

Let's open our Bibles this evening to Acts 21:18. We're going to continue on through the book of Acts. And tonight we, Lord be willing, will finish this chapter as it is kind of one story that comes together for us.

Last week, we effectively ended Paul's third missionary journey. That's why there's no map on the wall behind me. We'll put another map up when Paul gets ready to go to Rome. But this was Paul's long-awaited, kind of anticipated arrival in Jerusalem. He had brought with him elders from various Gentile churches throughout Asia and Europe; they were all bearing financial gifts from their fellowships, small and large, to help the poor in Jerusalem - Paul's idea of bringing together the Gentile believers who were very much convinced of the grace of God and then the Jewish saints who had a little harder time with that. So that was Paul's hope.

So tonight, in verse 18, we start a new section of the book of Acts called "the road to Rome." For the last fifteen years or so, Paul has been on the move. He went to Turkey, he went to Europe, he went to Asia; spent three years in Ephesus, a year and a half in Corinth. Started churches wherever he went. Spent a year pastoring the church in Antioch in Syria. But, beginning here in verse 18 and running through the end of chapter 26, Paul will spend most of his time in prison. He will be facing persecution, difficulty, hatefulness and murder, for that matter, for his faith in Christ and for the fulfillment of the many prophecies that had been told him as he was headed here. Luke is led by the Holy Spirit to dedicate six chapters and 175 verses to this time in Paul's life. So there's a lot we can learn about Christians and suffering for righteousness' sake and even how, at times, God may allow you to suffer - being unjustly treated - because he wants to use you to reach others. And sometimes the way you suffer shines the brightest light of all. And it certainly was the case in Paul's testimony - the way that he faced what he faced became a light to many.

Tonight we want to focus on two communities: the religious community of the Jews who will further reject, for the most part, the good news of Jesus while the Romans, who periodically (at least) in the Scriptures, showed a kindness to the church early on, and they could also be as brutal as the killing of James, if you will. And we'll look at those two groups. Jewish opposition to the gospel of Jesus can be

traced back to the beginning of the church in the book of Acts, and if you back up a little further to the ministry of Jesus, for all of those years as well. And they suffered because of it. We have seen Peter, John, and eventually all of the apostles arrested, beaten, some of them killed, threatened, certainly, warned to no longer preach in Jesus' name. Gamaliel, the Jewish leader, gave some good counsel in Acts 5, where he said, "If we're fighting against God, we're going to lose. So we are probably better just to get our hands off of this thing. And rather than beating these disciples, let's just see what the work will come to. If it comes to nothing, it was the work of man anyway. And if it survives, we'll find ourselves fighting against God, and that's a battle we don't want to fight." But that's the way that the church had seen the reaction to the religious folks who were around them. Chapter 7, Stephen is stoned to death. In chapters 8 and 9, the church is driven from Jerusalem. Saul begins to hunt them down to kill them, to arrest them, to imprison them. After his conversion, Paul is hounded everywhere he goes by legalists who follow him from country to country with violence and death threats and certainly subterfuge, in many ways.

Like Jesus, Paul faced much of his persecution from religious people. It's an interesting comparison. If you look at the things Jesus went through and the things Paul went through, they're very similar. They went through a lot of trials. Jesus appeared before Caiaphas and then Annas and then before the Sanhedrin before being taken to Pilate, who sent him to Herod, who sent him back to Pilate. You look at Paul's story, here, in the chapters ahead of us. He gets judged by the crowds in chapter 22, and by the Sanhedrin in chapter 23, and by Felix and Festus, Herod Agrippa II in Caesarea, and then another sixth trial before Herod, which would be his last; he would end up losing his head over it. Just like Jesus, Paul was rejected by his own countrymen and persecuted by the Romans as well. He was falsely accused. He was beaten for his faith. He was misrepresented by false witnesses. He was slapped in the face in court. They had plots to kill him time and again. The crowds' responses to Paul were very much what you will find of their response to Jesus some twenty-five or so years earlier. You will read, down in verse 36 of this chapter tonight, "For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, 'Away with him!'"

