and resolute woman did in after days . . . is impossible now to decipher from the record of the past. We know of four separate occasions in which the Philippian church sent supplies to their beloved founder and teacher ([2 Cor. 11:9](#), [Phil. 4:10–18](#)). And this was very probably due to Lydia's foresight and generosity. No other church performed so large a ministry, because no other church could perform it" (F. B. Meyer). Lydia was truly committed in her service to the Lord. Oh, for more saints like her whose commitment will continue year after year.

## **XIII. PRISONERS IN PHILIPPI**

### [Acts 16:16–40](#)

ONE OF THE most well-known experiences recorded of Paul in Scripture is his one-night prison experience in Philippi with Silas, his co-laborer. How little did Paul, or anyone else on the scene at Philippi at that time, realize that what transpired then

in the city of Philippi regarding Paul and the prison would be events well known by many, many people all over the world down through the centuries of time. And little did the citizens of Philippi realize that it was this incident which would make their city of Philippi ever famous. There were other things which natural man would deem of far greater importance and likely to give lasting fame—the gold mines in the area, the political battles of Rome, such as the battle between the duo of Anthony and Octavian and the duo of Brutus and Cassius, and the fact the city was named after the father of Alexander the Great. But when God writes history, it has a much different perspective than what man would give it. The important things in man's eyes fade away into oblivion while the things of God, which seem unimportant to man, become the significant happenings of that time. Wise men will not be swept away by what men deem important but will through the Word of God find out what really is important.

To study this memorable experience in Paul's life and also in the life of Silas, his fellow missionary, we will consider the disturbance ([vv. 16–18](#)), the detention ([vv. 19–34](#)), and the deliverance of the missionaries ([vv. 35–40](#)).

## **A. THE DISTURBANCE OF THE MISSIONARIES**

“And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying. The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days” (vv. 16–18). That which started the trouble that eventually landed Paul and Silas in prison was the talk of a slave girl in Philippi. What she said was a great disturbance to Paul and his work. We will note four aspects about this disturbance of Paul's work: the time of the disturbance, the tool in the disturbance, the tactics in the disturbance, and the termination of the disturbance.

### **1. The Time of the Disturbance**

Three things can be said about the time of the disturbance. It was at a prayer time, during a progressive time, and for a prolonged time. These three aspects of the time of the disturbance are habitual with Satan.

*Prayer time.* “It came to pass, as we went to prayer” ([v. 16](#)), the disturbance occurred. Those prayer meetings by the riverside may have attracted little attention from most of the people of Philippi, but it certainly attracted a lot of attention from the adversary of our souls. He knows that prayer is a mighty weapon against his kingdom, and that if he can hinder the praying of the saints, he can hinder the work of the saints against his kingdom.

This explains why our prayer times frequently seem to have so many disturbances that interrupt and distract our praying or even keep us from praying altogether. If you do not think there is an adversary, start praying and you will discover quickly that the devil is still around. Satan does not hinder the recreation programs, the suppers, the socials, the parties, and many other like programs at church as he will hinder times of prayer. He is not bothered by a large attendance at church when it is for a supper or banquet or ball game. But if a large crowd comes to pray, he will endeavor to make a disturbance of some sort to hinder the praying. If we are going to pray successfully, we will have to put forth much effort to do so—more effort than most put forth in spiritual endeavors, for our adversary will strongly oppose our praying.

*Progressive time.* No work of God can enjoy success very long without the adversary making his presence known. So it was in Philippi. Paul attends a small prayer meeting by the riverside just outside of Philippi and wins a woman to the Lord. Not long thereafter, hell vented its opposition.

The promptness of Satan in attacking the work of God is a rebuke to saints. We seldom show such promptness in opposing evil. At Philippi, Satan attacked the work of God as soon as it showed signs of progress. But we often wait until evil has been going on for a long time, has a real foothold in our life or in the church or in the lives of others, and has done untold damage before we even begin to think about hindering the work of evil. If one tries to awake people to the inroads of evil when evil is just in the embryo stage, most people get angry at that person and say he is being uncharitable, too critical, always thinking the worst of people and situations, and is being too reactionary in his response to situations. But the master of evil knows the fallacy of those arguments; for he knows that if you want success against your opponent, you must attack him early or it will be too late.

*Prolonged time.* “This did she many days” ([v. 18](#)). It was not just once or twice

that the demon possessed girl followed Paul and his fellow missionaries and cried out after them. She did it day after day. The adversary is persistent. He will not hinder us just once or twice then quit. He will disturb time and time again. He intends to hinder our work until he can stop it.

Would that we were as persistent and dedicated in doing the work of God. It is so hard to get church members to take on a job that requires an indefinite commitment. They will help for a few times; but when you ask them if they would do a certain task every week or until the task is finished, they nearly have a stroke. They feel to be asked to serve that persistently is much too demanding. They can, of course, commit themselves to the things of the world with great dedication. But when it comes to the things of the Lord, they have very little commitment at all. Is it any wonder, therefore, that God's work is struggling so hard against the onslaught of the evil one? Satan attacks day after day. But God's people do not serve faithfully day after day. Only a few are like Lydia, whom we read about in our previous chapter, and like Paul and his team who can be found serving the Lord faithfully over a prolonged period of time.

## **2. The Tool in the Disturbance**

"A certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying" ([v. 16](#)). A demon-possessed slave girl was the tool of Satan in this attempt to hinder the work of God which Paul was doing. The words "spirit of divination" are literally "spirit of Python." In Greek mythology, this was a large snake that was especially connected with predicting the future, fortune tellers, and the like. It has also been connected some with ventriloquism; but "soothsaying," which speaks of predicting and fortune telling, was obviously her main work. Jeanne Dixon of our day does the same work, and it is interesting that Jeanne Dixon claims that her work of telling the future began after a night dream of some sort in which a large serpent wrapped himself around one of her legs. All of this is very plainly Satanic. The association of a serpent with the devil should not seem strange to anyone who knows anything about [Genesis 3](#) which reports Satan, in the form of a serpent, seducing Eve into sinning.

Satan is still working evil in society today through tools like the soothsayer of Philippi. Fortune tellers are part of every circus and carnival, and they show up as advisors and columnists like Jeanne Dixon. Unfortunately, these tools of Satan are not in disrepute. Many, many people consult earnestly with them including people in high places in our government. As an example, President John Kennedy reportedly visited with Jeanne Dixon a few days before his ill-fated trip to Texas in 1963.

God warned His people in the strongest and plainest of terms to have nothing to do with these and like creatures ([Leviticus 19:31](#); [20:6,27](#)). Spiritism is rampant and becoming increasingly popular today, but Christians must stay as far away from it as possible. It is not a harmless little deed to venture into a fortune teller's tent at a carnival or to buy and play some of the games being sold today that allude to spiritism. It is most perilous to give attention to those who claim to know about your past and predict your future. These folk are tools of the devil to derail you spiritually. Their ultimate goal is the same as it was in Philippi. They want to stop the work of God wherever they can.

### 3. The Tactics in the Disturbance

"The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation" ([v. 17](#)). What the slave girl said is not what we would have normally expected her to say. We would have expected her to make very uncomplimentary statements. After all, that seems to be the normal way in which the world speaks of Christians and Christianity. But the girl spoke the truth. Paul and his missionary team were indeed "servants of the Most High God, who show . . . the way of salvation." Since she was demon possessed, what she said was doubtless involuntary. This was the case with testimony given about Jesus Christ by demon-possessed individuals during the earthly ministry of Christ ([Mark 1:24](#), [3:11](#); [Luke 4:34](#), [8:28](#)). But voluntary or involuntary, it was the truth.

So why should this truthful testimony disturb the work and workers of God? Cannot this be seen as free advertisement? No, no, a thousand times no; for there are some great perils in accepting and encouraging the testimony of the ungodly in the work of the Lord. Three of the greatest perils are the disrespect for the message, the defilement of the message, and the discrediting of the messenger.

First, *disrespect for the message*. The courtroom teaches us that the better the character of the witness, the greater the respect for the testimony of the witness. The worse the character, the less the respect for the testimony of the witness. Even though evil people speak the truth, their evil character makes suspect anything they say. Therefore, to accept and encourage the testimony of evil is to bring disrespect for the message of God. In God's work, we must ever be careful that God's message is given the highest respect. It is a message that needs to be exalted and honored above all other messages. We must not only reject the testimony of evil people lest it bring disrespect upon God's message, but we must also keep our own lives pure lest we bring disrespect upon the message.

Second, *defilement of the message*. Accepting and encouraging the testimony of evil lets Satan into the fellowship. Once in the door, he soon will be saying things which are not the truth and will thereby defile the message and lead folk astray who think he is still speaking the truth. To allow him on the team is one of the subtlest of traps of the devil for hurting the work of God. Once on the team, he can infiltrate and corrupt with great speed.

Third, *discrediting of the messenger*. Accepting and encouraging the testimony of evil gives the appearance that the messenger of God is associated with and in league with evil. This can quickly discredit the messenger of God which will really hurt his effectiveness for God.

In view of these three perils of accepting and encouraging the testimony of the ungodly, to associate with modernists for an evangelistic campaign, to seek the favors and help of the famous—but not so spiritual—people to promote a special Sunday at church, to take the money of those who make it through evil businesses (such as tobacco, gambling, and booze), and to seek government handouts to build buildings on the campuses of our Christian schools is only going to curse the work of God, not help it. It may seem at first to be of great help, but soon the accepting and encouraging of the testimony and support of evil in the work of God will show its tragic consequences. G. Campbell Morgan said, “The devil’s methods of opposition are those of alliance and antagonism, and the only serious one is the first. Let us beware of it.”

#### **4. The Termination of the Disturbance**

“Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her. And he came out the same hour” ([v. 18](#)). To say the least, Paul was not pleased with all this free advertisement. So he put a stop to it by casting out the demon. His action was extreme, strong, dogmatic, and uncompromising. He only saw harm to the work of God by the talk of this girl even if she did speak the truth. Paul had good precedence for firmly and forcefully rejecting such testimony, for Jesus Christ did likewise in His ministry ([Mark 1:25](#), [3:12](#); [Luke 4:35](#)).

The key to understanding why Paul dealt so strongly with this disturbance was that he was “grieved” with the evil. The word grieved “is a very strong word in the original” (William Jacobson). It means to be “worked up, displeased, worn out [weary of the evil] . . . Paul was grieved, annoyed, indignant” about this evil (A. T. Robertson). We deal with evil according to how upset we are with it. That which determines how upset we are with sin is how holy we are. The holier our lives,



the more upset we will be with evil. The lack of holiness in our society explains why people are so tolerant of homosexuals, abortionists, alcohol, gambling, divorce, adultery, and other evils. It explains why the courts of our land are so lenient to criminals. It also explains why churches refuse to deal with troublemakers as they ought and refuse to take much, if any, disciplinary actions against members who do such things as divorce and commit adultery. One of the best things that could happen to the church today would be for it to get a lot more “grieved” about sin than it does. But to get more “grieved,” it must become more holy. Unfortunately, the direction the church is going today is not in the direction of more holiness.

## **B. THE DETENTION OF THE MISSIONARIES**

The devil will now shift his tactics in Philippi. Instead of trying to hurt the work of God through patronage, he will now try to hurt it through persecution. Instead of telling people what nice men Paul and his co-laborers are, he will now tell people that Paul and Silas are troublemakers and a real harm to the community. Instead of fighting their work through praise, he will now fight it through prison. He will forcibly detain Paul and Silas in an all-out effort to stop them. But all of this will backfire. Instead of stopping the work of the Gospel, it will actually lead to the salvation of more souls; for God is still running the show!

To study the detention of the missionaries, we will note the avarice, attack, attitude, and adventure in the detention.

### **1. The Avarice in the Detention**

“And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market place unto the rulers” ([v. 19](#)). When Paul cast out the demon in the slave girl, it ruined the business of her masters. She was owned by a group of men who used her wretched demon-possessed condition to make themselves “much gain by [her] soothsaying” ([v. 16](#)). They had little concern about her well-being. It bothered them not when she suffered the many evil effects of being demon possessed. The only thing they were concerned about was money. So when Paul’s work healed the girl, they immediately took action against Paul and Silas. Avarice was the motivation for their persecuting of Paul and Silas.

How often Satan works through greed. Untold destruction has come upon society because of greed. Wars are often a result of greed. Gambling is rooted and

grounded in greed. Abortion is promoted by greed, for doctors make much, much money with their abortion clinics. Tobacco and booze are promoted because it lines the pockets of many people. These greedy people, who are the dirt of the ground in character, do not care about the well-being of others. They may talk a good line in public, as we will see more about later, but they are only concerned about what goes into their pocket. It is of no concern to the promoters of evil businesses that people may suffer grievous guilt, incur great health problems, experience broken homes, and lose their jobs, self-respect, character and even their life as a result of the products of these evil businesses and the performing for these evil businesses. These business people have only one concern—money in their pocket.

Avarice is a terrible thing when it grips a person. Beware lest it grips you and shrivels up your character to nothing and makes a shambles of a host of many other good things in your life.

## **2. The Attack in the Detention**

Motivated by avarice, the evil businessmen attack Paul and Silas. We note three features about the attack: the arrest, the accusations, and the afflicting.

*The arrest.* “They caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market place unto the rulers” ([v. 19](#)). There is nothing right about this arrest. The arresters had no authority to do the arresting. They were not soldiers or other officials who had official authority to apprehend lawbreakers and troublemakers. Furthermore, Paul and Silas were not breaking any law or troubling society with harmful conduct; but to the contrary, they had done a merciful deed by bringing liberty to a girl who had been under the awful oppression of demon possession. And they did not charge her a cent for this great healing either—action the avarice group would not understand at all. But still they were arrested and forcibly brought to the rulers of the city as lawbreakers and troublemakers.

This type of arrest is typical of the arrests when evil is doing the arresting. Evil pays no attention to legalities when they want to do their evil. But let evil be arrested, and it will look at every detail of the arrest with a magnifying glass to see if any violation of the law occurred. And if it did, they will attack the arresters with great earnestness and have the arrest declared null and void. God’s people must not be surprised if the legal process is often disregarded when they are attacked. But they can be encouraged that some day, the Divine legal process will come on the scene; and when it does, they will be exonerated and evil will be duly condemned.

*The accusations.* “These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans” ([vv. 20, 21](#)). The evil accusers portray Paul and Silas as really bad men. “It has been the artifice of Satan to make God’s ministers and people odious to the commonalty, by representing them as dangerous men” (Matthew Henry). Prejudice, prevarication, and pretending made up the substance of the accusations against Paul and Silas.

First, *prejudice* was in the accusations. When evil men do not have good solid facts to support their case (and these accusers certainly did not have facts), they often use prejudice to persuade. This was what the accusers of Paul and Silas did. They framed their charges in prejudice. “These men being Jews” started their accusation and [we] “being Romans” ended their charges. In those days the Romans were not fond of the Jews. In fact, Jews were being forced to leave the city of Rome. Tiberias and later “Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome” ([Acts 18:2](#)) which is how Paul met up with Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth, for Aquila and Priscilla had been driven out of Rome by the edict. So the accusers of Paul and Silas in Philippi—a Roman colony—found it very convenient to play on the racial prejudice of the people to persuade them to act against Paul and Silas. This would turn people against Paul and Silas quicker than their groundless charges.

The news media today follows the same tactic. They insert a statement here and there about people they are reporting on (whom they do not like) to help give a negative feeling towards those people whether what the person has done is bad or not. God’s people need to be alert to this lest they be influenced evilly by the news media. Too often we see professing Christians adopting attitudes and positions of the world that reflect the fact they have been giving more heed to the ungodly news media than to the Word of God.

Second, *prevarication* was in the accusations. The charges against Paul and Silas were nothing but lies. The two general charges were “exceedingly trouble our city” ([v. 20](#)) and “teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive neither to observe” ([v. 21](#)). Paul and Silas were doing neither. But it made no difference; evil will accuse whether the accusations are true or false. Evil accusers do not need facts to accuse.

While we cannot stop evil from accusing us even though we live as godly as can be, we need to be careful that we live such an upright life that evil can never accuse us factually. All that false accusations can do to us is hurt our reputation. True accusations, however, expose the deficiency of our character. We can survive well a sullied reputation, but we cannot do well for God when our character is defective.

Third, *pretending* was in the accusations. The charges “do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs which are not lawful to receive, neither to observe” ([vv. 20, 21](#)) are not only false, but they are also most hypocritical. These accusers cared nothing about the peace of the city or about loyalty to the law. They were only pretenders; for the reason they were bringing Paul and Silas to the rulers was that, as we have already noted, they had lost a source of crooked income. They would pose as men of peace though they were then bringing great unrest to the city. They pretended to be men loyal to the law, though they had flagrantly broken the law in arresting Paul and Silas. They wanted to appear to be men greatly concerned about the well-being of the community, though they were there making charges because the well-being of the slave girl had been greatly improved by the casting out of the demon.

This hypocritical practice is not extinct. It is very current. Abortion advocates pretend to be very concerned about the rights of people. But they would bludgeon to death *all* rights of an unborn child. The news media pretends great concern about the freedom of the press and protests vigorously any censuring of news reporting. Yet, no one censures the news more than they do. Joseph Parker said concerning all this hypocrisy, “Here is the crime of today, the miserable crime of working from one motive and trying to get credit for another.”

*The afflicting.* The accusations made by the greedy masters of the slave girl, though very untrue, resulted in a most cruel afflicting of Paul and Silas. We note seven aspects of the afflicting of these two godly men. They are injustice, impatience, indignity, injury, imprisonment, insult, and immobilization. We are indebted to Griffith Thomas for suggesting the third through the sixth of these alliterative words.

First, *injustice*. After the lying accusers finished their despicable talk, “The multitude rose up together against them, and the magistrates . . . commanded to beat them” ([v. 22](#)). Mob rule prevailed in this case. There was no justice, no equity. Both the multitude and the magistrates acted with great injustice.

The multitude heard but one side of the story and that was all they wanted to hear. Evil people are that way. Especially are they that way when God’s people or work is being accused of some evil. In their most unfair reaction to the accusations of the greedy masters of the slave girl, the multitude only revealed how corrupt they were, not how corrupt Paul and Silas were.

The magistrates went along with the multitude instead of governing lawfully and letting Paul and Silas defend themselves. Like many politicians in our land, they were not interested in justice but in being popular with the people. Such rulers are

a curse to any people.

Second, *impatience*. “The magistrates rent [tore] off their clothes [the missionaries’ clothes], and commanded to beat them” ([v. 22](#)). In tearing the clothes off Paul and Silas, the magistrates, obviously in an effort to impress and appease the multitude, would show that they were as outraged against these two men as was the multitude. The men had to be stripped down to the waist for the beatings, but the removing of the clothes did not need to be done in such a frenzied, impatient way. The clothes could have and should have been taken off in a more deliberate manner. But evil is impatient. In one way or another, this characteristic of evil shows. From the impatient tearing off the clothes of Paul and Silas to the practice of having sex before marriage, evil shows its impatience.

Third, *indignity*. This ripping off of the clothes of Paul and Silas was such an indignity for these two men. Yes, the whole ordeal of arresting and accusing and afflicting heaped much indignity upon them, but we note it here because of the obviousness of the indignity. Paul later mentioned in his letter to the Thessalonians—the place he went to right after leaving Philippi—how he was “shamefully entreated [treated], as ye know, at Philippi” ([1 Thessalonians 2:2](#)).

The world is not going to give God’s people anymore respect than they have to. The only reason our land gives as much respect as they do today is that society still has some piety left in it. But let the general populace of our country become Christless like this multitude in Philippi was, and you will see society in general and the rulers in particular treat God’s people in utter contempt. Ridicule and shame will be heaped upon Christians—the news media is already doing a great deal of this. We may not be too far from a persecution that will treat God’s people with disgraceful practices similar to Hitler’s treatment of the Jews.

Fourth, *injury*. “And commanded to beat them . . . they . . . laid many stripes upon them” ([vv. 22, 23](#)). This was a brutal punishment which would rip their backs into a bloody mess. “The nearest equivalent in English is to cane them” (Alexander). Unlike Jewish laws, the Romans had no merciful laws restricting the number of stripes that could be laid on the backs of the men. Such punishment could kill the afflicted. What suffering these two gallant souls experienced. One wonders if there are any folk in our churches today who could endure such a beating without recanting their faith. We think we sacrifice and put out so much for the Lord, but then when we read something like this, we want to crawl into a hole and hide from the shame due us for our whimpering.

Fifth, *imprisonment*. “They cast them into prison” ([v. 23](#)). Everyone that goes to prison does not go there because they have broken the law. Paul and Silas were the only ones at that mob scene who should have been permitted to stay out of prison.

All the rest of the people—the multitude, the accusers, the ones who inflicted the stripes, and the magistrates—were guilty of law breaking and brutal injustice and needed to be put in prison.

This is Paul's first prison experience for the cause of Christ. He will experience more imprisonments and, as a result, will some five times in Scripture call himself a "prisoner" of Christ ([Ephesians 3:1](#), [4:1](#); [2 Timothy 1:8](#); [Philemon 1:1,9](#)). But though a prisoner, Paul had more freedom in prison than the world had outside prison because he still had soul freedom. In your zeal for freedom, seek the freedom of the soul more than the freedom of the body. Soul freedom is the greatest of all freedoms. It gives eternal freedom. If you seek the freedom of the body more than that of the soul, you will corrupt your life and end up losing both freedoms.

Sixth, *insult*. When put in prison, the jailer "thrust them into the inner prison" ([v. 24](#)). This action said Paul and Silas were worse than the other prisoners. The inner prison was a more secure place to put prisoners. It was where you put those who you least wanted to escape. So not only are Paul and Silas said to be bad men, but placing them in the inner prison says they are the worst men in the prison. What an insult. It was an insult upon an insult.

The world habitually treats God's people and their beliefs as the worst of evils. In our country a law has been enacted which makes the protesting of abortion a most serious crime akin to that of racketeering. Hence heavy punishment can be handed out to anti-abortionists if they do not abide by the stringent rules given for abortion protesting. Of course, homosexuals can protest in the vilest of ways and cause much destruction of property; but they will only get a slap on the wrist, if they even get that. All of this is like Paul and Silas being put in the inner prison while the real criminals are put in the other parts of the prison.

Seventh, *immobilization*. After putting Paul and Silas in the inner prison, he "made their feet fast in the stocks" ([v. 24](#)). Not only is insult heaped upon insult, but now cruelty upon cruelty. It is utterly ridiculous as well as very cruel to put these men in stocks. How poor is the judgment of man when he is without God. They would shackle the feet of those who needed to be given the greatest of freedom to walk in their town. They would give freedom to walk to the vile masters of the slave girl and to the magistrates who were more interested in favor with a corrupt crowd than in honoring the law and justice and decency. So today, like in Paul's day, the government will restrict Christianity but will give all sorts of freedom to evil. As the days go by, you will see this more and more. Churches, Christian schools, and other Christian organizations and endeavors will be restricted, limited, and suppressed while evil gets more and more freedom under such things as freedom of speech—a freedom which will not be applied to God's people and work. Already we are restricted in

praying at school while evil is given more freedom than ever to propagate its evil in the schools. Christianity is being put in stocks while the abortionists, gamblers, homosexuals and other vile people are having more and more new laws passed to give them more freedom to propagate their evil.

### **3. The Attitude in the Detention**

“And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them” ([v. 25](#)). What a God-honoring, victorious, and incredible attitude Paul and Silas exhibited in prison. We note the alleviation, observation, and vindication involved in their attitude. There was the alleviation of trials, the observation by others, and the vindication of a choice.

*Alleviation of trials.* “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God.” For Paul and Silas it was midnight not only in regards to the clock but also in regards to their circumstances. They had been unlawfully and cruelly arrested and had gone through a mockery of a trial where truth was ignored and false charges were honored. Then they were brutally beaten which left them a bloody mess and in great pain. In this condition they were thrown into a dungeon (the nature of prisons in those days) and their feet placed in stocks. It was indeed dark. But God gives His people songs in the night ([Job 35:10](#)). Therefore, out of that great trial of darkness came not the sounds of curses or complaints but the wonderful, heart-lifting sounds of prayer to God and praise for God. Paul and Silas could not have done anything better to alleviate their suffering than what they did. Prayer to God and praise for God are great antidotes to trial. We look at these two antidotes in more detail.

First, *prayer* to God is a great antidote in trial. Paul and Silas lifted up their hearts and voices in prayer to God when in dire circumstances. We may be so bound in the prison and stocks of circumstances that we cannot do anything other than pray. But being limited to prayer is not a limitation. To the contrary, prayer is a mighty weapon to help in the time of trial. Take away prayer and we really are limited in dealing victoriously with our trials. But few souls pray in time of dark trials. So many folk in their dark times react in such a way as to only aggravate the pain of their trial. Some grumble and complain. Some go off in the corner and pout. Others groan and moan and cry and wallow in self-pity. Many turn to alcohol and try to drown their troubles when, in fact, they only irrigate them by their drinking. And some do the most foolish thing of all by committing suicide. Prayer is certainly a more positive and beneficial reaction to trial than these other reactions.

Second, *praise* for God is another great antidote in trial. Paul and Silas sang praises to God in their midnight experience. It is not the usual thing that people do in such situations, however. When times get rough, men often cuss and curse God which is the quickest way to make things worse. But in spite of that, it is a favorite reaction to trial. Even Job's wife advocated this reaction when Job was in his midnight hour. She told him to "Curse God, and die" ([Job 2:9](#)). However, had Job done that, he would not have solved his problems but only increased them greatly. He wisely honored God instead. God is the great source of help in time of trial. Dishonoring Him is certainly not going to help alleviate the trial.

*Observation by others.* Our text says that "the prisoners heard them." Paul and Silas, even in the inner prison, were being closely observed. What a different sound the prisoners heard in listening to Paul and Silas than the usual sounds they would hear night after night. And what an encouraging sound this would be. All the foul and complaining sounds they normally heard would only further defile and embitter their souls. But prayer to God and praise for God would produce a far different effect upon the hearts of these men in their discouraging situation. It would offer hope and faith which these men needed more than release from their physical bonds. What a wonderful influence Paul and Silas were in their prison experience.

This fact of the prisoners hearing Paul and Silas forcefully reminds us that we are always being listened to by others. Especially in our dark circumstances do people listen to us. What people hear from us in our dark times has much to do with how well we recommend our faith. "The world is watching Christians, and when they see Christians shaken by circumstances as they themselves [are], they conclude that after all there is very little to Christianity; but when they find Christians rising above circumstances and glorying in the Lord even in deepest trial, then even the unsaved realize the Christian has something in knowing Christ to which they are a stranger" (Harry Ironside). Christians as well as unbelievers are also affected by our attitudes in our trials. Young and weak Christians listen very closely to those they deem the more mature Christians when these mature ones enter midnight hours. What they hear either encourages or discourages these young Christians in the faith. We must ask ourselves continuously, what do others hear when they listen to us? Do we recommend the faith, or do we disgrace the faith by our attitude in dark times. Does what others hear from us help or discourage them. Let us so live our faith that it will always be recommended to others.



*Vindication of choice.* One of the things often overlooked that this midnight praying and singing did was to vindicate Paul's choice of Silas to take the place of Barnabas. Silas, in his God-honoring conduct in prison, proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was a most dedicated saint. Paul certainly had to be encouraged to have a co-worker who could take the bad times so well. Paul was careful in whom he chose for a co-worker, and that care is now paying off.

In the rough times of life, we find out who are the dedicated saints and who are not, and who are our real friends and who are not. In times of trial, we find out if we have made good choices or bad choices in choosing our friends, associates, and life's companion. When we follow God's guidelines in making our choices—guidelines which place a premium on devotion to the Lord (and guidelines which Paul obviously used in selecting Silas)—we can count on having our choices vindicated. How often men and women make unwise choices in marriages, as an example, because they ignore God's guidelines and opt instead to use the world's fleshly guidelines. Then when dark times come, the choice becomes a burden instead of a blessing.

#### **4. The Adventure in the Detention**

One of the meanings a dictionary gives for the word adventure is "a remarkable experience." That certainly describes the events which happened after Paul and Silas had prayed and sang in prison. To examine this remarkable experience, we will consider the power of God, the panic of the jailer, the prevention of suicide, the plea of the jailer, the proclaiming of salvation, and the proof of salvation.

*The power of God.* "And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed" ([v.26](#)). The adventure started with an earthquake. The earthquake had a great effect upon the prison and the prisoners. The doors of the prison which had been locked securely were immediately opened, and any bands upon the prisoners hands or feet or both were loosed. William Jacobson said that while the opening of the doors might be the effect of the earthquake, "The loosing of the bands was a distinct miracle." We believe the whole thing was a miracle. It was a miracle in the timing of the earthquake as well as a miracle in the loosing of the bands. God was displaying His great power on behalf of His faithful servants. Not only did the prisoners hear Paul and Silas praying and giving praise to God, but God heard, too! And He responded with an outpouring of His power on their behalf. Philippi is finding out that there is a far greater power than that invested by Rome.

How great it is to have the power of God working on our behalf. But there are requirements to be in alliance with God's power. Paul and Silas demonstrated some of the qualifications in their praying to God and praising of God when in severe trial in prison. If in the midst of your trial, you do likewise, you will also find the power of God working wonderfully on your behalf. Harry Ironside said, "I have an idea that if there were more joy in tribulation, more triumphing in trouble in our own day, we would see more shaking by the power of God."

*The panic of the jailer.* "And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled" ([v. 27](#)). In those days if a jailer lost any of his prisoners, he was "liable to whatever doom awaited those whom he had in custody" (Jacobson). Rather than face the disgrace of losing prisoners, the jailer chose suicide. Suicide was in favor in Rome. In fact, it was almost considered a virtue. But, oh, how defective is such thinking. However, what can you expect when God is left out. How different than the jailer did Paul and Silas behave in time of great trouble. It is the difference between those who have Christ in their heart and those who do not. The Christless world has nothing substantial to offer a person when the person is in dire trouble. Position, political power, status, money, and fame do nothing for peace in time of calamity. It was Paul and Silas, not the jailer, who had peace in the time of the earthquake.

*The prevention of suicide.* "But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm; for we are all here" ([v. 28](#)). Everything Paul said in that prison that night brought hope and comfort and encouragement to others. Here was a man that was grossly mistreated, in great pain, his back ripped opened in place after place and covered with blood, in the inner prison, and his feet in stocks; yet he is giving help and comfort to all who would listen. Paul is like some dear saints of God who when sick and suffering give the minister who is calling on them more encouragement and comfort than the minister gives them. It takes great faith to do that, and Paul had it.

In exhorting the jailer to not commit suicide, Paul told him that things were not as bad as the jailer thought. The jailer, like so many, looked at the dark side of the circumstances. He gave up quickly. He did not even examine the prison to see if any of the prisoners were present but "supposing" the prisoners had fled grabbed his sword to commit suicide.

The jailer's pessimism reflected the pessimism of the patriarch Jacob of the Old Testament. When his evil sons showed him Joseph's bloodstained coat of many colors, Jacob concluded that "an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent [torn] in pieces" ([Genesis 37:33](#)), and he "refused to be comforted" ([Genesis 37:35](#)). However, a little investigative thinking would have corrected that pessimistic conclusion—if Joseph had been torn in pieces, how come the coat was not torn? But those who live on the dark side of life only see the negatives, not the positives. They often refuse to be comforted no matter what you say to them. They give up quickly when the first cloud covers the sun.

However, the jailer, to his credit, did listen to Paul. It was the best thing the jailer had ever done. It not only saved his life; but before much time went by, it also resulted in the salvation of his soul. Things were indeed not as bad as he thought. In fact, things turned out to be better than they had been before the earthquake.

May God give us more Pauls who can exhort us with wisdom in the time of darkness. And may God give more of us an attitude, like that of the jailer, that will listen to the Pauls when they exhort us.

*The plea of the jailer.* "Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas . . . and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ([vv. 29, 30](#)). There are some commentators who insist this was not an evangelical question, that the jailer was not voicing a concern about his soul but rather about his peril as a jailer in this situation. But that conclusion does not make sense. First of all, how could Paul and Silas help him with his superiors? Paul and Silas were but prisoners, not powerful government officials who could get the jailer off the hook if he was in trouble with his superiors over the situation in the prison. Second, the jailer was not in trouble; for the prisoners were all present. Therefore, the only sensible conclusion about the jailer's question is that the calamity had filled the jailer's heart with fear and made him very concerned about his soul. He would certainly be well aware of what had been going on in town regarding the missionaries and their message of salvation. While he had heretofore shown little concern about soul matters, the calamity now made him very concerned about his soul. With Paul and Silas right there in his jail, he quickly and wisely went to them to find out how to be saved.

In examining the jailer's plea about salvation, we will note the fear in the plea, the obeisance in the plea, and the ignorance in the plea.

First, the *fear* in the plea. The jailer came to Paul and Silas "trembling" ([v. 29](#)). Jailers are not timid souls who are easily frightened. But when God shakes things

up, even the strongest of men tremble with fear. And fear can drive souls to Christ. Some preachers (as well as church members) think fear is not a legitimate motivation for salvation. But the Scripture will not support that notion. “Any minister who leaves out of his preaching ‘the note of fear’ is not only unfaithful to the truth, but he is neglecting one of the means the Spirit of God has used in every age for the conversion of souls” (G. S. Barrett).

That the earthquake caused the jailer to think about his relationship to God is commendable. Today we can have earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, diseases such as AIDS, and other catastrophes and yet most people laugh at the idea that God is judging and trying to say something to us. But it is a calloused heart that will not do some serious soul searching when calamities come. Unfortunately, that is the condition of much of our land. It was not, however, the condition of the jailer. Though cruel and heartless, he, however, was not so foolish as to ignore the earthquake and its speaking to him about his spiritual need.

Second, the *obedience* in the plea. When the jailer came to Paul and Silas, he “fell down before Paul and Silas” ([v. 29](#)). Things had certainly changed in a few hours in that prison. Earlier the jailer had cast these men in prison with disdain, had put them in the inner cell, and then locked their feet in stocks. He was the powerful jailer; they were the helpless prisoners. But now he is falling down before them. Let this reversal of the situation in the prison of Philippi encourage every Christian who has been scorned by the world. The day is coming when the scorers will stop their scorning and will instead have great respect for the saints of God. Let the saints of God be faithful to the Almighty; and they will often experience, even in this life, their enemies doing an about face to them in attitude. Truth always wins out in the end.

Third, the *ignorance* in the plea. The question “What must I do to be saved?” disclosed the great ignorance of the jailer. The jailer knew a lot of things. He knew the ins and outs of politics. He was well versed in the laws and customs of the land. But he was ignorant of the most important truth of all, namely, how to be saved. Though he was a powerful jailer, yet it was two of his lowly prisoners who knew the answer to the most important question man can ever ask. How frequently this situation is still true today. The famous, the powerful, the talented, and the rich are often ignorant of the most important truths of all while the obscure, the powerless, the untalented, and the poor know the answer well. It is infinitely better to know the answer well than to be all those other things the world thinks so highly of and be ignorant of how to be saved.

*The proclaiming of salvation.* “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house” ([v. 31](#)). Unlike many ministers today, Paul had the right answer to the jailer’s question. It is tragic that the vast majority of churches in our land and around the world do not know and could not give the jailer a satisfactory answer. You may not be able to answer a lot of questions people ask, but be sure you can answer this question when it is asked of you.

To examine this answer Paul gave about salvation, we will note the command in salvation, the centrality of salvation, the certainty of salvation, the corroboration of salvation, and the crowd for salvation.

First, the *command* in salvation. The command is simple but life changing. It is “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” ([v. 31](#)). Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ involves believing what Christ said about our sinful condition and about His being able to save us from eternal condemnation because of His work on Calvary and His resurrection. Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ involves acknowledging our sinfulness, repenting of our sins, and calling upon Christ to save us.

To be saved from sin’s condemnation, man is only asked to believe God. Man believes so many things, but strangely he is most skeptic of believing God. But if there is anyone we can believe, it is God. Nothing so benefits us as believing Him.

Note the answer to salvation is not believing about Christ, but believing “on” Christ. “There is a difference between believing something about Jesus and believing on Him . . . We must put our belief into action—we must trust Him as a sick man trusts the doctor, as a drowning man trusts the lifeguard. We must trust Him with our soul and our future as a man trusts the bank with his money” (Herschel Ford).

Second, the *centrality* of salvation. The focus on salvation is “the Lord Jesus Christ” ([v. 31](#)). Take Christ out of the Gospel message and we no longer have a message. Many religions of the world reject Christ, but in so doing they take away their ability to offer man soul salvation. Christ is the only way of salvation. “Neither is there salvation in any other” ([Acts 4:12](#)).

Third, the *certainty* of salvation. When you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, “Thou *shalt* be saved” ([v. 31](#)). This is an absolute certainty. There is no guess work to it. It is not “maybe” or “perhaps” or “probably,” but “shalt.”

Fourth, the *corroboration* of salvation. “And they spake unto him the word of the Lord” ([v. 32](#)). Salvation is supported by the Word of God. It is not some fanciful idea invented by some religious men. The message which Paul and Silas gave the jailer was based upon what the Word of God says. If we do not have that support for our message, we need to stop proclaiming that message.

Fifth, the *crowd* for salvation. “And thy house . . . And they spake unto him the

word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house” ([vv. 31, 32](#)). What an interesting scene this must have been. Prisoners battered by a beating, looking as unkempt as could be from all the mistreatment they had received, yet proclaiming the Word of God to the jailer and his household and at some unearthly hour of the morning in the midst of a prison just damaged by an earthquake. Yet, in spite of the unusual circumstances and appearances (the jailer’s household probably did not look like they were dressed in their Sunday best either), it was a glorious time; for many came to Christ. Not only did the jailer come to Christ, but so did his household.

Some want this passage to teach infant baptism just as they wanted the passage ([Acts 16:15](#)) about Lydia’s household being baptized to teach infant baptism. We noted in our previous chapter the fallacy of seeing infant baptism in these and other like texts. The fallacy is the assumption that infants were part of the household and that salvation is by proxy. Scripture will not support either idea.

*The proof of salvation.* “And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” ([vv. 33, 34](#)). Scripture plainly says the jailer was saved (“believing in God”), but what it says about his conduct right before it speaks of his “believing in God” gives such ample evidence of his salvation that we would know he was saved even if “believing in God” was not included in the text. Unlike many who profess to be saved, the jailer gave convincing signs in his conduct that he had been saved. We note five of them: his compassion, confession, communion, contribution, and cheerfulness.

First, his *compassion*. “He . . . washed their stripes” ([v. 33](#)). He who was a recipient of Divine compassion now reflects it by showing compassion to Paul and Silas in washing their stripes. He who earlier took these men as prisoners and would not so much as clean up their backs from the bloody beating but put them in the inner prison and in stocks, now acts entirely different and exercises great concern about the missionaries’ comfort. When Christ comes into the heart, so does virtuous compassion.

Second, his *confession*. The jailer “was baptized . . . straightway” ([v. 33](#)). Being baptized in those days amounted to the burning of bridges behind you, for it made it very plain that you had become a follower of Jesus Christ. There was no turning back. Baptism branded you as a Christian before the world. Hence, by being baptized, the jailer gave a good public confession of the fact that he had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some insist that the circumstances here regarding this baptism were of such that immersion could not possibly be the mode. But, to the contrary, our text provides for circumstances which easily allow for immersion and even strongly suggest it. We see this particularly in two words in [verse 33](#) and in the order of the events of that night.

The first word we look at in [verse 33](#) is “took.” The jailer “took” Paul and Silas and “washed” their stripes. “Took” means to take along with him. The jailer took the prisoners to some place where there was water so he could wash their stripes. The area of Philippi would have plenty of water places. One of the ancient names of Philippi was “Crenides . . . so called after the springs which feed the river and the marsh” (M. N. Tod). The prison would need a good water supply and would doubtless be located accordingly.

The second word we look at in [verse 33](#) is “washed.” The word “washed” is most significant. Two Greek words could be translated “washed.” One means to wash part of the body; the other means to bathe the entire body. Most significantly the word which means “the bathing of the entire body” (Vincent) is the one used in our text. Bathing of the entire body is in Scripture generally associated with a river or stream—not with a bowl of water.

Now add to the meaning of these words the order of the events, and baptism by immersion is no longer out of question. According to Scripture, the order of events that night was as follows: the jailer comes to Paul and Silas regarding his salvation ([vv. 29–31](#)), this was followed by Paul and Silas proclaiming the Word to the jailer and “all that were in his house” ([vv. 31, 32](#)). Then the jailer “took them” to a place where he could bathe them and thus wash their stripes clean ([v. 33](#)). Baptism is said to come immediately after that (Ibid.) which makes sense, for they were where the water was in having come there to wash the stripes of Paul and Silas. Then the jailer “brought them into his house” and fed them ([v. 34](#)). Immersion certainly is not prohibited by our text.

Third, his *communion*. The jailer “brought them [Paul and Silas] into his house” ([v. 34](#)). He wanted fellowship with these men. He could have put them back into their “inner” cell after he had washed their stripes and the baptismal service had occurred. But he is a saved man now and craves their fellowship, so he brings them into his house (generally the jailer’s house was connected to the prison) for a time of blessed fellowship.

One of the significant evidences of salvation is the desire for communion with the saints. Before his salvation the jailer would have little desire to fellowship with godly people—especially with these two bloodied and despised prisoners. But after salvation his desires greatly changed.

Fourth, his *contribution*. “He set meat before them” ([v. 34](#)). When the jailer brought Paul and Silas into his house, he not only fellowshiped with them, but he also fed them. In our last chapter we noted that after Lydia was saved, she opened her purse and provided room and board for the missionaries. Now here we note that after the jailer is saved, he opens his cupboards and provides food for the missionaries. Salvation is the greatest gift of all. When one has received this gift, he will show it by giving to the cause of the Lord.

Fifth, his *cheerfulness*. Scripture says the jailor “rejoiced” ([v. 34](#)). Indeed he could. The burden of sin would be lifted. His fear (“trembling” [v. 29](#)) would be gone. His hopelessness which led him to the brink of suicide was gone. Joy would abound. Salvation brings the greatest joy of all. Saints can rejoice when others cannot. Joy is not only a product of salvation, but it is also an evidence of salvation.

## C. THE DELIVERANCE OF THE MISSIONARIES

Though after the events of that night the jailer knew that Paul and Silas certainly did not belong in prison, he did not have the authority to release his prisoners. But there were others who had the authority to release them that knew Paul and Silas did not belong in jail. Therefore, “when it was day” ([v. 35](#)), the deliverance of Paul and Silas came about. To examine the deliverance and some significant events associated with it, we will consider the release of the prisoners, the request of Paul, the response of the magistrates, and the return to the brethren.

### 1. The Release of the Prisoners

“And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go” ([v. 35](#)). Scripture does not specifically state what it was that moved the magistrates to reverse their decision about Paul and Silas. But enough is said in Scripture to imply that their conscience was probably a major factor in decreeing the release of the two missionaries from prison. From what Scripture says, we can easily conclude that the magistrates had obviously acted under the influence of the mob the day before. As with Pilate, who was looking out for himself and so was “willing to content the people” ([Mark 15:15](#)) instead of doing what was right, these magistrates gave in to the wishes of the mob regarding Paul and Silas. But the night with the fear-producing earthquake could easily have worked on their consciences about the injustice and cruelty that was done to Paul and Silas; and so the next



morning, they set out to release Paul and Silas.

When God wants to, He can bring about the changing of the minds of anyone, even the worst of sinners. This provides a great encouragement to saints who labor under the oppression of evil men. What looks like an impossible situation can be changed quickly when God steps in on the scene. He can make our enemies our deliverers, if He so pleases. He made Haman honor Mordecai, the Egyptians to endow the fleeing Israelites with much wealth, and Pharaoh, the killer of male Jewish babies, to provide for the raising of Moses (which still must cause God to chuckle).

## 2. The Request of Paul

When the sergeants sent by the magistrates came to tell the jailer to release Paul, the sergeants received an unexpected request from Paul. Paul told the sergeants that he wanted the magistrates to come personally and “fetch us out” ([v. 37](#)) of prison. We will look into this request and note the condemnation in the request and the cause of the request.

*The condemnation in the request.* Paul’s request to the sergeants for the magistrates to come and “fetch us out” themselves was accompanied by a very condemning statement about the magistrates. The statement, which the sergeants relayed to the magistrates, said, “They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily [secretly]?” ([v. 37](#)). Horatio Hackett said, “Almost every word in this replay contains a distinct allegation. It would be difficult to find or frame a sentence superior to it in point of energetic brevity.” We note six indictments which Paul made against the magistrates. They were the injuriousness, ignominy, injustice, illegality, inhumanness, and irresponsibility of the magistrates’ conduct.

First, the *injuriousness* of the magistrates’ conduct is in the statement, “They have beaten us.” We have noted already the great bodily harm of this beating. Paul reminds the magistrates of the bloody scene which the magistrates ordered and observed. Second, the *ignominy* of the magistrates’ conduct is in the fact they had Paul and Silas unceremoniously disrobed and brutally beaten “openly” in front of the mob of people. This would cause the crowd to cheer and jeer at the expense of the humiliation of Paul and Silas.

Third, the *injustice* of the magistrates’ conduct is that they ordered the beating though Paul and Silas were “uncondemned.” The accusations were all lies. Paul and

Silas were guilty of none of the charges.

Fourth, the *illegality* of the magistrates' conduct was in the fact that Paul and Silas "being Romans" could not legally be treated the way they were without a fair trial. Paul and Silas were given no trial. The magistrates merely gave in to mob action. This charge is the one the magistrates will fear the most.

Fifth, the *inhumanness* of the magistrates' conduct was in their ordering Paul and Silas to be imprisoned. Prison was a beastly situation in those days.

Sixth, the *irresponsibility* of the magistrates' conduct was in their attempt to "thrust us out privily [secretly]." The magistrates would not face up to their responsibility of clearing Paul and Silas of false charges by coming themselves and acknowledging their wrong and personally releasing the prisoners.

Paul did indeed pack many charges into a very brief statement. And all the charges were true. The magistrates' behavior was despicable.

*The cause of the request.* The average reader, in reading of Paul's request to have the magistrates come and personally release him and Silas, may think that Paul was being proud and seeking revenge. The average reader may think that Paul should have been glad to get out of prison and that he is only asking for more trouble by requesting the magistrates to personally release him and Silas. But Paul was not acting in pride or in revenge. He was not making a foolish request. Paul was acting very wisely in making the request. Having the magistrates come and personally release and escort Paul and Silas from prison was a public declaration of the innocence of Paul and Silas. Their innocence needed to be made known for some very good reasons—none of them selfish on Paul's part. We note five of these reasons: the honoring of the gospel, the protecting of the church, the exonerating of the jailer, the respecting of the law, and the exposing of the accusers.

First, the *honoring of the Gospel*. If the messengers of the Gospel can be discredited, then the message of the Gospel loses respect and credibility. But if Paul and Silas are publicly declared innocent, this keeps the Gospel from being dishonored. As we noted earlier in this chapter, it is very important that God's servants see to it that God's message is given due honor.

Second, the *protecting of the church*. With Paul and Silas declared innocent, it would discourage future attacks on the church in Philippi. The magistrates would take care how the church was treated lest Paul come back and take the magistrates to court for their mistreatment of him as a Roman citizen.

Third, the *exonerating of the jailer*. Publicly declaring the innocence of Paul and Silas would exonerate the jailer for the very benevolent way in which he treated Paul

and Silas after the earthquake. It would keep him out of trouble with his superiors.

Fourth, the *respecting of the law*. Declaring the innocence of Paul and Silas would declare that the proceedings of the previous day were unlawful and wrong. If unlawful conduct is condoned, it only breeds more unlawful conduct. Paul was a good citizen, and, therefore, he gave respect to the law. He was unlike his accusers who only feigned respect for the law.

Fifth, the *exposing of the accusers*. Declaring the innocence of Paul and Silas would expose the accusers as troublemakers, liars in their charges, and hypocrites in their professed concern for the law and the good of the people. Criminals need to be exposed. Paul was not only concerned for the law, but he was also concerned for the well-being of the citizenry. These men had been fleecing the citizens of Philippi of their money. They need to be shown for what they truly are—bad men—so the citizens will not be defrauded by these men in some other crooked business venture in the future.

Paul's request was indeed a good one. It was not foolish, selfish, full of revenge, or full of pride. It was a request that showed his concern for a lot of people and also for some very good principles.

### 3. The Response of the Magistrates

“And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates; and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city” ([vv. 38, 39](#)). We note three things about the response of the magistrates to Paul's request: their dread, their decision, and their desires.

*Their dread.* When told what Paul had said, the magistrates did not laugh or take retaliatory action. “They feared” instead. The reason they feared was that they had learned that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. Roman citizens had some privileges regarding punishment and trial which if not respected would put the authorities in a city in big trouble with Rome. Being Roman citizens, Paul and Silas were entitled to a fair trial. The proceedings of the previous day were not a fair trial at all but a farce of a trial. The punishment was wholly unlawful. This meant that the magistrates could “become infamous and incapable of holding office” (William Jacobson) and the city of Philippi could lose its colony status. “In the year 44, Claudius had deprived the Rhodians of their privileges because some Roman citizens had been put to death there” (Ibid.).

Yes, the magistrates had plenty to fear and it was good they showed this fear. However, they should have displayed some other feelings also, but did not. They should have shown feelings such as remorse and pity and shame for the terrible way Paul and Silas were treated. But they only showed fear. The magistrates were concerned only about themselves and the fact that they were in jeopardy of losing their jobs, status, position, rank, prestige, and well-being. Had Paul and Silas not been Romans, the magistrates would have been unmoved and perhaps would have ordered the prisoners to be kept in prison instead of released. Like so many rulers and politicians, the magistrates were concerned mostly about themselves, not about the people they governed. That is why, as an example, they allowed the mob rule to govern the situation the proceeding day.

Some may wonder why the magistrates did not challenge Paul and Silas to prove their citizenship. After all, if claiming to be a Roman citizen got one such privileges, it would seem that a lot of people would claim this citizenship when they were in trouble. The reason they did not challenge it was that a false claim of Roman citizenship could result in capital punishment. “Paul’s word was taken at once. Claudius punished unfounded claims to citizenship with death” (Jacobson). It was much too risky to make a false claim of Roman citizenship for the magistrates to have any worries about Paul making a false claim in his circumstances.

*Their decision.* Their decision was quickly forthcoming. It was to do what Paul requested. “And they came and besought them, and brought them out” ([v. 39](#)). Paul’s message had cut them to the quick, and they acted with dispatch. They were in big trouble and knew it and so hastened to the prison in order to get themselves out of a jam. It was a “most humiliating act for Roman magistrates, but in this case it was unavoidable. The apostles had them completely in their power, and could easily effect their disgrace and ruin” (Barnes).

*Their desires.* The magistrates expressed at least two desires to Paul and Silas. They desired conciliation with the missionaries and separation from the missionaries.

First, the *conciliation desire*. They “besought them” ([v. 39](#)) expresses the conciliation desire. The word “besought” is translated from a word meaning to call along side to aid. “It is used for every kind of calling to a person which is meant to produce a particular effect, hence, with various meanings, such as ‘comfort, exhort, desire . . . to beseech’” (W. E. Vine). The application to our text is that the magistrates tried to gain as much conciliation with these two prisoners as they could. Apologies,

explanations, sympathy, and anything else they could say to appease the two wronged Romans were spoken to them. Brown (of Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown) said the magistrates “besought them to forgive the wrong done them, and not to inform upon them. What a contrast this suppliant attitude of the praetors of Philippi [was] to their tyrannical conduct the day before.”

Second, the *separation desire*. The magistrates desire for separation is found in “they . . . desired them to depart out of the city” ([v. 39](#)). This is such a sick desire. It exposed both the selfishness and stupidity of the magistrates.

It exposed their *selfishness* in that they wanted Paul and Silas out of the city lest the magistrates get in further trouble. As an example, “The colonists in Philippi would turn against the praetors if they learned the facts, proud as they were of being citizens” (A. T. Robertson). The magistrates wanted to hush this affair up as quickly as they can. With Paul and Silas gone, it would help keep the issue from presenting itself.

It exposed the *stupidity* of the magistrates in that they were desiring the best people who ever came to Philippi to leave. No one ever brought more blessing to Philippi than Paul and Silas. Yet, the rulers earnestly desired them to leave (“desired” is in the imperfect tense which means “they kept on begging them to leave,” A. T. Robertson). This same stupidity is seen in the people’s desire for Christ to leave their community ([Luke 8:37](#)). It is the same stupidity that ordered the prophet Amos to “prophesy not again any more at Bethel” ([Amos 7:13](#)). It is the same stupidity that is pushing the mention of God out of our public schools. It is also the same stupidity that is too frequently observed in our churches when some carnal member starts a campaign to rid the church of its godly pastor. How we need to be very careful that we do not push out of our lives the very things we need the most. But when Christ is not given the throne, this is the eventual practice.

#### **4. The Return to the Brethren**

“And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed” ([v. 40](#)). Paul and Silas did indeed leave Philippi, but at their own leisure. Before leaving they went to Lydia’s house, obviously a gathering point for the Christians in Philippi, and had a time of fellowship with the brethren. The fellowship had to be most welcomed by the brethren, for they would be very concerned about the events of the preceding day and how it fared with Paul and Silas and how it would fare with the church in the future. Paul could tell them a lot that would encourage them and comfort them.

It is interesting that Paul and Silas, who would be in much pain from their beating

of the day before, were the ones bringing comfort and cheer. Here is another case, as G. Campbell Morgan says, where “The sufferers comforted those who did not suffer.” The conduct of Paul and Silas is a rebuke to many of us who are more interested in being comforted than in giving comfort. The most trivial of trials often sends us seeking pity from others. Such action indicates we have a long way to go in spiritual growth.

The return of Paul and Silas to the brethren reminds us of what Peter did when he got out of prison ([Acts 12](#)), and also what the disciples did earlier when they were let go from prison ([Acts 4](#)). Saints want to be with saints. Those who profess to be saints and yet prefer the company of the world are betraying their unregenerate condition. Of course, there are some saints that good saints do not care to fellowship with. That is another story. The lesson here is that those who follow the Lord will seek and find their best and most wanted company with fellow believers. If you don’t, you had better check up on your spiritual condition.

## **XIV. PROPAGATING IN THESSALONICA**

### [ACTS 17:1–10](#)

THE GREAT DEDICATION of Paul and his fellow missionary Silas is most evident in our text. It tells of these two men pushing on to new areas to propagate the Gospel of Jesus Christ in spite of their having been terribly mistreated and still wracked with pain from the bloody beating in Philippi. Lesser men would have quit the work after suffering the injustice and brutality these two men suffered for proclaiming Christ. But Paul and Silas were serving the Lord from their hearts, not from their feelings. Their motivation was for the love of Christ (cp. “the love of Christ constraineth us” [[2 Corinthians 5:14](#)]), and such a motivation keeps men serving Him regardless of adversity.

This is not the first time we have seen Paul continue on in the work in spite of great suffering. We witnessed this great dedication in his first missionary journey. He was stoned and left for dead at Lystra, but the next day he was on his way to another town to carry the message of the Gospel. This dedication of Paul, as well as Silas, puts to shame so many professing believers today. Many in our churches turn in their resignations for nothing more than a frown. A good number of pastors and missionaries quit the ministry because they cannot endure a small salary and some

“going without” materially. Other saints quit serving if they are required to give up some pursuits of pleasure once in a while. Instead of our churches being a barracks filled with dedicated soldiers, they are more like baby nurseries full of whimpering cream puffs. It is a pathetic lot that makes up the bulk of the membership of our churches today. Men like Paul and his co-worker Silas are few and far between. Dedication is a lost word and practice in church. No wonder the church is powerless today and losing more ground than it is gaining.

From Philippi, Paul and Silas went to Thessalonica to continue their propagation of the Gospel. We will note the ministry of the Word ([vv. 1–4](#)) and the meanness of the wicked ([vv. 5–10](#)) in the missionaries’ experience in Thessalonica.

## A. THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

To examine the ministry of the Word by Paul and Silas in Thessalonica, we will consider the site, the season, the sermons, the servants, and the success of the ministry.

### 1. The Site of the Ministry

“When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them” ([vv. 1, 2](#)). Both the city of Thessalonica and the synagogue of the Jews speak to us about the site of the ministry.

*The city of Thessalonica.* This city was about 100 miles west and south of Philippi. It was the capital of Macedonia and is still a large city today bearing the name of Salonika, a corruption of the name Thessalonica. The name of the city in ancient times was Therma; but around 300 B.C. it was named Thessalonica in honor of the sister of Alexander the Great by either her husband, Cassander, who rebuilt the city, or by her father Philip.

To reach Thessalonica, Paul and Silas traveled on the Egnatian Way, one of the special and excellent Roman roads that was designed to help join the empire by providing a good route of travel through the various provinces. The road was a great contrast to some of the rough paths Paul and Barnabas had taken on their first missionary trip. Traveling on the Egnatian Way instead of those paths would be like

traveling on our Interstate highways instead of some narrow, one-lane dangerous dirt road through the hills.

The Romans, in endeavoring to link their empire together with good roads, unwittingly provided the Gospel with good roads on which to travel to many places in the world. Like the decree of Caesar Augustus which brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem where Christ could be born as prophesied, so the road building of Rome shows how God can use His enemies to accomplish His purposes. God's enemies will not stand in the way, but they will assist God if God so pleases.

To get to Thessalonica from Philippi, the missionaries traveled through two towns, Amphipolis and Apollonia. These towns were about thirty miles from each other with the first one being some thirty miles from Philippi and the last one some thirty miles from Thessalonica. Scripture indicates that Paul and Silas did not stop in these towns. They went for Thessalonica, for it was another chief city from which the Gospel could radiate out to other towns and areas better than a ministry in Amphipolis and Apollonia.

The fact that Thessalonica was indeed a great city in which to spread the Word of God to the world is emphasized by the fact that it was not only on the Egnatian Way, but it was also "the most important seaport of Macedonia" (Charles F. Pfeiffer). The importance of its seaport would especially give Thessalonica an advantage over Amphipolis and Apollonia in helping spread the Gospel quickly throughout the world. People from ships of other seaports would come in contact with the Gospel in Thessalonica and would take it with them to other parts of the world. This helps explain why Paul could say of the Thessalonians, "From you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad" ([1 Thessalonians 1:8](#)).

*The synagogue of Thessalonica.* Unlike Philippi, Thessalonica had "a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them." The phrase, "as his manner was," speaks of two important practices of Paul regarding the synagogue. It speaks of his practice in the worship of God and his practice in the work of God.

First, his practice in the *worship* of God. In the days of Paul, the pious went to the synagogue to worship. Today faithful worshippers of God find a church to attend. Luke notes that Christ was also a faithful attender of the synagogue when he says Christ attended the synagogue in Nazareth "as his custom was" ([Luke 4:16](#)). Joseph Parker, in his inimitable way, speaks of the worship habits of Paul and Jesus and its exhortation to us today when he says, "Paul was not an occasional attendant. Jesus Christ did not go now and then to the synagogue. The first Christians lived in



the Church, and only existed elsewhere.”

The early Christians would be astounded at the unfaithfulness of Christians in church attendance today. Especially would they be astounded if they knew of the great conveniences we have to get to church and of the comfort in which we can sit when in church. Our day will have much to answer for in regards to the great opportunities for worship which we often spurn in our unfaithfulness.

Second, the practice in the *work* of God. We have noted in earlier chapters Paul’s habit of going to the synagogue to begin proclaiming the Gospel in a new area. The synagogue service provided excellent opportunity to proclaim the Word; and it “afforded him the best means of access to serious and inquiring Gentiles” (Alexander). This was important; for his main calling was to the Gentiles ([Romans 11:13](#), cp. [Galatians 2:8](#)). We are inundated today with books and tapes and videos on new methods for reaching the lost and doing the work of God. While many of these new methods speak more of the world than of doing God’s work, some of them do, however, represent the principle Paul exhibited in going to the synagogue to start his work. The principle is simply to examine your situation to discover what opportunities you have and then use these opportunities to the fullest. This seems like common sense; but too often, as we noted in earlier chapters, church people are unwilling to adjust their ministries to using the practical opportunities at hand. Instead, they insist on using methods that are no longer practical or productive in reaching people.

## **2. The Season of the Ministry**

“Paul . . . three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures” ([v. 2](#)). Paul’s stay at Thessalonica has often been mistakenly thought to be but three weeks, for our text says he met in the synagogue three sabbath days to reason with the folk about Christ. But when one compares our text with what is said in some of Paul’s epistles, it becomes quite evident that Paul’s stay in Thessalonica was much longer than three weeks. That he met on three sabbath days in the synagogue simply says that this was the number of times Paul propagated the Gospel from the synagogue. After that he did what he did in a number of cities—he met elsewhere to further proclaim the Word of God.

The epistles which provide strong argument for a longer stay than three weeks are the two Thessalonian epistles and the Philippian epistle. The Thessalonian epistles speak at length on doctrinal matters which Paul could not have covered that well in just three sessions in the synagogue. These matters demand that he be there long enough for the new converts to grow considerably in spiritual knowledge.

The Philippian epistle speaks of support received from the church of Philippi which could not have occurred in three weeks' time. "Even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity" ([Philippians 4:16](#)). Paul did not take any remuneration from the Thessalonians and, therefore, needed support from others as well as from his own labors.

Paul was not a fly-by-night preacher. He endeavored to stay long enough to do a good job. When he did not stay long in a place, persecution was generally the reason. Unfortunately, persecution terminated Paul's stay in many places, Thessalonica included. Paul's ministry was of such character that sin could not tolerate it for very long.

Unlike Paul, many ministers behave more like a shifty politician than a faithful servant of God. Their long stay at a pastorate often does not indicate faithfulness as much as it indicates unfaithfulness. If they had been faithful to God's Word, they would not have been able to stay so long. On the other hand, some ministers do not last long at the church because they *are* faithful. Their record looks poor because of being run out and voted out here and there. But the truth of the matter is they are oftentimes the faithful pastors—not the ones who stay for many years and are very popular with the people.

### **3. The Sermons of the Ministry**

As we have said periodically in previous chapters, Paul's ministry was that of a message. Paul had something to tell people. Take away the message and he loses the reason for traveling. Churches need to remember that. The de-emphasis on the message in a great many of our churches says emphatically that they have forgotten the place of the message in the ministry of the church. Preachers especially need to remember this, too, and start spending more time getting better messages rather than running here and there doing other things.

In examining Paul's messages to the people in Thessalonica, we will examine both the style of his sermons and the subject of his sermons.

*The style of his sermons.* From our Acts' text and also from [1 Thessalonians 2](#), we have eight words (four in each book) which show us the various ways in which Paul propagated the Word of God in Thessalonica. These words are reasoned, opening, alleging, preach, exhortation, preached (a different word than the previous word "preach"), comforted, and charged.

First, *reasoned*. "Paul . . . reasoned with them out of the scriptures" ([v. 2](#)). The

Greek word translated “reasoned” in our text is the word from which we get our English words “dialectic” and “dialogue” and means “converse, teach in question and answer method, discourse” (A. T. Robertson). The “question and answer” meaning would certainly be prominent in our text. Paul would declare a truth, then the synagogue people would ask questions. Paul would support the truth from the Scriptures. More questioning and more answers would follow with Paul sometimes asking the questions as well as answering. Every Jewish missionary knows and practices this style of witnessing to the Jews. This is a predominant way of witnessing to Jews and requires that the believer really know the Scriptures. Over the years we have personally listened with great interest to Jewish missionaries as they related to us some of these types of encounters they have had with Jews.

Second, *opening*. Our Acts’ text also speaks of Paul “opening” ([v. 3](#)) the Scriptures in Thessalonica. The word “opening” means “explaining, revealing, letting in the light” (Griffith Thomas). The word is found but twice in the New Testament and both times Luke is the one who uses it. The other place the word is found is in [Luke 24:32](#) where the two on the road to Emmaus said of Christ after He had revealed His identity to them, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” Opening the Scriptures is the responsibility of every pastor. But, alas, how few open up the Scriptures! One of the great crying needs in our churches today is pastors who will open up the Word. Most sermons are prepared in haste, are full of stories, do nothing more than retell the Scriptures that have just been read. It is a shame, yea, even a crime of major proportions that pastors are so delinquent in the work of opening the Scriptures. But, of course, few in the congregation will complain; for few in the congregation are interested in having the Scriptures opened to them.

Third, *alleging*. Another word used in Acts to describe how Paul propagated the Word in Thessalonica is “alleging” ([v. 3](#)). The common use of the word today demands a translation change here. The common use and meaning today is “to assert or declare without proof” (*Webster’s New Universal Dictionary*). As an example, we say a suspect is the alleged thief or murderer, or a person is the alleged owner of a house. In our text, the word means just the opposite. It means to bring proof. To “lay alongside” (Griffith Thomas) or “set forth” (Vincent) as evidence or support. In application to our text, it means that Paul brought forth proofs, particularly from the Scriptures, of the doctrine he was teaching about Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Christ is not in the “alleged” [our day’s meaning of the word] category but is built on absolute facts which can be abundantly substantiated (cp. [Acts 1:3](#))!

Fourth, *preach*. “Whom I preach unto you” ([v. 3](#)). “Preach” is the fourth and final word in our Acts text disclosing how Paul propagated the Gospel in Thessalonica.

This word means to “announce, declare, promulgate, make known, proclaim publicly, publish” (Thayer). In summary, the word means to make known openly in a pronounced way. The Gospel message is not to be hidden under a “bushel” ([Matthew 5:15](#)). It is to be proclaimed to all mankind. We have some politicians today who claim they have the faith but that it is a private matter with them. Shame on them. Our faith is to be declared publicly. [Matthew 28:19](#) and [Mark 16:15](#) make that emphatically clear!

Fifth, *exhortation*. Twice Paul speaks of exhorting the Thessalonians ([1 Thessalonians 2:3,11](#)). To exhort means to call alongside to appeal, to admonish, to entreat. All forms of its meaning would be involved as Paul worked with the Thessalonians on a personal and group basis.

Sixth, *preached*. Paul said, “We preached unto you the gospel of God” ([1 Thessalonians 2:9](#)). The word “preached” (different word than in [Acts 17:3](#) above) here means to herald. The word refers to a herald who would go before a ruler, such as a king, announcing the coming of the ruler and giving out any other needed messages. The herald lifted up his voice and spoke loudly and clearly. Not all of Paul’s declaring of the Word of God was done in the preaching style, but some of it was. Preaching is being looked down on today. People do not like it, for it exhibits excitement and enthusiasm and passion for the Word of God. But let God’s men never stop preaching!

Seventh, *comforted*. This word, found in [1 Thessalonians 2:11](#), means to encourage, thus to comfort. Paul could do that because he proclaimed the Gospel. But if you leave out the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you will be shorn of any true comfort and encouragement. Modernists cannot give true comfort.

Eighth, *charged*. Paul also “charged” ([1 Thessalonians 2:11](#)) the people when propagating the Word of God. This, of course, does not refer to billing someone. The Greek word carries with it the idea of imploring someone and also of witnessing or testifying. The context determines the meaning application. This context in Thessalonians best suits the imploring meaning. But imploring will not suit those extreme Calvinists who oppose pleading with folk to be saved. This kind seems to think we only declare the message and then the people can take it or leave it. But one is not reading the Scripture correctly if he concludes we are not to plead with people to receive God’s message. The most justifiable pleading of all is pleading with folk to receive the message of the Word of God.

All these various styles of presenting the Word of God show us that variety is indeed involved in declaring the Gospel. Christ used various methods of speaking the truth. Using the various methods simply says that every opportunity is being used. Some have opportunity to preach from a pulpit, others have opportunity to

speaking on a one-to-one basis with a friend or co-worker or relative. Still others have opportunity to speak to a group or class. Some think if you don't use a certain style you are not giving out the Gospel. But that is not so. There are many different ways of proclaiming God's message. Make sure you are involved in one way or another.

*The subject of his sermons.* The subject of Paul's sermon was Christ. Paul spoke particularly about five things regarding Christ: the suffering, raising, identifying, coming, and obeying of Christ.

First, the *suffering* of Christ. Paul said, "Christ must needs have suffered" ([v. 3](#)). We may not have any problem with the idea that Christ went to the cross and suffered terribly, but the Jews had (and still have) much problem with that truth. They could not accept the Scriptures on suffering as belonging to their Messiah. They would develop strange interpretations and explanations to remove the predictions about the suffering of the Messiah as given by the prophets. Even the twelve disciples had this problem for awhile. When Christ told them He was going to suffer, they would not believe it. Peter was so opposed to it that he even rebuked Christ for saying He was going to suffer ([Matthew 16:21-23](#)). Therefore, Paul needed to make it plain to the Thessalonians that Christ had to suffer and that He suffered for our sins.

Suffering is still a hard doctrine to accept. Most people reject the suffering of Christ as necessary for their salvation. Also, many people will not accept the place of suffering in their own lives as planned by God to accomplish good things in their lives. But suffering is necessary. Christ must suffer in order to provide for our salvation. We must suffer via trials in order to grow in the faith.

Second, the *raising* of Christ. "Christ must needs have . . . risen again from the dead" ([v. 3](#)). Tremendously essential in preaching about Christ is to preach the resurrection of Christ. Leave out the resurrection and you destroy the message. It was absolutely necessary that Christ rise from the grave if we are going to have a Savior. Christ had to die for our sins, but do not stop there. He had also to rise from the dead or His dying would not do any good in regards to our salvation. So Paul not only said, "Christ must needs have suffered," but he also added to the "needs" part "risen again from the dead." There is no valid faith apart from the resurrection, for "If Christ be not risen . . . your faith is also vain" ([1 Corinthians 15:14](#)).

Third, the *identifying* of Christ. "This Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ" ([v. 3](#)). The term "Christ" refers to the Messiah. Paul spoke in the synagogue about Israel's longed for Messiah. Now he identifies Him with Jesus. This would be a shock to many Jews and doubtless to some of the Gentile proselytes, too. The Jews were not looking for a Messiah Who would come in the way Jesus did. They expected an

emancipator Who would deliver them from Roman tyranny and bring immediate exaltation for the nation of Israel. They did not understand that man's first and greatest need is not freedom from political enslavement but freedom from the enslavement of sin. Few care about the sin problem; most are interested in the political problem. But political problems will not be solved until the sin problem is solved.

Fourth, the *coming* of Christ. Here we speak of the second coming of Christ, both the rapture and the revelation. We learn from the Thessalonian epistles that Paul spoke much about this truth. In fact, the subject of the second coming of Christ is especially associated with the Thessalonian church. Howson said, "It may be said that in each of the primitive churches . . . there is some peculiar feature which gives it an individual character. In Corinth it is the spirit of party, in Galatia the rapid declension into Judaism, in Philippi it is a steady and self-denying generosity. And if we were asked for the distinguishing characteristic of the first Christians of Thessalonica, we should point to their overwhelming sense of the nearness of the second advent . . . Each chapter in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians ends with an allusion to this subject." For those who have difficulty in understanding all the ins and outs of the doctrine of the second coming, let them be encouraged that the saints at Thessalonica also had problems understanding the doctrine. They even thought at one time that they were going through the tribulation ([2 Thessalonians 2:2](#)).

The great truth Paul taught about the second advent—a truth we need to emphasize more—is that the second advent means we shall "ever be with the Lord" ([1 Thessalonians 4:17](#)). Oftentimes in our study of the end times, we get more concerned and excited about other things (such as what nations are going to be involved in the Great Tribulation period, who is going to be the Antichrist, and what weapons will be used in the battle of Armageddon) than about being forever with Christ. Many saints are like those who would go to an airport to meet a loved one but get so excited about the terminal building, the planes, the control tower, the crowds, the escalators, the parking garages, and other things that they forget the great thing about going to the airport is to meet their loved one. When we get into prophecy, let us keep our eyes focused on Christ and our being with Him, or we will miss the main point of it all.

Fifth, the *obeying* of Christ. Many will leave us here. They like doctrine but not duty. But Paul taught duty as well as doctrine to the Thessalonians. We learn this fact especially in the Thessalonian epistles. In these two epistles, Paul reiterates what he had told the Thessalonians in his visit to them. His instructing them about Christian conduct—obeying Christ in our daily walk—is summed up in, "Ye know how

we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you . . . That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you into his kingdom and glory” ([1 Thessalonians 2:11,12](#)). Paul had a lot to say about how they lived their lives as children of God. From the study of the Thessalonian epistles, we learn that he addressed a host of areas of conduct, too numerous to mention here, for they are a book-size study in themselves. These messages on Christian conduct inform us that when one becomes a child of God, he is to live accordingly. Today, it is hard to tell who is saved and who isn’t because so many professing believers live so much like the world. They need to read the Thessalonian epistles and learn that saved people are to live like their Savior.

#### 4. The Servants of the Ministry

The Thessalonian epistles make some significant comments which show the excellent character of Paul and Silas in their ministry in Thessalonica. Their excellent behavior is summed up by a verse from each of the two epistles: “Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblamably we behaved ourselves among you” ([1 Thessalonians 2:10](#)) and “we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you” ([2 Thessalonians 3:7](#)). The second chapter of the first epistle lists some specific details of their noble conduct—they were bold, steadfast, honest, God-pleasing, humble, caring, sacrificial, and industrious.

First, their ministry was *bold*. “We were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God” ([1 Thess. 2:2](#)). The word “bold” is an eight syllable word in Greek! It has much meaning. It means to speak with confidence, to not be timid, fearful, or apologetical. Paul and Silas did not act effeminately or like sissies. They were not wimps. They demonstrated noble manhood in their conduct and ministry. Let God’s men act likewise.

Second, their ministry was *steadfast*. Paul told the Thessalonians that he and Silas spoke “unto you the gospel of God with much contention” ([1 Thess. 2:2](#)). Paul mentioned how terribly he and Silas had been treated in Philippi and then said they spoke in Thessalonica in spite of the contention they faced. All of this says they were steadfast. They would not quit or change their message because of opposition or other difficulties. You will not last long serving Christ if you do not do the same.

Third, their ministry was *honest*. “Our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile . . . For neither at any time used we flattering words . . . nor a cloak of covetousness” ([1 Thess. 2:3,5](#)). Their message, manners, and motivation were all honest. Integrity was a hallmark of these two noble missionaries. Would that this could be said of all ministers today.



Fourth, their ministry was *God-pleasing*. “Even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God” ([1 Thess. 2:4](#)). This is not the case with most ministers today. Their one concern is to please man. They cater their ministry to men, they change the message to bring the cheers of men, and they overlook the sin of men. But this does not please God at all, and no ministry is worth a plug nickel that does not seek to please God above all others.

Fifth, their ministry was *humble*. “Nor of men sought we glory” ([1 Thess. 2:6](#)). Again we have a trait of Paul and Silas we seldom see in those claiming to be God’s servants today. Oh, the self-glorifying that goes on in Christendom today. It is enough to make one gag. One man calls himself “One of Bible Christianity’s most powerful and revolutionary voices.” He advertised one of his books as “This could be the most important book since *Pilgrim’s Progress*! Maybe the first truly new work of this century!” We expect men like the former heavyweight boxing champion, Cassius Clay (alias Mohammed Ali) to say, “I am the greatest.” But now we have those who are in fundamental Bible-believing circles singing the same tune. God give us men with Paul’s “nor of men sought we glory” attitude.

Sixth, their ministry was *caring*. Paul said, “We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children . . . being affectionately desirous of you . . . we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God” ([1 Thess. 2:7,11,12](#)). Paul and Silas really cared for the folk in Thessalonica. And note where his great care for them was, for this is what makes his care so noble. His care for them was chiefly in the spiritual area as is seen in “that ye would walk worthy of God.” He cared for these people’s souls. He was concerned about their spiritual well-being. This is the most important area of one’s life. When you care for others’ spiritual need, you show the greatest of all care for them. Church members, who are quick to accuse their pastor of not caring, need to remember this. The pastor who really cares for his people will provide for their spiritual help. Carnal church members have a different ruler to judge pastoral care, and it has little to do with spiritual help. But their ruler is not God’s ruler. Judge your pastor by God’s ruler if you really want to know if he cares for you.

Seventh, their ministry was *sacrificial*. “Ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail; for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you” ([1 Thess. 2:9](#)). Paul took no salary or love offerings from the church in Thessalonica. He paid his own way. While this is no justification for churches to be cheap and fleece their pastors with paltry salaries—Paul speaks strongly elsewhere about the responsibility of providing adequately for God’s servants—it shows the great sacrifice Paul and Silas paid to minister in Thessalonica. No one will serve God well who is afraid to sacrifice. That’s why most church members do so poorly



in serving at church. They do not want to sacrifice anything—time, money, or their pursuit of pleasures.

Eighth, their ministry was *industrious*. Paul said, “Ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail; for laboring night and day” ([1 Thess. 2:9](#)). Paul and Silas worked hard (“labor and travail”), and they worked long hours (“night and day”) to make it possible for them to minister to the Thessalonians. God’s servants ought always to be industrious, or they will not do much in their work. They cannot be forty-hour-a-week workers and serve God acceptably. The ministry is no place for those who want an easy job.

## 5. The Success of the Ministry

“Some of them [Jews] believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few” ([v. 4](#)). To examine the success of the ministry of Paul and Silas in Thessalonica, we will consider the count, composition, consorting, and confessing of the converts.

*The count of the converts.* Many were saved in Thessalonica. Most of the converts came from the Gentile ranks as “great multitude” and “not a few” indicate. “Some” Jews, however, were also saved. The number of converts would be a great encouragement to Paul and Silas, for it is always encouraging when many people are truly converted. But there are times when we will lament like Isaiah, “Who hath believed our report?” ([Isaiah 53:1](#)). Those times are real testing times to see if we will remain faithful to the message that is unpalatable to the people. We are especially facing this test in our day. Scripture describes our days and the description is not days of revival! To gain a crowd, many have compromised the message, filled the church services with fleshly entertainment, and lowered the standards. That, however, does not change the number of true conversions. It only multiplies the number of false conversions.

*The composition of the converts.* The converts are put in three groups. (1) “Some” refers to the Jews, (2) “devout Greeks” speaks of the Gentile attenders of the synagogue who left paganism to become proselytes of Judaism, and (3) “the chief women not a few” refers to women in the upper class of society who for the most part were doubtless also proselytes of Judaism. This latter group was surprising. Paul said later in one of his epistles, “Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” ([1 Corinthians 1:26](#)). That is the usual

situation. At Thessalonica, the unusual occurred in that many of those in the upper class of society believed. Generally the upper class scorns the Gospel, for they are too proud with riches and position to acknowledge themselves as sinners in need of Christ. In Antioch of Pisidia this scorn was especially seen. Scripture says, “The Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts [area]” ([Acts 13:50](#)). But God balanced that persecution by the upper class in Antioch of Pisidia with the conversion of many upper class in Thessalonica. God balances our afflictions with blessings.

*The consorting of the converts.* Those who believed “consorted with Paul and Silas.” True converts want to be with God’s people, especially do they want to be under the teaching of the Word by God’s men. Those who claim to be saved and yet show little interest in hearing God’s men teach and preach the Scriptures only betray their unredeemed condition. The redeemed want to hear the Word preached, and you do not have to provide all sorts of gimmicks, contests, and other carnal incentives to get true believers to church to hear the Word preached. Just preach the Word and they will come. It would be healthy for the spirituality of churches if they stopped all these carnal methods. These methods only corrupt the church and cheapen the fellowship.

*The confessing of the converts.* Paul makes a note in his first epistle to the Thessalonians to speak about the great witness of the believers in that city. Paul said, “From you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad” ([1 Thessalonians 1:8](#)). We referred to this earlier in this chapter, noting that because Thessalonica was an important seaport and was on the Egnatian Way, the testimony could spread throughout the world. But for the testimony to spread, the believers had to be faithful in their lives and witness. And they certainly were, or Paul could not have said what he did about their faith being spread abroad. It was not through missionaries they had sent out that the world heard the Gospel, but it was through their own mouths and manners that the Gospel was spread. Sometimes in sending out missionaries, folks forget that they must still use their own mouth and manners to proclaim God’s message. God puts us in places and among people that gives us opportunity to proclaim His message. Do not bemoan your situation, but be faithful in using what opportunities it provides, and you will accomplish much for God.

## B. THE MEANNESS OF THE WICKED

As it was in nearly every place that Paul ministered, so it was in Thessalonica—the wicked vented their wrath against the work of the Lord. We will note the cause, company, conduct, and consequences of the meanness of the wicked in Thessalonica.

### 1. The Cause of Meanness

“But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy” ([v. 5](#)) against the work of God in Thessalonica. Unbelief and envy were the two main causes of the meanness of the wicked in Thessalonica. Oftentimes, however, the world and carnal church members would try to disguise the cause of their dissident action as being something else, particularly something that is noble. But it is unbelief and envy that is really behind their evil action.

We note here in more detail each of these two causes for the meanness at Thessalonica against the work of God.

*Unbelief.* At the root of every act of meanness against God’s work is unbelief. It often leads to great zeal against spiritual truth. The word translated unbelief in our text is a very meaningful word and helps us understand something about the nature of unbelief. This word means to be obstinate, rebellious, disobedient, and unpersuadable. It shows up twenty-nine times in several forms in the New Testament and is translated “disobedient” (or “obey not” or “not obey”) sixteen times and “unbelief” or “believe not” (or similar phrases) thirteen times. It tells us that unbelief is intentional, obstinate, not something caused by a lack of facts. Hence, we should not be surprised that unbelief motivates to strong action against the work of God. Furthermore, all of this reveals to us that those in church who are a continual pain in the neck to the work of the church are probably unbelievers. Such may be deacons, Sunday School teachers, or holders of other important offices of leadership in the church. But their cantankerous spirit nullifies their claim of being a true believer.

*Envy.* Envy is often a bedfellow of unbelief. W. E. Vine characterizes the meaning

of the word here as a person who “desires to have the same or the same sort of thing for itself.” The ministry of Paul and his team in Thessalonica made the followers of Judaism very jealous. They did not like the attention, esteem, and crowd which the Gospel was getting. They wanted that for themselves. So they set out to attack the work of the Lord in hopes that they could discredit it and stop it and thus gain back the following, the esteem, and honor of the people.

This sort of envy is frequently seen in the church. It is often what is behind the slander, meanness, scorn, and uncooperative spirit that prevails among the troublemakers. They want the office, the prestige, the recognition, the special privileges, and the power that others have in the church; and, therefore, they go after those who have it. As with unbelief, it often reveals a heart that is not regenerate.

## **2. The Company of Meanness**

“But the Jews who believed not . . . took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city in an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason [where Paul and Silas were evidently staying], and sought to bring them [Paul and Silas] out to the people” ([v. 5](#)). The antagonists of the Gospel sought out a company of people to help them raise a big fuss against the work of the Lord, in particular against the chief workers of the Lord, Paul and Silas. Those they sought to help were “certain lewd fellows of the baser sort.” The meaning of the words in that phrase indicates people of low moral character who are nothing but loafers sitting around in public concourses doing nothing but talking. Today we would call them deadbeats. Vincent describes them as “loungers in the marketplace; the rabble.” They were the kind that would readily help to create a mob scene in the streets when encouraged to do so, as was the case in our text.

These people employed to raise a tumult in Thessalonica in order to attack the work and workers of the Lord certainly remind us of what happens in church business meetings all too frequently. When an important issue comes up for vote, the dissidents go out and find a number of backslidden members who have not attended the church in a long time and then get these members to come to the business meeting to vote against the important issue to defeat it. Any pastor who has not experienced this in his ministry has not pastored long or isn’t worth his salt. This recruiting of deadbeat members to vote against important church action should really encourage keeping the church rolls up-to-date and being more careful about who is recommended for church membership.

### 3. The Conduct of Meanness

We will look at four aspects of the evil conduct of the enemy of the work of God: the agitating of the city, the assaulting of Jason's house, the accusing of believers, and the acquiring of bail.

*The agitating of the city.* The enemies of God "set all the city in an uproar" ([v. 5](#)) and "troubled the people and the rulers of the city" ([v. 8](#)). It is not God's people that are the disturbers of the peace as evil wants people to think. Rather, it is the unbelievers that wreck the tranquility of society. The key to peace in society is peace with God. People who are saved have peace with God. The unbeliever does not; hence, the unbeliever is a potential disturber of peace in society.

The uproar would indeed trouble the rulers of the city. "If there was anything in the world that a Roman magistrate would become alarmed at, it was turbulences in the streets. The Roman power was very stern about any popular disturbance. They would hear a charge of that crime quicker than they would anything else" (B. H. Carroll). Thus, if you wanted to get the magistrates to act against someone, be it legal or illegal, just start an uproar and blame the cause of the uproar on those you don't like; then the magistrates will act against them to quiet the uproar. Such practices are still current. Communists thrive on public disturbances which they initiate. The Civil Rights movement has caused a number of disturbances over the years and then blamed it on others, but in the process they got attention and laws (unjust in most cases) in their favor. Church dissidents do the same thing. They disturb the peace then blame it on others—usually the pastor in an effort to get rid of the man who upsets their evil conscience.

The word translated "rulers" in [verses 6](#) and [8](#) means "politarchs." A. C. Gaebelein says, "As it is not found at all in classical literature, certain Bible critics accused the writer of the book of Acts of inaccuracy and impeached in this way the inspiration of the book. But like all other criticism, this charge has come back upon the critics. There is in the British Museum today a stone block in which the word 'Politarch' is chiselled. The stone was taken from a triumphal arch which stood in Thessalonica." Inscribed on that stone are a list of some of the politarchs of Thessalonica. "It is intensely interesting to find that some of these names [Sopater and Secundus] are mentioned in [Acts 20:4](#)" (Ibid.). All of this is another illustration of the wonderful veracity of the Scriptures.

*The assaulting of Jason's house.* "And assaulted the house of Jason, and sought

to bring them out to the people” (v. 5). Paul and Silas were staying in Jason’s house. So the mob went to Jason’s house to get the missionaries. “They burst into the house and searched up and down . . . They were getting ready to have a lynching party” (A. T. Robertson). Jason’s benevolence to the servants of God is not complimented by the world but results in cruelty from the world.

Do not expect the world to give you honor and praise for nobly serving God. Rather, expect the opposite. Furthermore, do not let the world’s antagonistic attitude towards your service for God stop your service. But continue serving anyway, for God will duly honor your service.

Providentially, Paul and Silas were not there at Jason’s house when the mob came seeking them. This saved them from much abuse. Some would say the missionaries were “lucky,” but believers ought never to talk that way. It was God, not luck, that intervened and saved the missionaries from what could have been their death. How much is attributed to chance or luck that is really the mercy of Divine providence. Shame on those who experience the Divine mercies of God and instead of thanking God, they praise luck.

*The accusing of believers.* The mob “drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city” (v. 6) and made accusation against them to the rulers. The accusation against the believers, which was especially aimed at Paul and Silas, was threefold. They were accused of bothering the city, breaking the law, and bowing to another king.

First, they were accused of *bothering the city*. “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also” (v. 6). Saying that Paul and Silas had previously “turned the world upside down” indicates that news about their ministry had spread throughout the land. That is not surprising, for travelers passing through the cities or from the cities Paul and Silas had previously been in would carry the news of the happenings regarding Paul and Silas. And, of course, the word about Paul and Silas would often be reported without much regard for the truth (typical of our news media). Paul and Silas would frequently be pictured as big disturbers of society. The phrase “turn the world upside down [is] elsewhere translated *made an uproar*, and *troubled* . . . It is a verb belonging to the later Greek, and strictly meaning to produce a state of insurrection or rebellion, and therefore very nearly corresponding to revolutionize in modern English” (Alexander). The accusation made against Paul and Silas was, of course, false. The message of the Gospel brought peace. It was the enemy of the Gospel that disturbed society wherever Paul ministered, including Thessalonica. Hence, this charge was a very hypocritical charge as is the next one,

too.

Second, they were accused of *breaking the law*. “These all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar” (v. 7). Wrong! They were obedient citizens. This charge was the same charge leveled at Paul and Silas in Philippi. And like the charge in Philippi, it was very hypocritical; for the accusers broke the law in their assaulting of the house of Jason and in dragging (v. 6) Jason and some other believers to the rulers. It is the habit of evil, however, to accuse others of the very thing they themselves are grossly guilty of. Communists accuse other nations of being warmongers when in truth that is the very nature of communism. Dissidents in church are ever accusing others of being inconsiderate when they themselves are the most inconsiderate people in the church. Divorced people quickly accuse people of not being loving and forgiving if they are against a divorced person remarrying or holding some high church office. But it is the divorced people who are grossly guilty of being unloving and unforgiving, for they did not love their mate as they ought and did not forgive their mate as they ought, or they would not have divorced their mate. Their wholesale lack of love is also seen regarding their children. If they had truly loved their children, they would never have put them through the sorrow and grief and the terrible disruption of life which comes about by the divorcing of their parents.

Third, they were accused of *bowing to another king*. “These . . . saying that there is another king, one Jesus” (v. 7). The accusation is partly true but also partly false. It is true that the message of the Gospel presents Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. But the accusation was intended to show that the missionaries were disloyal to Caesar as their ruler. They would not admit that you can be properly respectful of the ruler of the land and still bow down to Jesus Christ as the King of your soul.

The whole accusation reeked with insincerity. “A Jew zealous for Caesar [as these accusers wanted to appear to be] is an anomaly” (Maclaren). The Jews could not stand Caesar. They wanted a Messiah to free the nation of Israel from Roman dominion and to put Rome out of commission and put Israel in charge. But like the crucifixion, the Jews played loyalty to Caesar in order to attack the work of Christ. Such wicked insincerity called for and received great judgment from God and is part of the reason the Jews have been so persecuted down through the centuries since the crucifixion of Christ.

*The acquiring of bail.* “And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the others, they let them go” (v. 9). This money was not bail for the appearance of Paul and Silas at a future trial, but was “bail to guarantee his [Paul] good behavior” (E. M. Blaiklock). It could also be classified as a fine for the problems caused—even

though the problems were not caused by Paul and Silas but by the accusers. Again, how unjust were the actions of the rulers.

Believers have had to pay a high price for their faith, and the more opposed to Christ society is, the more the governments will be dipping their hand into the church treasury. How cruel and unjust to require this money from Jason and his fellow believers. No fair trial had occurred. It was simply mob action. Governments often turn their head the other way when God's people are treated unjustly; but if any other group (especially some despicable group—such as the homosexuals) is not given a fair trial, then governments intervene and insist with a great deal of sanctimonious pontificating that justice must be observed. But you will seldom find governments showing much concern about God's people being treated unjustly. Instead of concern, you will more likely see governments involved in treating God's people unjustly.

#### **4. The Consequences of Meanness**

“And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea” ([v. 10](#)). The consequence of this meanness was the departure of the two men who were the greatest blessing to Thessalonica that any two men had ever been. What a tragedy for Thessalonica. But when a society turns against Jesus Christ, it will drive out of its midst its best blessings. The people of the country of the Gadarenes drove out Christ after He had performed a most blessed and society-helping miracle by healing the man with demons ([Matthew 8](#)). Nazareth drove out Christ ([Luke 4](#)) Who was the best inhabitant that city ever had. Paul was frequently driven out of cities where he ministered. Today this work of evil is most conspicuous in our own land, too. Hatred of Christ is driving God out of our schools and government and society with the result being a great increase in crime, social unrest, and new laws and policies which are taking away more and more of our freedoms. Churches have run off their godly pastors and then they wonder why they struggle on year after year without experiencing the blessings of God. But you simply cannot push out God and His workers without suffering severe consequences.

## **XV. PRUDENCE IN BEREIA**

[ACTS 17:10–15](#)

TO ESCAPE PHYSICAL harm from the attack of the persecutors in Thessalonica, “the



brethren . . . sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea” ([v. 10](#)). The town of Berea was about fifty miles southwest of Thessalonica. Berea, whose modern name is Verria, was not located in a strategic location as were most of the towns in which Paul ministered. It was off the beaten path. As G. Campbell Morgan said about those who lived in Berea, “They lived on the byway, and not on the highway.” Marcus Cicero, a Roman orator, statesman, and philosopher, who lived during parts of the second and first century B.C., confirmed this description of Berea in an oration he made against Piso, an unpopular magistrate at that time who had interestingly also fled to Berea from Thessalonica for his safety. Cicero said, “He [Piso] was so unpopular, that he had to slink into Thessalonica, incognito and by night, and that from thence, unable to bear the concert of wailers, and the hurricane of complaints, he left the main road, and fled to the *oppidum devium* [means out-of-the-way or off-the-beaten-path] town of Berea” (*In Pisonem* 36).

Though Berea was an out-of-the-way town, it was needful for Paul and Silas to be located in a such place to keep them out of the limelight for awhile for their own protection. Paul and Silas going to Berea is similar in some ways to the situation that called for Paul being sent to Tarsus by the brethren in Jerusalem a few years after his conversion ([Acts 9:30](#)). Berea did indeed afford Paul and Silas some safety for a time as it did a century or so earlier to the unpopular magistrate Piso.

