

Parson to Person

ACTS 21

Thoughts on Acts 21

As the Gospel spread all over the “world,” disciples were multiplying. This growth would lend to Paul (and the others with him) meeting previously unknown believers. Meeting other members of the Christian family is always exciting. These persons would have been members of the Body of Christ, who had been added to the Church by others. Making acquaintance with these believers would bring the added encouragement of knowing that God was at work outside of Paul’s influence. It is a testimony to the fact that God is always at work—even without our help. Go figure.

One of the evidences that the disciples in Tyre were genuine believers was their testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit who was at work in them. These believers demonstrated both hearing from and acting upon the inspirations given them by His inner workings.

These believers, like others, warned Paul of impending danger in Jerusalem. In fact, several persons in Tyre warned Paul—attempting to persuade him not to go. However, the attempted cautions were unheeded and unfruitful. The same warning was repeated when Paul arrived in Caesarea through Agabus the prophet. However, Paul went on to Jerusalem anyway. Should he have gone? That is the question!

As the church grew so grew the problems. In fact, many who had not experienced direct contact with Paul (and the clear doctrines he taught) had mixed ideas and about the truth of the Gospel and the teachings Paul provided. Rumors, errors, and divisions abounded. There were even rumors suggesting that Paul taught “*all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs*” (Acts 21:21). This was untrue and needed correction.

With the Old Covenant fulfilled and the New Covenant now in effect, some would have suggested that the Jews reject Moses, stop the practice of circumcision, and reject all Jewish customs. However, Paul did not teach this, nor were the Jews commanded such.

Even though the earlier required “customs” were no longer essential, the Jews were nonetheless allowed to embrace them without violation of the Gospel—unless they believed these “customs” provided salvation. Much was needed to clarify this distinction. Therefore, the Jewish leaders sought the engagement of Paul to both demonstrate and explain the difference.

As part of the process, Paul went into the Temple with a small group of men who had taken a vow. But the Jews “*seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place’*” (Acts 21:27b–28).

When this occurred, these Jews stirred up the crowd and caused the arrest of Paul—thus fulfilling the predicted warnings Paul had repeatedly heard. However, as we will see in Chapter 22, Paul made a defense and greatly expanded his influence and the message of Jesus in Jerusalem. Yes, God worked in Paul’s ministry—whether through obedience or in disobedience. (Some wonder if it was right for Paul to take the Jewish converts to the Temple in support of their vow and/or if he should have gone to Jerusalem at all.)

Jews who celebrate their traditions and customs are not forbidden to do so as long as they understand that the Law has been fulfilled in Christ and that those customs are non-salvific but simply memorials and celebratory remembrances. On the other hand, those who keep the customs (whether Jew or Gentile) thinking that by doing so they are adding to their status in Christ or gaining the approval of God are missing the mark completely. In fact, acting in this way is Biblically forbidden.

I love you all, Pastor Paul