The Romans, on the other hand, were (at least in some places) sentimental from time to time towards the church. But the notion that the greatest enemy you will ever find is a religious one is probably correct. Not a political one. That stirs enough people up. But religious motives are the worst of all when it comes to

violence and hatred. So the Romans in Philippi apologized for beating Paul falsely (Acts 16). In Corinth, Gallio, the proconsul, stood up and held up the church against the accusation of the religious (Acts 18). In Ephesus, the chief clerk went to bat for Paul in an arena, screaming with people, to say he hadn't done anything wrong (Acts 19). It would be the Roman officials here that protect Paul from a murderous plot. So you can see both sides of the fence.

These next couple of chapters - there're lots of lessons to be learned. I'll tell you what the one that maybe you should learn from the rest of this chapter, and it's an important one; and here's the lesson - compromise always fails. If you're looking to accomplish God's will by somehow compromising, you'll never get His will accomplished. We will see Paul, our hero from the book of Acts, in his desire and his effort to reach out to his own, be counseled by James and others to make some conciliatory moves to satisfy religious Jews in Jerusalem. He does so, but his very actions are the basis for their rage; it absolutely turns against him. So I'll set the stage for you for a minute. Paul had carried the Jews and the church in Jerusalem in his heart for decades. He really felt that there was an obligation on his part to involve the Gentile churches in the life of the Jewish saints in Jerusalem. He had planted tens, if not hundreds, of churches. He was willing to bring financial help from all of them on this trip, in particular, and bring the leadership of those churches to say, "We love you, and we're with you. We're one body." He arrived with many brothers in tow, according to verse 4 of this chapter, and though he had been given plenty of warnings on what awaited him here, he was focused on the one issue that "this is something God wants me to do." And he didn't want to avoid the danger. He wanted to press on in faith and devotion to the Lord. He was excited about it. He even said to the Romans, when he wrote to them (chapter 15:31), "Pray that my service to the saints in Jerusalem would be accepted. I want this to work." He wanted to bring the church together. That really was his heart.

The Jerusalem church had never been totally friendly to Paul. Persecuted by the religious fringe for his faith in Christ, then for his boldness to speak about grace to the saints in the Lord, his freedom from legalism that offended them, his willingness to embrace Gentiles so quickly, and all of that was working against him. He didn't make a lot of friends standing where the Lord wanted him to stand. Paul had come to Jerusalem a handful of times since he'd been saved years earlier, and each time he hoped to correct and to inspire what he saw as a prevailing weakness in the church, which was to let go of those old religious practices and embrace the grace of God that was exemplified in all those types that they held onto so dearly;

that those were now fulfilled. We don't need them anymore. Jesus is here. This type has been fulfilled. There were many Jewish believers in Jesus who were bound still, with James, in the practice of the Law of Moses - customs; even customs and practices that weren't biblical but had been established by the scribes and Pharisees for years before. My father grew up as a very staunch Catholic. When my dad got saved, it took him a long time to let go of some of those Catholic practices in his life. He knew the Lord, loved the Lord. But, man, those things are ingrained, you know? They grab hold of you, and they keep you. And they were important to him, and it was really foolish to try to address them because his heart was okay; he just kind of needed to work his way out of all of that stuff. And that's really what's happening here. These are genuine believers caught up in years and centuries of Old Testament habits, if you will, and yet it hurt the church early on, and it was a transition that the Gentiles didn't have to go through. So even the practices of the scribes and Pharisees that the Lord had never prescribed, they were still clinging to; and so often Jesus spoke a lot about them in the Sermon on the Mount - talked about letting them go, letting them not dominate your heart, if you will. It led to some in the church in Jerusalem harboring a sense of superiority over the Gentiles. It wasn't a good thing.