When Paul and Silas arrived in Berea, they did not, however, view Berea as just a safe haven; but being fervent in missionary spirit, they also viewed it as a place to proclaim the Gospel; and so they “went into the synagogue of the Jews” ([v. 10](#)) and began preaching Christ. As Matthew Henry says, “That command of Christ to his disciples, ‘When they persecute you in one city flee to another,’ intends their flight to be not so much for their own safety (flee to another, to hide there) as for the carrying on of their work (flee to another, to preach there).” While persecution may end the ministry in one area, it often starts a new ministry in another area. The missionaries’ ministry in Thessalonica ended as a result of persecution, but it resulted in a new ministry starting in Berea. “The devil was outshot in his own bow; he thought by persecuting the apostles to stop the progress of the gospel, but it was so overruled as to be made to further it” (*Ibid.*, cp. [Philippians 1:12–18](#)).

The significant feature in the Berean ministry was the prudence of the Berean people in their response to the Gospel message. “These were more noble [i.e. wise, prudent in conduct] than those in Thessalonica” ([v. 11](#)). “These” refers primarily to the Jews. “The comparison is only between the Jews of the two places for in Thessalonica the triumphs of the Gospel among the Gentiles were at least as great as at Berea” (Brown). But the Jews did not respond well in Thessalonica. In fact, not many Jews responded well in any city where Paul ministered. But they certainly

responded well in Berea. And the nobleness of the response of the Berean Jews to the ministry of Paul and Silas is so impressive that in our day churches all over our land use the name Berea or Berean in their church name. You will not find this practice regarding the other places Paul was at. Perhaps a few churches have named themselves after other places Paul started, but no place compares with Berea in this naming practice.

In our study of the ministry of Paul and his faithful associate Silas in Berea, we will consider the details of their prudence ([vv. 10–12](#)) and the disdain of their prudence ([vv. 13–15](#)).

## A. THE DETAILS OF THEIR PRUDENCE

In three distinct ways, the Jews in Berea showed they were more prudent (“more noble”) regarding the Gospel than were the Jews of Thessalonica. They listened to the Gospel, examined the Gospel, and believed the Gospel.

### 1. They Listened to the Gospel

The Jews in the Berea synagogue “received the word [‘i.e. listened to the preaching of the Gospel,’ J. A. Alexander] with all readiness of mind” ([v. 11](#)). This verse tells us how well the Berean Jews listened to Paul and Silas when they proclaimed the Gospel. The Berean Jews listened enthusiastically in contrast to the Thessalonian Jews. “In Thessalonica many of the Jews out of pride and prejudice refused to listen” (A. T. Robertson). The Greek word translated “readiness of mind” indicates eagerness. These Berean Jews did not jeer the message. They were not bored with the message. No, these Jews were excited about the message of the Gospel and would listen with rapt attention to the two missionaries. How this must have thrilled Paul’s heart. Though his calling was chiefly to the Gentiles, yet, he longed greatly for his own race to be saved as is evidenced in his own words in the epistle to the Romans: “I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” ([Romans 9:2,3](#)) and “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” ([Romans 10:1](#)).

Would that we had more in our churches who would show this eagerness when the Word of God is preached. A great many show very little interest in the sermon. Of course, the sermons one hears nowadays in the church understandably kill a lot

of interest for hearing preaching. But what we are talking about here is that the great portion of those sitting in the pews on Sunday have such a despicably small and jaded spiritual appetite that the best of sermons cause no excitement in their heart. It is not a “noble” attitude, that’s for sure. It is a very spiritually sick attitude. Those with this attitude struggle to stay awake both physically and spiritually during the sermon time; and then when the service is over, they quickly beat it for home so they won’t miss out on any sports on cable TV or any parties with their friends. However, a good appetite is necessary for good health both physically and spiritually. If your spiritual appetite is waning, beg God to rejuvenate it to the extent that you will always be eager to hear the Word preached.

## **2. They Examined the Gospel**

“These were more noble . . . in that they . . . searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” ([v. 11](#)). Another evidence of the Bereans’ noble response to the Gospel was in their searching the Scriptures daily to examine the claims of the Gospel. This practice, like the excellent listening practice the Berean Jews displayed, is certainly not seen much in our churches. If we changed the words “more noble” to “unusual,” it would better describe our churches today; for so few in our churches search and study the Scriptures. And those who do search and study the Scriptures are often only doing so in order to find a text they can take out of context to justify some sin. But the Jews in Berea searched the Scriptures with a much higher motivation. They searched the Scriptures to examine the Gospel message.

We note the purpose of the examination, the protection via the examination, the principle in the examination, and the persistency of the examination.

*The purpose of the examination.* The Berean Jews “searched the scriptures” to see “whether those things” which Paul and Silas preached “were so.” While they listened eagerly and respectfully to the proclaiming of the Gospel, they did not blindly accept what was said. They went to the Scriptures (Old Testament scrolls in their case) to check the Word to see if the message of Paul and Silas was indeed supported by the Scripture as he said it was.

This examination of the Scripture to verify doctrine taught is not an act of doubt by the examiner, but it is an act of wisdom. “The noble hearer is not the man who immediately says, ‘Yes,’ to the interpretation of the preacher. The noble hearer is the man who appeals again and again to the Scriptures themselves, to find out if these things be true” (Morgan). “The preaching of ministers should be examined

by the Scriptures. Their doctrines are of no value unless they accord with the Bible" (Barnes). Joseph Parker said, "What is the model congregation? A congregation well provided with Bibles . . . a congregation that has the text before it, and that looks from the sermon to the text; from the text to the sermon; from the text to the context; and that binds the speaking man to keep within the sacred brief which God has given to him."

Not only is the examination of Scripture to verify doctrine not an act of doubt by the examiner, but it also is not an act of insolence to the preacher. The true minister will not fear such an investigation. He will, in fact, welcome it; for it can only confirm his message and honor his ministry. Obviously, Paul and Silas would be very glad to see a sincere examination of the Scripture regarding the Gospel; for they knew that when folk honestly examined the Scripture, it would result in their confirming everything the two missionaries said about Christ and the Gospel. "The doctrine of Christ does not fear a scrutiny" (Matthew Henry) but desires it.

*The protection via the examination.* Honestly examining the Scripture is great protection for the soul. In Paul's day the errors of Judaism held many in an oppressive iron grip, and many frauds were also passing through the country fleecing the people of the money and morals through false doctrine. Examining the Scripture to check on the validity of a person's preaching and teaching would establish whether the preacher or teacher was true or false. Hence, it would not only verify the veracity of the preaching of Paul and Silas, but it would also expose the falseness of the teachings of the frauds. This would protect the examiners from being taken in by the many false leaders and their philosophies.

Our day also has a problem with frauds. Many wolves, who would devour people's incomes, defile people's morals, and destroy people's souls, come in sheep's clothing pretending to be good people interested in your good when they are bad people interested only in their own personal gain and how much gain they can by hook or crook get from you. We have watched multitudes being willingly taken in by the religious, political, and philosophical frauds of our day. Even multitudes of professing Christians have gotten all taken up with these clever but corrupt leaders and philosophies. These professing Christians gullibly accept what the liberal politician tells them, believe the lying news media, are swept off their feet by new evangelicalism, modernism, religious radio and TV personalities, healing movements, the so-called counseling experts (such as the "Christian" [?] psychologists), lecturers with big audiences (such as Bill Gothard), and religious musical entertainers (the rock musicians and divorced musicians). But when you do not examine the frauds by

the Word of God, that is what will happen. Herschel Ford rightly said, "If Christians studied their Bible more we would not see them going off into so many false isms and cults." Barnes spoke similarly when he said, "The most prominent and usual cause of infidelity is found in the fact that men will not investigate the Scripture. Many infidels have confessed that they had never carefully read the New Testament. Thomas Paine confessed that he wrote the first part of the *Age of Reason* without having the Bible at hand."

To expose these counterfeits, you do not have to be a theologian; for it only takes a bit of Bible study to see through most of them. Thus, the fact that the charlatans of our society are so popular and accepted amongst professing Christians indicates how little Scripture the professing Christian knows today. Our churches are not helping the matter any by their anemic Bible teaching in the Sunday School and in the pulpit. So many Sunday School classes are a farce in terms of true Bible study. And, likewise, so many pulpits are like Mother Hubbard's cupboard; for they are barren of any food. Churches have lots of entertainment; and that keeps the crowd coming. But entertainment does not instruct in the Word of God nor protect the people from error. Rather, it makes the church corrupt in creed and character.

*The principle in the examination.* The Jews of Berea checked the Gospel message with the Scripture, not with the writings of Socrates or Aristotle, the famous Greek philosophers of antiquity, or with the writings of other noted philosophers of the world. This says they believed the Scriptures to be the final authority, the touchstone of faith. What a noble principle to guide their examination! Would that all people believed that today. Many doctrinal statements still say we believe the Word of God to be the final authority in all matters in which it speaks. But in practice, we pay little attention to that creed and instead base our decisions, our conduct, our morals, and our reasoning on what is popular in today's society. But there is no better rule and none equal to the Word for final authority. "Take the Scriptures as the test of truth: search them with care and diligence: compare what you hear with them: pray for wisdom, that you may discern aright: rest assured that you shall not use these means in vain" (Charles Simeon). Harry Ironside spoke likewise when he said, "The only way to test any system of doctrine is by the Word of God." We all have something that guides our conduct, that determines our belief. The wise man will look to the Word of God as the foundation and authority for determining right conduct and creed.

*The persistency of the examination.* While it is just one word, do not overlook the word “daily” in the examination action of the Jews at Berea. Examining the Scriptures daily indicates they were not occasional readers of the Scripture, but their study of the Scripture was continual and earnest. They did not, as many do today, only open their Bible in Sunday School and during the preaching services. But everyday they studied the Word of God earnestly (“searched” indicates something more than a casual reading of the Scriptures, a type of Bible reading which unfortunately characterizes too much of our reading of the Scriptures).

If we want the Word of God to do us much good, we need daily to get into the Word. We eat physical food everyday; how much more should we have good meals of spiritual food everyday. By the looks of the girth of many church members and the obvious evidence of their lack of spiritual nourishment, it is most indicative that they need to quit fasting on their intake of the Word of God and quit feasting on physical food and instead start fasting on their intake of physical food and start feasting on spiritual food. If God gave us bodies that reflected our intake of the Word of God, most church members would look as grossly emaciated as the poor people in the Third World who are dying because of lack of food. How disgusting to see Christians waddle to church grossly overweight who spiritually are nothing but skin and bones. Put “daily” back into your study of the Scriptures. As Albert Barnes said, “That man has very little reason to expect that he will grow in knowledge and grace who does not peruse, with candor and with prayer, a portion of the Bible every day . . . The constant searching of the Scriptures is the best way to keep the mind from error. He who does not do it daily may expect to ‘be carried about with every wind of doctrine,’ and to have no settled opinions.” You cannot daily soak up television and ignore the Word of God and come away thinking and acting like God’s people ought to think and act.

### **3. They Believed the Gospel**

“Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few” ([v. 12](#)). We note the number who believed and the nobility who believed.

*The number who believed.* “Many” in our text refers to the Jews, but “not a few” refers to the Gentiles. In Thessalonica it was “some” Jews but of the Greeks “a great multitude.” However, the Jews in Berea were more noble than those in Thessalonica; therefore, the number of Jews in Berea believing the Gospel was “many.”

It is always “noble” to believe the Gospel message whether many believe it or only few believe it. But the way the world talks, you would think it was never noble to believe the Gospel. Those who believe the Gospel message are often sneered at and ridiculed and made out to be strange people who are lacking in intelligence and good sense. But Scripture gives the true perspective. It is “noble” to turn to Christ as your Savior. To reject Christ is the opposite of “noble”; it is being ignoble. Eternity will label Christ rejecters as fools, and they will agree when they experience the just judgment of hell fire. They may have been dignified in this life with high honors and position and much respect. But rejecting the Gospel will make them eternal fools.

*The nobility who believed.* “Honorable women which were Greeks, and of men [also Greeks], not a few” ([v. 12](#)). Here we note the believing of the Gospel by the Gentiles in Berea since that notation is added on to our text by Luke after he tells us that many Jews believed. The many Jews believing would surely be an encouraging influence upon Gentiles to believe, especially those Gentiles who attended the Jewish synagogue.

Our verse points out that in Berea, Greek women of nobility responded well to the Gospel. This also happened in Thessalonica, but it was not the usual occurrence in Paul’s ministry or in anyone else’s ministry; for as we noted in our last chapter, Paul said, “Not many noble, are called” ([1 Corinthians 1:26](#)). The aristocratic crowd will not crowd heaven. Earthly riches and honor are generally a hindrance to one’s salvation. Such people cannot stoop in humility before the cross, for they are too proud with position to recognize their spiritual lowliness and too self-sufficient with material affluence to recognize their spiritual poverty.

The church of Berea was quite a church. It was composed of an unusual number of converted Jews and of an unusual number of converted higher-ups of the Greek women. History encourages us to believe that the church was a good church for some centuries. As an example, William Jacobson said, “The Church at Berea remained steadfast in the faith under very severe trials from Arianism in the latter part of the fourth century.” One of the converts in Berea, “Sopater,” later assisted Paul for a time in his ministry ([Acts 20:4](#)).

Some wonder why this church, as significant as it was, did not receive any epistles from Paul. J. A. Alexander said, “It is very remarkable . . . that it is never again mentioned [in Scripture], especially when such abundant evidence exists of Paul’s solicitous regard for the Christians of Thessalonica and Philippi in his three epistles to those churches still preserved in the New Testament canon.” However, Paul did not write epistles to every church he was at, and not writing an epistle to

the Berean church does not reflect negatively on either Paul or the church. In fact, it may be a compliment to the church's spiritual strength, for most of Paul's epistles to churches were written because of problems in the church. As an example, Corinth received two epistles because of their many problems with carnality. The epistle to the churches in Galatia was written because of the problem of legalism, and the Thessalonian epistles were written to deal with the problem they had understanding the doctrine of the second advent. It is the squeaking wheel that gets the oil. While not all of Paul's epistles are in that category, many of them are. This fact can justifiably cause us to believe that a lack of any epistles to the church at Berea indicates their spiritual steadfastness. The description of them in our text would only encourage that conclusion.

## **B. THE DISDAIN OF THEIR PRUDENCE**

Spiritual wisdom does not get much honor on this earth. Hence, the prudence of the Bereans in accepting Paul's ministry was not respected by the enemies of the Gospel. They vehemently disdained it. What God would call noble, this bunch will call foolish, troublesome, illegal, abominable, and other like names. And this group is not content to just call Christianity names; they will attack it and did in Berea. So Paul again feels the tentacles of persecution reaching out to crush him. Disrespect of the truth leads to persecution of those who declare the truth.

Seldom is Paul without persecution. "Satan cannot long endure the uninterrupted reception of the gospel" (Ironsides). No matter where he preaches the Gospel, persecution soon raises its ugly head. But we must remember for our encouragement that "The clamor often raised against the Gospel is no argument against the Gospel itself. God's messengers have in all ages been opposed by the ungodly. Even our Lord himself, who spake as never man spake, was credited by very few" (Simeon).

In studying the persecution that took place in Berea, we will note the source of the persecution, the stirring up by the persecutors, and the separation because of the persecution.

### **1. The Source of the Persecution**

"But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people" ([v. 13](#)). The manner in which the work of the Lord was attacked in Berea is exactly the way it



was done in Lystra during Paul's first missionary journey. In Lystra, unbelieving Jews from Antioch and Iconium, cities where Paul had just previously ministered before going to Lystra, came and persuaded the people against Paul and caused them to stone him ([Acts 14:19](#)). Now in Berea, unbelieving Jews come from Thessalonica to attack the work of the Lord. Both of these attacks show how earnest the attackers are in persecuting the work of the Lord and how organized and informed they are for doing it. They saw to it that they had their informers and contacts so they would know where Paul was and thus could attack him. Satan is not sitting on his hands only mouthing our ridicule once in awhile, but he is attacking God's work with much planning and plotting and persistency. Do not play down the efforts of Satan to stop the work of God. Be alert in your own life and in your church to his ways, or you will be a victim and not a victor in dealing with him.

## **2. The Stirring up by the Persecutors**

These rascals from Thessalonica "stirred up the people" ([v. 13](#)) in Berea especially against Paul. The word translated "stirred" means "to agitate or excite as the waves of the sea are agitated by the wind" (Barnes). The word "In the Original [is] a strong word" (Jacobson). Therefore, it was no mild disturbance but a serious attack on God's man in Berea. While many in Berea believed, there were still many in Berea who did not believe and who were, therefore, very susceptible to being influenced by the evil men of Thessalonica.

Causing people to be stirred up against a faithful servant of God is probably one of the easiest things to do in this world. It does not take much propaganda for society or the church to get agitated against God's man, for the ungodly have no love for the servants of God. Facts are not needed by those to get folk stirred up against God's minister. The lies of the enemy will be given much credence as we have noted in previous persecutions of Paul. It is always so with the ungodly. They want to believe the lie because they have no love for God, hence no love for those who would exalt God. Evidence to the contrary will mean nothing to them. And these lies against that which is holy travel with lightening speed and are quickly accepted; while truth moves ever so slowly through the land, and people are very slow to accept it. That explains why the liberal news media can spew out their ungodly propaganda, and much of society immediately accepts it as truth; while conservative Christians can speak the truth, but most people will be very skeptic about accepting it and are much more ready to reject it with a sneer.

All of this is an enlightening commentary and an exposing of many problems in our churches. Churches have many members, who like the unbelievers in Thessalonica,

like to stir up things against God's man. They speak untruths without a blush. They attack and accuse in subtle, crafty, and cruel ways. The fact that they are successful in upsetting many churches reflects negatively on the rest of the congregation. If the rest of the congregation were walking with the Lord as they ought, these church dissidents would not be able to stir up much trouble in the church; for their propaganda, gossip, and subtle ways would be given no credence by the members. But, unfortunately, the dissidents do not have trouble getting people to listen to them and to take sides with them. Surprisingly many are very ready, in fact, to listen to them. And those who seem so ready to listen to the dissidents and take sides with them also seem very slow to listen to and defend the faithful man of God. The conclusion in this is that our churches obviously have a lot more unbelievers in them than one may suspect.

### **3. The Separation Because of the Persecution**

"And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea; but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens; and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus to come to him with all speed, they departed" ([vv. 14, 15](#)). Once again Paul must leave town because of his excellent performance in ministering the Word of God. We note several details about this separation: the singularity of it, the sincerity of it, and the support for it.

*The singularity of it.* The attack was especially directed against Paul. Because "he was the outstanding exponent of the new faith, the indignation of the unbelievers was directed against him particularly" (Ironsides). Silas and Timothy were able to stay and continue ministering in Berea. That Silas and Timothy did not have to leave is no reflection upon them—it only shows that the persecutors were not aware how well these two helped in spreading the Gospel. The Thessalonians knew that Paul was the leader of the group and, therefore, a key person to attack. While Silas and Timothy were not especially targeted in Berea, they certainly received plenty of persecution in other places. We already know about Silas' experience with Paul in the prison at Philippi. The more dedicated you are and the more you champion the causes of Christ, the more you will be singled out for an attack from the enemy sooner or later.

The constant attack upon Paul teaches us that we make a great mistake if we judge success in Christian service in the same manner as the world judges success in life.

With the world, success means better and higher paying jobs, increased recognition and respect by society, and a great accumulation of this world's goods. But those standards are wholly inadequate for measuring success in God's work. In God's work we measure success by how faithful one is to the Word of God, how upright is the character, how diligent is the service, and how vehement is his rejection by the world. According to that measure, Paul was tremendously successful. What about you?

*The sincerity of it.* The words "as it were" in [verse 14](#) make it appear Paul was using some stratagem in his leaving Berea. But he was not. "*As it were* is in Greek a single word . . . strictly meaning *as* . . . to signify the mere direction in which any thing or person moves . . . this idiom is so common in Thucydides, Polybius, and Xenophon [significant Greek writers of antiquity], that it cannot be considered as implying an intention to elude pursuit, by seeming to go to the sea, but really journeying by land" (J. A. Alexander). It was about seventeen miles to the sea from Berea, but going to the sea and then taking a ship to Athens was a much easier (it was 200 miles from Berea to Athens) and quicker route than going by land. Also it would be much safer, too; for on a ship the attackers of Thessalonica could not catch up with him on some dark road and waylay him. Wisdom was used here in getting Paul safely out of the area. We cannot read deceit into Paul's actions here. Unlike many preachers in our day, Paul was extremely truthful.

*The support for it.* "They that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens" ([v. 15](#)). Not only was noble behavior seen in the reception of the Gospel by the Jews in Berea, but noble behavior was seen in that some of the brethren of Berea helped Paul to escape from there. These brethren stayed with Paul all the way to Athens. Paul did not have Silas and Timothy to assist him on the trip, and so some of the brethren of the Berean church accompanied Paul to assist him in "guidance and protection" (Alexander).

When some attack us in our Christian service, we can be sure that there will be others who will stand by us and render to us much helpful and encouraging service. Every faithful pastor knows this is true when churches and others turn against him. And the help these faithful saints give God's man will not go unnoticed by God, but God will duly reward all those who help His servants. They may be nameless, as they were in our text, but God knows who they are, and in due time He will give them proper recognition for their faithful service to His servants.

Note also that once they had gotten Paul safely to Athens, these brethren did not stop helping Paul. Paul was desirous of having Silas and Timothy with him and so sent “a commandment unto Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed” (v. 15). The brethren “received” (Ibid.) this command and took it with them back to Berea to give to Silas and Timothy. Always willing to help, these brethren were most valuable brethren indeed. Would that our churches were filled with their kind.

## **XVI. PAGANISM IN ATHENS**

### ACTS 17:16–34

TRAVELING TWO HUNDRED miles south from Berea, Paul made his next stop at the city of Athens. “It was the most celebrated city of Greece” (Barnes). Athens was the home of “Socrates, Demosthenes, and Plato; center of Philosophy, Literature, Science, and Art; seat of [the] greatest university of the ancient world; meeting place of [the] world’s intelligentsia” (Halley). While in Paul’s time the days of its greatest glory were in the past, Athens was still a city enjoying great prestige for its culture. But in spite of all its glory, fame, and culture, Athens was a pagan city. Named after the Greek goddess Athena, Athens was a city “wholly given to idolatry” (v. 16). “Wholly given to idolatry” can be translated “full of idols,” and that literally describes Athens, for it was indeed full of idol statues. Idols (many of which were very lewd) practically lined the streets. The ancient writer Petronius said, “It was easier to find a god than a man there.” It also had a number of impressive looking buildings dedicated and related to idolatry (such as the famous Parthenon whose ruins still stand) which dotted the landscape and defiled the citizens.

Our land, though supposedly much more enlightened, has many cities which are like Athens. They have great universities, famous cultural centers, highly advanced research and technology centers, and large stadiums and theaters for entertainment; but they are still pagan cities. Idol statues may not line the streets as such, but idolatry is everywhere. Men are devoted to greed—the casinos are the temples, and the slot machines and gambling tables are some of the statues. Men are devoted to fleshly passions—pornographic magazines and videos are some of the statues. Men are devoted to pleasure—stadiums and other places of amusement and entertainment are the statues. Like Athens, spiritual ignorance and moral decadence hang over these cities like a poisonous, suffocating cloud though these cities are esteemed as great cultural centers and places of great learning.

In our study of Paul’s sojourning in Athens, we will note the stirring because of

paganism ([vv. 16, 17](#)), the situation amidst paganism ([vv. 17, 18](#)), and the sermon against paganism ([vv. 19–34](#)).

## A. THE STIRRING BECAUSE OF PAGANISM

When Paul came to Athens, he came without his two assistants, Silas and Timothy. As we noted in our last chapter, he immediately sent word back to them, via the Berean brethren who had escorted Paul to Athens, that they should come to Athens. While waiting for them, Paul observed first hand the great paganism in Athens. What he observed really stirred him up. [Verses 16](#) and [17](#) of our text tell us the extent of the stirring and the evidence of the stirring. These verses tell us “how a splendid idolatrous city will strike a pious mind” (Barnes).

### 1. The Extent of the Stirring

“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry” ([v. 16](#)). The word translated “stirred” is the word from which we get our English word “paroxysm.” It is a strong word which is translated “contention” in [Acts 15:39](#) and “provoked” in [1 Corinthians 13:5](#). Paul was really upset with all the paganism. He could not tolerate it. The thousands of statues—works of art to the Athenians—and the magnificent temples built to house some of the idol statues did not impress him. Rather, he saw the great dishonor all of this was to God and the great defiling that it brought about in man, and it greatly agitated his spirit.

The effect the paganism had on Paul revealed his great spirituality. A man who walks close to God will not be taken in by all the window dressing of paganism. He will not be blinded to the vileness and blasphemy of paganism because it hides behind intellectualism, art, entertainment, and religion. And he will not view all the paganism calmly. It will provoke his soul to righteous anger, to the white rage of holiness against heathenism. This reaction by Paul to paganism will, of course, not sit well with the unbelieving world. As an example, “The brilliant Frenchman, Renan, says that the ugly little Jew abused Greek art by describing the statues as idols” (Morgan). But Paul was right, and the brilliant Frenchman is not so brilliant in his attitude about Paul or about the paganism in Athens.

Sad to say, most professing saints today do not react as spiritually as Paul did to the world around them. Many will have more sympathy for Renan’s remarks than

for Paul's attitude. If they had been in Athens with Paul, they would have admired all the works of art there though it was all attached to heathen worship. They could take a sight-seeing tour of Athens without being stirred in the slightest about the great moral degradation and terrible God-dishonoring attitudes that all the art and temples and entertainment represented. Most professing believers are so cold spiritually, they cannot be aroused about sin be it in their own lives or in the church or anywhere else. About the only time they get upset regarding sin problems is when someone gets upset about sin and exposes and denounces it. Exposing and denouncing sin causes them to be upset, but not about the sin problem. It causes them to be upset with the exposers and denouncers of sin. They do not like all the stirring up over evil, and so they get stirred up at those who are stirred up. This explains why some pastors are asked to leave their churches. Morgan says, "Where are the Christian men and women of the city? We shall find them and know them by the paroxysm of their unrest [about evil] . . . if there be no paroxysm, no force, no agony, no heart-break [about evil]. . . they are pagans and not Christians." May God give us people who are quickly and deeply stirred up against sin. If we are not upset greatly by sin, sin will destroy us.

## **2. The Evidence of the Stirring**

"Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him" ([v. 17](#)). When a person is truly stirred in his heart against evil, it will show! He will do something about the evil! Some say they oppose evil, but you would never guess it by the way they act. Paul, however, was a different sort. You would know quickly and easily that he was upset with evil. Being terribly upset about all the paganism in Athens, Paul could not keep silent. Everywhere he went in Athens, he immediately began to speak out for the truth and against evil.

How different is Paul's reaction to evil than the reaction of most modern day Christians. As we have just noted, the Christians of our day do not get stirred up much about evil. And since they are not stirred up, they obviously will not speak up either. Their lips are sealed shut in protest of most evil. Such people never want to take a stand. They are afraid that taking a stand against evil will cost them too much. So they just sight-see in Athens without a word of protest.

Paul certainly used his "waiting" time wisely in Athens. Morgan said, "The first declaration of this passage is that he [Paul] was waiting in Athens. That in itself is an arresting and suggestive word, for it reminds us that we shall see how a Christian man waits in a godless city. Therein is the whole value of this scene." Busy

denouncing evil and proclaiming truth is how Paul “waited” in Athens. Paul did not spend his “waiting” time just sight-seeing and taking in the entertainment available as would most professing believers today (one wonders about the spirituality of denominational conferences which advertise all the sight-seeing the delegates can take in while at the conference). No, he got busy doing the Lord’s work. Joseph Parker in complimenting Paul in how he used his “waiting” time said, “The ‘waiting’ of some men is infinitely more energetic than the toil of others . . . He was an ardent Christian. We are Christians, but not ardent.”

## B. THE SITUATION AMIDST PAGANISM

The moral and spiritual situation in Athens was certainly not good when Paul came to town. Our text describes some of the conditions which existed in Athens amidst all this paganism. It shows us how evilly paganism affects a society. Paganism provides an atmosphere especially conducive for evil to breed and grow in. From our text, we will note four specific conditions which existed among the Athenians which would be encouraged by paganism: spiritual complacency, sterile creeds, shameful contempt, and superfluous conversing.

### 1. Spiritual Complacency

Paganism causes complacency for spiritual truth. Zeal for paganism will greatly diminish interest for truth. The spiritual complacency caused by paganism in Athens is especially evident in the reaction of the folk in the synagogue to Paul’s ministry. They did nothing. “There is no word of any impression made there . . . Neither is there any record of their objecting” (Morgan). Paul has been in a number of synagogues prior to this, for he usually went to the synagogue first when he arrived in a city if the city had a synagogue. But after ministering awhile in the synagogue, violent opposition always broke out. A number would believe, but others would become very hostile to Paul. But not in Athens. He “disputed [same word as translated ‘reasoned’ in [Acts 17:2](#)] . . . in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons [Gentile proselytes in the synagogue]” ([v. 17](#)), but the reaction was characterized mostly by indifference. These people, though not idol worshippers, had been affected by the world around them, and it had diminished their spiritual zeal. Like the Laodiceans, they were “neither cold nor hot” ([Revelation 3:16](#)). Many of our churches are in the same condition today. The influence of the world has given them a very bad case of

spiritual complacency. They simply go through the motions. They are not upset with evil but neither are they excited about the Gospel. It is a condition that God abhors, and He will spew them out of His mouth (Ibid.).

## **2. Sterile Creeds**

“Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him” (v. 18). Where paganism abounds, ungodly philosophies will abound. Paganism allows the worst of philosophies to exist while turning a deaf ear to truth—which sounds like a lot of our schools today. Paul encountered two of the most notorious philosophies in Athens—Epicureanism and Stoicism. Their creeds were sterile. They were empty of true life and left their followers holding an empty bag spiritually.

Epicureans were followers of the teaching of Epicurus who was born some four hundred years earlier. Epicurus “taught that the highest good and great end of existence was serene enjoyment, which his followers interpreted as meaning pleasure, and that often of the grossest kind” (Alexander). Morgan said, “The Epicurean philosophy in practice, habit, and experience, when Paul came to Athens, was lust, in its most degrading form.” Epicureanism was simply a deifying of the vile passions of the flesh.

Stoicism was not any better. Its founder was Zeno “who taught at the same time with Epicurus” (Alexander). Stoics were pantheists. Fatalism and endurance were their basic tenets. In Paul’s time, “Beneath the profession [of Stoicism] was the most degrading form of evil, and the ultimate word of the Stoic was suicide” (Morgan). We see much of this suicide and fascination with death in our rock musicians today. False doctrine brings death, not life.

## **3. Shameful Contempt**

Paganism does not breed respect for the Gospel message. “And some said, What will this babblers say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods; because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection” (v. 18). Contempt for both the messenger and message of the Gospel were evident in paganistic Athens.

*Contempt for the messenger.* This contempt is seen in Paul being called a “babbler.” The word in the Greek means a seed picker, “an epithet at first applied to birds, then to beggars who collect and live on scraps, and finally, as an expression of contempt” (Alexander). God’s messengers are often called various contemptuous names; but that does not destroy their character, only their reputation. You can be



God's servant without reputation but not without character.

*Contempt for the message.* This contempt is especially seen in the Athenians saying the Gospel was a message of "strange gods." Strange that the Athenians should complain about "strange gods," for they had so many of them. But as was the case whenever Paul was accused in rejection, the accusers were often hypocritical in their accusations. The fact that "gods" is in the plural form and is mentioned in regards to "Jesus" and "the resurrection" indicates that they evidently viewed the resurrection as a god, too. This would not be unusual for them to do, for they sometimes viewed an idea or principle as a god. The Athenians "erected altars to Shame, and Famine, and Desires; and it is probable that they supposed the resurrection . . . to be the name also of some unknown goddess who presided over the resurrection" (Barnes).

How pathetic that in a city known for its intellectualism, some of the greatest truth of all—Jesus and the resurrection—should be ridiculed and so dumbly misunderstood. But pathetic as it is, it is a very common thing in places of worldly intellectualism. Go to the great universities and colleges of our day and you will find the Gospel message scorned and ridiculed with vigor. The greatest and most important truths for mankind and the greatest book of all will be rejected with great contempt by the so-called learned men of our times. But contempt for the truth only shows great mental and spiritual stupidity and blindness by those showing the contempt. It certainly does not negate the validity and importance of the truth.

#### **4. Superfluous Conversing**

"For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing" ([v. 21](#)). The people in Athens did little other than stand around the market place and jabber with each other. Even the strangers who were visiting the town became affected by the Athenians to do the same. Like those given to much talk today, they were always asking what the latest was.

In considering the situation in Athens, we have thus far been concerned with what are obviously major defects in the character of the people. Now we focus on a condition which seems to not be in the same serious category as what we have been considering. But do not underestimate the problem of superfluous conversing, or "idle inquisitiveness" as contemporary writers of that day called it (Griffith Thomas). It is a greater problem than most realize. It is not wrong to talk with one another, but

those given to incessant gabbing have some serious character flaws. These talkers are not good workers, for they stop and talk too much instead of working. These talkers do not accomplish much, for they are too busy talking with people to do any worthwhile project. These talkers are not good stewards of their time; for instead of doing something useful, they prefer to sit and just talk (in our day it is often sit and talk with others on the phone). These talkers are often gossipers, for those who talk too much will be known for their gossiping.

The message of salvation is followed by the message of sanctification, and the message of sanctification has plenty to say about the tongue. God wants His people to have a good tongue, one that is true, clean, kind, and discreet. A bad tongue is one of the earliest indications of trouble within. It does not have to be a foul, cursing tongue to reveal there is trouble within—although that certainly will do it. All it has to be is a tongue that is too active. If you want good spiritual health, want to be productive, and want to stay out of trouble then do not be of the kind that sits around talking all the time.

## C. THE SERMON AGAINST PAGANISM

Paul's disputing and reasoning with the Athenians in the synagogue and the market place led to his giving a sermon to a special and official gathering. We will note the place of the sermon ([vv. 19, 22](#)), the petitioning for the sermon ([vv. 19, 20](#)), the preface to the sermon ([vv. 22, 23](#)), the particulars of the sermon ([vv. 24–31](#)), the products of the sermon ([Acts 17:32,34](#)), and the parting after the sermon ([v. 33](#)).

### 1. The Place of the Sermon

“And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus” ([v. 19](#)). Paul was asked to declare his theology at a special gathering before the Areopagus in Athens. The Areopagus was the highest court in Athens. It met at a special location on a hill to the northwest of the marketplace. The hill was called Mars Hill. “It received its name from the legend of the trial of Mars [Ares as in *Areopagus*] for the murder of the son of Neptune” (Vincent). The Greek words rendered “Areopagus” in [verse 19](#) are rendered “Mars Hill” in [verse 22](#). But “hill” is not in the Greek at all. Paul spoke in the midst of the court, not in the midst of the hill. On this hill, “The judges sat in the open air upon seats hewn out in the rock . . . A temple of Mars was on the brow of the edifice, and the sanctuary of the Furies was in a broken cleft of the

rock immediately below the judges' seats. The Acropolis rose above it, with the Parthenon and the colossal statue of Athene [Athena]" (Ibid.).

In earlier times, this was a court of real power which could render out death sentences. But in Paul's day, the court had lost much of its power—partly due to Roman control—but it was still a formal place to hear out complaints or, as in Paul's case, a new doctrine. The decision which the court would render would be more in the form of an opinion in Paul's case, for it was obvious he was not involved in some trial in which he could be incarcerated or punished in some other way if the court so decided.

When the court heard Paul (a crowd would also be gathered to hear the proceedings), they thought they were doing the examining. They thought the whole proceedings were for them to examine Paul. But the truth of the matter is they were also being examined. They were being examined by the Word of God. How they would respond to Paul's sermon would reveal their heart and determine their destiny.

Little did the people in Athens realize that day that Paul's sermon before Areopagus would make that location forever famous. Sightseers still flock to the place because of Paul's sermon. In 1951 a great convocation took place on that hill to mark the 1900th anniversary of Paul's arrival in Athens. All the wiseacres in Athens in Paul's day would never have guessed that one. But when the great truths of God are not valued, one has great difficulty having proper perspective on what is important and what is not.

## **2. The Petitioning for the Sermon**

"May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears; we would know therefore what these things mean" ([vv. 19, 20](#)). The petition evidenced insincerity and ignorance.

*Insincerity.* The insincerity is seen in the fact that their desire to know more about Paul's doctrine was not a result of spiritual concern but of curiosity as [verse 21](#) indicates. Taking Paul to the Areopagus court was only for the purpose of evaluating his doctrine in comparison to other religious doctrines. It had nothing to do with concern about their soul. Sometimes people appear to be in earnest about wanting to know more about spiritual things when in truth their motives are not from the heart but for other reasons. Many attend church not because they are interested in worshiping God, but because they are interested in knowing what the latest gossip is

about the current church problem or they want to meet a friend or they are looking for business prospects, etc.

*Ignorance.* The ignorance in the petition is seen in their calling the things Paul was speaking about, which was about Christ the Redeemer and His resurrection, “strange” things. How pitiful that in a city which was a meeting place of the world’s intelligentsia and which was renown for its great university should call the most important truths of life “strange.” Surely Paul must have had these people in mind when he wrote in his first letter to the church at Corinth, “Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God” ([1 Corinthians 1:20,21](#)).

### **3. The Preface to the Sermon**

Paul began his sermon with a good preface. The preface spoke of the interest and ignorance of the Athenians in religion. That is not the usual way we think of things. We think of disinterest and ignorance as going together, not interest and ignorance. But you can indeed be interested in spiritual matters and still be woefully ignorant of them if you do not have the truth before you.

*Their interest in religion.* “Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ Hill [the Areopagus Court], and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious” ([v. 22](#)). The word rendered “too superstitious” means here “god-fearing,” though very literally it means “demon-fearing.” The word “demon” has only a bad sense to us, but it was used by the Greek writers in both a good and bad sense. Used in the good sense, it showed religious devotion. Used in a bad sense it showed superstition, that is, an irrational attitude towards the supernatural. Paul is not charging the Athenians with superstition as we use the word today (although we Christians would describe much of their religion as nothing but gross superstition), but he is simply acknowledging “their assiduous devotion to what they regarded as the true religion” (Alexander). It was a good way to begin his sermon. He was going to speak about his theology and reminds them that they themselves are very religiously minded and, therefore, should be much interested in what he has to say.

The Athenians great interest and devotion in religious matters forcefully instructs us that you can be very religious and still be a lost soul. You can be greatly devoted

to and occupied with religious matters and still not be saved. Salvation has to do with one receiving Christ as Savior. Leave that out of the picture and all the religions in the world will not save. What a tragedy to see a number of people in our land, as well as all over the world, ardently devoted to religion but without Christ. Religion is no substitute for Jesus Christ.

*Their ignorance in religion.* “For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you” ([v. 23](#)). The spiritual ignorance of the Athenians is repeatedly emphasized in the text dealing with Paul’s visit to Athens. First we saw it in their calling Jesus and the resurrection “strange gods” ([v. 18](#)). Then we saw it again when they asked Paul to come to the Areopagus to tell them about his “doctrine” ([v. 19](#)) which they described as “strange things” and admitted their ignorance of it ([v. 20](#)). Now we see it again in their altar to the “UNKNOWN GOD.” They knew many things in religion, but they were terribly ignorant about the most important thing of all in religion. They did not know about Christ. How ironic it is that these people who were so very religious were, however, extremely ignorant of the most important spiritual knowledge of all. In all their religion, they missed the main point. But there are many of their kind still with us today. There are those whose entire life is involved with religion, yet they are ignorant of Jesus Christ and the redemption He wrought through Calvary. Also some of the great seminaries of our land have lost the truth that inspired the beginning of their schools.

#### **4. The Particulars of the Sermon**

Paul’s message before the Areopagus was very similar to his sermon to the mob in Lystra ([Acts 14:15–17](#)) during his first missionary journey. It was not like the sermons he would give in the synagogues. In the synagogues he could start right in with the Messiah and that He was Jesus and that He must suffer for our sins. Those in the synagogue understood what he was talking about though they may have rejected the message. But the idolatrous Athenians at the Areopagus were very ignorant of such basic truths, and so Paul had to begin at the very beginning with them. He had to declare to them some very basic truths about God. Some criticize his message to the Athenians because they do not understand this important fact. They seem to forget a basic principle in learning; namely, you must start with the basics. As an example, you cannot teach trigonometry to someone who has not yet learned his numbers or addition or subtraction. The idolatrous Athenians, though

very religious, were very ignorant in theology; and Paul wisely recognized that fact and adjusted his sermon (not his theology—there is no compromise here) to their level of understanding.

We will note eleven particulars regarding this sermon—a sermon about the “UNKNOWN [to the Athenians] GOD” ([v. 23](#)) of Whom Paul said, “Him declare I unto you” (Ibid.), and a sermon that “Scoffers did not dream that one day this discourse would be more read and discussed than all those of their famous scholars put together” (Griffith Thomas). The eleven particulars of the sermon are the power, authority, nature, essentialness, nearness, wisdom, plan, Fatherhood, patience, command, and judgment of God.

First, the *power of God*. “God that made the world and all things therein” ([v. 24](#)). The Athenians had many gods, but none so powerful as the true God. In speaking of the true God, Paul wisely begins as the Bible begins by stating that He is the Creator of the earth and all things in it. This certainly demonstrates the great power of God. But it is a truth that worldly wisdom does not accept well. In fact, in our day, worldly wisdom does not even want this truth mentioned in our schools. They much prefer evolution (a theory without a shred of evidence and which leaves out God) taught in the schools. They want it taught as fact, too. The blind leaders want others to be blind also. Such is the attitude of sinful blindness.

Second, the *authority of God*. “He is Lord of heaven and earth” ([v. 24](#)). Next Paul speaks of the authority of the true God. It is logical that if He created the earth and all that is in it, He should be the Lord of it. But in his sermon, Paul says God is also Lord of heaven as well as earth. This lets the Athenians know that this God is greater than all the Athenian gods and reigns over them. Those in the synagogue never questioned this, but it was brand new information for the Athenians. They needed to know this before Jesus Christ could be preached as the Only Way of salvation.

Third, the *nature of God*. Paganism lowers the nature of God to the level of depraved man and even wild beasts and such inanimate things as trees and idols of gold and silver, etc. Paul would correct their poor view of the nature of God by stating some important truths about God’s person. We note three aspects of God’s nature which Paul addressed.

(1) Paul spoke of the true God as Someone Who “dwelleth not in temples made with hands” ([v. 24](#)). God was far greater than one who could be housed in a building

made by man.

(2) Paul spoke of the true God as One Who did not need to be fed by men's hands ("neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything," [v. 25](#)). Paganism thought the food they brought to the idols was for the nourishment of the gods.

(3) Paul spoke of God as not being some statue of "gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device" ([v. 29](#)). These are basic truths which believers take for granted, but paganism is ignorant of them and needs to be informed about them.

Fourth, the *essentialness of God*. While paganism had many gods, they limited the essentialness of each god to a particular area. Paul, in describing the true God, declares that He is absolutely essential to us in all things. "He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" ([v. 25](#)), and "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" ([v. 28](#)). This last statement was a quote from several of the ancient Greek poets—hence, even Greek literature rebuked the beliefs of paganism, something Paul took advantage of in speaking to the Greeks in Athens.

The fact of the essentialness of God in our lives is not a truth readily received in any day. Mankind habitually limits the need of God. In our land many do not think God is essential at all. We are told we do not need Him in our schools or government, and the courts agree and make it illegal to include Him. What fools! We cannot get along without God.

Fifth, the *nearness of God*. "He be not far from every one of us" ([v. 27](#)). Paganism often thought their gods were far off busily involved in their activities and, therefore, really not concerned about man and his needs. Some "thought of their gods as living on Mount Olympus, drinking nectar, eating ambrosia, and caring nothing for men on this earth" (Herschel Ford). Being near speaks of the readiness with which God can help us and also of the fact that God sees all we do. The gods of paganism were not viewed as always ready to help (Elijah used that belief of pagans to sarcastically chide the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel—see [1 Kings 18:27](#)), and the pagans thought they could hide from their gods and do things their gods would not see.

Sixth, the *wisdom of God*. "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" ([v. 26](#)). Great wisdom is evidenced in the way God has made man and populated the earth. Paganism had no God with

such wisdom. Their gods were limited in wisdom and ability. Also, what is said in this verse was “opposed to all the notions of the Epicurean philosophers” (Barnes).

Paul states some fundamental truths about man in this verse which the world is ever rejecting. We note four of them.

(1) Creation of man. “Made of one blood . . .” debunks evolution. It also “delivered a body blow to Greek pride and prejudice. They believed that they were a race apart and that all other people were barbarians. They spoke always of ‘the Greeks and the barbarians’” (Herschel Ford). When men stand before God, race makes not one iota of difference. The difference comes about in what we have done with Jesus Christ.

(2) Habitation of man. “Dwell on all the face of the earth” says where God intended that man should live. We may travel to other places like the moon and Mars, but forget the idea about setting up shop and establishing living quarters in those places. Only the earth has been given the environment in which the human body can live life as God intended it to be lived. Everything else is temporary at the most.

(3) Subordination of man. “Determined the times before appointed” emphasizes the sovereignty of God. He is in charge though some men think they are.

(4) Limitations of man. “Bounds of their habitation” guides the distribution of various races around the globe. “Bounds” bothers the flesh, for it does not want to be limited. It wants license to do anything it pleases. But you better abide by the “bounds” of God’s commands in every area of your life if you want God’s blessing.

Seventh, the *plan of God*. “That they should seek the Lord, if haply [perhaps] they might feel after him, and find him” ([v. 27](#)). The word translated “seek” means “to search diligently, that we may know distinctly and certainly” (Barnes). Paul’s exhortation to the Athenians is that they needed to earnestly seek after the true God, the one they called the UNKNOWN GOD. Isaiah’s “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found” ([Isaiah 55:6](#)) is the same exhortation Paul was giving the Athenians. It is an exhortation all mankind needs.

The intriguing statement in this verse which says, “might feel after him,” is one that “pictures the blind groping of the darkened heathen mind after God to ‘find him’ . . . whom they had lost. One knows what it is in a darkened room to feel along the walls for the door” (A. T. Robertson). But when we come to Him, we will no longer grope in darkness but will walk in the light of eternal day. This is the message Christ gave us when He said, “I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” ([John 8:12](#)).



Eighth, the *Fatherhood of God*. “As certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring” ([v. 28](#)). This is not the apostate doctrine that all mankind are the children of God and will all go to heaven. Rather, this speaks of the fatherhood of God in creation. He has made us all. This truth is used to rebuke the Athenians for their poor concept of the nature of God. “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device” ([v. 29](#)). While Paul presented his theology, he also refuted the theology of paganism. As Maclaren said, “Every word of Paul’s proclamation strikes full and square at some counter belief of his hearers.”

Ninth, the *patience of God*. “And the times of this ignorance God winked at [overlooked], but now commandeth all men every where to repent” ([v. 30](#)). Paul is now bringing his sermon to the climax, that is, to the confessing and salvation part. To do so he begins with the grace of God, for that is what God’s patience is. Paul speaks of the fact that though mankind had sinned, God did not immediately judge them. He overlooked it for the time being but will in time deal with man about their evil. What is the advantage to man that God overlooked it? The advantage is that God gives man time to repent of his sin. If God struck us down the moment we disobeyed, and He certainly would be justified in so doing, we would not be able to repent and, therefore, be saved. Man, however, often views God’s patience as God’s approval or that God will do nothing about the sin. This is “turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness” ([Jude 1:4](#)) which is so strongly condemned in Scripture.

Tenth, the *command of God*. “God . . . now commandeth all men every where to repent” ([v. 30](#)). This command says mankind has sinned. Man would not need to repent if man had not sinned, but the fact they are called to repent says they have sinned. And the call is to “all” men, for all have sinned. Regarding this truth, Maclaren said, “All men everywhere are summoned to repent. Philosophers and artists, and cultivated triflers, and sincere worshipers of Pallas and Zeus, and all barbarian people are alike here. That would grate on Athenian pride, as it now grates on ours.”

Note also that repentance is in the “now” category. Grace has given us time to repent. But grace will not always strive with man ([Genesis 6:3](#)). “Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” ([2 Corinthians 6:2](#)).

Eleventh, the *judgment of God*. The last three particulars of Paul's message deal with the past, present, and future. The past was addressed in the patience of God—"And the times of this ignorance God winked at [overlooked]" ([v. 30](#)). The present was addressed in the command of God—"God . . . *now* commandeth all men everywhere to repent" ([v. 30](#)). The future is now addressed in the judgment of God—"He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" ([v. 31](#)). The reason men were urged to repent was that judgment was coming—which is indeed a very good reason to repent.

At least three aspects of the judgment are given in [verse 31](#). They are the people to be judged, the principle guiding the judgment, and the person who will be the judge.

(1) The *people* to be judged include everyone, for the "world" will be judged. All men everywhere have to reckon with God about their life somewhere, sometime. Only fools think otherwise, and there are many of that kind. Paul did not detail the various judgments—the Athenians had not advanced that far in their understanding. But all the world will be judged at one judgment or another. Believers will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This judgment will not be about salvation but about service. It will not be a judgment of retribution but of reward. Unbelievers will be judged at the Great White Throne judgment. It is about salvation—the lack thereof—and condemns all the unsaved to eternity in the lake of fire. This judgment is not about reward but about retribution.

(2) The *principle* guiding the judgment is "righteousness." Unlike so many courts in our world, the judgment of God will be true, it will be righteous. No one will be able to claim it was unjust, unfair, or inequitable. Courts today seldom judge righteously. Injustice prevails as it did when Paul was hauled before court after court in his days.

(3) The *person* who will judge is Jesus Christ. In his sermon, Paul said, He is "that man . . . ordained" by God to be the Judge. Paul said the same thing in [Romans 2:16](#): "God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ." Christ spoke likewise when He said, "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son . . . And [God] hath given him [Christ] authority to execute judgment" ([John 5:22,27](#)). Paul said in [verse 31](#) that the "assurance" of the fact that Christ will be the judge is found in His resurrection.

The Athenians are not the only ones who need this exhortation about judgment. All men everywhere need this exhortation, for "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" ([Hebrews 9:27](#)). If in this life we get ready for anything at all, let us get ready for this judgment. No preparation is more important.

## 5. The Products of the Sermon

After the sermon is preached, we are anxious to see the results. Paul had three distinct results from his sermon. The three results were derision, delay, and devotion.

*Derision.* “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked” (v. 32). The resurrection was not very popular with the pagans in Athens. The attack on the resurrection is, of course, logical; for without the resurrection we have no Gospel. It is the “assurance” (v. 31) of the Gospel’s claims. Satan hates the resurrection, and he fights it every chance he gets. So this objection in Athens to the resurrection is not something unique but has and always will be a battle line for the Gospel against unbelief.

*Delay.* Not all of Paul’s listeners mocked. “Others said, We will hear thee again of this matter” (v. 32). Delay is not as difficult for the preacher to experience as derision, but it is just as deadly for the one who delays. “Men who defer inquiry on the subject of religion seldom find the favorable period arrive” (Barnes). Delay misses opportunity, for Paul left shortly thereafter thus taking away opportunity for those who delayed to hear him again. As Joseph Parker put it, “We say, ‘We will come again tomorrow.’ So we may, but Paul may not be there.”

Oftentimes the request for delay is just a clever cover-up for rejection. “Those who propose to examine its doctrines at a future time often do it to avoid the inconvenience of becoming Christians now, and as a plausible and easy way of rejecting the gospel altogether, without appearing to be rude, or to give offense” (Barnes).

*Devotion.* While most of the Athenians rejected the message in one way or another, “Howbeit certain men . . . believed, among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (v. 34). How interesting and unusual it is that one of the men on the court believed. Our text says that Dionysius was a member of the Areopagus. He paid attention when Paul spoke! He was the wisest man on the court.

We know nothing about Damaris, who was the only convert besides Dionysius that was named. The other converts were not named. But the Great Shepherd knows

their names ([John 10:3](#)). It matters not if people know our name, but it matters a great deal that He knows our name.

While not many responded well to Paul's message, history informs us that a church was eventually established in Athens. Paul planted the seed, and after some time it began to grow. The few that did respond to Paul certainly must have grown well in the Lord and carried on a good testimony for Him. That testimony resulted in others being saved. People may not listen to the preacher; but when they observe a consistent godly life in a professing believer day after day, the truth begins to sink in. Our churches today are certainly short on good preachers, but they are even shorter on good solid saints whose lives are so consistently godly that they are great advertisement for the Gospel.

## **6. The Parting After the Sermon**

"So Paul departed from among them" ([v. 33](#)). While Paul had some response, and we never want to discount the value of just one soul, the general response to his ministry in Athens was very poor. Indifference best characterizes the response. Yes, some mocked; but there was no violent attack as he had experienced in other cities. They simply walked away and went on to other things.

That sort of response can cut to the quick faster than persecution. General indifference is like throwing cold water on the fire of the soul. Persecution fires one up, but indifference is a wet blanket on the enthusiasm of man. Preachers face a lot of that today. In order to counter that, they often resort to gimmicks to gain back the people's interests. But that only prostitutes the work of God and corrupts the work. A legitimate response to general indifference to the message of God's Word may be departure as it was in Paul's case. There are others who will be eager to hear the Word of God, and we have an obligation to give them the message rather than labor on with those who could care less about the message. Departing a place of service may not necessarily be God's will in some cases, for God sometimes does direct differently. But Paul's departure was a wise move. His next stop was Corinth where the reception was totally different than at Athens.

The fact that Paul departed without good response in Athens and that his message was not on the simple ABC's of salvation and that the name of Christ is not clearly recorded by Luke in the message has caused some to say Paul was a failure in Athens. These critics then try to twist the first chapter of 1 Corinthians around to show that Paul had learned his lesson about preaching an intellectual message instead of the Gospel. One venerable saint of the past went so far as to say that Paul's preaching in Athens "was the poorest preaching that he ever did." But that is

an utterly preposterous conclusion. How anyone could read and study Paul's sermon in Athens and then say such a terrible thing as that is beyond our comprehension. Scripture gives no indication that Paul was a failure. The message he gave was superb and appropriate. It was not an "intellectual message" per se. It was just plain good theology that the simplest of mankind could understand, and it really attacked the problem of paganism. Christ was indeed in the message. Paul said that Christ was the One Who would be the judge of mankind. Paul had been speaking of Jesus again and again before he came to the Areopagus. Just because Luke records he said "that man" instead of the name of Christ does not deprecate Paul. Paul did not leave Christ out of his message in Athens! How ridiculous the thought. Furthermore, some did indeed get saved! Do not blame the lack of salvation decisions on the sermon being bad or on Paul being a flop in Athens. Put the blame where it belongs—on the unbelieving hearts of the Athenians. Not every soul or area responds well to the Gospel no matter how well it is presented.

## **XVII. PARISH OF CORINTH**

[ACTS 18:1–23](#)

FOR THE FIRST time on his missionary journeys, Paul, in coming to Corinth, entered a new field by himself. Some would say he also came to Athens alone. But while it is true that Paul came to Athens without any team members (Silas and Timothy), he was not alone in coming to Athens; for he was accompanied by some brethren from Berea. However, when he came to Corinth, Paul was traveling all alone. It was only after he had been in Corinth awhile that he was joined by his associates Silas and Timothy ([v. 5](#)). Silas and Timothy had been left in Berea when Paul came to Athens, but they came to Athens shortly as he had directed ([Acts 17:15](#)). When they arrived in Athens, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica ([1 Thessalonians 3:1,2](#)) and Silas back to either Berea or Philippi. Then after his disappointing work in Athens, Paul came alone to Corinth.

Though alone, Paul was still faithful to the Lord. Paul's faith was the kind that would stand whether anyone else stood or not. A mark of genuineness of true followers of God is their faithfulness when alone. Many professing believers, including some ministers, only practice the faith when surrounded by other believers. Leave them alone, and they have no spiritual backbone or dedication to live the faith by themselves. Their faith is only skin deep. They become what the crowd is around them. But the true saints stand regardless of surroundings. That explains why some

young people can attend a secular high school or be in the military and not lose their morals or testimony but be strong in the Lord; while on the other hand, some young people can attend a Christian school all their school days yet, when they get into the work-a-day world, they become like the world. It is what's in the person that determines how they stand when they are alone. Hypocrites can live the faith in a sympathetic crowd but not in an unsympathetic crowd.

The work of Paul in Corinth on this first visit there (he visited it at least three times, see [Acts 20:2](#) and [2 Corinthians 13:1](#)) was Paul's last main work of his second missionary journey. When he left Corinth, he headed back home to the Antioch church. On the return trip home, Paul did minister in Ephesus for a short time ([vv. 19–21](#)), as we will note towards the end of this chapter, but it was only a temporary stop. His main ministry to Ephesus would come on his third missionary journey.

Corinth has some special significance in regards to Paul's writing, for it is associated with at least five of Paul's epistles. Only Rome is associated with more. He wrote two epistles to the Corinthians, and he wrote three epistles in Corinth (two to the Thessalonians during his first stay and one to the Romans during his third stay).

To study Paul's first visit to Corinth, we will consider the significant circumstances Paul faced in Corinth ([vv. 1–3](#)), the steadfast communicating of the Gospel by Paul in Corinth ([vv. 4–11](#)), the surprising court Paul was in at Corinth ([vv. 12–18](#)), and the strange conclusion of his ministry in Corinth and of his second missionary journey ([vv. 18–23](#)).

## A. THE SIGNIFICANT CIRCUMSTANCES

The significant circumstances which affected Paul in Corinth which we will consider include the city, the couple, and the craft. We will see a description of the city, be introduced to a wonderful couple who befriended Paul, and note that Paul earned his living for awhile in Corinth by the tentmaking craft.

### 1. The City

"After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth" ([v. 1](#)). Corinth was about forty miles west of Athens. It was located on the famous Isthmus of Greece, that section of land which comprises the southern most section of Greece. Corinth was a large city. Some report it to have been in Paul's day as large as 200,000

with an additional 500,000 slaves. It was the capital of Achaia (one of the two Roman provinces of Greece—the other was Macedonia of which Thessalonica was the capital). Corinth was an important commercial center which meant merchants, shoppers, and seamen from many parts of the Roman Empire would be coming to Corinth. This would make it a very good place to preach the Gospel. As we have noted in previous chapters, Paul went to key cities to preach the Gospel, cities which because of their location would facilitate the spreading of the Gospel to surrounding areas and the world. Corinth was also a great sports center. Every two to three years it put on the Isthmus games which included such things as racing, boxing, wrestling, discus throwing, etc. This is significant in regards to Paul inasmuch as he makes periodic reference to those athletic contests in his epistles—using them to describe various aspects of the Christian life.

The hallmark of Corinth, however, was not her commercialism or athletic contests but her putrid character. Barnes said, “No city of ancient times was more profligate.” Morgan wrote, “It was proverbial for its debauchery. Men of the time, when desiring to describe utter corruption, said, ‘They live as they do in Corinth.’” Then he added, “The religion of Corinth had become the center and the hotbed of its pollution.” Hundreds of male and female religious prostitutes were readily available in the temples for the moral degradation of the people. B. H. Carroll stated, “The religion was too vile to discuss publicly . . . No decent tongue could describe what occurred under the name of religion.” Herschel Ford said, “Sodom and Gomorrah at their worst were no worse than Corinth.” And like our nation today, it was also a place where “all forms of gambling were carried on” (Carroll). That a church was started there only shows the great power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to change the worst of sinners into saints (cp. [1 Corinthians 6:9–11](#)).

## 2. The Couple

When Paul first arrived in Corinth, he “found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought; for by their occupation they were tentmakers” ([vv. 2, 3](#)). Paul was not alone for long in Corinth, for there a couple came into his life who were some of the finest Christians ever associated with him. Dr. B. H. Carroll said Aquila and Priscilla were “about the most notable married couple mentioned in the New Testament.”

Aquila and Priscilla were in Corinth because they had felt the heat of anti-Semitism. Moving to Corinth they set up shop in their tentmaking business. With

Paul needing to do some tentmaking to support himself, as we will see more about shortly, he would come in contact with these folk. Jewish guilds reportedly kept together as guilds were wont to do, and Edersheim says that they even in some places sat together in the synagogue.

Obviously saved before meeting Paul (if they were not saved, their conversion would surely have been reported amongst those saved in Corinth—not to have reported their conversion is an oversight we cannot accept as occurring), they would find instant kinship with him, and Paul with them. Hence, being of the faith and also of the same craft, Paul “abode with them.” Knowing how Scripture later reports Aquila and Priscilla, it is easy to conclude that they quickly gave Paul an invitation to stay with them and would constrain him to do so even as Lydia did for Paul and his team in Philippi. Without motels and hotels like we have today, he needed a place to stay; and the home of Aquila and Priscilla well supplied this acute need upon his arrival in Corinth.

How like God to wonderfully guide providence to bring Paul together with Aquila and Priscilla. He was greatly helped by them, and they were greatly helped by him. But when we seek to do God’s will, we can expect providence to work wonderfully for us. Blessed providence is, however, sometimes disguised by pain for awhile; for the orders to leave Rome would be painful for Aquila and Priscilla. But it was those orders that brought them into contact with Paul and enlarged their service and greatly helped his service. Here is another case where God uses the wrath of man to praise Him ([Psalm 76:10](#)).

Aquila and Priscilla were most dedicated believers. Their dedication is recorded in several places in Scripture. The most lengthy passage of Scripture regarding their noble spirituality is found later in this eighteenth chapter of Acts. There it is recorded how “Aquila and Priscilla . . . took him [Apollos] unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” ([Acts 18:26](#)). Apollos knew “only the baptism of John” ([Acts 18:25](#)); but when Aquila and Priscilla got through instructing him, his theology was straightened out and he was mightily used of God. Not many church members could do that today, for they have neither the knowledge nor the spiritual skill to help people spiritually. Another notable comment in Scripture about this couple is found in Paul’s salutation in the book of Romans. “Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus, Who have for my life laid down their own necks . . . Likewise greet the church that is in their house” ([Romans 16:3–5](#)). This couple so supported Paul that they took their life in their hands to help his ministry. What a condemnation this is to the puny dedication of most church members today. Also it is worthy to note from this text that this couple opened their home for the church to use as a meeting place in Rome. Not only did they do it in Rome, but they also



did it in Ephesus. “Aquila and Priscilla salute [greet] you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house” ([1 Corinthians 16:19](#)—this epistle was written from Ephesus). Having a house large enough for the church to meet in indicates they were obviously wealthy. But unlike most rich folks, their wealth was dedicated to the Lord’s work.

What great companions Aquila and Priscilla were for Paul in Corinth. How much he must have thanked God for coming in contact with them. And, of course, Aquila and Priscilla also had much to be thankful for in that they were privileged to come into acquaintance with the greatest of the apostles. But it needs to be pointed out, especially for those who complain they never have many good Christian friends, that the great friendship of these three was primarily a result of their mutual zeal for the Lord. Live a godly life and you will have godly friends. But live otherwise, and your friends will be a different sort.

### **3. The Craft**

“Because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought; for by their occupation they were tentmakers” ([v. 3](#)). We learned in the early part of this book about Paul’s tentmaking trade. Occasionally he resorted to tentmaking to support himself while on his missionary journeys. Tentmaking was a good source of income; for “There was a great demand for tents in ancient times, both for travellers and soldiers” (Alexander).

On his missionary journeys, Paul resorted to tentmaking at times out of expediency. While he is the one who especially exhorts God’s people to give adequate support to God’s servants, yet Paul recognized that there were times when to move into a new area and immediately start taking offerings for his own support left the suspicion that he was using the Gospel to make money, not to win people to the Lord. Many were the frauds passing through the land fleecing people of their money through lectures and entertainment. Paul did not want to shame the Gospel by appearing to be doing the same, so he earned his own keep at times. He was not going to leave any suspicion upon himself or the Gospel regarding money.

Preachers and churches need to take more care regarding money today. There are a number of preachers whose manner of handling money exposes a character unacceptable to preaching the Gospel. These men do not pay their bills well, borrow money and do not pay it back, dip their hands into the churches’ offerings, and have a number of other irregular ways of handling money. When a pastor displays these kind of traits regarding money, churches need to get rid of him on the double. He is bad news for the church and for the community and for anyone he comes in contact

with. Churches also need to keep an impeccable house regarding money. They need to have good policies, their treasurers should be people of the highest character as well as be able to handle money well, and churches need to pay their bills promptly. Oh, the ruin of testimony that comes from preachers and churches for improper handling of money.

## B. THE STEADFAST COMMUNICATING

Paul ever remained steadfast in preaching God's Word. To study his steadfast communicating of the Gospel to the Corinthians, we will note the contact for communicating, the charity for communicating, the compulsion for communicating, the conflict in communicating, the conversions from communicating, the consoling about communicating, and the commitment in communicating the Gospel.

### 1. The Contact for Communicating

"And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks" ([v. 4](#)). Paul's initial contact with the Corinthians came through the synagogue. We note the method *of* the synagogue contact and the method *in* the synagogue contact.

*The method of the synagogue contact.* For the seventh time, Scripture reports Paul beginning his ministry in a new area by going first to the synagogue. Previously the book of Acts has reported this practice of Paul occurring in Salamis ([Acts 13:5](#)), Antioch of Pisidia ([Acts 13:14](#)), Iconium ([Acts 14:1](#)), Thessalonica ([Acts 17:1](#)), Berea ([Acts 17:10](#)), and Athens ([Acts 17:17](#)). As we have previously noted, the synagogue was a good place to contact people with the Gospel for at least two important reasons. First, the people in the synagogue were acquainted with the Scriptures which meant Paul could quickly begin to show them the Gospel. This contrasted to the time Paul spoke to idol worshipers in Athens on Mars Hill. There Paul had to start with a very elementary approach; he had to begin with the identity of God. But in a synagogue, it was much different. Second, in the synagogue would be a number of Gentile proselytes which would give Paul a good contact with the very people to whom he was primarily called to witness ([Acts 22:21](#); [Galatians 2:8,9](#); [Ephesians 3:8](#)).

*The method in the synagogue contact.* Paul's method of communicating the Gospel in the synagogue in Corinth is summed up in two words in verse four: "reasoned" and "persuaded." The word "reasoned" speaks of the mind; the word "persuaded" speaks of the will. We need both in proclaiming the Word of God. Some do a good job of addressing the intellect, but they never make a personal application or appeal for decision or commitment. Others concentrate on the persuading part, but it is only emotionalism and pressure for decisions without a solid foundation for making a decision. One is truth without fire; the other is fire without truth. One is head without heart; the other is heart without head. One is knowledge without zeal; the other is zeal without knowledge. But we must have both truth and fire, head and heart, and knowledge and zeal. One without the other is a curse.

## **2. The Charity for Communicating**

"Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia" ([v. 5](#)). It was a big help for Paul when Silas and Timothy joined up with him in Corinth. Not only could they help him in the work; but they also brought material help with them so he did not have to spend so much time with the tentmaking and, therefore, could spend more time proclaiming the Word. We learn from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians of this material help. "And when I was present with you, and wanted [lacked], I was chargeable to no man; for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied" ([2 Corinthians 11:9](#)). The brethren were Silas and Timothy. They brought with them the charitable gifts from the churches of Macedonia.

Today, we still have a number of pastors who must work a secular job in order to be able to stay on the field and pastor a church. This, however, greatly hinders their work. They do not have the time to study the Word well enough to put good meals on the spiritual table each service, and they do not have time to attend well to the other responsibilities incumbent upon the pastor. When it is possible, these men need to be given enough help so they can quit their secular job and devote their entire time to pastoring the church. While self-supporting churches often help support a pastor in a missionary church, it is best when the church can support its own pastor. In fact, it is a crime when churches continue for years without being fully responsible for the pastor's pay. Allowing churches to do this does not teach the church responsibility, and it creates a welfare church. We are plagued with the problem of welfare families in our society who have been ruined of initiative, industry, and responsibility by constant government handouts. The same happens to churches. Therefore, churches need to learn to support themselves as soon as

possible. Paul saw this need and even apologized to the church at Corinth for not letting them support him more. “For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong” ([2 Corinthians 12:13](#)). Yes, it was proper when Paul first came to town to pay his own way and to receive support from the Macedonian churches. But the Corinthian church soon had enough folk in their congregation who had plenty of means to support Paul. It would have been best for Paul to have let them take over his support, but he did not and later saw his wrong in this matter and apologized.

While most pastors try to bring a church to self-supporting status, there are some pastors who have good paying secular jobs and are not willing to give up the big income from the secular jobs for a smaller, though adequate, income which their church could provide. While some may commend them for never asking a salary of the church, they are still wrong and in two ways. First, they are wrong in being unwilling to sacrifice. They do not want to give up a large income for the smaller income in order to teach their church responsibility in this area. Second, they are especially wrong in not wanting to give more of their time to the work of the ministry. Leaving their secular job would give them much more time. One wonders what their motivation is in serving the Lord when they prefer the higher income and less time for serving the Lord to the lower income and more time for serving the Lord.

### **3. The Compulsion for Communicating**

“And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ” ([v. 5](#)). “Pressed in the spirit” here does not mean depressed or discouraged but compelled, driven, or burdened to proclaim the Gospel. Paul felt a great holy compulsion to proclaim the Word of God. Hence, because he “was pressed in the spirit,” he “testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.”

Vincent says, “Instead of *spirit* the best texts read *by the word*.” This would mean the Word impelled him to testify. Regarding the Word impelling us to speak, Maclaren said, “It augurs ill for a man’s hold of the word if the word does not hold him. He who never felt that he was weary of forbearing, and that the word was like a fire, if it was ‘shut up in his bones’ [[Jeremiah 20:9](#)], had need to ask himself if he has any belief in the Gospel. The craving to impart ever accompanies real possession . . . The impulse to utter the word that we believe and live by seems to me to be in its very nature inseparable from earnest Christian faith . . . If this word has not a grip of you, impelling you to its utterance, I would have you not to be too sure that you

have a grip of it.”

Paul was very earnest in his ministry. In Athens he was “stirred” up because of all the idolatry. In Corinth he is compelled to proclaim the Gospel. One of the great problems seen in our churches today is a lack of this zeal. A sinful complacency grips church members. They are not compelled to do much of anything spiritually. Therefore, the church sits still doing nothing and offering no formidable opposition to evil. What a contrast all of this is to Paul!

#### **4. The Conflict in Communicating**

“And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to [was next to] the synagogue” ([vv. 6, 7](#)). It does not take long before Paul’s ministry experiences opposition. As we have noted before, Satan cannot long tolerate success in the Lord’s work. These two verses record the beginning of the conflict Paul experienced in Corinth. His chief opposers in the conflict, as usual, were the unbelieving Jews. We note the deportment of the opposition, the denouncing of the opposition, and the departure from the opposition.

*The deportment of the opposition.* In [verse 6](#) two things are said about the conduct of the opposition. They “opposed themselves” and they “blasphemed.” This shows the vigor of the opposition and the vileness of it.

First, the *vigor* of the opposition. The two words “opposed themselves” is a very misleading rendition of the Greek text. They were not fighting themselves; they were fighting Paul. The word “opposed” means “arraying themselves, as an army to resist an enemy, implying not mere private or fortuitous but systematic and concerted opposition” (Alexander). This indicates the opposition was very strong. It was planned and organized. It wasn’t a pop shot from here and there but a planned attack upon Paul’s work. They organized themselves, not opposed themselves. Evil is very good at organizing itself to attack truth. Today we see it in such groups as the ACLU. The devil is not playing games. Would that God’s people would stop playing church and get down to business for the Lord.

Second, the *vileness* of the opposition. They “blasphemed.” This word means to speak profanely and abusively of God and can also include abusive language for man. Since the opposition here for Paul was the Jews in the synagogue, the name

of God would not likely be profaned; but they would not hesitate to blaspheme the name of Christ and to speak abusively of Paul. Bad mouths are very characteristic of opposition to proclaiming the Word of God. Anyone who has served faithfully will know about both. Pastors know well how dissident church members can speak abusively of them.

*The denouncing of the opposition.* Paul was very strong in denouncing those who opposed him. He “shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles” ([v. 6](#)). Paul did two things here that strongly denounced the Jews for rejecting the Gospel. There was a demonstration—he shook his raiment; and there was a declaration—he spoke about their judgment. Paul’s actions and words rebuke many today who strongly fear to denounce Christ rejecters or to take any strong action against evil. But speaking in mild tones and in mild words and taking mild action against evil will do nothing to stop evil.

First, the *demonstration*. The shaking of the raiment by Paul spoke the same message as did the shaking off of the dust from one’s feet which Paul and Barnabas did in Antioch of Pisidia when the Jews rejected the Gospel. It symbolically expressed “unwillingness to have the least communication or connection with the place [or people]” (Alexander). It was an act that strongly denounced their rejection of the Gospel of Christ.

Second, the *declaration*. The words Paul spoke, “Your blood be upon your own heads,” mean the opposers were bringing judgment upon themselves. Paul was “clean.” He was not the evil one. They could not blame him when God brought judgment. The Jews at Corinth could only blame themselves for the judgment that would come upon them for their rejection of the Gospel. Of course, this is not the sentiment of our day. Today we blame everybody else for our problems and shortcomings. It is amazing and disgusting to see the extremes to which people go today—at the urging of psychologists and psychiatrists—to blame everything but themselves for their problems. But Paul is not a numskull. He knows where the blame lies. Until we put the blame where it belongs, we will never begin to deal with evil effectively. It was Ahab, not Elijah, who was the real troubler of Israel. It was Achan, not poor war strategy, that caused Israel’s defeat at Ai. It is laziness and boozing and immorality, not racism, that keeps a lot of people poor. And it is church dissidents, not the godly pastor, that hurt a church.

*The departure from the opposition.* “He departed thence, and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus, one who worshipped God, whose house joined hard to [was next to] the synagogue” ([v. 7](#)). There is a twofold lesson here: one has to do with service; the other has to do with judgment.

First, *regarding service*, Paul was wise to leave the synagogue ministry. Maclaren instructively said, “It is a great part of Christian wisdom in evangelical work to recognize the right time to give up efforts which have been fruitless. Much strength is wasted and many hearts depressed by obstinate continuance in such methods or on such fields as have cost much effort and yielded no fruit. We often call it faith, when it is only pride, which prevents the acknowledgement of failure.” We touched on this truth regarding Paul leaving Athens. It is again prominent in our text in his leaving the synagogue in Corinth to go elsewhere to proclaim the Gospel.

Second, *regarding judgment*, the Jews in the synagogue were getting what they wanted, only they did not realize it was the worst thing they could have gotten. What a privilege they had in having the Apostle Paul preach and teach in their synagogue. But they vigorously rejected it. Hence, they will lose the tremendous privilege they had. When we reject the Gospel, the time will come when it will be taken away from us. When we ignore and reject spiritual opportunities, they will be taken away. Our nation does not want God around. We are forcing Him out of schools and government and other areas of life. Concerted efforts are increasing to get Him out of every facet of society as possible. If our nation does not reverse its attitude and actions in this regards, God will oblige us and how! One day our nation will wake up to their folly, but it will be too late. In deep trouble, our nation will cry out for God. But He will have departed. Disaster will devastate the land. God will not deliver.

## **5. The Conversions from Communicating**

“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians, hearing believed, and were baptized” ([v. 8](#)). Paul had a number of conversions in Corinth. We note the prerequisite, power, past prominence, and problem of the conversions.

*The prerequisite of the conversions.* After Paul dealt firmly with sin, souls came to Christ. After he condemned evil, he reaped a harvest of souls. After he got the dissidents out of the way, he saw many become disciples of Christ. This is both encouraging and instructive. Conflict does not mean we’ve lost the battle, and

condemning sin is necessary if we are going to have much success in God's work. We cannot parley with evil and expect to see men turn to the Lord.

*The power of the conversions.* One convert is named in this verse, and it was a remarkable conversion. Crispus the chief ruler of the synagogue was saved. Sometimes people who we would think would never come to Christ are the first to come to Christ. The power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ must never be underestimated. Conversions like Crispus remind us of the great power of the Gospel (cp. [Romans 1:16](#)).

*The prominence of the conversions.* A number of the other converts in Corinth are named elsewhere in Scripture making Corinth the church which has probably more of its converts named in the Bible than any other church mentioned in the Bible. We can add to the name Crispus, the names of Titus Justus ([v. 7](#)), Gaius ([1 Corinthians 1:14](#)), Epaphroditus ([Romans 16:5](#)), Stephanas ([1 Corinthians 1:16](#)), Fortunatus ([1 Corinthians 16:17](#)), Achaicus (Ibid), Chloe ([1 Corinthians 1:11](#)), Sosthenes ([1 Corinthians 1:1](#)), Erastus ([Romans 16:23](#)), Quartus (Ibid.), and perhaps some more. It is a great honor for these believers to be named in the Word, but the greatest honor comes in having our name in heaven among the list of the redeemed. Your name may not be mentioned in prominent places on earth, but that matters little. What matters is where it is mentioned in heaven.

*The past of the conversions.* Some of the converted in Corinth were those who had lived the vilest of lives prior to conversion. This comes out in Paul's first epistle to the church at Corinth when he says (in a text we noted earlier in this chapter), "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus" ([1 Corinthians 6:9–11](#)). What a list of vile sins he gives; then he says, "such were some of you." Barnes said, "If a church, under the power of Christian truth, could be organized there, it is adapted to any city."

*The problems of the conversions.* Though the salvation of souls in Corinth would thrill the apostle, yet the church in Corinth became a very carnal bunch. F. B. Meyer



said, Paul “complained that he could not speak unto them as unto spiritual; but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ; that he was obliged to feed them with milk, and not with meat. He doubtless, detected the first working of that unhallowed leaven which was afterwards to break out in such fearful ferment. Even before he left there were probably manifestations of party spirit, of the appraising of gift above grace, of the mistaking licence for liberty, of the undue prominence of women in public assemblies, of greed in the Love feasts, confusion in the ministrations, and heresy in the doctrine of the resurrection.” A good many churches today strongly reflect the character of the Corinthian church. Even the case of incest mentioned in [1 Corinthians 5](#) reflects the degraded moral conditions of many in our churches including the ministers. From the second epistle of Corinthians comes the great and needed exhortation about separation from the world ([2 Corinthians 6:14-17](#)); but they, like most of our churches today, paid little heed to the text.

## **6. The Consoling About Communicating**

Right after the report of the conflict and the conversions we read, what a first time reader may be surprised to read, “Then spoke the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace; For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city” ([vv. 9, 10](#)). Five exhortations were spoken to Paul by the Lord. They had to do with the peace of mind, the proclamation of the Word, the presence of God, the protection of body, and the promise of souls.

*Peace of mind.* “Fear not” ([v. 9](#)) was the first exhortation the Lord gave Paul. Even a casual reading of the Scripture helps one understand why the Lord gave Paul this encouraging exhortation. In just about every city where Paul preached the Gospel, he was attacked. It started shortly after his conversion. He was attacked in Damascus and escaped when some of the brethren let him down outside the wall in a basket. On his missionary journeys he was stoned in Lystra so severely that people thought he was dead. He was given a terrible beating in Philippi and had to flee Thessalonica and Berea to escape the wrath of the enemy. So when opposition had just reared its ugly head in Corinth, organized and tough talking, no wonder Paul feared. Any man would fear for his life under these circumstances. Paul was human; though extra ordinary in dedication, he was still human. No one can go through the experiences Paul went through and then wonder why Paul feared. But though fear attacks, God’s Word is always there to allay our fears when we walk according to His

will; and nothing takes away fear so well as God's Word.

*Proclamation of the Word.* "Speak, and hold not thy peace" ([v. 9](#)). One of the effects of fear in the ministry is the stopping of the proclamation of God's message. Fear encourages one to either literally stop speaking the message or to compromise the message—which is another form of stopping the proclamation of the truth. It is not easy to speak out the truth when your safety is at risk or, as in the case of pastors today, when your job is at risk. But when we become timid through terror, let this exhortation of the Lord inspire us to keep at the work of proclaiming God's Word.

*Presence of God.* "For I am with thee" ([v. 10](#)). The exhortation to not fear and to speak out are accompanied by the encouraging fact that God is with him. As a small boy, I learned well the difference in one's courage with and without the presence of the Master. When my father was with me, darkness and scary places and farm animals, etc. did not frighten me. I would go anywhere with him. His presence was the difference. So it is with God. Moses would not go on with the journey unless God went with him ([Exodus 33:14,15](#)). The Great Commission given the disciples included the Great Promise of the presence of Christ: "Lo, I am with you always" ([Matthew 28:20](#)). The presence of the Lord with the disciples was a great inspirer of their gallant service. Paul received that promise which the disciples had received, and it had to really encourage his heart.

*Protection of body.* "No man shall set on thee to hurt thee" ([v. 10](#)). That had to sound really good to Paul. He had enough aches and pains from his previous persecutions to make that protection most welcomed. We sometimes forget about the aches and pains Paul had from his physical injuries via persecution. Any athlete knows that pain does not go away quickly. Weeks and months are often required to heal injuries and stop pain. Paul's injuries would make most of the sports injuries look pretty minor in comparison. Paul must have done a lot of hobbling around from his persecution inflictions. The Corinthians were reported as even complaining that "his bodily presence is weak" ([2 Corinthians 10:10](#)). Yes, in a city where the Isthmian games were held, where sports figures were the heroes, Paul would not be very impressive. A small Jew hobbling around does not impress the world that is all taken up with strong-bodied athletes. But the hall of fame in heaven will have Paul in it—the athletes at the Isthmian games will never be mentioned.

*Promise of souls.* “I have much people in this city” ([v. 10](#)). The promise of souls will lift the spirits of any discouraged servant of God. That the promise said “much” will doubly inspire the servant. While we are to proclaim God’s message where He tells us to proclaim it regardless of how people respond, it still is the great desire of God’s messengers to see people accept and honor the message. It is tough laboring where response is lacking and where people have little or no interest in God’s message. So the promise of a good response had to greatly encourage Paul.

Several lessons can be seen here in this promise. One lesson is that the sovereignty of God in salvation certainly does not negate the work of evangelism. Rather, a true understanding of it will promote evangelism. Another lesson is that the promises of God are realized as we obey the precepts of God. God may have many souls in Corinth, but Paul will not realize it unless he stays and preaches the Gospel. God does wonderful things for us but not to the disregard of human responsibility.

## **7. The Commitment in Communicating**

“And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” ([v. 11](#)). The vision from the Lord inspired a strong commitment from Paul to his work in Corinth. We see this in the time he stayed and the teaching he did.

*The time.* After the vision from the Lord, Scripture said Paul stayed “a year and six months” in Corinth. The length of the stay really showed Paul’s great commitment, for this stay in Corinth is the longest Paul has stayed anywhere thus far in his missionary journeys. Later he will stay some three years in Ephesus which will be his longest stay anywhere during his missionary trips. Prison will see him staying two years in Caesarea ([Acts 24:27](#)) and probably longer in Rome. In those situations he had no choice. At Corinth he did; and when God told him to stay, he stayed a good length of time.

*The teaching.* Paul’s stay in Corinth was for the purpose of “teaching the word of God.” He showed his great commitment by continuing to teach the Word of God all the time he was in Corinth even though the message had caused him some serious conflict with the Corinthians.

One of the most obvious ways we show our commitment to God’s work is in steadfastly teaching and preaching God’s Word. This was Paul’s practice as we noted

at the beginning of this section. But it is not an easy thing to do, for God's Word is not readily received today even in many of our churches. Hence, the tendency is to not preach the Word faithfully or to de-emphasize it in one's work. But that is unfaithfulness to one's calling. We are to preach and teach the Word whether people want it or not.

## C. THE SURPRISING COURT

The Jews' wrath against Paul and the Gospel appeared to cease when Paul left the synagogue to preach the Gospel elsewhere. However, all it did was lay low for awhile. Eventually it broke out again in a very pronounced way and sent Paul to court. We note the attack, accusation, arbitration, assault, and aftermath involved in this court appearance in Corinth by Paul.

### 1. The Attack

"And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection [attacked] with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat" ([v. 12](#)). We note the time of the attack and the unison in the attack.

*Time of the attack.* The attack was made "when" Gallio was the deputy in Achaia. History tells us that Gallio was a very amiable sort of person. He was brother of Seneca, the famous philosopher. Seneca, himself, speaks of how well liked and how amiable a person Gallio was. This would encourage the Jews (Jews here are the unbelieving Jews of the synagogue) to bring Paul to court, for they would view Gallio as a person easy to persuade.

Also if, as some believe, Gallio took his office while Paul was in Corinth, this would be another encouragement for the Jews to attack at that time; for the changing of the guard is generally a good time to attack. The Jews would have an advantage in the attack in that Gallio, being new, would not know much about Paul and would have to rely upon what the Jews said. Alert pastors know that when they first come on the field, church dissidents use the same tactic. They quickly bring in their complaints to the new pastor in hopes that he will rule in their favor since he is not fully acquainted with the problems they present. Yes, the devil times his attacks to take full advantage of situations. Let this be a warning to God's people so they will

be most cautious during such times.

*Unison in the attack.* Our text says the Jews attacked Paul with “one accord.” That’s not surprising. It is easier to get unanimity against the work of God than against anything else. People who do not get along with each other will suddenly become warm and complimentary to each other when the work of God is mutually disliked. Strange coalitions develop to oppose God and His people. But we should not view these united fronts with surprise; for after all, there are only two sides in life—God’s side and the devil’s side. Some issues make it very clear that this is so; and, therefore, you see where people really stand when these issues become front and center.

Unison against God and His people must not discourage God’s people. “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished” ([Proverbs 11:21](#)). Wickedness may be very popular, an evil cause may sweep over the land with great enthusiasm by the people, and godless rulers may be the darlings of the citizens; but unity for evil does not change the nature of evil nor the curse of evil. Godliness will generally walk in a minority. However, truth and righteousness are not determined by the size of the crowd but by the character of the creed and conduct.

## **2. The Accusation**

“This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law” ([v. 13](#)). The accusation was a deceptive one. It would make it appear that Paul was doing something against the Roman law. This was the same type of accusation which Paul had experienced in other cities. But Paul was not breaking any Roman law. If anyone was breaking the law regarding this case, it was those who arrested him and who caused an uprising in the city—contrary to Roman law. Hypocrisy is again in the accusation.

Evil loves to get righteousness in court under the guise that it is unlawful. Once evil can picture righteousness as against the law, then righteousness will not only be put away but will also be greatly deprecated in the eyes of society. This will kill much sympathy for it and will instead increase disdain for it. Such is what we are seeing more and more of in our country. People who would dare to have prayer at a graduation service in a public school are now being viewed as rebels and incorrigibles who are bent on going against the Constitution. Protesters of abortion are now so legislated against that they are viewed as evil as racketeers. It will get worse before it gets better. Our land is bent on an anti-God program that will

eventually outlaw religion in every place possible. And while they are doing that, they will at the same time pass laws to make legal the vilest of sins—and not only will they make these sins lawful, but they will make it perilous to even speak out against them. We are now, as an example, seeing this practice in our land regarding homosexuality. All of this is repugnant to decent people, and it is also an invitation for the heavy hand of God to strike upon our land in judgment.

### **3. The Arbitration**

“And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you. But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drove them from the judgment seat” ([vv. 14–16](#)). Gallio surprised the Jews; he quickly saw right through them. He saw they were trying to make their religious differences with Paul a breaking of the Roman law by Paul. So Gallio would have nothing to do with the case, for it was not “a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness.” Too bad the rulers in other cities, where Paul had been taken to court, were not as astute and honest as Gallio. But they were governed by the popular persuasion of the people, not by the principles of the law.

Gallio’s response helped to fulfill a promise the Lord had made to Paul about protecting him. The Lord had earlier told Paul that “no man shall set on thee to hurt thee” ([v. 10](#)). When the attack occurred and Paul was forced to go to court, he surely must have wondered about that protection God promised. But when God promises, God fulfills! Paul was unhurt, he left the court without a scratch. And, interestingly, as we will see shortly, the one leading the accusation was the one that got hurt.

Maclaren made an interesting note about Gallio’s fame when he said, “How little Gallio dreamed that he would live forever in men’s mouths by reason of this one judicial dictum!” Men seldom recognize what God deems important and where the Divine spotlight is shining. But time will eventually show us Divine priorities. However, we do not have to wait for time to reveal God’s priorities. It will be too late if we wait for time to show us the right way. We can know the right way much quicker by studying God’s Word. It will show us what is and what is not important—something society seldom does.

### **4. The Assault**

“Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things” ([v. 17](#)).

There are two parts to this verse about the assault upon Sosthenes which followed the clearing of Paul: the beating and the belittling.

*The beating.* What happened after Gallio dismissed the court was certainly different than in any of Paul's previous encounters with the court. He was the one who was always getting mistreated. But here his chief accuser gets beat up. Sosthenes, being the ruler of the synagogue (he took Crispus' place when Crispus got saved), would doubtless lead the attack on Paul in the court. With his case being so unceremoniously thrown out, it gave the Greeks opportunity to vent their hatred upon the Jews. Gallio's attitude would indicate that the Jews were vexing the court system by loading it down with unnecessary cases. That was all the Greeks needed to encourage their attack upon Sosthenes the leader of the Jews.

The name Sosthenes shows up again regarding Corinth, but it shows up in a most unexpected way. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, the opening salutation includes Sosthenes. "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes, our brother, Unto the church of God which is at Corinth" ([1 Corinthians 1:1,2](#)). While we have only two mentions of this name in the Bible and absolute proof that this Sosthenes was the same as the ruler in the synagogue is lacking, yet there are three good reasons why these two mentions can be about the same person. First, Paul makes no explanation about him in the salutation which indicates he was well known to the church—which Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, certainly would be. Second, the fact that the attack on Paul backfired would encourage Sosthenes to rethink his attitude. Third, Crispus, the predecessor of Sosthenes as ruler of the synagogue, was saved. Crispus and Sosthenes would know each other well. The beating and turmoil would give Crispus opportunity to witness to Sosthenes with a good deal of effectiveness. God delights to spite the enemy by saving its leaders—as He did here not only with Crispus and we believe Sosthenes, too, but also with the salvation of Paul.

*The belittling.* "And Gallio cared for none of those things." Many have used this text as an illustration of one who did not care about spiritual things. While Gallio may not have cared about the salvation of his soul, that is not what this text is saying. Our text simply says that Gallio was not concerned about the beating which Sosthenes received. Gallio's thinking was "what did it matter if a Jew got a few stripes more or less? No doubt they were richly merited; and so long as there was no public disturbance, the castigation might serve a useful purpose in cautioning the

Jews against bringing their matters into public notice or trespassing on the public patience” (F. B. Meyer). Gallio did not care that Paul’s accuser got beat up, but how different the attitude of the other courts Paul was in. Those courts did not care that Paul, the innocent one, was beat up. But Gallio, fulfilling God’s promise of protection for Paul, is more interested in justice. Paul did not merit punishment; Sosthenes did. While Gallio rightly believed the Roman court was not to judge religious disputes, he did see that Sosthenes was trying to pervert the law to be mean to Paul. Hence Gallio was not upset that Sosthenes got his just due.

## **5. The Aftermath**

“And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while” ([v. 18](#)). This court decision affected Paul’s ministry in just the opposite way that the previous court decisions had affected him. The previous court decisions resulted in Paul having to leave town. Here, the decision made it possible for Paul to stay “a good while.” The decision would discourage the Jews from going to court again and would stifle the Jews’ antagonism. God had worked in a wonderful way to keep Paul in Corinth. God is still doing that for His servants today. If He wants a preacher to stay in a certain church though the opposition is very threatening, He will arrange the circumstances so the preacher can stay. Let us give honor to God’s revealed will, as did Paul; and we will see God working wonderfully on our behalf.

## **D. THE STRANGE CONCLUSION**

As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, Corinth was the last main stop for Paul on his second missionary journey. From Corinth he returned to “Syria” ([v. 18](#)) where the church was (Antioch) that sent him on these missionary journeys. But Paul’s leaving of Corinth and the stops he made before he arrived in Syria all involved some strange conduct by Paul which caused both his ministry in Corinth and his second missionary journey to end on a strange note. To see this truth, we will consider his leaving of Corinth, his layover in Ephesus, his lingering in Jerusalem, and his lodging in Antioch.

### **1. His Leaving of Corinth**

Paul “took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him



Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea; for he [Paul] had a vow” ([v. 18](#)). In this departure from Corinth, we observe the stimulus for the leaving, the saints with him in the leaving, and the shorning during the leaving. The first and last of these three observations are in the strange category for Paul’s actions.

*Stimulus.* Why did Paul leave Corinth? Previously on this missionary journey he left an area either because he wanted to move on to another work, or because of persecution, or because of indifference to the Gospel. At Corinth things were going well. Many were being converted and opposition had been muted as a result of Gallio ruling in Paul’s favor when he was hauled to court. Paul did stay “a good while” ([v. 18](#)); but when he left, he did so for a reason we cannot justify.

