

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles
Week Twenty-Six
Acts 20:30-21:19

Day One

30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. 32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing.

v. 30 – It is a strong temptation for a leader to draw attention to himself (or herself), thus taking away attention from Jesus. It is difficult not to receive the applause or the praise and as if you earned or deserved it. Here Paul warned that leaders would distort the truth with one purpose in mind and that was to draw the disciples after them. Paul was very sensitive to this issue, and addressed it in the Corinthian church:

My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:11-14).

As we have stated many times in this study, the focus of the church is Jesus and His will. Anyone else who tries to “cut in” on that glory or focus is out of line. Leaders must make a conscious effort to keep people’s loyalties where they belong and not take what only belongs to God.

v. 31 – I heard someone say once that we would all be better leaders if there were more tears in what we did. Emotions can be used to manipulate people, but Paul’s tears added urgency and credibility to what he taught. He was so concerned for Jesus and His people that he was overcome with emotion when he warned them of the need to be on their guard against unscrupulous leaders and the devil, the great enemy of the Church.

And Paul’s warning is relevant today: You and I should be on our guard. We should honor and esteem the leaders that God has raised up, but never give to those leaders what only belongs to God. There are some today who did not keep guard, and the Church has suffered from an infatuation with personalities and their teachings. This has only served to fracture the body and take the focus off Jesus. **Are you guilty of this? Do you worship a leader more than God? Have you given the glory that belongs to God to someone else? If you are a leader, what safeguards have you put in place that you won’t receive what only belongs to God? Who is in your life who can address this if they see you doing it?**

v. 32 – Since Paul thought that he would never see them again, he commended them to the One who could preserve them by His grace. Paul knew his limitations as a spiritual leader and called on God to do what Paul could not do. Do you know your limitations? You will die, but you serve One who will never die. You are limited, but you serve One who has no limits. You will always do well to direct and commend those who follow you to God.

v. 33 – This was an important point for Paul. He worked as a tent maker so that he would never be perceived as one who enriched himself from his work among God's people. Oh, that modern leaders would learn from his example. And oh that God's people would have a burden to take care of God's leaders. If leaders worked to not pursue wealth and God's people worked to give God's leaders wealth, then we could avoid a lot of the foolishness that exists in churches and ministries today. But Paul did not want someone else's money and clearly communicated that in his ministry among God's people. As a follower, what can you do today to bless God's leaders in your life? As a leader, are you coveting what someone else has?

Day Two

34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. 35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" 36 When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. 37 They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him.

v. 34 – Paul worked as a tent maker and also preached the gospel. Some actually took this as a sign that he wasn't an important apostle.

This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. Don't we have the right to food and drink? Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such

things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast (1 Corinthians 9:3-15).

v. 35 – Paul explained why he did not take advantage of his right to earn a living from the gospel: 1) to set an example; 2) to show the value of work, which the Gentiles often demeaned or assigned to slaves; 3) to help the weak who would be offended by such support for Paul; 4) to show that Jesus’ words were to be acted upon and not just taught; 5) to be blessed by giving instead of receiving. **Can you see any other reasons why he did this? As you can see, this decision not to take any money but to work to support himself was a well thought out philosophy. Have you thought out your own leadership philosophy and values? I have and mine can be found on my website at <http://www.purposequest.com/philosophy.htm>.**

vs. 36&37 – When Paul was finished they prayed and wept together. Paul was an excellent pastor, although he never stayed long enough in one place to establish long-term relationships. Yet he engendered strong feelings wherever he went: people either loved him or didn’t care for him at all. Don’t expect everyone to love you or your leadership style as you lead. In part, God will allow this so that you stay humble and the people stay focused on Him and His will. This can actually be a blessing to you and prevent you from working to draw disciples after you, fulfilling your need to be needed or admired.

Day Three

38 What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship. 21:1 After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Cos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. 2 We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. 3 After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo.

v. 38 – The elders who were there grieved at the thought of never seeing Paul again. What a great testimony to Paul’s leadership. Even though he was a controversial figure, those that knew him best and who had been the recipients of his tender care loved him. And of course Ephesus was a great church in large part due to the grace of God that was with Paul’s work among the Gentiles.

v. 1 – Luke was with Paul during this visit, so the account we have received is firsthand. And Luke indicated how hard it was for them to leave the Ephesian elders, for they had to “tear themselves away.” Leadership is often about making hard decisions and this must have been hard for Paul. But he knew he had to be in Jerusalem, and he was willing to do whatever Jesus wanted him to do, no matter how painful.

How often I have protected myself from those hard decisions of what to do and what not to do. I have all too often been concerned about what other people thought about my decisions, or more precisely, concerned with what they would think of me. But Paul had

one mind and that was to please Jesus. No wonder he was so effective! Paul didn't try to please everyone, just Jesus. And that enabled him to accomplish much and still speak to the church today.

Are you of one mind, or are you trying to please many different people or constituencies? Do you make decisions based on what people will think or what God thinks?

