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A0933 – August 16, 2009 – Acts 21:15-26 – The Law Of Moses & Jewish Christians

Last week we dealt with Acts 21:1-14 and we said there was a minor point and a major point. The minor point had to do with the doctrine of inspiration. The biblical doctrine of inspiration simply states that God is the primary author of Scripture but He used human authors to enscripturate it, protecting their personalities, vocabulary and so forth yet ensuring that the words are the very words of God and not man. And the question we touched last week was “How did the human authors get the material of Scripture?” What modes were legitimate? Because Luke uses a mode described very plainly for us in the first of this two-volume work, the Gospel of Luke. It says he researched these things well, investigating eye witnesses. Is that valid? Yes, God the Holy Spirit used that to bring us inerrant original data in the Gospel of Luke and Acts. We brought this in last week because some of the eyewitnesses he investigated are mentioned in v 9. Eusebius tells us these four ladies were highly sought after informants for the period of Jewish Christianity, Acts 1-7. Philip was their father and he was an eyewitness of Acts 8, so he’s the main informant for Acts 8. And Luke was with Paul in Acts 21 and he’s interviewing him as to events from Acts 9-28. So personal research is a valid means God the Holy Spirit used to bring us Scripture.

The second point, the major point had to do with the parallels between Paul and Christ. These two men as they near the end of their lives track very closely and Luke has preserved for us deliberate parallels, embedded in the Greek text, that show us the mentality of a martyr and the kind of suffering these people have to go through on their way to being martyred. And we said there are at least three parallels. First, both Jesus and Paul knew they were going to be martyred, they knew persecution was coming in advance. Second, both men had others try to stop them, try to weaken their resolve and, we

might add, in every case it was genuine believers who had been satanically infiltrated. They had in mind the will of man and therefore they were opposed to God in these attempts to turn these men away from the course God had given them and which must be accomplished. Satan is always trying to undo the plan of God. And third, both men stayed firm to their course, they suffered mental anguish and peer pressure along the way, but in the end they finished the course. They were faithful to God and the plan of God. And this showed us the mentality of a martyr and what it's like to know you're on a crash course, without knowing all the details, but knowing you're going down and submitting to God's will all along the way. That's the lesson of last week.

Now we come to Acts 21:15-26 and the question we come to today is the question of the relationship of the Jewish Christian to the Law of Moses. What's the role of the Law of Moses in the life of a Jewish person who believes in Jesus Christ? It appears that the NT says that Christ is the end of the Mosaic Law for all who believe. If that's the case and since the Ten Commandments are part and parcel of the Mosaic Law, then it would seem that the Ten Commandments also do not apply today and that would be a radical position indeed. This is an issue that has not been resolved yet in the Book of Acts. The question of the Gentile believer's relationship to the OT Law was solved in Acts 15 at the Jerusalem Council but the question of the Jewish believer's relationship to that Law has not. So we have this very important issue to resolve.

Today we pick up in Acts 21:15 where we left off last time. They're in the city of Caesarea along the coast and Paul has had numerous warnings about the kind of treatment he's going to get in Jerusalem and the believers have tried to stop him but finally they give in to the will of the Lord.

Now in v 15 we read, **After these days we got ready**, the word means they packed up their bags **and started on our way up to Jerusalem**. It was quite a journey, about 50-64 miles depending on which road you took. But you notice they went **up to Jerusalem**. You always read they went up, not down, because it doesn't matter from which direction you're going, Jerusalem is up. That's because it sits on a mountainous ridge running north and south through the land. So even today if you travel the land of Israel, when you go to Jerusalem the bus will be going up and so they're going up.