We discover what that stimulus was from what he said in Ephesus, a layover stop on his trip back to Syria. He said, “I must by all means keep this feast [most think it was the feast of Pentecost, cp. [Acts 20:16](#)] that cometh in Jerusalem” ([v. 21](#)). The reason for leaving Corinth was not the furlough in Antioch—the furlough seemed simply to be a convenient stop because of his being in Jerusalem. The report in our text of his going to Syria was simply a notation of where he finally went after leaving Corinth. His reason for leaving Corinth is plainly stated in Scripture. It was to attend a Jewish feast in Jerusalem.

Why must Paul “keep this feast?” What made it so urgent that he said he “must by all means” keep the feast? That is strong language and demands strong justification. But there is absolutely no justification for it. Rather, there is condemnation. The feast was law not grace. The observance was not a church observance or ordinance. To observe it was a slap at grace. It was action the legalists would much approve.

Paul’s action here is a great warning to us all. Sometimes we can get so set on doing something that we lose sight of the priority and permissibility of it in our life. Also, sometimes in the place we seem to be the strongest we fail. Paul was so strong in opposing the legalists—in fact, none were stronger—yet he was so insistent on keeping a feast that he would terminate a ministry that was prospering. Joseph Parker said, “The greatest liberalist in the Church was also addicted to Levitical obedience.” Let this cause us to ever and earnestly examine all our plans and projects and pursuits to see that they are in the will of God. Let us never let down our guard even in our strongest points lest we fail miserably. If Paul could get off track, how much more are we liable to do the same.

*Saints.* “Priscilla and Aquila” went with Paul when he left Corinth. When Paul

landed at Ephesus, they stayed there ([v. 19](#)). For godly saints to accompany Paul on a trip was not unusual. Generally it was a fellow worker such as Barnabas on Paul's first missionary journey and Silas and Timothy on his second journey. But sometimes other saints accompanied him as was the case here in his leaving Corinth and was also the case in his leaving Berea.

The striking thing about Aquila and Priscilla accompanying Paul and then settling in Ephesus is the providence of God in this noble couple's life. Their move to Ephesus was probably for business reasons, but God had some more important reasons. After they had been in Ephesus for a while, "an eloquent" preacher ([Acts 18:24](#)) named Apollos came to Ephesus to preach. But his theology was missing some important ingredients. He only knew the baptism of John. However, Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos aside and guided "him [in] the way of God more perfectly" ([Acts 18:26](#)). God put this saintly couple in Ephesus so when Apollos came, they could straighten him out and make him more useful to the Lord. Those who are dedicated to the Lord will often experience such providential guiding of their circumstances. It is one of the blessings of devotion to Him.

*Shorning.* The shorning report about Paul is a second bit of strange action involving Paul in his leaving Corinth. Scripture says Paul "having shorn his head in Cenchrea; for he had a vow" ([v. 18](#)). Paul set sail from Corinth via Cenchrea. Cenchrea was a few miles from Corinth and was considered the "eastern port of Corinth" (Peloubet). A church was established in Cenchrea ([Romans 16:1](#)), which would be a result of Paul's Corinthian ministry. Just prior to leaving Cenchrea, Paul got a haircut which was associated with a vow.

It was not unusual for Jews in the Old Testament times to make a vow. Vows to God were made for a number of things, such as, "an expression of gratitude or of devotedness to his service when they had been raised up from sickness or delivered from danger or calamity" (Barnes). Any of these situations could have been why Paul made a vow in Corinth. Rules were given in the law on vow making. Cutting of the hair in regards to a vow indicates this vow was a Nazarite vow. There were several kinds of Nazarite vows. Some were lifelong (as in Samson's case). Some were for much shorter periods of time. Such a vow included abstinence from certain foods and wine, separation from dead bodies, and letting the hair grow. When the vow was completed, the hair was to be cut and a sacrifice was to be offered at the Temple in Jerusalem (formerly at the Tabernacle in the days of Moses) with the hair being put in the fire under the sacrifice ([Numbers 6:13–21](#)).

The cutting of Paul's hair evidenced two problems. First, it was part of the law

that was done away with at Calvary just as the observing of the feast was done away with at Calvary. Like observing the feast, Paul's vow showed his failure to keep legalism out of grace. Second, letting his hair grow in this vow was very inconsistent; for Paul was the one who exhorted men not to wear long hair ([1 Corinthians 11:14](#)), and that exhortation was given to the very people before whom he let his hair grow long. Strange indeed.

Paul's strange action manifests his humanity. If we are looking for perfection in Paul, we will be very disappointed. Scripture does not whitewash. Paul's strengths are reported, but so are his weaknesses. We can learn much from both.

## **2. His Layover in Ephesus**

When the ship came to Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila, as we have already noted, took residence there instead of going back to Corinth. Paul, however, did not intend to stay in Ephesus at that time, but before he took ship to go back to Palestine, "he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews" ([Acts 18:19](#)). Looking at this synagogue ministry of Paul in Ephesus, we note his readiness to testify and his refusal to tarry.

*His readiness to testify.* No sooner had they gotten to Ephesus than Paul "entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews" ([Acts 18:19](#)). This readiness to testify is most commendable. As we have noted before, the synagogue offered great opportunity to Paul to testify of the Gospel of Christ. Paul would usually be given an opportunity to speak at a synagogue service when he entered a new city. He never failed to capitalize on this habit of the synagogues. When he was allowed to speak, he gave them the Gospel.

While we may not have such immediate and golden opportunities by which to give a lengthy presentation of the Gospel whenever we go into a strange city, one principle we can learn from this action of Paul is that he faithfully pursued worship wherever he went; and this resulted in opportunities to proclaim the Word. On the Sabbath day in Ephesus, Paul did not sleep in or decide that because he was a stranger in the city, he would not attend the local synagogue service. No, since it was the Sabbath, Paul made his way to the synagogue service which was the only place in many cities in those days that any kind of worship of God could be found that was not connected with idolatry. And in this faithful pursuit of worship, he found opportunity to testify for Jesus Christ.

If we are faithful to the Lord in the responsibility of just going to church, we may

be surprised at the opportunities this will open up for us in God's service. Many never do much in God's work because they are not faithful to the small tasks such as attending worship services. Some who are irregular in attendance complain they are never asked to serve in the church. It does not seem to register in their minds that their absenteeism is why they are not asked.

*His refusal to tarry.* "When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not, But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem, but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus" ([vv. 20, 21](#)). The readiness of Paul to testify spoke well of Paul, as we noted; but his refusal to stay did not. The refusal of Paul to tarry when he was requested to do so is most out of character with Paul. Here were people eager to hear Paul's message, but he refused to continue his ministry to them.

A refusal to stay when a work is prospering is, of course, not necessarily wrong. God often moves His servants to other locations even though the people where they are at want them to stay. We have seen this many times in the past concerning Paul. Moving on in order to start a new work, or because of persecution, or even for a furlough were reasons Paul moved on in the past during his missionary journeys. Here, however, it is strange that Paul leaves without the impetus of any of these justified reasons. His stated reason for leaving (as we noted earlier) was "I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem" ([v. 21](#)). He did, however, accompany his reason by a promise to return "if God will," a good notation to make about any of our plans. But the question here is not was it God's will for him to return but was it God's will for him to leave? Paul's reason as to why he was leaving does not support an affirmative answer to that question.

Just talking about the will of God does not mean you are doing the will of God. We may throw around a lot of pious terms and yet be walking in disobedience. Let us not be like Paul was at Ephesus and limit our concern about the will of God to the future, but let us also be concerned that we are doing the will of God in the present.

### **3. His Lingering in Jerusalem**

After Paul had landed at Caesarea, [verse 22](#) says he went "up [to Jerusalem], and saluted [greeted] the church" (he also took in the feast and took care of the vow business—actions we have noted above). Paul had no business being in Jerusalem. We list five reasons why he should not have been in Jerusalem. These reasons

involve the precept from God, the purpose in coming, the problem of his reception, the prohibiting in the future, and the peril of stubbornness.

First, the *precept*. Some years earlier in Paul's life, the Lord had ordered him out of Jerusalem: "Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem; for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me . . . depart; for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles" ([Acts 22:18,21](#)). That was a strong and sufficient order to keep Paul out of Jerusalem. True, he returned once after that with Barnabas to attend the council about legalism. But that was obviously an acceptable exception. His trip with Barnabas from Antioch to take charity to the Jerusalem saints ([Acts 11:27–30, 12:25](#)) may also have occurred after receiving those orders, but it too would be an acceptable exception.

Second, the *purpose*. We have already noted that his purpose in coming was totally unjustifiable. He was coming to observe a feast that was part of the law that was done away with at Calvary. Hence, his purpose certainly did not justify his being in Jerusalem.

Third, the *problem*. When he got to Jerusalem, Scripture said he did go and greet the church. Wherever Paul went, he sought out God's people. That's commendable, though we do not commend his being in Jerusalem. True believers will want to be with other believers. Those who seem to prefer the company of the world are revealing a sinful condition in their heart. It is true that some saints are so cantankerous and unfriendly that one may find a more amiable friend in an unsaved person, but this does not negate the fact that the best friends for God's people are God's people.

Though we commend Paul for seeking out the saints, there is a problem here which must not be overlooked. The problem is that Paul had trouble being warmly received in Jerusalem. True, some of the leaders had given him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship ([Galatians 2:9](#)). But that did not cancel out the general lack of warmth towards Paul by the Jerusalem saints. This cool reception in Jerusalem by the saints is most understandable. Paul, in his persecution days "made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison" ([Acts 8:3](#)). In another passage of Scripture, he is described as "he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem" ([Acts 9:21](#)). And "threatenings and slaughter" ([Acts 9:1](#)) also characterized Paul's action against the believers in Jerusalem. No wonder when he first came to Jerusalem after his conversion that "they were all afraid of him" ([Acts 9:26](#)). These atrocious acts left a sore imprint on the Jerusalem saints which did not heal quickly. Yes, we are to forgive; but saints are human and many would struggle greatly in this matter. Ask yourself how warm you would feel towards one who had been instrumental in beating, imprisoning, and murdering some of your family, relatives, and friends.

Later on, Paul will again feel this coolness towards him when he comes back to Jerusalem ending his third missionary journey ([Acts 21](#)).

This problem alone (there was another problem that prevented warmth, and that was the fact Paul opposed legalism much stronger than they did) should have kept Paul out of Jerusalem. Coming to Jerusalem only caused unnecessary awkwardness and forced fellowship. Saints could use some lessons along these lines. Do not force yourself on people that you through your unsavory conduct have caused a strained relationship. Be kind and let the others live in peace when it is possible.

Fourth, the *prohibiting*. Another support for the fact that Paul should stay away from Jerusalem was the repeated warnings he received on his third missionary trip about going there ([Acts 20:23](#), [21:11](#)). He had no legitimate reason for going to Jerusalem, but going to Jerusalem was like a besetting sin for Paul. At the end of his second missionary journey, he insisted he must attend a feast (Pentecost) there; and at the end of his third missionary journey, he insisted on being in Jerusalem for the same occasion ([Acts 20:16](#)). But all along, Paul had orders from the Lord, repeated on the third missionary journey, that he should stay away from the city.

Fifth, the *peril*. Paul ignored the orders he received, and on his third trip openly fought the warnings given him, but much to his own harm. Not heeding the warning on this third missionary journey, he got involved in Jewish vows and legal observances again ([Acts 20:16](#), [21:20–24](#)) and was arrested and spent two years in inactivity in a Caesarea jail ([Acts 24:27](#)) which greatly diminished the work of Paul in preaching the Gospel. Yes, we have his sessions before Festus and Agrippa and the experiences on his trip to Rome coming out of all that. But one sees the grace of God in Paul's life in these matters, not the justification for his going to Jerusalem. One cannot help but think how much more he could have been doing had he not been sidetracked in Jerusalem.

#### 4. His Lodging in Antioch

"He went down to Antioch" ([v. 22](#)). Paul went to Antioch because there was the church which had sent him out on his two journeys. It was furlough time. We note the reception for Paul, the retinue of Paul, and the rejuvenation of Paul.

*The reception for Paul.* Unlike the mother church in Jerusalem, the people in Antioch would not have difficult feelings towards Paul. Antioch loved Paul. They knew him only as the great and trusted teacher and preacher and missionary. Their respect of Paul and his judgment showed as they took his side in the Barnabas' case.

They had great interest in Paul and would listen most attentively as he reported about his missionary experiences. So when Paul came to the Antioch church at the end of his second missionary trip, it would be a great time of blessing for all concerned. Leaving Corinth and Ephesus to come to Antioch for a furlough is most justified. But the Jerusalem trip was not.

*The retinue of Paul.* Paul came back from his second missionary journey alone. No one accompanied him after he left Ephesus. At times Paul would travel with quite a retinue of saints. But not during the end of the second missionary journey. He had gone out with Silas, but Silas was back in the Macedonia area, ministering to the churches that had been established on the second trip. Paul was an independent man and could travel alone; but one wonders if maybe Silas would have liked to come back to Antioch for a time of furlough, too. He surely needed it just as Paul did.

This is another thing about the conclusion of his Corinthian ministry and second missionary journey that does not smack of wisdom. But we must not let that lessen our esteem for Paul. As we noted above, Paul was human and Scripture lets us know that fact on some occasions. It is a tendency to make our Bible heroes perfect when they are indeed not perfect. This causes us to twist our interpretation of Scripture at times to fit our prejudices. It is best, however, that we interpret Scripture correctly and let the chips fall where they may. Otherwise, our learning will be hindered.

*The rejuvenation of Paul.* Paul “spent some time there” ([v. 23](#)) before he started out on his third missionary journey. It was good that he did. As we noted regarding his furlough after his first missionary journey, he needed both physical and spiritual rejuvenation. Such is true with all good servants. Our Lord addressed this matter when He said, “Come ye yourselves apart . . . and rest a while” ([Mark 6:31](#)). We must recognize that eventually the fuel tank will run low, our energy will run out, the battery will need charging, and the scythe will need sharpening. Therefore, we must stop a while and take care of these matters, or we will impair our service beyond repair. Some, of course, make a career of furloughs and days off and vacations; for they do not have good work ethics and laziness plagues them. But those who busy themselves in the Lord’s vineyard need rejuvenation ever so often and must stop in Antioch and “spend some time there.”

## **XVIII. PROCLAIMING IN EPHESUS**

WE NOW COME to Paul's third missionary journey. This missionary endeavor focuses mostly on Ephesus. Sixty-five of the ninety-four verses in the book of Acts which have to do with Paul's third missionary trip are associated with Ephesus. You can make that seventy out of ninety-nine verses if you count the five verses ([Acts 18:24–28](#)) concerning Apollos which set the background for the first recorded incident about Paul in Ephesus on this third journey.

As it was in the recording of the beginning of Paul's second missionary journey ([Acts 15:36](#)), so it is here; namely, we would like to see a new chapter started in Scripture. Chapter and verse headings, of course, are not Divinely inspired of God; and therefore one is justified in wondering why some chapters start where they do (see [Acts 21:40–22:1](#) for another illustration of this problem). In our judgment, it would be most appropriate if the beginning of his second and third missionary journeys started new chapters as does the first journey.

Ephesus was a large city of several hundred thousand people when Paul came into the city. It was the capital of the province of Asia and was an important commercial center mostly because of its harbor. But morally and religiously it was a dung hill. Idolatry dominated the inhabitants and was centered around the temple of Diana. This temple was numbered among the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was a building said to be about 400 by 200 feet and some 50 to 60 feet high. A striking feature of the building was the one hundred or more large pillars which held up the roof. Though a magnificent building, the temple was a place of moral filth with its hundreds of prostitutes ready to satisfy the lust of men all in the name of religion. Also in the temple was an image said to have fallen down from Jupiter ([Acts 19:35](#)). It was not a very attractive image, but it was a prized possession of Ephesus and much revered.

Paul had previously been prohibited from preaching in Asia ([Acts 16:16](#)), but that prohibition has been removed, and he will now spend some three years proclaiming the Word of God in this heathen city which will change that city dramatically. When writing the first epistle to the church at Corinth from Ephesus (some say he also wrote Galatians in Ephesus), Paul described his work in Ephesus as “a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries” ([1 Corinthians 16:9](#)). Great opportunities are generally met with great opposition, but God is more powerful than any enemy as is demonstrated by the results of Paul's ministry in Ephesus.

In this first of three chapters in our book on Paul's ministry in Ephesus (the other



two chapters are [chapters xix. and xxi.](#)), we will note the traveling prelude ([Acts 18:23](#)), the teaching experiences ([Acts 19:1–10](#)), and the transcendent miracles ([Acts 19:11–20](#)).

## A. THE TRAVELING PRELUDE

“And after he had spent some time there [in Antioch], he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples” ([Acts 18:23](#)). One verse covers the traveling experiences of Paul on his way to Ephesus where his main ministry would take place on this third missionary journey. But though only one verse is given to the traveling, it was not a quick and short trip. Besides spending enough time at various locations along the way to further instruct the saints, as we will note shortly, the distance from Antioch of Syria to Ephesus would require much time to cover; for it was well over one thousand miles. Paul traveled this all on foot and often on treacherous roads where the going would be extra slow as well as extra perilous. Our day will have a hard time appreciating the rigorousness of Paul’s travels. A. C. Hervey estimates that it took at least six months before Paul reached Ephesus after leaving Antioch. Dedication needed to be very strong for one to endure the travels Paul did in order to carry the Gospel to many locations.

In examining this traveling prelude of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus, we will note the departure from Antioch, the direction of the Apostle, and the discipling of the adherents.

### 1. The Departure From Antioch

“After he had spent some time there, he departed” ([v. 23](#)). The time Paul spent in Antioch was furlough time. We noted this at the end of the last chapter. Now he departs from Antioch to begin his third missionary trip. So Paul is on the move again. Furloughs are not the end in themselves but are a time to report to the supporting church or churches and to be rejuvenated for future missionary work. After that it is back to work.

Like his first and second journeys, Paul’s departure was from the city of Antioch of Syria. But unlike his first and second journeys, he departed alone on this third journey. Paul was a man who could go it alone. He delighted in the fellowship of faithful saints, but being alone did not disturb him as it does many, for his fellowship

with God was such that he never felt alone. Not many are that interested in the things of the Lord to cultivate so well the presence of God in their lives as Paul did. They do not do well alone for God. Unless they are surrounded with a host of other Christians, they will not stand well for the faith.

## **2. The Direction of the Apostle**

Like his second missionary journey, Paul's third missionary journey began with follow-up work in the churches in the Galatia region. These churches would include those in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia which were started during Paul's first missionary journey. Other churches may also have been included.

This would make the fourth time Paul had been in the four cities listed above. The memories of these cities would be deeply etched on his heart. There were the many souls that were converted whose renewal of fellowship he would greatly delight in. Then there would be the memories of the opposition to his ministry. He was expelled from Antioch of Pisidia after the sermon he preached which is recorded in [Acts 13](#). He stayed a good while in Iconium; but finally when opposition became so strong that it wanted to stone Paul, he moved on to Lystra. In Lystra he was eventually stoned, and so severely that folk thought he was dead. But he survived miraculously and the next day went to Derbe where he enjoyed one of the few places where his ministry was not hindered by violent opposition. On the second journey, the Lystra and Derbe area provided Paul one of his choice helpers; for it was in that area that Timothy lived. Timothy joined up with Paul on the second trip and was somewhere (probably Philippi) in Macedonia faithfully serving the Lord in one of the churches when Paul came through on this third missionary journey.

While persecution was a very strong memory regarding these places and would require much courage for Paul to return to those cities, persecution was not the only memory as we have noted. God balanced his experiences as He does with us, too. The difficult times are balanced with delightful times so His people do not get so down that they give up. But the delightful times are balanced with difficult times so His people do not become proud and soft in His work.

## **3. The Discipling of the Adherents**

Follow up work consisted of more than just visiting these cities and renewing acquaintances. It involved "strengthening all the disciples." It was not just a social gathering—as many people prefer church primarily to be—but it was a time of spiritual instruction. The word "strengthening" in our text is the same word

translated “confirmed” or “confirming” in [Acts 14:22](#), [15:32](#), and [15:41](#). It involves the teaching of the Word of God to help the saints grow in the knowledge of God. This work is extremely important in the church. It is wonderful to have babies; but after they are born, it takes a lot of dedicated work to help them grow up into healthy, mature adults. So it is with the work of the church. It is wonderful to have converts; but once a person is saved, the church has much work to do in helping the new convert grow spiritually. Many churches today only emphasize evangelism and ridicule the Bible teaching ministry. Yet, if the Bible teaching ministry is not done well, evangelism will cease to be Biblical evangelism—and that is what much evangelism is today. Also without follow up, believers will be much more susceptible to being taken in by cults and isms; and while they do not lose their salvation, they certainly are rendered useless in the Lord’s work and have little salvation joy. All of this dishonors God which is the worst result of all.

Later, the follow up work in Galatia also consisted of a letter. The contents of the letter showed a great spiritual problem in Galatia. Many wanted to go back to the Old Testament law for salvation. Legalists had done much evil work in Galatia. Doubtless much of Paul’s instructing in Galatia on this third missionary journey had to do with this problem of legalism. Ironical that he would instruct so earnestly in this area when he himself had just had problems with it. In his favor, however, is the fact that he did not have problems with legalism in the matter of salvation. It was in other areas that he had problems. Though these areas were bad enough for legalism, yet they were not devastating like legalism in the matter of salvation.

## **B. THE TEACHING EXPERIENCES**

Upon completing the follow up work in Galatia and Phrygia on this third missionary journey, Paul finally came to Ephesus to proclaim the Gospel. This he continued for three years ([Acts 20:31](#)). In this section, we will consider the teaching experiences Scripture records he had during that time in proclaiming the Gospel. They are the teaching in the streets, the teaching in the synagogue, and the teaching in the school.

### **1. The Teaching in the Streets**

Shortly after Paul arrived in Ephesus this second time, he found “certain disciples” ([Acts 19:1](#)), “about twelve” in number ([Acts 19:7](#)), who had some real deficiencies

in their knowledge and understanding of the Holy Spirit. Since this experience is not recorded as happening in the synagogue or in the school, we believe it probably happened in the streets, particularly in the Agora—the market place where people gathered in those days not only for buying and selling but also for much of their public life. We will note the inquiry, ignorance, informing, immersion, and inspiration involved in Paul’s teaching of these disciples regarding the Holy Spirit.

*Inquiry.* When Paul perceived the deficiency in these disciples’ knowledge and understanding of the Holy Spirit, he inquired, “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” ([Acts 19:2](#)). A person’s conversion involves the Holy Spirit. These disciples had not evidenced knowledge of this, hence the inquiry.

To understand the inquiry properly, we need to note that the word “since” in [verse 2](#) is better translated “when.” It should be “*when* ye believed,” not “*since* ye believed.” The two verbs received and believed “are in the aorist tense, and therefore denote instantaneous acts. The A.V. [KJV] therefore gives an entirely wrong idea, as there is no question about what happened after believing; but the question relates to what occurred when they believed” (Vincent). “This unfortunate translation has done a great deal of mischief. Upon this little word ‘since’ certain preachers and Bible teachers have built their unscriptural theory that the Holy Spirit must be definitely received in a second experience, which they term either a ‘second blessing’ . . . or some other name [e.g. the baptism of the Spirit]. According to these teachers a person may be a Christian, a true disciple, saved by Grace and yet be entirely destitute of the Holy Spirit” (A. C. Gaebelin). But the Bible teaches that “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” ([Romans 8:9](#)). Therefore, salvation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit must be simultaneous.

*Ignorance.* The answer the men gave to Paul revealed their great spiritual ignorance. They responded to Paul’s question by saying, “We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost” ([Acts 19:2](#)). There have been various attempts to say that this answer meant they did not know that the Holy Spirit was involved at the moment of conversion or that they were not aware that when one was saved there would be manifestations of the Holy Spirit in their lives such as speaking in tongues. But the Scripture does not say those things. What Scripture says is that the twelve men were very ignorant of the Holy Spirit to the extent they had never heard of Him.

This ignorance seems incredible. However, we have seen enough cases of

incredible spiritual ignorance in some of the members of churches we have pastored to make it not difficult to accept the fact that these disciples in Ephesus were as ignorant as they were of the Holy Spirit. As an illustration, when teaching an adult Sunday School class about the similarities of the prayer ([1 Samuel 2:1–10](#)) of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, and the prayer ([Luke 1:46–55](#)) of Mary, the mother of Jesus, one of those in the class, who had been a professing believer for many years, asked if the reason the prayers were similar was that Mary and Hannah knew each other and were good friends. She was so ignorant she did not realize Hannah lived a thousand years or so before Mary. Incredible indeed. Also it was shameful indeed. But the ignorance of the twelve in Ephesus was not that shameful. It is apparent they had been taught by Apollos before he had been straightened out by Aquila and Priscilla ([Acts 18:24–28](#)). This comes out in the question Paul asked them after they told of their ignorance of the Holy Spirit. Paul asked, “Unto what then were ye baptized?” ([Acts 19:3](#)). They responded, “Unto John’s baptism” (Ibid.). In Ephesus, Apollos, until straightened out by Aquila and Priscilla, had baptized people, doubtless including the twelve, unto John’s baptism—for that was all he knew (cp. [Acts 18:25](#)). Hence, that was all the twelve knew. Had they been baptized with the right baptism, they would, of course, have heard of the Holy Spirit for that is one of the names by which we are to baptize converts ([Matthew 28:19](#)). This response of the twelve explains why Luke previously recorded (in [Acts 18:24–28](#)) the encounter Aquila and Priscilla had with Apollos.

*Informing.* “Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” ([Acts 19:4](#)). Upon discovering what the situation was with these disciples, Paul then informed them of the meaning and the limits of John’s baptism. Regarding the meaning, Paul said John’s baptism was one of “repentance.” Regarding the limits, Paul said John’s baptism was that which looked forward to Christ’s coming “after him [John].” Hence, the baptism was limited to the days before Christ’s coming “after him.” After Christ came and was crucified and rose from the dead, a new baptism took place. The new baptism, conversion baptism, did not look ahead to Christ’s coming to earth to be our Redeemer, as did John’s baptism; for Christ had already come to earth as our Redeemer. Rather, it looked back at His redemptive work accomplished at Calvary and by His resurrection from the grave. It involved more than repentance of sin, but the receiving of Christ as Savior. These disciples were behind time in their belief. Paul caught them up to the fact that Christ had indeed come and, therefore, John’s baptism was no longer applicable.

*Immersion.* “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” ([Acts 19:5](#)). Though Scripture does not record all that Paul said to these disciples about baptism, “this” obviously included instruction about conversion baptism as well as John’s baptism, otherwise we cannot account for why these men were baptized by Paul. Paul not only pointed out the error of their ways but also pointed them to the right way.

Here is a case in which men walked faithfully according to the light they had and in due time more light was given them. Their ignorance was not a result of sinful disinterest in spiritual matters or in disobedience to the truth they were given. They simply had not been given the whole truth. But once they were given the truth, they responded in a most honorable way.

Today, most of the spiritual ignorance we see in our land is totally inexcusable. Folk have had ample opportunities to learn important spiritual truths and to have their ignorance removed, but they have been more concerned about the things of the world than about their spiritual knowledge. When men persistently choose to walk in spiritual ignorance, God will oblige them. He will either take the opportunities for spiritual learning away from them or keep their spiritual eyes blinded when truth is spoken to them. Thus they will continue to walk in spiritual ignorance and suffer the consequences—consequences that no one in his right mind would want to experience.

Paul’s baptizing of the twelve raises a question in some minds as to whether they were saved before they met Paul. The answer is yes, for the Scripture says so. They are called “disciples” ([v. 1](#)) and Paul speaks of their having “believed” ([v. 2](#)). It is hard to call them unsaved before they met Paul when they are described like this in Scripture. The same question could be raised about Apollos. Was he saved before he met Aquila and Priscilla? The answer is yes, for we do not find the Scriptures speaking of him being converted by the influence of Aquila and Priscilla but only of him being instructed in “the way of God more perfectly” ([Acts 18:26](#)). One does not have to be a theological giant and be able to cross all the “t’s” and dot all the “i’s” of Bible doctrine before he can be saved. This is no justification or encouragement for spiritual ignorance but an emphasis on the fact that faith in the finished work of Christ is how we become saved.

*Inspiration.* “When Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them, and they spoke with tongues, and prophesied” ([Acts 19:6](#)). Several things need to be noted about this action of Paul which is oftentimes misunderstood.

First, this action vindicated Paul's apostleship. The Apostles had the authority and power to communicate the Spirit on others by the laying on of hands. Those upon whom the apostles laid their hands received certain gifts of the Spirit such as tongues and prophesy (prophesy here is not foretelling but a forthtelling, an exhortation ministry). Paul's apostleship was challenged by some in the Galatian churches and also by some in Corinth (note Paul's defense of his apostleship in [2 Corinthians 10](#)). But this experience would give great evidence to his detractors, and others influenced by his detractors, that Paul was indeed an apostle. God vindicates the validity of His servants when it is necessary. Every faithful servant of God can count on this encouraging support from God.

Second, this action was not a pattern for the future. As others have pointed out, there are three occasions in the book of Acts where the receiving of the Holy Spirit is recorded in the early church; and each case is different. The first case occurred in the Upper Room. While the disciples were there, "Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" ([Acts 2:2-4](#)). The second occasion was when Philip was preaching to the Samaritans. Peter and John came to see how things were going; and when they prayed and laid hands on the new converts, the new converts "received the Holy Ghost" ([Acts 8:17](#)). There is no record of them speaking in tongues on this occasion. The third case was when Peter was at Cornelius' house. When Cornelius and those at his house heard Peter speak "the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word" ([Acts 10:44](#)). Speaking in tongues also occurred here ([Acts 10:46](#)). But here there was no laying on of the hands by Peter nor was there any praying for the Holy Spirit. So the cases vary. Sometimes prayer was involved, sometimes it was not. Sometimes the laying on of hands was involved, sometimes it was not. Sometimes they spoke in tongues, sometimes they did not.

There are some preachers today who park on one of the above texts and insist this is the way it is to be done. However, with the three texts varying in action, it is plain they do not provide a pattern for us today. A number of the unusual early church experiences belong in the category of transitional events and actions which take place whenever something new begins. But once it has begun, those things are no longer necessary. When a car starts down the road there is a shifting of gears until it gets up to traveling speed. When the car is at traveling speed, the shifting of gears is completed and no longer necessary until the car comes to a stop. To continue to shift gears when the car is at traveling speed would be destructive to the

mechanism of the car. So it is with the church age. The same was true with Israel. As an example, when they crossed the Jordan, the manna stopped ([Joshua 5:12](#)).

## 2. The Teaching in the Synagogue

For a period of “three months” ([Acts 19:8](#)), Paul taught in the synagogue in Ephesus. He had proclaimed the Gospel in the synagogue during his temporary stay in Ephesus ([Acts 18:19](#)), and now upon his return to Ephesus, he goes back to the synagogue and “spoke boldly . . . disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God” ([Acts 19:8](#)).

We note four things from this text about his teaching in the synagogue during these three months. They are the courage, character, compassion, and contents of his teaching.

*Courage.* Paul “spoke boldly” in the synagogue. It would take boldness to proclaim the message he spoke. Though it was Scriptural, yet it went cross grain to what most of the Jews wanted to believe. They did not want to believe that Jesus Christ was the Messiah nor that He came first to save their souls rather than to save their nation. But Paul proclaimed this truth anyway.

Any preacher who will faithfully proclaim the Word of God will have to have much courage, for he will not do much preaching without pressure from his listeners to water down his message and change it to suit the listeners. Today, we see so much evidence of lack of this courage among preachers. They are like politicians; for they say what gets them fame and favor, not what is the truth.

*Character.* Our text says Paul was “disputing” with the Jews in the synagogue. The word “disputing” is a translation of a Greek word which is translated four different ways in the New Testament. In Acts it is sometimes translated “disputing,” sometimes “reasoning,” and sometimes “preached.” In [Hebrews 12:5](#) it is translated “speaketh.” The word “disputing” is not the best translation for our text, for today we generally use this word to speak of contentiousness. Paul was, however, not being contentious and difficult. The meaning of the Greek word conveys the idea that Paul was teaching the Word of God with good reasoning. Paul was an excellent teacher. His teaching was not some dumb approach that lacked good sense. He did something more than pound the pulpit and yell and holler and walk up and down the aisles. He gave forth good facts, used good logical arguments, and supported his teaching well with Scripture.



The spiritual ignorance that is present in our churches today indicates we need a lot more of this skillful teaching in our churches than we are getting. Faith is not built on wistful thinking or emotions or feelings or prejudices; it is built on facts. In our churches we have too many strongly expressed convictions which are not supported by facts but are indeed built simply on wistful thinking or emotions or feelings or prejudices.

*Compassion.* The compassion of Paul is seen in his “persuading” the people. This word means “to prevail upon or win over . . . bringing about a change of mind by the influence of reason or moral considerations” (Vine). Paul would use the best of arguments and logic to show people their need of coming to Christ. This was done, as Scripture bears out throughout the book of Acts, with great earnestness. One does not plead earnestly with people to come to Christ unless he has some compassion. Whenever you see “persuading” in Paul’s ministry, be reminded of his compassion. Later in Scripture Paul’s compassion comes out very clearly in what he said to the Ephesian elders: “I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” ([Acts 20:31](#)). In his epistle to Romans, Paul also evidenced this compassion in a very conspicuous way when he said, “I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart . . . for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” ([Romans 9:2,3](#)).

*Contents.* Paul’s teaching in the synagogue was about “the things concerning the kingdom of God.” That is certainly a broad heading which covers much. The Kingdom of God involves a king, it involves subjects, and it involves laws. Christ is the King Who will sit on David’s throne. The subjects are God’s people—Israel in a physical sense, believers in a spiritual sense. The laws are those in God’s Word. It is God’s rule book, the constitution. Would that we subjects were much better at bowing down to our King and obeying the rule book than we are. It would make for a much better life and a great eternity.

What a wonderful message Paul proclaimed. It is a great contrast to the messages being proclaimed in our world. As in Paul’s day, many unholy and untrue philosophies are being taught today. We have the message of the atheists, of the abortionists, of the gamblers, of the feminists, of the homosexuals, and of the modernists that corrupt and destroy. Let us have more proclaiming of the “things concerning the kingdom of God,” a message that does just the opposite of corrupt and destroy.

### **3. The Teaching in the School**

For “two years” ([Acts 19:10](#)) Paul taught in the school of Tyrannus. That is, he rented the school, he did not become a professor for Tyrannus. We note the reason for teaching in the school and the results of teaching in the school.

*The reason for teaching in the school.* Though Paul was a great teacher and had a great subject, three months was the limit for his teaching in the synagogue. “When divers [means some, not divers into water] were hardened, and believed not, but spoke evil of that way before the multitude” ([Acts 19:9](#)), Paul found it necessary to find another place to teach the Word of God. Notice it was just some, not everybody, that made it impossible for Paul to continue on in the synagogue. It only takes some of the church members, not all of the members, to cause enough problems that a work cannot continue on productively in church. Likewise it only takes some, not all the citizens, to cause society to be unproductive. Don’t underestimate the power of evil just because it is only some. To have success in defeating evil, you must take action when it is in the “some” stage. Waiting until the “some” has become nearly “all” is to wait too long.

Three things are said about the “some” who caused so much trouble that Paul moved to the school of Tyrannus in order to be able to productively continue his teaching. The “some” were hardened, they were unbelievers, and they spoke evil of the Gospel. These three character descriptions will also fit many church dissidents.

First, they were *hardened*. “Divers [some] were hardened” ([Acts 19:9](#)). The Gospel either softens or hardens. It is the same sun that melts ice that hardens ground and makes it unproductive. It is the same sun that produces beautiful flowers that also produces stagnant swamps. It is the same sun that brings life that also kills through sun stroke. The negative results are not the sun’s fault; it is the fault of that which the sun shines upon. So it is with the Gospel. It will soften the repentant heart and make an excellent character out of one who receives it. But it will harden the rejecter’s heart and make the evil rejecter more evil.

Church members need to remember this truth about the work of the sun in regards to their pastor’s ministry. The godly pastor’s manners and message will cause the receptive heart to grow in the Lord, but they will cause the rejecting heart to become more cantankerous than ever. When church dissidents get worse, do not blame the pastor—blame the dissident. It was not Paul; it was the Christ rejecters that caused trouble in the synagogue.

Second, they were *unbelievers*. There is nothing nice to say about the words “believed not.” The words “Believed not, in Greek [are] a single word which may be rendered disbelieved, denoting not a mere negation, but a positive refusal.

The Greek verb also suggests the idea of disobedience or resistance to authority” (Alexander). Therefore, the words “believe not” tell us that unbelief is willful and that unbelievers have character problems. Unbelief is often disguised as intellectual rationale or lack of evidence. This makes the unbeliever look like a nice fellow who for good reasons does not believe. But rejecting the Gospel cannot be so easily excused. It is willful, and it reveals a character problem. The character problem is underscored in the third thing said about these problem makers in the synagogue.

Third, they *spoke evil of the Gospel*. These unbelievers not only refused the Gospel, but they endeavored to get others to reject the Gospel. To do that they “spoke evil of that way before the multitude” ([v. 9](#)). Note three aspects of this verbal attack by the enemies of the Gospel: how they spoke, what they attacked, and where they spoke.

(1) How they spoke. The words “spoke evil” mean to revile, to curse, to speak abusively and also unfactually. Bad mouths and unbelief in the Word of God go hand in hand. People quickly betray their lack of faith by their evil tongue.

(2) What they attacked. They spoke against that “way.” The “way” is an interesting description of the Gospel. Once before ([Acts 9:2](#)) we had the same expression referring to the Gospel. This is an abbreviated description, for it refers to the “the way of salvation” ([Acts 16:17](#)), “the way of the Lord” ([Acts 18:25](#)), and “the way of God” ([Acts 18:26](#)). It also refers to Jesus Christ Who said very plainly that He was the “way” ([John 14:6](#)). Hence, these antagonists in the synagogue in Ephesus spoke evilly against the Gospel, against Jesus Christ, against the message that Paul had proclaimed. Unhappy indeed will eternity be for folk who speak in this manner.

(3) Where they spoke. These antagonists did their speaking “before the multitude.” This means they spoke in the synagogue to those gathered for the synagogue service. They could not speak nicely even though they were in a religious service but had to spill out of their mouth vile speech right in the midst of the synagogue.

These unbelievers’ actions remind us of church dissidents’ actions in business meetings. Their caustic, clamorous, and calumnious remarks not only reveal their dislike for whatever is being promoted in the church business meeting, but they also reveal a heart that is full of unbelief. They may pass as believers and be church members, but their mouths betray their hard, unbelieving hearts. The talk of the unbelievers in the synagogue also reminds us of the talk we hear from the feminists, abortionists, apostates, and other like characters who make our society reek with foul creeds and conduct.

*The results of teaching in the school.* The results were very good. How often the devil outfoxes himself. In trying to hurt Paul's ministry of proclaiming the Gospel, the devil only helped it. Being rejected in the synagogue so that Paul had to teach in the school resulted in more teaching opportunity and in more spreading of the Gospel throughout Asia.

First, *more teaching opportunity*. "He departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus" ([Acts 19:9](#)). The word "daily" in our text is the key to more teaching opportunity. In the synagogue, the usual practice was to meet once a week. But Luke makes a note of the fact that in the school of Tyrannus, Paul taught daily. What a boon this would be to the work of the Lord. Paul not only could do a lot more teaching of the people, but many more people could now be reached by this "daily" teaching opportunity. Some who could not come on one day could come on another. Also, those who for one reason or another still must attend the synagogue on the Sabbath could still hear Paul on other days. Opportunity was no longer available in one place, but it was much more abundantly available at another. This is often the case in the Lord's work and should bring much encouragement to God's servants.

Second, *more spreading of the Gospel*. "This continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" ([Acts 19:10](#)). J. A. Alexander said, "It was probably at this time that the seven churches of Asia, to which the epistles in the Book of Revelation are addressed, were originally founded." Paul was rejected in the synagogue, but that only resulted in his ministry expanding throughout the Asian province. As we noted about the "daily" opportunity, so here we also see the encouraging fact that while one's work may be stopped in one area, it will only lead to expansion in another area. Let godly preachers who have been forced out of churches or other places of ministry encourage themselves in this truth.

### C. THE TRANSCENDENT MIRACLES

"And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul" ([Acts 19:11](#)). In no location was the Divine miracle working power displayed through Paul as much as it was in Ephesus. It did a great work for God and created quite a stir. We note the power of Paul and the pretenders of Paul.

## 1. The Power of Paul

To examine the power of Paul, we will note the singularity of the power, the source of the power, and the specifics of the power.

*The singularity of the power.* Scripture says the miracles worked in Ephesus through Paul were “special” miracles. All miracles are special in a sense, but these miracles were the special of the special. They were transcendent miracles; that is, they were not common or ordinary—if we can use the word common and ordinary to describe miracles. “What distinguished these from ordinary miracles was not their number or intrinsic magnitude, but the way in which they were performed, through articles of dress, which had been in contact with Paul’s body” (Alexander).

With these miracles being special, they strongly and plainly discredit those “healers” on the radio and TV who would endeavor to ape Paul’s work in Ephesus by sending out special prayer cloths which are said to have healing powers, and by asking you to send various articles which they will pray over to bring about your healing. These so-called healers are frauds and need to be treated as such. They are a disgrace to the truth, and they shame the Gospel message before the world.

The question arises as to why God worked special miracles through Paul in Ephesus and not in other places. The answer is that God gives extra power when extra opposition is to be overthrown. True, the strong opposition in Ephesus did not seem to be any worse than the strong opposition Paul had experienced in other cities. But God wanted Paul to stay in Ephesus for a good length of time. To be able to stay, Paul needed extra help to keep the great opposition at bay. In our next chapter, we will see that the great opposition finally broke out against Paul and thus ended Paul’s stay. That it was kept in check for three years reflects God’s extra endowment for Paul.

This extra endowment for Paul is most encouraging for God’s servants. If God wants us to do a work, He will supply whatever is necessary to do the work. If it requires extra ordinary help, He will provide it. Our responsibility is to commit ourselves to the will of God and let Him supply the extra help when it is needed.

*The source of the power.* We have already indicated that God is the source of Paul’s power. But we want to give more emphasis to that fact here. It is so easy for us to think we are doing the great work and to forget that we are only the means through which God does the work. Our text says that “God wrought special miracles” and they were only through Paul. Paul was the means through which God worked.

The same is said of Jesus Christ. In Peter's sermon at Pentecost he said that God "by him [Jesus Christ]" ([Acts 2:22](#)) worked "miracles and wonders and signs" (Ibid.).

*The specifics of the power.* Here we note some of the unique ways in which the power was transmitted from Paul to the people. "From his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them" ([Acts 19:12](#)). The handkerchiefs were cloths used to wipe sweat off a person; the aprons were the aprons workers wore to protect their clothes when working.

These lowly items of apparel encourage us in what God will use in His service if they are only yielded to Him. It isn't the item that is important. It isn't the item of cloth that entitled it to serve the Lord. What made it possible for these things to be used in a wonderful way was that they were surrendered to the Lord's use. We may not be much in the eyes of man. But if we are yielded to God, He can use us to do surprisingly great things. We may not have much to give to God's service. But give what you have—even if it is only in the sweat cloth or apron category—and see what God can do with it. A boy gave his small lunch to Christ, and Christ fed thousands. A farmer gave twenty loaves (not as big as our loaves) of bread and some grain to Elisha for the school of the prophets. Elisha used it to feed the entire school even though his servant protested that it was too small a gift to feed the students. The widow gave but two pence, yet she has been used of God for nearly two millennia to encourage people to give. Yield yourself to God, and you will be surprised at what God can do through you.

## **2. The Pretenders of Paul**

The great miracle working power that was flowing from God through Paul caught the eye of some exorcists in Ephesus. Paul was doing better than they were so they decided to change formulas and mimic Paul. Satan always has his counterfeiters who would mimic the work of God. We will note the identity, intentions, indictment, and infliction of these counterfeits.

*Identity.* "Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists . . . seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests" ([Acts 19:13,14](#)). The pretenders of Paul were a group of traveling exorcists. The word which is translated "vagabond" means a traveller, an itinerant, or wanderer. Many were the traveling hucksters in Paul's day. As we have mentioned in previous chapters, Paul was very careful that his conduct

would not make folk suspicious he was of the same character as were those itinerant frauds. Paul was also traveling from place to place as these people were. His conduct, however, would distinguish him apart from their kind.

These exorcists were Jews, which is surprising. One would have expected them to be Gentiles, but many Jews apostated to a great extent. Sceva was a “chief priest” not of Judaism, but of the false religion the exorcists followed. The Jews had much spiritual advantage over Gentiles; so whenever you see a Jew involved in great apostasy as Sceva and his sons were, it is a great warning of the peril of not being a good steward of one’s spiritual opportunities. Opportunities themselves do not guarantee success. We must use the opportunities well if they are to benefit us. The Jews often prided themselves in being highly favored by God; but they did not use His favors to do better in life and, therefore, experienced judgment just as those who did not have the favors.

*Intentions.* These exorcists, of course, were out to make money, as were all such hucksters. Therefore, when they saw the success of Paul, they coveted his success; for it would mean more money in their pocket. Their intentions were to mimic him in order to improve their business. How low people are who view the power of the Gospel as a means to money-making instead of the means of delivering people from the clutches of sin. So many people in every age only see position and influence as a means to selfish gain and not to bring benefit to others.

*Indictment.* “And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?” ([Acts 19:15](#)). These itinerant Jewish exorcists received a great indictment when they tried to cast the demon out of a man. The demon rebuked and exposed them for frauds.

There is also an indictment in the indictment. The two words “know” in this verse are different words. The word used in reference to Paul indicates greater knowledge than the word used in reference to Jesus Christ. Vincent says, “The difference may be given roughly, thus: ‘Jesus I recognize, and Paul I am acquainted with.’” This means the demon knew Paul better than Christ. How instructive. Folk everywhere today know many people and things a lot better than they know the Lord. This is exactly what Satan wants; and our schools reflect this fact, for in our schools we can learn much about many subjects except about God.

*Infliction.* “And the man [with the demon] . . . leaped on them and overcame

them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded” ([Acts 19:16](#)). We note the extent and effect of the infliction upon these Jewish exorcists.

First, the *extent of the infliction*. The seven sons were completely overpowered by the demon-possessed man who was operating under the power of the demon. One person dominating seven in a fight is most unusual and reflects the fact that there was some power greater than human power involved. While Satan is not as powerful as God, he can overpower man when man operates apart from God’s power. It must have been quite a frenzy as one man attacked and overpowered the seven exorcists all at one time.

The extent of the infliction was sixfold: leaping, overcoming, prevailing, fleeing, unclothing, and wounding.

(1) Leaping. “The man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them.” The word translated “leaped” means “to spring upon like a panther” (A. T. Robertson). Sin is often like that in that the evil effects come upon the sinner suddenly and without warning. Many who boast that their evil living has not hurt them will one day be “leaped” upon by the evil results to their shock and destruction.

(2) Overcoming. “The man . . . overcame them.” The word translated “overcame” means to have mastered something or someone, to become lord of someone. Sin eventually does this to the one who refuses to forsake his sin. Drugs, alcohol, and tobacco demonstrate well this mastering effect of sin.

(3) Prevailing. “He . . . prevailed against them.” The word “prevailed” comes from a word meaning strength. The thought here is that the man was too strong for these pretenders of Paul and was able to give them a good thrashing. Sin takes away our strength, but the work of Christ is to restore it; for we read, “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” ([Romans 5:6](#)).

(4) Fleeing. “They fled out of that house.” Sin does not bring peace and calmness to the sinner. “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest” ([Isaiah 57:20](#)). Sin puts the sinner on the run. The criminal is ever running from the law. There is, however, a fleeing that will keep us from this fleeing; and that is to flee from sin, such as, “flee fornication” ([1 Corinthians 6:18](#)), and “Flee also youthful lusts” ([2 Timothy 2:22](#)). Choose the latter fleeing instead of the former if you want peace in your heart.

(5) Unclothing. “They fled out of that house naked.” The word naked here is translated from a word which does not necessarily mean totally naked but to be “scantily or poorly clad” (Vine). Sin has ever been in the business of uncovering what should be covered in the matter of dress. In [Luke 8](#) the demon-possessed man “wore no clothes” ([Luke 8:27](#)). But when he came to Christ, he became “clothed”



([Luke 8:35](#)). We see a lot of nakedness in dress in society today, and it is the work of sin. Christians ought to reflect a better dress code than the world!

(6) Wounding. “They fled out of that house . . . wounded.” Our English words “trauma” and “traumatize” come from the Greek word translated “wounded” here. Sin inflicts awful wounds upon the sinner. It not only wounds physically, but worse it wounds morally and spiritually. It leaves character battered and bleeding and destroys the souls of men.

Second, the *effect of the infliction*. The experience of the exorcists had a great effect upon others. We look at the effect in a fivefold way: trepidation, exaltation, revelation, conflagration, and summation.

(1) Trepidation. The demon’s verbal rebuke of the exorcists and his infliction of bodily harm upon them “was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all” ([Acts 19:17](#)). In one of his epistles to Timothy, Paul told him, “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear” ([1 Timothy 5:20](#)). That “fear” is similar to the “fear” the infliction upon the exorcists had on the people. This experience put the fear of God in people. We would like to see that reaction to God’s judgments today. But, alas, nothing seems to bother most people. Earthquakes, storms, and diseases seldom move anyone to fear God. Too bad this is so, for the fear of God would make a wholesome change in their lives as it did in many in Ephesus.

(2) Exaltation. Another result of the infliction was that “the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified” ([Acts 19:17](#)). A more wonderful result could not have occurred than this. The enemies of Christ had spoken evil of Him in the synagogue, but the experience of the exorcists brought glory to Christ. God will see to it that Christ is glorified one way or another. If we do not glorify Him voluntarily for our own good, we will glorify Him involuntarily but to our own hurt. If you do not bow down to Christ on earth for your eternal blessing, you will bow down to Him before the Divine throne of judgment to your eternal cursing.

(3) Revelation. “And many that [had] believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds” ([Acts 19:18](#)). Many are the believers who have hidden sins that they cling to. One would be shocked to know what some believers still continue to do even though they have come to Christ. We do give time, of course, for spiritual growth in new converts; and that may be the case with most of those whom our text speaks about. But whatever the case, the infliction upon the exorcists so effected them that they wanted to be rid of any evil practices. While it is never comfortable to listen to people reveal their hidden sins, nevertheless, it had to be encouraging to Paul to see these saints clean up their lives. When saints do not clean up their lives, they will not lose their salvation; but they will miss out on many great blessings both

in time and eternity.

(4) Conflagration. “Many of them also which used curious [magical] arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver” ([Acts 19:19](#)). If you have turned from some sin, it will show in your conduct. So it was with this burning of evil books.

With the help of Matthew Henry, we list five things which the burning of the books did. First, it showed a holy indignation at the sins the book burners had been guilty of—we will never turn from any sin until we learn to hate it. Second, it showed the book burners’ resolution never to return to the use of those sins—their talk was supported by deeds. Third, it put away temptation from the book burners—burning the books would make it difficult to go back to these things. Fourth, it prevented the book burners from doing mischief to others—that is, they did not sell the books to others which would cause others to do evil, but they destroyed the books. We witnessed an example of this noble conduct by a farmer in one of our churches years ago. He had one of the largest government allotted tobacco acreages in the area. When he began to grow as a Christian, he became convicted about the tobacco growing and stopped growing tobacco. Other farmers pleaded with him to let them use the acreage to grow tobacco so the allotment would not be lost. But our church member refused; for in cleaning up his own life, he would not defile others. Fifth, it showed a contempt for the wealth of this world—they valued righteousness more than riches. Not many are in that category today. To most, money is more important than morals.

(5) Summation. “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed” ([Acts 19:20](#)). This verse is speaking about the sum total of the results of the infliction and the accompanying effects it had on the people. The end result was that the message of the Word of God had great success. It grew in influence. It grew in the number of its adherents. It prevailed over the opposition. Indeed, the Word will eventually prevail over all opposition. At times it may look like the Word of God is losing, but the game is not over yet. If you do not see much prevailing today, wait till eternity comes and you will see the great triumph of the Word of God. “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” ([Mark 13:31](#)). “My word . . . shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” ([Isaiah 55:11](#)).

## **XIX. PANDEMONIUM IN EPHESUS**

PAUL'S STAY IN Ephesus came to an abrupt end as a result of a mob scene in the great outdoor theater of Ephesus. Though he had a great ministry in Ephesus, a ministry which was so great that "all they which dwelt in Asia [the Roman province of which Ephesus was the chief city] heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" ([Acts 19:10](#)), he was eventually rejected with much hostility by the city. Paul had mentioned in his first letter to the Corinthians that he had great opportunities in Ephesus for preaching the Gospel, but he also told the Corinthians that he faced "many adversaries" ([1 Corinthians 16:9](#)) in Ephesus. His statement to them that he had "fought with beasts at Ephesus" ([1 Corinthians 15:32](#)) indicates how vicious the adversaries could be. The mob scene in the theater climaxed this opposition and was certainly representative of the beastly opposition Paul had spoken about.

Being forced to leave Ephesus was typical of Paul's missionary experience, for most communities where he ministered the Gospel eventually forced him to leave before he could leave on his own accord. Many men in every age who have been faithful in proclaiming God's Word have experienced the same. As with Paul, who was not honored in his lifetime but was imprisoned and eventually beheaded, so most of God's faithful servants seldom receive many accolades from the world around them and that includes even the churches they have pastored. Let faithful men of God who have been tossed out of church after church encourage themselves in this truth. Let them be faithful in serving their Savior, and the day will come when due honor will be given them. Rarely will much of that honor come in their lifetime, however. But eternity is the best place to receive rewards, for there the rewards are lasting and true and from God Himself. No rewards are better!

To study this pandemonium experience in the city of Ephesus, we will consider the contemplation before the pandemonium ([vv. 21, 22](#)), the cause of the pandemonium ([vv. 23–27](#)), the character of the pandemonium ([vv. 28–34](#)), and the cessation of the pandemonium ([vv. 35–41](#)).

## **A. THE CONTEMPLATION BEFORE THE PANDEMONIUM**

Just prior to the pandemonium in Ephesus over Paul's work of proclaiming the Gospel, Paul did some serious contemplating about his work and made plans for leaving Ephesus. He had been in Ephesus for some time now and so made plans

to move on. [Verse 21](#) tells us of these plans: “After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, [that] when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” The “after these things were ended” refers to the preceding text which speaks of the exorcists being overcome and of the revival many believers had as a result and their evidencing it by a great burning of heathen magical arts’ books. We will notice the prudence of planning, the particulars of the plans, the problem in the plans, and the preceding with the plans.

## **1. The Prudence of Planning**

Paul was wise to contemplate the direction of his ministry and to set forth some distinct plans regarding his future work. We will not accomplish much if we do not have plans, goals, and aims in life. To excuse our lack of planning on the idea that all we need to do is follow God’s leading is to ignore the fact that God leads us to plan. We need to plan our days, and we need to plan our life. We need to plan our work, and we need to plan our leisure. We need to plan our worship, and we need to plan our Christian service. Planning promotes wise and efficient use of time, effort, and resources. Though our plans sometimes have to be changed because of changing circumstances or because of a clearer understanding of God’s will, such changes do not negate the value of our planning; but our planning can help us adjust to changes in a much better fashion than had we not planned in the first place. Paul, as an example, had his plans changed as a result of the pandemonium at Ephesus; but his planning prior to the pandemonium greatly helped him to make quick and effective changes in his schedule. He did not flounder around, panic, or throw his hands up in frustration as to what he ought to do. His plans prior to the pandemonium removed all of that kind of unbecoming behavior.

## **2. The Particulars of the Plans**

“Paul purposed in the spirit, [that] when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome” ([v. 21](#)). This verse discloses that Paul had a threefold plan. It involved edifying the saints (passing through Macedonia and Achaia), encouraging the suffering (traveling to Jerusalem), and evangelizing the sinners (going to Rome).

*Edifying the saints.* Going to Macedonia and Achaia (the two provinces which Greece was divided into by Rome) was to visit the churches he had established in

those parts. These would include churches in such places as Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth. Paul believed in follow-up work. As we noted at the start of his third missionary journey, he was so concerned about follow-up work that he began this third journey (as he had his second journey) in follow-up work. For some of the churches Paul visited in follow-up work on his way to Ephesus, the visit was the fourth time he had visited them.

Converts need continual instruction in the Word of God in order that they might grow and develop into strong healthy saints whose service and testimony is God-honoring. Churches whose sole emphasis is evangelism will eventually cease to be good solid churches doing a good work; for without a strong emphasis on teaching sound doctrine and practical living, these churches will become filled with error and corrupt behavior which will destroy the church's testimony and ministry.

*Encouraging the suffering.* Paul's planned trip to Jerusalem involved bringing aid to the suffering saints in that city. Persecution and famine had impoverished many of the believers in Jerusalem, and Paul was determined to bring relief to them. To do this, he took up a collection from various churches in Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia ([Romans 15:25,26](#); [1 Corinthians 16:1,2](#); [2 Corinthians 8](#) and [9](#)). These texts about the collection have provided much helpful and inspiring instruction in the manner in which believers ought to give of their substance to the Lord. Giving systematically, liberally, sacrificially, and because of what Christ has done for us constitutes the main substance of the instructions about giving in these texts.

*Evangelizing the sinners.* The planned trip to Rome was for the purpose of evangelizing lost sinners. The trip to Rome emphasized the continued missionary objective of Paul to evangelize in strategic cities in order to expedite the spreading of the Gospel throughout the world. Paul's desire to go to Rome was "part of the divine plan which he was engaged in executing, by the establishment of radiating centers at great points of influence throughout the empire, which of course would have been incomplete if Rome had been neglected" (J. A. Alexander).

Ephesus was also a strategic city for evangelism. "The great wealthy city was the best possible center for evangelizing all the province of Asia, and that was to a large extent effected during the apostle's stay there [[Acts 19:10](#)]" (Maclaren). Now he would go on to Rome, the main center of the empire and, therefore, a city which would reach out into every area of the Roman Empire. Planning for evangelization in Rome was a very wise move. Churches need to plan their evangelism in their own

community with these same principles in mind—something we have noted earlier in this book.

G. Campbell Morgan makes a noteworthy statement about the sentence in our text which says, “I must also see Rome.” Morgan said, “That was not the ‘must’ of the tourist. It was the ‘must’ of the missionary.” Unfortunately, few are like Paul in this “must” business. A good many in our churches today are more interested in being a tourist than a missionary. They are more interested in sights than in souls. They will put out good money to take all sorts of tours to see the sights in our country or in far off lands—but with nary a burden for the souls in these places.

### **3. The Problem in the Plans**

While planning was a good thing for Paul to do, there was a serious problem in Paul’s plan. Going to Macedonia and Achaia was not the problem, nor were the plans to go to Rome. They made good sense. But his planning to make a return trip to Jerusalem did not. That was the problem in his plans.

We noted in previous chapters that Paul was told to stay away from Jerusalem; and on this last trip towards Jerusalem, he was repeatedly warned of the danger of going there. But he chose to ignore the warnings and went anyway—but not without hurting his ministry.

Though Paul was forbidden to go to Jerusalem, the collection for the poor saints was not forbidden. Others could have adequately delivered the gifts to the poor saints in Jerusalem. But Paul did not need to go there. In fact, Paul was dubious about going there. He was concerned about the peril of going there and about being accepted by the believers there. He voiced that concern in his letter to the Romans when he said, “Now I beseech you, brethren . . . that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me: That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea; and that my service [the collection] which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints” ([Romans 15:30,31](#)). Paul was indeed justified in his concern about how he would fare in Jerusalem; for the Lord, Himself, had earlier told Paul to hurry and leave Jerusalem; for the people of Jerusalem “will not receive thy testimony concerning me” ([Acts 22:18](#)).

We are wise to plan but only as we plan according to God’s will. Let us not be so set on fulfilling our own plans that we do not make them subservient to God’s way. As we will note in future studies, Paul was greatly delayed in going to Rome because of his disobedience about going to Jerusalem. While God overruled and in grace enabled Paul to eventually get to Rome, it was as a prisoner, not as a free man. Paul, however, was so diligent in using his opportunities even when restricted

by the limitations of his disobedience that it is hard for many to readily see the limitations he experienced because of his disobedience in going to Jerusalem. But the limitations were there, and one can only wonder what it might have been like had Paul been able to evangelize in Rome as a free man.

#### **4. The Preceding With the Plans**

“So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season” ([v. 22](#)). Paul’s plan involved more than himself. It also involved his workers. The first stage of his plan was going to Macedonia. But before he went there, he sent two of his workers. Thus he could stay on for awhile in Ephesus. In this sending of two of his workers on ahead of him, we note the delegation of his work and the qualification of his workers.

*The delegation of his work.* Paul did not try to do everything himself. Wisely, he delegated some of his work to others. This is such a wise thing to do not just in secular work but also in spiritual work. But many pastors do not do this as often as they should. In fairness to these pastors, the reason they sometimes delegate very little work in their churches is that few people in the church are capable or faithful enough to do the work. But delegation must be done if at all possible, for failure to delegate the work will overload the pastor and hinder him from concentrating on his main work.

We learn in other passages of Scripture (e.g. [2 Corinthians 9:1–5](#)) that Paul did much delegating to his fellow workers of the work of collecting gifts for the poor in Jerusalem. Timothy and Erastus, mentioned in our text, were doubtless engaged in that work as well as in doing follow-up work among the new converts in the new churches in Macedonia and Achaia.

*The qualification of his workers.* We have noted in earlier chapters of our book that Paul wanted co-workers who were of the finest sort, who were qualified in both character and ability. The two mentioned in [verse 22](#), Timothy and Erastus, were certainly of this kind.

Timothy is no stranger to students of the Scripture. He has been mentioned before in Acts, and we have already learned many good things about him. He had been in the churches of Macedonia and Achaia earlier with Paul and, therefore, would be a good man to send on ahead. People would have confidence in him, and he would do a good work in spiritual follow up. His dedication was unquestioned.

Erastus is new in our study of Paul, and this is his first mention in the Bible. Three times an Erastus is found in the New Testament: here, [Romans 16:23](#), and [2 Timothy 4:20](#). We believe the three are the same man. This would mean that Erastus was from Corinth ([Romans 16:23](#)), was converted under Paul's ministry there, and later worked some with Paul. According to the Romans' text, Erastus was the "chamberlain of Corinth." The word translated "chamberlain" in this Romans' text is *not* the same word as the one translated "chamberlain" in [Acts 12:20](#). The word in the Acts' text means "the officer who is over the bed-chamber" (Thayer). The word in the Romans' text means "the superintendent of the city's finances, the treasurer of the city" (Thayer). Erastus, therefore, was the treasurer of the city of Corinth. Having experience as a city's treasurer would make Erastus especially helpful in handling the collection from the saints. As Barnes said of Erastus, "He was . . . a very proper person to be sent with Timothy for the purpose of making the collection for the poor at Jerusalem. Paul had wisdom enough to employ a man accustomed to monied transactions in making a collection." Churches need to practice such wisdom in who they nominate and elect to church offices.

## B. THE CAUSE OF THE PANDEMONIUM

Paul's planning was confronted by a great uproar in the city of Ephesus. This, as we have noted above, necessitated some changes in Paul's plans, particularly as to the time and the manner he planned to leave Ephesus. Here we begin our look at the pandemonium which occurred in Ephesus by looking at what caused it. We cite three causes: the primary cause, the preferred cause, and the pretended cause.

### 1. The Primary Cause

"And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines for Diana [the Greek says Artemis, not Diana], brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together . . . and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover, ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods which are made with hands; So that . . . our craft is in danger to be set at nought" ([23–27](#)). The proclaiming of the Gospel in Ephesus by Paul had hurt the income of some businessmen in Ephesus, and they were upset! These men made "silver shrines" of



(not “for”) the goddess Diana and of the great temple in Ephesus in which the idol was kept. These shrines were either miniature replicas of the goddess and the temple, or they were stamped images of both on some coin-shaped piece of metal covered with silver. “Such shrines would be purchased by devotees and by worshipers of the goddess, and by strangers, who would be desirous of possessing a representation of one of the seven wonders of the world . . . The great number of persons that came to Ephesus for her worship would constitute an ample sale for productions of this kind, and make the manufacture [of them] a profitable employment” (Barnes). But Paul’s preaching had caused a serious decline in the business.

As we will note later, Demetrius also endeavored to make it appear that the “no small stir” was because the worship of Diana was being hindered. But the primary cause of the “stir” amongst the craftsmen was a reduction of the riches of these men. Their income was declining. They were touched to the quick as a result, for nothing so mattered in their life as their money. It made no difference to them that they were making money off of heathen superstition and a religion that promoted the foulest of morals. These men were out to make money, and that was what mattered most to them.

Demetrius is representative of so many people today whose main interest in life is nothing more than the accumulation of wealth. Character is pitched out the window quickly without shame by these people in order to gain more of this world’s goods. The “economy” is so important to these people that they will vote for the worst kind of politicians in elections because these politicians promise them a better economy. Money making is so important in our society that even Christians do not hesitate to be absent from church on Sunday in order to make that all important overtime pay for extra work on Sunday. Affluence is the goal not only of the ungodly but also of the godly. It is a sad state of affairs and will meet with the judgment of God.

## **2. The Preferred Cause**

“This Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands; So that . . . our craft is in danger to be set at nought” ([vv. 26, 27](#)). We say “preferred cause” here inasmuch as Demetrius would like to put all the blame on Paul for the problem he and his fellow craftsmen are experiencing. Of course, Paul was indeed the blame. But not the blame in a negative sense but in a positive sense. Demetrius wanted to have folk view Paul as a bad man; but in putting these men in business troubles, Paul was a very good man.

“We have here the noble testimony of a heathen to the zeal and success of the

ministry of Paul. It is an acknowledgment that his labors had been most strikingly successful in turning the people from idolatry” (Barnes). Paul’s ministry had resulted in many, many people being saved from the damnation of heathen idolatry. He had led many souls from the path of hell to the path of heaven. No wonder Satan was upset and worked through Demetrius to try to eliminate Paul.

The faithful preaching of the Word of God can put a lot of people out of business. Years ago when revival came to town, saloons were closed up, gambling places went out of business, and brothels lost their customers. Today we do not see the church having much of that kind of effect upon society. There are at least two significant reasons for that fact. First, the Word of God is not readily accepted by a great many people when it is preached today. Even church members are unmoved by the preaching of the Word though well it may be preached. Second, our churches are trying to do through picketing, petitions to government leaders, and protest rallies what they used to do with Holy Spirit-empowered preaching and praying. The church is trying to reform without regeneration, and it will never work. Paul never picketed the temple of Diana. But he proclaimed the Gospel of Christ; and when heathen worshipers were saved, the worship of Diana was hurt worse than any picketing could have done. Christians and churches need to lift up their voices in opposition to evil; but picketing buildings, petitions to government officials, and protest rallies are no substitute for Holy Spirit empowered preaching and praying. Furthermore, Bible-believers joining hands with modernists, with the church of Rome, and even with cults to oppose abortion or gambling or other like evils in society is a study in futility and frustration. We will never clean up society without honoring Christ as Savior and Lord—modernists, the church of Rome, and the cults certainly do not so honor Jesus Christ.

### **3. The Pretended Cause**

“Not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought, but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth” ([v. 27](#)). That the worship of Diana was in danger was no joke. Though at that time the worship of Diana was so popular and the greatness of the temple was so impressive and seemingly permanent that most men of that day would mock the idea of its imminent destruction, yet the Gospel did indeed destroy much paganism. Pliny, the ancient historian, said that “fifty years later . . . the gospel had put all the gods of Mount Olympus out of business, and left all their temples desolate” (Carroll). Yes, “The temple was in danger of collapse under the preaching of the tentmaker of Tarsus” (A. C. Gaebelain).

The Gospel is more powerful than any weapon of man. It can level structures men think are indestructible. The Gospel is still being preached all over the world today, but the temple of Diana has lain in ruins for nearly two millennia.

However, in spite of the fact that Demetrius spoke more truth than he realized, all his voiced concern about the worship of Diana was nothing but a pretended cause for the stirring up of the craftsmen. He and his fellow craftsmen were primarily concerned about their craft and “had their gains been increased by the introduction of Christianity, instead of being diminished, they would have let to others the task of vindicating the honor of their goddess” (Simeon). If they were to profit by the destruction of the temple and the cessation of the worship of Diana, they would have offered no such protest as they did. Their concern for the popular religion of the day was only as it put money in their pockets. They were like the people of Gardara ([Luke 8](#)) who seemed to be concerned about correcting the problem of the demon-possessed man in their area. But when the problem was corrected at the expense of their unlawful swine trade, they ran the Great Healer of society out of their society ([Luke 8:37](#)). They wanted some evil stopped, but not the evil that put money in their pockets.

How often men like to disguise their evil under the guise of some good cause—such as religion or the opposition to some evil or the support of some benevolent program. Today gambling is being pushed under the guise of aiding the economy and of giving financial help to our city governments, to our schools, and to various other works such as social agencies and even to churches (some churches are so low in character that they are not hesitant to apply for grants of gambling money income given to a community). All this talk about gambling sounds so nice and charitable, but gambling is still sticking the two-edged knife of destruction of character and destruction of financial stability in the back of society. Gambling destroys myriads of souls, wrecks havoc on the financial stability of multitudes, and leaves countless homes and families destitute of daily needs. But the disguise has beguiled much of society today, just as Demetrius was successful in making it look like the craftsmen were most concerned about the honor and worship of Diana and the temple.

### C. THE CHARACTER OF THE PANDEMONIUM

Demetrius was most successful in getting his fellow craftsmen and also the city of Ephesus stirred up regarding the peril the worship of Diana was experiencing because

of Paul's ministry. He got them so stirred up that great pandemonium resulted in Ephesus. We see the character of the pandemonium in the cry, crowd, confusion, capturing, cautioning, contempt, and chanting that were all involved in it.

## 1. The Cry

"And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians" ([v. 28](#)). After Demetrius had "called together" ([v. 25](#)) his fellow-silversmiths who were involved in making the silver shrines of Diana and the temple, he worked these men into a frenzy over their problem. When he finished speaking, the men were so stirred emotionally that they began crying out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." Then they spilled out into the streets of Ephesus and got the city doing the same. This created the great pandemonium in Ephesus. Of course, as we have noted above, the craftsmen's real concern was their loss of income; and it was that loss which prompted them to cry out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." A. C. Gaebelein even thinks, "It may have been a well-plotted scheme when the company of silversmiths in fury rushed out of their meeting room into the streets and shouted at the top of their voices, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians.'" As it is with most unions of our day, they tried to make their selfish interests, gains, and causes a noble concern that all decent thinking men everywhere would want to support.

We would note here that the word "Diana," found five times in the passage of Scripture reporting this pandemonium, is in the Greek "Artemis," and is, therefore, more naturally translated "Artemis." While the two names, Diana and Artemis, are sometimes used interchangeably, there was a Diana in Roman mythology that is distinguished from the goddess Artemis of Greek mythology whose temple was in Ephesus. But both of these pagan gods, however much they are different from each other, were associated with gross immorality; and the worship of them greatly defiled the people.

## 2. The Crowd

"The whole city . . . rushed with one accord into the theater" ([v. 29](#)). The cry of the craftsmen attracted a large crowd and stirred them up so much that they rushed into the outdoor theater of Ephesus. "The Greek theaters were vast unroofed enclosures, semicircular in form, with tiers of stone seats rising one above another" (Alexander). The size of the Ephesian theater has been estimated to be from twenty-five thousand to over fifty thousand. These "theaters of the Greeks were not only

places for public exhibitions [entertainment], but also for holding assemblies, and often for courts, elections, etc. The people, therefore, naturally rushed there as being a suitable place to decide this matter” (Barnes).

How easy it is to get a crowd to support wrong causes. They can be drummed up in a matter of minutes it seems. But to get a crowd to support truth is another story. In like manner, cults and isms can gain converts by the truck load while the Gospel struggles to win a few. God’s people have seldom been a large crowd. Even Pentecost and some of the best early church crowds were small compared to the millions on the other side and to the thousands that packed the theater in Ephesus. We have some large fundamental churches in our land today, but that does not negate the truth that God’s crowd is small compared to the world’s. What we need to remember is that the size of the crowd is not what validates a movement or a cause or a philosophy. It is the truth that validates it. Be on the side of truth whether the crowd is large or small, and you will be in the right crowd.

### 3. The Confusion

“And the whole city was filled with confusion . . . Some therefore cried one thing, and some another; for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore [for what reason] they were come together” ([Acts 19:29,32](#)). James Smith of *Handfuls on Purpose* says, “These enemies of God were blinded by the smoke of their own guns . . . The scene in the theater was like the troubled sea casting up mire and dirt [[Isaiah 57:20](#)].”

Mobs seldom have a clue as to what is going on. During the 1960s and 1970s when cities and campuses in our country were plagued by mob-type crowds demonstrating and rioting, the great portion of those in the crowds had no answers and were not sure what was going on. News media interviews verified that many of the rioters did not really know much about the issues that inspired the demonstrations and had no solutions to the problems they were protesting. Like the crowd in Ephesus, they were “filled with confusion . . . and the more part knew not wherefore [for what reason] they were come together.”

When we sort away all the secondary causes for the confusion at Ephesus, we come to the fact that the root cause of the confusion was the rejection of Christ. Because men rejected Jesus Christ, this confusing mob episode occurred in Ephesus. Rejection of Christ is the reason for all the confusion that exists today in our world and in individual lives. Christ did not come to earth to bring chaos and confusion. He came to bring order, calm, and peace. If you are in a confused state of things, check your relationship with Christ. If He does not reign in your life, confusion will.

#### 4. The Capturing

“And having caught Gaius and Aristarchus . . . Paul’s companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theater” ([v. 29](#)). Though Paul had sent some of his co-workers on ahead of him to Macedonia, he still had some who stayed with him in Ephesus. Those who stayed in Ephesus surely must have wished at the time that they were somewhere else when the uproar commenced in Ephesus; for when the shouting mob rushed towards the theater, they caught two of Paul’s fellow workers and forced them into the theater. “What they meant to do with the two, they had probably not asked themselves. A mob has no plans, and its most savage acts are unpremeditated. Passion let loose is almost sure to end in bloodshed, and the lives of Gaius and Aristarchus hung by a thread” (Maclaren).

The two men taken here were certainly fine godly men. Gaius was from Corinth and had been baptized by Paul ([1 Corinthians 1:14](#)). Also, according to [Romans 16:23](#), he kept Paul in his house—this hosting of Paul apparently coming after the riot in Ephesus. Aristarchus was another godly person who went with Paul to Rome ([Acts 27:2](#)) and there became a prisoner with him ([Colossians 4:10](#)). The character of these men is another illustration of the fact that Paul surrounded himself with the finest of Christian workers. And these workers were often under attack with Paul as is the case here in Ephesus. Many folk like the prestige of being around great men of God, but few stick around when the reproaches of the world fall on these great men of God. Gaius and Aristarchus were of a different sort, however. They supported Paul through thick and thin because they had the faith deep in their own heart. It was not prestige but principle that caused them to work with Paul.

#### 5. The Cautioning

“And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not [would not permit him to enter]. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure [go] himself into the theater” ([vv. 30, 31](#)). Paul had a twofold reason for going into the theater: he would see to the well-being of his friends who had been captured by the mob and taken into the theater, and he would defend the Gospel of Jesus Christ from any and all attacks. Paul was not a timid soul and did not back away from confrontation. (cp. [Acts 21:31–22:29](#)). However, in this case, entering the theater could have been death for him. His zeal needed to be tempered by the cool heads of others—and it was. Believers, as we would expect, interceded and opposed his entering the theater. But “certain of the chief of Asia” also besought him not to enter

the theater. This latter interceding was not expected. These “chief of Asia” were called “Asiarchs.” They “were persons chosen from the province of Asia, on account of their influence and wealth, to preside at the public games and to defray their expenses” (Vincent). These games occurred during special occasions and festivities associated with the temple of Diana. “Their [the Asiarchs] presence in Ephesus may be taken as indicating the season of the year. The games in honor of Diana were held in the month of May” (Jacobson).

That some of the “Asiarchs” were friends of Paul is most significant. It does not necessarily mean that they were converts (although some may have been converted after hearing Paul speak at the school of Tyrannus or in personal contact in the market places), but it indicates that they were at least impressed by his person. Paul was not a scummy character but lived a most upright life. In his contact with the Asiarchs, people of high demeanor and respect in society themselves, they would recognize in Paul a man of excellent discipline and deportment. Christians need to behave like this. People may not like the Gospel we believe, but we need to live in such a way that they cannot fault our conduct. One of the greatest problems our churches have today is the problem of a poor testimony by their members. So many of their members are dishonorable in their conduct. They are poor workers on the job, they continually gripe and complain, they are slothful and slovenly, they are gossips and busybodies, and they are hypocritical and dishonest. We can have the greatest doctrine of all; but when our deportment is poor, people simply will not respect us or our doctrine. But Paul was not like that. Hence, men like the “Asiarchs” respected him and were amiable to him and thought enough of him to do what they could to keep him from harm.

## **6. The Contempt**

“And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defense unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians” ([vv. 33, 34](#)). To understand the action in this text, one must be aware of several attitudes prevalent in a Gentile society. First, Gentiles knew that Jews strongly opposed idolatry (the captivity reported in the Old Testament pretty much cured the Jews of idolatry). So the followers of Diana would not be kindly disposed to Jews. Second, Gentiles often incorrectly viewed Christianity as simply a part of Judaism. These two views by the Gentiles would make the Jews want to defend themselves before this mob as not being the cause of it. Though they opposed the worship of Diana, they were not

about to start a war with it. Furthermore, they certainly did not want to be identified with Christianity which they obviously knew was somehow involved in producing this great agitation of the people. So the Jews endeavored to put Alexander, doubtless a spokesman and leader of the Jews, to the front so he could speak to the mob and clear the Jews of being the trouble maker.

But Alexander was not able to make “his defense unto the people” ([v. 33](#)); for the people, as soon as they saw he was a Jew, let racial prejudice take over. This really fanned the flames of the uproar in the theater. Since most did not know what was going on, all it would take was a few anti-Jew epitaphs to be hurled at Alexander, and the mob would take its cue for uproarious behavior. Mob mentality has no merits. That Alexander did not become the target of physical violence is surprising; but had not the uproar been stopped, he doubtless would have been greatly abused if not, in fact, killed.

## 7. The Chanting

“All with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians” ([v. 34](#)). The cry had begun with the craftsmen. Now the mob of thousands of people, cued by the outcry against Alexander, takes it up. The scoundrel Demetrius would enjoy the entire show. He could see his profits going up.

Maclaren said, “It is easy to get a mob to yell out a watchword, whether religious or political; and the less they understand it, the louder are they likely to roar.” This conduct is not limited to mobs in the streets of the cities, but we can also see shades of this today in our fundamental churches regarding various pet “shibboleths.” Let a preacher mention one of those in his preaching and a great chorus of amens will echo throughout the auditorium where he is preaching. But corner an “amen” shouter after the service, and you will discover he is generally woefully ignorant of the issue and is simply echoing others and shouting from emotion not knowledge.

The chanting here was a useless display of loyalty and always is. This chanting reminds us of the “vain repetitions” Christ condemned which the heathen practice in worship ([Matthew 6:7](#)). And heathen includes the church of Rome in their numerous and generally very fast paced recitations of “Our Fathers . . . ” and “Hail Marys . . . ” Any Protestant who has been to a Catholic funeral will have observed this heathenistic practice. During the service at the church or at a short service at the funeral home, the leader will say, “Let us say five (or whatever number money has determined) “Our Fathers” (the Lord’s prayer) and five “Hail Marys.” Then in rapid fashion these are said. They might as well chant, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians” for all the good it does in showing devotion and honor to God.



## D. THE CESSATION OF THE PANDEMONIUM

Thankfully, after a few hours, the uproar in the theater did come to an end and before any violence came upon those who were believers. Though violence did not occur, it was still wise for Paul to leave inasmuch as the atmosphere in Ephesus was not conducive to his safety. Lack of violence made it easier and safer for Paul to leave.

In examining the cessation of the pandemonium, we will examine the agent in the cessation and the arguments for the cessation.

### 1. The Agent in the Cessation

“The townclerk . . . appeased [quieted] the people” ([v. 35](#)). The man who was instrumental in stopping the uproar in the theater and bringing the city back to calmness was the “town clerk.” The term “town clerk” is not an impressive term to us; and, therefore, in our language does not denote much of a position or power. But the context shows this man was something more than a lowly civil servant such as our town clerks. The Greek word which is translated “town clerk” is also rendered “scribe” (especially “scribes” as in “scribes and Pharisees”) and can mean anything from a lowly clerk of some organization to a high and powerful post such as secretary of state of a government. The latter term reflects more the position and power of the town clerk in Ephesus. A. T. Robertson said, “The recorder or secretary [town clerk] was the chief magistrate of the city . . . This officer is not a mere secretary of another officer or like the copyists and students of the law among the Jews, but the most influential person in Ephesus who drafted decrees, was in charge of the city’s money, was the power in control of the assembly, and communicated directly with the proconsul.” That he represented significant authority is evident by the fact that he was able to quiet the yelling mob ([v. 35](#)).

While the town clerk was not aware of it, it is evident that he was being used of God to bring an end to this very dangerous situation for the saints. It is most encouraging to the saints to ponder how God uses the powers that be for His good. He used the Pharaoh of Egypt to provide for the protection and well-being of young Moses. He caused King Cyrus to befriend the Jews and aid them in their return to Palestine. Here He uses the town clerk of Ephesus to provide safety and protection for the saints. Satan may cause a lot of riots, but God is never at a loss to put them down and often uses men from Satan’s own camp to stop the riots.

## 2. The Arguments for the Cessation

The town clerk was a clever fellow. His short speech to the mob is one all politicians would like to be able to emulate in skillful manipulation of people's thinking and behavior. We note six aspects of his speech which he made to the multitude in the theater: the catering to their pride, the confirming of their beliefs, the chiding of their conduct, the clearing of their captives, the counselling about their courts, and the cautioning about their peril.

*The catering to their pride.* "Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshiper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?" ([v. 35](#)). The first thing the town clerk did was to feed the mob's pride. He would have them know that everyone knows about Ephesus and their worship of Diana. They were, therefore, a well-known people. And because the goddess was addressed in such noble terms, their religion was also given honor.

People delight to be told that they are well-known for some good deed. When someone tells you that, they generally gain your ear. So now the town clerk can do some more talking. Scripture, of course, warns us of the flatterer. Don't be eager for the compliments and praise of men. Keep your feet on the ground when others would honor you.

We need to note that this statement by the town clerk was not totally correct. It implied that all the Ephesians worshiped Diana and ignored the fact that since Paul had been in town many had turned from Diana to the Gospel. It was like the distorted reports of the liberal news media today that would tell us that all scientists believe in evolution and that only a few people oppose abortion, gun control, alcohol, and homosexuals.

*The confirming of their beliefs.* "Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against" ([v. 36](#)). The town clerk not only called their goddess "the great goddess," but he also goes farther and says the validity of their beliefs is indisputable. That would make the crowd feel good also. The crowd, however, had no proof for the validity of the statement, they just accepted the town clerk's word because that is what they wanted to hear. A lot of people are like this mob in every age. They believe what they want to believe, not what the facts say. Being this way, they leave themselves open to manipulation by any slick talking person. Make sure, therefore,

that you know the basis for your doctrinal beliefs, or you leave yourself unprotected from the clever assault of error.

Though the statement the town clerk made here concerning Diana is false, it is a good one when applied to the Gospel. Diana could be spoken against and time has proven that fact over and over. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ stands firm, for it is supported not by heresy and emotion but by facts. As an example, “He showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs” ([Acts 1:3](#)).

*The chiding of their conduct.* “Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly” ([v. 36](#)). Now the town clerk is getting down to application of their belief to everyday life. While we reject the doctrine of the goddess of Ephesus, we certainly agree with the town clerk in the principle that our beliefs should affect our conduct. Peter gives us an example of this application of doctrine to deportment when he speaks concerning some eschatological doctrine, “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation [conduct] and godliness” ([2 Peter 3:11](#)). If a person claims to be a Christian, his conduct should correspond.

*The clearing of their captives.* “For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches [heathen temples], nor yet blasphemers of your goddess” ([v. 37](#)). The town clerk, unlike civic officials in some other cities where Paul ministered, was acutely aware and very concerned about the fact that there was no legality in the mob arrest of Gaius and Aristarchus, two of Paul’s fellow workers. Therefore, after chiding the mob about their behavior, he addresses this problem of the illegal apprehending of these two believers.

The clerk had to know something about the conduct of Paul and his fellow workers or he could not have made the statement he did. Gaius and Aristarchus, along with Paul and other believers, had lived a most noble Christian life; and the town clerk knew it and as a result did not hesitate to defend their innocence. This is not the case with many believers today, however. Their lifestyle is so poor that the world does not exempt them from suspicion of any evil deed. Gone are the days when Christians, though despised by the world, were the most trusted people by the world.

*The counselling about their courts.* “If Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies;

let them implead [accuse] one another. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly” ([vv. 38, 39](#)). The town clerk was a sharp man. He knew who were the instigators of the pandemonium. In every age, union leaders and unions are generally agitators in a community; and the town clerk would be well aware of the man Demetrius.

Referring Demetrius to the courts was another bit of clever dealing. In so doing he did not embarrass Demetrius by saying he didn’t have a case. Rather, he subtly rebuked him by saying Demetrius dealt with his grievances in a wrong matter. Demetrius, of course, had no case to take to the courts—declining sales were not covered by any Roman law—and that is why he took it to the crowd for mob judgment rather than just judgment. That practice is still in vogue today and even in our churches. Church dissidents practice it all the time. They stir the people up through innuendoes and other snide remarks endeavoring to prejudice the church people against the pastor (or other persons the dissidents do not want in some position). The dissidents do not have facts so they work on people’s emotions and often are successful, unfortunately; for many church members are in such poor spiritual condition that they cannot discern the devilry of the dissidents.

*The cautioning about their peril.* “We are in danger to be called in question for this day’s uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly” ([vv. 40, 41](#)). Rome was especially sensitive about riotous activity in a city. In fact, “There was a Roman law which made it capital [punishment by death] for anyone to be engaged in promoting a riot” (Barnes). Ephesus was a free city which gave it prized privileges under Roman rule. No one in his right mind would want to lose those privileges. Hence, this bit of sober reminding by the town clerk obviously got through to the audience. That the town clerk was able to dismiss the assembly indicates the crowd got the message.

What the people of Ephesus did not realize was that they were in a far greater peril than that of the ire of the Roman government. They were in peril of the judgment of God for their rejection of the Gospel Paul preached, for their hostile behavior towards God’s people, and for their unholy worship of Diana. But men in every age generally fear the retaliation of their fellow man more than they fear the judgment of Almighty God. Preachers can speak about the judgment of God coming upon unholy behavior, but people will seldom give as much heed to that message as the mob did to the town clerk’s message regarding the problem of judgment from Rome. It is shameful that the mob in Ephesus showed more fear for Rome’s

judgment than mankind shows for God's judgment.

## XX. PURSUING THE PLAN

### ACTS 20:1–16

PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY journey comes to its final stages in the twentieth chapter of Acts. In our last study we became acquainted with the plans Paul made for the last part of his third missionary journey. These plans included visiting in the Roman provinces of Macedonia and Achaia and then heading back to Syria with a visit to Jerusalem to precede the actual return to his sending church in Antioch of Syria. The visit to Antioch of Syria is not specifically stated; but we believe on the basis of how he concluded his second journey ([Acts 18:22](#)) and on what is said in [verse 3](#) of our text about sailing to Syria, that it is only logical to conclude that he would have gone to Syria after visiting Jerusalem had he not been arrested in Jerusalem.

In this study we will see Paul pursuing his plans for the last part of his third missionary journey. We will note the stay in Greece ([vv. 1–5](#)), the service in Troas ([vv. 6–12](#)), and the sailing to Miletus ([vv. 13–16](#)).

### A. THE STAY IN GREECE

Paul planned that the last ministries of his third journey would be in the land of Greece. As we noted in our last study, Macedonia and Achaia were the two Roman provinces of what was formerly called Greece. Sometimes the province of Achaia was called Greece (as it is in [verse 2](#)), but here we use the name Greece as referring to both Macedonia and Achaia together. To study Paul's stay in Greece, we will look at his departure to Greece, his discipling in Greece, his diligence in Greece, his danger in Greece, and his devotees in Greece.

#### 1. His Departure to Greece

"And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia" ([v. 1](#)). We note two aspects of his departure to Greece: his leaving of Ephesus and his laboring in Troas.

*His leaving of Ephesus.* The account of the leaving of Ephesus mentions two conditions found wherever Paul ministered: antagonism and affection. The “uproar,” which we noted in our last study, emphasized the antagonism Paul experienced wherever he preached the Gospel. The “embraced them” emphasized the affection both Paul and the saints had for each other.

Those who minister faithfully in the Lord’s work will experience both antagonism and affection. There will always be antagonism to one’s ministry; but there will also always be those—sometimes the number is very small—who will respond to the Word, have much affection for the servant of God, and inspire reciprocating affection in the heart of the servant of God. The devil will make his presence known; but faithful disciples will also be part of the scene, too. We must be careful that we do not become negative and focus mostly on the antagonism and not give due attention to the affection part of our ministries. Antagonism may be great; but God will always provide for the affection, too. Though the enemy may seem overpowering, yet there will always be some in each ministry who will greatly warm the heart by their faithful fellowship in the Lord. It only takes the faithfulness of a few godly saints to more than compensate for all the antagonism a man of God receives in his work.

*His laboring in Troas.* The account in Acts of Paul’s departure from Ephesus to go to Greece does not include the Troas ministry which took place en route. This work at Troas was not mentioned in Paul’s original plans, but it became part of Paul’s plan somewhere along the way. We learn of this interesting fact about Troas in [2 Corinthians 2:12,13](#) and [7:5–8](#). When Paul left Ephesus, he headed for Troas, which was logical; for this was where he had previously taken a ship to Macedonia on his second missionary journey ([Acts 16:11,12](#)). But this time instead of taking a ship and going to Macedonia, he stopped awhile in Troas; for he said he found “a door was opened unto me of the Lord” ([2 Corinthians 2:12](#)). Paul took advantage of that opened door and preached the Gospel. He obviously had good success, for when he came back to Troas on his way east after visiting in Greece, there was a good group there to whom he at that time preached his famous long sermon ([vv. 6–12](#)), an experience we will note later.

Though a successful ministry, Paul did not stay long at Troas. And his leaving of Troas is not a compliment to Paul. We learn this from Paul’s own pen. He had expected to meet Titus in Troas and to receive from Titus a report concerning the church in Corinth. Corinth had problems and problem people. Paul had addressed these matters in his first epistle to them and was very anxious to know their

response to his counsel. But when Paul got to Troas, Titus was not there. This so upset Paul that even though he was having a good ministry in Troas, he left there to go to Macedonia. Paul reports this action in [2 Corinthians 2:13](#) where he says, “I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia.” In Macedonia, he finally did find Titus who alleviated his fears with an encouraging report about the church at Corinth ([2 Corinthians 7:5,6](#)). This report prompted the writing of what we know as the second epistle to the Corinthians.

Paul’s unjustified leaving of Troas teaches us a needed lesson about the peril of not dealing properly with anxiety. Paul did not leave Troas because of antagonism but because of anxiety. Beware of this subtle thing called anxiety. It can hinder us as much as antagonism from evil men. Anxiety is so subtle that we often do not recognize it as being as big a hindrance to our work as the antagonism of evil men. But anxiety is a great problem in the ministry. It can derail us if we are not careful. Therefore, we need to be earnest and faithful in the matter of “Casting all your care upon him” ([1 Peter 5:7](#)) and in heeding Paul’s own words to the Philippians which say, “Be careful [means anxious] for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” ([Philippians 4:6,7](#)).

## 2. His Discipling in Greece

“He had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation” ([v. 2](#)). Of the word “exhortation,” G. Campbell Morgan says, “It comes from the root of Paraclete. The two thoughts suggested are those of advocacy and comfort. In the cities where Paul had been much persecuted, and where much blessings had also resulted, he defended the cause of his Master, and comforted these people who, in all probability, were now suffering persecution, as he had done.”

Paul’s exhorting of the saints was follow-up work; for, as we noted in our last study, that was the main work Paul would do in Greece. Paul’s teaching and preaching would provide needed spiritual help to these young saints, and nothing comforts the soul so much as spiritual help. Notice that it was “much” exhortation. Today our church programs feature “much” entertainment but not “much” exhortation. The emphasis in our churches is generally on fellowship around food and games, not fellowship around the Word of God.