Paul, who was the Hebrew among the Hebrews (Philippians 3:5), had planted churches for two decades, had loudly proclaimed to everyone - as loud as he could - that it was an issue of the love of God and faith in Jesus and that all of these Old Testament rituals found in Judaism were only rituals. And with a heart for the Lord, they are fulfilled in Christ. They're done with. You can lay them down. He saw them, as he said to the Colossians (in chapter 2:17), they "are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ." So that's Paul, now, coming to Jerusalem. Imagine the barrier that he runs into. Paul had had his run-ins with Jewish Christian legalists before. They showed up in Galatia. It was that time when Peter moved for tables and dragged Barnabas with him, and there was confusion. Peter was no longer living the grace of God because he was afraid of the disciples of James. Now these weren't wicked, horrible guys necessarily. A lot of them were moderates, but they were just still caught in a lot of those Old Testament commitments that needed to be let go of. I know some of you that get saved and yet there's religious practices that take a while to work away from, or get you free of them, and it takes some time. But when Paul called Peter and Barnabas, stumbling, he talked to Peter about legalism and what a hateful trap that it was. With all of that having been said over the last twenty years or so, twenty-five years of the church, Paul has prayed about coming and making a difference

here in Jerusalem for years. It was in his heart. God's grace was available. His people were bound to the Law. He felt like a perfect candidate to talk to them about Judaism - with how he had grown up and how he had learned to be living the Hellenistic life as a Jew in a Gentile neighborhood. He was just sure that this would help. So imagine showin' up with all kinds of loot, gifts given freely by Gentile believers to help the struggling church - and it was struggling - in Jerusalem, sometime before Pentecost. In love, Paul had come, risking it all. He believed in the grace of God and the freedom it brought. He loved the Lord and His people. He wanted the walls of separation removed. He mentions it in several of his epistles as well. I've heard Christians say that. "Man, can't Christians just love each other?" Well, yeah, we're just like Paul. We're wanting things that we're just not seeing as we should.

So he arrives in Jerusalem, finally, after all of the warnings and all, and that is the background. And we read, in verse 17, "And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry." Now James had been the senior pastor here in Jerusalem since the earliest days of the church. Most of the others had gone out into the world, at least of the apostles and all. Thomas you can track that he ended up in India. There are still a huge number of churches of Thomas in India. Some of the patrons in the church, some of them can trace their lineage back to the days of Thomas. But this was James. James, not the brother of John (he had been murdered and beheaded by Herod); this was James, the half-brother of Jesus, the author of the book of James which, by the way, was already in wide circulation by this time, as was the letter to the Galatians. So James was well-known. He was a powerful man, maybe the most powerful man in Jerusalem. Paul, with his group, came to meet James (notice in verse 18), along with the leadership from the church. Greeting them, he laid out before them all that God had been doing these past fifteen-plus years amongst the Gentiles and the churches and the ministries and all. And it says that they greeted them "gladly" (verse 17), the brethren did, the congregation did. But then they met with the officials, the leaders, and he stood before these men in Jerusalem with the fruit of his labors, and they stood and listened - not close emotionally or friendship-wise, but respectful. Can you imagine Paul and Luke and Titus and all saying, "Well, these are the folks from Asia. Stand up and introduce yourselves. And these are the folks from Europe. Stand up and introduce yourselves." And one after the other, and there might have been tens of them standing before what

is a very legalistic, still, kind of a practice, though it's a Christian church. And they know the gospel, but they're still kind of bogged down in a lot of these Old Testament practices. And for them to introduce themselves, "Here's the nation that's been reached. Here're the thousands that have been saved. Here's the supporting work of God the Holy Spirit. Here're the healings and the miracles that took place. Here's the power of God's Spirit. And you should have heard what they did here and what happened over there. We were in Ephesus, and, man, the whole place gathered together and burned up their witchcraft books. It was phenomenal!" And on and on the stories would have gone. Never had these narrow-minded Jewish believers imagined any of this. And not only that, standing in front of them were pastors, elders from churches with gifts to love and to bless their church in Jerusalem and the bodies that they represented.