Verse 16, **Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge.** Now you can see these lodging arrangements were made in advance. This was set up probably by some of the disciples from Caesarea that when we take Paul to Jerusalem we'll have him stay with **Mnason. Mnason was a disciple of long standing**, the Greek simply says "an early disciple" which means he was one of the first converts to Christianity. He's a Jewish Christian but he's from Cyprus, the same island Barnabas was from and we think he was converted on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. He was one of the 3,000 converts on that day. Now he lives in Jerusalem, though the western text indicates he lived in a village about half-way between Caesarea and Jerusalem.ⁱ Nevertheless, I think he lived in Jerusalem. Why stay with this early disciple? This is a strategic move and it shows the wisdom of these early believers. This man was one of the first converts, that was back in AD33, and now we're in the ballpark of AD58, so it's been 25 years. We don't know how old Mnason was but we do know that many of the original Christians were dying off and everyday there was one less. And we know what that's like in our country because we have WWII veterans and everyday hundreds of them die and we're losing them fast. And so as their generation comes to a close we give honor to those men, these people are long-standing heroes in our country. They treated these original Christians the same way, they were accorded a kind of honor.ⁱⁱ And it's very important that they get one of these original disciples on Paul's side. Paul is not an original disciple. Paul is the new kid on the block as far as the Christians around Jerusalem are concerned and therefore they need political points, shall we say. So this why they lodge with **Mnason**.

Verse 17, After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. 18And the following day Paul went in with us to James. The question is **James** who? There are many James' in the NT. Actually I've told you before there are no James'. I'm sorry if you thought that was a biblical name but it isn't. The Greek behind this is *Iacobus* or Jacob and we get James out of the Latin translation of this that happened centuries later. But in any case they do have the same meaning, they both mean "supplanter, one who supplants." Now the James here is not James the Apostle. James the Apostle was beheaded by Herod Agrippa I in Acts 12 but then at the end of Acts 12 Herod Agrippa I gets his. So this isn't that James. This is James, the half-brother of Christ. Yes, Jesus had half-brothers and half-sisters. Some

denominations teach the perpetual virginity of Mary. And I'm sorry if you accord her that kind of a position because it's completely out of line with Scripture. If Mary were here today she'd say only with Jesus was I a virgin; after that I consummated my marriage with Joseph and we had other sons and daughters. The important point being that Jesus was born of a virgin. God orchestrated His supernatural birth to avoid the Coniah curse of Jer 22 and to avoid the sin nature curse of Rom 5. There is only one sinless member of the human race and that is Jesus Christ. But Jesus Christ did have brothers and sisters; half-brothers and sisters, of course, because Joseph wasn't Jesus' biological father. He did father others and here's one of them - **James**, he wrote the NT epistle of James and the epistle of Jude was written by another half-brother of Jesus. So these men became prominent in the early church. The interesting thing about them is as far as we can tell none of his brothers or sisters believed He was the Messiah until after His resurrection. And I've always found this encouraging for those of you who have unbelievers in your family. Here was Jesus Christ raised right alongside his brothers and sisters and he must have been Christ-like. You can't say He was a bad witness and yet none of them believed in Him till after the resurrection. So don't go blaming yourself for being a poor witness to your family or something; we're not condoning being a poor witness, but even Jesus' brothers and sisters didn't believe in Him and they were raised with Him.

Now, after the resurrection Jude did believe and James did too and he's the half-brother here. James had risen in the church to become the head of the Jerusalem Church. The local Jerusalem population called him James the Just (Heggesipus). So he had a good reputation both in and outside the church though some would question his justice due to the peculiar situation he puts Paul into in the following verses.

So Paul is gathered with James and all the elders of Jerusalem. You can see this is an important meeting, everybody showed up for this one. The apostles don't show and that's interesting. But apparently they had other things going. These men did missionary work too. Don't get the idea that because Acts centers on Peter and Paul that the other apostles sat at home and ate falafel's. They were out doing all kinds of missionary works and if you're interested in what they did I've related some of their history in Lesson 4 of this series. You can order the CD or get it online. But Luke is not interested in everything those other apostles did. Why not? Because Luke is interested

in how the gospel moves from Jerusalem to Rome. He's not interested in how it goes from Jerusalem to India. So keep that in mind with today's text because if you don't keep that in mind you're going to have the wrong focus. The wrong focus was Paul right or wrong in what he's going to do in later verses? Now we have to deal with the question but by the time we resolve it I hope you see that the reason Luke put this event with Paul in the text is not to solve whether he was right or wrong, but how God the Holy Spirit got the gospel to Rome. And what happens with Paul is key to that.