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me (Philippians 1:21-26).

v. 2-4 – Luke provided the itinerary of the cargo ship that took them toward Jerusalem. I doubt if a cargo ship was the utmost in travel comfort, but it was available. I have traveled some and know what it's like to be uncomfortable as you go. I'm sure Paul had his share of travel stories about close calls, lost luggage and seasickness. As I write this, I am on a cruise ship with all the comforts you can imagine. Yet when the seas act up and the waves are high, many people get motion sickness. Paul did write:

Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked (2 Corinthians 11:25-28).

Are you willing to be uncomfortable in God's service? Are you willing to give up some of your creature comforts for God's sake and the sake of those who don't yet know Him? What can you do today to prove that you are willing to put aside your wellbeing for that of another? For the cause of Christ?

Day Four

4 Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. 5 But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. 6 After saying good-bye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home. 7 We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day.

v. 4 – This is an interesting verse, for it seems to say that the Spirit was warning Paul not to go to Jerusalem. I choose to read it that the Spirit was warning Paul what was ahead in

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Jerusalem, and the disciples were urging him not to go. I believe that the Spirit does prophesy through other believers, but it is always the job of the recipient to judge the prophecy to determine the meaning and relevance. There are two tendencies with prophesy: one is to accept it without judgment and the other is to reject it outright. Both are wrong. Prophesy is to be carefully considered and only accepted when it bears witness with the recipient's spirit. Here is a quick reference to Paul's instruction on prophecy in the church:

Do not treat prophecies with contempt (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21).

Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:39-40).

Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said (1 Corinthians 14:29).

v. 5 – I don't think the believers existed in large numbers in many of the towns mentioned in Acts. Here we see that whole families escorted Paul out to the ship, kneeling to pray on the beach. I doubt if that was a large crowd. Yet look how bold and open they were to kneel down in public to pray. And there are times I have felt self-conscious to pray over my food in a restaurant! I have watched Muslims kneel down to pray in airports and I have watched Jews pray on airplanes, standing and rocking back and forth from the waist up. When I see that, I think of what Jesus said:

If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels (Luke 9:26-27).

How bold are you to publicly demonstrate your faith in Jesus?

vs. 6&7 – It's almost like Paul is on a farewell tour of the local churches as he goes to Jerusalem to face his trials and hardships. The Spirit gave him some measure of joy to see the saints before he entered into the next chapter in his ministry, which would take him to Rome and its government. It was like the Spirit wanted Paul to see firsthand the fruit of his past labors, perhaps as an encouragement for what was about to come. It's important at times to review what the Lord has done in your life and how He has used you. Someone once recommended that every person have an "atta boy (or girl)" file—a place where you can put stories, reminders and letters that tell how the Lord used you for good.

I have such a file for my email called "testimonies." In it I keep all the emails that people have written to say how much The Monday Memo or these Bible studies have helped them. I read these emails when I get discouraged or when I am starting a new project for which I haven't yet had the chance to see any results. **Do you have an "atta boy" file? What do you do to encourage yourself when you're down? Have you done enough**

to warrant an “atta boy” file? If you don’t have one, why not consider starting one, or doing something to keep track of how the Lord has used you for His purposes.

Day Five

8 Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. 9 He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. 10 After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

v. 8 – Philip was one of seven men chosen in Acts 6:1-7 to take care of the widows. Stephen was another one of the seven, and neither man seemed to have done much to care for those widows as they embraced their respective ministries. Stephen became an early martyr and Philip was an evangelist whom God used to convert the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8.

It seems that those seven deacons, however, took on a special identify, for here he was referred to as “one of the Seven.” I find this interesting, for it seems that they were chosen for their spiritual credentials and not necessarily for their ability to oversee the widow relief program. And we have absolutely no indication as to the kind of job they did to help those widows. I say that because the church still has a tendency to hire or appoint based on all kinds of criteria except for someone’s ability to get things done. We tend to choose nice people or successful people instead of productive people.

v. 9 – Philip’s daughters must have had a good reputation among the Church at-large or else Luke would not have mentioned them. It is quite a testimony when God’s servants have children who serve the Lord. That speaks highly of the job that Philip did as a father; it speaks even more highly of God’s grace that was with that family. You do the best you can raising your children, but ultimately it is God’s grace as to what they choose as their life’s path. As parents, we follow the admonition found in Proverbs:

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it (Proverbs 22:6).

v. 10 – Caesarea is close to Jerusalem, about a two-hour bus trip today. A stop there is standard on any tour of Israel today and it is a beautiful site on the Mediterranean Sea. We aren’t told why this prophet Agabus came down there, but it must have been in part to see Paul. Many believe that this aspect of the prophetic—in some manner foretelling the future—is the main thrust of prophetic ministry. And certainly it is a part of what some prophets do. But a prophet is adept at communicating and interpreting what God is doing; they serve as God’s mouthpiece to His people and to the nations. At times they do warn about the future, but they aren’t limited to that expression.

v. 11 – Agabus took an article of Paul’s clothing and warned him as others had been warning him, but with specific insight that he would be bound and handed over to the Gentiles. This was reminiscent of what Jesus predicted about his own ministry:

Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again" (Luke 18:31-33).