### 3. His Diligence in Greece

While in Greece, Paul was a busy man; for not only did he minister in word, but he also ministered by letter. He wrote at least two of his epistles, namely, Romans and Second Corinthians during this time. He wrote the second epistle to Corinth after he had heard the encouraging report about the church of Corinth from Titus ([2 Corinthians 7:5–7](#)). In reading the first part of this second epistle to the church in Corinth, one can easily see the great relief Paul was experiencing at the good news Titus had given Paul about the church in Corinth. Because of what [Romans 15:25,26](#) says, many justifiably believe that Paul also wrote the epistle of Romans while he was making this last tour through the land of Greece. This epistle he wrote while in the city of Corinth.

The end of the third missionary journey will see Paul’s ministry changing because of his arrests and imprisonments. His great contributions will then begin to be his epistles. Truly it is his epistles that have been his greatest contribution to the cause of Christ over the centuries. His personal presence was limited as to how many people he could reach, although the effects were very great. But his epistles have reached every age since his time, and they have enlarged his ministry so that he has reached around the world with his writings.

### 4. His Danger in Greece

“And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia” ([v. 3](#)). We should not be surprised at this turn of events in his stay in Greece. After all, everywhere Paul went, the enemy dogged his trail. Why should the enemy stop now? Paul was on the “most wanted list” of the devil, for Paul caused so much trouble.

The words “laid wait” in our text come from the Greek word meaning “a plot against one” (A. T. Robertson). It is found in Scripture only four times ([Acts 9:24](#), [20:3](#), [20:29](#), and [23:30](#)). Being a “plot” means the attack by the enemy was planned and organized. The planning and organizing that Satan does to hinder the work of God puts to shame the haphazard way God’s people often go about doing God’s work. And this haphazardness of God’s people greatly aids Satan in hindering God’s people in their service for God.

The attackers’ plans were to do away with Paul as he traveled by ship to Syria (on his way to Jerusalem). The Passover celebration was near at hand and, therefore, many Jews would be on the ships sailing east to Palestine to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. With crowded ships, it would be easier to do harm to Paul—such as throwing him overboard—than if the ships were not crowded. With a crowd, Paul



would not be missed as quickly as if few were on the ship. But somehow Paul was alerted to the plot. As in several previous occasions when Paul was plotted against, information of the harm reached him in time to avoid injury.

Again we see another illustration of God keeping His own informed. Regardless of how clever the enemy is, God can, if He so pleases, inform His own of the enemies' plans. This should encourage the harassed saints. But in the encouragement, we must not forget that revelation begets responsibility. Illumination is not apart from application. When Paul was given this information, he had to act upon it if the information was to do him any good. We sometimes forget that fact. Paul's action was to cancel his sailing trip from Corinth and instead travel by land back up through Macedonia and then sail across to Troas and on down the western coast of the Aegean Sea. This, of course, meant a lot of extra labor and a much longer traveling distance. But it also meant safety. Revelation may necessitate additional work, but it is for our good!

## **5. His Devotees in Greece**

"And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. These going before tarried for us at Troas" ([vv. 4, 5](#)). The retinue which surrounded Paul on his way back to Asia was an excellent group of Christian men. It would be especially important to have some men of excellent Christian character accompany him to Asia and then on to Jerusalem inasmuch as he was carrying a gift of money for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Not only was protection from robbery needed, but Paul also needed protection from accusations of misusing the money. These devotees who were with him in Greece came from various locations which would give a good representation of the churches in the provinces of Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia where he had collected the gifts. They would be able by traveling with Paul to give a good account to their various churches of the use of the gift money.

We note here some instructive information about each of these seven saintly men listed in our text.

Sopater of Berea. All we know of him is that he was from a good church, namely, the one in Berea. The Berea church was formed by and large from people who gave great attention to the Scriptures. Good men not only make good churches but good churches also make good men.

Aristarchus. We saw him in the last chapter and learned what an excellent person he was. He was a faithful servant of Christ, one who experienced some very rugged

trials in his service for Christ, and who would later suffer imprisonment with Paul.

Secundus. This man came from Thessalonica and is mentioned only this once in Scripture. But his mention tells us where he stood—he stood with Paul in the battle. This reminds us of the story of the deaf man who attended church every Sunday even though he could not hear a word. Asked why he kept coming, he replied (by sign language or writing) that he wanted people to know where he stood.

Gaius of Derbe. This is one of several men in Scripture named Gaius. All the men named Gaius in Scripture were good men. Gaius was a very common name which helps explain the number of people named Gaius in Scripture. But though the name was common, the excellent Christian character of those named Gaius in Scripture is not common.

Timothy. We have learned much about Timothy already in the Scriptures. And each time we see him in the Scriptures, he is always conducting himself most commendably. This shows his continued faithfulness in his Christian life and service. May we all be like Timothy in that whenever men see us, we will be found living a godly life.

Tychicus of Asia. Though not a prominent figure in the Bible, he nevertheless was a very faithful and trustworthy man. Paul called him “a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord” ([Colossians 4:7](#)). You may be a lot of things in this world that gain the accolades of the world, but the compliment Paul gave Tychicus beats them all. Tychicus delivered Paul’s epistles of Colossians and Ephesians to the respective churches. When he was carrying those epistles, he was carrying that which was worth more than money could buy.

Trophimus of Asia. He was a Greek from Ephesus ([Acts 21:29](#)) and a faithful fellow-servant with Paul. Paul’s arrest later in Jerusalem was because the Jews mistakenly thought Paul had taken this uncircumcised Gentile into the Temple. In one of Paul’s last epistles, we have this intriguing note about Trophimus: “Trophimus have I left at Miletus sick” ([2 Timothy 4:20](#)). This tells us that good people get sick and have trials, too. This leaving of Trophimus at Miletus was at a later date than the Miletus experience we will see later in this twentieth chapter of Acts.

Luke. The “us” of [verse 5](#) tell us Luke was also part of Paul’s retinue here. This is the first time since [Acts 16:40](#) that Luke is mentioned as being in the company of Paul. Luke had begun traveling with Paul in Troas during Paul’s second missionary journey. Then Luke stayed in Philippi when Paul moved on to Thessalonica. His stay was certainly a help to the new church in Philippi. But when Paul headed back to Asia from Macedonia at the end of his third journey, Luke rejoined Paul’s group. What a faithful companion Luke was. Obviously he was of great help to Paul physically because Luke was a physician, but he also was a great help spiritually. You can still

be a doctor and be very involved and helpful in God's work.

What a great group of men Paul had around him. But we need to remember that to have good men around you, you must be a good man yourself. To have good friends you must be a good person. Many folk complain that they lack good friends and no one wants to be with them, work with them, or go anywhere with them. The problem, of course, is generally with the complainers. They do not live in a way that encourages others to want to be friendly with them.

## **B. THE SERVICE IN TROAS**

“And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days, where we abode seven days” ([v. 6](#)). Paul spent the Passover and the week after it (“days of unleavened bread” [[Exodus 12:15–20](#)]) in Philippi. Then he sailed across the Aegean Sea to Troas. [Acts 16:11](#) records Paul making the trip in two days. This time the sailing took five days. The wind is not always at our back in life's experiences even when we are doing the Lord's work.

Of the seven days which Paul spent in Troas on this trip, Scripture focuses on just one of those days—the first day of the week which was Paul's last day in Troas. Scripture records a very unusual, traumatic, and yet most blessed worship service which Paul had with the saints in Troas on that first day of the week. To study this interesting and instructive experience in Paul's life, we will look at the day of the service, the dwelling for the service, the details of the service, the duration of the service, and the distraction in the service.

### **1. The Day of the Service**

“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them” ([v. 7](#)). For the first time in Scripture, we are told of believers meeting together specifically on the first day of the week to worship. The practice of meeting together on the Sabbath (Saturday) was a Jewish practice. The early believers continued for awhile to meet on the Sabbath for their time of worship, but soon the first day began to take precedence over the Sabbath. Why did they worship on the first day of the week? Because chiefly it was on the first day of the week that Christ arose.

Since Christ's resurrection, the first day of the week has justifiably never been the same. But the uniqueness of the first day of the week is being opposed by the

world today. In our land businesses now make no distinction between Sunday and the rest of the week. Sports make Sunday a big sports day instead of a big worship day. Many believers are caught up in this spirit of the world and are found at business or consumed with sports on the Lord's day. Even some so called fundamentalist churches, like Catholic churches have been doing for some years, are now scheduling services on Friday and Saturday to accommodate the crowd that prefers to do something else on Sunday rather than worship. All of this is a slam to honoring Christ and His resurrection and the salvation He provided for us through Calvary.

You will note that the meeting in Troas was in the evening. The first day of the week was a regular work day in those days, hence, the people could only meet during the evening. They knew nothing of the "day off" we associate with Sunday today.

## **2. The Dwelling for the Service**

The worship service was held in "the upper chamber, where they were gathered" ([v. 8](#)). The believers did not have church buildings in the early days of the church. Therefore, they met in people's homes (cp. [12:12](#), [Romans 16:3-5](#); [1 Corinthians 16:19](#)). These homes would obviously be homes that had rooms large enough to accommodate a sizeable group of people. The particular room in the dwelling in Troas where the believers gathered was located on the third floor ("third loft" [v. 9](#)). The largest rooms were often on the top floor of the dwelling.

While meeting in homes was necessary then and is sometimes even necessary today, having a building built especially for worship is a real advantage. We can be most thankful for the buildings we have today with all their helpful appointments from pews to musical instruments to PA systems. Charles Simeon said, "Little do we think what a blessing it is to us that we have houses built on purpose for the service of our God."

Luke makes a particular note to tell us that "there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together" ([v. 8](#)). This was a contrast to the darkened corridors of the heathen temples where gross wickedness was practiced in the name of religion. It is also a contrast to the lighting in dens of iniquity in our day. Taverns and night clubs do not abound with lights. Evil loves darkness, but righteousness has nothing to hide. Where the Light of the world has come to reign, lights will illuminate the meeting place.

## **3. The Details of the Service**

“Upon the first day of the week . . . the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them” ([y. 7](#)). Two aspects of the service are spoken of here. They were the observing of the Lord’s supper (“break bread”) and the preaching of the Lord’s Word (“Paul preached to them”).

*Observing the Lord’s supper.* It was often the practice of the early church to observe the Lord’s supper whenever they met for services—which, as we have already noted, was generally in the evening of the first day of the week. There is no command in Scripture as to how often the Lord’s supper must be observed or as to what time of day it should be observed. The only command regarding its observance is “this do in remembrance of me” ([1 Corinthians 11:24,25](#)). If we are going to call it the “Lord’s supper” ([1 Corinthians 11:20](#)), a case could be made to have it at night when “supper” is held; however, it is not the time of day that is important but the symbolism that should be emphasized.

The observance of the Lord’s supper at Troas will not support closed communion. Paul and his retinue did not belong to the church of Troas, but at Troas they partook of the Lord’s supper without hesitation. We believe that the belief of closed communion forgets that it is the “Lord’s” supper not the church’s supper.

*Preaching the Lord’s Word.* The main part of the service was the preaching of the Word. Paul preached until midnight ([y. 7](#)) and then “talked [we get the word “homelitics” and “homilies” from the Greek word translated “talked” here] a long while, even till break of day” ([y. 11](#)). We divide churches into two categories regarding the Lord’s supper and the preaching of the Word. They are the liturgical and non-liturgical categories. The liturgical churches place the emphasis on the Lord’s supper—the church of Rome calls it mass. Non-liturgical churches place the emphasis on the preaching and teaching of the Word. Non-liturgical churches have Scripture support for their emphasis but the liturgical churches do not.

Today we need to give more emphasis to the fact that the main part of the service was the preaching and teaching of the Word; for in many of our fundamental Bible-believing churches, more and more emphasis is being placed on other things than the preaching and teaching of the Word. Preaching of the Word is not being replaced by an emphasis on the Lord’s supper but by such things as musicals, plays, political rallies, and famous people entertaining. But the worship of God is a farce when there is little time for hearing the Word of God. And decreasing the emphasis on the preaching of the Word is most perilous, for the corruption of the church has

always increased as the preaching of the Word has decreased in the church.

#### **4. The Duration of the Service**

“Paul . . . continued his speech until midnight . . . and talked a long while, even till break of day” ([Acts 20:7,11](#)). This is not the usual length of a church service! About the only time you can get people to be at church till midnight is at a New Year’s Eve watch night service where food and games, not preaching, are a big part of the evening. The excellent spirituality of the believers at Troas is certainly evident in their enthusiastic support of the length of this service. They were eager to hear the Word of God and the more they heard the better. Unfortunately, there are not many like them in our churches today. Church people today want short sermons and few sermons. Have an all night preaching service and hardly anyone would show up. Even an all afternoon and evening preaching time interests few. James Smith, writing on this subject said, “The people who clamor for short sermons are not likely to be found at a midnight meeting. From the attitude of some modern churchgoers, you would think that they look upon listening to the preaching of the Word of God as a kind of penance that should be made as short as possible. They are perfectly satisfied with the smallest crumb of the heavenly bread for their souls.”

The length of the service does not teach us that we should always meet till midnight, nor does it rebuke us for not meeting all night. What it does say is that there are special occasions when we have extra long services or a series of meetings. They are not the norm, of course; for we cannot live life like that every day. But they are not to be ignored either, for special times do come when we need special services. As an example, Paul was here in Troas for the last time; and that called for a special service. We have special times in every other area of life; it is time we began to give more honor to special times spiritually when we put forth special effort and give extra time for spiritual instruction and edification. That we do not have these times as we used to is indicative of the spiritual coldness that grips our churches with a vice-like grip today. Most church members give hours and hours to TV and often watch it way into the late night hours, but they have no interest in doing anything like that spiritually. The loss from this kind of attitude will be with folk for all eternity.

#### **5. The Distraction in the Service**

“And there `sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep; and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and

fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead” (v. 9). Paul experienced what a lot of preachers have experienced during the time they are preaching—people sleeping during the preaching and a disturbance of some sort occurring during the preaching time. All of this was very distractive to the service in Troas. One does not have to be in the ministry very long before he will be acquainted with the problem of distractions in a church service.

To examine the distraction in the service at Troas, we will look at the reason for the distraction, the reaction to the distraction, the remedy for the distraction.

*The reason for the distraction.* “Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep,” was the cause of his falling out of the window and thereby becoming a great distraction to the service at Troas. Eutychus certainly did not go to sleep because of poor preaching! Some sermons put people to sleep, but not the sermons of Paul. Other reasons would contribute to Eutychus falling into a very sound sleep, such as the lateness of the hour, the stuffiness and warmth (caused by all the lamps) of the room which could easily explain why he was sitting in the window, and the tiredness of his body. Eutychus very likely was a young servant of some sort (the words “young man” of [verse 9](#) are translated from a Greek word which of the twenty-four times it appears in the New Testament, it is translated “servant” eleven times) which would account for his tiredness.

We see a lot of sleeping in church services today, but “Though the thing is often done now, yet how seldom is a sleeper in church furnished with an excuse for it” (Barnes). We could eliminate a lot of our attention problems in church if we prepared better for church services. Herschel Ford suggests we “go to bed early on Saturday night,” and then adds some wise counsel when he says, “We can desecrate the Lord’s Day by spending all our energies on the world Saturday night, and by not being at our best for Christ on Sunday. Sunday afternoon is also a time which we ought to watch. We ought not to spend Sunday afternoon in such a way that we will be ruined for the Sunday night service. It should be a time for rest and not for picture shows, sporting events and the tiresome visitation of friends.” Many will smirk at Ford’s exhortations about preparing for the church services, but Ford is right. If we followed his advice, we would be more alert and attentive in the church services and thus get more out of them as well as put more into them. Do not waste away your spiritual opportunities by not being ready for them.

*The reaction to the distraction.* Eutychus’ sleeping resulted in his falling out the

window to his death (which does not encourage falling to sleep in church). The reaction to such an event in a church service would be swift in coming and great in trauma. The greatness of the trauma is only logical. One would not need Scripture to inform us of the grief and shock that would come over the assembly when the event occurred, but Scripture does confirm the great trauma in Paul's statement, "Trouble not yourselves" ([v. 10](#)). Alexander says, "'Trouble not yourselves'. . . seems in English to refer exclusively or chiefly to internal perturbation or disorder, and to mean, 'be not anxious or alarmed.' But the Greek verb properly, and almost constantly, expresses outward disturbance, and particularly noise or uproar, as the kindred noun ["uproar"] is rendered in the first verse of this chapter, and the verb itself in [Acts 17:5](#) above ["sat all the city in an uproar"] . . . it evidently signifies the noisy and tumultuous expression of grief, which was customary at an oriental funeral."

This certainly produced a great distraction to the worship service. People's minds were no longer on Paul's sermon but were now on the situation with Eutychus. This is exactly what Satan likes to do in our church services. Today it is not someone falling out of a church window to his death that distracts, but it is such things as a baby crying or people whispering back and forth or undisciplined children frolicking on a pew or on the floor that disturbs the service and takes the listeners' attention away from the message. Let us not be guilty of being a disturbance in church or of encouraging one. Let us put great respect on the sermon time and by example encourage others to do the same.

*The remedy for the distraction.* "Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves, for his life is in him . . . And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted" ([Acts 20:10,12](#)). The first visit of Paul to Troas was marked by the significant vision he had regarding the man of Macedonia who pleaded with Paul to "Come over into Macedonia, and help us" ([Acts 16:9](#)). Now this last visit to Troas is marked by the miracle of raising a dead young man back to life. Troas certainly provided some special memories for Paul.

In raising this young man to life, Paul "fell on him, and embracing him" ([v. 10](#)), action similar to the actions of Elijah ([1 Kings 17:1-22](#)) and Elisha ([2 Kings 4:34,35](#)) when they were involved in the miracle of raising young boys back to life. These actions demonstrated the compassion of Paul and Elijah and Elisha for the afflicted.

As can be seen by Paul's conduct, the remedy to the distraction was to deal forthrightly with it. Paul wasted no time in dealing with the distraction. Preachers



need to do likewise. True, Paul worked a miracle by the power of God to stop the disturbance in his service at Troas. But you do not have to work a miracle to deal forthrightly and effectively with distractions in church services. Preachers waste their time trying to preach above the din of crying babies or other distracting problems and need to stop preaching for a moment and give proper instructions to stop the disturbance. Of course, this will upset some people, and they will voice their criticism harshly and quickly right after the service. But ignore these people; they have no appreciation for the value of the sermon. People who are more upset about the pastor calling down disturbers in the church service than they are about the disturbers distracting from the preaching of God's Word are people who need a revival—not people to listen to for advice!

## C. THE SAILING TO MILETUS

After the service in Troas, Paul's group sailed to Miletus, a four to five day trip from Troas. Scripture records some interesting and instructive details about the trip to Miletus. We will note the pedestrian in Assos, the progress of travel, and the passing by Ephesus.

### 1. The Pedestrian in Assos

"And we went before to the ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul; for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot. And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene" ([vv. 13, 14](#)). It was twenty miles from Troas to Assos. Why would Paul walk the distance, a day-long walk, instead of going by ship as did the rest of his group? Several reasons can be advanced for his walking. First, Paul was an active person, not the kind that wants to be boxed up in a ship any more than necessary. His personality, therefore, would encourage him to walk instead of ride when the option was present. Second, by walking to Assos alone, Paul could have some time alone with God and do some serious thinking. Both require solitude. We need to get alone for awhile each day if possible to spend time with God and to just stop and think. The hectic schedule so many keep does not allow for either, and it is not conducive to the well-being of mankind. Third, some have suggested that Paul needed the exercise. He had sailed from Macedonia by ship, then stayed in Troas for a week; and this lack of extensive moving around may have prompted him to take a good long walk. Paul, however, did not need

the exercise nearly as bad as many preachers we know. He normally did a lot of walking going from place to place in his ministry. Most ministers today do very little exercising. Their size and weight evidences it. For the good of their physical health, they need to do some consistent exercising of some sort. There is only disadvantage in the ministry in being overweight and out of shape.

## **2. The Progress of Travel**

“And we sailed from thence, and came the next day over against Chilos; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus” ([v. 15](#)) It is instructive to note that three times in [verse 15](#) we have the phrase “the next day.” This phrase marks the progress of the trip to Miletus. The lesson from this phrase is that we do not accomplish everything in one day. It is step by step, day by day, week by week, etc. The trip from Troas to Miletus took four to five days. To graduate from high school, you must spend a number of years in elementary school, and then another few years in high school. Gaining a degree in college takes four or more years. Advancing to a good position on your job takes a number of years of faithful work. Growing in grace also takes time; it is not done overnight. Today we want everything now. But we cannot have everything now, and wise men will learn to be patient in pursuit of their goals so they will in due time gain their goals.

## **3. The Passing by Ephesus**

“For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia; for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost” ([v. 16](#)). This is not a complimentary verse in regards to Paul. True, there are times when it is wise to pass by certain places; for to stop means a considerable expense of time which we may not have to spend if we want to get things done. But in Paul’s case, he should have stopped. He had no reason to make Jerusalem in time for the Pentecost celebration. That was not his calling. He had folk in Ephesus who needed his instruction and who would delight to have his instructions concerning Christ and His Word. But Paul had made up his mind to go to Jerusalem in spite of the warnings not to go and in spite of the need for his ministry elsewhere. Earlier Paul had also cut his time with the Ephesians. At the end of his second missionary journey, “he came to Ephesus, and . . . entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not, But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast [it was also

Pentecost] that cometh in Jerusalem” ([Acts 18:19–21](#)).

You will search in vain in Paul’s calling to find this need to go to Jerusalem to observe this feast. Going to Jerusalem accomplished him no good; and, as we will note in later studies, the second time he went there it got him in big trouble.

The lesson here is one of priorities. We need to be very earnest about having right priorities. Having right priorities is not only doing righteousness instead of wickedness, but it is also doing the best instead of the good. So many saints of God get derailed in their Christian life and service simply because they get sidetracked in some interest of life and, therefore, neglect their first calling, their primary duty. Do not pass by your Ephesus where you are needed so you can make it to some Jerusalem for the Pentecost feast you do not need to attend.

## XXI. PAUSING TO INSTRUCT

### [ACTS 20:17–38](#)

THOUGH PAUL WOULD not stop at Ephesus, he did want to give some instruction to the elders of the church at Ephesus. So “From Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church” ([v. 17](#)). This would be his farewell meeting with them, for this would be the last time he would see them ([vv. 25, 38](#)).

We need to note here who the “elders” of the church of Ephesus were that Paul called to Miletus to counsel. That is, what did this title represent? The word is translated from the Greek word “presbuteros.” We get our English word Presbyterian from it. Generically, the word refers to an older person. In regards to the church, the title refers to a mature person who has leadership in the church. Of the seventy some times the word appears in the New Testament, it is almost always translated “elders.” These elders at Ephesus were also called “overseers” in our text ([v. 28](#)), a word translated from the Greek “episkopos.” We get our English word Episcopalian from it. This title refers to one who has the oversight of the church. Vincent says this word denotes “the official function of the elders.” It is usually translated “bishop” in the New Testament (e.g. [1 Timothy 3:2](#), [Titus 1:7](#), [Philippians 1:1](#)). The two titles (presbuteros/elder and episkopos/overseer) are used interchangeably in the Scripture. They refer to the office that today we generally call the pastor. Qualifications for the office are addressed in [1 Timothy 3:1–7](#) and [Titus 1:5–9](#). Though we use the word “pastor” very frequently today, the word is actually only found once in the New Testament in the King James Version, and it comes from the root word of the word translated “feed” in [verse 28](#). We will note more on that part

of the office later. Suffice it to say here that these elders in our text were the chief leaders of the Ephesian church.

The instruction recorded in our text which Paul gave at Miletus to the Ephesian elders was excellent. This passage of Scripture is a gem that all ministers need to study and ponder, for it gives a wealth of instruction on how to fulfill one's ministry. We will divide our study of this instruction into three parts: the example in the instruction ([Acts 20:18–27,31,33,34](#)), the exhorting in the instruction ([Acts 20:28–32,35](#)), and the exit after the instruction ([vv. 36–38](#)).

## **A. THE EXAMPLE IN THE INSTRUCTION**

A major part of Paul's instruction for the Ephesian elders was a review of his own ministry among the Ephesians. Paul's ministry is a superb example of how one should perform his ministry. From this review, we will look at a dozen aspects of Paul's ministry at Ephesus. They are the candidness, consistency, commitment, condescension, conflicts, communication, courage, clearing, continuation, compassion, covetlessness, and chargelessness of his ministry.

### **1. The Candidness of His Ministry**

"Ye know . . . what manner I have been with you" ([v. 18](#)). Paul's ministry was not secretive, under the table, or clandestine. Paul was very open. He had nothing to hide. He had no secret agenda. He simply wanted to bring men and women to Jesus Christ. Honest ministries can be open and candid. It is evil ministries that keep the people in the dark as to what is going on. Good ministries do not object to being inspected; they welcome it in order to manifest the integrity of their character and the validity of the message. But evil ministries want no checking of the books, no examinations or inspections of character and message.

### **2. The Consistency of His Ministry**

"From the first day . . . at all seasons" ([v. 18](#)). Few things convince of good character and of the genuineness of the messenger and his message as does consistency. Paul exhorted Timothy to "be instant [diligent] in season, out of season" ([2 Timothy 4:2](#)) which says be consistent in your ministry. The world is always looking for inconsistencies in God's workers and God's work in order to give them an excuse

for rejecting the message of God. Therefore, some of the best advertisement a church can have is for its members to live consistent godly lives. This may not be a spectacular thing to the eyes of the flesh, but it will be an effective thing in regards to ministering the Word of God.

### **3. The Commitment of His Ministry**

Though “Serving the Lord” ([v. 19](#)) is only a three word phrase, it describes well the great commitment on the part of Paul to a ministry of proclaiming the Gospel. The commitment spoken of in this phrase is twofold: the labor in service and the Lord of service.

First, the *labor in service*. The great labor of his ministry is seen in the meaning of the word “serving.” It is translated from the Greek word “doulos.” Six times in the New Testament, Paul uses this term to speak of his service. The word means slave—particularly one who is born in slavery, one whose slave relationship can only be broken by death, and one whose will is swallowed up by another’s will. To describe one’s service to the Lord in this manner shows tremendous commitment in service. Our churches have very few folk who have anything close to this commitment.

Second, the *Lord of service*. Paul is not serving himself but he is serving “the Lord.” His commitment is not to his own personal gain but to Jesus Christ. He is not serving a denomination but Deity. It is not wrong to be an official in a denomination, but one’s priorities need to be clear—loyalties to God and His Word are to be above loyalty to any denomination. The best denominational official is a man whose foremost commitment is to Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. The reason denominations apostatize is that their leaders are more loyal to the denomination than they are to the Lord and His Word.

### **4. The Condescension of His Ministry**

Paul served the Lord “with all humility of mind” ([v. 19](#)). Paul did not strut; he was not interested in exalting self. He was not an arrogant, proud, and egotistical person who would make his followers into a group of gushers feeding his ego by their servile flattery. A lot of religious stars in our churches and on the radio and TV are another story. Paul followed Him who “humbled himself” ([Philippians 2:8](#)) to provide salvation for mankind.

We need a word of caution here lest we misunderstand this humility. Just because Paul walked humbly does not mean we should treat him with disrespect. There are those in the church who like to treat their pastor or visiting guest speaker

with disdain—calling them by their first names instead of a respectful title such as “pastor” or “brother,” and who offer no respectful courtesies due God’s servants. To act that way towards God’s servant is crass arrogance. When the servant of God walks humbly, let the church people do likewise by showing due deference to God’s servants.

## 5. The Conflicts of His Ministry

Paul said he served the Lord “with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews” ([v. 19](#)). The words “tears” and “temptations” tell us two things about Paul’s conflicts: they were painful and they were plentiful.

First, they were *painful*. “Tears” indicates the painfulness of the conflicts. The attacks upon Paul in his work were not trivial attacks which he could laugh off. They were cruel, bloody, and life imperiling. The pain he experienced was very severe, and it was not just physical pain, but it was also emotional pain. Few in our churches today know anything about these kind of tears. About the only tears many church members shed today are tears over the soap operas on TV. They are not acquainted with tears that come because of spiritual enemies who attack those taking a strong stand for the Lord.

Second, they were *plentiful*. “Temptations” [means trials] is in the plural form here which indicates the plentifulness of Paul’s conflicts. In city after city Paul was attacked. There were few places where Paul did not experience a strong attack by the enemy because of his proclaiming the Gospel. He was constantly in conflict with the enemy. Seldom was there any reprieve from attacks of some sort. God did indeed quiet the enemy a few times, but the usual experience was continued trials. Yet, Paul kept going. How that shames our dedication in the Lord’s work today. Our enthusiasm and dedication often diminishes after just one trial. Paul’s enthusiasm and dedication did not diminish after a multitude of trials.

## 6. The Communication of His Ministry

Paul was a great communicator and he had a great message to communicate which he communicated wherever he went. From our text, we will note three aspects of his communicating in Ephesus: how he spoke, where he spoke, and what he spoke.

*How he spoke.* Four different Greek words (six English words) are used to denote the various ways Paul communicated the message of the Word of God to

the Ephesians.

First, “Showed” ([v. 20](#)) and “declare” ([v. 27](#)) are translated from the same Greek word which means “to announce, make known” (Thayer). Many pulpits certainly fail to do this. They are empty and unenlightening. They may be bombastic and exciting to hear, but they do not illuminate on the subject.

Second, “Taught” ([v. 20](#)) means to instruct. Like “showed,” it involves enlightening and educating the listener. Pulpits are not to be used to entertain but to enlighten and educate spiritually. The audience may enjoy the telling of stories and be excited to a feverish pitch by the repeating of favorite religious shibboleths and mutual pet peeves; but they will not be educated much in the Scripture by all these things.

Third, “Testifying” ([v. 21](#)) and “take you to record” ([v. 26](#)) come from the same root word that we get the word martyr. It is to bear witness to the truth even if it is at the cost of your life. Not many professing Christians are willing to speak out for Christ at that cost. Paul, of course, did not count his “life dear unto myself” ([v. 24](#)). He was more concerned about proclaiming the Gospel about Jesus Christ.

Fourth, “Warn” ([v. 31](#)) is from a Greek word that is translated “admonish” four times and “warn” four times. Hence, the idea of reproof is involved in the warning. How often our warnings to the congregation must carry some reproof in them, for people are often careless and unconcerned about evil.

*Where he spoke.* Paul communicated the Gospel “publicly” ([v. 20](#)) and privately (“from house to house” [Ibid.]). Proclaiming the Gospel *publicly* in Ephesus would include the synagogue ([Acts 18:19](#)), the school of Tyrannus ([Acts 19:9](#)), and the market places ([Acts 19:1–7](#)). We need to get the message of the Word of God out where the public can hear it. Proclaiming the Gospel *privately* in Ephesus involved going “house to house” ([v. 20](#)). Note he “taught” when he went house to house. The “house to house” ministry of Paul and the early church (cp. [Acts 2:46](#) and [5:42](#)) was a good deal different than what is called “house to house” visitation today. The “house to house” ministry in Scripture was the holding of services in houses (cp. [Romans 16:3,5](#) “Greet Priscilla and Aquila . . . greet the church that is in their house”). In the homes they observed the Lord’s supper ([Acts 2:46](#) “breaking bread”) and proclaimed the Word ([Acts 5:42](#) “teach and preach Jesus Christ”). We are not criticizing “house to house” visitation, but the usual “house to house” visitation today must not be equated with the “house to house” work of the book of Acts.

*What he spoke.* What a great message Paul had to give to the Ephesians. We

cannot give a better message to anyone. Both the contents and completeness of the message are spoken of in our text.

First, the *contents* of the message. Paul's message spoke of (1) "repentance towards God" ([v. 21](#))—repentance is to be made to God because all sin is against God and only God can pardon; (2) "faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" ([v. 21](#))—faith in any other will not save; (3) "the gospel of the grace of God" ([v. 24](#))—salvation is of grace, not of works or merit; (4) "the kingdom of God" ([v. 25](#))—this involves a king, subjects, and rules; few want the king, you can only be a subject through salvation, and the rules, though the most beneficial for man of any rules, are generally ridiculed; and (5) the "counsel of God" ([v. 27](#))—which is the best counsel of all; man's problem is that he listens to the counsel of man but not the counsel of God.

These truths which Paul communicated to the Ephesians are the greatest subjects to engage the mind of man, yet most men are generally concerned about other things. Eternity, however, will show the great loss men will experience who paid little heed to the greatest subjects of all.

Second, the *completeness* of the message. Paul says, "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you . . . I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" ([Acts 20:20,27](#)). The words "kept back" and "shunned" are translated from the same Greek word which means to disguise, to keep from view, and not to publish. We can do this in various ways. We can (1) avoid the subject—sometimes it is not what preachers say but what they do not say that exposes their unfaithfulness; (2) give an improper emphasis to various truths—such as, making a major truth a minor truth and, therefore, concealing its importance; and (3) confuse the listener—use unfamiliar and unBiblical terms and make the simple complex so the listener does not know what is being said.

Many preachers do not preach all the counsel of God because they do not want to lose their job and they want to be popular with man. But as Barnes says, "Ministers ought to declare all that counsel, because God commands it; because it is needful for the salvation of men; and because the message is not theirs."

## **7. The Courage of His Ministry**

"And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide [await] me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" ([vv. 22–24](#)). The courage of Paul in fulfilling his ministry is



demonstrated again and again in Scripture. Our text gives us a good example of this courage. While this text speaks primarily of his courage in going to Jerusalem, a place he should not have gone, it is, nevertheless, indicative of the continual courage that Paul had throughout his ministry.

The world ever tries to picture Christianity as a belief for weaklings and the timid. But nothing could be farther from the truth. It has always taken great courage to live the faith. In fact, it takes so much courage that big macho men of the world often quail at the idea of living a Christian life in front of their ungodly friends.

## **8. The Clearing of His Ministry**

“Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men” ([v. 26](#)). This statement says Paul is clear from the guilt of not trying to stop men from going to hell. If those who came in contact with Paul ended up going to hell, it was not Paul’s fault. He had faithfully given them the Gospel message, and if they perish it is because they rejected the message. This aspect of Paul’s ministry is inseparably tied in with his faithfulness in preaching all the counsel of God ([v. 27](#)), which we noted above.

Not many church members can say what Paul said. These members do little to get out the message of the Gospel. They spend lavishly on themselves but not for endeavors to spread the Word of God. They spend much time on the things of the world but give little time to help spread the message of Jesus Christ and the salvation He provides for mankind. Paul may be “pure from the blood of all men,” but these church members certainly will not be. Paul’s statement reminds us of what Ezekiel said: “If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul” ([Ezekiel 33:8,9](#), cp. [Ezekiel 3:17–21](#)).

## **9. The Continuation of His Ministry**

“That by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day” ([v. 31](#)). Paul was not a quitter. He had great endurance in his ministry. He kept going even though the work became hard or perilous. A great number in our churches today have little of this continuation ability. They will perform their task for awhile, but soon they lose interest and quit. Not so with Paul; once he started a task, he stuck with it until it was finished. Therefore, near the end of his life he could honestly

say, “I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” ([2 Timothy 4:7](#)). That is a great epitaph for any man’s performance.

## **10. The Compassion of His Ministry**

“I ceased not to warn every one . . . with tears” ([v. 31](#)). This is the second time that “tears” are mentioned in this review of Paul’s ministry. The first time that “tears” ([v. 19](#)) were mentioned, they spoke of the pain of his conflicts in the work. Here the “tears” speak of the compassion he had for the people in the work. Paul was a man of great compassion. Other Scripture also shows this compassion in Paul: “I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” ([Romans 9:2,3](#)); “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” ([Romans 10:1](#)); “O ye Corinthians . . . our heart is enlarged . . . be ye also enlarged” ([2 Corinthians 6:11,13](#)). No one can truly fulfill the work of God unless he has compassion in his heart. Without compassion there will be uninspired effort, little sacrifice, and a shameful lack of quality in the work.

## **11. The Covetlessness of His Ministry**

“I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel” ([v. 33](#)). Paul was not like the many traveling frauds of his day who did indeed covet the silver, gold, and apparel of the people. Furthermore, Paul is not like many in the ministry in our day who look upon their followers as sources of income and greedily delight to lift large sums from them. A man who is in the ministry for material gain is a very defiled man, and he will defile the ministry. Unfortunately, our age abounds with these charlatans. From religious TV hucksters to small town evangelists who put much emphasis on the offering, the motive for their ministry is not the spiritual well-being of their listeners but the material gain of themselves. God will reckon with these wicked men someday, and it will not go well with them when He does.

## **12. The Chargelessness of His Ministry**

“Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me” ([v. 34](#)). Paul did not seek pay from the Ephesian church. He paid his own way. And we discover from this verse what we may have surmised before but now have proof of it; namely, Paul not only resorted to tentmaking to meet his own expenses but he also did it to help meet the expenses of those who traveled with him. What a generous and noble man Paul was! What a

different attitude he exhibits than is exhibited by the miserly Christians today. Many Christians are forever fussing about giving and about tithing. They are concerned they might be giving too much, or that they might be tithing something they do not have to tithe, or they are afraid that tithing might keep them from paying their bills. There are, however, some faithful workers in God's vineyards like Paul who see the work to be done and dig deep into their own pockets to make it possible for the work to be accomplished.

When the Good Samaritan gave the inn keeper some money and told him to care for the wounded man, the inn keeper was told by the Good Samaritan that "whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee" ([Luke 10:35](#)). This test of dedication and faith for the innkeeper is one God often gives His servants. But few pass the test. If they run out of the money given to do the work, they quit. They never think about digging into their own pockets and paying the expenses themselves and thereby trusting Christ to "repay" when He comes back. The healing of the wounded and the helping of the work can come to a halt for all they care, for they are not going to pay the expenses themselves. But Paul acted most differently, indeed! He gave us an example to follow. Wise men will emulate his performance, not excuse themselves from doing it.

It is well to note here that Paul's example of not receiving pay from the Ephesian church does not mean that churches should not care for their pastors. Many miserly church members would like to interpret Paul's example that way regardless of Paul's instructions to the contrary given in [1 Corinthians 9:7–14](#). Paul's habit of refusing a salary was because he was starting a church and did not want to look like the frauds traveling around at that time who were fleecing the people. Paul wanted nothing to hinder the acceptance of the Gospel. Normally, however, the church should care for the pastor's expenses. Paul's practice is like our policy when we start a new church. The preacher who comes to an area to start a new church will be supported by other churches. He will not take a salary from the new church until it is well established and what we call "self-supporting."

## **B. THE EXHORTING IN THE INSTRUCTION**

Paul gave some excellent exhortations to the Ephesian elders concerning their own ministry. Much instruction for those in the ministry is not only found in the example Paul was in his ministry but also in the exhortation Paul gave the Ephesian

elders about their ministry. The exhorting Paul gave the elders regarding their own personal ministry involved the character, call, commission, congregation, cautioning, commending, and commanding of the elders.

## **1. The Character of the Elders**

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves” ([v. 28](#)) is the beginning of the exhortation to the elders about their own ministry. It is a great place to start. The elders must take heed unto themselves before they can “take heed . . . to all the flock” (Ibid.) The elders must see to it that they are in shape spiritually before they can lead others spiritually. They must clean their own doorstep before they can clean others. They will not lead anyone higher spiritually than they are themselves.

Ministers have the same temptations others have and this alone justifies the exhortation to “take heed therefore unto yourselves”; but ministers also have additional temptations because the devil attacks them in a special way as they are an important key to doing the work of God. Hence, it is so essential for ministers to examine their own personal life and to take heed with extra care that they are walking obediently unto the Lord and doing what they are called to do. How tragic and ruinous have been the results where ministers have not “taken heed” and have fallen into great sin as a result. King David is not the only one to bring great ruin to his life by his sin. We know of preacher after preacher, some who have been personal friends, who have fallen by the wayside in disgraceful living because they did not “take heed” to their own lives as they ought. Character is so essential in the Lord’s work. If you would serve God, start with character in getting yourself prepared to serve.

## **2. The Call of the Elders**

“Which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers” ([v. 28](#)). No one calls himself to the ministry. It is a Divine call. This is both an encouragement and a warning. It is an encouragement to the minister in that when God calls, God enables. One may feel helpless in himself to do the work God has called him to do; but if God has called, He will enable the one called to do the work. The call being a Divine call is also a warning. It is a warning to the one called to be very earnest about seeking the will of God as to where he goes and what he does in the ministry. It is also a warning to church dissidents, for those who make it a habit to oppose God’s man are also opposing God’s appointment. Those who would fight God’s appointments and run off God’s preachers are also working against God’s plan, and woe be those who

oppose God's plan. "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm" ([1 Chronicles 16:22](#), [Psalm 105:15](#)) is the warning principle.

Though the call is Divine, it is often made known by human means, such as, a congregational vote to call a pastor or an appointment by church officials. That the call is Divine should caution those involved in the voting and appointing process to seek earnestly the will of God when they vote or appoint.

### **3. The Commission of the Elders**

The task to which these elders were appointed is given as "overseers, to feed the church of God" ([v. 28](#)). We have already noted the meaning of the word "overseers" which is to superintend the work of the church. Many in the congregation do not like anyone to lead them, and so they rebel against pastoral leadership and authority. But the church will struggle until it submits to God's appointed ways.

The word "feed" in this verse is translated from the word we also get the word "shepherd." And, as noted at the beginning of the chapter, the word "pastor" (found only in [Ephesians 4:11](#) in the KJV) is translated from the root word of the word translated "feed" in our text. This word "feed" not only includes the duty of feeding the flock, but it also includes the other duties of a shepherd, such as "discipline, authority" (Vine) and "tending, shepherding" (Vincent). The word is translated "rule" four of the eleven times it appears in the New Testament.

It is instructive to note that in [John 21](#), where Jesus told Peter three times to "feed" the sheep, that the first and third "feed" ([vv. 15, 17](#)) is from the word which only means to feed; but the second "feed" ([v. 16](#)) is the word in our text which means not only to feed the sheep but also to perform all those other tasks a shepherd must perform in regards to the flock, such as we noted above. Many church members would be happy if the pastor only preached and did not try to lead the church. But God gave the pastors both responsibilities. Today, however, it seems that many pastors are so busy leading the church in its administration that they do a poor job of feeding them. Christ's commands to Peter would tell us that feeding should have priority in the ministry. But (cantankerous church members take note) authoritative leadership is also part of the pastor's duty.

### **4. The Congregation of the Elders**

"Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" ([v. 28](#)). The pastor must remember he is the under shepherd, not the Chief Shepherd. The congregation belongs to God, not to the pastor. We are not critical of the pastor who

refers to his church as “my people,” for they are his people in the sense they have been given him by God to shepherd. But the real ownership of the people belongs to God.

The reason they belong to God is stated in our verse—He purchased them. And what a price He paid for them. He paid for them with the blood of Jesus Christ. There is no higher price! (That our verse says, “with *his* own blood,” is a good text for the Deity of Christ.) With such a high price being paid for the flock, the pastor ought to be extra careful in caring for this possession of God. The high cost for the flock will make God extra concerned about how pastors care for His possession.

## 5. The Cautioning of the Elders

“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears” ([vv. 29–31](#)). Paul warns the elders of Ephesus about a serious attack upon the church. Pastors with experience are well acquainted with this sort of attack and do not have any trouble understanding these verses. Paul was certainly an experienced servant of God, and, therefore, he could say “I know” about this attack. Indeed, he knew about and understood extremely well this insidious work of evil against the church of God. His experience helps him give an invaluable warning about this attack upon the church. To further study this attack, we note the object of the attack, timing of the attack, source of the attack, and the concern about the attack.

*The object of the attack.* “Grievous wolves . . . not sparing the flock . . . draw away disciples after them” ([vv. 29, 30](#)). The overall objective of the attack was to divide and break up the church and thus render it most ineffective in the work of the Lord. The objective of the attack is described symbolically as “wolves . . . not sparing the flock” and literally as “draw away disciples after them.” Drawing away disciples “after them” is readily seen in the practice which we in church call sheep stealing. The sheep stealing business is very prominent today. In fact, it seems to be a planned practice of a number of ministers, especially those trained in schools connected with churches who continually use high pressured promotional schemes to increase their attendance. These ministers come to town to build a church by taking members from other fundamental, Bible believing churches in the area. They are not interested in helping the churches that are in the area that are preaching the

Gospel. Rather, they are interested in getting followers for themselves. They want to “draw away disciples after them[selves]” (v. 30). In order to build up their name and their crowd, they are ever destroying other churches. They especially thrive on stealing those members who are weak in the faith and, hence, are undiscerning as to the evil tactics and ambitions involved. These ministers do indeed often get a name and are praised as really doing a great work for God. But eternity will have plenty to say about their unscrupulous work, and it won’t be nice at all.

Stealing members from one church to build another church is not the only application of “draw away disciples after them,” however. Not infrequently there are those in the church who endeavor to build up their own following of members in the congregation. These dissidents do not leave the church to start another church, but bring division within the church. They get their group to oppose the pastor or some program they do not like. They love to have their group of members following them instead of the pastor’s leadership. It is a selfish, rebellious, and divisive practice that divides the church and greatly hinders the effectiveness of its ministry.

*The timing of the attack.* Paul said “after my departing” (v. 29) the attack would begin. Evil ever likes to attack at times when the church is most vulnerable to attack. It is good strategy for any attacker to attack at a time when it is most effective. With Paul out of the way, the enemy had an obvious advantage in attacking the church at Ephesus, for they did not have to deal with Paul.

There are particular times when churches are more vulnerable to the attack than others. One is when the pastor is away. When the cat is away, the mice will play. When the pastor is on vacation, the dissidents will do their dirty work (e.g. an adult Sunday School teacher teaching a lesson that is not Biblical and that alienates people from the pastor). Another time is when the church is without a pastor; the dissidents get in prominent places of power and make it difficult for a new pastor to take over the reins. Still another vulnerable time is when the church is experiencing church troubles. Be it financial problems, discipline problems, or other problems in the church, it opens the door for dissidents to divide or for sheep-stealing ministers to raid the church to gain members for another church.

Let all the church people take heed here as to the timing of the attack. Let them be extra cautious when the pastor is away or when the church is without a pastor or when the church is experiencing some difficulties. Many church problems can be nipped in the bud by due caution in this matter.

*The source of the attack.* The attack comes from both outside and inside the church, and it comes from people of sordid character. “Grievous wolves shall enter in among you” ([v. 29](#)) speaks of those from outside the church who would by their devious methods hurt the church. These include those sheepstealing ministers from other churches. They also include the devilish cult workers who especially prey on new Christians in the church. Those “of your own selves” ([v. 30](#)) speaks of those who are in the church who cause much trouble to the church.

Obviously, the attack does not come from people of good character, and Paul does not describe them as good characters. Paul called them “grievous” which generically means “heavy,” such as a heavy burden to the church, “but explained by the context to mean cruel and destructive” (J. A. Alexander). He called them “wolves” which says they are unsaved. He said they were guilty of “sparing not the flock” which is another way of saying they were cruel and heartless and cared not for the spiritual well-being of souls. He said they spoke “perverse things” which means they had bad tongues. He said they “draw away disciples after them” which exposes their selfish ambition.

These descriptions by Paul of the character of the attackers is far different from how these troublers of the church are often described by folk. But Paul saw their real character. The easily beguiled and spiritually immature only see the window dressing and mistakenly think that is the real person. Church troublers endeavor to appear loving (frequently they accuse the pastor or other church leaders of lack of love), concerned about the well-being of the church (except it does not show in the offering plate or in their splitting of the church by dividing or stealing the members), and a martyr (they are ever complaining how they are being mistreated). But Paul says they are grievous wolves, phony Christians, cruel, selfish, deceitful people with perverse tongues who will destroy a church.

*The concern about the attack.* Paul was greatly concerned about the attack. This is seen in his warning the elders “day and night . . . with tears” about the problem. Paul had reason to be very concerned, for this problem is a very serious and destructive problem and is also a very common problem. We need, therefore, to earnestly heed the warning of this text in our churches today. We need to diligently “watch” ([v. 31](#)), that is, be very alert to this problem and not stick our heads in the sand when the problem shows itself. At the first sign of the problem we need to take steps to stop it. Especially let the leaders in the churches pay heed to this warning. It would stop many church splits, walkouts, and dissolvings.



## 6. The Commending of the Elders

“I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” ([v. 32](#)). The word “commend” in this verse is translated from a word which means to commit or to deposit for safe keeping. It is the same word used by Christ when He said, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” ([Luke 23:46](#)). God is the great protector of His people, and He provides that protection through the Word—called the “word of his grace” here. The Word is powerful (“able” is translated from the word we get “dynamite” and is from the same root word translated “power” in [Romans 1:16](#)), and Paul states two things it will do for the saint: “build you up” and “give you an inheritance.” This will protect you from spiritual weakness and spiritual poverty.

First, the Word builds up the saint. If we are to overcome the enemy, we must be strong and healthy saints. We must be built up in the faith. The word translated “build you up” means that which, as a house, “is reared and completed by slow degrees, and by toil” (Barnes). Spiritual growth is not something that happens overnight. We are indeed saved in a moment, but we do not grow up in a moment. It takes much time in Bible study to grow spiritually. But few saints are willing to give that time; and, therefore, they live in flimsy, frail shacks spiritually and are not very firm in the faith. Thus when temptation and trials beset them, they fail.

Second, the Word enriches the saint. The Word of God protects from spiritual poverty by making us rich where it counts the most. It makes us rich in faith, in service, and in character. And it makes us rich in spiritual rewards. Most of these rewards we will receive in eternity, for it is an “inheritance”—an “inheritance” generally speaks of the future. The carnal Christian does not have his eye on eternity and, thus, only thinks in terms of this life. As a result, he is not interested in a spiritual “inheritance” and will not study the Word of God to gain it. He is only interested in the Word as it promises him riches in this life. This kind will give only because they think it will increase their earthly riches. Giving because it will bring them eternal spiritual rewards does not interest them at all.

## 7. The Commanding of the Elders

“I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” ([v. 35](#)). Paul finishes the exhortation to the elders with a word about giving. He makes some specific applications for the elders about supporting the weak; and then he lays down the principle for all giving when he says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” This exhortation followed the report of Paul’s

example of providing for his own expenses and that of his fellow workers ([v. 34](#)) which we noted earlier. The word “shown” in [verse 35](#) means example, and Paul certainly was an excellent example in giving as can be seen in [verse 34](#).

How few in the world and even in the church have ever learned the truth about it being “more blessed to give than to receive.” It seems as though nearly everyone has their hand out to “get” not to “give.” It is a miserable way of life. Be a selfish tightwad and skinflint in giving and you will discover that God will limit your true happiness accordingly.

The phrase “remember the words of the Lord Jesus” is certainly an instructive phrase. We can forget about what a lot of people say, but it will be to our great harm to forget what Jesus Christ has said. Nothing will profit us so much as heeding what He said—be it about giving, as in this verse, or about any other subject. “Never man spake like this man” ([John 7:46](#)) underscores the importance of heeding His words.

## C. THE EXIT AFTER THE INSTRUCTION

“When he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore [much], and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him, Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more [note [verse 25](#)]. And they accompanied him unto the ship” ([vv. 36–38](#)). A most touching farewell occurs after the Paul finished instructing the Ephesian elders. We especially note two things about this farewell: the attitude of prayer and the affection for Paul.

### 1. The Attitude of Prayer

After the instruction it was fitting to pray, and before the parting it was fitting to pray. If you cannot pray after you speak, maybe you better change your message. God’s message is conducive to praying. To pray at a parting solicits the care of God as we journey. If we need anyone’s help in our journeys, it is definitely God’s help.

Note Scripture says he prayed “with them” ([v. 36](#)). None of the elders skipped out on this prayer meeting. What great loss they would have experienced had they missed this prayer time. Think that over the next time you are tempted to skip prayer meeting at church. You may argue that Paul isn’t there. True, he isn’t, but God is!

### 2. The Affection for Paul

How the men of Ephesus loved Paul. The weeping, embracing, and kissing (the traditional Oriental kissing on the cheek—no homosexual behavior here!) certainly tells us this was true. This man had led them to Christ; now they would see him no more, and it broke their heart.

We would like to see affections of this kind more often today. But sadly, the affections today are for the vile instead of the virtuous. There is little affection evidenced for men of God, but society goes batty over some immoral living singer or group whose music is from the pit of hell. We are a generation whose affections are indeed in the wrong place, and it has brought great ruin to multitudes.

Interestingly, it was this very church at Ephesus which was indicted some years later in the book of Revelation for having “left thy first love” ([Revelation 2:4](#)). Affections must be nurtured or they will die. We can best nurture our spiritual affections through the faithful reading and studying of God’s Word and through prayer. Husbands and wives can learn here. They must also nurture their love for one another all through their lives if they are to stay in love. Like spiritual affections, affections for husband and wife will be greatly helped by the Word of God and prayer. The Word and prayer will help the husband and wife to be faithful, kind, thoughtful, and attentive to each other—musts if marriage is not only to survive but is to be a delightful experience.

## XXII. PERSISTING ABOUT JERUSALEM

### [ACTS 21:1–14](#)

PAUL’S DETERMINATION TO go to Jerusalem regardless of what the Holy Spirit tells him is manifested with great clarity in our text. As a result, our text is not a very complimentary text in Scripture regarding the Apostle Paul. But it is included in Scripture for our learning. We may not like all that is said about our Bible heroes and would like the bad left out, but God does not whitewash the record of men. The great men of God in Scripture are not without their reported failures. This is not to discourage us but to teach us that when we fail, we must not give up but keep going for God. God is not looking for perfect saints to serve Him, or He would never find anyone to serve Him. This does not mean you can live a profligate life and still be qualified for all posts of service, but it means that failures in service do not have to be the end of service. Great men failed yet recovered and did great things for God. So can we.

We will especially focus on two locations in this chapter where Paul manifested

his unjustified determination to go to Jerusalem. These two locations are Tyre and Caesarea. Both are in the Palestine area, and Paul comes to them towards the end of his trip from Miletus to Jerusalem. Tyre, one of the main cities of Phoenicia, is located on the shore of the Mediterranean about sixty-five miles north of Caesarea. Caesarea, another coastal city, is located in Samaria about sixty-five miles distance from both Tyre and Jerusalem.

Paul's voyage from Miletus to Tyre was recorded in some detail by Luke, detail we note here in the introduction of this chapter. The first place they stopped at after leaving Miletus was "Coos" ([v. 1](#)). Coos, an island city, is famous because it was the birthplace of Hippocrates, the father of medical science. He was born about five hundred years before Paul passed through. "Rhodes" (*Ibid*), the next stop and also an island city, was so named because of "the great quantity of roses which it produced" (Barnes). Much of its historical fame is from the fact that one of the seven wonders of the ancient world was located there. This was the huge hundred foot bronze statue known as the "Colossus" which straddled the Rhodes' harbor and was so big ships could go between its legs. This statue of the god Apollo lasted fifty-six years before an earthquake brought it down sometime about 225 B.C. "Patara" (*Ibid.*), the final stop before Tyre, was on the mainland about forty miles northeast of Rhodes. There Paul "finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia [Phoenicia]. . . went aboard" with his retinue ([v. 2](#)) and headed for Phoenicia where Tyre was located. Paul changed ships to make connections just as we change buses or trains or planes in our day. In coming to Tyre, Scripture says they passed south of the island of Cyprus ([v. 3](#)), whose mention stirs up memories of the ministry of Paul, Barnabas, and Mark on the first missionary trip. Then they came to Tyre.

The cities mentioned on Paul's voyage had their glory days, but all have faded into obscurity. However, this is not the case with the great missionary who passed through them at the end of his third missionary trip. Little did these cities realize what an important visitor they had in their locales when Paul stopped by. But typical of the world, little do they know who and what is important. Let us not be so influenced and dominated by the spirit of the world that we get our priorities and esteem mixed up. When the world gets all excited about their interests, let us remember there are more important things than the latest show in town. The important things are spiritual. Time will never diminish their importance.

In turning to our main study of this chapter, we will consider the prohibiting in Tyre ([vv. 3–6](#)) and the protesting in Caesarea ([vv. 8–14](#)) of Paul going on to Jerusalem.

## A. THE PROHIBITING IN TYRE

After a trip of approximately four hundred miles across the Mediterranean from Patara, the longest leg of Paul's journey on this trip, Paul and his company "landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unlade her burden [unload her cargo]" ([v. 3](#)). The unloading of the cargo (and doubtless the loading of new cargo) took some time so they "tarried there seven days" ([v. 4](#)). To study Paul's stay at Tyre, where he was plainly forbidden to go on to Jerusalem, we will note the fellowship with the saints, the forbidding by the Spirit, and the farewell on the shore.

### 1. The Fellowship With the Saints

"And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days" ([v. 4](#)). The word "finding" teaches us a great lessons. It is translated from a word meaning to "discover after search" (Vincent). Vincent goes on to say, "The verb might be rendered strictly by our common phrase, 'having looked up the disciples.'" Tyre was a large city and with the saints obviously not being a great number, Paul had to do some looking around before he could find any believers with whom he could fellowship.

While much of what is said of Paul in the text of this chapter is not very complimentary, that which is said about him looking up the saints certainly is. Here is a man who wants to be with God's people, and who will put out good effort to find God's people. This is a contrast to many professing Christians of our day. They would not have bothered to find any saints to fellowship with, for they are not that interested in the company of believers. Furthermore, most believers today do not give much effort to finding a good church on Sunday when they are traveling or in a strange city on vacation. Any church will do if they go to church—most, however, do not attend church when they are away from home. When away from home, they make little attempt to worship with God's people on Sunday.

Paul's experience here tells us that no matter where you go, you can find good friends and people to be with if you want to. In the military we met some of the finest Christian friends we have ever had. Such friends are not easy to find especially in the military. But they are there, and you can find them if you really are interested in fellowship with God's people. You will not find them in dens of iniquity, of course; but you will find them when you attend Bible studies, prayer meetings, and church services. Sad to say a good many professing Christians in the military are not very interested in Bible studies or prayer services or worship services, so they do not meet good Christian friends. This same thing is also true in other walks of life. People who

complain they lack good Christian friends and companions are usually the ones who because of disinterest in spiritual things do little to find such choice company.

## 2. The Forbidding by the Spirit

“Who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem” ([v. 4](#)). If there is any doubt as to Paul being forbidden by God to go to Jerusalem, this verse removes it. “Through the Spirit” makes it absolutely clear that God told Paul not to go to Jerusalem. But as plain as it is in Scripture, many folk simply cannot and will not accept the fact that Paul was wrong in going to Jerusalem. These defenders of Paul going to Jerusalem will by various ways twist the plain meaning of the text to make it say what they want it to say even though it is directly opposed to what the text plainly says.

Some argue that because the “not” in this verse is translated from the Greek “mee” instead of from the Greek “ou” (the Greek language has several negatives) the statement is not an absolute forbidding of Paul but merely a wish that he would not go to Jerusalem. It is true that the Greek “mee” is not as strong a negative as “ou”; but it still is a negative, however! We may say, “Don’t you ever do that” or “Don’t do that.” The last statement is not as strong as the first, but it is still a negative and prohibits the action. So it is with “mee.” An examination of the use of “mee” in the New Testament will demonstrate that “mee” is a most sufficient negative to forbid Paul from going to Jerusalem. As an example, we see this illustrated very convincingly in [Matthew 2:12](#) which says, “And being warned of God in a dream that they should *not* return to Herod, they departed into their own country.” The “not” in this verse is the Greek “mee.” I do not think anyone will dispute the plain negative in God’s warning in this verse for the wise men not to return to Herod. Also the “mee” shows up [translated “not”] many times in the beatitudes in obvious negative commands. We quote a few: “Take heed that ye do *not* your alms before men” ([Matthew 6:1](#)), “do *not* sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do” ([Matthew 6:2](#)), “when ye pray, use *not* vain repetitions, as the heathen do” ([Matthew 6:7](#)). Surely no wise man would argue that the negative is only a wish in these verses. In [Acts 9:9](#) the “mee” is used to describe Paul’s lack of sight. The verse says Paul was “without” sight for three days. The “without” is the Greek “mee.” Did Paul have sight or was he blind? Obviously he was blind. These are just a few texts from a multitude which demonstrate very plainly that “mee” is not a wish but a negative. We may say, “I wish you did not do such and so.” But that is not the language of our text, and the use of “mee” does not make it so. Paul was plainly forbidden by the Spirit of God to go to Jerusalem. In going to Jerusalem he, therefore, disobeyed God. We may not

like that fact, but it is plainly what Scripture says.

The insistence in defending Paul and refusing to see his disobedience in going to Jerusalem is reflective of what mankind does many times in regards to their attitude towards the sins of their heroes and their attitudes towards their own sins. Wicked politicians have their ardent followers who refuse to acknowledge the huge character flaws of the politicians and will campaign for them without shame. Some well known preachers have failed miserably in character, yet they too have followers who absolutely refuse to acknowledge the failure of these preachers and who will continue to follow their “hero” and castigate anyone who dares to criticize him. The worst case, however, of not seeing sin is in how we deal with our own sins. How slow we are to see the error of our ways. We go to great lengths to try and justify our faulty ways even though in doing so we twist reason and logic all out of shape, make a mockery of the meaning of words, and make a fool of ourselves. You may make yourself blind to the sin of others and get away with it, but you will never make yourself blind to your own sin without paying a price no wise man would ever want to pay. Ignore other people’s sins if you will, but do not ignore your own sins. Take them to the Lord in confession and then forsake them.

### **3. The Farewell on the Shore**

“And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship, and they returned home again” ([vv. 5, 6](#)). What a touching scene this is of the believers in Tyre, of Paul, and of his company kneeling down on the shore of the Mediterranean in prayer together. The seven days of fellowship with the believers in Tyre would bring much spiritual blessings to the believers as Paul taught them in the ways of the Lord. When Paul left, their great appreciation for his visiting them and their great affection for him resulted in these believers going with him to the ship, as the elders of Ephesus also did (cp. [Acts 20:38](#)), and having this farewell time of prayer.

It is instructive to note who was present. Not only were the men present, as is the usual case, but also the “wives and children” were present. Hence, the whole family was included in this service on the shore. What a pity it would have been had these children been sent off to “gym time” during the prayer service as they often are in many of our churches today. How good that the whole family could be together. We are so departmentalized in our churches today that once we enter the church door the family is separated in all different directions and “never the twain

will meet” until church is over. While we are not opposed to graded Sunday Schools or to Children’s Church (it is often needed because fathers and mothers are not present with the children or the children do not know how to behave yet and would be a great disturbance to the worship service), we need more services at church that include the entire family. Society has little time for the family unit; but now churches are also opposing the family unit, howbeit unwittingly, by the continuous departmentalization. The church is the one place where the family unit ought to be emphasized. But, unfortunately, the church does not honor the family unit when it continually sends the husband/father to one place, the wife/mother to another, and the children to someplace else.

## **B. THE PROTESTING IN CAESAREA**

From Tyre, Paul headed for Caesarea as the next step in his going to Jerusalem. On the way to Caesarea, he had a one day stop at Ptolemais where he “saluted [greeted] the brethren, and abode with them” ([v. 7](#)). As was the case in Tyre, Paul sought out fellowship with God’s people wherever he went. Birds of a feather do flock together, and those who are not interested in fellowship with God’s children probably are not God’s children.

In Caesarea, Paul enjoyed a lengthy time of fellowship with dedicated believers; but after awhile the problem of going to Jerusalem was again brought up and much protesting was done by Paul, his travel companions, and “they of that place” ([vv. 11, 12](#)) about his going to Jerusalem. Paul insisted he would go to Jerusalem, but the others tried to persuade him not to go to Jerusalem.

In our study of Paul’s time in Caesarea, which was chiefly characterized by the protesting over his Jerusalem trip, we will note the entertaining by Philip and the predicting by Agabus.

### **1. The Entertaining by Philip**

“We that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea; and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven, and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy” ([vv. 8, 9](#)). We note two things about Philip, in whose home Paul and his company were given food and lodging: the dedication of Philip and the daughters of Philip.



*The dedication of Philip.* Philip was one of those faithful, dedicated saints of God who comprised the early church. The record of his service given in Acts shows a man truly consecrated to the Lord. Philip, as our text states, was one of the original seven men selected by the early church in Jerusalem to help in the distribution of material help to the needy, particularly the Grecian widows ([Acts 6:1–6](#)). To be selected for that group, he had to be a man “of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom” ([Acts 6:3](#)). Five of the seven (Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas) we know little about, but two of the seven became very prominent in Scripture. One was Stephen, the martyr at whose martyrdom Paul guarded the clothes of those who threw the stones to kill Stephen. The other notable of the seven was Philip.

When persecution became severe in Jerusalem and the saints were “scattered abroad” ([Acts 8:4](#)), Philip went to Samaria and, now as an evangelist, proclaimed the Gospel with great success. During his time in Samaria, he was sent south by the Lord to the desert to speak with the Ethiopian whom he won to Christ and baptized ([Acts 8:5–39](#)). Following more traveling in his ministry, Philip established his home in Caesarea ([Acts 8:40](#)) where Paul has now come to stay awhile with him at the end of Paul’s third missionary journey. What a delight it would be for Paul to visit with Philip, to speak with him about the things of the Lord and how salvation had changed Paul from a leading persecutor of the church to a leading propagator of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

*The daughters of Philip.* Our text notes that Philip had four virgin daughters who prophesied. Women’s lib will like this text, but it does not teach all that women’s lib would like it to teach. Having this spiritual gift did not mean the daughters were permitted to use it in every situation in the church. Paul makes it clear in his epistles ([1 Corinthians 14:34](#) and [1 Timothy 2:11,12](#)) that a woman is not to preach or teach before men in the church. However, the woman does have a sphere in which she can exercise such gifts; and that sphere is large enough to keep her very busy and most useful in the church. To prophesy not only means forthtelling but also foretelling. Hence, the four daughters could do a lot of work in the church just in forthtelling (teaching) the women and children. Women can have great ministries in the church even if they are not permitted to preach and exercise authority over men in the church. Women and children need to be taught; and godly, dedicated women can be of great service in devoting themselves to this ministry. That the four daughters were not used to prophesy to Paul concerning the peril of going to Jerusalem is significant in this regards. God used a man, Agabus, to give this warning to Paul as

we will note in our next point.

It surely had to be a blessing to Philip to have four daughters of such spiritual caliber. It is a tribute to his home that they were morally and spiritually upright. Would that we had more homes like that today.

## **2. The Predicting by Agabus**

“And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul’s girdle [belt], and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle [belt], and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles” ([vv. 10, 11](#)). The main incident reported of Paul’s stay in Caesarea is Agabus’ prophesy and the reaction to it by Paul and his friends.

We have met Agabus before. He visited the church in Antioch some years earlier and “signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world, which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar” ([Acts 11:28](#)). As a result of his prediction in Antioch, the believers “determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea; Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” ([Acts 11:29,30](#)). Here in Caesarea, Agabus comes to make another timely prediction, and it involved Paul again. In fact, it was all about Paul, particularly about his desire to go to Jerusalem. We note the source of the prediction, the specifics of the prediction, the support for the prediction, and the striving against the prediction.

*The source of the prediction.* “Thus saith the Holy Ghost” ([v. 11](#)). As it was with the message to Paul in Tyre, so it is here in Caesarea—the Holy Spirit is the source of the prediction. Thus this prediction is more than man’s wishes and desires. This is God speaking through one of His prophets. That makes the prediction Divinely authoritative; and, hence, disobedience to it is disobedience to God. For those who would justify Paul going to Jerusalem, this fact makes justification impossible.

This is the final warning Paul receives about going to Jerusalem. Paul has been repeatedly warned by God about the consequences of going to Jerusalem. We learned in his counsel to the elders at Ephesus that these warnings had been going on for some time. He told the elders, “The Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide [await] me” ([Acts 20:23](#)).

God is so gracious to mankind. Again and again He warns men of the serious consequences of their wrong pathway. But when men continually reject His warning,

there comes a day when God ceases to give any more warning. As [Genesis 6:3](#) says, “My spirit shall not always strive with man.” Men are warned again and again about the consequences of rejecting Christ. Yet, like Paul refusing to heed the warning about going to Jerusalem, men everywhere fail to heed the warning about eternal hell fire. Therefore, the Spirit of God ceases working in their heart, and they plunge on headlong down the path of eternal condemnation. Let us heed God’s warnings when He first gives them to us instead of rejecting them again and again until it is too late.

*The specifics of the prediction.* “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle [belt], and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles” ([v. 11](#)). Paul was told who his enemies were (the unbelieving Jews), what evil they would do to him (bind him and turn him over to the custody of the Gentiles [Roman soldiers] who were ruling over the Jews), and where they would do the evil to him (Jerusalem). Being given such a detailed warning certainly took away any excuse he had for not avoiding the trouble.

Some insist that since this prediction did not specifically tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem that it was only preparing him for what was coming. This is not a logical conclusion at all, however. Warnings of this nature come not to prepare for the suffering ahead but obviously to prevent one from continuing on a course that will bring many harmful consequences. Where a prediction of future suffering is made that is not to encourage departure from a pursuit is in such a statement as, “Yea and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” ([2 Timothy 3:12](#)). Such a statement certainly does not suggest we should quit living the Christian life—and it is plain to see that fact in the text. But Paul’s warning about going to Jerusalem is an entirely different story. The repeated warnings were repeated calls to change his course and avoid Jerusalem. He had other tasks to do. God had called Paul to preach to the Gentiles “far from hence [Jerusalem]” ([Acts 22:21](#)), not to the Jews in Jerusalem. Going to Jerusalem would imperil his ability to fulfill his calling to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles. Being bound and imprisoned, Paul would be unable to minister the Gospel with the freedom he had before. He would be unable to travel to other cities and lands as he had been doing in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His two years of silence in the prison in Caesarea ([Acts 24:27](#)) shortly after the Jerusalem arrest certainly reinforces the fact of his disobedience. What blessings he could have been to others in those two years. He could have reached other areas with the Gospel, he could have given much more instruction and encouragement to Christians in places like Ephesus, Troas, and Tyre instead

of being in prison shut up from ministering. All imprisonments are not a result of disobedience, but the one in Caesarea certainly was; for it could have been avoided. Paul could have been busy preaching the Word in many places instead of spending day after day in prison.

*The support for the prediction.* “And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem” ([v. 12](#)). Paul’s friends earnestly endeavored to get him to heed the warnings of Agabus and not go to Jerusalem. These friends of Paul were by their pleading endeavoring to keep Paul from disobeying God’s way. There are those, however, who believe these who pleaded here with Paul not to go to Jerusalem were, in fact, encouraging Paul to be disobedient. Charles Simeon goes so far as to say. “This advice, though well meant on their parts, proceeded in reality from Satan himself.” Simeon illustrates to what surprising lengths people will go to defend Paul against the message of the Holy Spirit. If these friends were indeed speaking for Satan, then Agabus was speaking for Satan, too. To make that conclusion is gross blasphemy of the Holy Spirit!

We can thank God for people who try to keep us from disobedience. Our problem today is that we have too many friends who only encourage us to do evil. Paul had a great group of godly men as his companions in his travels, and the group with him in Caesarea were of the finest. Their united and earnest counsel was for him to avoid Jerusalem. They urged him to heed the message of the Holy Spirit which they themselves had not only heard in Caesarea from the mouth of Agabus but had also heard in Tyre through the Spirit of God speaking through believers there. We can profit greatly by godly friends but not if we ignore their wise counsel. And it is not difficult to discover if their counsel is wise. Just check it out with the revealed Word of God. In this case, Paul’s friends would be strongly vindicated for the advice they gave Paul because it was in accord with what God was speaking through His Spirit.

*The striving against the prediction.* “Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done” ([vv. 13, 14](#)). The words “break mine heart” have to do with breaking one’s purpose. J. A. Alexander said it means a “weakening . . . [of] my courage, and endeavoring to shake my resolution.”

That which makes it difficult to perceive Paul’s disobedience is that his arguments for going to Jerusalem sounded so noble. Speaking earlier with the Ephesian elders,

Paul camouflaged his disobedience in similar noble terms: “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” ([Acts 20:24](#)). Courage, willing to die for Christ, a desire to proclaim the Gospel, honor for Jesus Christ, and faithfulness in his calling were all used as arguments to his friends to justify his wrong course of action. But let us remember that disobedience generally comes dressed in the garb of some good thing. Gambling is promoted as a great help to our economy; abortion is pushed on the basis of freedom for women; alcohol is advertised as promoting great fun; and in the churches today, we use many unsanctified worldly methods but justify their use because they do such things as increase the attendance. Let someone argue against the unholy methods and they will be inundated with the fact that souls are being saved, attendance is growing, people are hearing the Word of God as a result, and show me your statistics (which if not as many as their statistics they conclude it proves them right and you wrong). The tempter does not dress in rags but in silks and satin.

Some believe Paul did not understand these warnings as that which forbid him to go to Jerusalem but only as predictions of what he faced. Hardly is this the case, however. Paul was certainly no dummy. If any man could perceive what the repeated warnings meant, he could. But he chose not to accept the warnings. That Paul knew what such warnings meant is plain by his response to other warnings. Paul was informed in Damascus early in his Christian life about a plot to kill him. He responded by being put over a wall in a basket to escape. He did not ignore the warning and walk out the gate where his would-be captors waited. Paul was warned in Iconium of a plot to stone him, and he wisely heeded the warning by leaving Iconium. Paul at one time was forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach in Asia, and he heeded the warning unlike his response to the forbidding by the Spirit about going to Jerusalem. Paul was warned in Berea and also Thessalonica of evil being stirred up against him. His response was to leave these towns as a result. In our last chapter we learned of Paul being warned in Greece about a plot against him if he took a ship from there to Syria. He heeded the warning and changed his course and went up through Philippi and over to Troas instead. Later on in Acts we will learn that Paul was warned by his nephew of a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem after his arrest. When he learned of this, he took his nephew to a centurion so action could be taken to thwart the conspiracy. But though Paul was warned and warned about the peril of going to Jerusalem, he absolutely refused to heed the warning. It is impossible to justify his trip to Jerusalem. It was nothing but disobedience.

Paul’s persistence in Caesarea about going to Jerusalem finally caused his friends

to stop pleading with him. “And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done” ([v. 14](#)). Paul’s friends acquiesced to Paul’s wishes. When they said, “The will of the Lord be done,” it was not an admission that they had been fighting the will of God and were now accepting it; but it was a way of expressing their resignation to Paul’s insistence. It is as if they had said, “If you think it is the will of God, go ahead and do it.” They obviously did not think it was the will of God but had come to the point where they saw it useless to argue anymore with Paul. J. A. Alexander says, “These words might also be explained as an expression of submission to the Lord’s will in allowing Paul to rush, as it were, blindfold to his own destruction.”

Paul’s third missionary journey ended in a manner it should not have. The journey should have ended in Antioch of Syria where the sending church was located. But the detour to Jerusalem caused the journey to end there. After his arrest in Jerusalem, which we will see in our next study, the rest of the book of Acts will see him as a prisoner, journeying wherever the Roman government takes him.

## XXIII. PURIFICATION IN JERUSALEM

### [Acts 21:15–39](#)

REFUSING TO HEED any warning about going to Jerusalem, Paul left Caesarea with his retinue and headed for the holy city some sixty-five miles south and east of Caesarea. The three to four day trip would be a melancholy trip especially for Paul’s companions, for they knew what awaited Paul in Jerusalem. This trip would also be the last trip for some years or even for the rest of Paul’s life—depending on how many imprisonments he had—which Paul would make as a free man. After he has been in Jerusalem a few days, he will no longer be free to decide when to stay or when to leave anywhere. The Roman government will make those decisions instead. And, typical of governments, Rome will take their time in making decisions about Paul’s locations regardless of how it affects his comforts and well-being. As an example, Paul can wait in prison in Caesarea for several years for all they care (cp. [Acts 24:25](#)) while they play politics with the Jews regarding his case.

The particular action which precipitated Paul’s trouble in Jerusalem was the participation of Paul in the observance of a purification vow in the Temple shortly after he arrived in the city. In this chapter we will consider the days before the purification ([vv. 15–20](#)), the desire for the purification ([vv. 20–27](#)), and the disturbance from the purification ([vv. 27–39](#)).

## A. THE DAYS BEFORE THE PURIFICATION

Scripture notes three particulars about Paul's visit in Jerusalem before he became involved in the purification vow. They are the residing with Mnason, the rejoicing of the brethren, and the reporting to the leaders.

### 1. The Residing With Mnason

“And after those days we took up our carriages [luggage], and went up to Jerusalem. There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge” ([vv. 15, 16](#)). Mnason is mentioned only this once in Scripture, but though the mention is brief and singular, we learn much from it about him that is most complimentary. We learn of his charity, courage, conversion, and country.

*His charity.* Paul and his companions needed lodging when they arrived in Jerusalem, but lodging at that time of the year was not easy to find. The Passover had just passed and the feast of Pentecost was now to be celebrated. A multitude of visitors would be in Jerusalem because of these important religious celebrations. Lodging would, therefore, be at a premium. But Mnason was able to provide room for Paul and his companions. To be able to provide lodging for the number in Paul's group indicated Mnason obviously had a large home. That he had room at this time for these men indicated that he preferred to give his charity to those who were followers of Jesus Christ. He practiced what Paul wrote in [Galatians 6:10](#): “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” Believers' benevolence should begin with believers.

*His courage.* Providing lodging for Paul would take some courage. Paul was not well liked in Jerusalem. Mnason would certainly be cognizant of the hostile attitudes amongst many of the Jews about Paul and the rumors spread about him even among the believing Jews ([v. 21](#)). But Mnason had the courage to stand for the faith and, hence, to support the faithful. Mnason was not the kind that supports the cause of Christ only when it is popular. He stood faithful at all times, and that takes a lot of courage—something we see little of today among professing believers.

*His conversion.* Scripture says Mnason was “an old disciple” ([v. 16](#)). The word translated “old” means “of long standing” (Vincent). This means his conversion would date back to the early days after the crucifixion and resurrection or even before then. A. C. Hervey said, “He may very probably be one of those Cypriots mentioned in [Acts 11:19,20](#), and so have been a disciple before the death of Stephen . . . If he had been one of Paul’s converts in the visit to Cyprus recorded in [chapter 13](#), Paul would have needed no introduction to him.”

It is good to see those who have been saved a long time still serving the Lord faithfully and earnestly. We have those in our churches today who when they retire from their secular job seem to think they ought to also retire from serving the Lord. When they rest from their secular labors, they want to rest on their laurels in their spiritual labors, too. Not so with Mnason; he had been saved a long time but was still in the trenches in the battle for Jesus Christ. May his number grow in our churches.

*His country.* Our text says Mnason was “of Cyprus” ([v. 16](#)). As we noted in our previous paragraph, Mnason may have been one of the Cypriots of [Acts 11:20](#) who helped carry the Gospel to Antioch of Syria in the early days of the church following the great persecution outbreak in Jerusalem. “It is worthy of remark how many points of contact are presented in this book [of Acts] between the apostolical history and the isle of Cyprus” (J. A. Alexander). Barnabas came from Cyprus ([Acts 4:36](#)); the first country Paul entered on his first missionary trip was Cyprus ([Acts 13:4](#)); Barnabas and Mark, after the split between Paul and Barnabas over Mark, “sailed unto Cyprus” ([Acts 15:39](#)) to minister the Gospel. And here in our text, we have Mnason of Cyprus hosting Paul in Jerusalem. Cyprus was indeed blessed of God, and its most famous sons have been those who carried high the banner of Jesus Christ. The greatest blessings a land can have are spiritual, and the greatest sons a land has are those who have lived faithfully for Jesus Christ.

## **2. The Rejoicing of the Brethren**

“And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly” ([v. 17](#)). What a different reception Paul received from the “brethren” this time than the first time he came to Jerusalem after his conversion ([Acts 9:26–28](#)). As we have noted in previous studies, Paul had treated Christians in Jerusalem very brutally; and the memories many saints would have of Paul would not be nice. Paul was doubtless responsible for much loss of possessions and life of the believers in his persecution



days, and it would not be easy to quickly receive Paul when he was converted.

So what is the reason why the believers now after some years receive him so gladly? The main reason Paul could be received gladly by the brethren was that Paul had faithfully proclaimed and practiced the Word of God over the years since his conversion. Paul had proven by his creed and conduct that he was a changed man and that he was indeed a fellow believer. David said in the Psalms, “They that fear thee will be glad when they see me, because I have hoped in thy word” ([Psalm 119:74](#)). You cannot make everybody happy in this life. You cannot make God’s crowd and the devil’s crowd happy at the same time—some try but none succeed in this attempt to walk on both sides of the street. You can only make one side happy at a time. Wise men will live in such a way that it makes glad the heart of God’s people all the time. There are a number of professing believers, however, who live in such a way that it sickens, saddens, and shocks God’s people. Which way do you live—do you cause the godly to be glad or sad? Do the faithful saints of God delight in your company or do they deplore your company?

### 3. The Reporting to the Leaders

“And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted [greeted] them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord” ([vv. 18–20](#)). The first meeting Paul had in Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey was with the laymen of the church. This second meeting was with the leaders of the church. These leaders included James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ ([Galatians 1:19](#), cp. [Matthew 13:55](#)) who would later author the epistle of James and who was the number one leader of the church in Jerusalem, and the elders (not deacons, as some think, but the presbuteros, the overseers, the pastors) of the church. This is probably the meeting in which Paul gave the contribution for the poor saints, for it is only proper and logical that he would give the gift to the leaders of the church so they could oversee its distribution. But whether or not he gave the gifts to the leaders in this meeting, we do know for sure that he gave a report of his ministry to them. We note the particularity of the report, the piety in the report, and the praise for the report.

*The particularity of the report.* Paul’s report was very detailed. The word “declared” and “particularly” reveal this fact. The word “declared” is translated from a word which means “expounded, set forth in detail” (Alexander). The word

“particularly” is in the Greek “by each (or every) one . . . every (thing) one by one” (Ibid.). Paul did not give a quick general report but gave a very detailed report. Believers in those days had more interest in missions than they generally do today so would be more patient in listening to a detailed report of the events of Paul’s work. Believers today will watch TV for hours, but a sermon by a preacher or a report by a missionary bores them quickly because the believers are so cold spiritually.

Paul’s report would be accompanied by live specimens of his work; for most of the companions of Paul were a result of Paul’s ministry and could, therefore, attest to the excellency of Paul’s ministry. We have some churches and other ministries today who boast of many conversions and dedications; but, unlike Paul, they lack the accompaniment of good examples to attest the validity of their claims.

*The piety in the report.* Note that the report is about “what things God had wrought” ([v. 19](#)). The emphasis was not on what Paul had done but on what God had done. True, God had done it “by his [Paul’s] ministry,” but it was God’s power that is to be credited. Paul was simply the vessel God used. It is still that way. Let us never forget it. Anything that we do that amounts to anything in the Lord’s work is a result of God’s power—we are just the vessel He chose to use. Our concern needs to be that we are a clean vessel ever ready for the Master’s use.

*The praise for the report.* “And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord” ([v. 20](#)). It was only right that God should be glorified; for as we noted in the last paragraph, it was His power that made possible the success of Paul’s ministry. Today, we prefer to glorify man instead of God. Men do not do well today in seeing God behind the blessings. Be it blessings at church or blessings in other areas of our lives, we glorify and praise everybody but God for them. Especially is this evident in the material world. As an example, God blesses the land with good weather so we can have abundant crops, but few give God any credit. Failure to credit God has its consequences, however; and none of them are good.

## **B. THE DESIRE FOR THE PURIFICATION**

Paul had hardly finished giving his report when the leaders of the Jerusalem church brought up the matter of keeping the law. It was good that they glorified God

regarding Paul's report, but they were obviously more interested in the observance of the ceremonial law than in the spreading of the Gospel. Their desire was that Paul observe a ceremonial law (in this case a law regarding purification involving a Nazarite vow) to show that he was not against the law but kept and respected the Mosaic law. We will note the cause of the desire, the counsel in the desire, and the compliance to the desire.

## 1. The Cause of the Desire

"Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe, and they are all zealous of the law; And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together; for they will hear that thou art come" ([vv. 20–22](#)). Two basic reasons are given why the church leaders desired Paul to participate in this observance of the law: the devotion of the people, and the declarations about Paul.

*The devotion of the people.* "They [the thousands of believers in Jerusalem] are all zealous of the law" ([v. 20](#)). The first reason they gave for Paul to observe a purification law was the zeal of the Jerusalem believers for the law. What they did not seem to realize is that this was no reason at all but was a great indictment upon the people. It is a great conflict of interest to say that they "believe" but are also "zealous for the law." The two—faith and the law—do not mix ([Galatians 3:11,12](#)). "This was a great weakness and mistake to be so fond of the shadows when the substance was come, to keep their necks under a yoke of bondage when Christ had come to make them free" (Matthew Henry). "The substance was in Christ, and when the substance came, it was foolishness to go back and take up the weak and beggarly elements of the world" (B. H. Carroll).

Because the people were zealous of the law, the leaders of the Jerusalem church wanted Paul to show that he was just like them. They figured this would appease the people, that it would make everybody happy. Were they ever wrong! It did not do one good thing. All it did was upset people. The Gospel upsets people, too. But it also saves people! Observing the ceremonial law of Moses, however, did not save anyone.

It is a sad commentary on the Jerusalem leaders that they did not try to correct this zeal for the law in the believers. They should have condemned it. But instead

they are condoning it and endeavoring to get Paul to pay his respects to their zeal for the law. Pitiful. However, a dozen or so years later, this matter of observing the ceremonial law was taken care with finality; for Titus, the Roman ruler, came to Jerusalem and destroyed the city and the Temple. That ended all the observances in the Temple that the believers in the Jerusalem church were so zealous about. The destruction of the Temple left them with nothing but the substance; the shadow was destroyed. All they had was Christ; they no longer had the burdensome ceremony that foreshadowed Him. Now that is a sarcastic way of looking at their situation, but it is needed to get the point across. They had no business being zealous for the law. Christ had come; they did not need the ceremonies anymore! When the Temple was destroyed, it was a good thing for them; for it got them away from the shadow and focused on the substance Jesus Christ, Who was all they needed.

*The declarations about Paul.* “They are informed of thee” ([v. 21](#)). These leaders of the Jerusalem church told Paul that some bad stories (bad in their opinion) had been going around about him. He was accused of teaching the Jewish believers to “forsake [we get “apostasy” from the Greek word here] Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs” ([v. 21](#)). We note the informers, intensity, inaccuracy, and intent of these declarations.

First, the *informer*s of the declarations. The leaders of the church of Jerusalem did not tell Paul who the informers were. They did not identify his accusers. The leaders simply said that the believers “are informed of thee.” This refusing to identify the informers is a condemnation of the church leaders. It gives away their bias in the situation. They try to appear to be a supporter of Paul, but in truth they really aren’t. The informers were not good people, as we will note shortly when we note the inaccuracy and intent of the declarations about Paul. But the church leaders in Jerusalem skipped over that fact and pressed Paul to prove himself.

Whenever anyone reports to you that bad things are said of you, and then they refuse to identify your accusers, you are justified in suspecting that the one speaking to you is not really your supporter, as they want to appear. Rather, they are sympathetic with your accusers—and may even be your main accuser. Pastors especially need to be alert to this fact. When some member comes in and tells the pastor that some are accusing him of this or that but refuses to name the accusers when pressed to do so, put it down that the member is part of the accusing group! Experience has confirmed that again and again.

Second, the *intensity* of the declarations. These declarations against Paul were very earnest. They were not just casual comments made over the back fence by a

few church dissidents. “Informed” ([v. 21](#)) is translated from the Greek word from which we get our English word “catechism.” It means to instruct in detail. These accusers of Paul were going to great length to destroy Paul. They were instructing the people carefully and in detail with accusations that would prejudice the people against Paul. It was a very organized attack against Paul. This is characteristic of evil. Would that believers would be as earnest in doing God’s work.

Third, the *inaccuracy* of the declarations. Like accusations which church dissidents make against the pastor or others they do not like, and like accusations the liberals make against the conservatives, these accusations were a most inaccurate representation of Paul’s action and attitudes. Truth was twisted out of context and sweeping conclusions were made without warrant. The specific accusation had to do with circumcision. The accusation in [verse 21](#) was that he forbade it. From that accusation they concluded he taught folk to forsake all the law of Moses and that they should not walk in its customs. What Paul really taught was that circumcision was not necessary for salvation. He did not forbid it; he simply said it was not necessary. No mention of salvation is, of course, found in the accusation. The accusers were not interested in salvation, only in their legalism. As for the whole law of Moses, Paul never taught anyone to forsake the moral laws which are embodied in the law of Moses. But he most certainly did tell people that now that Christ had come, we no longer need to observe the ceremonial law which foreshadows Him and which was such a burden to observe ([Galatians 3:19, 23–25; 4:9,10; 5:1,13](#)).

Fourth, the *intent* of the declarations. The leaders of the church of Jerusalem did not discern the intent or they never would have advised Paul to do what he did, for they would have known it would have accomplished nothing good. When people accuse as Paul was accused, you are not going to satisfy the accuser by observing some little ceremony, or by making some token concession or compromise, or by presenting some more evidence. The accusations were not to get Paul to correct himself but to prejudice the people against him so his ministry would come to naught. You do not appease these accusers; you expose them if you want to do any good. Rather than get Paul to observe some aspect of the law, the Jerusalem church leaders should have exposed the folly of being zealous for the law.

Church troublemakers are just like Paul’s accusers. As an example, their accusations of the pastor are not made constructively to help correct a problem. They just do not like his message and want him out of the way period! The accused may try to counter the accusations by doing something here or something there to hopefully appease the accusers. But the troublemakers will not be appeased by that sort of thing. They do not like the pastor, and the only action they will be satisfied with is his dismissal.

## 2. The Counsel in the Desire

“Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them [pay their expenses], that they may shave their heads, and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing, but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from [things] strangled, and from fornication” ([vv. 23–25](#)). Here the leaders of the Jerusalem church tell Paul they want him to participate in a purification observance in the Temple of four men of the church who had a Nazarite vow (the shaving of the head in [verse 24](#) identifies the nature of the vow). In examining this counsel for Paul, we note the planning, the paying, and the persuasion in the counsel.

*The planning in the counsel.* The leaders of the Jerusalem church gave Paul such detailed instructions as to what they wanted him to do that it was obvious they had planned this out in advance. The speed at which they switched the subject from Paul’s missionary trip experiences to the keeping of the law also indicates that this concern about keeping the law was not something that just came up, but it was something they were waiting to bring up. As soon as they knew Paul was in town or even as soon as they knew he was planning to come to Jerusalem, they set about to make arrangements for him to participate in a Mosaic law observance.

Nothing about this planning has a good smell to it. It indicates the priorities of the church leaders of Jerusalem were mixed up and that their doctrine was faulty. They needed to be teaching the people the truth about the law instead of condoning and encouraging them in the keeping of the law. Instead of pressuring Paul into vindicating their beliefs and practices, they ought to have been defending Paul’s creed and conduct to the people. These leaders were being led, not leading. They let the thousands of church members who were zealous for the law lead them down the wrong path. This, of course, is not an uncommon situation in churches even today. Many church leaders compromise with their congregation in order to keep peace and their position. Today it is not condoning observances of the ceremonial law but condoning divorce, membership in the lodge, worldly music in the services, attendance at the cinema, and other sinful practices of the congregation.

*The paying in the counsel.* “Be at charges with them [pay their expenses]” ([v. 24](#)). The church leaders tell Paul to participate in this purification observance as a sponsor. The offerings required for this purification were at least three beasts per person ([Numbers 6:13–15](#)), and this was “beyond the means of the very poor, and consequently it was thought an act of piety for a rich man to pay the necessary expenses and thus enable his poor countrymen to complete their vow” (Howson). Paul was obviously not a rich man, so how could he pay the expenses? The logical answer to that question is that the Jerusalem leaders thought Paul could use some of the gift money which he brought with him to give aid to the poor saints in Jerusalem. But this, of course, would be gross misuse of the money. Hardly would the Gentile believers be inclined to sacrifice money as they did to help some poor Jewish believer pay for an observance of a Mosaic law which was done away with at Calvary.

Asking Paul to pay—whether from his own pocket or from the gift money—was a very selfish attitude by the church leaders in Jerusalem. They had planned this thing all along but were unwilling to pay the expenses. Beware of those people who plan but do not want to pay. There are a number in church who are this way. They have grandiose plans for the church, but they do not have grandiose plans for their paying anything to fulfill the plans. They are always soliciting people to do things, but they themselves do little. They want to eat in a fancy place but are unwilling to pick up the tab.

*The persuasion in the counsel.* “As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from [things] strangled, and from fornication” ([v. 25](#)). These church leaders were pretty clever. To encourage Paul to do something which he might not be willing to do, they make sure he knows they are not requiring Gentiles to keep the law. After all, Trophimus, a Gentile, was part of Paul’s group that was meeting with the church leaders; and he would be hearing all this counsel. The leaders had to pacify him lest they appear to be going back on their word regarding the agreement made in the Jerusalem council about the law some years before.