I think if you look at verse 20 there are two "ands" that kind of tell the whole story. Because we read, "*And* when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. *And* they said to him, 'You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law.'" Two *ands*. The first *and*, they heard what God had done through Paul's life, and all they could do was say this, "Praise the Lord." What else could you say to a testimony of twenty years of Paul's ministry but, "That's amazing! Isn't God good!" But the second *and* kind of spoils the enthusiasm, doesn't it? Because the second *and* says, "Yes, I know there might be thousands of Gentiles all over three continents that have come to know the Lord, but you should know there are thousands of Jews here in town, and they're also believers, and their zeal is for the law. We've got rules, man. Your freedom doesn't work here. Your joy seems misplaced. Oh, you come from runnin' around the world, but here, where God began His work, there is this hunger for the law." And the bottom line is that they were not as interested in the grace of God and world evangelism as they were in the maintenance of their old religious way of life as they walked with Jesus. You have probably heard of Messianic fellowships. They have them today. There are certainly some Messianic fellowships that seem to place more value on the re-enactment and the incorporation of old Jewish practices than to celebrate the freedom that God has brought to us through His Son. That's dangerous. But that's how Jerusalem was. It was locked in the tradition, the practices, the old. Though they knew the Lord. Would have gone to heaven - every one of them, I'm sure. But hearing this from James and the guys in Jerusalem, I think it probably broke Paul's heart. It was such a tragic indictment. There was a zeal, but the zeal was for tradition; the zeal was for custom; the zeal was for legalism and culture and exclusivity and works. And not once was there any

declaration, "We have a zeal for Jesus here in Jerusalem." No, no, no. Their issue was about the law. That was what they were interested in. So, they were zealous, all right, for the law.

And, according to verse 21, they made sure everyone else was as well. We read this, "But they have been informed about you that you teach 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." So, not only are there "myriads" of, and the word "myriads" means innumerable amounts in Greek. It's thousands upon thousands, that have been "informed," and the word "informed" there is the Greek word for catechism, and the word "catechism" means to be taught. So, "There are thousands of people here in Jerusalem that have been taught that you are leading Jewish believers astray. It isn't just gossip. It's part of the curriculum. Right? That you would teach the Jews among the Gentiles to forsake" (the word is apostasy), "to walk away from Moses, not be circumcised, not follow the customs, not practice the Old Testament law. Everyone here knows about you, buddy. You don't have a reputation here that works." This is amongst believers caught up in legalism.

I wonder if the thought of answering, "So what's your point?" entered Paul's mind. Because my first thought at reading goes, "Yeah, and? What do you want me to say?" Paul taught, without apology, that the customs and religious practices of Israel couldn't save anyone, couldn't bring anyone into a relationship with God - that all of those things were signposts to point people to Jesus, who had now come, and that you could be saved trusting in Him. If you read the book of Romans, for example, Paul wrote, in chapter 2, that circumcision has only a spiritual advantage if you keep the whole law. If you trust in your circumcision, then you better not break the law. Because if you break it in one point, you've broken it in all. So he reduces that to say, "Look, at best, circumcision is a declaration in an outward form of the weakness of our flesh and our need to cut away our confidence in it and instead place our confidence in Christ." And then he went on to say this, "Even those who are not circumcised can please God if they walk with faith because it's faith, not ritual, that God is interested in." It's a pretty big challenge to religious folks. Paul would later tell the Jewish saints in Rome (in chapter 28:17 of Acts), when he is arrested there, and he gives his defense, he says to them, "Look, brethren, I've done nothing against the people or the customs of our fathers, and yet I'm delivered into prison from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. But I've never broken a law of God. I've broken customs but never a law of God."

Which is exactly what Jesus would have said. He wasn't violating God's Word or the law of God taking the position on grace.

So, verse 17, the church - they love Paul, they love the work of God's Spirit. The leadership greet Paul, they're cordial. They hear the details about what God has done, and they glorify the Lord, "Isn't God good!" But they said to him, "All right, great that He's doing that all over the world, but I want you to know how many Jews are here that are believers, that have been taught the law, that are informed about you, that you are contrary to the law."

Verse 22, " 'What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come. Therefore do what we tell you.' " So, what's the problem? "Well, there're Jewish saints here that will certainly start talking together now that you're in town. They have it out for you. They've been taught that you're anti-Jewish custom," if you will. And I want to say, "Well, of course they do, James. That's exactly what you've been teaching them for years!"