So v 19, **After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.**

Now notice **one by one** he's going to **relate** the third missionary journey. Paul literally sat down and for probably several hours he went through painstaking detail. He said I set out from Antioch and I went by land up to the Galatia region and I went to all the churches I planted there and I re-enforced them, answered their questions and so forth. Then I went west toward Asia and I came to Ephesus, I stayed there almost three years and evangelized all Asia. Then I went over to Macedonia and I went back to the churches I planted there in Philippi and Thessalonica and eventually I went down to Achaia and dealt with the problems at Corinth. You'll notice these are all places he'd been on journey one or journey two. So the emphasis in this report is not on evangelism though Paul did some of that, but on the advanced training in these areas. So that's the emphasis of this report and he clearly gives God the glory, he says I relate **the things which God had done...through** my ministry. God did the work, God gets the credit, God gets the glory.

Verse 20 **And when they heard it they began glorifying God;** now I have to admit from the text it doesn't sound like they were that interested in Paul's report. They give God the glory but look what they say next, **and they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; 21 and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. 22 "What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.** In other words, Paul, that's great and all but we've got more "pressing issues." It doesn't say they didn't care much about Paul's

report, it just gives a strong impression that they don't because they instantly change the topic. And now we have to deal with another problem here and that concerns whether Paul was right or wrong in doing what he's going to do. So let's work through the text.

Now look, let me try to encapsulate the problem for you. Notice what James says in v 20, we've got **thousands of Jews who have believed** and that word **thousands** is *myriads*, but myriad means "tens of thousands" and so, at minimum we have twenty thousand Jewish believers running around Jerusalem. You say, what, are you kidding me, twenty thousand? Yes, and that's minimum. You shouldn't be too surprised. In Acts 4:4 it was said that there were about 5,000 men who had believed and that doesn't include women or children. In Acts 5:14 it says there were multitudes of men and women. And so this is not mere hyperbole. This is a very real problem they have on their hands. They've got over twenty thousand Jewish believers on their hands and, get this, **they are all zealous for the Law**. So that describes the particular kind of believers we are talking about. Jewish believers zealous for the Law of Moses. There are two kinds of Jews in this passage. We've met the two categories earlier in Acts 6 when they had the widows dispute; that dispute was between the Hellenistic widows and the native widows. The differences caused a problem. Well, now the same two groups are involved. In verse 20 there are Jews that are **zealous for the Law** and these are the natives of the land of Israel. They were provincial, they never moved out of their little box in Jerusalem. They were the extreme conservatives. They thought they were the real deal because they lived in Jerusalem, so they thought they were superior. That's the first category of Jew here in the text.

The second category of Jews are described in v 21 as **Jews who are among the Gentiles**. These were the Hellenists and they lived outside the land of Israel. Hellenists is just a term that referred to Greek culture and these Jews got labeled Hellenists because from the native's perspective these people had been influenced by Greek culture, they were tainted by foreign elements which is why they were looked down on. These Jews had been out in the world, they were not provincial, and they were more cosmopolitan in outlook. They had a broader experience base and they tended to think outside the box of Jerusalem and the Jewish people. We'd say they were more liberal. And so

you have these two categories of Jews with two different outlooks; we'll call them the natives and the Hellenists.