But this concession to the Gentiles only condemned them. It indicated they were separating the Jews and the Gentiles into two separate groups, requiring one thing for one group and another thing for the other group. This was indeed a double standard. This double standard was practiced by Peter in Antioch some years before, and Paul rebuked Peter for it ([Galatians 2:11–14](#)). Now the leaders of the church of Jerusalem

are openly practicing this double standard again. The church is one group—not Jew and Gentile. Peter told those at the conference on legalism in Jerusalem some years earlier that God “put no difference between us [Jews] and them [Gentiles], purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” ([Acts 15:9,10](#)). Paul reiterated this truth when he said, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” ([Galatians 3:28](#)). But the Jewish leaders were ignoring the unity of the believers. They would endorse a division, have two Gospels, and keep the Jewish believers under bondage to the law. Sometimes denominationalism does the same, and closed communion also divides. Ecumenicalism is not the alternative, of course; but the unity of the believers is something that needs more emphasis today.

### **3. The Compliance to the Desire**

“Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them” ([v. 26](#)). Paul complied completely with the desire of the Jerusalem church leaders. We agree with G. Campbell Morgan who said, “I hold that Paul made the greatest mistake of his ministry on this occasion.” We note the price of the compliance, prediction for the compliance, preference in the compliance, policy in the compliance, and plea for the compliance by Paul to the desire of the Jerusalem church leaders for him to observe a Mosaic ceremonial law.

*The price of the compliance.* Money was not the only cost of this compliance, the greatest cost was that it took away Paul’s freedom to travel throughout the world spreading the Gospel as he had been called to do and was doing. It put him in seclusion in prison in Caesarea for two years and then after a boat trip to Rome, another two years of confinement. The work which he could have been doing instead had he not gone to Jerusalem is enough to condemn the Jerusalem visit let alone the participation in this Mosaic ceremony which thoroughly condemns the visit.

*The prediction for the compliance.* Paul’s compliance reminds us that one sin leads to another. Paul was wrong in coming to Jerusalem; and then when he got to Jerusalem, he did another wrong in trying to mix law and grace. One sin opens the door to other sins. One sin predicts more sinning. The idea that it won’t matter if we



compromise a little bit here or there is a trap to doing more evil.

*The preference in the compliance.* One thing that condemns Paul so much in his compliance is the preference he demonstrated regarding whose advice he would follow. He heeded the advice of the Jerusalem church leaders so quickly and completely even though they did not have his best interests at heart; while, on the other hand, he refused to heed the repeated advice to not go to Jerusalem given by godly saints, fellow workers, and a prophet who did have his best interests at heart. Even though the Spirit of God gave the warning to not go to Jerusalem, Paul persisted in going. The advice of the Jerusalem church leaders was certainly not given by the Spirit of God. It was bad advice all around—doctrinally and otherwise. Yet, Paul quickly heeded this advice. However, it is the habit of men to quickly accept bad advice when they continually refuse good advice. When one rebels against the holy Word of God, he will be found readily heeding the unholy word of man.

*The policy in the compliance.* Paul's compliance was to practice the corrupt policy of doing evil that good may come. Keeping the law had been done away with at Calvary. To practice it, as Paul did, to show it was still valid was to do wrong. Yet, he did this wrong in order that good may come, namely, the salvation of Jews. But doing evil that good may come is a very bad policy. It defiles and destroys. G. Campbell Morgan said, "The teaching of this incident is that love must ever be loyal to truth. To sacrifice a principle for a moment in the hope of gaining an opportunity to establish it afterwards, is always to fail. We never win an opportunity that way."

*The plea for the compliance.* Some plea in favor of Paul's compliance by saying that Paul said, "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" ([1 Corinthians 9:22](#)). Many would like this text to have no qualifications. But to interpret the text that way allows us to say that I became a murderer to save murderers, an adulterer to save adulterers, a drunkard to save drunkards, a lawbreaker to save lawbreakers. Obviously that is not the meaning of the text. Paul was not to keep the Mosaic ceremonial law, which Calvary ended, in order to save those who were still devoted to the law.

## C. THE DISTURBANCE FROM THE PURIFICATION

Paul's participation in the purification observance in the Temple resulted in a great disturbance in Jerusalem. We will note the creation of the disturbance, the culprits of the disturbance, the charges of the disturbers, the cruelty of the disturbers, the closing by the disturbance, and the cessation of the disturbance.

## **1. The Creation of the Disturbance**

When Paul was seen and recognized in the Temple by some unbelieving Jews, they "stirred up all the people . . . [and] all the city was moved" ([Acts 20:27,30](#)) by their "Crying out" ([v. 28](#)) their accusations of Paul. When "The cry went over Jerusalem; it was like touching a powder magazine with a spark of fire; the streets were soon thronged with people" (B. H. Carroll). It is a sad commentary on the people of Jerusalem that they could be so quickly and easily "stirred up" and the whole city "moved" in such a short time against one who has been falsely accused. Truly this is another illustration of the fact that lies can move people to action much quicker than truth. It is also an illustration of the fact that "It is always easier to rouse men to fight for their 'religion' than to live by it" (Maclaren).

The supposedly great plan of James and the elders of the Jerusalem church for making peace with the legalists blew up right in Paul's face with this disturbance. B. H. Carroll said of this plan for Paul to take part in the purification observance, "Did it do any good? Not a bit in the world. It was the most unwise thing that could possibly have been done, for it put Paul conspicuously in the Temple for a week. It required seven days to consummate this vow [note [verse 27](#)], and Jerusalem was full of Jews who were not Christians, from all over the world, and somebody from some of the places where he had been would be sure to recognize him, and they hated him worse than they did the devil." As we said earlier, this legalistic spirit needed to be attacked, not appeased. It needed to be condemned, not conciliated. It needed to be exposed, not embraced. You do not make peace with evil. The thinking that you can get along with evil by some compromise is a mirage that soon disappears when your peace making efforts make it easier for evil to attack you. Lower your standards in church to accommodate the carnal people, and you will give carnality a victory. As an example, allowing Christian Rock music in the church only makes the church's music program reek with carnality.

## **2. The Culprits of the Disturbance**

"And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia,

when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him” ([v. 27](#)). These instigators of the disturbance were doubtless from Ephesus. Asia is the province in which Ephesus was located, and it was in Ephesus that Paul had his main ministry in Asia. Thus, the unbelieving Jews in Ephesus would be especially hostile to Paul. When they saw him in Jerusalem, they were not able to contain themselves. “Regarding him as an apostate, and as such no longer entitled to the privileges of a Jew, they were naturally moved with indignation, when they saw him in the temple” (J. A. Alexander).

It needs to be noted that the culprits were religious people, in fact, very devoutly religious. To come all the way from the province of Asia to Jerusalem for special religious days indicates considerable devotion to religion. But as history verifies again and again, some of the worst persecution for believers has come from very religious people. Catholics have shed the blood of multitudes of believers over the centuries. The same is true of devout Moslems and their hostilities towards believers. All enemies of God’s people are not atheists or non-religious. Religions that do not exalt Jesus Christ as the Savior of mankind will greatly oppose those who do. Satan delights to persecute through religion, for it is a most effective disguise of evil.

### **3. The Charges of the Disturbers**

“Crying out, Men of Israel, help. This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place; and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple)” ([Acts 20:28,29](#)). To examine the charges made by the disturbers against Paul, we will note the site of the charges and the slander of the charges.

*The site of the charges.* The evil character of the attack is evidenced in where the charges against Paul were made known. It was in the Temple before the crowd where the charges were made. The accusers had no interest in taking their accusations to a proper judicial site where the case could be heard with justice. They hated Paul and wanted to raise a mob—which they did. And they also wanted to execute Paul with mob justice—which they almost did.

These accusers of Paul are like church dissidents who never take their grievances to any responsible authority to have them examined in a just manner. Rather, they voice their grievances to others in the church vestibule or other gathering places

with a good bit of volume so others standing around can hear the charges without difficulty. This way they hope to convict the criticized person before the criticized person has a chance to answer the charges. This helps to influence voting in church elections and in other church matters. It is as wicked as the devil, but church troublemakers do it all the time.

*The slander of the charges.* The charges were twofold, and in both cases they were untrue. The charges had to do with Paul's teaching and trespassing.

First, the slanderous *teaching charge*. This charge said Paul taught "all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place [the Temple]" ([v. 28](#)). This was a general charge which lacked specifics, a typical type of accusation by people lacking character and evidence. Paul was not "against the people"—a vague charge that was given only to incite. Also he did not teach against the law, he just said the law had no effect on salvation. Furthermore, his presence in the Temple ought to have stopped the anti-Temple charge. He certainly would not be in the Temple observing a Mosaic ceremony if he was teaching against the Temple.

Second, the slanderous *trespassing charge*. This charge said Paul "brought Greeks also into the temple, and [therefore] hath polluted this holy place" ([v. 28](#)). There were places in the Temple where a Gentile was prohibited from going. Death was the punishment for disobeying this rule, and the Romans consented to this punishment.

How ready the enemies of Paul were to make this charge public even though it was a charge made solely on supposition; for [verse 29](#) says, "For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple" ([v. 29](#)). They had not actually seen Trophimus in the Temple; they only "supposed" he had been there. But the enemies of Paul were not bothered that it was only supposition. Accusers of this kind do not need facts to accuse. Hence, a good person is not exempt from accusations from these kind of people.

How often in church this sort of accusation spreads like wildfire. On mere supposition the accusers conclude all sorts of evil conduct. To check the accusations out is not their desire. They only want to condemn and destroy the accused. You cannot reason with this bunch.

#### **4. The Cruelty of the Disturbers**

Here we focus on the physical attack on Paul. Those who verbally assault will

eventually physically assault. Those who use their tongues evilly against people will soon be using their hands evilly against the same. So it was with Paul's accusers. "They . . . laid hands on him . . . took Paul, and drew him out of the temple . . . went about to kill him . . . [by] beating of Paul" ([Acts 20:27,30–32](#)). How cruel was the treatment Paul received in the Temple. The grabbing him (laid hands on him and took him), dragging him (drew him out of the Temple), and beating him (with the intention of killing him) was the physical abuse the great ambassador for Jesus Christ received from his enemies. It fulfilled the warnings Paul had received repeatedly on his way to Jerusalem. And "This, though not perceived to be so at the moment, either by himself or others, eventually proved to be the end of his ministry at large, and the commencement of his long apostleship in bonds" (Alexander).

Wherever Christ is rejected—as He was here in the Temple—society will become more cruel. This explains why we are seeing more and more cruelty in our nation both in the rise of crime and in the frequent failure of the courts to deal firmly with evil. It also explains why evil nations—such as Russia, Japan, Germany, China, Iraq, and others have treated war prisoners so barbarically.

While the treatment of Paul was unjustly cruel and reflected the rejection of Christ, we need to remember that the cruel treatment of Paul was also the consequence for his failure to heed the warnings given him about staying away from Jerusalem. Paul suffered much for the cause of Christ, but he also suffered much for refusing to heed the leading of the Spirit of God. May we pay attention to this warning.

## **5. The Closing by the Disturbance**

It is worthy to note here that when Paul was dragged out of the Temple, "forthwith [at once] the doors were shut" ([v. 30](#)). Various reasons have been advanced as to why the Temple doors were closed at this time. One reason is that the Temple officials did not want the uproar to spill over into the Temple. The most obvious reason the doors were closed in regards to Paul is that the charges made against Paul included bringing "Greeks [Gentiles] also into the temple, and [thus] hath polluted this holy place" ([v. 28](#)). Thus the Temple officials would want to close the Temple doors until such time as Paul would no longer be a threat (as they supposed) to polluting the Temple.

We note several instructive observations from this closing of the Temple doors in regards to Paul. They have to do with a perverting and a prohibiting.

*The perverting.* The shutting of the doors is an illustration of the perverted sense of holiness that Judaism had. It was all right to drag Paul out of the Temple and beat him to death (if they could) without trial. But how terrible that a foreigner should enter the Temple to worship. It was all right to be physically abusive to Paul, but he must not be allowed to bring a Gentile into the Temple with him. When Christ was crucified, the same perverted view of holiness was seen, for the accusers of Christ “went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover” ([John 18:28](#)). They could lie in their accusations of Him and be so unjust in their seeking the blood of Christ, but they dare not pollute themselves ceremoniously by entering the judgment hall. How perverted and hypocritical is such behavior. Today we still behave that way. Some folk get all upset if a certain order of service is not followed in the church but hesitate not to gossip and spread their divisive criticism in the church to any and all who will listen to them. Others are so very concerned about whether a man has hair a bit over his ears or not; but they take no thought of their own sour spirit, poor giving habits, cheating on the income tax, and all the filth they watch on TV.

*The prohibiting.* Having the doors of the Temple closed to prohibit Paul from entering the Temple is an illustration of the fact that God’s choicest servants are often shut out of organized religion. How often the best of God’s preachers are shunned by denominational officials, excluded by religious leaders, and uninvited to large religious conferences. Like the prophet Amos, many of God’s best are told to “prophesy not again any more at Bethel; for it is the king’s chapel, and it is the king’s court” ([Amos 7:13](#)).

## **6. The Cessation of the Disturbance**

“As they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain [Claudius Lysias, [Acts 23:26](#)] of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them; and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left [ceased] beating of Paul” ([vv. 31, 32](#)). A great uproar in the city of Jerusalem was building over Paul, but it did not last—fortunately for Paul, or he would have been killed.

In considering this cessation of the disturbance in the city of Jerusalem, we will note the informing of the soldiers, the intervening by the soldiers, the incarceration by the soldiers, the investigation by the soldiers, the invective before the soldiers, and the ignorance of the soldiers.

*The informing of the soldiers.* “Tidings came unto the chief captain” ([v. 31](#)). Rome occupied Jerusalem. Helping them to control the city was the tower of Antonia, located on the northwest corner of the Temple and connected to the Temple. In this tower a group of soldiers was located, and from it guards could see what was going on in Jerusalem especially at the Temple where great crowds would be gathered daily. Rome wanted no riots, no stirring up of the people; for it could pose a threat to Rome’s rule. The tower provided Rome much help for spotting commotions right at their beginning. When the riot broke out in the Temple over Paul, one or more of the guards in the tower could immediately see the trouble and would inform proper officials who would then take necessary action. This is how the Roman garrison in Jerusalem was alerted to the riot going on in the Temple.

Rome had a good system for keeping informed of all that was going on in Jerusalem. It helped keep the Jews subdued. But once in awhile the Jews forgot about Rome’s presence and, hence, got themselves in big trouble. This reminds us that God is always aware of what we are saying and doing and even thinking; but we often forget about this fact; and, as a result, we get ourselves in big trouble for so doing.

*The intervening by the soldiers.* Three things can be said about the intervention. It was speedy, successful, and solitary.

First, it was *speedy* in that once informed they “immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them [the mob]” ([v. 32](#)). “Immediately” and “ran” emphasizes the speed. The speed is what saved Paul’s life. God can indeed intervene in quick order. Sometimes we get into circumstances in which we think we are a goner; but God can rescue us with great speed if He so desires. Would that we were as speedy in serving Him. We like God to be speedy in coming to our help, but we too often drag our feet when He asks us to help Him in His service.

Second, it was *successful*, for “when they [the mob] saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left [ceased] beating of Paul” ([v. 32](#)). The presence of law enforcement officials does indeed hinder crime. Those who would take the policemen off the streets have a lot to learn about controlling crime.

Third, it was *solitary*. None of the thousands of saints who were zealous for the law helped rescue Paul. They who encouraged Paul to observe the Mosaic ceremony gave him no support when he got in trouble. How true this is of sin. Though you yield to its solicitations; it will forsake you when you get in trouble because of it. So it is with bartenders, tobacco manufacturers, abortionists, casinos, and other

iniquitous advocates.

*The incarceration by the soldiers.* “Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains” ([v. 33](#)). Paul will henceforth be a prisoner of Rome for a number of years. It is a sad scene for it need not have happened. But Paul’s failure here is a stark reminder that we can indeed bring great limitations upon ourselves in serving the Lord when we insist on fulfilling our own desires instead of God’s desires. Self will never enhance freedom, not even in the best of saints.

*The investigation by the soldiers.* “The chief captain . . . commanded him to be bound with two chains, and demanded who he was, and what he had done. And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude . . . he could not know the certainty for the tumult” ([vv. 33, 34](#)). Two things are striking about the investigation: the incarceration before the investigation and the inadequacy of the investigation.

First, the *incarceration before the investigation*. Paul was incarcerated then investigated. This would seem on the surface to be a gross injustice. But as we learn in [verse 38](#), the captain thought Paul was a notorious Egyptian who was a leader of a group of murderers. Thinking Paul to be that man, the captain did what he would be expected to do under the circumstances. We would like to see this practiced more in our day instead of the lenient way in which criminals are treated.

Second, the *inadequacy of the investigation*. The answers of the crowd regarding Paul made little sense. The chief captain could not figure out from their answers what Paul had done. Several trials later, the case still will be cloudy; for the accusers really never had a case. They simply hated Paul.

*The invective before the soldiers.* When Paul was led away from the mob by the soldiers, “The people followed after, crying, Away with him” ([v. 36](#)). How this reminds us of the experience of Christ. This was “the same cry [[Luke 23:18](#)] that was uttered near the same spot, many years before, by a deluded and infuriated rabble, thirsting for the blood of the same person whom, within a week, they had welcomed with hosannas, as the true Messiah” (Alexander). Though Paul should not have been in Jerusalem, yet in this instant he was like Christ in that he and his message were not wanted and, therefore, against him was hurled the same invectives that were hurled against his Redeemer. The world has never been cordial to God’s choicest servants.

How unjust was the invective. The crowd could not offer a good case against



Paul when asked, yet they demanded a sentence and a severe one. This evil shows up in every age. It is especially used against the godly. As an example, we must not have the Bible or prayer in school nor must we teach creation in public schools. The sentence is strong, but the case has never been tried to see what harm it is doing (do not confuse court decisions, which pervert the meaning of the constitution, with a trying of the case). The accusers show the wickedness of their heart when they shout out such invectives. They are not interested in justice or fairness at all. They simply hate truth and want to stop it.

*The ignorance of the soldiers.* “And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? Art not thou that Egyptian, who before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city” ([vv. 37–39](#)). Here was one of the greatest servants of God ever, and the chief captain and soldiers are terribly ignorant of him. The captain thought Paul to be the notorious Egyptian who was a leader of a group of murderers who had plagued the area for awhile.

This ignorance is so typical of the world today. Many folk who know all the ins and outs of politics, business, sports, Hollywood, etc. are dunces when it comes to spiritual things. They know the names of famous people in the world, but not the names of choice servants of God. They know the names of the best selling books of the world, but cannot name the books of the Bible. They are all thumbs when you talk to them about spiritual things, and their ignorance will bring them eternal suffering unless the grace of God intervenes. You may not be learned in many areas but do not be ignorant spiritually. No ignorance will hurt you more.

## **XXIV. PLEA BEFORE TROUBLEMAKERS**

[Acts 21:39–22:29](#)

THOUGH RESCUED FROM the rioting crowd that wanted to kill him, Paul did not want to leave them without speaking to them. So he asked the Roman military captain, Claudius Lysias, who was in charge of the rescue, “I beseech thee, suffer [permit] me to speak unto the people” ([Acts 21:39](#)). The Roman captain, who at first mistakenly thought Paul was a notorious Egyptian who was the leader of a murderous group of

men, granted Paul's request. Paul was in a good location at the time to speak to the people, for he "stood on the stairs" ([Acts 21:40](#)) of the "castle" ([Acts 21:37](#)) where he had been taken. This doubtless being the stairs of the tower of Antonia where the soldiers were billeted.

Paul termed his speech a "defense" ([Acts 22:1](#)). It was a plea for acquitting him of the charges the crowd had made against him. He gave his speech in the "Hebrew" language ([Acts 21:40](#)) instead of the Greek—the language he had just been using when speaking to the Roman captain ([Acts 21:37](#)). Many in the crowd would understand Hebrew much better; but more importantly, it was the Jews' language and using it got the Jews' attention better than speaking in Greek. Therefore, "when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence" ([Acts 22:2](#)). Paul was fluent in both Greek and Hebrew which says something about his intelligence and education.

In all of this commotion over Paul, it is instructive to note that the one who is acting with the most composure and calmness is Paul himself. He certainly was a man who could control himself in the most difficult of circumstances. Here he is sought after by a murderous crowd, bound in chains by Roman soldiers, yet speaking with great calmness and dignity to the clamorous crowd below him. In the study of Paul, it is repeatedly evident that he is a man always in control of his situation. He may be harassed and even stoned, but he never loses his composure. Even in his sharp exchange later with Ananias, the wicked high priest, Paul kept control of his situation ([Acts 23:2–5](#)). We all need to be more earnest in the controlling of our passions. Scripture says, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" ([Proverbs 16:32](#)). Today, the world seems prone to exonerate poor control of one's passions, saying we must not inhibit folks from expressing themselves. That is all a bunch of nonsense as the results of poor control of our passions will quickly confirm.

To study this plea by Paul before the troublemakers in Jerusalem, we will consider the credentials of Paul ([Acts 22:1–5](#)), the conversion of Paul ([Acts 22:6–16](#)), the calling for Paul ([Acts 22:17–21](#)), and the contempt for Paul ([Acts 22:22–29](#)).

## A. THE CREDENTIALS OF PAUL

Paul begins his defense by giving his pro-Jew credentials which are very good ones. It was important that he make "prominent whatever marked him as a Jew, in order

to refute the charge on which he was arrested, namely, that of traitorous hostility to the religion of his fathers” (Alexander). These credentials include his identification, education, and dedication.

## **1. His Identification**

“Men, brethren, and fathers . . . I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia” ([Acts 22:1,3](#)). This confirmation of his Jewish identity (the crowd knew who he was) was probably said as much for the Roman soldiers as for the Jewish crowd. The captain had said to Paul just moments before that he thought Paul was the notorious Egyptian leader of a group of murderers. Paul told the captain his correct identity, and now this identifying by Paul in his speech would repeat publicly what Paul had just told the captain privately ([Acts 21:39](#)). It would let the captain know that Paul was not saying one thing in private and another in public. Other soldiers probably also thought Paul was that notorious Egyptian leader. But Paul by giving his identity at the start of his speech cleared up who he was and who he was not—which was an important thing to do at the outset of his speech. Though Paul was now speaking in Hebrew, the Roman soldiers, at least the officers, would understand him. These soldiers had to know some Hebrew language or they would not be able to govern in Jerusalem very well.

In giving his identity, Paul really emphasized his Jewish sympathies here at the beginning of the speech, which was important to do if he was going to make a good defense against the accusations made against him. He emphasized his Jewish sympathies by the “verily” ([Acts 22:3](#)) and by the fact that he addressed the crowd as “brethren, and fathers” ([Acts 22:1](#)). Thus he informed them he was not only a Jew in the flesh but also one in the spirit.

Informing his listeners that he was born in Tarsus of Cilicia would perk up the interest of the Roman soldiers and also gain their respect, for Tarsus was a city which strongly supported Rome. It did not hurt Paul to have some respect from the Roman soldiers either if he was to continue his speech with their protection.

With this sagacious identifying of himself, Paul evidences right at the beginning of his speech that he is an excellent communicator and knows how to deal with his audiences whoever they are. This example should not be lost by preachers. Some seem mostly interested in bombastic rhetoric, thumping of the pulpit, and the repeating of pet phrases. But they ought to earnestly study the Word of God instead in order to give forth a wise presentation of Divine truth that is applicable to the audience to whom they speak. Preachers are not to be concerned about impressing an audience with how fiery or articulate they are, but they need to be primarily

concerned about giving a message to the audience that the audience needs.

## 2. His Education

“Brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers” ([Acts 22:3](#)). We have noted in the early chapters of this book that Paul was a very educated man. He was no back number. Here he emphasizes the high quality of his Jewish education by telling the crowd that he sat under the teaching of the famed teacher Gamaliel. No teacher was so respected by the Jews as Gamaliel was. To sit under him meant you were indeed “taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers” ([Acts 22:3](#)). To be able to say you had been educated under the famed teacher Gamaliel in Paul’s time was like saying that you had graduated with a law degree from Harvard or Yale or some other like prestigious college in our time. So Paul’s education, as well as his identification, emphasized his Jewish loyalties and interests. Though he was from Tarsus of Cilicia, he still came to Jerusalem for education under Gamaliel. He did, of course, make use of education opportunities in Tarsus; but as a loyal Jew, he also came to Jerusalem to sit under the feet of the most respected teacher of the Jews.

Even though Gamaliel was a great teacher in the eyes of the Jews, he certainly did not know much about Jesus Christ as is seen in [Acts 4](#). How typical this is of most of the great and famous teachers in our schools today. They know much about many subjects; but when it comes to the most important one of all, they are woefully ignorant. Like Gamaliel, they receive many accolades from the world; but when it is all over, they will die and go to hell because they did not know much about Jesus Christ. Paul did not follow Gamaliel in his ignorance of Christ. He saw the light about Christ and saw that He was the One we need to know the most. Therefore, he wrote in one of his epistles, “That I may know him [Christ]” ([Philippians 3:10](#)). May we all seek to know more about Jesus Christ.

## 3. His Dedication

“Was zealous towards God as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate [council] of the elders; from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished” ([Acts 22:3–5](#)). Paul is not proud of his persecution record, but he brings it up to remind the Jewish crowd before him of his Jewish loyalties and zeal. He had good support for his claim, too;

for the high priest and elders (Sanhedrin), many of whom were doubtless listening to him here, gave him authority to go to Damascus to persecute believers.

This reminder to the people of his past zeal for Judaism—a zeal far above those in the crowd (cp. [Galatians 1:14](#))—not only would refresh the crowd’s memory about Paul’s dedication in the Jews’ religion, but it would also make the soon to be reported story of Paul’s conversion to Jesus Christ to carry added impact upon the Jews. If a man with Paul’s zeal for the Jewish religion converts to Christianity, that should cause this Jewish crowd to sit up and take notice that this faith in Jesus Christ is indeed something special. If Paul was a disinterested and unfaithful person in the Jewish religion, it would not be surprising if he converted to Christianity; and, therefore, it would understandably not cause the Jews to be much impressed with Christianity. But when a man with Paul’s zeal for Judaism converts to Christianity, it has to really commend the greatness of Christianity to any thinking Jewish person. Christianity is truly great whether big men or small men convert to it. However, when a man such as Paul would convert to Christianity, wise people ought to pay attention.

## B. THE CONVERSION OF PAUL

The account of Paul’s conversion is given three times in the book of Acts ([9:1–18](#), [22:6–16](#), and [26:9–18](#)). We have already covered in detail the account given in [Acts 9](#). Now we will cover the second account of his conversion which is a somewhat briefer account than the one in [Acts 9](#). As we did in [chapter 2](#) of this book, we will consider three aspects of Paul’s conversion: the revelation of Christ, the response of Paul, and the role of Ananias.

### 1. The Revelation of Christ

“And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me” ([Acts 22:6](#)). The Gospel is centered on Jesus Christ the Savior, hence, Paul’s conversion account begins with his meeting Jesus Christ. Any conversion account that leaves out Christ describes a bogus conversion.

We note the mode, moment, mercy, message, and muteness of this revelation of Jesus Christ made to Paul on the road to Damascus.

*The mode of the revelation.* Light was the mode by which Jesus Christ was revealed to Paul. The revelation being in the form of light spoke symbolically of four aspects of the person and work of Jesus Christ. It emphasized that He is the Son of God, the Savior of man, the Sovereign of Israel, and the Smiter of evil.

First, the *Son of God*. When Paul saw Christ in the form of a glorious light, he could say as the Apostle John said, “We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father” ([John 1:14](#)). This speaks of the Deity of Christ as does [Hebrews 1:3](#) which says of Christ, “Who being the brightness of his [God] glory, and the express image of his [God] person.”

Second, the *Savior of man*. [John 8:12](#) records Christ as saying, “I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

Third, the *Sovereign of Israel*. In the Old Testament, the coming Messiah was occasionally spoken of as light. As an example, [Isaiah 9:2](#) says, “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.” In [Matthew 4:16,17](#), Christ referred to this passage in Isaiah in speaking of Himself as the Messiah.

Fourth, the *Smiter of evil*. The destruction of the Antichrist is described in [2 Thessalonians 2:8](#) as “Then shall that Wicked [person] be revealed, whom the Lord . . . shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.” The brightness of the holiness of Christ will be too much for the Antichrist and his followers.

*The moment of the revelation.* “As I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon” ([Acts 22:6](#)). The moment was a contrasting, committed, and crucial moment.

First, it was a *contrasting* moment. Being noon, the sun was at its brightest; yet the glory of Christ was so much brighter that it struck down Paul and his companions. The glory of heaven always contrasts with the world’s glory. The glory heaven gives is always much greater than the glory earth gives. Be more interested in the glory God gives than in the glory man gives.

Second, it was a *committed* moment. The time of day when the revelation came revealed the great commitment Paul had to his work. With it being the hottest time of day, Paul, unlike most people, was still on the road pursuing his trip to Damascus to persecute the believers. Only those with great commitment would be on the road at that time of day.

Third, it was a *crucial* moment. With Paul being so close to Damascus, it looked as though the Christians would not escape the wrath of Paul’s persecution. But God

stepped in before it was too late. At times God waits until trouble is almost upon us before He steps in to rescue us. We all prefer that deliverance come long before trouble arrives. But in order to strengthen our faith and better reveal His power, God frequently delays deliverance until the last moment.

*The mercy of the revelation.* “Suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me” ([Acts 22:6](#)). This was not the light of judgment, but the light of salvation. What grace indeed was this light. Paul had been a terrible, brutal persecutor of God’s people and had despised Jesus Christ with great hatred; yet God would save him. Paul was certainly right when he said later, “God . . . called me by his grace” ([Galatians 1:15](#)). How encouraging to know that God will save the worst of sinners when they call upon Jesus Christ for their salvation. God’s grace in salvation will not turn down anyone who comes to Christ. The reason sinners go to hell is not that God does not have the grace to save them, but because they will not receive God’s gracious offer of salvation.

*The message of the revelation.* “I . . . heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” ([Acts 22:7](#)). Paul saw more than a light; he heard a message. Though brief, this initial message from heaven to Paul on the road to Damascus said much. We note the Christ, the compassion, the condemnation, and the church in the message.

First, the *Christ*. “Why persecutest thou me?” That statement was a great revelation of Jesus Christ. Paul knew he was hearing from heaven; and, therefore, the ramifications of this statement were as shocking as they were illuminating. He had been persecuting those who believed in Jesus Christ as the Savior from sin. So he learns now that Jesus Christ was what He claimed to be. This knowledge is absolutely vital in the matter of salvation. The sinner must come to the knowledge that Christ is the Savior of mankind. The light had symbolically demonstrated this important truth about Christ. Now the message makes it plain. Let our messages of salvation also make plain Who Jesus Christ is.

Second, the *compassion*. The double form of the name, “Saul, Saul” denotes compassion. This double form is seen in “Martha, Martha” ([Luke 10:41](#)), “Simon, Simon” ([Luke 22:31](#)), “Jerusalem, Jerusalem” ([Matthew 23:37](#)), and “Samuel, Samuel” ([1 Samuel 3:10](#)). Scripture says when Jesus “saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them” ([Matthew 9:36](#)). Scripture also says “God so loved the world” ([John 3:16](#)). We have already seen God’s mercy in this revelation; now

we see His love in it, too. Men often accuse God of lack of love, but the lack of love problem is not with God but with men, for men do not love God as they ought.

Third, the *condemnation*. “Why persecutest thou me?” There is a twofold message here in the condemnation: the indicting of Paul’s sin and the irreverence of all sin. (1) The *indicting* of Paul’s sin was important, for if a man is going to be saved, he must first realize that he is indeed lost. We have some who want to preach only the love of God but not the holiness of God. They want to preach about the grace of God but not the guile of man which makes grace necessary. (2) The *irreverence* of all sin is seen in the fact that though Paul was persecuting the church, he was told by Christ that he was also persecuting Christ. All sin is primarily against God. We may sin against man, but it is first and foremost against God. That is why David said after his sin regarding Bathsheba and Uriah, “Against thee, thee only [chiefly], have I sinned” ([Psalm 51:4](#)).

Fourth, the *church*. “Why persecutest thou me?” Paul was persecuting the church; but in this statement, Christ says Paul was persecuting Him. This means that Christ is identifying Himself with the church. Hence, if you attack the church, you attack Christ. It works the other way, too: “Inasmuch as ye have done it [a kindness] unto one the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” ([Matthew 25:40](#)).

*The muteness of the revelation*. “And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me” ([Acts 22:9](#)). In [Acts 9:7](#) it is reported that the companions of Paul did hear a voice. The apparent contraction with this text is explained away by the fact that though they heard a sound, they did not hear the message. Their ears were not opened by the Holy Spirit. Does this mean the men could not be saved? Does it mean they were not ordained to be saved? No, a thousand times no. What it means is that if they are to learn the message, they will have to do some inquiry. Whether they inquired of Paul in order to find out what went on is something we do not know. But if they had any interest and wisdom at all, they would have inquired; and then they would have heard the message. They were given partial revelation. If they wanted more they needed to show interest in learning more. It is always that way in learning about God. We will see more of this truth in our next point.

## 2. The Response of Paul

Paul responded surprisingly well to this revelation of Christ. In fact, considering his past, his response can be said to be astonishing. In a moment, Paul went from



hating Christ to obeying Christ. In a matter of days Paul went from being an extremely zealous persecutor of Christianity to an extremely zealous propagator of Christianity. Oh, the great and wonderful power of the Gospel to so transform a man!

In examining Paul's response to this revelation of Christ, we will note the interrogation, education, and consecration in the response.

*Interrogation.* Isaiah said, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" ([Isaiah 55:6](#)). That is exactly what Paul did. He did not waste opportunity. Christ had manifested Himself to Paul, and Paul did not turn away in rejection of Christ. He sought to know more by asking several significant questions. The two questions were: "Who art thou, Lord?" ([Acts 22:8](#)) and "What shall I do, Lord?" ([Acts 22:10](#)). What great questions to ask! The first question has to do with *Divine knowledge*. It is where men need to start. Men need first and foremost to know God. We may learn other things in life, but the most important learning is about God. We will never solve the greatest problems of life if we are ignorant of God. The second question has to do with *Divine duty*. Few ask about duty, only about privileges. If people do ask about duty, they generally ask the wrong people—they ask worldly advisors who have no interest in Divine duty and service.

*Education.* The answers Christ gave to Paul's questions instructed Paul regarding the Son of God, the holiness of God, and the serving of God. Those who earnestly seek to know about God will learn about God. Spiritual ignorance is largely because of disinterest in spiritual matters.

First, the *Son of God*. The answer to the first question ("Who art thou?") was "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest" ([Acts 22:8](#)). This was a confirmation of the initial message given Paul by Christ. It confirmed that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Son of God, the Savior of man, the Messiah of Israel. He was what He claimed to be and what the believers believed and confessed He was. As we noted above, this information had to be a very disconcerting to Paul. It said he was fighting heaven in his persecution conduct. If the crowd in Jerusalem listening to Paul's speech took to heart what he said here, they would be very disconcerted, too; for they were also fighting heaven in their opposition of Paul.

Second, the *holiness of God*. The repeated condemnation of Paul's persecuting conduct emphasizes and instructs that God is a holy God and will not tolerate sin. Many will not like this bringing up of Paul's sin again. But people must be convicted of the fact that they are sinners before they will see the need of being saved.

Touching on sin lightly does not bring much conviction. Men have to be told again and again that their conduct is evil, for mankind is very defensive of his evil conduct and will continually excuse it. But men do not get saved by excusing their sin but by repenting of their sin.

Third, the *serving of God*. The answer to the second question (“What shall I do?”) instructed Paul about two things regarding his serving God: the nature of his duties and the revealing of his duties.

(1) The *nature of his duties* are in the words, “Arise, and go into Damascus, and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do” ([Acts 22:10](#)). These are simple duties, indeed. But in God’s service you start with lowly duties before you are given higher duties. Simple and easy duties are given before complex and difficult duties. The flesh does not like this order, for it wants exalted duties right away. But God would prove us before promoting us. Hence, we must be faithful in doing the humble tasks before we receive exalted tasks.

(2) The *revealing of his duties* gives us two lessons. The first lesson says our duties are revealed to us by God as we need to know them. Paul is not told everything he must do in life but is only given his duty for today. He is told to go into the city, and then he will find out more. He needed to know his immediate duty but not his duty for the future. Give attention to today’s duties which you know and do not worry about tomorrow’s duties until they are revealed. The second lesson is that obedience to present duties brings revelation of future duties. If Paul obeys his first assignment, he will be given more light as to his next assignments. He is to “go into Damascus, and *there* it shall be told” him his next duties. The same lesson is taught in [Jeremiah 18:2](#) where God told the prophet Jeremiah, “Arise, and go down to the potter’s house, and *there* I will cause thee to hear my words.” Jeremiah must obey the command to go to the potter’s house before he learns more from God. Many need to pay attention here. They are floundering around trying to find the will of God but doing a poor job of it. The reason they have this problem is that they have not obeyed the will of God and so have not received more enlightenment as to what to do.

*Consecration*. “I came into Damascus” ([Acts 22:11](#)). Paul did not reject the revelation given him. He received it fully and showed his consecration to Christ by his obedience to Christ’s commands given to him. We note the promptness and problems in Paul’s obedience.

First, the *promptness*. Paul did not delay in doing what Christ told him to do. The genuineness of a new conversion can be ascertained well by noting the speed at

which one who claims to be a new convert responds to God's commands. Many who claim to be a new convert are like the ones in the Bible whom Christ spoke about as saying, "I go, sir' and went not" ([Matthew 21:30](#)).

Second, the *problems*. Going into Damascus looked like such an easy thing to do, yet it was not quite as easy as it may seem. There were significant problems that Paul had to deal with if he was going to obey the Lord. Obeying the Lord never is easy. Yes, as we noted above, some tasks are easier than others; and the first task of Paul was easier than later assignments. But there are always difficulties on the path of obedience. These difficulties test our commitment. Paul had at least three problems he must solve if he is going to obey the Lord here. (1) He was blind and, therefore, had to get someone to lead him into Damascus ([Acts 22:11](#)). Being blind made movement difficult. (2) He had to explain to his companions that things had changed and he was no longer going to persecute Christians. That would not be an easy thing to do. (3) He would have to inform the religious leaders of Antioch that he was changing sides (he probably informed them through one of his companions, for being blind he could not do the task himself). This also would be a difficult thing to do and even dangerous. But Paul was committed to obeying Christ and, therefore, did not let these problems hinder him from obeying. Would that we would be as insistent on obeying the Lord as Paul was. Unfortunately, we also let the slightest of problems often become an excuse for disobedience.

### **3. The Role of Ananias**

God uses human agents in His work. In Paul's conversion, a man named Ananias was used to help Paul get started on his Christian life. Paul needed encouragement and guidance after his experience at noon on the road near Damascus; and Ananias, under God's direction, provided that for him. In examining the role of Ananias in Paul's conversion as Paul related it here in our text, we will note the character of Ananias, the compassion of Ananias, the curing through Ananias, the communication from Ananias, and the commanding by Ananias.

*The character of Ananias.* "Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews who dwelt there [Damascus]" ([Acts 22:12](#)). What Paul said to the crowd about Ananias, who was a believer, certainly would commend Ananias to the Jews and, therefore, help give credence to faith in Jesus Christ. As we noted earlier, Paul's credentials would do this, too. So if both Paul and Ananias, who were loyal Jews, turned to Christ, this would give a weighty witness to the Jews

for Christ. But, of course, as we will note shortly, the crowd rejected the witness. Evidence could be great and the credentials of believers could be that which would make their witness very weighty in favor of the Gospel, but the Judaizers' minds were closed to the truth as are many minds in every age.

Paul said two significant and complimentary things about Ananias: he was a devout man according to the law and he was a distinguished man among the Jews.

First, Paul stated that Ananias was a *devout man* according to the law. This did not mean Ananias was a legalist like the Pharisees. It meant that when you measured his life by the law of God, he would do well. This is not the case with most folk. Most folk may do well when measured by the world, but they will not do well when measured by God's holy standards. If you have any wisdom, you will not be concerned much about how the world measures you, but you will be very concerned how you measure up with God.

Second, Paul stated that Ananias was a *distinguished man* among the Jews. He had a "good report of all the Jews" who lived in Damascus. That does not mean he rejected Christ as Judaism did; but it meant that he lived in such a way, people could not condemn him. The Jews especially would scrutinize his behavior, but their scrutiny did not reveal poor character but good character. Would that more church members would live that sort of life today instead of the shoddy way they do live. Today it is difficult to see any difference between many professing believers and the world. The morals of many believers are no different than the world. Their work ethics, their discipline, their priorities, and their habits reflect the world, not the Word of God.

One can understand why God used Ananias in Paul's conversion. God employs the fit, not the unfit. He uses men of character in His work. If you are not in His service, maybe that is the reason why.

*The compassion of Ananias.* When Ananias came to Paul, he greeted him with a warm, "Brother Saul" ([v. 13](#)). That was not an easy thing to do. Ananias knew what Paul had been—a terrible persecutor of the church. Now he is calling him "Brother." This was no compromise as is seen so often today when folk call bad people good names. Paul had changed. He was no longer the persecutor. He was now a disciple of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the title, "Brother," now fits. Ananias not only showed his own compassion in calling Paul "Brother," but he also testified to the power of the Gospel to change people.

*The curing through Ananias.* “Receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him” ([v. 13](#)). Paul had a need. God enabled Ananias to provide that need. How differently Paul looked upon Ananias here than what he had originally intended to look upon Ananias and other Christians when on his way to Damascus. Before his conversion, Paul would look at Ananias with hatred and bloodthirstiness. Now, after his conversion, he would see Ananias with an entirely different perspective. This reflects what happens to all who are truly saved—they see things vastly different than before they were saved.

*The communication from Ananias.* “And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard” ([vv. 14, 15](#)). Ananias tells Paul that God has chosen Paul for four reasons: to know God’s will, to see God’s Son, to hear God’s Word, to proclaim God’s Gospel. What blessings! Yet, the world would not value these as blessings. They are not interested in knowing *God’s will*, for they are too taken up with their own rebellious will. They are not interested in seeing *God’s Son*. They prefer to see the vile things on TV. They are not interested in hearing *God’s Word*; that is why so few read it. It is why so few preach it, and why so few of the world show up to hear it when it is preached. And they are not interested in proclaiming *God’s Gospel*; they are too busy with their own agenda and have no interest in the spreading of the Gospel.

You will note that after the first three blessings—knowing God’s will, seeing God’s Son, and hearing God’s Word—is the work of proclaiming God’s Gospel. This reminds us that blessings bring obligation, and privilege is not without responsibility. When God gives you great spiritual blessing, it is so you can serve Him better. Many folk like the first three blessings but do not like the responsibility, the work, and the duty of the last blessing. However, blessings not only bring privilege but also responsibility.

*The commanding by Ananias.* The last thing Paul said about Ananias in this speech was that he told Paul, “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” ([v. 16](#)). Water baptism is ordained of God for every believer. It is a symbolic representation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ which is the real and only means of our salvation. Baptism does not save, but it is a public testimony that we are saved, and

it is a public testimony of what made it possible for us to be saved.

A problem is present in this verse with the phrase “and wash away thy sins.” Some believe that phrase teaches that baptism results in the washing away of our sins. This is in conflict, of course, with the plain teaching of Scripture elsewhere that states that our sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ. Examples of such Scripture texts are [1 John 1:7](#) which says, “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin,” and [Revelation 1:5](#) which says that Christ “washed us from our sins in his own blood.” We can help solve the problem of this verse by attaching “wash away thy sins” with “calling on the name of the Lord” instead of with “Arise, and be baptized.” When we call upon Christ to save us, our sins are then washed away by His blood. Our text does not say, “Arise, and be baptized TO wash away thy sins” but “Arise, and be baptized AND wash away thy sins.” How do you wash away your sins? By “calling on the name of the Lord.”

### C. THE CALLING FOR PAUL

After telling of his conversion, Paul speaks of his calling. This will bring up the subject of his relationship to the Gentiles, and will address the area where the Jews had so much problem. It will also bring an unplanned end to Paul’s speech.

In examining Paul’s calling as it is related in this speech, we will note the prerequisite, priority, place, people, and protest of his calling.

#### 1. The Prerequisite of His Calling

“And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple . . . he said unto me . . . I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles” ([Acts 22:17,21](#)). Prayer is an important prerequisite for service for God. Therefore, it is not surprising that our text reports that Paul was praying when he learned his specific calling in God’s service. True praying men—and Paul certainly was a true praying man—will be spiritually qualified for service and will be spiritually sensitive to God’s calling in service. The failure of a good number of folk to know their calling lies in their poor prayer life. Today, there is an increasing interest in psychological tests to see what field a person should pursue. This test business is gaining interest in the church unfortunately. Tests are being given to discover one’s spiritual gifts and aptitudes and from that to decide where one should serve the Lord. Prayer and the will of God are given only token and symbolic attention. However,

you can forget the tests. But do not forget prayer. Make much of prayer. Prayer is a very important key to knowing the will of God and to being ready to do the will of God. The tests are something else.

## **2. The Priority of His Calling**

“Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem” ([Acts 22:18](#)). Anytime the will of God is given, we need to get moving accordingly. Delay is disobedience. You may have to wait awhile (to learn patience and discipline) before you receive directions; but once you receive them, do not be lethargic about obeying them. Opportunities do not sit around and wait for you to respond to them, but they are generally present for only a short time. Timing is so important in doing the will of God. Delay will miss golden opportunities. Therefore, when you learn the will of God, “make haste” to do it. We want God to be speedy about fulfilling our requests, so it only seems right and fair that we also be speedy about fulfilling His orders for us.

## **3. The Place of His Calling**

“Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem . . . depart” ([Acts 22:18,21](#)). Soon after Paul’s conversion, God made it very plain to Paul that he was not to stay in Jerusalem. Later on God would amplify the places where He wanted Paul to go; but when God first began to make known His calling to Paul, He told Paul that he was not to stay in Jerusalem to minister the Word. He could minister the Word elsewhere. But Jerusalem was off limits.

Generally, when God tells us the place of our calling, it is a positive command. That is, we are told where to go. In Paul’s case, it started with a negative command—he was told where not to go. The reason the negative command came first was that Paul greatly desired to minister in Jerusalem to the Jews in that city. But God did not want him in that place—and for good reason. Paul’s past made him unacceptable to the people in Jerusalem. The unbelieving Jews would see him only as an unwanted traitor whom they would hate with a passion. The believers would be suspicious of him because of his past in persecuting them. He had inflicted deep wounds upon them which would take much time to heal. God knows our situation and our gifts and will call us to a place and task best fit for us. Be careful to know the “where” in your calling. It is vital if you plan to serve God acceptably.

That Paul was not to minister in Jerusalem was something Paul simply would not accept. His affections for his Jewish brethren in Jerusalem were so great that he

kept coming back to Jerusalem anyway even if only for short periods of time. But just coming back for short periods of time was yielding to temptation, and sooner or later he would be trapped—which he was in this last visit. He was warned by God that Jerusalem would not receive his testimony; and sure enough, they did not receive his testimony. He is now in custody of the Roman soldiers as a result.

#### 4. The People of His Calling

“I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles” ([Acts 22:21](#)). The will of God not only involved where Paul was to minister, but it also involved to whom he was to minister. Paul was to minister primarily to the Gentiles—which he did and with great success. His calling to minister to the Gentiles is repeated throughout the Scripture. In the first account of his conversion given in Acts, we read, “He [Paul] is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles” ([Acts 9:15](#)). In [Romans 11:13](#), Paul says, “I am the apostle of the Gentiles.” Further mention of his Gentile calling can be found in [Galatians 2:7,8](#) and [Ephesians 3:6–8](#).

That Paul was primarily to witness to the Gentiles did not, however, exclude his witnessing to the Jews. In the [Acts 9:15](#) text, he was not only told of his call to the Gentiles; but he was also told that he would bear the Gospel message to “the children of Israel.” But that did not negate his calling to go primarily to the Gentiles. Paul had a great passion for his own brethren, the Jews, and God gave him a number of opportunities to proclaim the Gospel to the Jews. Paul’s problem was his wanting to make the Jews in Jerusalem his primary target.

It is significant that while Paul won a number of Jews to the Lord, yet he was never received as well by the Jews as he was by the Gentiles. Again and again Scripture records the Jews rejecting Paul—and it was generally with great vehemence ([Acts 13:45,46](#); [14:2](#); [14:19](#); [17:5](#); [17:13](#); [18:5,6](#); [20:3](#); [21:11](#) [a prediction of it]; and [21:27](#)).

#### 5. The Protest of His Calling

“And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee; And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him” ([Acts 22:19,20](#)). There will always be opposition to the will of God, and a good deal of that opposition comes from within our own rebellious hearts. Generally it is a lack of zeal that protests our calling, but in Paul’s case it was his zeal for his Jewish brethren that prompted his protesting of his calling.



Paul's argument here was that the Jews would accept him in Jerusalem because they knew his zeal for Judaism which had been evidenced in his having been a zealous persecutor of the believers in Jerusalem. This zeal was manifested as far back as the stoning of Stephen. But, of course, his turning to Christ had in the Jews' thinking showed he no longer had zeal for Judaism but only had zeal for a faith they despised. Paul, however, never seemed to comprehend that fact.

Let us never argue with God about His orders. When we protest God's orders, we are with despicable pride exalting our wisdom above Divine wisdom. We only talk foolishly in so doing. We only contradict ourselves when we, like Paul, say, "Lord," and then protest His order.

## D. THE CONTEMPT FOR PAUL

"And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live" ([Acts 22:22](#)). The crowd had nothing but utter contempt for Paul. It was restrained momentarily as he spoke, but soon his speech set off another demonstration of their great contempt for him. To examine this contempt, we will note the bias, bloodthirstiness, behavior, and believing of the crowd.

### 1. The Bias of the Crowd

"And they gave him audience unto this word" ([Acts 22:22](#)). "This word" was "Gentile" ([Acts 22:21](#)). When Paul brought the Gentiles into his speech, that was the end of the attention span for the crowd which had listened very attentively to him thus far. Like the people in the synagogue in Nazareth who listened to Christ until He mentioned the Gentiles ([Luke 4:25-29](#)), this crowd was extremely biased about the Gentiles and did not want them to have equal spiritual privileges. These Jews knew they were a privileged people in regards to Divine revelation. But they refused to see the responsibility of their privileges and viewed their spiritual privileges only as a reason to boast of themselves and to look down on the Gentiles instead of taking the message to the Gentiles. Maclaren said, "The less they entered into the true possession of their heritage, the more savagely they resented sharing it with the nations . . . To seek to keep religious blessings to one's self is a conclusive proof that they are not really possessed."

This bias is not extinct. It has shown up in other forms in our day. It shows up

in church when old timers begrudge the idea of new people in the church holding important church offices. It shows up in the form of disinterest in missions. Such people care only about reaching their own community with the Gospel but do not see their responsibility to people in other lands in our world. It shows up in the form of church and denominational jealousy. When other churches or denominations thrive in the Gospel, there are those who grow green with envy and, as a result, become unjustifiably and slanderously critical of the churches and denominations that are doing well.

## **2. The Bloodthirstiness of the Crowd**

“Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live” ([Acts 22:22](#)). Earlier, when the Roman soldiers had led Paul away to the safety of the Roman barracks (tower of Antonia), this crowd had cried, “Away with him!” ([Acts 21:36](#)). Now they continue to cry the same bloodthirsty cry. They wanted Paul’s blood. They wanted Paul dead. Facts made no difference to them. Paul could give them no argument that would pacify them or change their minds. As it was with Christ, so it is now with Paul; the unbelieving Jews cry out for his blood.

This terrible attitude is not unique. Every age is filled with it. This attack upon Paul reminds us that there is a deep resentment of the unbelieving world against the believers; and when opportunity arises to reveal that resentment, it will be revealed vehemently. This is why believers are slain all over the world in countries controlled by godless governments. This is why these governments single out the believers to be exterminated. The main issue in life is between God and the devil. Hence, the great contempt the world has is for God’s people.

What a sad commentary on Jerusalem and Judaism to cry out, “Away with him” for both Christ and Paul. Christ was God manifested in the flesh, Israel’s Messiah, and the Wonderful Savior of man; yet they wanted to kill Him. Paul was one of the greatest Christians to ever live, yet they also wanted to kill him. No wonder God allowed Rome to destroy Jerusalem. And no wonder He allows so much destruction today; for mankind is still rejecting the Son of God and His great servants.

## **3. The Behavior of the Crowd**

“They cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air” ([Acts 22:23](#)). Those who had much contempt for Paul did not behave well. But what can you expect from people who reject the Gospel, Jesus Christ, and His servants. They made a lot of noise which made no sense, they cast off their clothes which showed

their shame, and they threw dust into the air which was so dumb to do. How ignominious was their behavior. This crowd was not constructive; it was destructive. They did not reflect wisdom, but they reflected gross stupidity. They will cry for the blood of the one man whose actions are law abiding while they act so lawless themselves.

Times have not changed. We still have this kind of mob mentality in the world. We see it in the totally uncalled for street rioting caused by some court decision which did not go just right for some people. We see it in Rock concerts where people act wildly. We see it in the wild, demonstrative marches in our cities by the moral filth [homosexuals] of our society. And what is so disgusting is that the news media treats this kind of sick behavior with a good deal of respect. Christians will be mocked and ridiculed for living godly lives, but despicable mob mentality, morals, and manners will be given respect by the news media. This, of course, will eventually destroy a society; for giving respect to evil gives power to evil. And when evil has power it will destroy, not build up.

#### **4. The Believing of the Crowd**

The Roman officials paid more attention to the reaction of the crowd than to the speech of the Apostle. That is typical of Christ rejecters. They honor what should be condemned and condemn what should be honored. Because the Roman officials believed the crowd, they decided to scourge Paul. We will note the evil of the scourging and the escape from the scourging.

*The evil of the scourging.* “The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be ex-amined by scourging, that he might know wherefore they cried so against him” ([Acts 22:24](#)). This plan of the captain is the typical way cruel armies and government try to extract confessions. They torture the victim until he talks or confesses his evil. This scourging torture consisted of taking either a whip or rod and beating upon the bare back of the victims. The beating would cut and tear hunks out of the flesh. Pain would be terrible. The sight would be gory. At times the beating left the victims unconscious or an invalid. Sometimes it even killed the victim. Proposing it for Paul was total injustice, for Paul had not been proven guilty of anything yet. In fact, he was the only one in the whole scene who was behaving well. But the Roman officials were more interested in subduing the riot than in justice.

*The escape from the scourging.* “And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain . . . Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him; and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him” ([Acts 22:25–29](#)). Paul escaped the scourging by appealing to his Roman citizenship. This appeal worked, and it also shook up the troops, for the “chief captain also was afraid” ([Acts 22:29](#)). Roman citizenship had its privileges and woe be he who violated the privileges of a Roman citizen. One of the privileges was that he could not be scourged ([Acts 22:25](#)) or bound ([Acts 22:29](#)) if he was “uncondemned” ([Acts 22:25](#)). Paul had not had any charges proven against him. That was very evident. The mob demanded his death, but they did not bring forth charges that justified his death. Rome had yielded to the mob’s wishes in order to appease the mob. But their appeasing ran into trouble when they discovered Paul was a Roman. You always get in trouble trying to compromise with evil.

Paul’s escape from the scourging is a picture of the Gospel. (1) As the threat of judgment was real in Paul’s case, so it is very real in the sinner’s case. (2) But escape was made possible through a birth. In Paul’s case, he was a “free born” Roman. That is, his parents were citizens of Rome when he was born which meant he automatically became a Roman citizen at birth. Being born a Roman citizen exempted him from judgment. In the sinner’s case, he escapes judgment when he is “born again.” (3) Paul owed his life-saving citizenship to others—his parents in his case. The sinner owes his life-saving citizenship to another—Jesus Christ. (4) Being “free-born,” Paul gained Roman citizenship without personal cost. His Roman citizenship came free. It costs the sinner nothing to gain heavenly citizenship. Salvation is free to the sinner. (5) While Paul’s citizenship did not cost him, someone else had to pay a high price for his citizenship. Either his parents obtained Roman citizenship “With a great sum” as did Claudius Lysias ([Acts 22:28](#)), or the residents of Tarsus were awarded the privilege through the high price of going to war for Rome. The new birth costs the sinner nothing, but it did cost Jesus Christ the tremendous price of Calvary.

## XXV. PROVOKING THE SANHEDRIN

[Acts 22:30–23:11](#)

PAUL NOW BEGINS a series of trials which will last for several years. These trials will be before the Sanhedrin, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. All of these trials will be both unjust and avoidable. But the unjust treatment of Paul in these trials keeps most readers from seeing how avoidable they were. It is our nature to sympathize with the one who is grossly wronged especially if that one is a great person like the Apostle Paul. But in all the sympathizing for Paul, let us not forget that Paul could have avoided all these trials by heeding the repeated warnings to not go to Jerusalem. Instead of having to repeatedly defend himself before corrupt courts and rulers, he could have been preaching the Gospel in new areas as well as strengthening the faith of many Christians whom he had previously won to the Lord and who had pleaded with him to help them learn more about the faith. Paul had been imprisoned and treated terribly unjust during his missionary trips, but then he was doing the will of God. The imprisonments were unavoidable. But not these trials and hearings and imprisonments which cover the rest of the book of Acts. Paul, like a lot of people in every age, brought much trouble to himself which he could have avoided had he done that which God had said to do.

This chapter of our book focuses on Paul's hearing before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Paul had caused a real dilemma for Claudius Lysias, the Roman captain in charge of Paul's arrest and custody. The captain did not know what to do with Paul; but he definitely had to do something soon or he, the captain, would be in serious trouble. Paul had been the center of a great uproar in Jerusalem the day before, yet the captain had no definite charges against him. Discovering that Paul was a Roman citizen really complicated matters. Paul had privileges as a Roman citizen that the captain had violated in binding Paul and in ordering him to be scourged. Fortunately for the captain, the citizenship of Paul was discovered before the scourging took place. But things were embarrassing for the captain, and he was in a very touchy situation. He must keep peace in the city with the Jews, but he also must treat Paul right.

To help remedy the situation, the captain needed to get more information about Paul. Therefore, "because he would have known the certainty wherefore he [Paul] was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them" ([Acts 22:30](#)). With the uproar of the preceding day being centered around Paul, the captain could not help but feel that Paul surely was guilty of something, or there would not have been the uproar in the city. But the captain had not been able to gain any helpful information from the crowd when they were queried about Paul ([Acts 21:33](#)), yet the crowd kept insisting Paul be killed ([Acts 21:36](#), [22:22](#)).

Therefore, the captain will have the Sanhedrin convene to examine Paul.

The Sanhedrin was the most powerful ruling council of the Jews. It was composed of seventy to seventy-two elders of Israel. It was generally presided over by the high priest. The captain would feel that surely an examination of Paul by the highest official ruling council of the Jews would be able to discover the charges and thus help the captain to know what action to take. Unlike the frenzied crowd, the Sanhedrin would be expected to provide a sober, deliberate, and just examination of Paul. But was the captain to get a surprise! The Sanhedrin would prove to be as uproarious as the crowd and just as unfitted to judge as the crowd was. Paul would provoke the Sanhedrin as much as he provoked the crowd. The captain would get no answers, only more questions.

To examine this text on Paul's experience before the Sanhedrin and their being very provoked by Paul, we will note the smiting of Paul ([Acts 22:1–5](#)), the schism over Paul ([Acts 23:6–10](#)), and the solace for Paul ([Acts 23:11](#)).

## A. THE SMITING OF PAUL

Paul had been before the Sanhedrin for only a few moments before he so provoked the Sanhedrin that he was smitten on the mouth at the order of the high priest. We will note the cause of the smiting, the command for the smiting, and the condemnation of the smiting.

### 1. The Cause of the Smiting

After Paul had been brought to the gathering of the Sanhedrin and was “set him before them” ([Acts 22:30](#)) to be examined, he “earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” ([Acts 23:1](#)). This simple appeal by Paul to his integrity was all it took to get the Sanhedrin—especially the high priest, the presiding officer in charge of the council—provoked. This council was not of the mind to do justice but to judge according to their personal advantages and prejudices.

We note two things about Paul's appeal: it was fearless and it was factual.

*A fearless appeal.* The statement, “Paul, earnestly beholding the council,” describes a man who is not timid or afraid. Paul, like Elijah of old, was not afraid to

go eyeball to eyeball with anyone. He would not be intimidated by this council of elders which caused so many others to fear. Paul had a Gospel message of which he had not the slightest shame ([Romans 1:16](#)) but unhesitatingly proclaimed it whether people received it enthusiastically or rejected it vehemently. He knew that the root reason for this examination was because of the hatred of the Gospel message. Other reasons were advanced by his enemies for his arrest and death, but they were all secondary reasons.

*A factual appeal.* Paul claimed he had not violated his conscience. To the casual reader it may seem most incorrect for Paul to say he had “lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” How could a man who had persecuted Christians so brutally say he had lived with a good conscience? The answer will be found in some of Paul’s statements made later on in the book of Acts. As example, in [Acts 26:9](#) Paul says of his persecution actions, “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” When Paul was persecuting Christians, he thought he was pleasing God. This attitude was predicted by Christ, Himself, when He said to the disciples, “The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service” ([John 16:2](#)). That did not make the killing right, of course; but it does say that Paul, and the others who were persecuting Christians to death, were not violating their consciences.

The persecuting of Christians, however, was not the issue here. The primary application of Paul’s claim here in the Sanhedrin will refer to Paul’s relationship with the Mosaic law. The crowd had accused him of being against the law of Moses and against the Temple which was the place where the law was especially honored. Paul would inform the council that the accusation was not true and that he was instead a loyal, conscientious Jew who had not conscientiously violated the law. “Touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” ([Philippians 3:6](#)) says the same thing. This does not mean that Paul did not sin against God, for our conscience can be guided by principles that are not right. When Paul persecuted the church, that fact was certainly true, as we noted above. Also, Paul’s claim to not having violated his conscience does not contradict the fact that prior to his conversion his conscience was obviously beginning to work on him about his persecution as “it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” ([Acts 9:5](#)) indicates. What Paul said was simply a general statement to the council concerning his conscientiousness, and that statement was factual. Paul was a very conscientious person. Would that more people endeavored to be as conscientious in their doings. Of course, for the conscience to be an accurate and correct guide, it needs to be governed by the Word of God. But the way so

many live today, even a deficient conscience, if heeded, would greatly improve their conduct.

## 2. The Command for the Smiting

“And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth” ([Acts 23:2](#)). We note the reproach of the command and the revelation in this command.

*The reproach of it.* The command was intended to cast great reproach upon Paul, to humiliate him before the Sanhedrin, and to make his case look bad. The smiting of the mouth said that what Paul was saying was so terrible that his mouth needed to be stopped immediately. Since no facts are advanced by Paul’s testimony to substantiate Paul’s wrong, Paul is treated ignominiously to imply he is wrong. This action is the typical reaction of evil towards good when evil has no facts to prove their case against good. Lacking facts, evil scorns, calls names, and belittles. As an example, people who are against such things as abortion, homosexuality, and gambling are made out by the ungodly to be extremists who are ignorant, uncharitable, and bad for society.

*The revelation in it.* The command not only said to smite Paul, but it also said some things about Ananias and the Sanhedrin. It revealed both the iniquitous character of Ananias and the injustice of the Sanhedrin court.

First, the *iniquitous character of Ananias* was revealed. Joseph Parker said of the reaction of Ananias to Paul’s statement of living a conscientious life: “Goodness always awakens wickedness. The man presiding over the council was the embodiment of every crime that could defile personal character and debase official dignity . . . [the smiting] is the only thing the bad man can do. He has no other shot in his locker; he can only strike, abuse, defame, and cause the innocent to suffer . . . it is the weakness of fury and the fury of weakness.” Ananias was indeed a very corrupt man, totally unfit for the office of the high priest. “He was a violent, haughty, gluttonous, and rapacious man” (A. C. Hervey). History reports him stealing from other priests, working with assassins to accomplish his purpose, and siding with Rome against his own people. Hence, it is not surprising that he gave such a cruel order. Bad men give bad orders.

Second, the *injustice of the court* was revealed. No one in the Sanhedrin expressed opposition to the unjust order. No one protested the cruel action. A court



that gives and tolerates such orders is certainly not a court where justice will be found. The order revealed the court had already rendered its decision against Paul before it even heard him out. Like a lot of people, the court had made up its mind and did not want to be confused with facts.

### 3. The Condemnation of the Smiting

Ananias' action was condemned, however. It was condemned by Paul. "Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall; for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" ([Acts 23:3](#)). Paul's condemnation of Ananias was forceful, factual, fulfilled, fought, and faultless.

*It was forceful.* Paul's rebuke was very forceful. He was never soft in indicting sin. On his first missionary journey he demonstrated this fact. Rebuking the sorcerer for trying to turn the deputy in Paphos from the Gospel, Paul said sternly, "O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season" ([Acts 13:10,11](#)). Paul never viewed sin as something to treat tenderly. He saw the great harm of sin and condemned it without hesitation. Would that we had more of this attitude in our pulpits, legislatures, courtrooms, and schools today. It would be one of the most helpful things to happen to our society.

*It was factual.* Paul condemned Ananias as a hypocrite. This was certainly an accurate description of Ananias. Paul emphasized Ananias' hypocrisy in a twofold way: he attacked his character as hypocritical by describing him as a "whited wall," and he attacked his conduct as hypocritical by declaring the injustice of his order.

First, the *hypocritical character*. "Whited wall" described well the hypocrite's character. Christ used a very similar term "whited sepulchers" ([Matthew 23:27](#)) to describe hypocrites. It says the character of the hypocrite is nothing but whitewash. Behind the whitewash is corruption, filth, rot, and evil. The people of the Sanhedrin are said to have worn white robes when in session. If that was the case here, the term was even more fitting for the occasion; for behind the white robe of Ananias was a man with a very dark character.

Second, the *hypocritical conduct*. Paul said, "Sittest thou to judge me after the law, and [yet] commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" The phrase "contrary

to the law” in the Greek means to break the law. “The lawlessness was twofold and consisted, first, in the unworthy and unjust treatment of Paul’s person; then, in arbitrarily condemning him before he heard him” (Alexander). Ananias’ order to smite Paul broke the law twice, yet Ananias was suppose to be judging Paul after the law. How hypocritical Ananias was in his conduct in court. But hypocritical men give hypocritical orders (which explains why, as an example, Congress sometimes passes laws which they decree do not apply to themselves). But Ananias’ order only condemned Ananias by revealing what a sordid character he was. The order certainly did not condemn Paul.

*It was fulfilled.* History tells us that within the next six or eight years, Ananias was brutally smitten to his death. “We learn from Josephus that this Ananias, in the beginning of the Jewish War, was taken from an aqueduct where he lay concealed, and put to death by sicarii or assassins, perhaps some of the same zealots, whose fanaticism he encouraged and inflamed on this occasion” (Alexander). Of course, Ananias did not need to be brutally smitten to death in order to be smitten of God. God not only smites in this life but also in the next life. We need not think God is unjust if He lets the extremely wicked live a long earthly life and in material prosperity. This life is a drop in the bucket in comparison to eternity, and the wicked will be smitten of God for all eternity. And the eternal smiting is infinitely worse than any smiting in this earthly life.

*It was fought.* “And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God’s high priest?” ([Acts 23:4](#)). Whenever sin is rebuked, there will always be those who will fight the rebuker. Hence, the preacher who preaches against sin will be fought; so will the whistle blower at work and the policeman who arrests criminals. Those who fight the rebuker will ignore the sin that is rebuked and instead try to make the rebuker the big evil. All of this is gross hypocrisy, of course, but it is done all the time. And it was done in the Sanhedrin. “Paul was blamed for this little ebullition [agitation] by men who themselves became angry seven days a week . . . Hypocrites, every one!” (Parker). Paul had already addressed the hypocrisy in the Sanhedrin when he told Ananias he was a “whited wall” sitting to judge after the law but giving orders contrary to the law. Now the defenders of Ananias expose their hypocrisy in censuring Paul.

Not only is the hypocrisy seen in ignoring the greater sin of the two (if Paul’s rebuke was a sin), but the hypocrisy was evident in claiming Ananias as the high

priest. Though he was acknowledged as the high priest by the Sanhedrin, in truth he was not the high priest according to Mosaic law. The law stated that the high priest was to be a direct descendent of Aaron, and the position was a lifetime position. In Paul's day, the high priest was controlled by Rome. They appointed and unappointed whom they willed, depending on how well the high priest went along with Rome.

How great was the hypocrisy of the Sanhedrin. But when men reject Jesus Christ, there will not be justice in judgment. This explains why the courts in our land are so full of injustice. Rejection of Christ is worse in our land than it has ever been, and our courts are more unjust than ever. So, as an example, our courts decree we cannot have on government property Christmas decorations which honor Christ lest we offend some; yet the government hands our money to art groups that by their art blaspheme Jesus Christ which offends many. The same is true regarding the teaching of evolution in our schools. We cannot teach creationism lest we offend some atheist, but our laws decree that atheistic evolution must be taught in our schools regardless of who this offends. These same courts grant all sorts of rights to criminals, but you will notice the victims have no such rights granted them.

*It was faultless.* "Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people" ([Acts 23:5](#)). J. A. Alexander said, "The fashionable sentimental view of this verse is that Paul acknowledges his having spoken in a fit of passion, and apologizes for it . . . [But] the acknowledgement itself would be at variance with all the facts and circumstances of the case." This is not an apology by Paul for what he just said. He does not apologize for his condemning of Ananias. There was nothing for which to apologize. Ananias was a vile man and needed rebuke. In the crucifixion trials, Jesus Christ was also censured for the way He answered the high priest—and was smitten for it as well ([John 18:19–22](#)). Christ did not apologize for His answer but instead rebuked those who censured Him ([John 18:23](#)).

Paul's answer to the censure was twofold. First, he said he did not know that Ananias was the high priest. Second, he agreed that you should not speak evil of the ruler of the people (he quoted from [Exodus 22:28](#)). Some believe Paul did not know Ananias was the high priest because he had bad eyes and could not see that Ananias was the high priest. Paul did have eye trouble; but if he could not see well enough to know who was the presiding officer, then the statement "earnestly beholding the council" does not make much sense ([Acts 23:1](#)) and the trip alone from Troas to Assos ([Acts 20:13,14](#)) would be impractical if not impossible. Paul knew his man; he was not ignorant of this wicked man—that is why he called him a "whited wall." Paul

just did not know that Ananias was at the time the high priest.

Paul agreeing that one should not speak evil of the ruler is not an apology either. Paul did not speak evilly. He spoke the truth. To speak evilly of one is to speak dishonestly, criminally, and cruelly. The meaning of “Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people” is not that rulers are not to be rebuked for their evil.

The problem here is not Paul; the problem here is Ananias. Paul is not at fault, Ananias is. So many commentaries spend most of their time scrutinizing Paul’s action and ignoring the gross inequity of the court. These commentaries are just like our courts. They strain at a gnat and swallow a camel ([Matthew 23:24](#)). The conduct that was bad was the conduct of Ananias. It was terrible conduct. Yet, of course, the people in the Sanhedrin completely ignore his gross evil and instead give Paul a strong censure for what he said to Ananias.

Today we see this attitude frequently in society and even in the church. Society attacks just about every move a policeman makes in arresting a criminal, but they ignore the terrible deeds of the criminal. In reading the newspapers, you get the feeling that the policeman is the bad guy and the criminal is the poor mistreated person who needs to be given more government handouts to compensate for his mistreatment (so called) by the policemen. In church when some disgruntled church member causes all sorts of problems and walks in a most unholy way, the other members will ignore his evil and scrutinize with a fine-tooth comb how the pastor deals with the problem. People will closely examine the pastor’s words and deeds to see if perhaps he is not showing enough love, is not being strictly constitutional (church’s constitution), etc. But the cantankerous, troublemaking church member will seldom be criticized or condemned for the unholy way in which he or she has acted. All of this is the work of the devil. He attacks the rebuker, not the sinner. Making the rebuker the sinner and the sinner the person who is being unjustly treated will dishonor righteousness and honor evil—which is the devil’s program. This is what was going on in the Sanhedrin with Paul and Ananias.

## **B. THE SCHISM OVER PAUL**

“There arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the multitude was divided” ([y. 7](#)). Though the Sanhedrin was the most powerful ruling body of the Jews in the days of the early church, they were no match for the Apostle Paul. After the encounter with Ananias, Paul manipulated the Sanhedrin into an

uproarious internal fight with one another. The Sanhedrin's internal fighting displays a pitiful example of leadership. But people in church cannot throw many stones, for many church business meetings get almost as bad sometimes; for, unfortunately, the devil often manipulates God's people into fighting one another.

To examine this schism in the Sanhedrin, we will look at the prompting, particulars, peril, and product of the schism.

### **1. The Prompting of the Schism**

"But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council [[Acts 24:21](#) says he stood up when he cried out], Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees confess both" ([vv. 6–8](#)). The meaning of the word "perceived" at the beginning of this text needs to be defined here in order to correctly understand the situation. This word is translated from a Greek word which means that Paul knew beforehand about the differences between the Pharisees and Sadducees. He did not just discern it at that moment. This problem had existed for years. Paul, knowing the problem and knowing that the Sanhedrin was made up of a number of Pharisees and Sadducees, decided to exploit the situation to change the focus in the Sanhedrin from the condemnation Paul gave Ananias to the conflict that was ever present in this ruling council.

This manipulation of the Sanhedrin was a bit of clever action by Paul. It did indeed get the focus off his rebuke of Ananias and, thus, take the heat off of Paul at least for a short time. But the manipulation was not commendable conduct on the part of Paul. Paul making such a big deal over being a loyal Pharisee was so contradictory to his conversion and calling. The Pharisees certainly did not have a good track record regarding Jesus Christ. Being a Pharisee at that time is not something any believer should have been encouraged to be. So Paul's clever actions cannot be justified though our sympathies for Paul and our dislike of the corrupt Sanhedrin makes us want to justify them. As we have said earlier, we often fail to see Paul's wrong in the Sanhedrin and in his other encounters with the enemy in Jerusalem and elsewhere because Paul is so mistreated. Here, our disgust with the Sanhedrin makes us want to cheer on Paul and say, "That a way to go" when he gets the Sanhedrin into fighting among themselves. Also, we can argue that the incorrigibility of the Sanhedrin made it impossible for Paul to get any kind of

decent trial, so why not get the Sanhedrin to fighting among themselves and thus end the council session. But in view of Paul's calling and in view of his disobedience in coming to Jerusalem, all of this clever manipulation in the Sanhedrin is nothing more than worldly policy. Instead of cleverly causing the Sanhedrin to fight among themselves, he should have been using his cleverness to proclaim the Gospel of Christ in other parts of the world where God wanted him to be.

As we noted in a previous chapter, one sin leads to another sin. Paul sinned in not obeying the Spirit's warning to not come to Jerusalem; this led to his sinning in participating in a purification rite which Calvary had made obsolete, and now he is sinning in manipulating the Sanhedrin into an uproarious fight among themselves. Yes, Paul was very clever here; and we aren't unhappy to see the Sanhedrin in an uproarious fight among themselves. But this was not a success experience for Paul. He was acting in the flesh. And the Apostle, himself, afterwards evidenced that he recognized the impropriety of his schism-causing action in the Sanhedrin ([Acts 24:20,21](#)).

## **2. The Particulars of the Schism**

"For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees confess both" ([v. 8](#)). This doctrinal difference between the Pharisees and Sadducees was no trivial division as just about anyone reading the Scripture can perceive. It was a very major difference. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection, and they believed in angels and spirits. But the Sadducees did not. Such doctrinal differences would make it impossible for the two groups to fellowship around a common theology, for theologically they were going in opposite directions. But they did find some common ground upon which they could fellowship and work together. That which brought the Pharisees and Sadducees together was their mutual hatred of Jesus Christ and their mutual hatred of Rome. They worked together because of what they did not like, not because of what they liked. But though they could meet together in the Sanhedrin and both demonstrate equal injustice in judgment, the schism was always there. It only needed fanning; and it would flame up into a very heated conflagration, as it did here in the council meeting when Paul was being examined by them.

What Paul said that prompted the riot, he could legitimately say in defending himself; for "the hope and resurrection of the dead" ([v. 6](#)) was central to his Gospel message. And it was the Gospel message that was the real reason for his being attacked by the Jews. Paul believed that the hope of Israel was to be found in Christ. He also believed that the resurrection of Christ was the foundation of the Gospel.

But, of course, he did not define it that clearly to the Sanhedrin or there would have been no contention between the Pharisees and Sadducees. Later, in trials before Felix ([Acts 24:21](#)) and Agrippa ([Acts 26:6–8](#)), Paul would bring up the hope and resurrection (the hope is inseparable from the resurrection). Also, when he arrived in Rome four to five years later, he again brought up the subject as the reason for why he was bound ([Acts 28:20](#)). But though what Paul said here in the Sanhedrin was true, the reason Paul brought up this subject in the Sanhedrin was not to declare the Gospel but to divide the council. That does not commend Paul at all, and it is a warning to all of us that when we get off the path God wants us on, we will begin to behave in a very uncommendable way. If we want to keep our conduct worthy of the Lord, we must keep ourselves in the will of God.

### **3. The Peril of the Schism**

“And there arose a great cry; and the scribes that were of the Pharisees’ part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle” ([vv. 9, 10](#)). The schism over doctrine ended up being a schism over Paul—and to his great peril. Since Paul said he was a Pharisee and held those beliefs of the Pharisees which especially caused schism between them and the Sadducees, the Pharisees defended Paul against the Sadducees. So Paul ended up being right in the middle of the fight. Support and opposition for Paul went from verbal to physical action. The peril of the physical action became so great that the Roman captain, sizing up the situation with the skill of a military man, sent in soldiers to rescue Paul “lest Paul should be pulled in pieces.”

Paul certainly caused quite a riot in the Sanhedrin. It was the second riot he had caused in Jerusalem in two days, and he needed rescuing from both of them by the Roman soldiers. Through his disobedience in coming to Jerusalem, Paul has now greatly imperiled himself twice. How much peril we get ourselves into because of disobedience. There is peril that comes to those who dare to live for Christ—Paul certainly experienced much of this kind of peril. But there is another peril which comes for living contrary to God’s ways, and that is the peril Paul experienced in the Sanhedrin. It was a peril he could have avoided. Some troubles we cannot avoid; but others, like this peril Paul experienced in the Sanhedrin, we can definitely avoid. Let us so live that we do not add unnecessarily to our troubles.

## 4. The Product of the Schism

It is instructive to note that the support Paul received from the Pharisees in the Sanhedrin was short lived. When Paul was on trial before Felix in Caesarea about a week later, no Pharisee stood up for Paul to defend him. In fact, from the conspiracy to kill Paul (we will study this in our next chapter) on through all of his trials, no more support was received from the Pharisees. This only emphasizes the folly of creating the schism in the Sanhedrin. What, if any value, Paul got from it was not lasting. So it is with all methods of the flesh. What we gain by clever manipulating of people, by pulling strings, by dealing under the table, etc. are all a mirage which will soon reveal themselves as nothing substantial at all.

## C. THE SOLACE FOR PAUL

“And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” ([v. 11](#)). The night after the Sanhedrin episode, the Lord made a special visit to Paul to encourage him. Four times in Scripture we have a record of a visit by the Lord to encourage Paul ([Acts 18:9,10](#); [22:17–21](#), [23:11](#); [27:22–25](#)). This is the third of these four recorded visits.

When the Lord comes to cheer up His saints, they need to be cheered up. How true it was here. It was not only night here in terms of where the sun was, but it was also night here in regards to where the apostle was. We agree with G. Campbell Morgan when he says it was “one of the darkest nights in the history of Paul.” Bound and guarded by soldiers in the tower of Antonia, Paul’s situation was bleak and getting bleaker.

The specific areas where Paul needed solace will be found in what the Lord did and said to him, for what God does and says to encourage one reveals where that one needs to be encouraged. The context of this verse will give us plenty of reasons for why Paul would be in need of solace from the Savior, but this verse will tell us specifically where Paul was hurting. At least four areas are mentioned that were especially discouraging to him. We will address them under the headings of the presence of God, the precept from God, the praise from God, and the promise from God.

### 1. The Presence of God



“The Lord stood by him” ([v. 11](#)). Divine comfort begins with Divine companionship. Moses could not bear the thought of going without God’s presence and said so to God: “If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence” ([Exodus 33:15](#)). After David sinned, he feared the loss of God’s presence in his life and so he prayed, “Cast me not away from thy presence” ([Psalm 51:11](#)). Joseph was in a sad and forsaken situation in Egypt after he had been sold into slavery by his wicked brothers, yet we read that “the LORD was with Joseph” ([Genesis 39:2](#)). Later after Potiphar’s wife had slandered Joseph and caused him to be put in prison, we read again, “But the LORD was with Joseph” ([Genesis 39:21](#)). That was the key to Joseph’s success.

When God is with us, we can endure anything. Take God away from us, and the slightest trial will overcome us. In Paul’s second epistle to Timothy, he spoke of this consolation when he said, “At my first answer [defense] no man stood with me, but all men forsook me . . . Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me” ([2 Timothy 4:16,17](#)). “Notwithstanding” says that with the Lord we can endure anything. However low Paul had sunk that night after the uproarious session of the Sanhedrin, he would endure, he would make it, and his spirits would rise because of the presence of the Lord. You may not have much of this world in terms of possessions, position, comforts, and luxuries; but if you have the Lord with you, you are in good shape.

It is instructive to note here that Paul was not comforted by the presence of the Jerusalem believers. Their absence in his support is very condemning of them. Where were they? Did they care? They were the ones who urged him to participate in the purification observance—that which got him into so much trouble. Hence, they ought to have felt very obligated to do all they could to help him at this time. But, as we noted in a previous chapter, they were of no help at all. There isn’t even any record of their praying for Paul. When Peter was in prison, the church made great prayer for his deliverance ([Acts 12](#)). But we do not read of anything like that going on among the believers regarding Paul. If they were praying like that, it surely would have been mentioned in the Scripture. But the Jerusalem church had been made a poor church by the intrusion and toleration of legalism. Paul will be forsaken by them.

## **2. The Precept From God**

“Be of good cheer” ([v. 11](#)). We may be surprised that comfort comes from commandments. We think of promises not precepts as the place we will find solace for our wearied souls. But the truth of the matter is that some of the best comforts come from God’s commandments. Commandments are not given us to burden us

but to bless us. Obeying them will bring blessings that will give us great comfort. Had Paul obeyed God's orders to stay away from Jerusalem, he would have not experienced the many discomforting things he did in Jerusalem.

The precept given Paul here was not an easy one to obey. He was told be "be of good cheer" in a place where "good cheer" would be as sparse as prayer in a meeting of atheists. But when God gives a command, He will enable us to do it. And so God gave Paul some very good reasons here to be of good cheer. For one thing, Paul could be of good cheer because of the presence of the Lord. Furthermore, the praise and promise the Lord was going to give him after this precept would also give much help to Paul to be of good cheer. Though Paul was in bonds, he still had much to cheer him up. Of course, if he looks only at his bonds and not at his blessings, he will not be cheered up. If we want to be cheered up, we must concentrate on our blessings not our burdens. If we focus on all the bad things in our life, we will be pessimistic and only be a drag on others. In the midst of our troubles, let us meditate on the many things (and they are many) for which we can give thanks to God rather than complain about all the bad things in our life. God's people are to be cheerful people, not down-in-the-mouth people.

### **3. The Praise From God**

"Thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem" ([v. 11](#)). Praise counters failure. In the time of failure, man has a tendency (especially if his circumstances are bleak as were Paul's circumstances) to see nothing but failure. Failure to reach the Jews with the Gospel would be hanging heavy upon Paul's mind that night. Paul had a great desire to give them the Gospel, but his stay in Jerusalem had not given him much opportunity at all for preaching Christ. His ill-advised and ill-fated observance of the purification vows did nothing to open the door for the Gospel. Then the Sanhedrin episode ended any hope he might have had of reaching his own with the Gospel. It would be easy for Paul to wonder if he had testified at all in Jerusalem the way things had gone and the way he had acted.

But in spite of his failure, he had still done some testifying for Christ. As an example, when he stood on the stairs of the Antonia tower and spoke to the mob, he testified of Jesus Christ when he gave them the story of his conversion. In Jerusalem, Paul did not testify for Christ with the excellence he had testified elsewhere; but God notices the positive even if it is small at times. If there is anything worth praise, God will be faithful to praise in order to encourage us. Would that we were so faithful in praising our matchless Savior Who is completely worthy of our praise!

#### 4. The Promise From God

“So must thou bear witness also at Rome” ([v. 11](#)). Promise as well as praise counters failure. Not only would failure to testify well in Jerusalem be much on Paul’s mind, but also his failure to heed God’s warnings about coming to Jerusalem would weigh very heavily upon him. In his present circumstances, his disobedience to the Spirit’s leading looked as though it was ending Paul’s opportunity to preach the Gospel. The promise given Paul tells us that Paul was indeed fearful that his service for the Lord was done. Being in bonds, he was no longer able to preach. He could not move about on his own. Would he ever be able to engage in preaching again? Was he now going to be silenced in prison and shut out from reaching the multitudes with the good news about Jesus Christ? Some months earlier he had purposed in his heart to preach Christ in Rome ([Acts 19:21](#)). But his present circumstances would not encourage him to think he had any prospects of doing that. Paul had written earlier to the Corinthians about being a castaway ([1 Corinthians 9:27](#)). He was not human if thoughts of being a castaway did not come to him and bother him when he was bound in the tower of Antonia that night. But now, and to Paul’s great encouragement, the Lord tells Paul he will indeed preach in Rome. God wasn’t done with Paul after all.

As great as this promise is, it would not bring much cheer to many saints today, for they are so carnal. If God promised them fame, fortune, and fun, then they would cheer up. But promising them an open door for serving God would not do it. They find no joy in serving the Savior. They are so spiritually cold that they have no delight in the Word of God or the work of God. Let us so live, however, that we will find our greatest delights in spiritual blessings. Let us so live that the loss of material possessions would not bother us nearly as much as the loss of opportunity to serve the Lord or opportunity to read and study and delight in the Word of God.

You will notice in this promise that the Lord did not promise Paul release from his bonds so he could go to Rome. Paul would go to Rome as a prisoner, not as a free man. This instructs us that Paul’s disobedience did indeed limit him. Paul, however, made such good use of his limited opportunities in service that it may be difficult for some to realize he was limited in his service. But he was, nevertheless. When we sin against the plain commands of God, we do hinder our service. Even the great Apostle Paul was limited by his failure. Chains and years of imprisonment limited him considerably. There are those in our churches today who do not like some of the qualifications given in the Bible for church officers because it excludes them from some positions in the church. They do not want to admit that some sins can indeed limit one in the service of the Lord. But though they are limited in what positions they can hold, they still can serve the Lord; and they need to learn from Paul to use

their limited opportunities to the fullest. Doing so they will discover they can do a whole lot more than they ever dreamed. It may be more humbling service in the eyes of man, but it can be very honored service before God.

Oh, what grace it is that God comes to comfort us when we have failed. We expect God's encouragement when we have been faithful but have not experienced outward success or have been mistreated. But when we have failed, as Paul had done in Jerusalem, we often feel that God will give up on us. However, depend on God's grace to come to you even in that dark hour of failure to encourage you to try again.

## XXVI. PROTECTION FROM CONSPIRACY

[ACTS 23:12–35](#)

AFTER THE COMFORT *for* Paul comes the “conspiracy” ([v. 13](#)) *against* Paul. After the solace from the Savior comes the storm from Satan. After the promise given Paul comes the persecution against Paul. After the night with the presence of the Master comes the day with the presence of the murderers. This is not unusual, but the usual. When God blesses, we can expect Satan to buffet. It not only is so with us but was also so with Jesus Christ; for, as an example, after the dove came upon Christ at His baptism, the devil came upon Christ in the wilderness temptation attack.

The conspiracy against Paul followed on the heels of the riotous meeting he had the day before with the Sanhedrin. Hence, this makes the third day in a row that Paul experienced outspoken opposition in Jerusalem. First came the mob attack in the Temple area, then the next day came the Sanhedrin experience, and now the day following the Sanhedrin uproar comes the conspiracy to take his life. But in each of these uprisings in Jerusalem against him, Paul's life was protected. God's grace does indeed look out for His own even though His own sometimes do not look out for themselves. This was the case here with Paul who came to Jerusalem knowing he was walking into trouble—trouble which he could have avoided had he heeded God's warnings.

To study this conspiracy against Paul and the protection Paul received from it, we will consider the need of the protection ([vv. 12–15](#)), the nephew in the protection ([vv. 16–22](#)), and the nature of the protection ([vv. 23–35](#)).

## A. THE NEED OF THE PROTECTION

That Paul needed protection from the conspiracy and that it was substantial protection he needed is made plain by taking a look at Paul's enemies and their plans. In so doing, we will note they were dedicated, diversified, disrespectful, deceitful, deadly, disloyal, and defiled.

### 1. The Enemy was Dedicated

"And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy" ([vv. 12, 13](#)). The enemy of Paul was a dedicated bunch. We see it in our text in that they were steadfast, sacrificial, and speedy about their work of trying to kill Paul. Would that God's people showed more of this dedication in serving Him.

*Steadfast.* The enemy would not give up. They were determined to kill Paul. In their attack upon Paul, they were steadfast in spite of past results and in spite of present difficulties.

First, they were *steadfast in spite of past results*. The enemy had failed repeatedly to slay Paul. They had been foiled in this present Jerusalem visit by Paul when they tried to beat him to death as a mob ([Acts 21:31,32](#)) and when the Sanhedrin tried to condemn him in their council meeting ([Acts 22:30–23:10](#)). However, after these two defeats, they did not go off in the corner and pout and fold their tents. Rather, they increased their determination to "get" Paul.

The enemy of Paul (not always the exact same people but always of the same evil spirit) had not only been trying to kill Paul in Jerusalem the last few days, but the book of Acts also reports the enemy had been trying to kill Paul ever since Paul was converted. The enemy plainly tried to kill Paul in Damascus ([Acts 9:23–25](#)), Jerusalem ([Acts 9:29](#)), Iconium ([Acts 14:5](#)), Lystra ([Acts 14:19](#)), and Greece ([Acts 20:3](#)). But each time they failed. However, they are a determined bunch; and they try again here in Jerusalem to slay Paul. The poor results of the past did not diminish their current efforts.

Lack of results often causes many saints to quit trying. But we must never give up, for our enemy does not give up. We must keep faithfully at our God-given task whether we see encouraging results or not. We must not slacken our efforts just because results do not come in the way we expect them to come. Preachers must

continue to faithfully preach the Word whether many people respond or not. Let those who espouse the cause of righteousness never be outdone in determination by those who espouse the cause of evil.

Second, they were *steadfast in spite of present difficulties*. The plan of the conspirators, which we will note more in detail as we go along, involved killing Paul as he was being brought to the Sanhedrin from the tower of Antonia by a group of Roman soldiers. This meant that the conspirators had the very difficult task of overcoming the Roman soldiers in order to kill Paul. Catching Paul alone in some secluded place is one thing. Attacking Roman soldiers to get to Paul was, however, another thing. But in spite of the difficulties, the conspirators were determined to carry out their plans.

Would that the saints of God would be so steadfast in their determination in doing the work of God. But, alas, the slightest of difficulties causes them to complain, give up the task, and say it cannot be done. The problem, of course, isn't the hardness of the work but the heart of the worker. If one is earnest enough about doing the work of God, difficulties will not stop the effort. Difficulties will only cause that person to put forth more effort.

*Sacrificial*. These conspirators vowed they “would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul” ([v. 12](#)). Going without food and drink says they would go without legitimate pursuits in order to accomplish their goal. Food and drink are not inherently evil. They belong to the necessities of life. Yet these men would go without them in order to kill Paul. How this rebukes God's people in our present day who often will not go without even the nonessentials to serve the Lord. They will not give up their luxuries, let alone their necessities to serve God. So on weekends they take their boats and trailers and go camping instead of going to church. If you chide them for this practice, they will protest loudly that they “need” to get away to rest and relax, etc. They never, however, talk about their “need” to worship and be nourished spiritually.

This poor dedication of many Christians was addressed some years ago by a French communist when he contrasted the dedication of communists to the average Christian. He said, “We are ready to sacrifice everything, even our lives [for the cause of communism]. But you people [Christians] are afraid to soil your hands.” We will not gain many victories over the enemy when our dedication is so inferior to their dedication. This helps explain why so many churches accomplish so little in God's work.

*Speedy.* Going without the necessities of life meant these conspirators would try to kill Paul as soon as possible. One cannot go very long without food and drink, especially without drink. Hence, the attack on Paul must occur promptly. They wanted no delay in killing Paul. According to their plans, they would attack Paul on the next day ([v. 15](#)).