So, " 'Do what we tell you,' " verse 23. "We've got a solution. Here's how we're going to bring you into the good graces of the saints here in Jerusalem." Verse 23, " 'We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.' " So, "Here's our solution for you." And I think the truth of Jesus setting you free would have been a better solution. But, anyway, carry on for now. There're four guys here for Pentecost. They've made a Nazirite vow. Now the Nazirite vow - you can read about it in Numbers 6 - was a uniquely Jewish practice. It was adopted by both men and women, by the way. It was sometimes adopted for life. Think Samson, who didn't follow through. But it was a special time of devotion to the Lord. Most of them in the Bible lasted thirty days; some of them, a whole lot less than that even. But it was a time when you would shave your head, no wine, no touching a dead body. It was a time of real devotion to the Lord. To break that vow, you had to offer seven days of being in full-time prayer without going to work, just there 24/7 at the Temple. You had to bring many offerings, according to Numbers 6, when you were finished so that you've invested, you've devoted yourself. It was a time of real devotion. There was quite a cost involved, not only to take time off of work but to offer three animals and a drink offering and a grain offering, and the lamb for a sin offering. There're lots of cost that came with it. But, look, Jesus has come.

So, "Paul, why don't you get involved in this very typical practice at the Temple? Do it publicly. Forward the money to these guys so that they can stand with you. You'll make a big show of things, and people will know. Yeah, you're right in there with us." Well, he wasn't right in there with them. That was the problem. He was free. They were not. "But here's what you should do. Do what we tell you." That's verse 23. "Paul, go in with them in this Jewish practice. Pay their expenses so these four boys can apparently offer to God something which cost them nothing." That's ridiculous. "In so doing, the community of believers here, and unbelievers alike, will know that what they've heard about you is not true; that you are a good Jewish boy at heart. You may be a Christian, but the law is important to you."

Let me say this to you. What they are asking Paul to do is abjectly cowardly and wrong. It was compromise for the sake of establishing a position regarding the old religious customs. It was deceptive because Paul didn't believe that, didn't teach that, didn't practice that. Oh, he made one of these vows himself, on his second journey, in Corinth. For him, it was a personal matter of devotion to God. It had value because his spiritual life was in order. He didn't depend upon the ritual. He used it as a form of worship. But that's not what they're asking him to do here. They're asking him to establish that law is more important than grace. That, he should not have done.

But here's the lesson - to never compromise principle to support policy. It doesn't work. The moment you do, your position is weakened, and so is your influence. And certainly one of Satan's greatest tools is to seek to have us compromise our stand, for example, of faith in God alone. Remember Pharaoh saying to Moses, when Moses said, "Let us go to the desert and worship," and he said, "Okay, you can go. Just leave your kids." And then he said, "No, no, no. We're going to take our kids." And then Pharaoh said, "All right. Well don't go too far." And so it went. We know we are to walk with Jesus, but sometimes saints will say, "Well, we don't want to be fanatics. We don't want to go overboard living this godly life." And I've never met anyone that's gone overboard living a godly life. I've known people that have gone underboard, way under, trying.

So let's talk about evangelism. Paul's in a position where he wants to reach these people. How much compromise would you allow in your life before you defeat the very purpose of your heart in trying to reach people with the truth? You have a gospel, but now it is hidden, tainted, twisted or deflected by the behavior that you choose. Obey their religious practices or share in their liberties. Would you go to

the bar and sit down with some guy, drink all night, just because you want to "I just want to be there, bro, for ya"? Or would you stand outside and go, "Here, this is what God has delivered me from, and so I'm calling you to a new way of life"? How much would you be willing to participate in? Well that's the call of James and the church to Paul, who has been the single greatest soul winner in the history of the early church. And they sit in judgment of his liberty. And they ask him for this strange admixture of faith in Jesus with ongoing attempts for righteousness that comes through the keeping of ceremony. They weren't free. That was the problem. And they resented the fact that Paul was. And so what do they say to Paul? "Can you meet people halfway?" And, in my opinion, he should never have done it. And I would say that the fruit that comes from it would bear that out. But his heart is right. He wants to reach these folks - his people - in the worst way. "Whatever I can do. To all people....." He said, (1 Corinthians 9:20-22), "To the Jew, I become a Jew so that I could by some means win the Jews. I become all things to all men that I might win some." That was Paul's mentality, and that was his heart.