Now here's the interesting thing: in the Book of Acts it's the more liberal Jews, the Hellenists that are on the forefront of every missionary journey. Just think back when the church was isolated to Jerusalem. How many chapters? Acts 2, Acts 3, Acts 4, Acts 5, Acts 6, Acts 7, it's all Jerusalem, we're not going to budge, we're happy right here. Who's the guy that starts pushing to break out of Jerusalem? Stephen. And Stephen paid a heavy price for that. Was Stephen native or a Hellenist? A Hellenist. Then we come to Paul, the missionary par-excellence. Who's Paul? He's been trained in Jerusalem but was he a native or Hellenist? Another Hellenist. Every move recorded in the Book of Acts outside of Jerusalem is led by a Hellenist. Why is that? Because they had a wider view of the world, they had a wider view of the plan of God, they saw the wider implications of the cross of Christ for the Gentile world. And so they were anxious to take the gospel out, let's move out of Jerusalem into the Gentile world.

But the provincial Jews were not interested in moving out. They are the one's here described as **zealous for the Law**. Now in America we don't have many good examples of how serious they really were. We're accustomed to American rulers who are very diplomatic, they're kings of compromise. So I have to take you to what I think is the best illustration in modern times, extremist Islam. All Muslims are not extremist but the 10% that are demonstrate this principle very well. These people are zealous for world domination and so when you go to the negotiation table with them they're not interested in negotiation. They're interested in controlling you or killing you and taking your property. When you enter into the room they're telling you this is the way it's going to be. They're not interested in moving an inch. This is why in the 1970's when the Israeli officials would negotiate about the land and people would ask, how much land are you going to annex and they said, we're not moving an inch, that's our land, it's ours by divine right and we're keeping all of it. What's happened since the 1970's? Inch-by-inch they've given it up. They've given up the Sinai, they've given up Gaza and they've given up Judea and Samaria. Why did they do that? Pressure. Pressure to cower to the extremist Islam agenda. For them it's a contest of who's the stronger people. And if you're not the stronger people you have no right to exist. And so, historically, Israel has bent to their demands and Arabs

interpret that as a sign of weakness. Then you go to the negotiation table again, same thing happens, they get stronger and you get weaker. And this is the game that's being played. These people are zealous and they are going to get their way. They are not interested in compromise. Now that's all I have to compare these Jews to. They are zealous for the Law and this is the way it is and Paul needs to get in line.

Now obviously James and the elders of Jerusalem couldn't do anything about these people. Otherwise they would have solved the problem. But here comes the problem himself, Paul, and we'll lay it on him, he can solve the problem since he is at the root of the problem. Which is why some people say, James, that's not a very nice thing to do.

Now what was the problem? Well, they've got their Law over here and they're not going to budge. And someone has come down the pike, v 21, and told them Paul's teaching contrary to their Law. He's teaching **all the Jews...to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.** And the **customs** there is sort of a catch-all to say, Paul's teaching against the whole Jewish way of life. So let's deal first with the **forsaking of Moses.** Is this a true accusation? Had Paul indeed taught this? First let's go back to Acts 13:38. This is Paul's sermon in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch. This was an address to Jews. What's the issue? Did Paul forsake Moses? Verse 38, "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him [that's Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, ³⁹and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses." Now you see a very clear a contrast between what belief in Christ can accomplish vs what the Law of Moses could not accomplish. Very clear. The key thing is in the word "freed." In v 38 it's used twice. It's the Greek word *dikaioo* and if you're a student of the Greek you know immediately what that word means, "justified." So let's read it again, but this time replace "freed" with "justified." Paul says "and through Him everyone who believes is justified from all things, from which you could not be justified through the Law of Moses. So very clearly what is Paul's doctrine? That justification before God is not by keeping the Law of Moses but by faith in Jesus Christ.