So Paul was following in Jesus’ footsteps, which meant that his beloved city, Jerusalem, was to be a source of suffering and pain for him. Someone said that a person’s leadership is measured by their ability to endure pain. If that’s true, then Paul was indeed a great leader. **How is your ability to endure pain? I think in part it will depend on the cause for which you are suffering. If something is important to you, you will endure whatever you must because it is connected to something of value. So how much are you willing to suffer for Jesus? How important is He and His work to you. Don’t answer too quickly. I take people to Africa and watch them suffer over not having cable television! That’s not even what I’m talking about!**

If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good" (1 Peter 4:15-19).

Day Six

12 When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." 14 When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done." 15 After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.

v. 12 – This offers us important insight into how a believer should respond to a prophetic word. Agabus delivered his message that Paul would suffer when he arrived in Jerusalem. Paul’s fellow believers attempted to interpret what Paul should do as a result of receiving that prophetic warning. It is a common for others to try and interpret God’s will for others. Often this is done with the best of intentions; at times it is done out of selfishness or genuine concern for the other person.

But no one, absolutely no one, can ultimately interpret God’s will for your life. Only you can determine and carry out God’s will for your life. You can and should listen to what others have to say and carefully and prayerfully consider it. But you must not surrender

the relationship you should have with God to anyone else, whether it is your spouse, parent, pastor, or friend. I wonder if this is in part what Jesus meant when he said:

“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:37-39).

Have you listened to anyone more than God? Have you been more concerned with what others have thought about you and the will of God? If so, what are you prepared to do to correct that?

v. 13 – Paul was moved by their concern for his welfare, but this did not alter his course or his priorities. Whenever people express concern over my safety when I travel, I respond, “I gave my life to the Lord on May 16, 1973. I didn’t loan it to Him, only to take it back when things were hard or dangerous.” **How about you? Did you give your life to the Lord, or loan it to Him for safekeeping? If you gave it to Him, are you still acting like you loaned it?**

Christians should be the most radical people on earth, armed with the same attitude that Paul expressed here. I am not recommending that you be reckless, but at the same time you can’t be overcautious so as to protect your life. Paul was ready to suffer and die for the cause of Jesus. I must be ready to do the same.

v. 14 – The people saw that their appeals were not going to change Paul’s course of action, so they commit the situation to God’s grace and released Paul to God’s care and providence. **Is there anyone that you are trying to protect and whom you need to release to God’s grace and care? Your child, grandchild, spouse or friend? You cannot prevent someone you love from going through difficult times if it’s God’s will. So stop trying and release them to God fully and completely.**

v. 15 – With the knowledge of what was ahead, Paul and his party made preparations to go to Jerusalem. Someone said that courage isn’t the lack of fear, but functioning in the midst of fear. If that’s true, and we’ve seen that Paul was at times fearful, then we can safely assume that Paul was courageous. And you and I must also be courageous if we are carry out God’s will and purpose for our lives.

Day Seven

16 Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples. 17 When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. 18 The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. 19 Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

v. 16 – This is the only mention of Mnason in the Bible. How special that he was one who offered hospitality to God’s servants. He was from Cyprus as was Barnabas, so I would suspect that they were at least acquainted with one another, if not close friends. **Is your home open to the saints? Do you practice hospitality, as we are commanded to do?**

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling (1 Peter 4:9-10).

v. 17 – The church in Jerusalem received Paul warmly, but there was obvious tensions between Paul’s work and the work of the Jews in Jerusalem. I have written about these tensions in previous studies, pointing out the great gap that existed between Paul, the Roman citizen and Gentile apostle, and Peter, the Jewish businessman who was never comfortable working with Gentiles.

There are still some Christians with whom we will more closely identify than others. Perhaps it is their personality, calling, or tendencies. **We must love all our fellow believers, but I don’t think we must like them. Does that make sense? Are there some in your church that you aren’t particularly fond of? You must love them, but you may not wish to spend much time with them. I think that is a normal occurrence.**

vs. 18&19 – This is James, the brother of Jesus and head of the Jerusalem church. The elders were present with James to hear Paul give a report of his work among the Gentiles. There is no question that James and the elders accepted this work, but I don’t think they liked this work. They were committed to their culture and found it hard to escape its limitations. Paul, having been raised outside Jerusalem, found it easier to identify with, or at least work with, the Gentiles.

Paul gave a detailed report of what God had done through his ministry. This is what’s referred to as magnifying the Lord—taking what He has done and making it easier for others to see and understand. It isn’t bragging or boasting, just giving God credit for what He has done with and through you.

What report would you give to James today, if he were alive, concerning what God is doing through you? Could you tell him? Would you tell him? What would you tell him? How long would it take to give him your report? That may be a good exercise for today: give some thought to the report you could give to any interested party concerning what the Lord has done through your life and ministry.