Too bad we cannot get church members as earnest about doing the work of God. They prefer to drag their feet instead of show any kind of speed in getting God's work done. As an example, bring up some project in a business meeting at church and you will see many church members trying to delay the project by arguing that it does not need to be done right away and that we should wait awhile in order to think about it more. Insisting we think about it more sounds like good advice, but it is a crafty scheme to delay indefinitely the project; for no matter when you bring it up later—the delayers still want to think about it more. They are in no hurry to do God's work. But we must remember the enemy of our souls is not dragging his feet. Therefore, if we are going to combat him successfully, we must not be dilatory in doing the work of God. Our dedication must be great enough to cause us to move quickly and not drag our feet.

## **2. The Enemy was Diversified**

“And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said . . . ye with the council [Sanhedrin] signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him; and we, or ever he come near [before he comes near], are ready to kill him” ([vv. 14, 15](#)). The enemy of Paul was diversified in its attack upon him. The mob attack was foiled by the Roman army, so they will use another method to kill Paul. They will ambush him as he is being taken to the Sanhedrin.

Satan has a number of ways in which he attacks God's people. If, as here, an open attack does not work, then an ambush will be tried. If poverty does not work, then he will try prosperity. If he cannot defile us from within by getting us to sin, then he will blacken us from without by getting others to slander us. If discouragement does not stop us, then he will try to get us carried away in our delights. If attacks from outside the church do not work, then he will try to get the church members to fight among themselves.

All of this diversity of the enemy exhorts us to be ever alert and watchful to his tactics. We can never let down our guard. What the enemy tried to do yesterday may not be what he tries to do today. All gates of the city must be guarded, all areas of our life must be alert to attack by the enemy of our soul, or we will be defiled,

shamed, defeated, lose our joy, and be crippled for service.

### **3. The Enemy was Disrespectful**

There was absolutely no respect of the law—either man’s law or God’s law—in this conspiracy against Paul, for the men involved in this conspiracy were plotting murder. We will discover quickly in God’s service that opposition to God’s work has no interest in being law abiding. When God’s work and workers are attacked, laws will be trampled on without hesitation. Paul is arrested contrary to the law. Paul is being confined and bound contrary to the law. Paul is being condemned to death by the conspirators which is contrary to the law. Throughout his missionary travels, Paul was often treated unlawfully not only by the ordinary citizen but also by civil authorities. So it is with God’s people today. All around the world, attacks occur against the church which are contrary to the law of the land, but the officials of the land look the other way when the law is broken. Society will insist on the law being respected except when it deals with God’s people.

Sometimes, we see this problem even inside the church. Church dissidents will insist on every jot and tittle of the constitution being adhered to by those they oppose. They will use the constitution to slow down the work of others all they can. However, when the dissidents want to do something, they pay no attention to the church constitution. This is especially true when they want to get rid of a godly pastor. But let the church try to vote out some troublemaking-member and the dissidents will fight that move with every constitutional guideline (or imagined guideline—they are good at imagining constitutional guidelines) they can.

### **4. The Enemy was Deceitful**

“And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him; and we, or ever he come near [before he comes near], are ready to kill him” ([vv. 14, 15](#)). The plan of the conspirators called for the Sanhedrin to request of Lysias, the captain of the Roman soldiers who had Paul in their custody, that he bring Paul to another council meeting so they could examine him “more perfectly.” This request would sound like a logical request to the the captain, for the Sanhedrin certainly had not examined him very well the previous day. But this request was nothing but a lie, of course; for it was simply a ruse to get Paul out in the open so Paul could be



attacked and killed. The conspiracy called for deceiving the Roman military.

Jesus Christ said of Satan, “He is a liar, and the father of it” ([John 8:44](#)). Hence, it should not be surprising that when he attacks the work and workers of God, he freely employs deceit. Truth will not condemn God’s work, therefore, the enemy can only lie. How often Christianity is lied about by its enemies. How often God’s faithful servants are lied about. Joseph was terribly slandered by Potiphar’s wife, Naboth was viciously slandered by Jezebel, and Jesus Christ was slandered worse than anyone else. But slander will not hurt us as much as our sinning. We may lose our reputation through slander, but sin will cause us to lose our character. Losing our reputation hurts, but not nearly as much as losing our character.

## **5. The Enemy was Deadly**

“Certain of the Jews banded together . . . saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul . . . we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul . . . we . . . are ready to kill him” ([Acts 23:12,14,15](#)). Three times in these verses we are told plainly that the enemy wanted Paul’s blood. They were a cruel, bloodthirsty, murderous group. Their attack on Paul was not just one of words, it was also one of action—deadly, murderous action. They wanted to rid society of Paul. They were not beseeching government powers for equal time with Paul; they wanted exclusive time.

Christians are so slow to wake up to the fact that opposition to God’s people and God’s work is serious. The enemy means business. He is not playing games. He wants to wreck the church. He wants to destroy the faith. He wants to destroy God’s people. In view of this fact, God’s people need to fight evil more vigorously and deal with it more forcefully. When temptation shows up in the individual life, it must be dealt with very firmly; or it will overcome the saint. When opposition shows up in church, the church must deal with it firmly; or it will destroy the church’s ministry. We cannot deal lightly with sin, for sin is deadly.

## **6. The Enemy was Disloyal**

“Now therefore ye with the council [Sanhedrin] signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow, as though he would enquire something more perfectly concerning him; and we, or ever he come near [before he comes near], are ready to kill him” ([v. 15](#)). The Sanhedrin had to assent to the proposal of the conspirators in order to give an official invitation to Lysias to bring Paul to the council for another examination. “The word translated ‘signify’ [[v. 15](#)] . . . properly

denotes a formal or official notice” (Alexander). Thus we learn that the Pharisees in the Sanhedrin, who had earlier supported Paul, were no longer supporting him. They quickly became disloyal. “Some suppose that this flagitious [grossly wicked] proposition was made only to the chief priests and elders of the Sadducean party, as the Pharisees had openly espoused Paul’s cause. But as this effect was owing to a momentary impulse, and as both parties afterwards accused him before Felix ([Acts 24:15](#)), it is better to make no limitation not suggested by the text or context” (Alexander). The Pharisees were simply disloyal. Their support of Paul was only temporary. He could not count on them through thick or thin. That should not be surprising, of course; for the Pharisees as well as the Sadducees were not hesitant to change sides on issues whenever it was to their personal advantage. They did not have character to stick with a position because it was right. They were politicians, not statesmen.

## **7. The Enemy was Defiled**

Here we focus especially on the defilement of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin evidences their defilement by going along with the request of the murderous conspirators. “The Jews [Sanhedrin] have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul tomorrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly” ([v. 20](#)). The corruption of the Sanhedrin was obviously well known beforehand, or the group making the proposal to them would not have made it to them in the unashamed and open way that they did. Making this proposal was a confession of murderous objectives; but the group making the proposal to the Sanhedrin was obviously not fearful that the Sanhedrin would be upset, squeal on them, or turn them over to government officials. No, they knew the Sanhedrin. They knew how defiled in character they were and that a murderous proposal could be successfully made to them.

Those who oppose God’s work and workers are not people of good character. And this goes for the troublemakers in the church, too. Sooner or later you will discover that those members who continually oppose the work of the church have considerable character problems. Sin opposes righteousness, and so men of bad character oppose men of good character. This does not mean that every time a pastor is opposed, the opposition is people of bad character. Sometimes pastors are corrupt and guilty of intolerably bad behavior and need to be put out of their pastorate. Good men will oppose the pastor in this case. But so often it is bad people opposing a godly pastor.

## B. THE NEPHEW IN THE PROTECTION

“And when Paul’s sister’s son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul” ([v. 16](#)). A key in the protection Paul received from the conspiracy to kill him was Paul’s nephew. This is the first and last time we will see Paul’s nephew in Scripture. Not a great deal is said of him in Scripture, and especially is nothing said previously in Scripture to give any hint that Paul had family in Jerusalem. So we are surprised to suddenly read of one of Paul’s relatives being in the city. We do not know the nephew’s exact age (“young man” in [verses 17](#) and [18](#) is translated from the same word translated “young man” in Paul’s case in [Acts 7:58](#) and can be used for one from a young boy to a man in his twenties), what he was doing in Jerusalem (was he going to school there, or did he live with his parents there?), or how he overheard the plans of the conspirators. But we do know that he was an important figure in the protection of Paul from the conspirators, and that is the information God would have us know.

In studying the work of Paul’s nephew in protecting Paul, we will note the alertness of the nephew, lowliness of the nephew, promptness of the nephew, boldness of the nephew, attentiveness to the nephew, earnestness of the nephew, and the quietness of the nephew.

### 1. The Alertness of the Nephew

“Paul’s sister’s son heard of their lying in wait” ([v. 16](#)). Some place in the city of Jerusalem, Paul’s nephew heard about the conspiracy. That Paul’s nephew heard of the conspiracy strongly indicates the conspirators were not as careful as they should have been about concealing their plot. As Matthew Henry said, “We do not find that the plotters, though they took an oath of fidelity, took an oath of secrecy.” God, of course, could have exposed the plot even if they had kept their plot with great secrecy. But the habit of sin is to expose itself sooner or later. We only fool ourselves if we think we can sin without being found out; for God said, “Be sure your sin will find you out” ([Numbers 32:23](#)).

How Paul’s nephew heard of the conspiracy, we do not know. We do not know whether he heard about it directly or indirectly. But in whatever way he heard it, we do know that he was alert to both danger and duty. He was alert to the danger that Paul was in, and he was alert to his own personal duty to make known this conspiracy to the right people. God’s people can learn from this alertness.

*Alertness to danger.* As Paul's nephew was alert to the danger Paul was in, so the saints need to be alert to the dangers of evil about them, such as the dangers of false doctrine, of popular but corrupt philosophies (e.g. psychology and psychiatry), of worldly music (though it be called Christian), of TV, and of fleshly practices (e.g. divorce, cocktails, dancing) approved by the world but not by the Word. Too often, however, professing Christians ignore the dangers, refuse to heed the warnings they hear (they even criticize those who point out the dangers of various evil practices), carelessly go on their way, and then get trapped by the enemy. Do not be a naïve Christian. Get into the Word of God regularly so you will be alert as to the dangers of evil.

*Alertness to duty.* As Paul's nephew was alert to his duty, so let God's people be alert to their duty in serving the Lord. Paul's nephew saw that Paul was in danger and immediately realized his duty to help save Paul. In like manner, knowing that souls are in danger of eternal hell fire, we have a duty to give them the good news of the Gospel which will help them escape the judgment of hell.

Our specific duty is oftentimes determined by our circumstances, as in the case of Paul's nephew. But the irresponsible and undedicated will seldom if ever be alert enough to recognize their duty when it presents itself. As an example, when new people walk into a church for the first time, many members stand around and gawk at them never realizing it is their duty to greet the guests, welcome them to the church, help them find their classes, etc.

## **2. The Lowliness of the Nephew**

God does not need famous and influential people to accomplish His purpose. He can use anyone to do His will. Oftentimes, as here in the protecting of Paul from the conspiracy, God uses the lowly and unimpressive to the world to thwart the devil's plans. God delights to mock the devil by using weak and common things to defeat the work of the evil one. God will later use an impressive force, the Roman army, to protect Paul; but here He uses an obscure young person to bring protection to the Apostle.

All of this should be an encouragement to God's saints who have little to impress people. It isn't fame or fortune that is necessary to serve the Lord; it is faithfulness. Paul's nephew was at that time nothing special other than having Paul for an uncle which in that day did not mean much, and it would not be something you bragged

about in Jerusalem! Paul's nephew was just an inconspicuous young man who, however, became a valuable tool of God in simply reporting the conspiracy to the right people. This nephew of Paul did not even do that which seems like a great heroic exploit either, but it was indeed great in its effect. You may discount your work as nothing of any account, yet, it may result in that which is very important and vital to the work of the Lord. Hence, do not be concerned about being big in the eyes of man but be very concerned about your faithfulness in the eyes of God. If you are faithful, God will use you and much more than you may think. Little did Paul's nephew realize that his seemingly small deed of reporting a conspiracy against the great apostle would immortalize him for centuries in the Word of God.

### **3. The Promptness of the Nephew**

"And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul tomorrow into the council . . . now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee" ([vv. 20, 21](#)). When Paul's nephew became aware of the conspiracy, the agreement with the forty plus men and the Sanhedrin had already taken place. The death of Paul was planned for the next day. The next step was for the Sanhedrin to request of Lysias that Paul be brought to their council. Hence, the conspiracy needed to be exposed immediately, even before the council sent an invitation to Lysias. Any delay in exposing it would be deadly. Therefore, it was extremely important that the nephew be prompt in reporting this conspiracy. A prompt report of the conspiracy would give the Roman soldiers the time needed to get Paul out of Jerusalem before the conspirators had a chance to act.

Promptness is so important, especially in the Lord's work. God can by His providence give us advantages and opportunities to act for Him, such as he did for the nephew by putting him where he could hear about the conspiracy. But if we are not prompt in using the providential opportunities, we will waste them and fail in our responsibility. Had the nephew not been prompt in his actions, disaster could have prevailed.

### **4. The Boldness of the Nephew**

"He went and entered into the castle, and told Paul" ([v. 16](#)). It surely took some courage for Paul's nephew to do what he did. It would take courage to walk uninvited into the barracks where the Roman soldiers were, and it would take courage to make known the conspiracy. He risked being discovered and found out by the conspirators, and that would have been very perilous for him—probably it would have cost him

his life. But the nephew saw his duty and with boldness did what had to be done.

We are never to risk our lives unnecessarily, but our heavenly duty is more important than survival. This is a truth few professing Christians are aware of today or would embrace if they knew about it. As we noted early in this chapter, these Christians protest sacrificing the unnecessary let alone the necessary in order to serve God. Hardly would they lay down their lives to obey Him. But let us never forget that we owe our salvation to the One who obeyed the Heavenly Father even unto death in order that we might be saved ([Philippians 2:8](#)).

## 5. The Attentiveness to the Nephew

“Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain; for he hath a certain thing to tell him. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed [asked] me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? . . . and he [the chief captain] called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready . . . provide . . . and bring him [Paul] safe unto Felix the governor” ([Acts 23:17–19,23,24](#)). The captive (Paul), the centurion, and the captain were all attentive to the nephew’s mission.

*The captive was attentive.* Paul had just received a promise from the Lord the previous night that he would carry the Gospel message to Rome. With this promise in hand, why should he be concerned about a conspiracy? God had promised; so why not tell his nephew about the promise and tell him God would take care to see that Paul was protected; therefore, don’t worry about the conspiracy. Such is the foolish thinking of some. But Paul did not react that way. After listening to his nephew relate the details about the conspiracy, Paul took the nephew to a nearby centurion to have him taken to the chief captain (Lysias) and informed of the conspiracy so proper action could be taken.

All of this teaches us that promises do not preclude our acting with prudence. Promises do not take away our responsibilities. God does not work miracles unless necessary. He did not need to work a miracle here, for Paul could have the captain informed, and the captain could take proper action to counter the conspiracy. Few of God’s promises are like salvation in that once we are saved we do not have to concern ourselves about doing anything else to realize the promise of eternal

salvation. Most other promises do involve responsible action if the promise is to be realized. Unfilled promises need to be understood in this light instead of blaming God for failing. Promises are to encourage us to action, not make us careless or lazy.

*The centurion was attentive.* The centurion immediately did what Paul told him to do. One cannot help but see God in this. How often does a prisoner tell a centurion to do something and he does it? But Paul was acting in accordance with Divine promises here; and when we do that, God works mightily on our behalf even to moving people to work for us who normally would not.

One instructive thing we especially want to note here regarding the centurion's action is what he called Paul. He called him "Paul the prisoner" ([v. 18](#)). "Paul the prisoner" is some title for one of the greatest Christians and missionaries that ever lived and for one of the greatest sons the nation of Israel ever had. But depend on it, the world is not in the habit of addressing the truly great people with the right titles. Some of the vilest men of our time are called by high sounding titles, such as, President, King, Emperor, Prime Minister, etc. In Paul's day, vile men like the Herods were called "King." Wretched men like Felix and Festus were called "governor." But Paul was called "Paul the prisoner." Even worse is what mankind called Jesus Christ when He was on the earth. But someday, Christ will be addressed with the highest of titles known to man, and His followers will be called better things than what they were accustomed to in this vile world. Do not be concerned about what men call you in this life. Be primarily concerned what God calls you. If God calls you honorable names, the day will come when men will do the same.

*The captain was attentive.* The attentiveness of Lysias, the captain, to Paul's nephew was surprising. He gave Paul's nephew a private hearing. "The chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?" ([v. 19](#)). It would not have been surprising had the captain given Paul's nephew a fleeting moment and then sent him on his way. After all, what can a young boy tell a captain that is all that important.

That Paul's nephew was more likely to be in the category of a young boy than a man in his twenties (we noted above that "young man" of [verse 17](#) can cover a wide age group) is evidenced by the fact that the captain took him by the hand to lead him to a private place. You take young boys by the hand but not young men. Taking the nephew by the hand and leading him to a private place to converse reflected

the concern of the captain regarding Paul's situation. Lysias, with all his faults, was not an inept soldier. Obviously, his promotion to captain was for more reasons than that he knew the right people. He demonstrated the qualities of a captain in how he was quick to respond to situations including this one. He was not going to ignore any information concerning Paul that might come to him. He rightly discerned that he had a touchy case on his hands, and he was not going to be careless. All of that is commendable. We would like to see more of that among Christians. There is no premium in being careless or lax in the performance of one's duties. If anyone should demonstrate proper care and caution, it ought to be Christians. But, alas, we often see better character in people of the world than in some saints.

## **6. The Earnestness of the Nephew**

"And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul tomorrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them; for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee" ([vv. 20, 21](#)). Paul's nephew exhibited earnestness in his prompt reporting of the conspiracy to Paul. But even more was his earnestness exhibited by the manner in which he reported the conspiracy to the captain, which we note here. After telling the captain the information of the conspiracy, he earnestly exhorted the captain to not yield to the request to bring Paul to the Sanhedrin for further examination.

There are some who think that it is only necessary to tell people the news of salvation and that to earnestly plead with folk to be saved is to tamper with the Sovereignty of God. Such thinking is not Scriptural. The nephew did more than give the captain information. He earnestly exhorted the captain regarding what he should do! While many churches and evangelists have made havoc of the invitation time at the end of a service, and through tricks and gimmicks have gotten people to "come down the aisle," their unsanctified actions do not cancel out the legitimate pleading with people to turn to Christ. If we never earnestly plead with people to turn to Christ, it gives the distinct impression that we really do not care about lost souls and that this matter of soul salvation is not as important as it really is.

## **7. The Quietness of the Nephew**

"So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See



thou tell no man that thou hast showed these things to me” ([v. 22](#)). The nephew was wisely ordered by the captain to keep his mouth shut about his coming to the captain and reporting the conspiracy to him. If the nephew talked, the attempt of the captain to get Paul out of town would be foiled. But the nephew obviously kept quiet, for the captain was able to get Paul out of town before the conspiracy took place.

Keeping one’s mouth shut in confidentiality is a mark of character. If you cannot keep your mouth shut but must blab indiscreetly anything you know, you are a despicable person. You prove by your loose tongue that you are untrustworthy. Our churches have a number of church officers who have trouble here. Let something be discussed in confidence in a deacons’ meeting or trustee meeting or in some other meeting, and within a few hours of the meeting the news is being gossiped about by folk in the church. Why? Because some church officer could not keep his mouth shut when he was suppose to. Church people who are like that should not be church officers. They have proven they are untrustworthy and lack the character to serve in such places. Their loose tongue only hinders the work of God. Speaking when they should keep quiet has often stirred up great trouble in church that was totally unnecessary.

## C. THE NATURE OF THE PROTECTION

After being informed by Paul’s nephew about the conspiracy, Lysias, the captain, “called unto him two centurions” ([v. 23](#)) and gave them orders for moving Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea in order to provide for Paul’s protection. To study the nature of Paul’s protection from the conspiracy, we will consider the convoy, the communiqué, and the confinement.

### 1. The Convoy

“Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night. And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix, the governor” ([vv. 23, 24](#)). We will note the details, departure, and destination of the convoy.

*The details of the convoy. “Two hundred soldiers . . . horsemen threescore and*

ten . . . spearmen two hundred . . . [and] beasts that they may set Paul on” describes an impressive convoy for the beleaguered apostle. Some five hundred and seventy soldiers (besides all the horses) are employed for the protection of Paul. And note that Paul is not forced to walk. Many of the soldiers have to walk but not Paul the prisoner. He is provided with a beast upon which to ride. Lysias was taking no chances. Physically, Paul was doubtless not up to the kind of march the military was going to make that night. So he will be permitted to ride so as not to slow down the march.

God’s servants will discover that support for their work will come from a variety of sources. Sometimes support comes from expected sources such as Paul getting support from his nephew—you expect your family to help you. But sometimes support also comes from unexpected sources such as the large group of Roman soldiers and horses here. The fact that support sometimes comes from unexpected sources should be a great encouragement to God’s people, for there are times when we see no possibility of support from the normal and expected sources. When that happens we have a tendency to fear the worst and think we are without any source of help. But our help comes primarily from God, not the sources. Therefore, when normal, expected sources are dried up, that does not mean our help has dried up. It simply means that support will come from elsewhere. God can use any source to help us. He is not limited.

*The departure of the convoy.* “At the third hour of the night,” which is 9 P.M., the convoy was to begin its two-day trip to Caesarea. Starting at this hour of the night was late enough so the group could get out of Jerusalem without observance and early enough so they could make good distance before morning light broke. Lysias must get Paul out of town and a good way to Caesarea before the council came to him to request another hearing for Paul. That request would come the next day. With Paul a good way from Jerusalem by the next day, Lysias would be able to tell the council that Paul was unavailable and that they would have to go to Caesarea and plead their case before Felix. The Sanhedrin, not knowing that Lysias was informed of the plot, would have no legitimate complaint with Lysias. After all, they had acted very poorly when Paul was before them the first time; and they could understand why Lysias would send Paul to another court.

That which is involved in the departure time shows two needed things about our conduct if we are to benefit from our opportunities. They are speed and sacrifice—two ingredients we noted earlier in this chapter that accompany dedication. First, *speed* in using our opportunities is essential if we are to gain from them. Opportunities

seldom stick around very long. They open the door for us but for a short time, then the door closes. Those who are not prompt about using their opportunities will lose them. Lysias had little time to get Paul out of town; he must act quickly and he did. Second, *sacrifice* in using our opportunities is essential also if we are to gain from them. The soldiers must march all night in order to provide safety for Paul and also to keep Lysias from having a problem with the Sanhedrin. We do not like the night shifts. They call for sacrifice—loss of sleep for one thing. But if we are to benefit from our opportunities, sacrifice will often be part of the program. Of course, the benefits will more than compensate for the sacrifice; but short sighted people with small character will not see that fact.

*The destination of the convoy.* “Make ready . . . to go to Caesarea.” Caesarea, located on the Mediterranean coast, was sixty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem. It was the Roman capital of Judea. Getting Paul a good distance out of Jerusalem would secure Paul’s protection from the murderous conspiracy against him. Also, with Caesarea being the Roman capital of Judea, it would bring Paul before Felix, the Roman governor of Judea, who would be the proper Roman official to next examine Paul. This, as we have noted, would get Lysias out of a touchy situation. Being examined in Felix’s court would honor Paul’s Roman citizenship (which Lysias would want done), and it would also keep the Jewish crowd from pressuring Lysias to let them try Paul again. Lysias needed to keep peace with both the Roman government and the Jews. Sending Paul to be examined in Caesarea would do that.

The road taken to Caesarea included passing through Antipatris ([v. 31](#)) for an overnight stay. Antipatris, rebuilt and named by Herod the Great after his father Antipater, was somewhat over half the way from Jerusalem to Caesarea. There in Antipatris, the four hundred soldiers left the group and returned to Jerusalem. This left the cavalry (seventy horsemen) to accompany Paul to Caesarea. By the time the group had gotten to Antipatris, the distance was great enough to lessen considerably the danger for Paul. Hence, the number of troops guarding him could be substantially reduced, although seventy horsemen is still a very impressive guard.

Going to Caesarea, where Paul had left less than two weeks earlier to go to Jerusalem ([Acts 24:11](#)), had to cause some somber thoughts for Paul. It was in Caesarea that Paul received his last warning about going on to Jerusalem ([Acts 21:10–12](#)). The warning was unheeded, of course; and so Paul is now “Paul the prisoner” ([v. 18](#)). He is still God’s ambassador, but his movements are now and will continue to be limited by his chains.

Everyone of us come to our Caesareas in life somewhere. These are times when

we must make critical decisions. The whole direction of our life will be affected by these decisions. Let us learn from Paul's wrong decision to not let passion overcome Divine precepts which then results in our unnecessarily ending up a prisoner of undesirable circumstances. In Paul's case, his passion problem was not some fleshly appetite but it was a passion for the salvation of his Jewish brethren in Jerusalem. It is very hard to criticize a passion like that. But in view of God's call for him and of God's warning for him, Paul was wrong and paid a severe price for his wrong. Most folk generally have much lower passions endeavoring to lead them in the wrong direction. But whatever the passion, it must be subjugated to the precepts of God if we are to make the right decisions in our Caesareas.

## 2. The Communiqué

Lysias sent a letter with the troops to be delivered to Felix the governor. The letter would tell about Paul so Felix would know something about the new prisoner given to his custody. We note three things about the letter: it was a promotional letter, a prevaricating letter, and a profitable letter.

*A promotional letter.* "Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them; then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman" ([vv. 26, 27](#)). The first thing we notice about the letter is that the captain, Claudius Lysias, is using the situation to promote himself. Governors can have much influence in rank advancements and prestigious military assignments for men like Lysias; therefore, he will make sure he looks good in this letter. He begins the letter by a noble greeting to a very ignoble man. Felix the governor was a scoundrel. But if you want promotion from the world, you must often stoop to giving honor to the dishonorable in order to ingratiate yourself with them. After flattering Felix, the captain then describes his action in an heroic manner: "Then came I with an army, and rescued him" ([v. 27](#)). The "I" gets the primary praise. Lysias makes sure Felix knows that Lysias is a most capable captain.

How like the flesh to praise self. We can understand that Lysias would do something like this, for after all he is of the world. But, alas, we see believers doing it as much as the world. The ministry is full of this obnoxious practice. Many pastors and evangelists hesitate not to blow their own trumpet and let everybody know how great they are. Some religious magazines are nothing but braggadocio magazines of the editor whose pictures and plaudits are sprinkled abundantly throughout the

magazines. “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips” ([Proverbs 27:2](#)) is a Scripture text that needs a lot more attention among Christians.

*A prevaricating letter.* “Then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman” ([v. 27](#)). To promote himself, Lysias had to prevaricate. What a different story Lysias presents about Paul’s case than what actually occurred. First, Lysias says he *rescued* Paul. But while the action of Lysias did indeed rescue Paul from the mob which was trying to beat him to death, Lysias actually *arrested* him and put him in bonds. Second, Lysias makes it sound like Paul was rescued because Lysias understood that Paul was a Roman; and, therefore, being loyal to the empire, Lysias went to great effort (used the army) to rescue one of Rome’s citizens. But hardly was that the case. The real truth of the matter is that Lysias thought Paul was the notorious Egyptian ([Acts 21:38](#)) when he arrested Paul during the mob scene near the Temple. He only discovered Paul’s citizenship when he was about to have Paul scourged after Paul made his speech to the mob. Lysias had gotten himself in trouble binding Paul and would have really been in trouble had the scourging actually taken place. But the letter makes it sound much differently. It was a very distorted report of the case but typical of men who are primarily looking out for themselves. We have lost a lot of character when we resort to lying to make our performance look better than it was. Anything we gain from such lying will eventually produce a greater loss than any gain we got from the lying.

*A profitable letter.* This letter is a profitable letter for us in that it teaches us a great lesson about checking what man says with what God says. Do not read Lysias’ account only, but read Luke’s account also. Do not read the newspaper only, but read the Scriptures also. Do not listen to the worldly wise-acre only; but listen to God, too.

So many fail to get God’s side of the story; and, therefore, they do not know the truth. They let clever but corrupt men fill their minds with philosophies, ideas, and standards that seem to sound so very good; but they do not check God’s Word to see what God has to say about these things, to see how God thinks and what His standards are. An example of this problem is seen in how men say Jesus Christ was born. [Matthew 1:18](#) says, “The birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise [way]” and then goes on to describe the details of the birth of Christ. But the apostates and the secular world pay no attention to Scripture and, therefore, have a number of different ways

they say it happened. But if you want to know the truth about the birth of Christ, check with the Scriptures. Another way in which truth is distorted is in the writing by so called Christian writers who write fiction stories on Bible passages. We have read some of these stories (and books), and they are disgusting distortions of truth. We do not need to fictionalize the Scriptures. We need to preach and proclaim the Scriptures as they are, not as we like to imagine they are. Check the Word of God for the facts. We will thus be able to expose every Lysias be he a Roman captain, a college professor, an apostate minister, or a so-called Christian psychologist.

### **3. The Confinement**

When Paul arrived in Caesarea, the military guard “delivered the epistle to the governor, [and] presented Paul also before him” ([v. 33](#)). After Felix, the governor, had read the letter and ascertained that Paul was in his judicial district ([v. 34](#)) and agreed to hear his case when Paul’s accusers came to Caesarea ([v. 35](#)), he then “commanded him to be kept in Herod’s judgment hall” (Ibid.). We note here the injustice and the invaluableness of the confinement.

*The injustice of the confinement.* Paul was declared innocent by Lysias’ letter ([v. 29](#)) and will later be declared the same by Felix, Festus, and Agrippa; yet he will continue to be confined. There is, of course, no justice whatever in this. But believers will learn sooner or later that injustice will often be the experience of God’s people. Scripture promises it, history records it, and experience will confirm it. Our day talks a great deal about the subject of justice—they often call it “rights.” But in action our day is becoming an increasingly unjust day. Especially are they guilty of trampling on the rights of believers. The group in our land that is mistreated more than any other group is the believers in Jesus Christ. All the talk of rights for minorities, abortionists (they have rights to kill?), homosexuals (how obnoxious!), and others never gets as far as the believers. And it will get worse! How unjust was Paul treated. He was such a great man. His benefit to society was so great. He had more character in his little finger than all his opponents had in their whole bodies. Yet, Paul is in prison. So much for man’s wisdom.

*The invaluableness of the confinement.* Strange as it may seem, the confinement in Herod’s judgment hall was a very valuable thing for Paul at this time. Many folk hated Paul with a passion, and in Jerusalem he had stirred up the people to a white heat to where they tried several times to kill him and were plotting to kill

him when he was sent to Caesarea. Under these circumstances, Paul could not stay in someone's private home or be allowed to walk the streets alone. He needed a body guard twenty-four hours a day, and God provided him such a body guard in the Roman soldiers and at Rome's expense. Paul could not have gotten a better body guard from men than from the Roman soldiers. This is just another illustration of the fact that God can use His enemies to protect His own. Rome certainly was no friend of Christ, yet they provided excellent protection for one of the greatest ambassadors of Christ the world has ever known. This reminds us of God using His enemy Pharaoh to protect the great deliverer Moses when Moses was a child. How this mocks the devil, shows the power of God, and warns of the futility of fighting against God. God is still in control and ever so often He manifests this control by using the enemy to do work for Him. It is foolish to fight against God, for you will end up fighting against yourself.

## XXVII. PERFORMANCE BEFORE FELIX

### ACTS 24

PAUL NOW BEGINS a series of trials and hearings in Caesarea before Roman officials. These experiences will cover a period of over two years. The first official before whom Paul will stand is Felix. His appearances before Felix will be both public ([vv. 1–23](#)) and private ([vv. 24–27](#)). Scripture reports just one public appearance but several private appearances. The public appearance will be an official trial, but the private appearances will simply be informal hearings. We are given more information about the public trial than the private hearings, but both are very instructive and show the great difference between Paul and all others involved in these hearings before Felix. Paul's performance was so exemplary. His righteousness was most evident while the wickedness of his accusers and his judge were also most evident.

### A. THE PUBLIC TRIAL

"And after five days Ananias, the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul" ([v. 1](#)). When the Sanhedrin, as part of the plot to kill Paul, made their deceptive request

to Lysias for another hearing for Paul, they were told by Lysias of Paul's move to Caesarea (but, of course, not the reason for the move). They would also be told that if they wanted to press charges against Paul they would now have to go to Caesarea to Felix's court to state their charges against Paul. The Sanhedrin would be upset that Paul had escaped the murderous conspiracy, but Lysias had covered his tracks well, and so the Sanhedrin could only do as Lysias said to do. Hence, in five days, Ananias and other representatives of the Sanhedrin showed up in Caesarea with their hired orator, Tertullus, as their spokesman.

In examining this public trial of Paul before Felix, we will note the accusations by Tertullus, the answer by Paul, and the action by Felix.

### **1. The Accusations by Tertullus**

"And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him" ([v. 2](#)). We will look at five aspects of these accusations: the spokesman of the accusations, the sycophancy in the accusations, the specifics of the accusations, the soldier in the accusations, and the supporters of the accusations.

*The spokesman of the accusations.* "A certain orator named Tertullus . . . informed the governor against Paul" ([v. 1](#)). The accusers of Paul did not have facts, so they resorted to rhetoric to try and persuade the judge. Lacking substance, they tried to convince with clever speech instead. This is typical of evil. It is ever the habit of evil to employ clever tongues to propagate their lies ([Romans 16:18](#) and [Colossians 2:4](#)). In our day it is not only clever tongues but also clever pens that promote evil. Liberal newspaper and magazine columnists and book authors continually pour out a stream of lies deceitfully clothed in the impressive garments of skillfully manipulated words. Though vile this tactic is, it unfortunately often works; for many are easily deceived by clever speech.

That Tertullus would use his oratorical skills to speak so evilly of Paul certainly reflects on the great lack of character in Tertullus. He could be bought. Cross his palm with enough silver, and he will use his skill to abuse others. It matters not to him if the cause is just or not; he will speak what he is paid to say. His number is not extinct. Lawyers abound today who are like him. They will defend any cause, though obviously wicked it may be, in order to pad their wallets and promote their fame. Many ministers also adjust their messages for pay and position. Instead of declaring the truth that honors God, His Son, and His Word, they will with clever speech deny the great doctrines of the faith. Tertullus and his kind are greatly deficient in



character and are a great curse to society.

*The sycophancy in the accusations.* “Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words” ([vv. 2–4](#)). Not only does evil resort to clever speech to persuade others, but they also use flattering speech. Tertullus laid it on pretty thick regarding Felix. You can almost see the slobber running down Tertullus’ mouth in his obnoxious fawning before Felix. In flattering Felix, he mixed a little bit of truth with a whole lot of untruth (B. H. Carroll said, “He did some steep lying”) in this sick bit of sycophancy. It was true that under Felix some “quietness” ([v. 2](#)) had come to the land—he had been able to rid the land of some of those bands of robbers that were ever harassing travelers and others. But “very worthy deeds” (*Ibid.*) was a joke. Felix, who had risen from the ranks of a slave to political power and financial wealth, had a very debased character. He was a cruel cutthroat who suppressed the country savagely. He had seen to it that Jonathan, a high priest, was assassinated; and he conducted a corrupt court that prospered on bribes (cp. [v. 26](#)). Furthermore, he was an immoral man who had just recently induced his latest wife (he had three), Drusilla, to desert her husband to become his wife.

Tertullus’ speech also spoke of accepting Felix with much thankfulness ([v. 3](#)), but in truth the Jews “never did accept anything that he did. They hated him worse than they hated the devil . . . the Jews, instead of accepting his administration thankfully, never did stop [attacking it] until they had him recalled, and Porcius Festus sent to succeed him” (Carroll).

*The specifics of the accusations.* The accusations by Tertullus against Paul were fourfold. They concerned Paul’s character, contempt, creed, and contaminating. The accusations were nothing but a batch of lies. After Tertullus had lied about Felix, he then lied about Paul.

First, *character*. “We have found this man a pestilent fellow” ([v. 5](#)). The first accusation by Tertullus is a denouncing of Paul’s overall character. Tertullus calls Paul a pest, a plague. How twisted and perverted is the accusation of Tertullus. How evil Tertullus was. He sounds like the liberal news media of our day that can eulogize some of the vilest people in the country, then at the same time castigate conservative people as being real scoundrels; for he could say good things about a

very bad man (Felix), then at the same time say evil things about one of the best men that ever set foot on the earth (Paul). Paul was one of the greatest blessings to come to men. His ministry changed people's lives from dissipation of character to dedication for Christ. Yet, he is called a pest. So the liberals call conservatives backward, non-progressive, and intolerant (conservatives are indeed intolerant of criminals, abortionists, homosexuals, and other evils—but the liberals make it sound like that is being oppressively intolerant to good people). Fundamental Christianity is called restrictive, opinionated (as though the liberals were not opinionated), uncharitable, against freedom, etc. Churches also have some Tertullus type characters in them. These church members can speak so condemning of a godly pastor while they exonerate and speak highly of some immoral, divorced, troublemaking church member. Tertullus and his descendants would criticize God and honor the devil.

Second, *contempt*. “A mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world” ([v. 5](#)). This accusation would get attention from anyone truly concerned about the success of Roman rule. One thing the Roman Empire did not tolerate and did not like to hear about was uprisings, insurrection, riots, and the like against the government. Tertullus, in unashamed perverting of facts, presents Paul as one who throughout the Roman Empire (“throughout the world” primarily refers to the Roman Empire here) shows great contempt for the Roman government and tries to get other Jews to rebel and rise up against the government. Besides being totally false, this accusation is filled with gross hypocrisy; for it so happens that the Jews themselves were very upset with the rule of Rome. At the time Tertullus spoke, Jews were revolting more and more and in a few years would begin the revolt that would result in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in putting down the revolt. They hated Rome's rule, yet feigned loyalty to it in order to condemn Paul. They did the same with Jesus Christ, too. They are like church troublemakers who, in trying to stop some project advanced by church leadership or in trying to run off a pastor, profess a great concern for the work of the church; but in their conduct, they work against the church.

Third, *creed*. “A ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” ([v. 5](#)). Tertullus' third charge is that Paul embraces an illegal religion. The word “sect” describes Christianity as illegal; that is, it was not authorized and approved by Rome. “Ringleader” says Paul is a leader of the religion—which would add to Paul's guilt of embracing an illegal religion. “Ringleader” is a military word and generically means “leader.” Paul was indeed a leader of the Christian faith. He was a trail-blazing missionary for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Rome permitted some religion in its empire. But if you did not come under the category of a legal religion, you were in violation of Roman law. Christians did

not consider themselves a new religion per se. Christianity was a fulfillment of Old Testament teaching—we will see more on this later. Judaism refused to receive Christ as the Savior and Messiah promised in the Old Testament, and they would do their best to stop Christianity by painting Christianity as a completely separate religion that was not legitimate by Rome's law.

We have many in our day who still want to make Christianity illegal by government laws. In our country they are gaining more and more ground. This accounts for such things as kicking the Bible out of the schools, removing prayer from graduation services, and prohibiting Christ-related Christmas decorations from being on government property. These are the beginnings. The ultimate goal of those pushing these restrictions is to stop any observance of our religion.

Fourth, *contaminating*. “Who also hath gone about to profane the temple” ([v. 6](#)) made against Paul by the mob in the Temple. The original charge was that Paul had polluted the Temple by bringing a Gentile into it ([Acts 21:28](#)). Obviously, the accusers who came to Caesarea realized they did not have any proof that Paul had actually brought any Gentiles into the Temple—for the charge was made on nothing more than supposition (“they supposed” that Paul had brought a Gentile into the Temple [[Acts 21:29](#)]). But the accusers do not want to let this charge disappear completely. So to keep the charge, they will modify it from Paul actually profaning the Temple to Paul simply planning to profane the Temple. Second, it was a most hypocritical charge. Here was Tertullus lying about Felix and lying about Paul; then he suddenly becomes concerned about the purity of the Temple. Joseph Parker said, “Imagine Tertullus being excited regarding the purity of the temple! . . . How suddenly some men become pious! How wonderfully they are excited about the temple under some circumstances! What a genius is hypocrisy!” It is like abortionists acting very concerned about life when an abortionist doctor is killed. It is like a tightwad, stingy church member complaining that the annual budget committee did not raise the mission budget enough. It is like homosexuals talking piously about child abuse. What detestable hypocrisy. Tertullus is a corrupt character. Felix is a corrupt character. Ananias and the elders of the Sanhedrin are corrupted characters. Yet, it is Paul, one of the greatest men of character to live on the earth, that they accuse of being a bad man. Sick! But so it was with Jesus Christ. The sinless Savior, God manifested in the likeness of human flesh, was condemned by mankind as a bad man when all He ever did was good ([Mark 7:37](#)). As He was condemned, so His faithful followers will be condemned. Let God's servants remember this the next time they are attacked in some business meeting by some scurrilous church member whose sainthood is suspect and whose character reeks of the world.

*The soldier in the accusations.* “Whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, Commanding his accusers to come unto thee; by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him” ([vv. 6–8](#)). Lysias, the Roman captain who rescued Paul three times from the Jews (from the mob, from the Sanhedrin, and from the conspiracy) is also accused vehemently by Tertullus. And as Tertullus lied about Felix and lied about Paul, so he lies about Lysias. But in the case of Lysias, Tertullus will have trouble making points with Felix; for unknown to Tertullus, Felix has the letter from Lysias that tells a far different story—one that Felix is much more likely to believe than that of an orator hired by the Jews. Tertullus did not help his case any by castigating Lysias. But liars soon get themselves in trouble.

Tertullus’ story about the Jews trying to judge Paul according to their law but being stopped by Lysias’ violent taking of Paul away from them is really a wicked twisting of the facts. But as we said, Tertullus was like the liberal news media; for that is about as accurate as much of our news gets reported today. It is all slanted in whatever direction the reporter wants to slant it. Some folk are persistently naïve, of course, and believe what they read in the newspapers and hear on the radio and see on TV, willingly being beguiled by the clever reporters with their liberal slanting and perverting of the news.

*The supporters of the accusations.* “And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so” ([v. 9](#)). We would expect Ananias and the elders who came with him to Caesarea to assent to what Tertullus said. They hired him and orchestrated the whole accusation. Once he finished his speech, the script called for them to assent. How pathetic that religion so unashamedly assents to a pack of lies. We expect the ungodly world to assent to falsehoods. But here the leaders of Judaism assent enthusiastically and in concert to all the prevaricating of Tertullus. How true it is, however, that when religion rejects Christ—as did Judaism—it will lose its character and become as cruel a tyrant as there can be. In the end times, it will be a Christ-rejecting religion that will turn on mankind with bloody brutality.

## **2. The Answer by Paul**

“Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered” ([v. 10](#)). Unlike some court situations Paul was in, such as the one in Philippi ([Acts 16:20–24](#)), Paul was given opportunity to answer his accusers. Felix had his faults,

and they were great and many. But he did give Paul opportunity to answer for himself, and that was commendable. Paul being a Roman citizen doubtless had something to do with Felix being so willing to give Paul time to defend himself.

Paul's conduct in answering the charges laid against him was most exemplary. In fact, he was the only one in the court that day who acted with character. He spoke the truth and acted most discreetly. But typical of the world in which we live, the ones who behave with excellence are generally in a place of dishonor in the world while the ones who act deplorable are in the place of honor. What we see today is what the writer of Ecclesiastes saw in his day. "I have seen servants upon horses [the place of honor], and princes walking as servants [the place of dishonor] upon the earth" ([Ecclesiastes 10:7](#)). But the day is coming when things will be changed to what they ought to be. Then Christ, as well as His people, will ride in honor while the enemy will walk in dishonor.

Paul's answer refuted the charges made against him. It silenced his accusers. And unknown to them, Paul's testimony—not their accusations—was substantiated by Lysias' letter. Had Felix not been such a corrupt governor, Paul would have been set free; for the facts were all in favor of Paul.

To examine Paul's answer in detail, we will divide it into six parts: his compliment, civility, confession, conscientiousness, charity, and critics.

*His compliment.* "Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself" ([v. 10](#)). It is proper to speak and act with respectful manners. In court this means you address the judge respectfully when you begin your speech—either in prosecution or defense. Tertullus resorted to gross flattery that was nothing but prevaricated praise. Paul also complimented Felix with respectful speech in his introductory remarks to Felix, but he did not stoop to the disgusting fawning tactics of Tertullus. In his opening comments, Paul gave due recognition to Felix's time in office which gave Felix experience as to the issues of the day. This, said Paul, encouraged him to speak. Why? Because with the experience Felix had, he would be capable of understanding the issues well and, hence, be capable of rendering better judgment than one who had been in office only a short time and was unacquainted with the issues the Jews raised. "Having more perfect [precise] knowledge of that way" ([v. 22](#)) emphasizes that Felix's experience gave him better knowledge than the inexperienced. Felix had been in office at least six years; some historians believe longer. This was longer than the usual term of office for his position. In the six or more years, Felix would become well acquainted with the Jews and the issues that stirred them. A newly appointed

governor fresh from Rome would be at a great disadvantage in understanding the underlying feelings involved in this court scene. Hence, Paul's statement, unlike the flattering slobber of Tertullus, was a fitting compliment to Felix. Paul "showed the difference between the artful compliments of a courtier [such as Tertullus had given Felix], and the respectful address of a Christian" (Simeon).

*His civility.* "Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city; Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me" ([vv. 11–13](#)). At the beginning of his answer to the charges laid against him, Paul first addresses the charge of contempt for the Roman government. Tertullus had declared Paul was "a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world" ([v. 5](#)) which said Paul was going around stirring up all the Jews against Rome. This charge would be the most lethal of all the charges made against Paul and the one Rome would be most concerned about. Hence, Paul addresses it at the beginning of his defense. He declares the civility of his conduct and his innocence of the sedition charge in a threefold way: lack of time to start sedition, lack of troublemaking to suggest sedition, and lack of testimony to substantiate sedition.

First, lack of *time* to start sedition. Paul said it had been "but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship" ([v. 11](#)). That did not give him time to gather up a following to rebel against Rome. There were men throughout the empire that were doing things like that. They would move into an area and then recruit followers to rebel against local Roman government. But that all takes some time. Time to recruit, time to train, etc. Paul had already been in Caesarea for "five days" ([v. 1](#)) which left but seven days that he was in Jerusalem. Of those seven days, he was in the custody of Lysias for at least two. That leaves but five days in Jerusalem to revolt against Rome. Obviously, he did not have time to be guilty of sedition—and, therefore, his arrest in Jerusalem could not be because of sedition.

Second, lack of *troublemaking* to suggest sedition. "I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city" ([vv. 11, 12](#)). Paul went up to Jerusalem to worship, not to stir up trouble. "Raising up the people" ([v. 12](#)) refers to raising up a mob of followers to revolt. Paul did not do this in the Temple, synagogues, nor anywhere else in the city. He categorically denies any conduct that would speak of sedition. That his presence stirred up the people to mob behavior is no blemish on Paul but is a discredit to the character of the mob.

Living godly stirs up the ungodly, but that does not make the godly a troublemaker. It simply condemns the ungodly.

Third, lack of *testimony* to substantiate sedition. “Neither can they prove the things of which they now accuse me” ([v. 13](#)). That was a bold challenge to the accusers, but Paul could make it because it was true, and the accusers knew Paul was right. They had even watered down one of their charges (the charge regarding the profaning of the Temple), as we noted earlier, because of lack of evidence. Tertullus made a clever speech, but Paul points out that it lacked proof. So it is with the attacks on Christianity and the Word of God. They are articulated with high-sounding speech by gifted and famous people. But they are deficient in lack of proof.

*His confession.* “But this I confess unto thee that, after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets; And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust” ([vv. 14, 15](#)). Here Paul addresses the charge against him of embracing an illegal religion. We note the courage in the confession and the clarification in the confession.

First, the *courage* in the confession. It is often not easy to confess one’s faith. Especially is this so when one’s faith has just been castigated, scorned, and accused of being against the law. To confess one’s faith under those circumstances takes much courage. But Paul had that courage, however; and so he unashamedly confessed that he did indeed worship God in the way his accusers called “heresy” (the word “heresy” in [verse 14](#) is translated from the same word as “sect” in [verse 5](#)). Paul was also a leader of the faith, but it was not necessary to confess that also, for the issue was primarily legality not leadership.

Would that we all were so courageously faithful in acknowledging our faith in Jesus Christ. The time may come for us, as it has for many throughout world history, that to confess Jesus Christ may be our death warrant on this earth. But better to confess Christ and die than to deny Christ and live. Few today would confess Christ if it cost them their life, for they won’t even confess their faith if it brings laughter by others or loss of friends or job.

Second, the *clarification* in the confession. In Paul’s confession, he clarifies what he believes in order to show that Christianity is not, in fact, disassociated with the religion of his accusers and, therefore, is not illegal. Paul worshiped the same God, read the same Scriptures, and believed some of the same major doctrines the accusers believed (e.g. “they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection



of the dead, both of the just and unjust” [v. 15]). Hence, his faith cannot be construed to be a new religion which Rome would condemn as illegal. To accuse Paul of heresy is to be hypocritical. If Paul was illegal in his worship, then so were his accusers.

Paul’s argument here points out an important truth that the Old Testament is not opposed to the New Testament. The New is the fulfillment of the Old. “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” ([Galatians 3:24](#)). “Judaism is the bud; Christianity is the bright, consummate flower” (Maclaren). The Gospel does not tell us to stop preaching from the Old Testament but only enhances preaching from the Old Testament. The unbelieving Jews in Paul’s day would not accept the fact that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah and, therefore, insisted that Christianity was a new religion, unrelated to what the Jews believed. They hated Rome but would like Rome to attack Christianity as an illegal religion.

*His conscientiousness.* “And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men” (v. 16). Tertullus had attacked Paul’s character. In his statement about his conscientiousness, Paul makes reference to his character in a prudent manner. Paul mentions, as he did previously before the Sanhedrin, that he has endeavored to live a conscientious life. The mention of this in the Sanhedrin resulted in his being smitten in the mouth ([Acts 23:1,2](#)). But that did not happen in Felix’s court. Ananias, who was sitting in the court listening to Paul, would doubtless do a slow burn when Paul again mentioned his conscientiousness. Ananias would also be concerned that Paul would bring up the smiting incident in the synagogue. While Ananias and the elders would deny it, Lysias could certainly confirm it. But Paul did not bring up the smiting incident, much to the relief of Ananias, we believe. Rather Paul simply defended his actions by pointing out his motivation, namely, to be without offense towards both God and men. Note that God came first. It is many times very difficult to not offend both at the same time. If we do not offend God, we generally offend men. If we do not offend men, we doubtless will offend God. If we cannot keep peace with both God and men, choose to keep peace with God.

*His charity.* “Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings” (v. 17). This part of Paul’s answer will attack two accusations made against him—the bad character accusation and the contempt accusation. “Alms” and “offerings” do not sound like one who is a pest nor like a leader of sedition. “Alms” refers to the benevolent gift which Paul had brought to the Jerusalem believers



who were in need of assistance. He had collected this money from the churches on his recent missionary journey. “Offerings” comes from the same Greek word as “offering” of [Acts 21:26](#) which refers to the offering made for those involved in the purification observance in the Temple whom Paul was supporting.

Though Paul came to Jerusalem to do good for the people, he was attacked, beaten, and imprisoned. Christians should not be surprised if they, too, experience this kind of treatment. Jesus Christ was treated this way. No one has ever tried to bless man so much as Jesus Christ, and yet He was so rejected that men rejoiced to see him killed. If Christ suffered this mistreatment and such a great follower of Christ as Apostle Paul suffered this mistreatment, then we Christians today cannot expect to be exempted from this mistreatment. But let not this mistreatment stop our benevolence. Let it not stop our service for God. We are to serve Him whether we are appreciated by men or not.

*His critics.* “Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult; Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day” ([vv. 18–21](#)). Paul brings his answer to a close by focusing on his critics—both the Sanctuary (Temple) critics and the Sanhedrin critics.

First, the *Sanctuary critics*. Paul first deals with the Sanctuary critics—those who accused him of profaning the Temple. He says three things about them: who they were, what they found in the Temple, and where they weren’t.

In regards to *who they were*, Paul says they were “Jews from Asia” ([v. 18](#)). They were not resident Jews of Jerusalem. That fact weakens the profaning accusation against Paul; for it looks mighty strange that visitors to Jerusalem, but not the inhabitants of Jerusalem, first attacked Paul in the Temple. If there was a real problem with Paul, normally the local residents would have been first to protest.

In regards to *what they found* in the Temple, Paul says they did not find profanation or any attempt to profane by Paul (as Tertullus accused) but purification. “Certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult” ([v. 18](#)). There is a big difference between purification and profanation. But Paul’s accusers, of course, ignored such differences.

In regards to *where they weren’t*. Paul says, “Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me” ([v. 19](#)). The absence of the

Asian Jews greatly weakens the case against Paul about the Temple charge, for a case falls apart without witnesses. The officials who did come to Felix's court to accuse Paul obviously did not want any of those rabble rousing Asian Jews in court before Felix. That kind would be a liability not an asset to the accusers. Even though Tertullus mentioned the charge of profaning the Temple, it was watered down; for Paul's accusers at this trial would rather make a watered down charge against Paul than have the Asian Jews present to testify. Some Christians are like those Asian Jews. Their lives and their lips make very poor witnesses for the cause they claim to support. Churches do not like to have them involved in public service because of that fact.

Second, the *Sanhedrin critics*. Paul says two things about these critics, who unlike the Asian Jews, were present for this trial. He notes their silence about the council meeting and their schism in the council meeting.

In regards to their *silence* about the council meeting, it is most interesting and condemning that in the accusation against Paul nothing was said about the council meeting. If the accusers had been good men, they would have told Felix what they had found in their examination of Paul in their council meeting. But, of course, these men could not do that; for the council meeting was such a farce—from the smiting of Paul to the fighting over Paul.

In regards to the *schism* in the council meeting, there is a hint in the mention of it that Paul had some doubts as to the acceptableness of his conduct in dividing the Sanhedrin (we mentioned this in an earlier chapter). But Paul brings up this schism to show that the issue was not the profaning of the Temple or sedition or bad character, but it was about “the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day” ([v. 21](#)). It was a doctrinal issue regarding Jewish beliefs, and Rome had little interest in such issues and certainly did not want their courts cluttered up with such arguments.

Paul's defense was a good one. He showed the fallacy of the charges, pointed out the conspicuous lack of witnesses, and ended by focusing on what the real issue was all about. Paul believed the Gospel and Jesus Christ, but his Jewish accusers did not. His accusers tried to make out that his case was about a lot more than it was. But Paul refuted that thinking. It is always the habit of evil people to try to make a case appear something that it is not when they do not want the real issue to be front and center. Church dissidents do this in their troublemaking at church. As an example, the pastor's sermons upset their conscience; so they attack him—but the attack does not focus on the conscience upsetting sermon, for that would expose their evil. Rather, they direct their attack on some other area of the pastor in hopes of gaining support from others they would not gain if they attacked the message.

### 3. The Action by Felix

Tertullus has accused and Paul has answered. Now it is up to Felix, the judge in this case, to act. Not surprisingly, what he did is not impressive. His actions can be summed up in two words: deferred and defective.

*Deferred.* “And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter” ([v. 22](#)). Deferring judgment on the case was the easy way out for Felix. Felix knew Paul was right. He could figure that out just by listening to Tertullus and Paul speak. But what really would help Felix to know Paul was right was the letter Lysias sent to Felix. It would not contradict Paul at all. But it would contradict much of what Tertullus said.

But Felix was a politician and also a greedy man and so was more interested in his position and purse than in justice. He knew that politically he must keep peace with the Jews, and leaving Paul confined would appease the Jews. It would also give him opportunity to see if he could gain a bribe from Paul for Paul’s freedom as we will note later ([v. 26](#)). If he lets Paul go free (which he should have because Paul won the case), he will irritate the Jews and lose a chance to squeeze money out of Paul for an acquittal. Therefore, he will keep Paul in prison under the pretense that he wants Lysias to come and give further testimony.

Bringing Lysias into the picture was a crafty move. No one could deny that he would be a valuable witness. But, obviously unknown to Paul’s accusers, Lysias was not coming to Caesarea to testify in this case. He could not leave his post in the turbulent city of Jerusalem. Furthermore, he had sent a letter regarding Paul; and that was sufficient testimony. But Felix saying he would wait for Lysias to come would pass as a good excuse to defer judgment.

*Defective.* “And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him” ([v. 23](#)). Such arrangements sound so charitable, but they represented great injustice. The arrangements, of course, certainly could have been much worse. The injustice of Paul’s confinement would be mitigated by having contact with friends (such as Philip the evangelist, who lived in Caesarea, plus Luke and other of Paul’s Christian friends and fellow workers). But in spite of the leniency, it was still great injustice. Paul was still confined though he was innocent. This was

a defective decision, not a charitable decision. Paul should have been freed. “The indulgence given to Paul, in his light confinement, only showed how clearly Felix knew himself to be doing wrong, but small alleviations do not patch up a great injustice” (Maclaren).

Later we will see Felix making another deferred and defective decision. Only in that case it will have to do with his soul’s relationship with God—the worst place to make a bad decision. It is the character of evil men to defer doing right and to be defective in conduct dealing with right and wrong. Deferring a decision unnecessarily makes the decision defective.

## B. THE PRIVATE HEARINGS

“And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ . . . he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him” ([Acts 24:24,26](#)). During the “two years” ([v. 27](#)) in which Paul was confined in Caesarea after the public trial before Felix, Paul had some private hearings before Felix. But because of the nature of these hearings, it would be much more accurate to say that in these hearings it was Felix before Paul, not Paul before Felix as it was in the public trial. Paul was on trial in the public session before Felix; but in the private hearings, it was Felix who was on trial. Paul acquitted himself when he was on trial before Felix, but Felix certainly did not acquit himself when he was on trial before Paul. Paul could refute the charges made against him by the Jews, but Felix could not refute the charges made against him by the Jew, Paul. “Paul did not tremble when he stood before Felix, but Felix trembled when he stood before Paul” (B. H. Carroll).

To examine these private hearings, we will look at the reasonings of Paul and the response of Felix.

### 1. The Reasonings of Paul

“He sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And . . . he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” ([vv. 24, 25](#)). We note the subject, suitableness, steadfastness, and similarities of the reasonings.

*The subject of the reasonings.* The subject heading was “the faith in Christ” ([v.](#)

24). The subpoints were “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” (v. 25). These subpoints are essential to the Gospel. Regarding this truth, Charles Simeon said, “Many confine their ideas of the Gospel to the one subject of justification by ‘the faith of Christ.’ But the Apostle when dilating on ‘the faith of Christ,’ introduced the subjects mentioned in my text. The knowledge of these is in fact necessary to a just comprehension of that [the Gospel]. We must see our desert and danger as transgressors of the law, before we can ever duly appreciate the Gospel.” Let us look at each of these three subpoints separately.

First, *righteousness*. This part of Paul’s message dealt with right and wrong. This is where we must start in the Gospel. If there is no wrong, there is no need of forgiveness or of a Savior to make us right. A true Gospel preacher will do much preaching on right and wrong. He will emphasize God’s standard of righteousness and condemn all that deviates from God’s standard as wrong. Where a pulpit is silent or mild in condemnation of evil, you have a pulpit that will not do much Gospel preaching. When John the Baptist prepared the way for Christ, he proclaimed the righteous standard of God by lambasting sin. If preachers are to prepare hearts to receive Christ, they must likewise lambaste sin. But a great many pulpits in our land are like the priests Ezekiel indicted when he said, “They have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they showed difference between the unclean and the clean” ([Ezekiel 22:26](#)). When you preach righteousness, however, you will make plain the difference between the holy and the profane, the clean and the unclean.

Second, *temperance*. This Greek word translated “temperance” is found four times in the New Testament (here, [Galatians 5:23](#), and [2 Peter 1:6](#) twice). It refers primarily to “continence” (*Strong’s Concordance*), that is, the control of our sexual passions. (B. H. Carroll says plainly that “it refers to sexual control”). This certainly needs preaching more! Our world does not champion control in about any area, and especially are they not encouraging much control in the matter of sex. Immorality is a way of life in our age. Chastity is mocked. Limiting sex to marriage is scorned. But, of course, these ridiculed sex practices, if practiced, would eliminate all venereal diseases including AIDS. Furthermore, they would greatly reduce the number of parentless children, single mothers, divorce, murders, abortion, and a number of other evils that plague society. Control of our sex passions is not a joy killer. It is the way to true happiness.

Third, *judgment to come*. The subject of “faith in Christ” certainly includes judgment to come. The wicked like to think that if they “beat the law” in this life they are home free. But “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” ([Hebrews 9:27](#)). Worse judgment awaits the wicked in eternity than they

could ever experience on earth. Men must answer to God for how they have acted here on earth. God will look us over closely. Even “every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” ([Matthew 12:36](#)). If that does not drive you to Christ for forgiveness of your sins, you are indeed one with a very hard heart.

*The suitableness of the reasonings.* Paul gave the right message to his listeners. These two, Felix and Drusilla, were very wicked people. As we have noted before, Felix was a vile, cruel, greedy, and immoral person. He was a slave who rose to the power of an aristocrat by evil manipulations. He hired assassins to kill Jonathan the High Priest (Ananias succeeded him) and had others killed who stood in his way. He was a very wealthy man who padded his pocket with bribes in court cases. Drusilla was no better. She was one of the beauties of her day, but it was all outward beauty as she had an extremely ugly heart. She married Azizus, king of Emesa (near Syria), but left him to marry Felix. Drusilla reflected the character of the wretched family from which she came. Her great-grandfather (Herod the Great) tried to kill the young child Jesus in Bethlehem, her great-uncle (Herod Antipas) had John the Baptist beheaded, her father (Herod Agrippa I) killed the Apostle James ([Acts 12](#)), and her brother (Agrippa II) will shortly come on the scene in Scripture living incestuously with Bernice, who was the sister of both himself and Drusilla ([Acts 25:23](#)).

With such evil in the lives of Felix and Drusilla, Paul’s message was certainly suitable. “He was not satisfied with gratifying the curiosity of his hearers, he endeavored to reach their consciences and convince them of their sins” (Simeon). Of course some will complain that Paul should not have been so plain, pointed, and personal here. But B. H. Carroll said, “Was it polite? Not very, but it certainly was right. Paul was not sent out to be polite—he was sent out to preach the gospel of God. And if he ever did intend to preach on righteousness, continence, and judgment to come, that was the audience for him . . . He took a shot at the game in sight.” Let preachers learn from this. There is no value in preaching sermons that do not apply to the audience. It is absurd to think that God would send preachers to a people to preach that which was not needed by the people.

*The steadfastness of the reasonings.* In view of the character of Felix and Drusilla, it would require great steadfastness to preach the message that was needed. Furthermore, “His [Paul’s] boldness in this instance is the more remarkable, as he was dependent on Felix for his release. A time-server or an imposter would have

chosen such topics as would have conciliated the favor of the judge, and procured his discharge from custody. He would have flattered his vanity or palliated his vices" (Jacobson). Joseph Parker said, "It is easier to speak upon Mars' Hill to a great crowd than to speak in a gilded chamber to two eminent personages." Yet, Paul did not fail here. He was faithful to the truth. There was absolutely no compromise in his message. Paul did not fear the one who had the keys to prison; he feared the One Who had the keys to heaven. How this shames those ministers who water down their message to please their influential members. They only stand to lose their job if these members do not like the truth, but Paul could lose his life if Felix and Drusilla got upset.

*The similarities of the reasonings.* There are some interesting similarities in the performance of Paul in the private hearings before Felix and in the performance of John the Baptist before Herod Antipas. We note six similarities.

First, both Paul and John preached to rulers who had wives they should not have had—wives which they obtained through divorce. Second, both Paul and John, in most commendable faithfulness, addressed the personal and pertinent sins of their rulers to their face. Third, both Paul and John were sent for to be heard repeatedly by these rulers. Fourth, both Paul and John saw their rulers get convicted by their messages. Fifth, both Paul and John did not see the wives of their rulers evidence conviction over their sin. Sixth, both Paul and John were unjustly kept in prison by their rulers.

What great men were Apostle Paul and John the Baptist. What evil men were Felix and Herod Antipas. Yet, in their day, Paul and John were in prison while Felix and Herod ruled. This is often the case, as we noted earlier in this chapter. But do not let the temporal circumstances take away the true perspective of time and eternity. Today Felix and Herod are looked at with universal scorn while their prisoners, the Apostle Paul and John the Baptist, are held in universal esteem. Eternity will only emphasize these changes. Let this encourage us to stand by the truth though for a season we become scorned by society.

## **2. The Response of Felix**

Like the public hearing, Felix's response to the private hearings was very poor in character. This poor response to Paul's messages given in the private hearings was fourfold: disturbance, delay, deceit and deference.

*Disturbance.* “As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled” ([v. 25](#)). The word “trembled” is translated from a Greek word meaning “becoming terrified” (A. T. Robertson). Paul’s message really got to Felix. He could not stand under the glare of the light of truth without being greatly alarmed and shaken in heart. To emphasize the greatness of the terror Felix experienced, we need to remember that this was not a timid man who was afraid of his own shadow. This was a man who hesitated not to shed blood, to rob through bribes though Roman law forbid it, and to enter the sword and dagger field of Roman politics and fight it out with other cutthroat men for position and power. This is the man who became terrified by Paul’s message. Later, however, Felix hardened his heart to conviction and the message ran off his back like water runs off a duck’s back. If the working of the Spirit of God upon our heart is refused, eventually the Spirit, in God’s judgment upon the rejecter, ceases to work; and we no longer feel the conviction ([Genesis 6:3](#)).

*Delay.* “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” ([v. 25](#)). What a tragic statement! Conviction pleaded with his heart, but he delayed taking action. It was not the time, as far as he was concerned, to take care of this matter. Poor Felix, his priorities were all mixed up; and eternity will ever punish him for it.

One thing we must learn regarding our spiritual life is that we will never have the needs of our spiritual life met if we wait for a time that is convenient to the flesh, for there is no time convenient to the flesh to attend to spiritual needs. We must make time for our spiritual life. We must set other things aside to pursue spiritual matters. Convenience is a matter of priority. One disinterested in spiritual matters will never find a convenient time to pursue them. The best time for Felix to deal with these matters was right then when he was under conviction. He never came under conviction like that again. He heard Paul again, but the opportunity to act was never better than it was at the first private hearing for Paul. Felix was wrong in thinking there would be a better time to take care of these matters.

*Deceit.* “He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him; wherefore, he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him” ([v. 26](#)). Felix, under the pretense of wanting to hear more about “the faith in Christ” sent often to hear Paul. But the real reason he wanted to hear Paul was to obtain a bribe from Paul. “Had not Paul dropped a word about some collection, or offering,



which he had been making for the poor saints?” (Parker). This would cause Felix to suspect that Paul had friends who would have money to free Paul. Hence, Felix will have more hearings with Paul in hopes that it will provide opportunity to obtain a bribe. But, of course, Paul would have none of the bribe business. Character was more important to Paul than freedom.

We can say that deceit was involved in the first private hearing, too, when both Felix and Drusilla heard Paul. They were doubtless looking more for entertainment than edification (cp. Herod’s interest in seeing Jesus [[Luke 23:8](#)]). They deceitfully disguised their interest in entertainment in hearing Paul by saying they wanted to hear about “the faith in Christ.” Felix is not alone in being deceitful about why he is going to church. The Sunday morning crowd is full of such kind. They all want to appear that they are showing up primarily to worship God; but some come to help gain customers for their business, some come to meet friends, some come out of curiosity, some come to hear the latest gossip, and some come to make trouble. God sees through all of these motives, however; and man will one day have to answer for his deceit in the matter of attending church.

*Deference.* “Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound” ([v. 27](#)). In spite of the fact that Paul was obviously innocent of the charges brought against him by the Jews, in spite of the fact that Paul spoke the truth regarding “the faith in Christ,” Felix left Paul in prison out of deference to the Jews, whose conduct he knew full well was unjust. Why did he do this? Because he was more interested in getting along with the crowd than in doing right. He had his finger on the public pulse, and that—not truth and righteousness and justice—was one of the main factors which determined his actions. But Felix was playing a losing game and within a couple years, he began his fall. Paul, however, has never stopped rising.

## **XXVIII. PROTESTING BEFORE FESTUS**

[Acts 25:1–12](#)

POLITICS HAD PRIORITY over justice so Paul’s case stalled for two years in Caesarea until Festus replaced Felix as governor of Judea ([Acts 24:27](#)). Though Paul could be visited by his friends, it must have been a long two years. Paul was a man of action. But in Caesarea he was forced to sit for a couple years. While much blame for this is to be charged to Felix, the corrupt governor, yet, Paul does not escape blame

himself. No, he was not guilty of any of the accused crimes brought against him in his various trials; but he was guilty of going against the leading of the Spirit of God about going to Jerusalem. This resulted in his arrest and prolonged custody by Rome. Sitting in Caesarea would be especially instructive, as it was in Caesarea that Paul refused the final warning about going to Jerusalem.

Not all of our sitting times, however, are a result of going contrary to God's leading. Many times God puts His people on hold to teach them patience and other valuable lessons about waiting on God. But at other times, God has to sit us down as a parent or school teacher sits a child in the corner for a time because of disobedience. As we have said before, it is so hard to admit that Paul did bring some of these trials upon himself unnecessarily. But he did; and rather than try to justify him, we need to let his failure cause us to more earnestly ponder our own lives and the decisions we make and the paths we walk on in order to avoid taking steps contrary to God's will.

In this chapter we come to Paul's trial before Porcius Festus which ended with Paul's protesting appeal, action that resulted in Paul being sent to Rome shortly thereafter. We will note the prompting of the trial ([vv. 1–6](#)) and the particulars of the trial ([vv. 6–12](#)).

## A. THE PROMPTING OF THE TRIAL

The trial before Festus was prompted by both the visit of the governor and the vice of the Jews. It was not prompted by the evil of Paul! There should not have even been another trial, for Paul was not convicted of any crime in the earlier hearings before Felix. But we are not witnessing justice in these trials, only injustice.

### 1. The Visit of the Governor

“Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem” ([v. 1](#)). The visit to Jerusalem by Festus involved change of personnel, concern for peace, and criticism of Paul.

*Change of personnel.* Felix, the governor who left Paul in confinement for two years, has been replaced by Porcius Festus ([Acts 24:27](#)). History informs us that Felix was replaced because so much complaint was made against him by the Jews. As we

noted in our last study, though Tertullus praised Felix highly, it was all hollow praise; for the Jews could not stand Felix. His cruel administration was unacceptable. Rome was sensitive to complaints about their officials by the people where the officials governed. After all, if the official does not govern well, the people could revolt. Rome, of course, did not want that. Judea was seething with dislike for Rome; and so when they continually complained about Felix, Rome wisely removed Felix from office and replaced him with Festus.

We know nothing about Festus' life prior to his appointment as governor in place of Felix. His time in office was short. Josephus says that he died two years after he replaced Felix, but he does not tell why Festus died. From the Scripture we can observe that he was not a procrastinator like Felix. The narrative of Scripture concerning Festus describes him as a man who is prompt and energetic. When he came from Rome to Caesarea, the headquarters for the governor, Scripture says he stayed there only "three days" ([v. 1](#)) before he was on a trip to Jerusalem. When he came back to Caesarea, Scripture reports that "the next day" ([v. 6](#)) he had Paul in court. Later when King Agrippa expressed to Festus his desire to hear Paul, Scripture records Festus as saying "Tomorrow . . . thou shalt hear him" ([Acts 25:22](#)). Yes, Festus attended to matters quickly. It was a good trait, and it is one we would like to see more often among believers. If you have a job to do, get busy and do it. If you have bills to pay, get busy and pay them. When it is time to act, don't procrastinate. There is no value in putting off to a later time what could and should be done now.

*Concern for peace.* Festus made his trip to Jerusalem in his concern for maintaining peace in the land. As we noted above, Judea was seething with dislike for Rome and was in considerable unrest—an unrest that would boil over in a few years and result in the terrible destruction of Jerusalem. Rome's rulers, such as Felix, had not helped the situation but by their evil administrations had increased the Jews' dislike for Rome.

Since Jerusalem was the main city of the Jews, it was especially the place where Festus needed to go to meet with the officials and begin to establish a good relationship with them right at the beginning of his coming to office. The Sanhedrin, the highest ruling body of the Jews, was located in Jerusalem; and Festus would especially want to meet with them. These meetings would try to find solutions to various grievances that the Jews had with Rome. Festus had plenty of work to do to undo some of the damage that Felix had done in his rule. Corrupt rulers such as Felix (and Festus, while better than Felix, was short on character, too) do not help peace in any land. Corruption only breeds turmoil. Peace comes with character—which

explains why riots and wars have plagued the world throughout its history.

*Criticism of Paul.* “Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul” ([v. 2](#)). As soon as Festus came to Jerusalem, the Jews aired to him their evil criticism of Paul. Festus surely had to be surprised that one of the main concerns of the Jewish rulers was about Paul. And indeed he would be justified in this surprise. With all the problems the Jews faced in their land, they ought to have been concerned about a lot of other things than Paul. But making their attack upon Paul of such high priority showed why the Jews were having so much trouble. They were hostile towards good, towards the Gospel, towards Jesus Christ, and His faithful servants. God’s blessings do not abide upon a people who are like this. The root cause of many problems in our land and throughout our world can be found right here. When mankind rejects God, and instead pursues wickedness, trouble will eventually plague the land.

Criticizing Paul to Festus right after Festus took office is action we often see in churches. This is habitually the case in regards to pastors. When a new pastor comes on the field, the dissidents move quickly to bend the ear of the pastor regarding their evil complaints about others. They make the complaints sound so obviously in favor of the complainer that the pastor, if unaware of this habit of evil people, will immediately extend sympathy to the dissidents and see what can be done to make them happy. But wise pastors know better. They know they are being told a very lopsided story and that the dissidents are only trying to bias the pastor before he has a chance to know both sides. The new pastor is at a disadvantage in that he does not know the whole story nor who the dissidents are. If he falls for their line, he will be prejudiced against some good people in church and will make some bad decisions early in his pastorate which will hinder him the rest of the time he is in that pastorate. This will only help the dissidents to do their evil.

## **2. The Vice of the Jews**

“And desired a favor against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea” ([v. 3, 4](#)). We note the request and the refusal for a trial in Jerusalem which was involved in the vice of the Jews.

*The request.* The request to have Paul brought to Jerusalem for trial (the trial is not stated, but it is understood) was a most deceitful request. The Jews really did

not want a change in venue, but a circumstance for villainy. They had no confidence that any future trial would result in Paul being given the death sentence. The only way they were going to see Paul put to death was through some other means. So like the forty some assassins of two years earlier, the Jewish leaders plot to ambush Paul as he is being brought to the place of trial. This time the plotters have all the way from Caesarea to Jerusalem to ambush Paul and murder him. The earlier plot only had from the tower of Antonia to the Sanhedrin to kill him.

How hypocritical was this request. The hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders is again most evident. “They sought in this nefarious way to destroy the Apostle Paul, contrary to the law, even while they pretended that they wanted to judge him in accordance with the law” (Ironside). These rulers of the Jews, the ones who were to uphold the law of God, were plotting to grossly violate law. Those who accused Paul of breaking the law, were plotting to break it by shedding innocent blood.

This hypocrisy is a habit of religion that is merely outward in form. Joseph Parker said that this “Religious hatred thought less of murder than of ceremonial pollution . . . they would take care to have their assassins on the road to kill the hated Christian. Yet these men would not eat until they had washed their hands! . . . The more you attend to mere ceremony [outward form] the more you fritter away the substance of your character . . . He who is inhumanly pious about things of no importance is, in his heart, a child of Cain.” Oh, make sure your faith is real, that it lives in your heart and is not just outward show. If all you have is outward religion, it will be of little help in preventing evil in your life but will instead promote it.

*The refusal.* Festus quickly refused the request of the Jewish leaders for a change in venue for Paul. Festus had several very good reasons for refusing the request. First, before he could move a case to another place, he had to have the permission of the accused. Later Festus asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem and be tried. Paul refused and Festus could not go against his will. Roman law forbid it. Second, “At Caesarea was also at that time the residence of the Roman governor, and the place of holding the courts, and as Paul was lodged there safely, there did not appear to be any sufficient reason for removing him to Jerusalem for trial” (Jacobson).

We must recognize that God was in this refusal by Festus of the Jew’s deceitful request. While the Jews did a better job of concealing their latest plot against Paul from the Roman rulers than they did several years before, they could never conceal the plot from God. God knows all and can stop every plan of evil if He so desires. And it is so easy for God to intervene and thwart the plans of evil. He does not have to work spectacular miracles when intervening but can use very ordinary means, as

He did here in protecting Paul from the murderous plans of his enemies.

## B. THE PARTICULARS OF THE TRIAL

While Festus refused to move Paul to Jerusalem, he did not refuse the Jews' request to give Paul another trial. "Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him" ([v. 5](#)). Of course, the Jews did not want a trial; but they could not tell Festus that fact, so they had to go along with his plans or it would look suspicious. Furthermore, Paul did not need another trial, but he got another one anyway. Though Roman law about trials was in concept and on paper very noble and fair, yet the corruption of the rulers made trials a tool of evil men. Hence, Paul was being tried again and again though each time his innocence was proven. There is not a fragment of justice in such a situation. But when evil attacks good, you will not find justice be it the ACLU attacking prayers in school graduation programs or a church dissident attacking church policies.

Though having another trial for Paul was not justice, Festus is not to be blamed too harshly for scheduling another trial. He had not had opportunity to learn all the facts about Paul, and for all he knew Paul needed to be put on trial. But he did not condemn Paul just because he put Paul on trial. His statement, "if there be any wickedness in him," indicates this fact. As Matthew Henry said, "Festus will not take it for granted, as they desire he should, that there is wickedness in him, till it is proved upon him, and he has been heard in his own defense." Sad to say, we know of a number of professing Christians who in their habitual gossiping are not that fair and just but hesitate not to accuse even if it is only on hearsay.

We note five aspects of this trial: the accusers, the accusations, the answer, the appealing, and the appeal.

### 1. The Accusers

"Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man . . . And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul" ([Acts 25:5,7](#)). We note two things about the accusers here: they were influential and intimidating.

*Influential.* “Able” in [verse 5](#) is translated from the Greek “dunatoi.” The generic meaning is “power.” The context indicates that more is involved than the idea of a person just being able by circumstances to attend; but as A. T. Robertson said the word “able” refers to “The mighty ones among you . . . the men of power . . . and authority.” This is logical. The previous trial in Caesarea before the governor (Felix in that case) involved “the high priest . . . with the elders” ([Acts 24:1](#)). Not just anybody will be Paul’s accusers. The Jewish leaders will be his accusers.

How often this is the case with evil. It is influential people who promote it. Advertisers get the rich, the famous, and the powerful to say a good word for their products. Evil does the same. Many times in the Scripture we are taught this lesson that evil likes to solicit from the place of position, the place of great influence. So today it is high government leaders who promote gambling, it is the *Supreme Court* that rules out prayer and the Bible, and it is those who sit in high seats of education who promote evolution and attack the Bible’s creation explanation. In like manner, Paul’s accusers will be the leaders of the Jews. As we noted in our last study, none of the rabble of the Asian Jews will be brought to court. They are not impressive enough.

*Intimidating.* Paul’s accusers “stood round about” ([v. 7](#)) him and the “judgment seat” ([v. 6](#)) upon which Festus sat. Paul was just one, and a despised one. But the accusers are many and surround the judgment seat and the accused. Evil seems frequently to outnumber the righteous, have it surrounded, and be so intimidating in its posture and position. But though evil appears too powerful to overcome, it is righteousness that will ultimately gain the victory. Paul did not have numbers or worldly position rooting for him, but he had God. That is all that matters. The world may put Christianity in a lowly, scorned position. But that does not change the value of Christianity or the vileness of evil. When evil seems overpowering and threatening to destroy, be encouraged that God is with the righteous; and, therefore, they will eventually be the victors.

## **2. The Accusations**

The accusers “laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove” ([v. 7](#)). There are three things about the accusations we will consider: their plentifulness, painfulness, and prooflessness.

*Plentifulness.* The accusations were “many.” The plentifulness of the accusations against Paul remind us that living a godly life does not exempt you from being accused of much evil. Many of the best men in the history of the world, such as Paul, have been accused of a host of evil deeds. Even Jesus Christ, the absolutely sinless Son of God, was accused by many people and of much evil. And those accusations have not stopped, for today He is still being accused of much evil—some today have stooped to such terrible blasphemous depths as to accuse Him of being a homosexual. Christians should not be anymore surprised when the world heaps accusations of evil upon them than a conservative should be surprised when the liberal press attacks them with all their prevaricating print and prattle. It is the nature of evil to attack righteousness. The more righteous you are, the more you will be attacked. This explains why godly pastors are frequently under continual attack by church dissidents. It explains why anti-abortionists are continually ridiculed. It explains why moralists are derided by homosexuals, why a good neighbor is gossiped about by a bad neighbor, and why law enforcement agencies receive more bad press than does the criminal. Accusations do not necessarily mean the accused are guilty of some evil but rather that the accuser is.

*Painfulness.* The accusations were also “grievous.” The word “grievous” is translated from a word that means heavy and weighty. The word is translated “heavy” in “they bind heavy burdens” ([Matthew 23:4](#)). It is translated “weightier” in “omitted the weightier matters of the law” ([Matthew 23:23](#)). The word “grievous” inflicts Paul here. It tells us that the accusations would be very burdensome, hence, very painful to Paul. Though Paul was innocent of all charges, as we will note next, the accusations still hurt. Just because an accusation is not true does not mean it will not hurt when made. It always hurts when people say evil things about you. It not only can hurt your feelings, but it can also hurt such things as your job promotion opportunities, your reputation, your friendships, your family, and your finances—such as large court expenses. Heavy indeed will be the accusations though they are as false as can be.

Though living a godly life does not stop prevaricating, painful accusations against us, these accusations are not as painful as true accusations. Therefore, make sure that the accusations of evil made against you are all false, and the day will come when the pain will be removed and vindication will be yours. God will see to that. But if the accusations are true, it will be another story.



*Prooflessness.* The accusers “could not prove” one single accusation. Evil has never been able to prove any of its iniquitous accusations and claims. But that does not stop them from making the accusations and claims; and, as it was in Paul’s case, that does not mean courts will clear the innocent. Evil seems to often obtain its purpose through its lies. Lies sell automobiles. Lies sell lots of insurance. Lies make money. Lies gain job promotions. Lies get folk elected to high office in the land. Lies have caused schools to reject the Bible account of creation and insist evolution be taught exclusively regarding origins. Lies have made gambling and abortion and homosexuality legal and protected. But though lies seem to be winning and seem to be a necessity in life, lies will never win out against God Almighty. Truth is the victor with God. Remember that the next time you are tempted to lie.

### **3. The Answer**

“While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar have I offended in anything at all” ([v. 8](#)). Paul’s answer indicates that the charges were basically unchanged from what they had been two years before. There was accusation of an illegal creed (“against the law of the Jews”), of contaminating the Temple (“against the temple”), and of contempt for Rome (“nor yet against Caesar”). Though the charges were “many” ([v. 7](#)), they still involved the same old basic accusations.

Evil may put on many different disguises, but underneath is the same vile character. Years ago evil was moving across the land under the term “New Thought.” Today it is “New Age.” If the Lord does not come back soon, it will be other names in the future. But new names do not change evil. It is still sin, it still dishonors God, and rejects His Word and His Son.

### **4. The Appeasing**

“But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?” ([v. 9](#)). We note the politics of the appeasing, the priority in the appeasing, and the protection from the appeasing.

*The politics.* “Willing to do the Jews a pleasure” shows the politics in Festus’ action following Paul’s answer. A few days earlier, Festus firmly refused the Jews’ request to move Paul to Jerusalem to have a trial. Now he changes his mind. He sees the attitude of the Jews, knows what they did to Felix, and so adjusts his actions to

please the Jews. Such is a politician. He has no convictions other than to be in office. His views change with the wind of public opinion. Such men make very poor rulers. Unfortunately, our nation, like the Roman Empire, is plagued with an abundance of these kind of characters in office.

*The priority.* Festus revealed his poor priorities in trying to appease the Jews. His priorities were selfish. He did not care whether Paul suffered injustice or not. He did not care if the court did what was right or not. What he primarily cared about was Festus. He would do the Jews a favor in order to help his own cause. He would sacrifice others in order to save himself. People like that are a burden to society. We have them in abundance in Congress. They, as an example, burden the people with taxes to have money to spend on projects that will help the Congressmen's own selfish cause.

*The protection.* Note that Felix's statement about moving the trial to Jerusalem is a question to Paul. As we noted earlier in this chapter, Paul had the final say on change of venue here. Felix could not ship Paul back to Jerusalem if Paul said he did not want to go back. This protection for Paul reminds us again of the various ways by which God provides for us. God used Paul's nephew to help protect Paul; God used Roman soldiers to protect Paul; God used the disposition of a Roman ruler (Festus) to protect Paul when the Jews deceitfully requested Paul be brought to Jerusalem; now God uses Roman citizenship laws to protect Paul. Sources of help may fail, but the God of help never does. Therefore, help will ever be provided. Thank God for the sources, but keep your eyes primarily on The Source of sources.

## 5. The Appeal

"Then said Paul . . . I appeal unto Caesar" ([vv. 10, 11](#)). The appeal was Paul's protest of the decision and attitude of the court. We will look at six things involved in this appeal. They are the authority for the appeal, the apologia in the appeal, the admonishment in the appeal, the appraising in the appeal, the attitude of the appeal, and the acceptance of the appeal.

First, the *authority* for the appeal. "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged" ([v. 10](#)). Being a Roman citizen, Paul had the authority to request an appeal. Paul's statement reminds the court of a basic fact: a Roman citizen should be judged in a Roman court, not in a Jewish court. To go back to Jerusalem would mean that Paul would waive his rights as a Roman citizen and be judged under

Jewish law. Paul, with the aid of Roman law, vigorously opposes the idea of going back to Jerusalem for a trial which would have no justice whatever.

Second, the *apologia* in the appeal. “I [have] done no wrong” ([v. 10](#)). Paul again declares his innocence. Paul’s argument for his innocence has been stated well at his trials. He defended his conduct as respectful of Roman laws, respectful of the Temple, and believing in the same Scriptures his accusers professed to believe. He is innocent and in making the appeal says so. This is important, for innocence is what gives weight to the appeal. In like manner, innocence (lack of evil) also gives weight to our appeals (prayers) to God. It is the prayer of the righteous man that “availeth much” ([James 5:16](#)); but on the other hand, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” ([Psalm 66:18](#)).

Third, the *admonishment* in the appeal. “To the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest” ([v. 10](#)). Paul boldly admonishes Festus for not acting according to what he knows. Festus had enough information to know that Paul is not guilty. In fact, Festus later acknowledged to Agrippa that Paul was innocent ([Acts 25:25,26](#)). It is a pitiful display of poor character that Festus will not act according to the facts. But every age is full of that kind. That is why people still manufacture and use tobacco products, promote gambling, advertise alcoholic drinks, and defend abortion and homosexuality. That is also why people vote for vile politicians, attack godly servants of God, and teach evolution in school. They ignore the facts in the interest of pursuing their evil goals.

Fourth, the *appraising* of the appeal. Was Paul wise in making the appeal? Very much so. Paul told the Jews in Rome that he was “constrained to appeal unto Caesar” ([Acts 28:19](#)). Because of the situation in Festus’ court, it was necessary, hence, wise that he appeal. In at least three ways Paul was wise in making the appeal. (1) He was wise in that there was no hope of justice in a trial in Jerusalem. (2) He was wise in that to go to Jerusalem jeopardized his life. And (3) he was wise in that God’s revealed will was to go to Rome ([Acts 23:11](#)), not Jerusalem. The appeal would take him to Rome. Would that all our decisions would reflect as much wisdom.

Fifth, the *attitude* in the appeal. “For if I be an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die; but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them” ([v. 11](#)). Paul’s attitude in this appeal was not lawless. He was not using the appeal to delay justice as so many criminals use it today. Paul sought an appeal to vindicate his innocence. Paul’s use of the courts was to promote truth and justice. So much use of the court system today in our land is just the opposite. People use the courts to get rich through law suits. Criminals use the court system to escape due punishment for their crime. Liberals use the court system to suppress conservatives. Atheists use the court

system to suppress religion.

Sixth, the *acceptance* of the appeal. “Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go” ([v. 12](#)). After conferring with his advisors (“council”), Festus announced his acceptance of the appeal. Festus would not be happy with the fact that Paul appealed, for the appeal did not make Festus look good. It was a condemnation of the court in which it was made, for it said that the court did not render satisfactory judgment. And to pour salt in the wound, it was Festus’ first case since taking over as the new governor. But Festus had no other option regarding Paul’s appeal than to accept it. Festus could “do nothing else, without personal risk, because it was known [that the] words ‘I appeal’ were ‘omnipotent in the Roman Empire.’” (Griffith Thomas).

The appeal instructs us about the problems we create for ourselves when we try to compromise with that which is right. Festus had enough information to know that Paul was not guilty and that he should, therefore, be freed. He will later admit such to Agrippa. To not free Paul and instead use him as a pawn to try to appease the Jews was wholly unjust, and this action by Festus backfired. It resulted in Paul’s appeal which made Festus look bad. Also, it put Festus in a quandary because he had no charges to send with Paul to Rome. Sending a man to court in Rome without charges is in Festus’ own words “unreasonable” ([Acts 25:27](#)). It is bad enough having an accused person appeal your judgment, but to not have any valid charges against the accused is really bad. So Festus got himself in an embarrassing situation compromising with righteousness. But when you do not do that which you know is right, you are inviting trouble. You are painting yourself into a no-win corner.

## **XXIX. PROFESSION BEFORE AGRIPPA**

[Acts 25:13–26:32](#)

ONCE MORE PAUL stands before a Roman ruler to defend himself. First it was Felix, then it was Festus, and now it is Agrippa. The gross injustice and inequity of it all is most conspicuous. The rulers are wicked men, but Paul is a righteous man; yet Paul is treated as the criminal. However, though Paul is the prisoner and Felix, Festus, and Agrippa are the princes, the trials and hearings end up with Felix, Festus, and Agrippa being the ones who are really on trial. Paul, the lowly, despised prisoner, takes on each of the three rulers with God’s message and forces the rulers to deal with matters of the soul. Paul’s excellent defense ended up putting him on the

offense and these wicked rulers on the defense—and they failed miserably. Though they were princes of the world, they were paupers spiritually.

In Paul's hearing before Agrippa in which Paul gives an excellent profession of his faith in Christ, we will consider the occasion for the hearing ([Acts 25:13–22](#)), the occurrence of the hearing ([Acts 25:23–Acts 26:23](#)), and the outcome of the hearing ([Acts 26:24–32](#)).

## A. THE OCCASION FOR THE HEARING

Two things prompted the hearing before Agrippa. They were the visit of Agrippa and the vexation of Festus. When Agrippa was visiting Festus, Festus told Agrippa about his problems regarding Paul, and this led to the hearing for Paul before Agrippa.

### 1. The Visit of Agrippa

“And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute [visit] Festus” ([v. 13](#)). We note the practice of the visit and the people in the visit.

*The practice of the visit.* Festus was a new office holder in Palestine; and so Agrippa, as government officials often do, “came to pay a complimentary visit to the new procurator [governor]” (B. H. Carroll). Agrippa's domain overlapped Festus' region of rule in that Rome had given Agrippa the authority over the Temple in Jerusalem and also the authority to appoint the high priest. Jerusalem, of course, was in Festus' domain, for it was Judea over which Festus ruled as governor.

The visit lasted “many days” ([Acts 25:14](#)) and would be characterized by parties and entertainment and much political backslapping, little of which would reflect godliness. Governments today are not much different than governments in Paul's day. Whenever officials get together, God is generally left out; but booze and foul entertainment are in abundance—and all at taxpayers' expense. Christian officials in government who think they must patronize these affairs have no Biblical support for so doing and only show how much they have let their government position corrupt them.

*The people of the visit.* “King Agrippa and Bernice” ([Acts 25:13](#)) were the two

prominent personages in this visit. They were brother and sister, not husband and wife; and both were very corrupt in character which is typical of the family of rulers they came from.

Agrippa was Herod Agrippa II of the Herodian family. His great-grandfather ordered the killing of the babies in Bethlehem in trying to kill Jesus. His uncle killed John the Baptist. His father, Herod Agrippa I, killed James ([Acts 12:2](#)), tried to kill Peter ([Acts 12:3ff](#)), and was eaten of worms after he gave a speech in Caesarea before a large audience in which he wore a stunning, silver-threaded robe and was acclaimed a god by the crowd ([Acts 12:21–23](#)). When he died, the Agrippa of our text was but seventeen—too young Rome thought to give him all the land his father ruled. So he was only given part of the territory—a section in northeast Palestine with the capital of it being Caesarea Philippi located some seventy-five miles northeast of the Caesarea where Festus ruled over Judea. Later Agrippa was given more territory when he became older. Agrippa remained in politics for many years. He died without children; and, therefore, when he died the Herodian dynasty came to an end—thankfully.