Now what do we mean by justification? We mean nothing less than the perfect imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ to our account. This is what

the Protestant Reformation was all about; this is what tore Europe to shreds in the 16th century. And still very few people understand it. Justification is not about being baptized by the Spirit, justification is not about the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in my heart, justification is about a legal decision made in the courtroom of heaven. So don't get confused. People will talk about grace and faith and often what they mean is that God gave them a little grace to help them be a little better and God gave them a little more grace and this helped them get a little better and that's all talk about grace but its non-sense. That's not God's grace in justification. That's using God's grace as a step-ladder to get good enough to go to heaven. That's not how it works. How it works is at the moment of faith God makes a decision in heaven that you have in your account the perfect righteousness of Christ. And at that moment, I don't care what you do after that fact, nothing is going to change that court decision. It's been decided. That's justification, the legal transaction that occurs at the moment a human being expresses faith in Christ.

Now let's turn to Rom 4 to look at the issue of **circumcision**. Did Paul teach Jews not to circumcise their children? Rom 4 is one of the great passages of Scripture on justification by faith. What we just got through talking about. And here we have the two great examples of justification and everywhere Paul would go he'd intersect with these Judaizers that said you've gotta be circumcised Paul. If you're not circumcised then you're going to hell, then Paul would whip out this argument. This is an absolutely irrefutable argument. I've never seen anyone even give an answer to this argument. Here's the argument, in Rom 4:1, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God." Now here's the thing, Abraham is Paul's example and he says, now look guys, if Abraham was justified by works before God then he's got something to boast about, he's got kudos with God but that's not going to fly because of v 3. "For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." Quotation from where? Check your margin. Gen 15:6 and Gen 15:6 is in a verb tense that pushes Abraham's faith in God back to Gen 12. And that's when Abraham was credited with righteousness, that's justification. He was declared righteous at that point, not in his heart, in heaven. Now come down to v 9 for the final part of what Paul taught. This is the question of circumcision. "Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on

the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." ¹⁰How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised?" That's a very good question to ask. When Abraham was justified in Gen 12 was he circumcised? Paul answers, "Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;" it's perfectly clear, if the father of the Jewish nation Abraham was justified before he was circumcised then is circumcision necessary to be justified? Obviously not. So he goes on v 11 to show it's the same for Jew and Gentile, it's all the same, "and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, ¹²and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised." So we're back to faith - faith alone, no works, no circumcision.

Now it may sound easy so far. But now I'm going to make it hard. Some of you may wonder why you aren't taking us to Galatians. Galatians is the great book on justification by faith and the argument that you should not be circumcised. The reason I'm not taking you there is for one simple fact. Galatians is written to tell Gentile believers not to get circumcised. The issue in our passages is whether Jewish believers should get circumcised.

What have we said so far? We've said a) the Law of Moses doesn't justify (Acts 13), b) Abraham was justified before he was circumcised (Rom 4) and c) justification is by faith alone (Acts 13 and Rom 4). Now turn to Acts 16. I present you with a problem. Acts 16:3, Paul is up in the Galatian region and he meets a man by the name of Timothy. What does Paul do with him in v 3? "Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek." Now you say Paul, why did you do this, you know circumcision is unnecessary. Why did you violate grace? Hold on, slow down. There was a little Jewish law that said if you have a mother who is Jewish but your father is Greek then you don't circumcise the baby; you let the baby grow up and when he's full grown he gets the choice, do you want to identify with the Gentiles or the Jews? And if he wanted to identify with the Jews he would be circumcised, but it was his choice. Now the verse says Paul wanted him to go with him and the reason is given in the verse - because of the Jews who were

in those parts. In other words here's Paul, Paul's got Silas with him, Paul and Silas are Jews and then there's Timothy. Everyone knows Timothy's father's a Gentile so if we take him we're going to have problems, unless - unless somehow we can say he's a Jew. So the principle Paul uses here is To the Jew I became a Jew and he says Timothy, would you like to become a Jew for the sake of this mission, this way we can get in the synagogues and we can preach the gospel. So, you can say Paul said elsewhere don't get circumcised, but this is a special case, it wasn't for salvation, it was so they could interact with Jews for the gospel.