In verse 25 we read, " 'But concerning the *Gentiles* who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.' " Which is nothing more than a quotation from Acts 15:28-29, where the decision had been made amongst everyone that the *Gentiles* didn't need to become Jews before they could become saints or Christians or believers. It was almost like, "Here's what we want for you, and by the way, Paul, we already signed on to the old Acts 15 deal. We're with ya, man. We're just talkin' about the Jews here, not the *Gentiles*. We just want them to feel comfortable with you and where you've come from. This is a Jewish thing."

And we read in verse 26, "Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them. Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia," (from Ephesus, we will find out) "seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd, and laid hands on him." Now, I guess verse 25 made the pill easier to swallow. But in verse 26, we see that Paul, in his love for his people, agrees to take a position of compromise. He agrees with James, "All right, man, if that's what it's gonna take." He puts a lot of his own money on the line to finance four guys' spiritual commitment. We had somebody once - and I thought it was.....I wanted to laugh out loud, but I didn't

think that was fair.....but I laughed out loud inwardly, does that count? It doesn't even count, I don't think.....but I had a guy come and say to me, "Hey, bro, can you help with my rent?" And I said, "Why can't you pay the rent?" And he came to the church. And he said this, "The Lord told me to quit workin'." I said, "Well, let me get this straight. You now want me to pay the consequences of your action of faith. Is that right?" "Yeah, the Lord just told me not to work and to talk to you about it." I said, "Well, I'm glad you came and talked to me. I can't help you, and I never will help you. Go ask the Lord how you're gonna pay your rent." "Well, I did. He told me to talk to you." Look, if you're gonna make a decision, live with the consequences. I'd say if you're gonna quit your job because you don't like it, have another one ready. Don't be foolish and call it faith. So here these men are sacrificing, making a devotion, expending themselves, at someone else's expense. And Paul agrees. These guys take a week off of work, they go through the rituals, they dedicate themselves in public, and it all seems to go well for the week that Paul was there with them. The days were counted, the time was planned, the offerings were laid up. Everything was ready to go. But I think this was Paul's greatest blunder. I don't think I admire anyone but Jesus in the Bible. Except for Jesus, Paul probably more than anyone else. Joseph comes close. Daniel. People I never can be like. There're a bunch of guys in there who I'm exactly like. That's not one of them. This is no way to reach the lost. This is no instruction to save from religious bondage. Jesus' answer to this was (2 Corinthians 6:17), "Come out and be separate. Separate yourself. Step away from this." But he stepped into it. Paul, who I believe wrote the book of Hebrews, will say to the Jewish believer regarding the symbols here (Hebrews 7&8), "Give up the old wineskins, man. Those are old wineskins. We have a new wine." Pictures were good until Jesus came.

In any event, we are told in verse 27, at the end of that week of dedication, there were some believing "Jews from Asia." And Paul had been, you remember, in Ephesus for those three years before he had returned here, who "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.' (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)" All they had seen him with was "in the city." It's not exactly the Temple. This is a big city. It's one little small Temple. At the end of the seven days, some real legalists - in town for Pentecost - turn on Paul, and these were folks who were from Ephesus. Paul had been there for three years; the church was huge and influential. And they hated

Paul's freedom, and they thought that they would never find a greater support among the zealots than here in Jerusalem. They certainly couldn't find that support in Ephesus. So one grave exaggeration and one outright presumptive lie is all that it took to set off a whole Temple full of Pentecost celebrants at the party. Now, there was, at the Temple, a wall - actually a court - where they had the Court of the Gentiles. It was partitioned off. It had a sign upon it that said under penalty of death, Gentiles could not cross any further towards the internal, the central part of the Temple. So the Gentiles had an approach to the Lord, but they were separated by some things. Paul used that very word when he wrote to the Ephesians, and he said (in chapter 2:14), "Let's pray that the Lord would remove this wall of separation that's down the middle and make us one - Jews and Gentiles, women and men. The Lord makes us one." He used that very example in his teaching to the Ephesians.