Bernice, like her sister Drusilla (Felix’s wife), was morally slimy. History says she married her uncle (the Herod who was king of Chalcis—the area first given Agrippa to rule) in an incestuous relationship which was characteristic of the Herodian family. After he died, she lived with Agrippa which history reports was another incestuous relationship. Then she married Polemon, king of Cilicia, but later left him and went back to Agrippa. Some years later, she became the mistress of Titus, the Roman general who destroyed Jerusalem and who later became emperor of Rome.

The Herodian family is certainly not unique in their moral debauchery. Rulers in every age have lived in a moral pig pen—and that goes for the leaders of our own nation. The pity of the matter is that society seems little concerned about moral degradation in high places—unless, of course, it provides political fuel to attack the opposition party. But today the political parties of our land are so shot through with moral filth that anymore they are hesitant to attack the moral stench of the people in the opposing party for fear of having their own moral filth exposed. Politics is not alone in this mess either. Religion is full of the same foul behavior—even in fundamentalism where divorced preachers are now no longer a rarity but rather common. And rather than condemn the situation, ministers are ever twisting Scripture to justify it. Judgment time surely is near.

## **2. The Vexation of Festus**

“And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul’s cause [case]

unto the king” ([Acts 25:14](#)). Paul’s case was a problem for Festus. He sought help from Agrippa on what to do about it. In examining what Festus told Agrippa about Paul’s case, we note the attention on Paul, the attack on Paul, the advocacy for Paul, the accusations against Paul, the asking of Paul, the appeal by Paul, and the arrangement to hear Paul.

*The attention on Paul.* “Festus declared Paul’s cause” ([Acts 25:14](#)). The special interest in Paul’s case was not to insure justice but to help Festus get out of a touchy and embarrassing situation. Since Agrippa was supervisor over the Temple and also had good connections in Rome, Festus would rightly think that if he could get some advice and help from Agrippa about Paul’s case, Festus could get himself out of a difficult situation with both the Jews in Jerusalem and the rulers in Rome.

Focusing the attention on Paul demonstrates that sooner or later mankind will have to deal with spiritual matters. We can ignore them for a time, put off dealing forthrightly with them (as did Felix with his “convenient” excuse), leave them in prison in hopes that out of sight means out of mind, or drown out the thoughts of spiritual things by an endless round of worldly pleasure seeking. But spiritual matters will not go away, and eventually man will have to deal with them. Postponing dealing with spiritual matters properly, as was the case with Festus in his not handling Paul’s trial with justice as he should have, only makes things worse. Multitudes wait until it is too late. Eternal hell fire is the tragic result.

*The attack on Paul.* “When I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him” ([Acts 25:15](#)). Festus reports to Agrippa the verbal attack by the Jews upon Paul when Festus was visiting in Jerusalem. The attitude of the Jews about Paul is summed up in two words in [verse 15](#): “against him.” When men reject Christ, they will be “against” His servants. Those in church who seem to be continually “against” the pastor are only revealing a great evil in their heart; namely, they are “against” Jesus Christ. They may protest that accusation, but their actions confirm it. Being “against” God’s servants manifests a heart that is “against” Jesus Christ.

*The advocacy for Paul.* In Jerusalem, Festus went to the defense of Paul. It was the only time he defended Paul. He informed Agrippa of this advocacy when he reported how he answered the Jews in Jerusalem when they wanted Festus to bring judgment against Paul: “To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans

to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have license [opportunity] to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. Therefore, when they were come hither [Caesarea], without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth" ([Acts 25:16,17](#)). This statement to Agrippa evidences rather plainly that Festus made it with his own interests in mind more than the interest of Paul. "Not the manner of the Romans" and "without any delay" would make Festus look like a loyal Roman ruler and also a punctual ruler. As is the manner of politicians, Festus tooted his own horn early and earnestly in his reporting of Paul's case. Herschel Ford said about Festus here, "Let a man tell his own story and he always makes himself a hero." Though Festus presented himself in noble terms, the truth was Festus had not handled the case well but had acted with great injustice in what he had done. So it is with politicians and their braggadocio. They are bad men who try to tell the public they are good men. Un-fortunately, many voters believe the politicians' propaganda.

In Festus' statement, we again note that though Roman law, like ours, was very good in print, in actual practice it was perverted. [Verse 16](#) says, "It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before he who is accused have the accusers face to face, and have license [opportunity] to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him." However, the Gospels and Acts tell us that Roman officials did not always follow that practice. The classic example of Rome ignoring their own law is in the case of Jesus Christ. He was delivered up to the executioners though His accusers could not prove their accusations and though Pilate, the Roman governor, and Herod the king both found no guilt in Christ.

Nations may have great laws, but if the people of the nation are corrupt, the laws will be perverted and injustice will result, not justice. So today the Constitution is perverted by the ACLU and our courts to declare in the name of religious freedom that we do not have the freedom to pray at school events or to put on government property Christmas decorations that speak of Christ's birth or to play in some of our government owned and financed airports Christmas carols that speak of Christ. Yes, our Constitution states plainly that the government is not to prohibit the exercise of religion. But it does anyway because people in our land are corrupt; and, therefore, they pervert the laws they do not like, just as Rome did centuries ago with Jesus Christ and His followers.

*The accusations against Paul.* "Against which when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed; But had certain questions



against him of their own superstition [religion], and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And . . . I doubted of [was perplexed about] such manner of questions” ([Acts 25:18–20](#)). Festus diagnosed the case most accurately! Give him credit for seeing exactly what the issue was really about. It was about “one Jesus, who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.” But Festus was terribly ignorant on the subject. Harry Ironside said, “Festus did not know it, but that was the greatest matter that the world had ever been called upon to face. That story about Jesus which was dead whom Paul affirmed to be alive was to be declared throughout the world. It was to overthrow the paganism of Rome, to make men over, and eventually to bring in a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. And yet it seemed such a trivial thing to this philosophic Roman.”

So often we see men of power and position and popularity in this world who know much about government, politics, business, sports, and other things but who are woefully ignorant about the most important matters of life. Festus knew his way around politically but not spiritually. He speaks of the Son of God only as “one Jesus.” However, Paul, the prisoner, lowly and despised by the rulers, knew what was important. He knew well about the things of Jesus Christ. Time has shown abundantly that it is much better to be a prisoner and in the know spiritually than to be a prince and not in the know spiritually.

*The asking of Paul.* “And because I doubted of [was perplexed about] such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters” ([Acts 25:20](#)). Festus fabricates! We learned earlier in Scripture that the real reason Festus asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem was because Festus was trying to appease the Jews ([Acts 25:9](#)). Now he tries to make it sound like the reason he was asking the question of Paul was that Festus was interested in justice. When politicians talk, one must be careful about believing what they say. They can sound so noble, yet behind their noble talk is a deceitful heart whose main goal is to advance themselves.

*The appeal by Paul.* “But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar” ([Acts 25:21](#)). Paul’s appeal created much problem for Festus. That is why Festus speaks to Agrippa about Paul. But Festus has only himself to blame for Paul’s appeal. Had he acted according to facts and with justice, he would have freed Paul after the trial. But when he failed to act in accordance with truth and righteousness,

he came into some sticky problems. We may think we are avoiding problems by compromising with right, as Festus did to try and please the corrupt Jews; but you never compromise with right without bringing upon yourself problems that are worse than the ones you tried to avoid through evil compromise.

It is helpful to note here that the term “Augustus” in this verse was a title, not a proper name. It “properly denotes that which is venerable, or worthy of honor and reverence. It was first applied to Caesar Octavianus, who was the Roman emperor in the time when our Savior was born, and who is usually called Augustus Caesar. But the title continued to be used of his successors in office, as denoting the veneration of reverence which was due to the rank of emperor” (Barnes). The emperor at this time was Nero, the man who would do so many terrible deeds including murdering his mother and beheading Paul. How repugnant to decent people to call Nero “Augustus.” But, as we have noted a number of times earlier, time and eternity will correct the honoring business. Today we honor Paul and scorn Nero. As others have said, “We name our boys Paul but our dogs Nero.”

*The arrangement to hear Paul.* “Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. Tomorrow, said he, thou shalt hear him” ([Acts 25:22](#)). Festus was only too glad to grant Agrippa’s desire to hear Paul. There would be no delay. Festus would make arrangements immediately so that “Tomorrow” Agrippa would hear Paul.

Agrippa’s interest in hearing Paul’s case smacks more of interest in entertainment than interest in solving a problem or in bringing about justice. The hearing would also provide an occasion for Agrippa to show off himself, a habit that was typical of the Herodians, and which was done at Paul’s hearing which we will see shortly. But though Agrippa had selfish motives for hearing Paul, his request to hear him resulted in providing for mankind a most instructive dissertation by the great Apostle. The devil out foxed himself here.

Referring to Paul as only “the man” shows contempt for Paul. Paul certainly did not have much honor among his contemporaries. Governments in Paul’s day certainly did not give honor to Paul for his great work. They did respect his citizenship, though it did not stop the gross injustice of his court appearances. But they did not respect his work, a work that was more important than all the work of these government officials put together.

History will tell us that governments seldom respect and give due honor to the great men of God of their day. Instead, governments are in the habit of bestowing honor on many vile people and for worthless deeds. The world honors its own,

but seldom God's faithful followers. Such honors as the Nobel Peace prize for the communist negotiator of North Vietnam and for Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian terrorist leader, tell us how ridiculous are the world's honors. But heaven's honors will not be that way. Paul will be highly honored by God and for a most noble work, but Festus and Agrippa will get no honors—only condemnation.

## B. THE OCCURRENCE OF THE HEARING

As Festus had promised Agrippa, “on the morrow” ([Acts 25:23](#)) the hearing regarding Paul took place. We will look at the arrival of Agrippa for the hearing, the announcement to Agrippa to start the hearing, and the answer to Agrippa by Paul in the hearing.

### 1. The Arrival of Agrippa

“And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth” ([Acts 25:23](#)). We note the pomp and prisoner involved in the arrival of Agrippa.

*The pomp.* Agrippa, like his father and the rest of the Herodians (and like most politicians in every age), loved to parade. Grand entrances in glittering royal apparel fed their ego, and they did not miss opportunities for such displays. Even a hearing for a prisoner was turned into an ostentatious display accompanied by dignitaries (“the chief captains, and principle men of the city”) for an honor guard and fawning attendants to add to the impressiveness of the parade. Bernice would not miss using these opportunities to dress in the most expensive and glittering of outfits—a habit we see with the wives of some of our own politicians. But all the “pomp” was nothing but vanity. The word “pomp” is translated from a Greek word from which we get the English word “fantasy” which tells you something about the vainness of all the show. It is all empty adulation. It is solely earthly. One given up to this sort of show is indeed small in character.

*The prisoner.* When all the dignitaries had finished parading into the hearing

place and had taken their high seats of honor, then Paul was brought in. What a contrast he would present to Agrippa and the big shots gathered in their splendor. In chains and humble prison garb and guarded by a soldier, the greatest person in the whole assembly was ushered to his lowly seat. Little did anyone comprehend in that assembly of dignitaries that everything was all backward. It was Paul who should have been brought to the hearing place with trumpets and honor and bowings; and they, the esteemed dignitaries of the day, should have been dressed in rags and made to sit on the floor in humble recognition of their great inferiority compared to Paul.

Our day is not much different than Paul's day. The wicked are still on parade while the righteous are scorned as the scum of the earth. But let not the righteous despair, for the day is coming when the righteous will judge the world and the wicked will bow before them. God's people will be the honored ones while the unbelievers will be the despised ones.

## **2. The Announcement to Agrippa**

To start the hearing, Festus made a formal announcement regarding the purpose of the hearing. He speaks primarily to Agrippa, although others in the audience are also acknowledged. Some of what he announces here about Paul, Festus has already told Agrippa; but the formal announcement is necessary so that all those in the audience are made aware of what the hearing is all about.

In the announcement, Festus speaks of the demand for Paul's death, the declaration of Paul's innocence, the decision for Paul's move, and the deficiency of Paul's charges.

*The demand for Paul's death.* "Ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer" ([Acts 25:24](#)). This verse reminds us, as many do in the Word of God, that sin is very aggressive. It does not attack with complacency. The Jews were "crying" out for Paul's death. That is the language of great earnestness. They meant business. They were a cruel bunch burning with hatred against Paul. They did not want a reprimand for Paul; they wanted his removal. They wanted him dead.

The attitude of Paul's enemies rebukes God's people. We seldom see among professing Christians any zeal for the Lord's work that is anywhere close to the zeal these Jews had to stop Paul. We seldom see among God's people as fervent an attack against sin as the Jews fervently attacked Paul. No wonder our churches do

so little for God and have so little, if any, restraining influence upon the evils of society. No wonder so many Christians are overcome by sinful temptations in their own lives. No wonder church troublemakers are allowed to cause so much trouble in the church. God's people simply do not get excited about fighting sin and about exalting righteousness. There is little "crying" out against the evils of the day from our pulpits (such as John the Baptist did [[Luke 3](#)]), and little "crying out" to God in earnest prayer about the evils of the day (such as Ezra did [[Ezra 9](#)]).

*The declaration of Paul's innocence.* "I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death" ([Acts 25:25](#)). Once again we see the injustice of the trials and hearings that Paul has experienced. Festus declared Paul's innocence, but yet Paul is still a prisoner. Four times Paul's innocence was declared since he was arrested by Lysias ([Acts 23:29](#), [25:7](#), our present text, and [Acts 26:31](#)). Yet, Paul is still bound. How wickedly incongruent for Festus to declare Paul's innocence but still present him as a prisoner.

Jesus Christ was likewise repeatedly declared innocent, yet He was still crucified. Pilate ([Luke 23:14](#), [John 19:6](#)), Herod ([Luke 23:15](#)), one of the thieves crucified with Christ ([Luke 23:41](#)), and a centurion at the crucifixion scene ([Luke 23:47](#)) all plainly declared Christ innocent. But the world rejects the truth. And the rejection is not based on facts but on the basis of their sinful bias. That is why they reject the Gospel message even though it is presented with the greatest of care and logic. How tragic for the heart to be in such a hardened condition. But when truth is continually refused, God in judgment hardens the heart of the rejecter and brings him to his doom. Oh, beware of rejecting the truth of God. Beware of refusing to obey the will of God. It can be disastrous.

*The decision for Paul's move.* "But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him" ([Acts 25:25](#)). Festus states that Paul is going to be moved from Caesarea to Rome because of Paul's appeal. Festus is careful, however, to leave out why Paul appealed. Like the distorted reporting of our lying, liberal news media, Festus also distorted his report about Paul by making it look like Paul was solely responsible for the appeal. But as we learned earlier, Paul would not have appealed if Festus had treated him justly by releasing him when the trial did not prove him guilty as charged. Festus, however, had kept Paul bound in order to please the Jews and had asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem for a trial before the Jews. Paul then had no

choice but to appeal to protect himself. But Festus leaves all of that out.

Festus' failure to be honest reminds us that politicians are habitually this way. We cannot believe them and seldom know when they are telling the truth. They can pervert every situation they speak about to make it sound in their favor. But as we can discern Festus' dishonesty through the study of the Scriptures, so we can discern the dishonesty of politicians today by having our discernment sharpened through the faithful study of the Scriptures. Knowing the Word helps us to spot error, be it in an apostate preacher or a politician or a philosopher or a professor or a psychiatrist or a psychologist.

*The deficiency of Paul's charges.* "Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal signify the crimes laid against him" ([Acts 25:26,27](#)). The deficiency of the charges against Paul was great. In fact, Festus had no charges whatsoever against Paul. This presented a dilemma for Festus and prompted the deliberations about Paul.

First, it *presented a dilemma* for Festus. The dilemma is that Festus must send Paul to Rome but without charges to substantiate the case. Festus rightly concluded that it was unreasonable to send Paul without charges. Indeed it was, and it was also unreasonable to keep Paul in prison without charges. All of this did not make Festus look very good. It was his first trial as governor of Judea. To have your judgment appealed on your very first trial suggests you are not a capable judge. But as we have noted earlier, Festus brought the dilemma upon himself. He refused to give due honor to truth and righteousness, and anytime you do that you will bring trouble upon yourself.

Second, it *prompted the deliberations*. It is true that Agrippa requested the hearing, but the request was not made until Festus brought up Paul's case in hopes Agrippa would do something about the case. Festus does some fawning here before Agrippa when he says, "specially before thee." It was a bit of public backslapping which politicians do to each other when it serves their own selfish purpose. However, though this fawning statement by Festus was self-serving, Agrippa's knowledge of the Jews would give him an advantage in understanding the problem, as Paul will point out shortly.

How sick it is that Festus tries to get some sort of charge on Paul—and in this case without any accusers. The trial before the Sanhedrin and those before Felix failed to come up with any valid charges against Paul. Then the trial before Festus

failed also. But still Festus wants to find something wrong with Paul. However, he will not find anything wrong with Paul. Neither will the critics of the Bible and of the Gospel find anything wrong with God's Word and God's way of salvation. Like Festus, the critics can search and search; but all they will find is verification that the Word is true and the Gospel is real. That, however, is not acceptable to them. Prejudiced by a hard heart, they do not want to accept the findings.

### 3. The Answer to Agrippa

[Chapter 26](#) of Acts records Paul's great answer to Agrippa. It is the longest of Paul's speeches recorded in Scripture. To examine this speech which is mostly a review of Paul's life and faith, we will note Paul's capability, courtesy, creed, cruelty, conversion, calling, and commitment.

*Paul's capability.* "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself" ([Acts 26:1](#)). Opportunity was afforded Paul to speak, and he was ready, willing, and able to speak. Such are those who are earnest in serving the Lord. Peter said, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you" ([1 Peter 3:15](#)). Paul was always ready, and the reason he was always ready was because he did what the first part of that verse in Peter's epistle said: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." Paul had room for God in his heart. He was greatly devoted to Jesus Christ. That is what makes a man always ready to answer regarding his faith.

The manner in which Paul answered indicated he was no timid soul afraid to speak about his faith. Paul "stretched forth his hand" as he began to speak. He took command of the hearing at that point. Before he was finished, Agrippa and Festus were on the defensive. The hearing put them, not Paul, on the spot. But it would never have done that if Paul had not been able to speak for himself concerning his faith in Jesus Christ. His faith was real. His heart was committed to Jesus Christ. If such were the case with the members of our churches today, the testimony of the churches would be vibrant and victorious instead of the lame testimony which too often characterizes our churches.

*Paul's courtesy.* "I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews, Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are

among the Jews; wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently” ([Acts 26:2,3](#)). As he did with Felix, Paul spoke respectfully to Agrippa at the commencement of his defense. Paul did not slobber out some fawning accolades upon Agrippa that were untrue and only self-serving. But Paul did treat Agrippa with the courtesy one is to treat high office in such a situation. His recognition of Agrippa’s ability to assess the case was based on fact; for Agrippa was indeed well acquainted with Jewish habits and beliefs and, therefore, would understand better than other rulers what Paul would be talking about regarding his experiences and faith.

Paul ended his courteous introductory remarks by saying “hear me patiently.” This was a courteous way of introducing his answer, but it is also an instructive statement that people in our churches need to heed. A problem most people in the pews have is little patience for the sermon. They want a short sermon that is sugar coated. They have patience to watch TV by the hour but not to listen to a sermon for a few minutes. They delight in overtimes in sporting events but do not have patience for regulation time in sermons. If you want spiritual blessings, you must have patience. If you want to learn the Word of God, you must have patience in the study of the Word and in listening to preachers preach the Word.

*Paul’s creed.* After his initial introductory remarks to Agrippa, Paul immediately speaks of his creed. We note seven things he says about his creed: the awareness of his creed, the application of his creed, the avoidance of his creed, the animosity against his creed, the antiquity of his creed, the anticipation in his creed, and the argument for his creed.

First, the *awareness* of his creed. “My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews, Which knew me from the beginning . . . that after the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee” ([Acts 26:4,5](#)). Paul’s beliefs were not hidden! From his very youth, no one had any doubts as to what he believed. Before he knew Christ, he was an outspoken proclaimer of Judaism (“strictest sect . . . a Pharisee”). When he became a Christian, he made it very plain where he stood. This is the only kind of testimony that is valid. People around us ought to be aware of what we believe. They may not like what we believe, but they ought never to have to ask if we are a Christian. Our faith should be most evident at all times.

Second, the *application* of his creed. “My manner of life . . . after the strictest sect of our religion I lived” ([Acts 26:4,5](#)). Paul lived what he believed. Paul practiced what he preached. He applied his creed to his conduct. His faith was not just lip, but it was also life. Many folk profess a great creed but never apply it anywhere in their



life. But Paul could point to his “manner of life” as testimony of what he professed to believe. Can you do the same? Do you apply what you believe to your behavior?

Third, the *avoidance* of his creed. “Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee” ([Acts 26:5](#)). Paul’s accusers did not want to bring up in court that Paul had lived a most exemplary life of a Pharisee. That fact would not help their accusations that he was a pest and troublemaker. Like the liberal news media in their attack upon conservative beliefs, they simply left out pertinent facts in their testimony in order to make Paul look bad.

Fourth, the *animosity* against his creed. “And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers” ([Acts 26:6](#)). Paul’s accusers had brought many charges against him that had nothing to do with what the real issue was between him and his accusers. They charged him with sedition against Rome, trying to profane the Temple, and in general just being a pest of a person. But the real issue was his religious creed, his doctrine. It was a belief that culminated in the Savior, Jesus Christ, Who is the fulfillment of the promise made in the Old Testament Scriptures about the Messiah. The unbelieving Jews hated that belief, and multitudes in every age have hated it. This hatred often spills out in verbal and physical attacks upon those who embrace this faith as it did against Paul.

Fifth, the *antiquity* of his creed. “I stand . . . for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers” ([Acts 26:6](#)). Paul’s faith was not some new and strange belief. It was rooted in and grounded on the Old Testament Scriptures given to his Jewish ancestors (“our fathers”). These Scriptures his accusers ardently professed to believe (but, of course, they did not believe them). Our faith must be rooted and grounded in the Word of God if it is to have validity.

Sixth, the *anticipation* of his creed. “And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers, Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly [earnestly] serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope’s sake, king Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews” ([Acts 26:6,7](#)). Three times Paul speaks of hope in these two verses. What is the hope? It is the resurrection of the dead. And when the resurrection of the dead is mentioned, Jesus Christ is on the scene. It is His resurrection that confirms and assures the fulfillment of all the believers’ hopes—the hope of sins forgiven, the hope of Christ’s return, the hope of eternal life in heaven. There are no greater things to anticipate. Without these hopes in one’s creed, the creed is a curse.

Seventh, the *argument* for his creed. “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” ([Acts 26:8](#)). The argument Paul advances to justify his belief in the resurrection is that God caused it to happen.

The resurrection is not an incredible happening when you bring God into the event. The skeptics ridicule the miracles in the Bible, scoff at the resurrection, and laugh at the prophecies of Christ's return. They say it is impossible. But they leave out God, so no wonder they think it is impossible. Put God in the picture, however, and a lot of things clear up, are understandable, and will come to pass. So it is in our life. Problems mount and we think it impossible to see them solved. But bring God into the picture and the impossible vanishes.

*Paul's cruelty.* Paul next addresses the blackest blot on his life—his cruel persecution of Christians. We note the nature, the encouragement, and toleration of the cruelty.

First, the *nature* of his cruelty. Paul said he did “many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth . . . I shut up [the saints] in prison . . . And when they were put to death, I gave my voice [voted for the death sentence] against them [Christians] . . . I punished them oft . . . and compelled them to blaspheme . . . I persecuted them even unto strange [foreign] cities” ([Acts 26:9–11](#)). In the first chapter of our book, we looked in detail at Paul's deeds of persecution, and in doing so we covered these verses. Suffice us to say here regarding the nature of his cruelty that it was brutal, beastly, bloody, barbaric, and blasphemous. That a man could do what he did and be so wondrously changed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ certainly shows the power of the Gospel to change man.

Second, the *encouragement* of his cruelty. Evil conduct is never without encouragement from someone. We would expect that encouragement for such atrocious deeds which Paul committed would come from lowly people outside of civil society. But, alas, it came instead from highly respected religious leaders. One of the ways they greatly encouraged him to do terrible evil acts was to give him “authority” ([Acts 26:10,12](#)) to do the evil. The fact that encouragement to do evil came from a highly respected place should not surprise us, for we see repeatedly in the Scriptures that sin solicits from places of respect and popularity and power. It was highly respected and popular and powerful religion that urged Paul to such cruel acts of persecution. Today it is governments that urge society to gamble, and it is education that promotes immorality. Beware when evil tempts you that you are not seduced by the fact that some place of earthly respect and popularity and power encourages you to do the evil. Have victory over every temptation by making the Word of God your guide in life. You will never find encouragement to do evil coming from the Word of God.

Third, the *toleration* of his cruelty. In all of Paul's cruel deeds, not once was

he arrested. Rome tolerated his cruelty and the Jews tolerated it. Yet, when Paul embraces the Gospel of Jesus Christ which changes men from vile reprobates to upright and noble behaving men, he is arrested and incarcerated in prison. Paul could cause men and women to be put to death without fear of Rome or the Jews attacking him. But let him preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ which rescues men and women from eternal damnation in hell, and he is constantly being harassed by the Jews and civil authorities. We are seeing more of that behavior in our land today. Our nation is becoming more tolerant of gambling, abortion, and homosexuals; but they are at the same time becoming much less tolerant of religion. We no longer can pray in the schools, and restrictions are being imposed upon the expression of our faith in many other places. Our government encourages evil but discourages practicing the faith. Can judgment be far away?

*Paul's conversion.* For the third time, Paul's conversion is recorded in Scripture. We have examined it at length in two previous studies, therefore, we will not do so here. We will simply mention that his conversion was unusual in regards to the events that accompanied it but not in regards to how Paul was saved. Paul's conversion was dramatic, but he did not become anymore saved than you or I even though our salvation experience may lack the spectacular in man's eyes. As are all conversions, Paul's conversion was a result of God's grace. It was also illuminating (salvation opens our eyes to the greatest truths of all), life changing in its effects (most obviously so in Paul's case), and a result of the power of God ([Romans 1:16](#))—only God's power could transform someone like Paul from an ardent persecutor of Christ to an ardent propagator of Christ.

*Paul's calling.* In previous studies we have also noted Paul's calling as well as his conversion. However, unlike his conversion report here, we will look in detail at his calling given in this passage of Scripture inasmuch as some of the details given here about his calling are not given elsewhere. We note the authority, appointment, area, assurance, and aim of his calling.

First, the *authority* of his calling. There is no question from whence comes Paul's call for service. It comes straight from God, specifically from Jesus Christ. "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose . . . the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee" ([Acts 26:16,17](#)). Paul was not sent by the Sanhedrin as was the case in his persecution days. Paul was sent by God. To go on his own would have been as wrong as not going when called.

Make sure you know God's calling in your life. He has a calling for you. Friends may advise, relatives may insist, the world will try to dictate, and selfish desires may want to rule; but it is what the Almighty says that is the final word about your calling.

Second, the *appointment* of his calling. Here we look at the particular calling received by Paul from the Lord. He was called to be a "minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee" ([Acts 26:16](#)). Paul was to be a preacher and teacher of the Word of God. Some of the Word he already knew ("hast seen"), but some he would learn in the future ("those things in which I will appear [reveal] unto thee"). This is true with every preacher and teacher of the Word of God. We do not know it all when we start preaching, but we are to keep learning more and more as we serve the Lord. When a man comes out of college or seminary with some knowledge of the Word of God, he better not stop learning from the Word or his ministry will grow sterile.

God's ministers are to be men of the Word. Few are, unfortunately. They are public relations men, committee men, negotiators at board meetings and business meetings, denominational officers, and religious decor at civic events; but few are men of the Word. However, few things are needed so much in our land today as men of the Word.

Third, the *area* of his calling. As we have seen in earlier studies, Paul was commissioned to minister unto the "Gentiles, unto whom I now send thee" ([Acts 26:17](#)). Paul did a great work amongst the Gentiles. In other texts of Scripture, Paul was also told that he would proclaim the Gospel to the Jews, too. But his primary calling was to the Gentiles.

Paul was sent primarily to the Gentiles for a good reason—he was more acceptable to them than to the Jews. His ill-fated trip to Jerusalem ignored this truth. He dearly loved his own people and wished ardently for their salvation, and that we can only compliment. But this did not negate his Gentile calling. His priorities must be for the Gentiles, which was at times a hard struggle for Paul. But Paul is not alone in his struggle to stay put where God wants him. Others have also struggled to go where God wants them to go rather than where they want to go. In our calling to serve the Lord, we must give great care to serving in that area of the vineyard where He puts us. God does not place people in various areas without good reason.

Fourth, the *assurance* of his calling. "Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee" ([Acts 26:17](#)). The calling came with assurance of protection from his enemies. Paul needed that promise to encourage him in his work. Many times he had to go into difficult and dangerous areas, and many times his message greatly upset people. The assurance given Paul did not

mean he would be exempt from trials and attacks by the enemies. It simply meant that Paul would be preserved through them. God does not tell us we will not suffer trials, but He promises that we will survive the trials. We would like the promise to be that trials would not come, but that is not the promise. Trials are instructive and, therefore, need to be experienced. Hence, we do not need exemption from trials, but preservation in the trials.

Fifth, the *aim* of his calling. “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” ([Acts 26:18](#)). Evangelism was the aim of Paul’s ministry. Many aspects of evangelism are involved in this great verse which packs so much into such a short space. From this verse we learn that evangelism involved opening, turning, freeing, forgiving, enriching, and believing.

*Opening:* “To open their eyes.” Sin blinds the eyes. The Gospel opens the eyes. The unsaved see only this world and its rewards. The redeemed see heaven and its rewards.

*Turning:* “To turn them from darkness to light.” Salvation is spoken of in the Scriptures as going from darkness to light. Christ said, “I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” ([John 8:12](#)). To follow Christ, man must be turned in a different direction than he was going in his sin.

*Freeing:* “To turn . . . from the power of Satan unto God.” Sin puts us under the bondage of Satan’s power, but salvation frees us from that bondage.

*Forgiving:* “To . . . receive [the] forgiveness of sins.” The greatest need man has is to have his sins forgiven. The message of evangelism is that forgiveness is available through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. So many churches are bogged down with social programs trying to minister to material needs, forgetting that the greatest need is forgiveness of sins.

*Enriching:* Salvation brings an “inheritance” for the redeemed. Paul wrote later, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” ([2 Corinthians 8:9](#)). It is good to be reminded here that “inheritance” speaks of the future, not the present. Many saints in this life may be in poverty, but eternity will be a far different story indeed. They will come into an inheritance which is not temporal nor just material, but one that is eternal and spiritual—the greatest inheritance anyone can have.

*Believing:* Christ told Paul that salvation is by “faith that is in me.” Faith, not works, is how one is saved. And the “me” instructs us that it must be faith in Jesus

Christ, no other. These are cardinal truths of the Gospel.

*Paul's commitment.* How did Paul respond to his commission? He responded with great dedication. His commitment was extremely great. It is summed up in the words "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" ([Acts 26:19](#)). Then he detailed the various ways he evidenced his commitment to his calling: he was faithful in every site, situation, season, and sermon.

First, he was faithful in *every site*. He preached the Gospel faithfully "first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts [area] of Judea, and then to the Gentiles" ([Acts 26:20](#)). Unlike politicians who say one thing in one part of the country and then the opposite in another part of the country, Paul always preached the same Gospel everywhere he went.

Second, in *every situation*. "For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me" ([Acts 26:21](#)). In spite of persecution, Paul kept going. Many folk do well when the situation is pleasant and the crowd is approving. But let opposition raise up its ugly head, and those with small commitment will quit.

Third, in *every season*. "I continue unto this day" ([Acts 26:22](#)). It is one thing to start something, it is another thing to continue on day after day as Paul did. A number of folk look very good at the beginning. They seem to be bubbling over with enthusiasm and excitement. But they do not last. Their commitment was not strong. It never got to their heart. Paul exhorted Timothy to "be instant [diligent] in season, out of season" ([2 Timothy 4:2](#)) which is an-other way of saying be faithful all the time.

Fourth, in *every sermon*. Paul's sermons said "none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles" ([Acts 26:22,23](#)). Paul's messages were always true to the Word of God. That always requires great commitment to the Lord. Pressures are often great to deviate from the Word, to compromise and preach what man wants to hear.

We need to note here that the statement that Christ was the "first that should rise from the dead" means the first to stay alive after raising from the dead. Others before Him came back to life after they had died (e.g. the widow's son in Elijah's day, the Shunammite's son in Elisha's day, the son of the widow of Nain, Jairus' daughter, and Lazarus), but none of these stayed alive. Jesus Christ did, however.

Paul's answer to Agrippa was filled with Gospel truth. Paul had a great opportunity to give out the Gospel before a host of dignitaries, and he did not fail. His was a

gallant profession of his faith. Oh, that all of us would always be so gallant in living and speaking our faith before others.

## C. THE OUTCOME OF THE HEARING

The best thing one can say about this hearing is that it provided us with a great speech by the Apostle Paul. How instructive and inspiring are his words. Other than that, the hearing did not change a thing regarding Paul and prison. Festus obtained no charges against Paul and unless he invented some (which we suspect he did, but Scripture does not say), Paul was sent to Rome without charges filed against him.

To look at the outcome of the hearing in more detail, we will consider Festus' response, Agrippa's response, and the joint response to Paul's answer.

### 1. Festus' Response

"And as he [Paul] thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad" ([Acts 26:24](#)). Festus' response was inappropriate, interruptive, ignorant, and insulting.

*Inappropriate.* Festus had no business speaking at this time. He was totally out of place. The hearing was for Agrippa, not Festus. Paul was speaking primarily to Agrippa, not Festus. It was, therefore, not appropriate for Festus to speak to Paul at this time. It also was not appropriate for him to assess the case. It was Agrippa who was to assess the case.

Festus showed very poor protocol here. He performed very poorly as a governor. He did not treat his guest, King Agrippa, respectfully. But when you do not respect the Gospel message, as Festus certainly didn't, you will have trouble respecting a lot of other things that ought to be respected.

*Interruptive.* Festus interrupted Paul's speech. Paul had not yet finished his defense when Festus started to talk. Festus butted in and talked when he should have been listening. Paul had exhorted Agrippa to "hear me patiently" ([Acts 26:3](#)). Festus ought to have listened to that exhortation to Agrippa and applied it to himself also. How does Festus expect to obtain charges if he will not be patient enough to

hear the man out?

Unbelief is like Festus. It will not listen to the whole case. It has made up its mind and does not want to be confused with facts; and it will, therefore, not be courteous enough to let faith finish speaking.

*Ignorant.* Festus had already announced his ignorance of the case (“I doubted of [was perplexed about] such manner of questions” [\[Acts 25:20\]](#)). Now he emphasizes his ignorance. Ignorant people should keep still and listen so they will learn and, therefore, remedy their ignorance. But not Festus. He is ignorant and is going to stay ignorant and will, to his shame, give a public display of his ignorance.

Paul, with a few choice words after Festus’ interruption, emphasized how ignorant Festus was. He said to Festus, “the king knoweth of these things . . . this thing was not done in a corner” ([Acts 26:26](#)). The prince and the public knew about the things Paul was talking about, it was the procurator (Festus) who did not know. That should have really shamed Festus. Festus simply made a fool of himself saying what he did. But you will always make a fool of yourself when you react as he did against the Gospel message.

*Insulting.* Festus told Paul that Paul was “beside thyself” and “mad” ([Acts 26:24](#)). The words “beside thyself” are translated from one Greek word meaning “to rage, be mad” (Vine). The word “mad” is translated from a kindred Greek word from which we get the English word “maniac.” Festus attacks the mind of Paul. Because Festus does not understand what Paul is saying, he insults the mentality of Paul. The problem, however, was not the mentality of Paul, but the spirituality of Festus.

To call another person a maniac because he understands something you do not is to make of fool of yourself. Ignorance only shames itself when calling intelligence madness, and especially is this so in spiritual matters.

Paul calmly answered Festus with “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness” ([Acts 26:25](#)). What a put down for the governor. Paul was not yelling with a loud voice; it was Festus who was doing so and, thus, acting like a mad man. Paul addressed Festus with dignified terms (“most noble” referring to his office), but Festus calls Paul insulting names. Time has vindicated Paul. His speech, which Festus termed words of a mad man, have been given great honor over the centuries while Festus’ remarks have justifiably been accorded universal scorn.

How often the world calls Christianity disparaging names. Christ was said to be “beside himself” ([Mark 3:21](#), the words mean “to be out of one’s mind” [Vine]) and was said to have a “devil [demon]” ([John 10:20](#)). The disciples were said to be



drunk when they were simply spirit-filled ([Acts 2:13](#)). Christians are often called crazy or insane or “nuts” for their earnest dedication to the Lord. It seems the more dedicated and devoted you are, the less respect you will receive from the world. But it is the world that is mad and insane and crazy and stupid. It is great madness and folly to reject the Gospel and spend eternity in the fires of hell.

## 2. Agrippa's Response

The response of Agrippa to Paul's answer came after Paul turned from the interruption of Festus to direct his attention back to Agrippa by saying, “King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest” ([Acts 26:27](#)). Agrippa's response is a very famous response, but it is also a very faulty response. He said, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” ([Acts 26:28](#)). We will look at the tragedy of the response and the treatment of the response.

*The tragedy of the response.* “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” is such a pathetic statement. The extent of “Almost” is debated as to how much Agrippa was persuaded. The “Almost” found in our text is the first of just two times (the other is in the next verse) in the New Testament that the Greek word is translated “almost.” It is translated “few” twenty times, “little” eight times, and “small” five times. This supports the position that Agrippa's statement said “mostly I do not believe” rather than “mostly I do believe.” “Almost” does not show up in an English translation until the Geneva Bible. The Tyndale Bible translated it “Somewhat” which would say Agrippa was only in a small way persuaded.

With the hymns and sermons on this verse over the last few hundred years, it may be difficult for many to accept the fact that the “Almost” can mean “in a little I am persuaded” and not “mostly I am persuaded.” But it makes no difference as to whether one prefers the “mostly” or the “little” translation; for the lesson is the same; namely, Agrippa came up tragically short in his response to the Gospel. There was some persuasion going on in his heart. But not enough. A miss is as good as a mile in this business of salvation. Only in horseshoes does being close count. In salvation, you are just as lost if you came close to being saved as you are if you never had much feeling about being saved. Rejection is rejection! “Mostly” or a “little” brings about the same eternal destiny, namely, hell fire. What a tragedy to not receive Christ. And how great the tragedy to reject Christ after hearing the speech Apostle Paul made to Agrippa. Agrippa had advantages, he knew the Scriptures. Even Paul knew that Agrippa believed the prophets. Yet, he refused Jesus Christ. While it was sad to see

Paul so unjustly treated by the court, the real tragedy of that day was to see Agrippa turn away from Christ.

*The treatment of the response.* Paul responded to Agrippa's statement with, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether, such as I am, except these bonds" ([Acts 26:29](#)). Paul wished that all those hearing him that day were as he was—be it little ("almost") or be it much ("altogether")—except for the prison chains. Basically Paul wished that his hearers were saved. He did not wish them the chains, of course; but he wanted them to be saved as he was saved. The statement urged Agrippa to be saved, and it urged the audience to also come to Christ. Scripture gives no record to encourage us that any came to Christ that day. But the lack of interest in being saved was not Paul's fault. He gave them the Gospel and urged them to accept it. Some in the audience would doubtless agree with Festus in that their attitude towards Paul's speech would be one of scorn. Others may have been like Agrippa—affected, but not enough. Truly it was not Paul who was the prisoner, but the real prisoners were all those who rejected the Gospel. Paul was the only true free man in the hearing place.

### 3. Joint Response

"And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them; And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar" ([Acts 26:30–32](#)). This joint response resulted in a confirmation of Paul's innocence and a continuation of injustice.

*Confirmation of innocence.* "Nothing worthy of death or of bonds" ([Acts 26:31](#)) was the conclusion of the officials after hearing Paul. It was as plain a statement of innocence as could be given. Festus had stated earlier that Paul was only not worthy of death ([Acts 25:25](#)), but here the statement includes that he should not be in bonds either. Lysias, the Roman captain, had also stated that he was not worthy of bonds as well as being not worthy of death ([Acts 23:29](#)).

The confirmation of innocence meant that Festus was worse off then before the hearing. Before the hearing he had no charges worthy of death, now he has no charges worthy of bonds. How true it is that the more truth is examined, the better

it appears. The more Paul was examined, the better his great character was seen. And the more the Word of God is examined, the more accurate and more wonderful the examiners will find it to be.

*Continuation of injustice.* “This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar” ([Acts 26:32](#)). Though declared innocent of any evil, Paul is still kept in bonds. Thus, injustice continues. And more injustice is added to the situation by blaming Paul for his being kept in bonds. True, he had appealed and the appeal had to be honored. But it was Festus who forced the appeal. When Festus proposed a trial in Jerusalem, Paul had to appeal to protect himself from a most dangerous situation. Therefore, Festus is the one who should be blamed for Paul having to remain in bonds. But Paul is the one who gets blamed. This is simply injustice upon injustice.

How clever is evil. It is always trying to pin the blame on truth and righteousness. So God gets blamed when things go bad. The pastor gets blamed if things do not go well at church—as though Satan and the cantankerous church members had no hand in making things go bad at church. The policeman gets blamed for crime. Nero blamed the Christians for the burning of Rome, and Ahab (an Old Testament Nero) blamed Elijah for troubling Israel. Be careful who and what you blame for your troubles. Blaming the wrong source will only compound your troubles; it will not solve them.

## XXX. PERIL AT SEA

### [ACTS 27](#)

OUR TEXT RECORDS the fourth shipwreck experienced by the Apostle Paul. Earlier he had reported in his second epistle to the Corinthians that he had already suffered three shipwrecks ([2 Corinthians 11:25](#)). Now in our text in which Paul is traveling to Rome, a great storm on the Mediterranean Sea brings about his fourth shipwreck experience. In our boot camp days in the Navy, one of our instructors—a crusty, war-hardened sailor—had been forced to jump off two sinking ships during World War II. That was considered quite a distinction, but it takes an inferior place to Paul’s experience of having four ships go down under him.

Paul spent a lot of time traveling in ships on the seas, and the perils he experienced on the waters could probably write a most exciting and significant book

by themselves. As it is, his fourth shipwreck experience—the only one reported in detail—is a most significant piece of nautical literature, let alone being part of the inspired Word of God. Maclaren said, “It reads like a log-book.” William Jacobson said, “In the whole range of Greek and Roman literature there is nothing that gives so much information about ancient ships and seamanship as this chapter.” We would add that this chapter also gives an abundance of spiritual lessons—our main interest—which is something that the “whole range of Greek and Roman literature” will be even more deficient in doing.

To study this text regarding Paul and the storm at sea and his fourth shipwreck experience, we will note the progress before the storm ([vv. 1–8](#)), the prediction about the storm ([vv. 9–13](#)), the particulars of the storm ([vv. 14–20](#)), the proclamation during the storm ([vv. 21–26](#)), the pretenders in the storm ([vv. 27–32](#)), and the preservation in the storm ([vv. 33–44](#)).

## A. THE PROGRESS BEFORE THE STORM

In this trip to Rome, Paul traveled on the sea for some time before his fourth shipwreck occurred. In fact, the shipwreck did not take place until Paul had traveled about three-fourths of the way to Rome, was on the second ship of the voyage, and had been in the storm for some two weeks. Here, in the first main point of this study, we note the progress before the storm in which the ship traveled from Caesarea to Fair Havens—about two-fifths of the way to Rome. We will look particularly at the start to Italy, the stop at Sidon, and the struggle to Fair Havens.

### 1. The Start to Italy

“And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus’ band. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia, one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us” ([vv. 1, 2](#)). From these verses about the start of the voyage to Italy, we observe the cause of the trip, the centurion for the trip, and companions of the trip.

*The cause of the trip.* “And when it was determined we should sail into Italy” ([v. 1](#)) speaks of the decision made by Roman officials on how and when to send Paul to

Rome. Paul's fourth shipwreck experience occurred when he was being sent by sea to Rome as a result of his legal appeal made to Caesar during his trial before Festus. Since Paul was a prisoner, Roman officials—Festus particularly—had to make all the arrangements to get Paul to Rome. The decision was to send Paul by sea, of course, as going by land would normally have been much harder and longer.

Paul's going to Rome, whether by land or sea, was already "determined" by God several years earlier ([Acts 23:11](#)). As Matthew Henry said, "It was determined by the counsel of God, before it was determined by the counsel of Festus, that Paul should go to Rome; for, whatever man intended, God had work for him to do there." The Roman government was simply paying the bill for Paul's trip to Rome.

Little did Festus or Rome realize that Paul's traveling to Rome was more important than the traveling of any Roman official. Paul was God's ambassador carrying the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This trip would result in the spreading of the Gospel throughout many areas of the world. The Roman empire would die in a few centuries, but the work of Paul is still going on nearly two millennia later. Governments rise and fall, but God's work keeps going on.

*The centurion for the trip.* "They delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band" ([v. 1](#)). The "Augustus' band" was not some musical group, but it was one of the many different groups of the Roman army. As it is with the armies of most nations, various regiments, divisions, and companies of soldiers have their special names (and often special uniform insignia markings, too). The "Augustus' band" was named after the title of the Roman emperor. In the account of Cornelius coming to Christ, we learn of another group name. Cornelius was "a centurion of the band called the Italian band" ([Acts 10:1](#)).

Julius had obviously to be a very capable military man in order to be entrusted with these prisoners for a trip to Rome. And we will see shortly that he was not only capable but was considerate as well. These characteristics were important for his task; for the voyage will require Julius to not only be a good soldier, but to also be a good diplomat.

*The companions for the trip.* "Paul and certain other prisoners . . . [and] one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us" ([vv. 1, 2](#)). Paul's companions for the trip varied considerably in character. He had prisoners for companions, but he also had such great Christians as Luke and Aristarchus as companions. Paul being mentioned with the other prisoners drew this instructive comment from Matthew

Henry: “Paul was linked with these [other prisoners] as Christ with the thieves that were crucified with him . . . it is no new thing for the innocent to be numbered among the transgressors.”

Luke and Aristarchus would obviously be the companions that would mean the most to Paul. Luke (the “us” of the above Scripture quote), the beloved physician and author of Acts and one of the four Gospels, was a great Christian who was a loyal friend of Paul. He stuck with Paul through thick and thin. “Only Luke is with me” ([2 Timothy 4:11](#)) is an illustration of Luke’s faithfulness to Paul. Aristarchus was likewise a loyal friend of Paul. We met Aristarchus in [Acts 19](#) where he was pushed by the mob into the theater when there was a riot in Ephesus. Later in [Acts 20:4](#) he is mentioned as one of the representatives of the churches helping Paul take the collection to the poor saints in Jerusalem. He is mentioned in two of Paul’s epistles in a most honorable way. [Philemon 1:24](#) mentions him as among Paul’s “fellowlaborers.” [Colossians 4:10](#) mentions him as a “fellowprisoner.” How often God provides excellent companions for us in our dark times. They may not be many, but they will be faithful, true, and a great encouragement.

## **2. The Stop at Sidon**

“And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated [treated] Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself” ([v. 3](#)). The trip by sea from Caesarea to Sidon was smooth sailing. It only took a day to cover the seventy-five miles or so to Caesarea. When they stopped at Sidon, Julius gave Paul liberty to visit Christian friends in that city so he could “refresh himself.” Letting Paul visit his friends said much about what Julius knew and believed about Paul. Julius knew Paul was a man of excellent character and was not of criminal nature. Some believe that Julius was one of the officers who heard Paul’s excellent profession before Agrippa, and that this had much to do with the way Julius treated Paul throughout the trip. Julius certainly would not let the normal prisoner visit his friends. Even if Paul had a guard chained to him, it still would normally be most unwise for him as a prisoner to be permitted to walk off to visit his friends. After all, a guard could be easily overcome by a number of others. But Paul lived his faith so well before men that even a Roman centurion would give him unusual liberties without concern. Today, in contrast, Christians live so poorly before the world, that the world has no more trust in them than they do anyone else.

## **3. The Struggle to Fair Havens**

The trip from Sidon on the western coast of Phoenicia to Fair Havens on the southern coast of the island of Crete was not smooth sailing. It gave plenty of warning that it was too perilous to continue pursuing the trip to Italy at this time. We examine this trip by looking at a detouring route, a different ship, and a driving wind.

*A detouring route.* The ship at Sidon was headed for Myra of the province of Lycia. Normally, the ship would have taken a straight northwest course across the Mediterranean going south of the island of Cyprus. But “because the winds were contrary” ([v. 4](#)), the ship “sailed under [under the lee of] Cyprus . . . over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia . . . to Myra, a city of Lycia” ([vv. 4, 5](#)). To sail “under the lee” is sailors’ language for sailing near the coast in order to gain a wind break from the strong winds of the sea. Here, it meant the ship sailed north along the eastern side of Cyprus until it passed Cyprus. Then it sailed between Cyprus on the south and the provinces of Cilicia, Pamphylia, and Lycia on the mainland north of Cyprus until it came to Myra of Lycia. The winds being “contrary” was an ominous sign that continuing the trip to Italy would involve much peril. It was past the summer and into the fall (“fast” of [verse 9](#) refers to the Day of Atonement which was during the fall). This meant dangerous storms were now part of the Mediterranean scene.

*A different ship.* At Myra, “the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein” ([v. 6](#)). The ship boarded in Caesarea was not traveling any farther towards Italy, so like we change planes or trains in some of our trips, the centurion had to change ships to continue the trip. The ship he changed to was a bigger ship than the first one the Caesarean group traveled on. It could carry at least 276 people as [verse 37](#) indicates. The ship was from Egypt (Alexandria) and carried wheat ([v. 38](#)) from Egypt to Rome. Egypt at that time exported much wheat from its fruitful wheat fields near the Nile River.

Though it was a different ship and was larger and more impressive, it was still headed for trouble because the dangerous trip was still being pursued. How often in life we try to make superficial changes in our lives in order to overcome some problems. We change ships but not plans. We change politicians but not practices. We put slummy people in better houses but because we do not change the slummy people, the better houses do not change their lives. Government takes over gambling but that does not change the evils of gambling. The Caesarean group needed more than a different ship; they needed a different plan in order to avoid great trouble.

So it is with many people.

*A driving wind.* It was very difficult sailing when the ship embarked from Myra and headed for Italy. They “sailed slowly many days, and scarce [same word is translated ‘hardly’ in [verse 8](#)] were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under [under the lee of] Crete, over against Salmone; And, hardly [with difficulty] passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens, whereunto was the city of Lasea” ([vv. 7, 8](#)). J. A. Alexander said regarding this trip, “It is clear from the narrative of Luke that they were driven to the east and south of Crete against their will . . . by the northwest wind.” The strong northwest wind made traveling west slow going and forced them south towards Crete instead of going west towards Greece. They finally stopped at Fair Havens on the south side of Crete. It was not where they had originally intended to stop; but blown off course, this was where they had to stop.

The ship’s inability to go on the course it intended is a picture of the lives of people who persist on a lifestyle that is filled with prohibiting perils. In persisting in these evil lifestyles, they soon discover they are no longer in much control of their lives. Evil habits unmercifully control them, and evil friends exercise a strong influence over them driving them farther and farther away from the right path of life and into more and more trouble with God and man. Such people often ridicule Christianity by accusing it of being so restrictive, yet they are the ones who lack freedom because of the bondage of their evil ways. Sin, like the driving wind, controls their every movement. They do not have control of their lives. We will see this truth emphasized again later on in this study.

## **B. THE PREDICTION ABOUT THE STORM**

While the ship was anchored in Fair Havens, Paul warned that continued sailing at that time of the year would be disastrous. He predicted much trouble ahead if they ventured out on the sea. We will note the reason for the prediction, the repeating of the prediction, and the rejection of the prediction.

### **1. The Reason for the Prediction**

“Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous,



because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them” (v. 9). Three good reasons are present in this verse to justify Paul’s prediction of the storm. They are the equinox of autumn, the endangerment of all, and the experience of the apostle. Like the warnings God gives mankind about sin, there were some very good reasons for Paul to make this warning prediction about further sailing.

*The equinox of autumn.* This was the time of the year when “sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past” (v. 9). The time of the year was good justification for Paul’s warning prediction of trouble ahead if they continued to sail at that time. The “fast” referred to here in our text tells us what time of the year it was. The “fast” is connected with the Day of Atonement celebration for the Jews. This celebration was during “the time of the autumnal equinox [which occurs about September 21st], and when the navigation of the Mediterranean was esteemed to be particularly dangerous from the storms which usually occurred about that time. The ancients regarded this a dangerous time to navigate the Mediterranean” (Barnes). The trip from Caesarea had taken an abnormal amount of time; for the winds made progress slow by slowing down the ship’s speed, causing it to take time consuming detours, and blowing it off course. Furthermore, they had spent “much time” in Fair Havens. All of this brought them into the time of the year when storms were especially prevalent on the Mediterranean.

In the verses describing the trip thus far are a number of statements concerning the struggle the ship was having with the winds that would be harbingers of the coming stormy season on the Mediterranean: “The winds were contrary” (v. 4); “we . . . sailed slowly many days” (v. 7) because of the opposing winds; “scarce [with difficulty] were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us” (Ibid.); “hardly [with difficulty] passing it” (v. 8) because of the winds. These winds ought to have been enough warning to keep sailors from sailing. Paul should not have had to warn them. But, as we will see later, the sailors, like many people do when following the path of sin, shut their eyes to the obvious warnings of their way.

*The endangerment of all.* “I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading [cargo] and ship, but also of our lives” (v. 10). Anytime this sort of danger is eminent, warning is not only justified but also mandated. Two hundred and seventy-six people were passengers on the ship, it was a large merchant ship, and it was loaded with wheat. If the ship goes down at sea, a great loss of life would occur plus a great loss of material goods would occur. Paul, of

course, had been promised by God that he would make it to Rome. But the promise does not lessen human responsibility and concern for others, and so Paul dutifully and unselfishly gives the warning. While Paul had the promise of life from God, he had no assurance at this time that the others would be spared. Later, God informed him all would be spared. But that revelation had not been given yet.

*The experience of the apostle.* “I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage” ([v. 10](#)). Paul’s warning was rooted in his own personal experience. The Greek word translated “perceive” means “to be a spectator of” (Vine). This is not perception that comes by a special revelation from God, but it is perception that comes by experience. Paul had been on three shipwrecks ([2 Corinthians 11:25](#)) prior to this coming shipwreck. He was an experienced sea traveler and, therefore, knew much about storms and other perils at sea. He did not need a Divine revelation to make a warning here. Some think that this prediction was a Divine prophecy. But it certainly did not have to be, and Scripture does not support a Divine revelation. God does not give Divine revelations for duty when they are not necessary. And it was not necessary here. Where a Divine revelation would be necessary in this situation is to order them to sail in the dangerous conditions. You do not need a Divine revelation to stay off the roads when there is a raging blizzard going on and the roads are covered with snow and ice and visibility is zero. You would need a Divine revelation to justify traveling on the roads but not to stay off the roads. So it is here with Paul’s warning prediction. We do not need to seek more light to guide our way when we have the combination of experience and circumstances as Paul did in this situation.

## **2. The Repeating of the Prediction**

Paul gave his prediction repeatedly. He did not issue the warning just once and then not mention it again. The repeating aspect of his prediction is found in the verb tense of the Greek word translated “admonished” in “Paul admonished them” ([v. 9](#)). The verb tense is the “imperfect tense inchoative . . . [meaning] began to admonish and kept on at it” (A. T. Robertson). The English language does not have such a verb tense in it and, therefore, we cannot translate it fully with any of our verb tenses, so translators simply use the past tense in translating the word.

The repeating of the prediction of disaster at sea left the mariners with no excuse for the shipwreck which later occurred. These sailors had plenty of warning just as people over the ages have had plenty of warning from God of the dire results of

pursuing a path of sin. God told Israel that He warned them in plenty of time [“early”] and repeatedly [“Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day”] through the prophets ([Jeremiah 7:25](#)), but they seldom heeded the warnings. Many today are no different. As an example, you can show young people repeatedly that their marriage plans are against God’s will and that they will eventually produce shipwreck. But these young people, like the mariners Paul warned repeatedly, go on their way only to meet disastrous shipwreck in which they lose everything. Don’t blame God for your troubles. He has warned you repeatedly of the peril of your sinful ways.

### **3. The Rejection of the Prediction**

Paul’s warning, as we already noted, was rejected. We note the excuses for the rejection, the enthusiasm for the rejection, and the effect of the rejection.

*The excuses for the rejection.* Rejection of wisdom invariably comes with clever and high sounding excuses that fool many. At least four excuses can be found in our text for rejecting Paul’s wise advice: the excuses of competence, convenience, compromise, and calm.

First, *competence*. Though Paul’s prediction of disaster was justified, right, gracious, and noble, “Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul” ([v. 11](#)). It should be no surprise that Paul’s warning was rejected by the centurion. After all, who is going to listen to a prisoner instead of the master of the ship and the owner of the ship about when to sail and when not to sail. Surely the people connected with the ship are far more competent in making decisions about sailing than a lowly prisoner. But, of course, in this case, it was not so. However, Paul’s position as a prisoner hindered people from believing him.

The lesson here in this excuse is how Satan ever puts the messenger of truth in a disrespectful category so that the message of truth will be rejected. Paul, the messenger of truth, is in the category of a prisoner. He is not the master of the ship (here that means the one who steers the ship) or the owner of the ship. He is not a highly respected passenger, nor is he an esteemed Roman official who commands much authority. He is simply a prisoner. Of all the personnel on board the ship, no one is lower than a prisoner.

How often we see this situation in society. The devil sees to it that the people who have wisdom are frequently in low esteem and position in the world so that

what they say does not carry much weight with anybody. On the other hand, the devil will see to it that the spiritually ignorant will be highly respected and in high positions in the world; they will be the ones steering the ship of state; they will be the ones with power in society. We see this problem in the way the liberal press attacks the conservatives. The liberals describe the conservatives in terms of ridicule and scorn so that whenever the conservatives speak, folk do not respect what they say. This problem shows up in church, too. The devil sees to it that the godly pastor with God's message is continually criticized and belittled by the dissidents so that when he speaks, no one respects what he says. Let God's people be alert to this situation so they can at least combat it at church.

Second, *convenience*. "Because the haven was not commodious to winter in" ([v. 12](#)). The name Fair Havens was rather deceptive, for it presented some problems for a ship if it wanted to stay there over the winter. The harbor apparently was not protected as well as sailors like a harbor to be, and it did not provide as much in the line of supplies and entertainment to winter in as sailors would like. However, under the circumstances, it would have been much better to suffer some temporary inconveniences in Fair Havens than to suffer shipwreck. But oftentimes we make foolish decisions because we are afraid of suffering a bit of inconvenience to do what is right.

Third, *compromise*. Paul warned not to sail at all. But the mariners would compromise. Compromise is a frequent excuse for rejecting wise counsel. The sailors will not sail on towards Rome but will sail only "to Phenice [Phoenicia], and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the southwest and northwest" ([v. 12](#)). Phoenicia (also spelled Phenice, Phoenix, and Phoenix) was a good harbor for protection and also for supplies and entertainment to winter in, and it was only some forty miles away. That was not very far away and could generally be reached in less than a day's time from Fair Havens. Furthermore, to get there, they would sail "close by Crete" ([v. 13](#)) and not get far out into the Mediterranean.

A very subtle temptation is one that does not encourage you to go a long way from the right path but only a short way. Sinful compromise does not encourage you to go all the way to Rome, but only to Phoenicia and to stay close to the shore of Crete when going to Phoenicia. This sounds so noble. But this temptation is as destructive as those that encourage you to go way out to sea and all the way to Rome. Once sin has you away from where you belong, it is very easy to quickly take you farther and farther away from the right path. Under the guise of going to the port of Phoenicia, sin will whisk you quickly out to sea where you will be destroyed. Beware of the subtle temptation of doing something "just once," or "not going very far," or "it is just a little sin." These are traps for the unwary that lead to great sin.

Fourth, *calm*. “And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing from thence, they sailed close by Crete” ([v. 13](#)). The wind blowing softly out of the south provided another excuse for rejecting Paul’s wise warning. This calm of the soft breeze was most promising to the mariners. They thought surely they could obtain their goal of reaching Phoenicia. But, as we know from the account in Acts, the soft, southern breeze only led them to disaster. Instead of obtaining their goal, they lost everything they had. And as men know today, a south breeze at that time of the year was not a sign that they could sail but was a sign of a coming storm.

The soft, southern breeze certainly illustrates the deceptiveness of sin. Sin often looks so harmless. Furthermore, it also looks promising. It looks like that which will bring much pleasure and gain. But though sin is advertised as calm, it is chaos. Though it is advertised as “soft,” you will discover instead that “the way of the transgressors is hard” ([Proverbs 13:15](#)). Though it advertises itself as that which will bring you good things, it will instead take away all the good things you have.

*The enthusiasm for the rejection.* Scripture says, “The more part advised to depart from there” ([v. 12](#)). Paul was in a small minority, for most on the ship rejected his message. Popularity was not with Paul but with going to sea. So it is with evil. There is a lot more enthusiasm for evil than for good. The majority chooses the path of sin, not the path of righteousness. “Enter ye in at the strait [narrow] gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat” ([Matthew 7:13](#)). The crowd is for sin, not holiness.

Preachers need to remember that just because they have the right message does not mean they will have a crowd. The idea that if you faithfully preach the Word of God you will build a big church is not an idea that has support from Scripture. To the contrary, Scripture is full of illustrations where God’s faithful preacher has lost his crowd. As an example, Christ lost His crowd in [John 6](#). It went from thousands down to twelve in a matter of days, and one of the twelve was a phony. This, of course, does not mean that preaching the truth will always mean no crowd. The lesson here is that we are to preach the truth regardless of whether the crowd accepts it or not. Thank God when a church grows and when numbers increase. How encouraging and blessed that experience is. But many times it won’t happen that way. The crowd will reject the message and only a few will respond favorably to it. But preach the message faithfully anyway. God will look you over for how faithful you were to His message, not for how many followed you.

*The effect of the rejection.* The immediate effect was to leave Fair Havens ([v. 13](#)). The long term effect was the loss of the ship and all the goods—something we will consider later. Here, we want to look at the immediate effect. Leaving Fair Havens looked so deceptively appealing. Pulling up anchor looked like freedom. No more restriction of the anchors. Now the ship could sail unrestricted out into the sea.

Sin seems this way at first. Righteousness is mocked as restrictive. But sin gets free of those anchors to which righteousness is tied. It can do what it wants. It can drink, take drugs, gamble, smoke, and be immoral. It is not restricted by religious convictions. It is free—so thinks the sinner. But soon he will learn, as did all those on that ship in Paul's day, that they did not have the freedom they thought they had but were driven over the sea as the wind so desired. Addiction to drink and drugs and gambling certainly is not freedom. The burdens immorality binds on people are also anything but freedom. Girls are stuck at home taking care of an unwanted baby instead of enjoying the freedom of virtue. Boys are tied down with expenses for child support instead of having the freedom to spend their money elsewhere. Yes, "loosing" from the right way of life looks like freedom, but it is the path to slavery.

## C. THE PARTICULARS OF THE STORM

Paul predicted the storm. The sailors did not believe the prediction. But Paul was right, for a great storm came upon the sea. We will note three important particulars about the storm, namely, the storm was sudden in coming, severe in consequences, and slow in ceasing. In the study of these particulars of this storm, we will discover a number of spiritual lessons about the voyage of life.

### 1. The Storm was Sudden in Coming

"But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon" ([v. 14](#)). When the "south wind blew softly" ([v. 13](#)) the sailors decided to sail thinking all was well. How foolish was their thinking. They had not traveled far—it could have been as few as five or ten miles—when suddenly they were hit with "a tempestuous wind." Five miles or so west from Fair Havens is Cape Matala, where the coast of Crete turns a sharp ninety degrees to the north and proceeds for seven or eight miles until it turns another ninety degrees to the west. Once passing Cape Matala, a ship loses protection of the Crete coastline and is immediately exposed to any north wind blowing down from Mount Ida which is due north of Cape Matala. William

Jacobson reported an example of this experience. He said, “Captain Spratt, having left the Fair Havens with a light southerly wind, had, after rounding Cape Matala, a strong northerly wind directly down from Mount Ida.”

The suddenness of the storm coming upon the ship would be a shock to the sailors. They were lulled into a false security with the soft, southerly wind. Then all of a sudden the ship is in a storm. Their experience illustrates well the experience many a sinner has who persists in his sin. Though warned plainly and in plenty of time by God’s servants to avoid an evil pursuit, they instead listen to the seductive calls of sin and follow it. But “He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” ([Proverbs 29:1](#)). “Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy” ([Proverbs 6:15](#)). Some sinners may live well into old age, but the storm of eternal judgment will still come upon them suddenly. Awful will be that day for every sinner. Judgment will be too sudden to permit repentance, too sudden to change course.

## **2. The Storm was Severe in Consequences.**

The storm was a great storm and, thus, the consequences from the storm were most severe. The greatness of the storm is confirmed and emphasized in the word “tempestuous” in [verse 14](#). It is translated from a word from which we get our English word “typhoon.” The word “typhoon” is today used for hurricanes in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The storm in Paul’s day was called “Euroclydon” which generally means “northeasterner.” With the winds being from the northeast, we can understand why the ship was blown in a westerly direction by the storm.

The severity of the consequences can be seen in noting the many losses that were occurred in the storm. We note ten important losses: the loss of respect, freedom, control, safety, stability, joy, peace, possessions, guidance, and hope.

First, *loss of respect*. “But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon” ([v. 14](#)). The respect which the passengers on the ship had for the sailors, for the master of the ship, for the owner of the ship, and for any others who had part in making the decision to sail away from Fair Havens was lost. When the soft, southerly wind blew, these men thought it was safe to sail. Paul’s warnings were despised and doubtless laughed at as the ship set sail in what seemed like ideal conditions. But in a few miles, chaos descended. The decision makers would be laughed at now.

Sin takes away respect. At first, of course, it seems to give respect. The liar gains

esteem, but only for a few miles down the road. Soon the truth comes out in life and what shame comes upon the liar. The gambler wins big money; and because he is rich, he gains much respect. But down the road a ways in life when he loses at gambling, he will also lose respect. Politicians rise in the esteem of people and are given long standing ovations in convention halls. But not many years later, their true character is seen and their respect diminishes greatly.

Those who walk righteously do not gain quick respect from the world. But the more miles down the road they go, the closer they come to great and lasting respect. Paul, who was disrespected, will soon be the respected one on the ship.

Second, *loss of freedom*. When the storm came, “the ship was caught” ([v. 15](#)). A. T. Robertson said this is a “graphic picture as if the ship was seized by a great monster.” When the sailors were loosing from Fair Havens and enjoying the freedom of moving out to sea, they thought they had freed themselves from the restrictions of Fair Havens. But it did not take long before they lost all freedom so that Fair Havens looked like great freedom.

When we sin, we lose freedom. The world wants to make people think the believer is restricted, bound to convictions that kill pleasure. But soon the sinner finds that he is “caught” by his evil. Either he is “caught” by addiction to some evil, life consuming habit; or he is “caught” for breaking the law and incarcerated; or he is “caught” in some burdensome obligation such as alimony payments. What looked like freedom was not freedom at all.

Third, *loss of control*. The sailors “could not bear up [the ship] into the wind, [so] we let her drive” ([v. 15](#)). The wind was so strong that the sailors could no longer control the ship—the wind controlled the ship and blew it where it willed. The master of the ship could no longer steer the ship. He who advised to sail, in contrast to Paul’s advice, was now utterly helpless to do anything.

Here is another picture of the evil consequences of sin. While sin looks so inviting, it does not take long before sin takes away your ability to control your life. Sin takes away our strength and leaves us helpless before the consequences of evil. Sin likes to advertise itself as that which makes us strong. But that is a lie, for sin only weakens. Some macho-appearing men defend their drinking by saying they can take it or leave it. But we notice they always take it—they cannot control their appetite as they think they can. And when they get to drinking, they conspicuously lose control of their actions. Of course, the experts tell us this lack of control (alcoholism they call



it) is just a disease. But it is a disease you can keep from getting by simply abstaining. Hence, alcoholics cannot hide under the “disease” excuse and blame their lack of control on it. The drinkers are at fault. They made the decision to drink just as the sailors made the decision to sail. The result in both cases is loss of control.

The master of the ship is like those who encourage you to sin; but when you get in trouble from sin, they cannot do anything to help you. As an example, those who sell alcohol and encourage you to drink will not and cannot give you any help when you get in trouble drinking.

Fourth, *loss of safety*. “And running under [under the lee of] a certain island which is called Cauda [also called Clauda, Claudus, and Caudos], we had much work to come by [secure] the boat . . . they had taken up” ([vv. 16, 17](#)). Hooked by a rope to the stern of the ship was a small boat which normally trailed the ship. This boat could be used to reach shore if the ship was anchored out from the shore. The boat also served as a lifeboat (cp. [vv. 30–32](#)). The storm made it unsafe for the boat to be left trailing the ship. To save the boat, the sailors had to bring in the boat and hoist it on board. This was a very difficult task, too difficult to do out in the open sea, so the sailors waited until they had the protection of the island of Cauda to do the work.

The jeopardy which the storm put all the lives in is symbolized by the plight of this small boat. The jeopardy sin puts people in is also symbolized by the plight of this boat. Sin takes away safety. It imperils everything. Especially does it imperil our soul.

Fifth, *loss of stability*. The sailors “used helps, undergirding the ship” ([v. 17](#)) which is called “frapping” a ship. Ships in those days were not as strong as ships today; therefore, when storms came, ropes were passed under the ship and drawn up on both sides and tied together to hold the ship together so it would not come apart in all the tossing about on the seas.

This illustrates how sin effects the stability of a person. Sin takes away emotional and mental stability. People have to then be girded up by outside helps. Mental institutions have to sometimes literally bind their patients because the patients have no stability. [Luke 8](#) speaks of the demon possessed man who had no stability and, therefore, had to be “kept bound with chains and in fetters” ([Luke 8:29](#)). We hear such terms as “freaking out,” “going off the deep end,” and “coming apart at the seams” to describe loss of stability in people. The world tries to deal with this loss of stability by tying ropes of psychology, drugs, alcohol treatment centers, and

other efforts. But these “frappings” are only temporary at their best and do not deal with the real problem, namely, the sin problem. The storm of sin will continue to break apart the ship of our lives if we do not deal with the sin in our lives.

Sixth, *loss of joy*. “Fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, [the sailors] strake sail, and so were driven” ([v. 17](#)). The sailors had a legitimate fear here. They feared getting stuck in one of the big sand bars off the coast of Africa. The word “quicksands” is translated from a Greek word which is “a proper name, *the Syrtis*, one of two sandy gulfs particularly dreaded by the ancient seamen on the northern coast of Africa, the Syrtis Minor near Cathale, and the Syrtis Major near Cyrene, which last is the one here meant, as being that to which a northeast wind would naturally drive them from the coast of Claudia” (J. A. Alexander).

Sin wants to be pictured as fun. It does give “pleasures” at the beginning (cp. [Hebrews 11:25](#)), but it is only temporary. Soon fear fills the heart. In contrast to sin, “God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” ([2 Timothy 1:7](#)) through Jesus Christ. When the angels announced the birth of Christ, their message was “Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy” ([Luke 2:10](#)). When Christ comes on the scene, He removes fear and brings real joy. Sin does just the opposite.

Seventh, *loss of peace*. The ship was “exceedingly tossed with a tempest” ([v. 18](#)). Hour after hour the ship was tossed about on the Mediterranean like a cork upon the waters. No one could rest. Turmoil was constant. No one on board the ship knew from one minute to the next what would happen. Anxiety would be tremendous. Paul and his companions would be the only ones who would know any measure of peace of mind. But they would still be in a tumultuous situation. Christians can live in a peaceless world but still have inner peace.

The continuous tossing of the ship pictures the loss of peace that sin brings upon the sinner. Scripture says, “the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” ([Isaiah 57:20,21](#)). The great disturber of mankind has been sin. Men have gone contrary to God’s way, just as the sailors went contrary to Paul’s warning; and they have brought upon themselves great troubles. The world has tried hundreds of ways to gain peace while still walking on the path of sin but, of course, has never gained it. The only way peace will come is when men bow before the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, and acknowledge Him as their Savior and Lord. He can give rest

from the storms of life. “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” ([Matthew 11:28](#)). Christ gives the best peace to the troubled soul: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you” ([John 14:27](#)).

Eighth, *loss of possessions*. With the relentless tempest pounding the ship, “they lightened the ship; And on the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship” ([vv. 18, 19](#)). Later they cast out their valuable cargo of wheat ([v. 38](#)) because of the storm. The losses continue to pile up for the ship because they did not heed the warning prediction of Paul. Lightening the ship here reminds us of the sailors doing the same on the ship Jonah was on ([Jonah 1:5](#)). Wealth and possessions lose their value when our physical life is on the line. But most people do not value their spiritual life as much. Matthew Henry makes a good comment on this subject when he says, “Any man will rather make shipwreck of his goods than of his life; but many will rather make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience than of their goods.”

One of the attractive promises given by sin is that it will profit you materially—and it does, but only for a season. Eventually you will lose it all. Either you will lose it through profligate living, or you will lose it to others when you die, for you cannot take it with you. Drunkards lose such things as their homes, their jobs, and their cars. Gamblers and the immoral experience the same. Sin blows a soft south wind upon us to get us to travel the forbidden path, but before long we are paying a great price.

Ninth, *loss of guidance*. The storm lasted for some days which meant “neither sun nor stars in many days appeared” ([v. 20](#)). Ships did not have compasses and other navigational aids as we have today. They relied upon the sun and stars to chart their location and course. Therefore, when the sky was closed off, the sailors had no means of knowing where they were or where they were going.

Sin produces drifters. Many folk today have no sense of direction in their life. They simply flounder around hither and yon. As the sailors rejected the council of Paul and as a result ended up without a guide, so also sinners end up without a guide because they reject the counsel of God’s Word. Sinners walk in the dark because of sin.

Tenth, *loss of hope*. “And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and

no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away” (v. 20). What great despair gripped the hearts of those on board the ship. Shipwreck and loss of life seemed inevitable. Those on the ship felt it was only a matter of time before they would be plunged to their death in the stormy waters. Hope was gone.

Here is another illustration of the work of sin. Paul described the sinner as “having no hope, and without God in the world” ([Ephesians 2:12](#)). Losing hope is one of the worst things we can lose. When hope is gone, we are in serious trouble, despair sets in, and we quit. The ultimate act of hopelessness is suicide. Behind it all is sin. But in Jesus Christ comes hope for mankind. In his defense speeches in court, Paul spoke of hope—the hope of the resurrection which hope speaks of heaven and is rooted and grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Sin has nothing to offer like that. Rather, it only destroys our hopes.

### **3. The Storm was Slow in Ceasing**

This storm was a long one! It lasted for over two weeks ([Acts 27:27,33](#)). When we read of the storm coming, we would normally expect it to be over in a day or so or even in much less time. But it did not end in a day or two days or three days. In fact, when they finally shipwrecked, the weather was still bad. What was to be a short day’s trip from Fair Havens to Phoenicia turned out to be much longer than that—and it ended in Miletia (named Malta today) instead of Phoenicia.

The troubles that we bring upon ourselves through sinning are not troubles that go away quickly. It isn’t just a momentary storm that is soon over and we are back in business as good as new. But the troubles last and last and last. The fast living as a young person brings troubles that will last all through the rest of your life. Getting a divorce does not end troubles, but only causes storms to go on and on. The drinker, druggie, and smoker may quit; but the troubles of these evil habits will continue to haunt them the rest of their life. Physical problems are not the only problems that hang on for years and even a lifetime, but mental and emotional problems also stick like glue to the sinner.

Don’t be fooled by temptation. Just a little fling can trouble you the rest of your life. You can do things in a moment that will affect you for eternity. The storms of sin are not short storms.

## **D. THE PROCLAMATION DURING THE STORM**

In the midst of the raging storm, Paul steps forward with another proclamation. He had spoken a warning before the storm when the ship was quietly harbored in Fair Havens. But that warning was rejected. As a result the ship is now in great trouble. However, because of the grace of God, Paul gives another helpful proclamation. We note the moment, the man, and the message of the proclamation.

## 1. The Moment of the Proclamation

“But after long abstinence [eating no food] Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said . . . ” ([v. 21](#)). [Verse 33](#) indicates that “long abstinence” eventually totaled some fourteen days. This was the length of time since they had left the harbor of Fair Havens (cp. [v. 27](#)). Paul did not start speaking the moment the storm hit. As soon as the ship started having big trouble with the storm, he could have said, “I told you so.” But he wisely waited until God instructed him to speak. The waiting was vital in regards to the attentiveness of the people on board the ship. After they had been on the stormy seas for nearly two weeks and had suffered much loss and could, therefore, clearly see their folly, they would be more ready to listen to what Paul had to say.

So often God has to let people come to their wits end before they will listen. Many people seem to have to have the props knocked out from underneath them before they will pay attention to what God is saying. It is like saving a drowning man, you must let him alone until he quits fighting and gives up before you can rescue him. We need to pray earnestly to God that we will listen at the start and not have to lose so much before we finally get in an attitude to listen to Him.

## 2. The Man of the Proclamation

The excellent character of Paul really shows up well in this storm and in this proclamation. Troubles much more than tranquility reveal what a man really is. From this incident during the storm we note Paul’s leadership, courage, calmness, loyalty, service, knowledge, faith, integrity, and value.

*His leadership.* Paul was in the lowly category of a “prisoner” when he boarded the ship. But before those on board the ship reached Rome, Paul was a good deal more than a prisoner. Matthew Henry said Paul “distinguished himself, and, though a prisoner, undertook to be their counsellor and comforter.” Joseph Parker spoke similarly when he said, “When was Paul ever hidden in the crowd—tailed off in the dim distance? He is still the chief figure; put him where you will, he comes naturally

to the head and naturally assumes the sovereignty, whatever the occasion may be.”

True leadership becomes most evident during a crisis. Many have the position of leadership who do not have leadership ability. When troubles come, we discover quickly that their position and their ability are two different things. Others, like Paul in his day, are not given positions of leadership by society. But let a storm come and that leadership will evidence itself in very pronounced ways.

*His courage.* “Paul stood forth in the midst of them” ([v. 21](#)). Paul was bold in his conduct. He was not a timid soul. What made him bold? The answer is that he embraced the truth. He was right! He had with wisdom given a warning prediction that if the ship sailed away from Fair Havens it would encounter great trouble. Now he could stand before all aboard the ship without shame. He could speak out without apology. The centurion did not heed the warning, and the ship’s crew did not listen to him. But time proved Paul right and gave him the boldness others on the ship did not have. Stick with the truth. You may be scorned and rejected for awhile. But you will have a holy boldness that those who embrace error will not have.

*His calmness.* “Paul stood forth in the midst of them” ([v. 21](#)). This is not the action of a man who is out of control. This is not the conduct of a man who has been in a state of panic for two weeks. Paul may have been physically tossed around on the seas for two weeks; but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually he had not been tossed about. He was still calm within though he was tossed about without. This is not the first time we have seen this calmness. Every time we have seen Paul in turbulent circumstances, he was master of them. He was often the only cool head in the whole scene even though he was the one being attacked in many cases.

What accounts for this calmness of spirit? The reason for this calmness was that Paul had a close relationship with the Lord. That is the foundation of all true peace. Therefore, if we expect to have much calmness in our spirit when troubles come, we will have to cultivate a good relationship with the Lord. Our faith in God will have to be something more than window dressing. It will have to be in the heart.

This calmness of spirit is not only needed to help us to act with wisdom under duress, but it is also essential if we want to have a good testimony of our faith. We will not give much testimony to the world of the value of our faith if we do not demonstrate stability in the time of stress. The world watches us all the time to see if they can find some cracks in our profession. Especially do they watch us in time

of trial. We may boast of our faith in God, but all our talk means little if our walk in troublesome times is shaky.

*His loyalty.* “There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am” ([v. 23](#)) says emphatically on whose side Paul stands. It made no difference to him if most of those on board were heathen, he would let them know in very plain terms that he belonged to the Lord. Few saints have been as loyal as Paul was to the Almighty. Many saints are loyal one day and disloyal the next. Circumstances and the crowd has a lot to do with whether they will or will not be loyal to the Lord. They talk about how good God is when things go well; but when troubles come, they will not hesitate to complain to God about His dealings with them. Furthermore, they stand for the Lord when in church with a sympathetic crowd; but when out in the unsympathetic world, their loyalty disappears. Not so Paul. He would declare that He was on God’s side no matter what the circumstances were or what the character of the people were he was with. It is being in difficult circumstances and with an unsympathetic crowd that gives our loyalty its strongest test. Paul passed the test with flying colors.

*His service.* “God . . . whom I serve” ([v. 23](#)). Paul not only stands on God’s side, but he also serves God. Some folk want us to believe they are on God’s side, but their lack of service for God denies that claim. The Greek word translated “serve” here is sometimes translated “worship” ([Acts 7:42](#), [24:14](#), and [Philippians 3:3](#)). Service and worship are inseparably related. If we worship well, we will serve well. If we do not worship well, we will not serve well. Therefore, it should be to no one’s surprise that folk who do not attend the worship services at church faithfully are folk who do not serve well in the Lord’s work at church.

Joseph Parker, in reference to Paul’s serving the Lord, notes that “The revelation [about the storm] was not made to a fanatic, but to a servant, a toiling man, one who had set his hands to the Gospel plow.” God still follows this practice in regards to the learning of the Word of God. Illumination in the study of Scripture does not come to those who are lazy and who exhibit little industriousness in their study of the Scriptures and in their service for God.

*His knowledge.* “Saying, Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar; and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee” ([v. 25](#)). Paul spoke with heavenly knowledge when he spoke to those on board that tempest-tossed ship that

day. He had heard from God and had something to say. Paul would not have been of much help to those on the ship if he had spoken without this spiritual knowledge. To have this knowledge, men must hear from God. Paul heard in a vision. We do not need visions today in order to hear from God, for we have the written Word of God. Therefore, let preachers get into the Word of God where they will hear from God. Then they will be filled with spiritual knowledge and will have something worth while to say in the pulpit. The pulpit should reflect spiritual knowledge, not spiritual ignorance. It will be of no help to people if it does not speak forth spiritual knowledge.

*His faith.* “I believe God” ([v. 25](#)). Paul had faith in God. Faith in God is the great need of men. Men believe every Tom, Dick, and Harry even though what they say may be ludicrous and unsupported by wisdom or facts. But let God speak, and men scoff instead of believe. No wonder mankind is in trouble. If there is anyone we can believe, it is God. Yet, mankind seems to believe everybody else before they will believe God.

This statement is another attestation of Paul’s faithful and courageous testimony. It is not easy to say you believe God; for when you say you believe God, men often ridicule and even attack you physically. But Paul did not hesitate to stand up and declare his faith without apologies. We should do likewise wherever we are.

*His integrity.* Paul’s integrity was clearly evident in his message to those on board the ship. Some of the message was good news (no loss of life); some was bad news (the ship’s destruction). Paul did not leave out the bad news and only emphasize the good news. But many self-serving preachers do that. They preach what the people will like and leave out what the people will not like. That is not integrity but criminality. Integrity is evidenced when one is faithful to preaching the negative, which the people do not like, as well as the positive, which the people do like.

There is much lack of integrity in the pulpits today. This lack of integrity is not just in the apostates’ pulpits, but it shows up in fundamentalists’ pulpits, too. Instead of indicting sin, preachers go easy on it lest they offend some influential members. They do not speak out on divorce for fear they will lose support—maybe even their job. They do not speak out against the ungodly music in the church or unsavory dress styles or TV and other evils for fear they will lose a lot of their crowd. They prefer the favor of men rather than fidelity of character. Integrity is not important to them. It is a shame such men are allowed in the pulpit.



*His value.* “God hath given thee all them that sail with thee” ([v. 24](#)). It is quite obvious that the reason the others on board the ship were saved was because of Paul. Barnes said, “It is implied here that it was for the sake of Paul . . . the leading purpose of the divine interposition in rescuing them from danger was to save his life. The wicked often derive important benefits from being connected with Christians, and God often confers important favors on them in his general purpose to save his own people. The lives of the wicked are often spared because God interposes to save the righteous.” This practice was plainly stated early in the Bible in the case of Sodom. Had ten righteous people been found in Sodom, Sodom would not have been destroyed ([Genesis 18:32](#)). While the lying, liberal news media and other liberal organizations, such as the ACLU, scorn Christianity, they will one day discover that but for those Christians they despised, our nation would have been destroyed long ago.

### **3. The Message of the Proclamation**

We note five parts of the message Paul proclaimed on board that storm-riddled ship. We label these five parts as follows: condemnation, comfort, casualty, casting, and command.

*Condemnation.* “Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss” ([v. 21](#)). Paul’s message begins where it needed to begin—with a justified condemnation of the sailors’ actions. Paul had given a repeated warning about the peril of leaving Fair Havens. But they did not listen. Time proved that Paul was right. Time always vindicates truth.

As we noted a few paragraphs earlier, many folk do not like the rebuking part of the message. They want the message to be all positive with no negative. But they will never find support for that attitude in Scripture or in experience. Before the sinner is going to be interested in salvation, he must first be convicted of his sin. Ignoring his sin is to take away his need of salvation. In our day and age there is a real assault being made by many people upon the negative part of the message. Let not preachers be influenced by this attack to compromise their messages by leaving out the condemnation part in their preaching. We need more preaching against sin in our churches and communities, not less!

*Comfort.* “Be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you . . . God hath given thee all them that sail with thee” ([Acts 27:22,24](#)). What good news this would be to all those on board the ship. Earlier, Luke, the writer of Acts and who was on this voyage, said, “All hope that we should be saved was then taken away” ([v. 20](#)). Now Paul tells them that all will be saved.

It is God’s message that offers the best comfort and hope. The world has no message equal to God’s message for giving comfort. God is the greatest of all comforters. But leave out God (as the world’s message does), and we lose true comfort.

*Casualty.* All those on board the ship would be saved, but not the ship ([v. 22](#)). The rejection of Paul’s wise counsel in Fair Havens will extract a price. Herein is a needed lesson. Many folk seem to think that when we ask God to forgive us our sins, that He also cancels out all punishment. It is true that He cancels much punishment, but He does not cancel all punishment. When a sinner comes to Christ for salvation, eternal punishment is cancelled. But God still allows enough trouble to come upon the repentant sinner for his sins to enforce the truth that sin is a costly way of life. Furthermore, there are some sins that, though God forgives you of them, will keep you from certain offices in the church. This is another truth that is not popular today. But it is Scriptural. The lives were saved but not the ship. We cannot sin with impunity! There will always be some casualties somewhere that will hurt. The Psalmist stated this holy truth well when he said, “O LORD our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance on their inventions [sins]” ([Psalm 99:8](#)).

*Casting.* “Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island” ([v. 26](#)). Not only did Paul tell the people their lives would be saved, but he also told them a bit about their future. However, you will note he did not tell them everything they might have wanted to know; for he did not tell them the name of the island upon which they would be cast nor when it would occur. This is an illustration of how God reveals His will. God reveals His will to us in steps and according to what we need to know. It would be good for the people on the ship to know they would be “cast” upon an island. But they did not need to know the name of the island at that moment nor when it would happen. They knew enough to guide their present conduct but not enough to satisfy mere curiosity. Those who want to be faithful in doing God’s will need to learn well this practice of God about revealing His will.

*Command.* Revelation begets obligation. Those aboard the ship had been given Divine revelation through Paul. The revelation came with a command. It was a simple command, but not an easy one to do. The command was “be of good cheer” (v. 22). Though difficult to obey, the command came with help to perform it as do all of God’s commands. After Paul said to “be of good cheer,” he then gave them a good reason to be of good cheer, namely, their lives would be spared. Under the circumstances, that would really help to cheer them up.

Sometimes the commands God gives us seem impossible to perform. After being storm-tossed for two weeks and having no hope of survival, to be told to be of good cheer would seem almost like mockery. But Paul had just given them some good reasons why they could be of good cheer. Sometimes the encouraging reasons for obeying God’s commands are not made known to us as quickly as they were on board the ship. But even if the making known of the reason is delayed for some time, we can still be confident that what God tells us to do is the right thing to do no matter how the world may mock. As A. T. Robertson says, “God had spoken. That was enough.” If God says it, that is reason enough to encourage us believe and obey.

## E. THE PRETENDERS IN THE STORM

In this record of a perilous sea experience in the life of Paul, Luke gives us a paragraph (verses 27 through 32) which focuses upon the sailors of the ship. We call them the “pretenders”; for in focusing upon them, Luke reports a very deceptive attempt by the sailors to escape from the ship. Under the “colour” [pretense] (v. 30) of putting out anchors, they tried to flee the ship and leave the others on the ship to perish. But Paul detected their evil conduct and nipped it in the bud which resulted in the saving of all those aboard the ship.

In studying this paragraph about the sailors, we will note the circumstances of the sailors (which motivated their escape attempt), the conduct of the sailors (the attempted escape), and the condemnation of the sailors (Paul’s exposure and stopping of the escape attempt).

### 1. The Circumstances of the Sailors

“But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen [sailors] deemed that they drew near to some country, And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms. Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day” ([vv. 27–29](#)). We note five aspects of their circumstances: the difficulties, darkness, danger, dread, and despair.

*The difficulties.* The words “driven up and down in the Adria” sum up the difficulties the sailors were experiencing in trying to sail the ship. For some two weeks the difficulties were so great that the sailors were not able to sail the ship at all. As we have noted earlier, the ship was controlled by the storm, not by the sailors. So they were “driven up and down in the Adria [the ancient name for that part of the Mediterranean between Greece and Sicily].”

The futility of the efforts of the sailors to save their ship illustrates the futility of efforts by man to save his own soul. It is impossible to save yourself. Sinners sooner or later will find the task of saving their soul beyond their ability. Salvation will have to come from other than themselves. This is the work of Jesus Christ. No soul is too difficult for Him to save.

*The darkness.* “About midnight the shipmen [sailors] deemed that they drew near to some country, And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms” ([vv. 27, 28](#)). The sailors were living in the dark; and, therefore, their discernment was very limited. Being in the dark, they could not see. All they could do was check the depth of the waters and try to listen to the waves to see if they were indeed coming to land. They were perilously limited in discernment.

Darkness is a picture of the spiritual situation of the sinner. As such, Peter fittingly speaks of our salvation in terms of having been “called . . . out of darkness into his marvellous light” ([1 Peter 2:9](#)). Being in the dark, one cannot discern well. Spiritual darkness means one cannot discern the most important truths of the life. As Paul said, sinners have their “understanding darkened” ([Ephesians 4:18](#)). Like the sailors were physically, so sinners are spiritually; they do not know where they are or where they are going. Unless the grace of God saves them, they will perish.

*The danger.* The sailors were in great peril of falling “upon rocks” ([v. 29](#)). They

were near a hostile shoreline. If the ship got too close to the shore, it would be dashed upon the rocks and destroyed as well as all those in the ship. How well this pictures the situation of the sinner. Without Christ, they are near the shoreline of eternal destruction. At any moment they can be dashed upon the rocks of a Christless death and enter eternity under the judgment of God forever. Their situation is extremely dangerous. It ought to drive them to Christ for their salvation. But so many sinners are lulled into a stupor that makes them unaware of the great danger in which they live. Only the mercy of God can open their eyes to their peril and deliver them.

*The dread.* The sailors, unlike many sinners, recognized their perilous situation and feared as a result ([v. 29](#)). Darkness amplified their fears. Small children illustrate this truth in that they are often afraid of the dark. Sin produces spiritual darkness and brings upon mankind great fear. Righteousness brings peace. But sin brings fear. Our world is full of fear because it is full of sin. Wicked men put on a good front in public, but get them alone in private facing death and fear permeates them.

*The despair.* The words, “and wished for the day” ([v. 29](#)) describes hearts filled with despair. The sailors were not a happy bunch of men looking forward to the future. They were without hope. Abject despair gripped them because of their circumstances which they got themselves into by not listening to God’s servant. Our world is in the same condition and for the same reason. It is not a happy world. Abortion does not make people happy, as an example. Neither does immorality or gambling or booze. The world does not want to listen to God’s message. But ignoring God’s message will eventually lead the sinner into most despairing circumstances, the worst which is eternal hell fire.

## **2. The Conduct of the Sailors**

“And as the shipmen [sailors] were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour [pretense] as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship [bow]” ([v. 30](#)). We noted earlier that troubles reveal a man. In Paul’s case it revealed the excellence of his character. But in the case of the sailors, a far different revelation was seen. It revealed the corruptness of their character. The sailors may have appeared to be pretty nice men when folk boarded the ship back in Fair Havens. But the crisis of this storm revealed what corrupt men these sailors were.

Their corruptness is especially seen in their scheme to escape the ship. This

scheme was deceitful, disbelieving, deadly, and disrespectful.