But turn now to Acts 18:18. Here Paul's at Corinth. He's enjoyed protection from the Lord for a year and a half, he's preached the word and he's about to leave on a ship and what do we read? "Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow." Paul? The great man of grace took a Nazirite vow? That's Numb 6, that's under the Law of Moses. What are you doing Paul? Don't you know you violated grace? Paul's going to get involved in another vow in our text today.

But hold your horses and turn to Acts 20:6. All we're doing now is accumulating evidence, when we've got it all before us we'll come back and try to answer the question. Here Paul's at Philippi and what's he do there? "We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread," Why did they wait till after the feast of unleavened bread? Because Paul kept the Feasts. That's another feature of the Law of Moses. Drop down to verse 16, here we see Paul again, this time in a hurry. Why? "to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost." Another Jewish Feast day.

Now, go back to our text, Acts 21:22. What we know now is that much of what Paul taught seems to be in contradiction to his actions. He said justification is by faith alone, not by the Law of Moses, not by circumcision, but then he kept portions of the Law of Moses and had Timothy circumcised. Now we come to this charge.

Recap, about twenty-thousand Jewish believers are saying that Paul teaches to forsake the Law of Moses and don't circumcise your children. The Jerusalem elders haven't solved the problem so they throw it on Paul. V 22,

“What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. You gotta do something Paul, you can’t hide out, they’re going to find out you’re here. V 23, **“Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; 24take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law.** So, in other words, Paul, we don’t believe your teaching that, so go do this and that will put the whole thing to rest. There are these **four men who were under a vow.** This is a Nazirite vow described in Numb 6:1-21. These were voluntary vows - you chose of your own volition to vow something or other to God and eventually they expired. These were temporary vows and when they expired you would go down to the Temple with your sacrifices to be released from the vow. Now before you could go into the Temple with your sacrifices you had to be purified and so these four men are going to have to be purified. Paul is not under the vow but he’s been out of the land of Israel and any Jew who left the land of Israel was considered unclean because he’d been out among the Gentiles. So Paul can’t go into the Temple area without purification, they say, go with these four and get purified with them and do something else, v 24. **Pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads;**ⁱⁱⁱ Now you can go back and read about the expenses in Numb 6:13-18. It was very expensive because what they had to purchase were animals for sacrifice; one male lamb, one ewe lamb, one ram, a basket of unleavened cakes and flour with oil, a grain offering and a drink offering. Now that’s a lot of money. You have to buy that for each of the four men. What’s James’ argument? Paul, put your money where your mouth is. This will prove you **walk orderly; keeping the Law** of Moses. There will be no question if you do this. So, in v 26 Paul does it.

And you think to yourself, hmm, Paul, what are you doing here? What you’re doing is dangerous. You’ve preached grace, you’ve preached the Law of Moses can’t justify, you’ve preached circumcision can’t justify, but you have taken a vow yourself earlier, you circumcised Timothy. Now you’re doing this thing in the Temple. So what’s going on? I’m confused Paul about what you’re doing.

Turn first to Acts 24:16. I think at least this passage will help us get in Paul’s mind at the time. This is where he’s giving his defense before Felix. At this point he’s already been arrested and imprisoned and he says in his *apologia*,

“In view of this [the resurrection], I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience *both* before God and before men. ¹⁷“Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings;” Now that’s referring back to where we are in chapter 21. He came to Jerusalem to bring these alms, these financial contributions from the Gentile churches. The second reason he came was “to present offerings,” those are sacrifices. Some commentators say Paul was coming to bring his own sacrifices; we don’t know for sure but if he was that would raise even more questions. But v 18, “in which they found me *occupied* in the temple, having been purified, without *any* crowd or uproar.” Now, what’s he saying? Remember, this is his courtroom defense. And all he’s saying is I didn’t do anything wrong. And I think v 16 ties in closely with this, Paul hadn’t violated his conscience. Paul didn’t think he did anything wrong going into that Temple and purifying himself and paying their expenses.