But needless to say, here's how (verse 29) rumors get started. "Yeah, we saw Paul in town with a Gentile, so he must have tried draggin' him into the Temple." Well that's far-fetched, isn't it? Doesn't even a reasonable guy go, "That doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense at all." "Hey, I saw this guy at the movies. I think he was at church." "Ah, he's at the movies!" But hate has a rationale all of its own.

So, verse 30, "And all the city was disturbed." Why? Well, because if we go back to what James said, "Everyone here has been taught that you're a troublemaker, Paul, when it comes to the Jews." "And the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. Now as they were seeking to" (bless him? pray for him? no! Pentecost guys) "kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, 'Away with him!' " It certainly didn't take long for a religious riot to break out. If there was a freedom that you could find here, this wasn't it. And the intention of the people at the Temple was fairly clear; they were here to worship God for Pentecost.....oh, yeah, and to kill a guy if they could. What a life Paul led. Now

beaten by a mob who he loved, he wanted to reach them in the worst way with the grace of God that God has provided through His Son. He had brought men, thousands of dollars, and hundreds of miles to just say, "We love our brethren in Israel that are of Christ and in Christ here in Jerusalem." He'd done everything he could to bless. He compromised himself, and that didn't work either because they weren't convinced. They knew better, and so should Paul. What he hoped to avoid, he couldn't avoid.

Fortunately Rome kept a garrison of a thousand men on the northwest corner of the Temple Mount in a place called the Antonia Fortress. When we take you to Israel, we can show you where it was put. Herod had it built. Because this place was trouble, and if there was trouble, it was there that there was trouble. And so to stay right with Rome, they made sure that they had that taken care of. So they call for the soldiers. We are told in Josephus' writing (the Jewish historian) that Pentecost in the 1st century could draw a million-plus people to Jerusalem. This was no small riot; this was as bad as it got. A million people at the Temple and Rome with a presence of a thousand soldiers to avoid trouble, which they hated. And so the Temple police out of the Antonia Fortress.

And notice - who saves Paul? Not the Jews. "Who is he, and what has he done?" And he couldn't get a straight answer at all. No sensible answers, anyway. And so he takes Paul into protective custody, and he wants to get to the bottom of it. They chain Paul between two soldiers. They push him through the crowds. When the crowds get too thick, and they get near the barracks of the Antonia Fortress, they hold him overhead and carry him over their heads to save him. Paul maybe should have listened to all those warnings; this was going to get bad.

Now here's my question for you - where's the church now? Where are the believers standing up for Paul? Where're James and his elders now? Where are they? Why aren't they protesting his arrest? Why aren't they standing with him and saying, "You take him, you take us too"? Why aren't they in the battle? And the answer is - because they're still caught up in the legalism. In fact, through all of these next five or six chapters, the church from Jerusalem never gets themselves involved. They don't come to Caesarea to see how Paul's doing. They don't stand up to support him. They don't come to his aid. They don't testify in his behalf. They just let him squander away his life. All because of the lack of grace that God has given and they haven't embraced.

In verse 37, we read, "Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, 'May I speak to you?' He replied, 'Can you speak Greek? Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?' " "Yeah, that was me." (Laughing) No! Verse 39, "But Paul said, 'I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.' So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language." The Roman commander mistook Paul for some famous insurrectionist from Egypt; thought that only someone like that, killing four thousand others, could draw a crowd so angry. But Paul sees his opportunity. This is what he's been dreaming about for years - speaking to the Jews in Jerusalem about the Messiah. He, I am sure, believed if he could get the chance to speak to them about God and all that He had done, they would listen and all be converted. His influence, his notoriety (if nothing else) is pretty well evidenced by the fact that he stands on these stairs and just goes like this (Pastor Jack spreads his arms), and everybody quiets down. The whole place goes silent. It's an amazing picture. Paul's great anticipation to accomplish the work of God. The crowds wanting to just tear him limb from limb. And in that crowd, many of the saints who were still bound in the do's and do not's and not the grace that God had provided. With one wave of his hand, he silences the crowd. He turns to them and says to them in Hebrew, "See you next Wednesday night." (Laughing)

Shall we pray?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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