*Deceitful.* Anchors are normally let down from the bow of the ship. But [verse 29](#) informed us that during the night, four anchors were let down from the stern. This unusual act was to keep the bow of the ship pointed towards land. But later on the sailors under the pretense of letting down the anchors from the bow and using the boat (note [vv. 16, 17](#) about the boat's presence) to take the anchors out a ways from the ship tried to escape from the ship.

Sin is deceitful. As it was here, it is deceitful in appearance. It appears to be one thing when it is something far different. Sin advertises itself as fun when it brings great heartache. Sin says it is good for the economy (increased employment and taxes from alcohol and gambling profits as an example) when it is very costly to the economy; for it increases anti-crime expenses, welfare costs, etc. Sin promises power when instead it weakens. Yes, the sailors conduct was typical of sin; for it was deceitful.

*Disbelieving.* Trying to escape the ship as they did said they did not believe Paul's message given a bit earlier about all those on the ship being saved and cast upon a certain island ([Acts 27:24,26](#)). They chose their own method of salvation, but it was not God's method. Like many folk are spiritually, the sailors did not like God's way of salvation; so they devised one of their own. But their own plan would not provide salvation for mankind ([v. 31](#)). Like the doctrine of the apostates, it was a bogus salvation. God has made it plain in His Word how man is to be saved. Ignore that way and you will perish.

*Deadly.* The sailors' scheme was deadly for those left on the boat. Paul, in exposing the escape attempt, said that if the sailors did not "abide in the ship, ye [the soldiers and others on the ship] cannot be saved" ([v. 31](#)). With the sailors gone, the ship could no longer be guided closer to the shore as it needed to be (and as it later was) in order for all aboard to safely disembark. Thus, the sailors' escape plan virtually decreed the death of the others on board the ship. In like manner, sin kills. "The wages of sin is death" ([Romans 6:23](#)). You are playing a deadly game when you flirt with sin and deal gently with it.

*Disrespectful.* The sailors had no respect for others in their escape plan. They

were only looking out for themselves. They may have feigned much interest in the passengers as they lined up to pay the fare to ride on the ship. But when the crisis came, the selfishness of the sailors came out very pronouncedly.

Sin is of the same character. It solicits with seemingly great concern for the sinner. But it only values the sinner for personal gain. It is not interested in the welfare of the sinner but the wealth of the sinner. If tobacco and alcohol manufacturers were interested in the welfare of people they would stop making their products. If abortionists were interested in the good of the expectant mothers, they would never do abortions. But there is much money in abortion, so the abortionists feign an interest in the expectant mother's welfare in order to get wealth. All of this sin reeks with selfishness.

### **3. The Condemnation of the Sailors**

"Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off" ([vv. 31, 32](#)). To examine this condemnation by Paul of the pretenders, we will note the recognition for the condemnation, the reason for the condemnation and the reaction to the condemnation.

*The recognition for the condemnation.* Paul was quick to discern the evil of the sailors. They did not fool him. Unfortunately, others on board the ship were not so wise. But those who walk close to the Lord and who have a good understanding of the Scripture will be quick to discern evil. The carnal Christian and the world, however, are easily beguiled. They have difficulty seeing evil in many sinful practices. Preachers who condemn such evil things as Christian Rock, divorce, TV, and show time religious radio and TV programs are often strongly criticized by their carnal church members who are blind to the evil. But get in the Word of God earnestly and your discernment will be sharpened greatly, and your value to others will greatly increase.

*The reason for the condemnation.* "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved" ([v. 31](#)). The peril of those who remained on board was the reason for the public condemnation of the sailors' action. We mentioned above that without the sailors, the ship could no longer be sailed. They were the only ones who knew how to steer the ship, how to lift the anchors, set the sails, etc. While the ship was eventually going to be run aground, it still had at this point and time some sailing yet

to do to get closer to land. Therefore, it was very important that the sailors not be permitted to leave the ship. Their action must be condemned and stopped for the well-being of all aboard the ship.

Paul's condemnation needs to be pondered by those who are quick to criticize when a preacher speaks out strongly against some sin. Such folk accuse these preachers of being negative, showing lack of love, and being of a critical spirit for the denouncing of sin. But the condemnation of sin is for the benefit of the listener. Paul said "ye" not "they." Had Paul not exposed and condemned evil, many of his listeners would have perished. Paul was concerned about the well-being of those on board the ship. This is hardly negative, showing lack of love, and being of a critical spirit.

Some may wonder how this condemnation by Paul squares with the promise that all would be saved. The answer is that God had provided a means for the salvation of all. But if the sailors are allowed to flee, the means for the salvation of all aboard is gone. Paul, like faithful preachers, insisted on God's way of salvation. If you compromise and accept other ways of salvation (as the apostates do), you will cause many to perish.

*The reaction to the condemnation.* "Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off" ([v. 32](#)). The soldiers' reaction to Paul's condemnation of the sailors is most commendable. We see this in their receptiveness to stop the sailors and their resoluteness in stopping the sailors.

First, the *receptiveness* to stopping the sailors. How things have changed since Paul spoke in Fair Havens. There he was not believed. Now he is virtually the captain of the ship! The centurion and the soldiers believe Paul and emphatically demonstrate their belief by cutting the ropes holding the boat to the ship so the boat will fall into the water and no longer be a temptation to escape. Belief is confirmed by behavior. Hence, those who claim to be saved but who do not show it by their behavior probably are not saved.

The soldiers' actions indicate that the centurion had obviously appropriated the ship for government services. [Verse 11](#) suggests that he was in charge, and here it is even more evident. He took control of the situation and his soldiers moved the sailors out of the way and did quick work in remedying the problem. The sailors did not protest—they were not about to argue with a Roman officer and his armed soldiers.

Second, the *resoluteness* in stopping the sailors. To some—the same bunch that does not like outspoken condemnation and exposure of evil—cutting the boat



loose from the ship was action that was much too severe. The critics would say the soldiers overreacted. They would argue that the boat could have been used to go ashore when the ship was broken up. The boat, however, was not necessary to save anyone, as is confirmed later; but it was now a great peril to all on board the ship. Leaving that boat attached to the ship would only have been continual temptation for the sailors to try another escape. The soldiers were taking no chances. They did what was right.

Too bad our society does not act likewise in regards to evil. Leniency in dealing with evil is a great problem in our land, and it accounts for why society has so many troubles. Our courts only slap the wrist of the criminal. Parents hardly do that anymore with their misbehaving children. Discipline in school is becoming harder and harder to do lest some lawsuit from the ACLU occur. Even in Christian schools, discipline is a problem because the parents stick up for the trouble-causing child. But a lot of problems could be stopped in our land, churches, and schools if we practiced what the soldiers did to the boat. Furthermore, a lot of personal problems could be remedied, too, by such firm action. Folk need to deal with temptation firmly if they are going to succeed in living a victorious life. They need to cut off some unholy friendships, activities, and habits. If they do not, they will not be saved from corruption. The Scottish preacher of years gone by, Alexander Maclaren, who thought refreshingly different than most moderns today, said that even “Misused good things have sometimes to be given up in order to keep people from temptation.” We have trouble getting people to give up bad things, but good things may also have to be given up for the spiritual health of a person. This is not the thinking of our day, but it is thinking desperately needed in our day.

## **F. THE PRESERVATION IN THE STORM**

Paul had promised that all those on the ship would be preserved through the storm. Here we will see the fulfillment of the promise in the safe disembarking from the ruined ship. We will examine here the preparation for disembarking, the proposal in the disembarking, the plan for the disembarking, and the proficiency of the disembarking.

### **1. The Preparation for Disembarking**

The preparation for disembarking involved eating, promising, praying, rejoicing,

emptying, and maneuvering.

*Eating.* “And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat; for this is for your health” ([vv. 33, 34](#)). For the fourth time during this storm-tossed cruise, Paul steps forward to give counsel and leadership to those on the ship. Like cream coming to the top, Paul moved to the leadership of those aboard the ship during the storm. The wisdom of his counsel and conduct was very vital to the protection of the lives of all those on the ship. It also gave excellent testimony of his faith, a testimony we see little of today in Christians who are under stress.

The advice to eat was very wise. The storm had greatly reduced their appetite (sea sickness, anxiety, and extra duties especially for the sailors) and had greatly hindered the preparing of meals. But the ordeal ahead for all concerned would involve the need of physical strength. The sailors would need it for the work of guiding the ship into the harbor of the island and beaching it, and the rest of the people would need it to get through the waters to the land when they left the broken up ship. So Paul’s counsel to eat was very wise. And it was also feasible, for it was more possible to eat now since they were closer to shore and were not quite so storm tossed.

Paul’s advice here to do some eating reminds us of the counsel given Elijah by the angel in the desert when Elijah fled from Jezebel. The angel provided food for Elijah then told him, “Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee [if you do not eat]” ([1 Kings 19:7](#)). The task ahead for Elijah and for those on board the ship required some needed nourishment.

While our day needs more counsel to curb its food appetite than cater to it, the principle lesson here about taking care of our physical health is still needed. Neglect of our physical needs through poor eating habits and also through the lack of exercise not only can shorten life unnecessarily but also take away the quality of the life lived. This can adversely affect our service for God. If we want to serve the Lord well, we need to take care of ourselves physically as well as spiritually. This does not mean that all physical problems are a result of neglect, but a great many of them are. As it was with those on board the ship with Paul, they needed improved health if they were going to accomplish what God wanted them to do.

Lack of eating is often a problem with those experiencing great troubles in their life. This only adds to their troubles as their body begins to complain for lack of good nourishment. Folk who are down because of their troubles only get more

down when the body does not feel well. Disciplining themselves to take needed nourishment would help them emotionally and physically to better deal with their problems.

*Promising.* Paul's exhortation to eat came with an encouraging promise which said, "For there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you" ([v. 34](#)). Paul's statement was a "proverbial expression for the slightest injury or loss" (Alexander). While no hair literally may be lost, the expression went farther to say that no harm of any sort would come to any on board the ship in their escape to land. Not only would they survive and make it to land, but they would also make it in good shape.

This promise certainly had to be encouraging to all on the ship, and it would help them do the eating that Paul exhorted them to do. Paul's encouraging promise reminds us again, as we were reminded in [verse 22](#), that God generally gives us encouraging promises with His commandments. The folk on board the ship may not have felt like eating because of their great despair over the storm. But the encouraging promise of safety would help lift their spirits, and lifted spirits help the appetite.

*Praying.* "And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all" ([v. 35](#)). One of the notable examples of Paul's noble Christian conduct on board the ship was his giving thanks to God for the food. This was a simple deed, but a most significant one in regards to his faith. It showed the unashamedness of his faith, for he prayed to God "in the presence of them all." How this shames so many Christians today who can sit in the luxury of a nice restaurant with an abundance of food before them and then devour the food without ever stopping to give thanks—because they are afraid to do so in public or before whoever is eating with them. It is not necessary to pray out loud as Paul did, for unlike Paul you may be eating separate from most of the others in the restaurant. But to fail to at least bow your head in silent prayer is inexcusable and betrays the sickness of your faith.

Paul's giving thanks in the midst of troubles is another needed lesson. Some folk get so absorbed in their problems that they never do much giving of thanks in their prayers—all they do is continually ask for alleviation of their troubles. They will find quicker alleviation of their troubles by giving thanks for the blessings they do have instead of concentrating only on their problems. It will also raise their spirits considerably.

*Rejoicing.* “Then were they all of good cheer” ([v. 36](#)). What a good influence Paul was on the people aboard the ship. It is an example of what all Christians should be wherever they are. However, many of God’s people do little if anything to improve the atmosphere where they are. Some are of such a despairing spirit that whenever they show up they are like a cloud that covers the sun, for they cause others to become discouraged and pessimistic. Others cause people to be critical and cynical. Still others cause people to compromise and do evil. But Paul was the kind that improved things wherever he went. In the midst of great troubles, as here with the storm, Paul brought encouragement. In the midst of paganism, Paul brought the fresh air of holy theology. In the midst of spiritual darkness, Paul brought spiritual light. We need to take a good hard look at our own actions and see what sort of influence we are upon people.

*Emptying.* “And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea” ([v. 38](#)). The cargo of wheat was not thrown overboard earlier when other things were pitched into the sea, for the cargo was the pay load of the ship. But finally in the end, the wheat must go also; for the ship was coming into shallower waters and needed as much draft as possible to navigate in the shallow waters and to be beached (which it was as noted in [verse 41](#)). Though the ship was going to be destroyed, it was essential that it be beached so that the escape of its passengers could be accomplished.

It is not difficult to see in this experience a spiritual lesson which says that if you get your heart too set on your material possessions it could cost you your soul. The saving of the lives of those on board the ship was dependent upon emptying the ship of its cargo. Christ said it was difficult for rich men to be saved ([Matthew 19:23](#)). The difficulty is not that God is unable to save them; but that the rich people, when they have to choose, prefer their cargo of riches to their soul’s salvation.

You will note that the emptying of the ship of its wheat cargo was not done until the people had eaten. The food gave them the strength to do the task. Spiritually it works the same way. Before we can do much for the Lord, we must partake of spiritual food—the Word of God. We cannot serve Him well and we cannot overcome the attacks of evil upon us unless we are strong. Paul said to “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” ([Ephesians 6:10](#)). Most saints are weaklings, however, for they take very little nourishment from the Word. As a result, they have little stamina to serve with faithfulness and little strength to overcome temptation.

*Maneuvering.* Before the disembarking of the people on board the ship, the ship needed to move farther inland. It had been anchored during the night out a ways from the island. Now after daylight had come and the people had eaten some food and had emptied of the ship of its cargo of wheat, the sailors took up “the anchors [and] . . . committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore [and] . . . ran the ship aground” ([vv. 40, 41](#)). This action by the sailors shows the wisdom of Paul’s advice the night before when the sailors tried to leave the ship. They were still needed to help sail the ship into the harbor to beach it.

Once the ship was run aground, “the forepart [bow] stuck fast, and remained unmovable, but the hinder part [stern] was broken with the violence of the waves” ([v. 41](#)). Though the promise of safety had been given, the final hours on board the ship were still traumatic. The promise did not eliminate the difficulties. It would simply be a great encouragement when things got worse, for things did indeed get worse before they got better. This illustrates an important truth about God’s promises. After they are given, circumstances often get worse to make it look even more impossible than before that the promises will be fulfilled. But it is not the circumstances that determine if the promises will be fulfilled or not. It is the power of God that determines the fulfillment of the promises. The circumstances only test our faith, and God is pleased that we be subjected to these tests oftentimes; for it helps to strengthen our faith by keeping our eyes on Him and not the circumstances.

## **2. The Proposal in the Disembarking**

“And the soldiers’ counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose” ([vv. 42, 43](#)). Again we see the truth that crises reveal the true character of men. We have already observed how the crisis of this storm served to reveal the excellence of Paul’s character and the degradation of the sailors’ character. Now we see this crisis reveal the degradation of the soldiers’ character. The degradation of the soldiers is seen in their proposal to kill the prisoners. It was uncaring, uncivil, unnecessary, ungrateful, and unacceptable.

First, it was *uncaring*. Selfishness motivated the soldiers to kill the prisoners. Rome either executed those who lost a prisoner (cp. [Acts 16](#) and the Philippian jailer) or would require the prisoner’s guard to serve the penalty the prisoner was to serve. The soldiers did not want to lose any of the prisoners and be subjected to either penalty. Therefore, they would kill the prisoners. This was all terribly selfish,

of course. It demonstrated they did not care for others. They were looking out for themselves alone just as the sailors were doing a bit earlier.

This selfishness explains why the soldiers were so willing to stop the sailors' escape in support of Paul but now go against Paul. The sailors' escape jeopardized the soldiers' lives. Killing the prisoners did not. In this inconsistency, the soldiers acted like many church people. They appear to be supporters of the faith, but you will observe it is only when it is to their advantage and gain. Let another church besides their own prosper, and you will not see them rejoicing in the salvation of souls. Let a rival beat them out for a church office, and suddenly they are not enthused about God's work anymore. The same principle is seen in the remark of an old time evangelist that said it is often hard to say "Amen" in the other man's meeting. God help us to be genuine in our faith and not like these despicable soldiers.

Second, it was *uncivil*. It was barbaric to think of the soldiers lining up all the prisoners and then killing them on board the ship. Things were bad enough on board the ship with the turmoil from the storm. Now the soldiers would make it worse by brutally covering the decks of the ship with blood instead of letting the prisoners get to shore alive. But degraded characters behave this way.

Third, it was *unnecessary*. The likelihood of prisoners escaping was pretty slim considering the soldiers that were on hand and that the prisoners would be weary and worn from the two week storm and the ordeal of getting to shore. If these soldiers had used any wisdom, they would have worked out a plan of disembarking that would have kept the prisoners in check easily.

Fourth, it was *ungrateful*. The proposal to kill the prisoners meant Paul would be killed; and, thus, the soldiers were grossly ungrateful to Paul in making this proposal. But for him, all on board the ship would be dead men. How wicked these soldiers were. But men in every age do even worse, for they would reject God and run God off the premises of society even though they owe their all to His mercy.

Fifth, the plan was *unacceptable*. "But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them [the soldiers] from their purpose [killing the prisoners]" ([v. 43](#)). The plan was stopped cold by the centurion. And the reason the centurion stopped the plan was because of Paul. The centurion shows up well on this voyage. True, he rejected Paul's advice in Fair Havens about not sailing. But after the storm came along, the centurion evidenced he had learned that Paul was right and began to heed Paul's counsel.

A good Gospel lesson can be seen here in the saving of the prisoners. The prisoners were saved because of Paul. This saving of the prisoners depended upon the fact that Paul was identified with them as a prisoner but was not guilty of crime as the other prisoners were. If he had not been a prisoner, the centurion would

not have saved the prisoners; for the plan of the soldiers would not have imperiled Paul's life. Furthermore, had Paul been a criminal like the rest of the prisoners, Paul would have had no saving power either; for his life would not have been that which would have been used of God or respected by the centurion. How this reflects the salvation of our souls. We are saved because of Jesus Christ. This salvation was made possible by Christ coming to earth in the form of a human but not with the sin of a human. Had Christ not been identified with us (as Paul was identified with the prisoners), He could not have died in our place. Had Christ been guilty of sin, His death would not have been efficacious.

### **3. The Plan for the Disembarking**

The abandoning of the ship was not haphazard. It was according to a plan laid down by the centurion. The centurion had a most sensible plan for abandoning the ship. His orders gave a wise sequence in which men were to abandon the ship. He "commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land; And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship" ([vv. 43, 44](#)). It was important for the swimmers to go first, for they would be able to guide the others coming ashore. The swimmers would find out where the current was the least perilous, where the shallow water was, and other features of the shore and then could convey this to the nonswimmers struggling on boards and other pieces from the ship.

No work, not even the abandoning of a ship, will be very successful if it is not done in an orderly way. God's promise of success here did not justify lack of planning and proper procedure. Rather God's promise of success involved man's responsibility in doing things in an orderly way. Church leaders can learn from the centurion in how to do things in an orderly fashion. Many of our churches are a disorganized mess. Church troubles thrive in such circumstances.

### **4. The Proficiency of the Disembarking**

"They escaped all safe to the land" ([v. 44](#)). No abandoning of a ship was done more proficiently than the abandoning of this Alexandrian ship Paul was on. There were no life vests or life boats or any modern day equipment to assist in the disembarking from the shipwreck. Yet, every person made it to shore in good shape. Curiosity would certainly like to know if Paul disembarked with the swimmers or if he grabbed a board of some sort to come ashore. Regardless of how he came to land, he was none the worse for wear and, as we will see in our next chapter, was

able to perform with excellence on the island where they landed.

The success of the disembarking honored God and vindicated Paul. God had promised through Paul that there would “be no loss of any man’s life” ([v. 22](#)) of those on the ship. Paul dared to declare that Divine promise even though circumstances would argue very strongly against him. But he was proclaiming Divine revelation, and when you proclaim Divine revelation, you can have confidence that your message will not come back to shame you; for what God says is true. Let every preacher remember this truth. Some are afraid of being shamed by men for proclaiming the Word of God, so they change the message. But such will discover that though they may escape some ridicule from men in the present, they will experience far worse shame later on from God.

## XXXI. PROMINENCE IN MELITA

### [ACTS 28:1–10](#)

TWO WEEKS OF peril at sea were followed by a three months’ ([v. 11](#)) stay on the island of Melita. It was a good time for Paul. In those three months he was not subject to any harassment from his enemies; but to the contrary, he was very well received and greatly respected on the island. He became, in fact, the most well-known and most sought after person of any who had been on the ship. The master of the ship, the owner of the ship, Julius the centurion, and any other dignitaries who might have been on board the ill-fated ship all took a back seat to Paul.

Rising to prominence was characteristic of Paul. He was never in the background no matter what his situation was. On the ship he started out as just a prisoner, but he rose to great prominence anyway. He did the same on Melita. As Maclaren said about the Melita experience, “As always, Paul fills Luke’s canvas; the other two hundred and seventy-five were ciphers.”

In the study of Paul’s experience on the island of Melita, we will consider the place of prominence ([vv. 1, 2](#)), the protection initiating prominence ([vv. 3–6](#)), and the performances amidst prominence ([vv. 7–10](#)).

### A. THE PLACE OF PROMINENCE



“And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness; for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold” ([vv. 1, 2](#)). We will note three things about the place of prominence: the land of Melita, the label of the Melitans, and the liberality of the Melitans.

*The land of Melita.* We look at both the description of the land and the Divine providence for the land.

First, the *description of the land*. Melita is a small island about eighteen miles long and nine miles wide at the extremes with a total of approximately ninety-five square miles. It is located between Sicily and Africa, being some sixty miles from Sicily and nearly one hundred ninety miles from the coast of Africa. Today we know it by the name of Malta (the name Malta includes several other nearby small islands). The island became very famous during World War II, for it was one of the most bombed places of the war. Melita was known for its honey and is said to have been named Melita because the name means honey. Whether Paul had any honey or not while he was there, he would certainly view his experiences in Melita as sweet compared to the bitter experiences he had in other places prior to his arrival at Melita. God mixes the bitter with the sweet to keep us balanced. If you have had some bitter experiences lately, look for some sweet ones to come to balance the ledger. If you have have had smooth sailing for awhile, do not think God is forsaking you if some bitter experiences come and tear at your sails.

One of the northern inlets of the island is called St. Paul’s Bay. This is the bay which tradition says the ship came into and was beached and destroyed. Evidence is strong that the particular bay bearing Paul’s name is indeed the bay described by Luke, for the depths and the currents of the sea there match Scripture. The naming of the bay after Paul is another reminder of the prevalence of truth and righteousness. Though Paul was but a prisoner suffering much injustice, yet it is his name that is given to the bay—not the name of any other person on board the ship. Paul, more than anyone else, is the one that has resulted in much attention being given to this island. Eternity will only emphasize this fact that truth and righteousness will in the long run gain the greatest distinction and honor.

Second, the *Divine providence for the land*. That the ship Paul was on should be blown to Melita was the providence of God. Blown just a few miles in another direction, and the ship would have passed by Melita and continued to be blown farther west on the Mediterranean. This would have resulted in the ship being destroyed out in the sea far away from land, and all the people on board the ship

would then have perished. But God guided the ship to Melita and the people on the island were greatly blessed as a result.

It was through Paul, the man of God, that the people of that island were so greatly blessed. We will note the particular blessings later. Suffice it here to say that Paul was a great blessing to them. God had a ministry for Paul on that island and directed the ship to come to the island. The way in which Paul arrived for the ministry is not the usual way God's servants get to their location, but it did the job. God can use any means He wants to in sending His servants hither and yon. A shipwreck may seem like a disaster, but things of that sort have opened a door of ministry for many others beside the Apostle Paul. God's people need always to be ready and willing to serve God so that no matter where they are, they will have a ministry for His glory and for the blessings of others.

*The label of the Melitans.* Luke calls the people of the island "barbarous people" ([v. 2](#)). The term "barbarous" immediately speaks to us of backward, crude, and savage type of people. However, that is not the way the term was used when Luke wrote Acts. In Luke's day "The Greeks regarded all as barbarians who did not speak their language, and applied the name to all other nations but their own. It does not denote, as it does sometimes with us, people of savage, uncultivated, and cruel habits, but simply those whose speech was unintelligible" (Barnes). Alexander said the word "is nearly equivalent to the common use of natives for the inhabitants of unknown countries." Paul intimates something as to the meaning of the word when he says in one of his epistles, "Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me" ([1 Corinthians 14:11](#)). We label people for various and sundry reasons. But the label is not what really matters. It is how we live that matters. May no disgraceful label be given us for unholy living, but may we so live that labels of disgrace will only be given for scorn of our righteous ways.

*The liberality of the Melitans.* The barbarians "showed us no little kindness; for they kindled a fire, and received us, every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold" ([v. 2](#)). Though the Melitans could not speak Greek, "they could speak the eloquent language of kindness and pity . . . They had not come down to the wreck for plunder, as might have been feared, but to help the unfortunates who were shivering on the beach in the downpour of rain, and chilled to the bone by exposure" (Maclaren). Griffith Thomas said, "These people welcomed Paul and his

companions with warmth not only of heart, but of hearth.”

This kindness of the people of Melita will characterize their conduct throughout the entire three months Paul and his companions were marooned on the island. Their kindness, which puts many Christians to shame, demonstrates the truth that often in the place where you least expect kindness you receive an abundance of it; but in the place where you ought to receive it, you receive little of it. It was the Samaritan who helped the robbed and beaten traveler going from Jerusalem to Jericho. The Levite and priest would not give any aid. The people of the great city of Jerusalem, who had so much spiritual advantage, harassed Paul; but the people on a small, insignificant island of Melita, who had little spiritual advantage, showed much care. God will always provide for His servants, but it often comes from unlikely sources. Those who could help and do not will one day have to reckon with God for their failure, and the reckoning will not be a pleasant experience. A good many church members in our day are in that category. They could do a whole lot more in helping the work of God than they do. But they are so materialistic, they see their affluence chiefly as means for their own selfish interests and not for the Lord’s work.

## B. THE PROTECTION INITIATING PROMINENCE

The very first incident of note on the island after the escape from the ship was centered around Paul. It was that which immediately distinguished him above the rest of those who had escaped to the island. It involved Divine protection from a poisonous snake. We will examine this incident by noting the attack upon Paul and the attitudes about Paul.

### 1. The Attack Upon Paul

“And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand” ([v. 3](#)). It is instructive to note when the attack came and why it came.

*When the attack came.* Paul was attacked by the snake when he was doing good. The people of Melita had “kindled a fire” ([v. 2](#)) for the shipwrecked people who were soaked to the skin and shivering in the cold. But fires need to be refueled

periodically to keep them going. It was when Paul was helping refuel the fire that he was attacked by the snake. It is good to note the excellent character traits of Paul that are most evident in this seemingly mundane deed. The deed shows he was a humble, hard working, and helpful person.

First, he was a *humble* person. Though he had become very prominent on the ship, yet he was still humble enough to do the lowly task of gathering fire wood in this emergency. As we have noted earlier, crises really reveal people's character. The situation at hand with the boat people who were wet and cold was not time for people to strut their rank. All hands needed to pull together for the good of those shipwrecked. Paul never hesitated but humbly gathered up sticks for the fire. One wonders how many others on the ship also were out gathering wood.

Second, he was a *hard working* person. Paul did more than token work in gathering up the sticks, for Scripture said he had a "bundle" of sticks. Paul was a hard worker. He was not lazy nor did he do a halfway job. This we have observed of him before when we have studied his missionary journeys. Paul shames many Christians by his good work ethic. Unions will not look good either when compared to Paul's labor standards.

Third, he was a *helping* person. The islanders had done much to help the shipwrecked people, but Paul was not one to take the help sitting down. He would not let them do it all when he was capable of pitching in and helping out, too. This is not the attitude of the welfare crowd, however. The more you do for them, the less they will do for themselves. They never see help given them as help to get them started on their own but only as help to let them shirk their duties. If you give them money, they think that means they have to work less to earn money. Build them a fire to warm them up, and it will never cross their minds that they should help to refuel the fire after they have gotten warmed up. A number of folk are like this in the church, too. They would not be out with Paul gathering wood for the fire. They do little to help out in the church. Yet, they would be the first to complain if the fire went out. Unfortunately, this kind of church person also acts this way in society; and any testimony they might have for the Lord is cancelled out quickly by this lack of industriousness.

That Paul was attacked when he was acting so nobly is not easy for many people to understand. People have little trouble understanding the coming of afflictions when one is doing evil. But it is always difficult for people to understand that we may also be afflicted when we are doing good. While it is true that evil does indeed bring many afflictions that righteous people do not experience, it is also true that living righteously does not eliminate all afflictions. You may indeed experience affliction because you are doing right as did Paul here. While that may really puzzle you at the

time, we will learn later in this snake attack incident what we learn in many places elsewhere in the Scripture: namely, these afflictions will prove to be great blessings in disguise.

*Why the attack came.* There are at least three reasons why the snake attacked Paul. They are the natural cause, the Satanic cause, and the Divine cause.

First, the *natural cause*. Under the conditions, it would be easy for Paul to pick up a stick which had a snake attached to it. Being cold, the snake would be very sluggish and, therefore, would not move noticeably when Paul picked up the stick to which it was attached. Furthermore, the snake was doubtless similar in color to the piece of wood. With the rain and cold and haste to get more wood, it would go easily undetected. But once the snake got over the fire, it would warm up immediately and unhappily. Thus, it would lash out at the nearest object which happened to be Paul's hand. Some would stop at the natural cause explanation and not pursue any other cause for the viper attack. This is the general attitude of the world about most events. But wise men look for more causes than just the natural cause. That is why we also consider the Satanic cause and the Divine cause.

Second, the *Satanic cause*. Satan certainly was in this. It made no difference to him that God promised Paul he would go to Rome to testify. Satan still tried to derail Paul in spite of the promise. Unlike many saints in the Lord's work, Satan does not give up easily in his work. A. C. Gaebelien summed up the efforts of Satan in trying to stop Paul from reaching Rome when he said, "How Satan tried to hinder Paul from reaching Rome; how he attempted to oppose God's will and God's plan! By the murderous Jews, by the storms of the sea, [by] the suggestion of the soldiers to kill the prisoners, and now by the viper Satan tried to frustrate the Lord's plan. But God kept His servant and no harm could come to him. In the same keeping all His people rest. We are safe under Him, our omnipotent Lord."

Third, the *Divine cause*. God overrules all! What Satan would use to frustrate God's plan, God will use to further His plan. As we will see more about later, the snake attack on Paul led to distinguishing Paul above all those from the ship and thus helped to enlarge his ministry on the island. This gave Paul acceptance among the people and that permitted him to minister to them.

How often God uses our afflictions to enlarge our work for Him, to open up doors that otherwise would have remained closed, to reach more people, and to have more opportunities for serving Him. Admittedly, it is not easy to see our afflictions in this positive way when the afflictions are upon us. We all will have some anxious moments at the fire when the snake is attached to the hand. But faith

will see beyond the present trouble and anticipate the Divine purpose in the trial. If we will look at our trials as the opening of doors to further service for our Savior, it will be an immeasurable help in alleviating the discomforts of our trials.

## **2. The Attitudes About Paul**

Three things can be said regarding the people's varying attitudes about Paul because of this snake attack on him. They had a fine attitude, a faulty attitude, and a fickle attitude.

*A fine attitude.* "And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live" ([v. 4](#)). The islanders had a fine attitude about right and wrong and the punishment of wrong. Particularly they believed that murder was wrong and that it merited the death sentence. Would that we had more of that kind of thinking in our land today! Capital punishment is decreed in the Word of God as far back as [Genesis 9:6](#). But common sense ought to see the wisdom of it anyway; for in our country, capital punishment would cut murders by two thirds the number. The FBI some years ago gave the statistics that ought to have encouraged greatly the executing of murders. They said that approximately two-thirds of the murders which occur in our country are done by repeaters who have either been let out on parole or have escaped from prison. Hence, capital punishment would eliminate two-thirds of the murders in our land. But the liberals, who have more sympathy for the criminal than the victim, are careful not to let these facts affect them. So it is very difficult to have capital punishment. If it does occur, protesters will show up at the scene; and the news media will focus on the protesters and on how terrible it is to execute the murderer. The folk in Melita, though back woods in education and modern advances of our day, knew a whole lot better, however.

Why did these people of nearly two millenniums ago think so rightly in regards to murder and its punishment? Maclaren answered well when he said, "These rude islanders had consciences, which bore witness to a divine law of retribution." Albert Barnes spoke likewise when he said, "These barbarians reasoned from great original principles, written on the hearts of all men by nature, that there is a God of justice, and that the guilty will be punished." The attitudes which prevail in our society that causes our courts to be so disgustingly lenient with criminals is one that not only goes against the Word of God but also against the innate consciences of men.

Woe be those who reject God's Word and the intuitive thinking God puts in a man's heart.

*A faulty attitude.* The Melita natives, though right about murder and the death sentence, were not right about judging on outward appearances. "These Maltese critics did what many of us are doing with less excuse—arguing as to men's merits from their calamities or successes. A good man may be stung by a serpent in the act of doing a good thing; that does not prove him to be a monster. He [a bad man] may be unhurt by what seems fatal; that does not prove him to be a god or a saint" (Maclaren). The islanders had the same problem as did the disciples in Jesus' day who asked Christ concerning the blind man: "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" ([John 9:2](#)). To their surprise, Jesus said, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" ([John 9:3](#)). Job's friends also concluded that Job's suffering indicated he was a wicked man. Jesus corrected similar thinking in people when he said, "Those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?" ([Luke 13:4](#)). All afflictions do not indicate evil in the afflicted. Neither does all prosperity indicate righteousness, for many are the vile who have prospered in this world.

*A fickle attitude.* After Paul "shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm . . . they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly; but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god" ([vv. 5, 6](#)). In the minds of the people, Paul went from a murderer to a god in a few minutes. Being called a god is not new to Paul. The same thing happened to him and also Barnabas in Lystra. There Paul went from a god to a man worthy of death (he was stoned there) in a short time ([Acts 14:11–19](#)).

All of this reminds us of the fickleness of public opinion. Do not build your life on public opinion. You can go from a hero to a heel (or vice versa) in moments. Christ was praised with a chorus of "Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel" ([John 12:13](#)) by the crowd on Sunday; but before the week was over, they were shouting, "Crucify him, crucify him!" ([John 19:6](#)). Even the ungodly sports heroes of our day know how fickle the crowd is. The athlete can be a hero one moment but booed unmercifully the next. To adjust your life to the approval of the crowd is to make a fool of yourself. Many, however, do just that. But wise men will look to God and His Word for their

approval. God is faithful, not fickle.

## C. THE PERFORMANCES AMIDST PROMINENCE

The prominence Paul received from the snake incident, which occurred on the first day of the three months' stay on Melita, resulted in a reciprocation of ministries between him and the islanders. To study these performances of both Paul and the people, we will look at the hospitality of Publius, the healings by Paul, and the honoring by the people.

### 1. The Hospitality of Publius

"In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us, and lodged us three days courteously" ([v. 7](#)). Once the people got dried out and warmed up by the fire, it was necessary to find lodging for them. Temporary lodging was first needed until a more permanent lodging could be found to house the people from the ship while they waited for a suitable time and conditions to again sail on their way. Paul and his companions were lodged by Publius, the "chief man [governor or similar office] of the island." Paul's prominence because of the snake bite incident would doubtless have much to do with his being selected to stay with Publius. The hospitality of Publius was very liberal. The word "lodged," says J. A. Alexander, "in its modern sense, is too restricted to convey the force of the original, which means to entertain as guests, and comprehends all the rites of hospitality, as well as the mere furnishing of shelter for the night or even comfortable quarters."

It is significant that Paul, a lowly prisoner, is accorded such an honorable lodging. But the snake bite incident has given him much respect. It is an encouragement to all who would serve God. The world may scorn us and put us in some lowly despised category, but God has ways of putting us in honorable respect with others in order for us to serve Him better. Paul the prisoner became the most esteemed and prominent person of the ship. Joseph was a prisoner one day, but the prime minister the next. God can take care of our reputation very quickly when we have kept our character in good shape.

### 2. The Healings by Paul



Staying in the quarters of Publius provided Paul with an opportunity to bring alleviation of suffering to the people on the island. When God provides nice quarters or possessions or material gain for us, it is not so we can lay around enjoying the luxury; but it is to open doors of service. If this truth was understood well, many folk in our churches would spend their money much differently than they do. But many view an increase in pay as more money to spend on such things as adult toys, not more money to give to the Lord's work. And many view an increase in leisure time as simply more time to spend pursuing fleshly pleasure—which means they will miss more church services. Paul, however, used his prosperous situation to do additional service for the Lord.

In examining these healings, we will note the father healing and the further healings.

*The father healing.* “And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux; to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him” (v. 8). The “bloody flux” with a “fever” was a very severe case of dysentery which could kill. Paul's arrival on the scene would indeed be most welcomed and timely.

In looking at this healing, we will note the reciprocation in it, the remarkableness of it, and the remuneration of it.

First, the *reciprocation* in it. Publius had done a real favor for Paul and his companions by housing them in his residence. Unlike the ungrateful attitudes that are seen so much in this world, Paul showed his gratitude by being alert to doing some favor for Publius. He did not have to look long, for the sickness of Publius' father would soon be made known to Paul and his companions. Obviously, it weighed heavily on the mind of Publius. When Paul found out the situation, he “entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.” Like helping to pick up sticks for the fire, Paul was not one to receive gratuities without reciprocation. He was not a freeloader. Our society is in need of much learning in this area. Believers also need much improvement here especially in regards to their reciprocating with God. He has done so much for us, but few of us are doing much for Him to show any kind of appreciation for His goodness to us. The offering plate goes by and there is not the slightest hint of reciprocation by the stingy way most people give. Many tasks need to be done at church, but few are interested in reciprocating what God has gone for them by doing any of those tasks.

Second, the *remarkableness* of it. Joseph Parker notes two remarkable things about this healing which are worthy of mention here.

He said the first remarkable thing about this healing was that “Paul . . . healed, and not Luke. Luke was a physician; but he does not mention any healing as having been done by his skill . . . Many scientific readers have ascribed to Luke great skill in the matter of description, acute precision in observation, and no one has been able to find fault with any statement which Luke has ever made regarding human suffering and healing. Yet Luke healed none. Luke kept the diary; Luke wrote the journal; Luke magnified the preacher and the intercessionist and said nothing about his own professional education and talent.” With much honorable humility Luke reported this work of Paul.

Parker said, “The second remarkable thing in this narrative is that the poorest should have rendered help to the richest . . . That is what sanctified poverty is always doing. So many mistakes are made about poverty. It is the richest thing in the whole world . . . I am not speaking of vicious poverty, criminal poverty, or poverty that is brought about by willfulness and wantonness, but of the greater poverty . . . I speak about disciplinary poverty; not thriftless want, not sinful necessity—about that I have nothing good to say.” Being in poverty and yet blessing richly reminds us of Jesus Christ of Whom Paul said, “Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” ([2 Corinthians 8:9](#)). Few understand this principle today, for few have ever become poor in order to aid the work of the Lord. Yes, some missionaries and pastors know something of this experience. But, unfortunately, few in our church congregations have the slightest clue as to what this is all about.

Third, the *remuneration* of it. Publius learned in this healing what many need to learn; namely, befriending God’s servants will bring many benefits. Churches who treat their pastors poorly should not be surprised if they struggle year after year. You will not find a prospering church that is mean and stingy towards their pastor. This principle also works with nations. Let a nation treat God’s people well and God will bless that nation. When nations persecute God’s people, they are signing their own death warrant. Sooner or later they will experience the judgment of God. The prevailing attitudes in our nation towards Christianity do not predict a pleasant and prosperous future for our nation!

*The further healings.* “So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed” ([v. 9](#)). One opportunity, if used faithfully, leads to another opportunity. Paul’s performance with the father of Publius provided opportunity to be a blessing to many others. Herein is a much needed lesson regarding service. It is especially needed by those who complain they never are

given much to do in the Lord's work. Such a complaint only betrays the complainers' failure to use their opportunities faithfully. When God gives you a task to do, do it well if you expect to be given other tasks. If you want to be active in serving the Lord, be faithful to do every task well you are asked to do. Many professing saints have a reputation for being undependable. Such folk do not get the assignments the dependable ones receive. Many are floaters in God's work because they have never been very faithful in serving the Lord. You can even miss your calling that way, and many have. These folks are ever wondering out loud how you can know the will of God. The answer is that you will know plenty about God's will if you are obedient to it. Obey the orders you have today and you will know well your orders for tomorrow.

### **3. The Honoring by the People**

"Who also honored us with many honors; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary" ([v. 10](#)). Paul's performance was a blessing to all. He was a blessing to the islanders in bringing about the alleviation of much physical suffering; and he was a blessing to all ("us") involved with the ship in that because of him, many supplies were received from the islanders for the trip to Rome.

Paul's influence is the influence God's people should have wherever they are. We do not have to be rich or have high earthly position to bless society. We can be as lowly as a prisoner, as was Paul, and still bring much blessing to others. The secret is to have a right relationship with God. Paul's influence on the island was not just evident in the material and physical area. He obviously had a great influence spiritually, too; for history says that Christianity abounded on the island of Melita for a number of centuries after Paul's visit. While Luke does not record any specific evangelical work by Paul, you can be sure it was done. You cannot leave Paul in a place for three months without him proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

What sort of influence are we? Are we a blessing to people or a curse? If people listen to us, will they hear wisdom or folly? Is our lifestyle an example to be followed or one to be shunned? If people watch our conduct, will they see holiness or worldliness? Is our relationship with God of such quality that we can still be a blessing to people even though we are under the shadow of scorn and rejection by much of mankind? These are questions we need to ask ourselves periodically. They are questions which will search the heart of the honest person. Paul's performance in Melita will give him high passing marks on this test. Oh, that all of us would so live our faith in Jesus Christ that we would pass the test with flying colors.

## XXXII. PASSING TO ROME

### Acts 28:11–31

ROME AT LAST! Paul's desire to visit Rome is finally going to be fulfilled. Several times Scripture has recorded him expressing his desire to go to Rome. He said in Ephesus, "I must also see Rome" ([Acts 19:21](#)); and he wrote in his epistle to the Romans, "Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you" ([Romans 1:10,11](#)). Making the visit to Rome a certainty was Christ's promise given to Paul the night after the tumultuous episode in the Sanhedrin. Christ said, "Thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" ([Acts 23:11](#)). The storm at sea appeared at times to make Paul's visit to Rome very uncertain. But God's promises are sure; and the storm, shipwreck, and three months on the island of Melita did not stop Paul from making it to Rome.

In this our last study on the life of Paul, we will note the particulars of his move to Rome from Melita ([vv. 11–16](#)) and the pursuit of his ministry in Rome ([vv. 17–31](#)).

### A. THE PARTICULARS OF HIS MOVE

"After three months" ([v. 11](#)) on the island of Melita, conditions finally permitted the trip to Rome to resume. The trip had started from Caesarea nearly four months earlier. But slow traveling because of the winds and then the two weeks in the storm had put a lengthy delay in Paul's getting to Rome. But now the final stages of the trip are to be made which will put Paul in Rome for the first time. Luke keeps an interesting diary of the trip from Melita to Rome. We will examine it from the standpoint of the ship, the seas, the stops, the saints and the shelter.

#### 1. The Ship

"And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux" ([v. 11](#)). The centurion booked passage from Melita on another "ship of Alexandria" (cp. [Acts 27:6](#)). Unlike the last "ship of Alexandria" they were on, this one had made it to port in Melita without shipwreck. Luke records the ship's symbols as being "Castor and Pollux." These were images or

names found generally on the front of the ship. These symbols reflected heathen paganism. Castor and Pollux were two gods of mythology said to be the twin sons of Jupiter by a human mother. After their death, fable says they were made the constellations we know today as Gemini. This is a northern constellation between Cancer and Taurus, containing the stars Castor and Pollux. The name of Gemini is probably best known to us as the name of one of the space programs. However, as spectacular and famous as the Gemini space program was, no spaceman will ever be as famous as the prisoner, Apostle Paul, who was on the “Gemini” ship of Alexandria.

## 2. The Seas

Unlike most of the trip thus far, the trip from Melita to Rome was uneventful as far as traveling conditions were concerned. There were no storms and the seas were smooth. “The south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli” ([v. 13](#)) is a good illustration of the good conditions prevailing in the last stage of the trip to Rome. The last time we read of a south wind blowing ([Acts 27:13](#)), it was a harbinger of stormy weather. But not now. The sailing from Melita to Puteoli (from there to Rome was by foot, not by sea) was done on smooth seas.

Not all seas in life are smooth, however. Many have some pretty big looking waves. While we cannot always expect smooth sailing in life, we certainly can avoid a lot of rough seas by following the will of God. But many folk have ignored the wise warnings from God given to us by God’s men, such as Paul in Fair Havens, and have brought rough seas upon themselves unnecessarily.

## 3. The Stops

With the ship of Alexandria being a cargo ship (it doubtless carried a lot of wheat as did the first ship of Alexandria Paul was on that was shipwrecked), it stopped periodically at various ports. First, it stopped at Syracuse which is about eighty miles from Melita on the eastern edge of Sicily. The next stop was another seventy miles away in Rhegium, located on the tip of the “boot” of Italy. The final stop was Puteoli which was 180 miles from Rhegium and 125 miles from Rome. From Puteoli to Rome, the journey was completed by foot. Two towns are mentioned in [verse 15](#) through which they went on foot. They are “Appii forum” and “The three taverns” (not a very nice name in our day’s language, but it can be rendered “three inns” instead of “three taverns”).

Again, as we have noted before in our study of Paul’s life, little did anyone realize

when Paul was taken through these various ports and towns as a lowly prisoner, that these places would owe their lasting fame chiefly to him. The world little esteems the things of God, but time has a way of embarrassing the world for their unperceptiveness regarding God's work and people.

#### 4. The Saints

Enroute to Rome, Paul enjoyed some wonderful Christian fellowship. In Puteoli "we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days" ([v. 14](#)), and in Appii Forum and Three Inns, believers came from Rome to meet Paul ([v. 15](#)) and accompany him the rest of the way to Rome. We note three important factors involved in Christian fellowship from these experiences of Paul on his way to Rome. They are the desire for Christian fellowship, the duty in Christian fellowship, and the delights from Christian fellowship.

*The desire for Christian fellowship.* "We found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days" ([v. 14](#)); "And from thence [from Rome], when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as the Appii forum, and The three taverns" ([v. 15](#)). We have three incidences here of great desire for Christian fellowship by believers. First, in Puteoli, Paul "found" believers. "Found" indicates he looked for them. That evidences that he had a great desire to fellowship with the saints. Second, the brethren in Puteoli, when Paul found them, wanted Paul to stay a week (there is nothing in Scripture to indicate their desire was not granted by Julius, the centurion who was in charge of the prisoners). Their request for Paul to stay a week manifested an earnest desire for Christian fellowship. Third, some believers in Rome desired fellowship so much that they traveled many miles to meet Paul (fifty miles to Appii Forum and thirty miles to The three inns).

Desire is a prime requirement if you want Christian fellowship. Like many good things, you will not have good Christian fellowship with other saints if you do not desire it. One's heart is revealed by its desires, and a lack of desire for Christian fellowship indicates some serious spiritual problems. In fact, those who do not desire fellowship with God's people give good evidence they just may not be God's people. Those who complain they lack good Christian friends may be confessing their disinterest in being with God's people because they are disinterested in the things of God.

Of course there are some professing saints that godly people do not desire to fellowship with. But that does not speak critically of the godly people who do not

want to fellowship with these professing saints. It only reveals that the professing saints may not be saints; or if they are, they are in a very backslidden, disobedient condition. In one of his epistles, Paul speaks about the need of separating from disobedient saints ([2 Thessalonians 3:6](#)), for they are a bad influence. But the godly will want to be with the godly. Without that desire, there will not be Christian fellowship.

*The duty in Christian fellowship.* The brethren coming all the way from Rome to meet Paul in Appii Forum and The Three Taverns especially show an important duty regarding Christian fellowship. That duty is giving. The believers from Rome had to give of their time and means to make the trip to meet Paul. The trip would be made on foot as cars and trains and planes were unknown then. Hence, the trip would require a good deal of effort.

Any good friendship or fellowship with fellow believers requires giving. All must give who want the fellowship. Those who are leeches, sponges, and parasites will not enjoy good Christian fellowship. This kind only wants the others to pay the price, put out the effort, travel the miles, etc. for fellowship. They do not want to sacrifice anything, yet they expect to have good fellowship anyway. Paul would contribute plenty to any fellowship he had with Christians, and those who reciprocated were the ones who best discovered a great time of fellowship with Paul. Some doubtless refused to travel to meet Paul. They, of course, missed the fellowship of accompanying Paul to Rome—a miss they would only regret later on.

*The delights from Christian fellowship.* “The brethren . . . came to meet us . . . when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage” ([v. 15](#)). Christian fellowship brings wonderful delights, benefits, and blessings. The saints coming from Rome were a great encouragement to Paul and caused him to thank God. In this we see two choice blessings of Christian fellowship: help for the saints and honor for God.

First, *help for the saints*. Paul was encouraged by these saints. The world discourages. It cannot help our faith. But believers are a different story. They are working and cheering for the same cause. It is an encouragement to meet folks that are on your side. We do not have enough of them in God’s work. Most people are hinderers of God’s work, but these saints were helpers.

Second, *honor for God*. Paul “thanked God” for the fellowship with the brethren. This gratitude, of course, gave God honor. He doubtless also thanked the Christians from Rome for coming to meet him to accompany him to Rome. Knowing Paul he

would thank them profusely and many times. But Paul thanked God, too. True Christian fellowship causes us to honor God. That is a benefit that is extremely valuable. Our chief business in life is to honor God. We need help to do it more. True Christian fellowship provides much help for this. Next time you are tempted to skip church, remember this truth. Skipping church will dishonor God.

## 5. The Shelter

“And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was suffered [permitted] to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him” ([v. 16](#)). The move to Rome finally is completed with Paul being settled in some dwelling. We note two things about Paul’s lodging: the favor of it and the fetters in it.

*The favor of it.* The other prisoners were delivered to “the captain of the guard” for their shelter. But Paul was given much favor by being permitted “to dwell by himself.” He did not have to stay in the same place as the rest of the prisoners. They were doubtless placed in some prison in Rome, but not Paul. He was accorded special favor. Obviously, Julius the centurion had a lot to do with this. As we have noted through the journey to Rome from Caesarea, Julius had special respect for Paul. The longer the journey lasted, the more he respected Paul. Paul lived such a godly life before him, that Julius could easily see that Paul was not in the category of the other prisoners. Hence, when in Rome, he saw to it that Paul was favored. Christians could gain a lot more respect if they would live like Christians. Not all the scorning of the saints is because of the saints’ creed. It is because of the saints’ conduct—the saints do not live like saints.

*The fetters in it.* Though Paul was permitted to dwell separately from the other prisoners, he did have a soldier who guarded him ([v. 16](#)). In fact, Paul was chained to the soldier (“bound with this chain,” [v. 20](#)). Julius would not have the power to free Paul from his prisoner category, otherwise we believe he would have done that. But powers higher than Julius determined Paul’s prisoner status. Julius could only make it as comfortable as possible.

How incongruent that Paul, the great man of God, the one who was so vital to the saving of the people on the ship, the one who worked the miracles on the island of Melita, and the one who desired the company of the best people on the earth is in chains as a prisoner. “How many great men had made their entry into Rome,



crowned and in triumph, who really were the plague of their generation! But here a good man makes his entry into Rome, chained and triumphed over as a poor captive, who was really the greatest blessing to his generation” (Matthew Henry). All of this shows how ludicrous becomes the thinking and the judgment of mankind when they reject Jesus Christ. Turning away from Christ causes men to embrace the curse and condemn and imprison the blessing. The world thinks Christians are weird—but it is the world that is weird!

## B. THE PURSUIT OF HIS MINISTRY

Though he was “bound with this chain” ([v. 20](#)), Paul did not let this stop him from pursuing his ministry after he got to Rome. While he could not go to the people, they could come to him; and they did. Furthermore, as we will note later, he not only pursued his ministry through personal contact with people but also through writing some more of his epistles.

To study more about Paul’s pursuit of his ministry after he arrived in Rome, we will note the contacting of the Jews, the communicating of the message, and the continuation of his work.

### 1. The Contacting of the Jews

“And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief[s] of the Jews together” ([v. 17](#)). It did not take long for Paul to get down to business once he was in Rome. His burden for the Jews’ souls inspired him to contact them. His contact was wisely made through the “chief[s] of the Jews” who would be the leading Jews in Rome. Some believe they were the heads of the synagogues in Rome. But the command by Claudius for all Jews to depart from Rome ([Acts 18:2](#)) had been given only about five years earlier, so it is doubtful the Jews who dared to come back to Rome would be in the synagogue business this soon. But whatever their situation, Paul was able to contact them and through the leaders would reach many other Jews.

To study this initial contact with the Jews, we will look at the declarations *by* Paul and the declarations *to* Paul.

*The declarations by Paul.* Paul made two important declarations to the Jews. He

declared his fidelity and his faith.

First, he declared *his fidelity*. “And when they were come together, he [Paul] said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of” ([vv. 17–19](#)). Before Paul can begin on the Gospel message, he must first address why he is a prisoner. This prisoner situation of Paul would be foremost in the minds of his listeners and needed to be explained. Paul tells why he is in Rome and declares his innocence, his fidelity of character. Paul was careful in the way he spoke of the fellow Jews in Palestine, but he made it plain that they were “against” his being set free, and that was a factor in his appeal. He did not have to relate that Festus forced the appeal by asking if Paul would go back to Jerusalem to be tried. All that needed to be said here was that the Jews’ attitude was responsible for his being a prisoner. Rome judged him innocent ([v. 18](#)), but because of the Jews, they left Paul bound.

Paul’s declaration of fidelity made it plain where the trouble was—and it was not with him. So often, however, God’s servants are viewed as the ones who are the cause of trouble. Ahab called Elijah the troubler of Israel, but Elijah set him straight by saying it was Ahab, not Elijah, that troubled Israel ([1 Kings 18:17,18](#)). Many times in our churches, the pastor is accused of being the troubler of the church. But the truth of the matter is that it is generally the accusers who are the troublers of the church. In fact, you can often tell where the trouble is in a church when you observe who the people are who are ever trying to make it appear that the pastor is the problem in the parish.

Our world has great difficulty in discerning who the troubler is. The attack upon the Bible and prayer in the schools makes it look like such things are a real problem in society, but the same bunch that attacks the Bible and prayer in the schools will push for the rights to teach homosexuality in the schools. The problem is not the Bible and prayer; the problem is homosexuality and the people who push it. Do not let the liberal lying news media get you mixed up on where the problem is. Get in God’s Word so you can discern where the problem really is.

Second, he declared *his faith*. Paul will never talk long before he is talking about his faith. As soon as he stated why he was in Rome, he made a statement about his faith: “For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain” ([v. 20](#)). Paul’s faith was the real issue. The “hope of Israel” was a phrase that summed up his faith. The “hope of Israel” was all about Jesus Christ. It spoke of Him as the Messiah Who is the Key to Israel’s glory and Who is the only Redeemer of sinners. Christ, of course, is not only

the “hope of Israel” but as the Redeemer of sinners, He is the One great hope of all mankind. Without Christ we have no hope (“without Christ . . . no hope,” [Ephesians 2:12](#)).

Note that Paul said he was “bound” for this hope. While this hope brings the greatest freedom of all—soul freedom—it often also takes away physical freedom on this earth. Hence, many who are free are bound. But many who are not bound are not free. Better to be in the first category than the last.

We need to remember that in order to be “bound” *for* the faith we must be “bound” *by* the faith. The threat of being bound by earthly chains causes many to recant their faith in Christ. Some recant their faith for fear of being bound by much lesser chains—such as the chains of rejection, lack of popularity or promotion, etc. But when faith has us “bound” in its blessed grip, we will not recant our faith for fear of being “bound” with earthly chains.

*The declarations to Paul.* As Paul’s declarations to the Jews’ were twofold, so are the Jews’ declarations to Paul. They speak concerning his accusations and his affirmations. Their declarations were simply responses to Paul’s two declarations.

First, concerning *his accusations*. “And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came showed or spake any harm of thee” ([v. 21](#)). It is unusual that the Jews were not already biased against Paul, for lies seem always to travel faster than truth, and truth was shipwrecked and marooned on an island for three months. But, as others have pointed out, the Jews of Judea may have seen that the case was against them and to write grievances against Paul would only agitate the Roman government. Paul had been acquitted by Lysias, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. The Jews would have little hope that Paul would be condemned before Caesar (who was the detestable Nero at that time). God can silence the enemy if He so pleases, and it pleased Him here to keep the Jews in Rome in the dark about the false accusations of the Judean Jews. This will help to focus their attention on the faith which it did as we note next.

Second, concerning *his affirmations*. “But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest; for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against” ([v. 22](#)). Paul had given a strong affirmation of his faith in his declaration to these Jews. Now they direct their attention to that. Their comments about the faith in Jesus Christ are not nice, however. They could only speak negative things about the Gospel. They called it a “sect” which it was not and which was an insult to Paul. They also said that “everywhere” it was spoken “against” which was not true. Many had embraced the Gospel, not all rejected it. But when you hear the news via the devil,

e.g. the apostates or today's liberal news media, that is the report you will receive. It will be biased and distorted. Any relationship it has to the truth will be accidental.

The "everywhere" statement reminds us of how the evolutionists would have us believe that "all" scientists believe in evolution, when in fact multitudes of scientists do not. But the news media and education officials will try to keep you in the dark about the fact that many scientists do not believe in evolution. Church dissidents are the same way in reporting their gossip. "Everyone" is against the pastor according to them, or "everyone" is against some proposed church program which the pastor and board may be proposing which proposal the dissidents do not like—probably because it advances the work of the Lord.

## **2. The Communicating of the Message**

It had to be a great delight to Paul to hear the Jewish leaders say, "We desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest" ([v. 22](#)) about the Gospel. Paul burned with a holy zeal to proclaim the Gospel; and when people expressed a desire to hear the Gospel, he was more than ready and willing to proclaim it. He was a most enthusiastic communicator of the Gospel. And he was a skilled communicator of the Gospel, too.

The request of the Jews resulted in Paul being able to have a good session with these Jews in which he could teach them about the Gospel. To examine this communicating of the Gospel by Paul to the Jews in Rome, we will note the schedule, subject, Scripturalness, style, success, scorning and separation of his teaching.

*The schedule of his teaching.* "And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging" ([v. 23](#)). In order to give appropriate time to Paul's teaching and to invite others to come to hear Paul, a time was scheduled when all would come together to hear Paul. We still do this today. Especially is this seen regarding our church services. The practice is an excellent one. You will have difficulty accomplishing much in proclaiming the Word of God if you do not schedule a certain time for it.

You will note the Jews kept the appointment. In fact, "many" came to Paul's lodging to hear him on the appointed day. Pity those who knew about the time but decided, as many church folk do, to skip the meeting. How much they missed by not coming. And how much people miss by not keeping the appointment to meet at church at a set time to hear the Word of God proclaimed.

People who fail to keep these appointments at church have some predictable

trademarks about their conduct and attitude towards the church and the pastor. We note four of them.

First, they are the first ones to complain if they are not visited enough by the pastor or others from the church. This is a most hypocritical complaint, of course; but they make it anyway. They expect others to keep on schedule in making their calls (and extra calls, too), but they do not feel obligated to be faithful about keeping the appointments themselves.

Second, they, more than anyone else in the church, request counselling sessions with the pastor. This is such a selfish bit of conduct. If they would come to church when the pastor is preaching, they would be counselled well and regularly by his sermons and would not need special sessions. But because they do not come regularly, they need extra counselling. Our advice to pastors when these people call up to schedule a counselling session is to tell them to show up for the church services and they will get plenty of counselling. Through time consuming counselling sessions (and those who do not have time for a thirty minute sermon will drag on a counselling session for hours if you let them), these people can be a drain on the pastor's time and thus a hindrance to him in doing the work of God.

Third, they often request extra Bible study classes and meetings. Piously they will come into the pastor's study and say they feel a need for more Bible study and couldn't the church schedule some extra Bible study times and sessions. But, of course, this is nothing but a cover-up. They would not be at those meetings either. If they are not faithful to the regularly scheduled meetings, they will not be faithful to the extra scheduled meetings. If they want to learn the Bible better, let them avail themselves to all the Bible teaching and preaching services first before they ask for more.

Fourth, they miss the very services and messages that deal with their problems. How often we have personally seen this happen. You preach a sermon that you know is really needed by some of your members—it can be either a corrective they need or an encouragement—but they are not there to hear the message, and so they miss the help they could have received. Soon they fail in that area.

Keep your appointments to hear the Word of God. Missing them is to your great loss. It also shows your unfaithfulness, for agreeing to be in attendance and then not showing up is unfaithfulness. When you join a church, you in principle agree to come to the services. Many do not see that obligation, but mostly because they do not want to see it.

*The subject of his teaching.* “He expounded and testified the kingdom of God,

persuading them concerning Jesus" ([v. 23](#)). Two things can be said about the subject of Paul's teaching: it was about spiritual things and it was focused on the Savior.

First, it was about *spiritual things*. The general theme of Paul's message was "the kingdom of God." This is a spiritual subject. These Jews in Rome demonstrated a great deal more interest in the message than do most people today. Most people today want to hear about the kingdom of earth, not the kingdom of God. They are interested in politics, business, entertainment, sports, and fleshly pleasures. Spiritual matters are boring to them, and they do not want to be bothered with matters concerning their soul and its relationship to God. Their level of interest is horizontal, not vertical. That is why, as an example, they want their churches to show the Super Bowl on TV at church on Sunday night instead of having a regular preaching service. But "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" ([Romans 14:17](#)).

Second, it was focused on *the Savior*. Paul's main subject was "concerning Jesus." What a great subject! And Paul loved to talk about that subject. If you took Jesus Christ out of his message, Paul would be making tents on a permanent basis. Furthermore, if you took Christ out of Paul's message, his message would not be worth anything; and he ought to go to making tents instead of preaching. But, of course, there are many today who call themselves ministers who can preach and preach (if you call it preaching) without ever mentioning Christ at all. But beware of the minister who does not preach about Jesus Christ. He is an imposter, a devil in clergyman's clothes, a curse for people, and one who sends souls to hell.

*The Scripturalness of his teaching.* Paul taught "both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets" ([v. 23](#)). Paul's message was from the Word. He was a "Bible" teacher and preacher. That is the only kind that is worth anything. Those who do not preach from the Word are worthless. Some preachers complain they run out of things to say in the pulpit. No one who preaches and teaches the Word will ever say that! If you get your messages from the Word of God, you have all the material you need for a lifetime of preaching and teaching. You will never run out.

We said above to beware of the minister who does not preach Jesus Christ. We add here, beware of the man whose message does not square with the Scriptures. The message is not valid that is not supported by the Word of God. Paul told Timothy to "preach the word" ([2 Timothy 4:2](#)). That's all you need to preach. Anything more or anything less and you no longer have God's message.

*The style of his teaching.* “He expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus . . . from morning till evening” ([v. 23](#)). Four things can be said about the style of Paul’s teaching. It was done clearly, earnestly, faithfully, and tirelessly.

First, *clearly*. The word “expounded” in [verse 23](#) means to give exposure to something or to set something out so it can be seen. It is the same word used in [Acts 7:21](#) (translated “cast out”) regarding the putting out of Moses in a basket so he could be seen. In the application of Paul’s teaching, it means to make clear, to explain so all could see and understand the truths about the kingdom of God and about Jesus Christ. The practice of making the Word clear is illustrated in [Nehemiah 8:8](#) which says, “So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.” To make the Word of God clear so others can see and understand the great truths of Scripture is the business of every preacher. But too many preachers only muddle the message instead.

Second, *earnestly*. Paul’s earnestness in teaching is found in the words “testified” and “persuading” in our text. The word “testified” means to “attest or protest earnestly” (Strong). The Greek word translated “testified” has within it the word from which we get our English word “martyr.” Paul is so earnest in his work that he literally lays his life on the line to proclaim the Gospel. The word “persuading” means to try to win over, to try to get folk to change their mind, to convince by reason, logic, etc. All of this means one is being earnest in his teaching. Preachers need to be earnest in proclaiming the Word. It is a dishonor to God to have the Word taught and preached without earnestness.

Third, *faithfully*. The context bears out the fact that Paul’s message to the Jews in Rome was the same message he taught and preached everywhere he went. He was faithful to the truth. He would not compromise to appeal to his audience. The validity of a man’s ministry depends upon his being faithful to God’s message. Without that faithfulness, the preacher is a curse to those who hear him.

Fourth, *tirelessly*. Paul taught these Jews “from morning till evening” ([v. 23](#)). Paul would teach as long as anyone would listen. His heart was in his business. He was not on union hours, nor was he the inventor of the thirty minute sermon. Paul went all night in Troas ([Acts 20:6–11](#)) and now he goes all day in Rome. We do not advise anyone going all day or all night in our day, for few listeners will stay longer than thirty minutes. But it is a mark of great spiritual decline that folk can watch ball games by the hour but get nervous and fidgety and upset when the sermon goes past thirty minutes.

*The success of his teaching.* “Some believed” ([v. 24](#)) the message Paul gave them. This is an encouragement to all those who labor for the Lord. So often when the Word of God is proclaimed, rejection seems dominant. But in spite of the rejection, we will find that “some believed” anyway. Preaching and practicing the Gospel in the early days of the church was often met with much opposition. The opposition was very discouraging, but still “some believed.” Even in Athens, where the city was given up to idolatry, “some believed.” Not many, but some; and a church was eventually started there. God never said that all would believe. In fact, Christ said the number who would not believe would be larger than the number who did believe ([Matthew 7:13,14](#)). But some will believe, and we need to encourage our labors by this fact.

*The scorning of his teaching.* “Some believed not” ([v. 24](#)) speaks of those who scorned the message. The words “believed not” are one word in the Greek. The meaning involves disbelief—a stronger rejection than the word unbelief. Disbelief involves rebellion and disobedience. It means the rejection was willful, intentional. The difference between unbelief and disbelief is not a splitting of hairs. To illustrate: a young child may drop his toy to the ground or he may throw it down with disgust. Either way the toy ends up on the ground. The mere dropping compares to unbelief; the throwing it down with disgust compares to disbelief.

Paul gave quite a warning to those who rejected the Gospel message. This hints at the conclusion that many more rejected his teaching than received it. In his warning to those who scorned the message, Paul quoted from [Isaiah 6:9–10](#) about closing the eyes and ears to truth ([vv. 25–27](#)) and the judgment that it would bring. The judgment it brought was that the Gospel would be taken from them and given instead to the Gentiles who would accept the truth: “Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it” ([v. 28](#)).

Again in our study of Paul’s life, we see the lesson that opportunity rejected is opportunity lost. Many folk are not learning this lesson well, however; and it is not just the folk outside the church. Professing Christians have this problem, too. They are often poor stewards of spiritual opportunities. They miss many church services and do not read and study the Word of God as they could with all the Bible study aids available today. They will be the first to complain, of course, when oppression takes away these opportunities. But opportunities not used are opportunities lost.

*The separation of his teaching.* “Some believed . . . and some believed not” ([v.](#)



24). Paul's teaching separated men into just two camps—believers and unbelievers. Those are the two main divisions of men in time and eternity. Men divide people into many camps. We have divisions of race, nationalities, political parties, religious denominations, etc. But when it is all said and done, the only division that matters is “believed” and “believed not.” God will separate mankind for all eternity according to this division. It does not make any difference about your race, nationality, political parties, religious denomination, and a host of other differences; what matters is whether you believed the Gospel message or did not believe it.

Sometimes preachers are accused of bringing division in the church. The accusation is true but generally not as the accuser sees it. The accuser would like to have people think that the preacher is a bad man and that this is why he brings division. But a good preacher will always bring division because he preaches the truth and the truth divides. The people who are bad are those who reject the truth. Be careful that you do not accuse a preacher of having a divisive personality when in fact it is not his personality but the message of the Word of God that divides men.

### 3. The Continuation of His Work

“And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” ([vv. 30, 31](#)). We come to the final two verses of the book of Acts and the end of Luke's chronicle of the advance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (but not the end of the advance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!). Any avid student of the Scripture could wish that Luke had recorded much more about Paul and how things turned out regarding his appeal. But though that is not recorded in detail as many of us would like, we still can learn much about the continuation of Paul's ministry in examining these two verses and some other texts in Scripture related to them.

To look at the continuation of Paul's ministry, we will note the financing, following, freedom, faithfulness, follow-up, and future of his work.

*Financing.* “And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house” ([v. 30](#)). Paul, though still a prisoner, was able to rent (“hired”) a house. Immediately the question is raised as to where he, as a prisoner, got the money to rent a house. His being a prisoner would naturally cause us to think he would be without any means to rent a house, in fact, without means to do much of anything. But Scripture does not lie; Paul was able to rent a house. Some conjecture, and not without good reason, that

the gifts Paul received from the people of Melita helped to provide him with means to rent a house in Rome. Others believe he had friends in Rome who supported him, which certainly was very possible. We do know for certain from the epistle to the Philippians that the church in Philippi sent Epaphroditus with some gifts to help him ([Philippians 4:10–18](#)).

One thing we can count on in the Lord's work and that is God will see to it that it is financed. We may not have the means in ourselves; but if it is of God, it will be financed. Our chief concern needs to be that we are in His will. When we are in His will, His supplies will accompany us.

*Following.* “And received all that came in unto him” ([v. 30](#)). Paul, because he was still a prisoner, could not go out into the city where the people were but they had to come to him—and they did. At times he had quite a following. Some of those who came to Paul would be the believers who would want to hear regular instructions from Paul regarding spiritual things. Others who came would be unbelievers who would be brought by the believers or by others who had heard about Paul.

Coming to hear Paul when he was a prisoner would, of course, not do anything for one's status in Rome. How often spiritual instruction is put in the category of disrespect by the world as we noted several chapters back in the rejection of Paul's advice about the storm. We will frequently find in this world that the pursuit of spiritual truth will not be given much honor by the world. You can pursue strange and impractical studies with the world's applause; but pursue things pertaining to the Word of God and the future of the soul and the world smirks and ridicules as though you are a strange person wasting your time on frivolous and unimportant matters.

*Freedom.* “No man forbidding him” ([v. 31](#)). Though Paul was a prisoner of Rome and a soldier guard would be chained to him at all times ([v. 20](#)), he was not forbidden to carry on his Gospel ministry. Today the ACLU would bring a lawsuit, I am sure, against Paul arguing that he should not be allowed to carry on his ministry as long as the government was involved. The ACLU would especially be upset that this freedom given Paul to pursue his ministry resulted in some of Caesar's household being saved ([Philippians 4:22](#)). The soldiers who were chained to Paul would come under the sound of the Gospel like few others. They *had* to stay there when he spoke to others about Christ, and they could not leave him when he spoke to them personally. They either got saved or would consider their duty extremely miserable. But if they only

knew who Paul really was and how famous the man would be down through the years, they would have fought over who could be chained to him. Chained to Paul, they were given spiritual privileges of rare value indeed.

Sometimes we may be chained to circumstances which on the surface seem boring and unproductive. But they may prove to be a great blessing to us if we capitalize on the spiritual opportunities that are in the circumstances.

*Faithfulness.* “Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence” ([v. 31](#)). The faithfulness of Paul in his continuing ministry is most evident in two ways in this verse: the message of his preaching and the manner of his preaching.

First, the *message of his preaching*. Paul continued to preach “the kingdom of God, and . . . those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ.” As we have noted a number of times before in Paul’s ministry, the hallmark of faithfulness in the work of the Lord is faithfulness to the message. Paul never changed his message. No matter who he was speaking to, he spoke the truth. When he spoke to the Jewish leaders of Rome after he first came to Rome, he spoke the same message. Now he keeps proclaiming the same message as he continues his ministry in Rome. When God judges His servants it will not be regarding how many were the servants’ followers but how faithful the servants were to the message.

Second, the *manner of his preaching*. Paul gave out the Gospel message “with all confidence.” The Greek word translated “confidence” is the same Greek word that is translated “boldness” in [Acts 4:13,29,31](#). Paul spoke without apology. He was not a timid preacher and teacher of the Gospel. He was not cowered by circumstances or the crowd though hostile they may be. Let us follow his example in declaring the Word of God. A timid declaration casts doubt on the Word and will not encourage faith in it. We must proclaim the Word with boldness if we are to do honor to it.

*Follow-up.* Being confined to his house and unable to travel did not keep Paul from doing follow-up work. While in this “two year” ([v. 30](#)) prisoner situation, Paul wrote *Ephesians*, *Philippians*, *Colossians*, and *Philemon*. This was a follow-up ministry in writing instead of in person. And what a great work he did in his epistles. Today, nearly two millennia later, these epistles are still doing follow-up work with believers all over the world. Though he was physically restricted by his prisoner status, his pen was not restricted. Satan may have thought he had the Gospel ministry chained pretty good in Rome with Paul chained to a soldier all day

every day. But Paul's ministry continued to reach out into the world and into every age since then.

*Future.* "Paul dwelt two whole years" ([v. 30](#)) in Rome in his own hired house. Add the two in Rome to the two years he spent in prison at Caesarea plus the time before and after the Caesarea imprisonment and you have around five years that Paul was under government arrest as a result of his going to Jerusalem against the will and warning of God. As we have noted before, he used the limited opportunities of his imprisonment to the fullest which makes it difficult to perceive that his disobedience cost him much in his service for God. Paul did more with limited opportunities than the rest of us generally do with unlimited opportunities.

What happened after the two years of imprisonment in Rome? The Scripture does not plainly say, but it gives us enough hints to cause us to conclude that Paul was released from prison and was able to travel a few years proclaiming the Gospel before a second imprisonment ended his life. Some incidents mentioned in Scripture which do not seem to fit into any of his activities prior to his visit to Rome encourage us to believe he was released. Leaving Titus in Crete ([Titus 1:5](#)) and leaving Trophimus sick in Miletus ([2 Timothy 4:20](#)) are examples of these incidences.

Paul's second imprisonment was not like his first. No longer in a rented house, he was in the dungeon. Furthermore, he was a forsaken man: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world . . . Only Luke is with me . . . Alexander the coopersmith did me much evil . . . at my first answer [defense] no man stood with me . . . Do thy diligence to come before winter" ([2 Timothy 4:10,11,14,16,21](#)). But though he was in prison and forsaken, he still had a ministry; for from that cruel imprisonment came the gems of the pastoral epistles (*First Timothy*, *Second Timothy*, and *Titus*). And though imprisoned and forsaken, Paul was still triumphant, for he said in that dungeon, "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, that by me the preaching might be fully known" ([2 Timothy 4:17](#)) and "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day" ([2 Timothy 4:6-8](#)). History said Paul was beheaded as was John the Baptist and other saints of God. But his beheading did not stop his ministry. Paul has a larger ministry today than he ever had when he was alive on the earth. He is still prominent, through his epistles, in teaching the great truths of the Gospel.

**QUOTATION SOURCES**

The person listed is the author of the book which follows his name unless an asterisk (\*) appears after the book title. In this case the person is a contributor to the book or is quoted in the book. Quoting a person does not mean we necessarily endorse all the beliefs, practices, or associations of that person.

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## PAUL BOOK OUTLINE

### 1. PERSECUTOR OF BELIEVERS

#### 1. THE BACKGROUND OF THE PERSECUTOR

1. His Race

1. His Region

1. His Raising

20. His Religion

#### T. THE BRUTALITY OF THE PERSECUTOR

20. Assisting

20. Consenting

20. Destroying

20. Intruding

20. Dragging

20. Disrespecting

020. Imprisoning

20. Threatening

20. Killing

002. Traveling

- 2. Binding
- 2. Persecuting
- 2. Abounding
- 2. Punishing
- 2. Beating
- 2. Opposing
- 2. Voting
- 2. Torturing
- 2. Raging
- 2. Blaspheming
- 2. Injuring

## **1. POWER OF GOD**

### **A. THE REVELATION OF CHRIST**

- A. The Mode of the Revelation
- A. The Moment of the Revelation
  - 1. The Mercy in the Revelation
  - 1. The Message of the Revelation
  - 1. The Might of the Revelation

### **A. THE RESPONSE OF PAUL**

- 1. The Asking by Paul
- 1. The Actions of Paul

### **A. THE ROLE OF ANANIAS**

1. The Character of Ananias
1. The Call of Ananias
1. The Concerns of Ananias
1. The Communication for Ananias
1. The Compliance by Ananias

## **1. PREPARATIONS FOR SERVICE**

### **A. THE SECLUSION IN ARABIA**

- A. When He Went to Arabia
- A. Where He Went in Arabia
1. Why He Went to Arabia

### **A. THE SOJOURN IN DAMASCUS**

1. The People of Paul
1. The Preaching by Paul
1. The Persecution Against Paul

### **A. THE SEASON IN JERUSALEM**

1. The Fear of Paul
1. The Friend of Paul
1. The Faithfulness of Paul
1. The Foe of Paul

### **A. THE STAY IN TARSUS**

1. The Acceptance of Paul
1. The Acceptance of the Gentiles



## **1. PLACEMENT IN SERVICE**

### **A. THE SEEKING FOR PAUL IN TARSUS**

A. The Circumstances Resulting in the Seeking of Paul

A. The Consecration Revealed in the Seeking of Paul

### **A. THE SERVING OF PAUL IN ANTIOCH**

1. The Time In Antioch

1. The Teaching in Antioch

1. The Titling in Antioch

### **A. THE SENDING OF PAUL TO JERUSALEM**

1. The Prophecy About the Famine

1. The Providing for the Famished

## **1. PREMIÈRE OF MISSIONS**

### **A. THE SUMMONS IN ANTIOCH**

A. The Declaring of the Summons

A. The Discerning of the Summons

1. The Dispatching According to the Summons

### **A. THE START IN SALAMIS**

1. The Speaking of the Word of God

1. The Servant of the Men of God

### **A. THE SORCERER IN PAPHOS**

1. The Identification of the Sorcerer

1. The Profession of the Sorcerer
1. The Association of the Sorcerer
1. The Opposition From the Sorcerer
1. The Condemnation of the Sorcerer

#### A. THE SHIRKER IN PERGA

1. The Character of the Departure
1. The Cause of the Departure
1. The Cost of the Departure

### **1. PREACHING IN PISIDIA**

#### A. THE PLACE OF THE PREACHING

- A. The City of Antioch
- A. The Synagogue of Antioch

#### A. THE PARTICULARS OF THE PREACHING

1. The Readyng for the Preaching
1. The Reviewing in the Preaching
1. The Reporting in the Preaching
1. The Relating of the Preaching

#### A. THE PEOPLE AND THE PREACHING

1. The Congregation
1. The Critics
1. The Converts

## **1. POLARIZATION IN ICONIUM**

### **A. THE MINISTRY OF GOD'S SERVANTS**

A. The Partnership of Their Ministry

A. The Preaching in Their Ministry

1. The Proof for Their Ministry

1. The Perseverance of Their Ministry.

### **A. THE MENACING OF GOD'S SERVANTS**

1. The Prejudice of the Enemy

1. The Polluting by the Enemy

1. The Plotting by the Enemy

1. The Preservation From the Enemy

## **1. PROBLEMS IN LYSTRA**

### **A. THE HEALTH PROBLEM**

A. The Condition of the Cripple

A. The Concern of the Cripple

1. The Curing of the Cripple

### **A. THE HONOR PROBLEM**

1. The Declaring of the Honor

1. The Denouncing of the Honor

### **A. THE HARASSMENT PROBLEM**

1. The Character of the Harassment

1. The Conquest Over the Harassment

## **1. PROCEEDING TO COMPLETION**

### **A. THE FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL**

- A. Evangelizing the City
- A. Educating the Converts

### **A. THE FOLLOW-UP OF THE CONVERTS**

- 1. Confirmation
- 1. Exhortation
- 1. Explanation
- 1. Organization
- 1. Propagation

### **A. THE FURLOUGH OF THE MISSIONARIES**

- 1. A Good Record
- 1. A Good Report
- 1. A Good Rest

## **1. POLEMICS ABOUT LEGALISM**

### **A. THE CONTENDERS FOR LEGALISM**

- A. The Creed of the Legalists
- A. The Character of the Legalists

### **A. THE CONFERENCE ABOUT LEGALISM**

- 1. The Prompting of the Conference
- 1. The Participants Sent to the Conference

1. The Path to the Conference
1. The Preliminaries to the Conference
1. The Particulars of the Conference
- A. THE COMMUNICATION AGAINST LEGALISM
  1. The Contents of the Letter
  1. The Carriers of the Letter
  1. The Consequences of the Letter
- A. THE CENSURE INVOLVING LEGALISM
  1. The Cause of the Censure
  1. The Character of the Censure

## **1. PARTING FROM BARNABAS**

- A. THE CONCERN OF PAUL
  - A. The Area of the Concern
  - A. The Attestation in the Concern
- A. THE CONFLICT OVER MARK
  1. The Stands in the Conflict
  1. The Source of the Conflict
  1. The Separation Because of the Conflict
  1. The Sequel to the Conflict
- A. THE CHANGE IN ASSOCIATES
  1. Silas
  1. Timothy

## A. THE COMMENCEMENT OF TRAVELING

1. The Commending by the Church
1. The Circuit of the Churches

## **1. PLAN OF GOD**

### A. THE DISCERNING OF GOD'S WILL

- A. The Prohibiting
- A. The Pleading
1. The Pondering

### A. THE DOING OF GOD'S WILL

1. The Promptness in Doing God's Will
1. The Prudence in Doing God's Will
1. The Patience in Doing the Will of God
1. The Piety in Doing the Will of God

### A. THE DIVIDENDS OF GOD'S WILL

1. The Physician for Paul
1. The Push by Providence
1. The Peddler of Purple

## **1. PRISONERS IN PHILIPPI**

### A. THE DISTURBANCE OF THE MISSIONARIES

- A. The Time of the Disturbance
- A. The Tool in the Disturbance

- 1. The Tactics in the Disturbance
- 1. The Termination of the Disturbance
- A. THE DETENTION OF THE MISSIONARIES
  - 1. The Avarice in the Detention
  - 1. The Attack in the Detention
  - 1. The Attitude in the Detention
  - 1. The Adventure in the Detention
- A. THE DELIVERANCE OF THE MISSIONARIES
  - 1. The Release of the Prisoners
  - 1. The Request of Paul
  - 1. The Response of the Magistrates
  - 1. The Return to the Brethren

## **1. PROPAGATING IN THESSALONICA**

- A. THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD
  - A. The Site of the Ministry
  - A. The Season of the Ministry
    - 1. The Sermons of the Ministry
    - 1. The Servants of the Ministry
    - 1. The Success of the Ministry
- A. THE MEANNESS OF THE WICKED
  - 1. The Cause of Meanness
  - 1. The Company of Meanness

1. The Conduct of Meanness
1. The Consequences of Meanness

## **1. PRUDENCE IN BEREIA**

### **A. THE DETAILS OF THEIR PRUDENCE**

- A. They Listened to the Gospel
- A. They Examined the Gospel
1. They Believed the Gospel

### **A. THE DISDAIN OF THEIR PRUDENCE**

1. The Source of the Persecution
1. The Stirring up by the Persecutors
1. The Separation Because of the Persecution

## **1. PAGANISM IN ATHENS**

### **A. THE STIRRING BECAUSE OF PAGANISM**

- A. The Extent of the Stirring
- A. The Evidence of the Stirring

### **A. THE SITUATION AMIDST PAGANISM**

1. Spiritual Complacency
1. Sterile Creeds
1. Shameful Contempt
1. Superfluous Conversing

### **A. THE SERMON AGAINST PAGANISM**



1. The Place of the Sermon
1. The Petitioning for the Sermon
1. The Preface to the Sermon
1. The Particulars of the Sermon
1. The Products of the Sermon
1. The Parting After the Sermon

## **1. PARISH OF CORINTH**

### **A. THE SIGNIFICANT CIRCUMSTANCES**

- A. The City
- A. The Couple
1. The Craft

### **A. THE STEADFAST COMMUNICATING**

1. The Contact for Communicating
1. The Charity for Communicating
1. The Compulsion for Communicating
1. The Conflict in Communicating
1. The Conversions from Communicating
1. The Consoling About Communicating
1. The Commitment in Communicating

### **A. THE SURPRISING COURT**

1. The Attack
1. The Accusation

1. The Arbitration

1. The Assault

1. The Aftermath

#### A. THE STRANGE CONCLUSION

1. His Leaving of Corinth

1. His Layover in Ephesus

1. His Lingering in Jerusalem

1. His Lodging in Antioch

### **1. PROCLAIMING IN EPHESUS**

#### A. THE TRAVELING PRELUDE

- A. The Departure From Antioch

- A. The Direction of the Apostle

1. The Discipling of the Adherents

#### A. THE TEACHING EXPERIENCES

1. The Teaching in the Streets

1. The Teaching in the Synagogue

1. The Teaching in the School

#### A. THE TRANSCENDENT MIRACLES

1. The Power of Paul

1. The Pretenders of Paul

### **1. PANDEMONIUM IN EPHESUS**

## A. THE CONTEMPLATION BEFORE THE PANDEMONIUM

### A. The Prudence of Planning

### A. The Particulars of the Plans

#### 1. The Problem in the Plans

#### 1. The Preceding With the Plans

## A. THE CAUSE OF THE PANDEMONIUM

### 1. The Primary Cause

### 1. The Preferred Cause

### 1. The Pretended Cause

## A. THE CHARACTER OF THE PANDEMONIUM

### 1. The Cry

### 1. The Crowd

### 1. The Confusion

### 1. The Capturing

### 1. The Cautioning

### 1. The Contempt

### 1. The Chanting

## A. THE CESSATION OF THE PANDEMONIUM

### 1. The Agent in the Cessation

### 1. The Arguments for the Cessation

## **1. PURSUING THE PLAN**

### A. THE STAY IN GREECE

A. His Departure to Greece

A. His Discipling in Greece

1. His Diligence in Greece

1. His Danger in Greece

1. His Devotees in Greece

A. THE SERVICE IN TROAS

1. The Day of the Service

1. The Dwelling for the Service

1. The Details of the Service

1. The Duration of the Service

1. The Distraction in the Service

A. THE SAILING TO MILETUS

1. The Pedestrian in Assos

1. The Progress of Travel

1. The Passing by Ephesus

## **1. PAUSING TO INSTRUCT**

A. THE EXAMPLE IN THE INSTRUCTION

A. The Candidness of His Ministry

A. The Consistency of His Ministry

1. The Commitment of His Ministry

1. The Condescension of His Ministry

1. The Conflicts of His Ministry

1. The Communication of His Ministry

1. The Courage of His Ministry

1. The Clearing of His Ministry

1. The Continuation of His Ministry

1. The Compassion of His Ministry

1. The Covetlessness of His Ministry

1. The Chargelessness of His Ministry

#### A. THE EXHORTING IN THE INSTRUCTION

1. The Character of the Elders

1. The Call of the Elders

1. The Commission of the Elders

1. The Congregation of the Elders

1. The Cautioning of the Elders

1. The Commending of the Elders

1. The Commanding of the Elders

#### A. THE EXIT AFTER THE INSTRUCTION

1. The Attitude of Prayer

1. The Affection for Paul

### **1. PERSISTING ABOUT JERUSALEM**

#### A. THE PROHIBITING IN TYRE

A. The Fellowship With the Saints

A. The Forbidding by the Spirit

1. The Farewell on the Shore
- A. THE PROTESTING IN CAESAREA
  1. The Entertaining by Philip
  1. The Predicting by Agabus

## **1. PURIFICATION IN JERUSALEM**

- A. THE DAYS BEFORE THE PURIFICATION
  - A. The Residing With Mnason
  - A. The Rejoicing of the Brethren
    1. The Reporting to the Leaders
- A. THE DESIRE FOR THE PURIFICATION
  1. The Cause of the Desire
  1. The Counsel in the Desire
  1. The Compliance to the Desire
- A. THE DISTURBANCE FROM THE PURIFICATION
  1. The Creation of the Disturbance
  1. The Culprits of the Disturbance
  1. The Charges of the Disturbers
  1. The Cruelty of the Disturbers
  1. The Closing by the Disturbance
  1. The Cessation of the Disturbance

## **1. PLEA BEFORE TROUBLEMAKERS**

## A. THE CREDENTIALS OF PAUL

### A. His Identification

### A. His Education

#### 1. His Dedication

## A. THE CONVERSION OF PAUL

#### 1. The Revelation of Christ

#### 1. The Response of Paul

#### 1. The Role of Ananias

## A. THE CALLING FOR PAUL

#### 1. The Prerequisite of His Calling

#### 1. The Priority of His Calling

#### 1. The Place of His Calling

#### 1. The People of His Calling

#### 1. The Protest of His Calling

## A. THE CONTEMPT FOR PAUL

#### 1. The Bias of the Crowd

#### 1. The Bloodthirstiness of the Crowd

#### 1. The Behavior of the Crowd

#### 1. The Believing of the Crowd

## **1. PROVOKING THE SANHEDRIN**

### A. THE SMITING OF PAUL

#### A. The Cause of the Smiting

A. The Command for the Smiting

1. The Condemnation of the Smiting

A. THE SCHISM OVER PAUL

1. The Prompting of the Schism

1. The Particulars of the Schism

1. The Peril of the Schism

1. The Product of the Schism

A. THE SOLACE FOR PAUL

1. The Presence of God

1. The Precept From God

1. The Praise From God

1. The Promise From God

## **1. PROTECTION FROM CONSPIRACY**

A. THE NEED OF THE PROTECTION

A. The Enemy was Dedicated

A. The Enemy was Diversified

1. The Enemy was Disrespectful

1. The Enemy was Deceitful

1. The Enemy was Deadly

1. The Enemy was Disloyal

1. The Enemy was Defiled

A. THE NEPHEW IN THE PROTECTION



1. The Alertness of the Nephew
1. The Lowliness of the Nephew
1. The Promptness of the Nephew
1. The Boldness of the Nephew
1. The Attentiveness to the Nephew
1. The Earnestness of the Nephew
1. The Quietness of the Nephew
- A. THE NATURE OF THE PROTECTION
  1. The Convoy
  1. The Communiqué
  1. The Confinement

## **1. PERFORMANCE BEFORE FELIX**

- A. THE PUBLIC TRIAL
  - A. The Accusations by Tertullus
  - A. The Answer by Paul
    1. The Action by Felix
- A. THE PRIVATE HEARINGS
  1. The Reasonings of Paul
  1. The Response of Felix

## **1. PROTESTING BEFORE FESTUS**

- A. THE PROMPTING OF THE TRIAL

A. The Visit of the Governor

A. The Vice of the Jews

A. THE PARTICULARS OF THE TRIAL

1. The Accusers

1. The Accusations

1. The Answer

1. The Appealing

1. The Appeal

**1. PROFESSION BEFORE AGRIPPA**

A. THE OCCASION FOR THE HEARING

A. The Visit of Agrippa

A. The Vexation of Festus

A. THE OCCURRENCE OF THE HEARING

1. The Arrival of Agrippa

1. The Announcement to Agrippa

1. The Answer to Agrippa

A. THE OUTCOME OF THE HEARING

1. Festus' Response

1. Agrippa's Response

1. Joint Response

**1. PERIL AT SEA**

## A. THE PROGRESS BEFORE THE STORM

A. The Start to Italy

A. The Stop at Sidon

1. The Struggle to Fair Havens

## A. THE PREDICTION ABOUT THE STORM

1. The Reason for the Prediction

1. The Repeating of the Prediction

1. The Rejection of the Prediction

## A. THE PARTICULARS OF THE STORM

1. The Storm was Sudden in Coming

1. The Storm was Severe in Consequences.

1. The Storm was Slow in Ceasing

## A. THE PROCLAMATION DURING THE STORM

1. The Moment of the Proclamation

1. The Man of the Proclamation

1. The Message of the Proclamation

## A. THE PRETENDERS IN THE STORM

1. The Circumstances of the Sailors

1. The Conduct of the Sailors

1. The Condemnation of the Sailors

## A. THE PRESERVATION IN THE STORM

1. The Preparation for Disembarking

1. The Proposal in the Disembarking

1. The Plan for the Disembarking
1. The Proficiency of the Disembarking

## **1. PROMINENCE IN MELITA**

### **A. THE PLACE OF PROMINENCE**

#### **A. THE PROTECTION INITIATING PROMINENCE**

1. The Attack Upon Paul
1. The Attitudes About Paul

#### **A. THE PERFORMANCES AMIDST PROMINENCE**

1. The Hospitality of Publius
1. The Healings by Paul
1. The Honoring by the People

## **1. PASSING TO ROME**

### **A. THE PARTICULARS OF HIS MOVE**

- A. The Ship
- A. The Seas
1. The Stops
1. The Saints
1. The Shelter

#### **A. THE PURSUIT OF HIS MINISTRY**

1. The Contacting of the Jews
1. The Communicating of the Message

## 1. The Continuation of His Work

