Let me summarize what I think the word of God is teaching. On one hand, for a Jewish believer it is not necessary to obey the Law of Moses but it is permissible to obey the Law of Moses. As long as a Jewish believer does not obey the Law to be justified or to be sanctified he has the freedom to follow it. Apparently it didn’t bother Paul and apparently what Paul taught was that it was not necessary but it was permissible.

But I’ll tell you, right or wrong it bothers me. It confuses things. Let’s say that Paul went into the Temple and did this not because he thought it was necessary but simply because it’s an area of freedom. I do it because I’m free to do it but it’s not required. The Jewish believers he’s doing this for think it is required. So what are they going to think when he goes into the Temple and does this? They’re going to think Paul is saying we must follow the Law of Moses. And that bothers me.

Now, to conclude let’s turn to 1 Cor 9:20. I want to show you how this can’t solve the problem. 1 Corinthians had already been written so this Scripture was in circulation and if you’d cared to you read what Paul wrote you could have hunted down a copy yourself. Verse 20, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law *though not being myself under the Law*, so that I might win those who are under the Law; ²¹to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win

those who are without law.” What’s the one phrase you read over and over in that passage? Why did Paul become all these things? To win them to Christ. Now, does that have any application to what Paul did in Acts 21? Who was he doing that for in Acts 21? Jews who’d already been won to Christ. So, this doesn’t help answer.

Now, what’s the conclusion? I took you through all that. What can you leave me with? Paul didn’t think he did anything wrong but I think he was on very thin ice. I think we can say without a doubt that he misled twenty-thousand plus Jewish believers into thinking that Paul was saying we must walk orderly according to the Law of Moses. And that’s not a biblical conclusion, that’s not what Paul believed, that’s not what Paul taught. We are not under the Law of Moses as a rule of life. The entirety of the Law of Moses was set aside, including the Ten Commandments. That was a unit of Law for the OT nation of Israel. We are the Church and we are under the Law of Christ. Some of the laws are the same but the important thing to understand is that we are not under the Law of Moses. Although there are wisdom principles we can learn from it

But the real question we haven’t even answered yet. And that is this. Why did Luke write this? Why is this in his Acts of the Holy Spirit? Luke never tells us whether Paul was right or wrong. He’s not even interested in that. What Luke is interested in showing us is how the gospel got to Rome. Since this event in Paul’s life resulted in his going to Rome, Luke records it.

This is the third time we have seen a situation that has appeared sinful and yet God has used it to expand the church. In Acts 6 He used a church fight over the widow distributions to cause the events which led to the gospel busting out of Jerusalem. No one is said to be right or wrong, only that God used a church fight to fulfill a stage in the great commission. The second event is Acts 14 when Paul and Barnabas have a fight over whether to take John Mark along or not. The text never says who was right or wrong. It only says this is what happened. Luke’s interest again is showing not who was right or wrong but that as a result of the division the gospel went out along two roads rather than just one. And now we see Paul go into the Temple in Acts 21 and do his purification vows and in the end God is going to use this to take the gospel to Rome. What’s the principle that we are to learn from this? That the question of Paul’s rightness or wrongness is a mute question. The

point is that God uses us, sinful or not, to accomplish His purposes. Rom 8:28, “God works all things together for good for those who love God...” And that is a principal that shows God is sovereign, God is in control and He is so in control that he can take all your mess and all my mess and He can turn it around to accomplish His purposes. You’re not going to change the plan of God; God is going to use you to fulfill His plan. That’s the greatness of our God.

ⁱ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Ac 21:16.

ⁱⁱ Furneaux quoted by A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Ac 21:16.

ⁱⁱⁱ It was considered an act of piety to pay the expenses for the poor.

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