



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 21:1-40

“Paul’s Third Missionary Journey, Part V”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of the study of Thy word, and we thank Thee particularly for this great history of the early church, which Luke has given us, and we thank Thee for the way in which he has described the ministry of the great apostle, the Apostle Paul. And we ask that as we consider the concluding part of his third missionary journey to Jerusalem, that we may learn things that will be helpful to us, in understanding the Christian faith, and we pray also that it may have special relevance to us in our Christian life in 1983. We commit the time to Thee. We thank Thee for the salvation we have through the Lord Jesus Christ. In whose name we pray. Amen.

[Message] I would imagine that if you attended the average Christian church, and over a period of time, listened to the ministry of the word of God. And if you listened to ministry that was genuinely biblical, though not necessarily expository in a connected sense, you would probably rarely if ever have any message on Acts chapter 21, which is the passage that deals with the conclusion of Paul's missionary journey to which we are truing tonight. It's one of those passages that we just would skip. That is those of us who teach the word. It's not a chapter that on the face of it appears to have the appeal that so many other chapters of the Bible have. It doesn't have special revelation

concerning the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. It seems to be relatively provincial in its emphasis, and so this is one of the advantages of expository ministry. Expository ministry of books of the Bible and expository ministry of the lives and ministry of individuals, and we are studying of course the ministry of Paul. So it’s with a little bit of trepidation that we turn to this chapter. It is a marvelous chapter in its exposition of some of the principles that guided the Apostle Paul, and I think it also has some application to us. And will help us to understand a few things that we as Christians might not understand if we didn’t see such a beautiful illustration of those truths in the life of Paul here.

Now, we are following the apostle’s missionary journeys and particularly the third journey. And we are tonight to look at the conclusion of that third journey. And the apostle will move down the western coast of Asia Minor. He will pass by such places as Cypress and Rhodes, and then he will land in the land at Tyre, move down to Ptolemais, then down to Caesarea, and then ultimately will make his way up to Jerusalem against counsel to the contrary that seems to characterize the comments that are made to him. In fact, in one sense the key note of the lengthy section that begins in chapter 21 in verse 15, through the end of the book is the key note of bondage because the apostle is warned about the fact that he is going to be in bonds, but instead he carries out the ministry he feels God has called him to, and then the rest of the book in the story of Paul in custody, or in bondage.

Probably the main value, if we were to pick out one thing that characterizes this lengthy section, it is the truth of 2 Timothy 2:9, where the apostle says, writing to Timothy, “Where in, (speaking about the gospel.) Where in I suffer trouble as an evil; doer unto bonds, but the word of God is not bound.” So we will see Paul in bonds, but we will see nevertheless the gospel having free course even through the Lord’s servant and prisoner. The principle practical interest in this portion of the account of the life of Paul lies in the knowledge that it gives to us of Christian guidance, and we must remember that the apostles, Paul in particular, tell us that we are to follow them as

examples. In fact, Paul, more than once says, “Be a imitator of me.” So we may reasonably expect that the principles, by which the Apostle Paul is guided in his Christian life, are principles that have reference to us. We cannot say really Paul was an apostle, and he was guided in a different way than we are guided. In some respects that’s true because he did have certain special revelations that we generally do not have today. But ordinarily the principles by which God deals with apostle are the principles in which he deal with us. And so it’s very important for us to pay attention to the apostle and the way in which God dealt with him.

Now, looking at the chapter we are going to follow it geographically and first of all remember Paul was in Myletus speaking to the Ephesians elders and we looked briefly at that last week in our study, so we are moving into chapter 21, and Luke the historian will describe the passage of Paul and his company from Myletus, which was on the western coast of Asia Minor to Tyre. In verses 1-6 we read,

“And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, (that was a little island in the Aegean Sea, along the western coast of Asia Minor.) And the day following unto Rhodes, (And Rhodes also another island on the western coast, really southwestern almost southern coast of Asia Minor when it turns to the east, Rhodes is today as probably many of you know, a tourist islands, dn many people go there to spend their holidays. Paul was there at Rhodes.) and from thence unto Patara: (Now, Patara was a little place on the southern coast, of Asia minor, and it was city on the continent.) And finding a ship sailing over unto Phoenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. (Now, you can tell by the way that Luke the historian is with the Apostle Paul in this part of his journey.) We went aboard and set forth. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, (Literally seen Cyprus.) we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, (So he sailed right by Cyprus, although he saw the island. They evidently did not stop there.) and sailed in to Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there

the ship was to unlade her burden. (You can see for example as you read this that their way of conducting things was very much as our way is today. The ship was going to be unloaded, and because it was going to be unloaded that would take some days, at least a week here, it appears, and the apostle was free to do what he wanted to do during that time, so he found disciples,) we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. (That’s interesting isn’t it, that they would tell the Apostle Paul what he was supposed to do and what he was not supposed to do. One would think that one should be rather careful what he should tell an apostle. So what we are probably to understand by this is that when they met in their meetings, and remember as we have said more than once, in the meetings of the early church there was freedom for the men, who had spiritual gifts to exercise their gifts and for the priests to exercise their priest hood, so in the meetings of the church a prophet evidently stood up and said to Paul, maybe more than one because the way this is written here one might understand it to be that way.) so finding disciples there we tarried seven days, who said to Paul through the spirit. (So evidently several of the prophets stood up in the meeting and freely gave the apostle some advice. Now, this advice was divine advice. It was these men were New Testament prophets evidently. In a moment we will have one of them appear, Agabus, but from the way in which this is written it’s likely that it is the same thing. The early church had a number of New Testament prophets who carried on a ministry among them. In fact, they were so common that one of the earliest post New Testament books, one of the apostolic works usually associated with the apostolic fathers is the Didache, and in it are certain instructions given for the interacting of prophets. It’s a rather interesting thing. Some time we’ll talk about it, because there are some rather interesting words of advice that the early church gave concerning it later on. But here the apostle was warned that if he continued to go on to Jerusalem, well, he would have difficulty there and find his way into bondage or into prison,) And when we had accomplished those days, (Luke continues) we departed and went our way; and they all

brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.”

What a lovely little scene that is. Henry Ward Beecher once declared that Paul was devoid of artistic sense. That he traveled through all the cities of Asia. These cities were packed with things of beauty and artistic merit and value and never once is there a line in his epistles about the beauty of the area through which he spent most of his life. Well, that may be a legitimate criticism for someone who was getting ready to write a column for the travel section of the Dallas Morning News on Sunday morning, but the apostle was not a person like that. There was one dominating thing with him, and that was the preaching of the gospel. And so Dr. Parker is right when he says, that’s not Richard Parker incidentally, but Dr. Parker said there was no scenery to Paul there was no geography. There was nothing but lost humanity, and the redeeming cross of Jesus Christ. So one following Paul and one following Luke gains the impression, if you pay attention that these men are interested in something far more important than scenery. Well, now in verse 7 we have the account of the journey from Tyre to Ptolemais. Verse 7 we read,

“And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day. (Now, this was another place on the coast of the land, and so they stayed there just a day evidentially the boat had now been loaded with whatever it was intended to be loaded with or would be loaded, and so they didn’t spend much time there.) And the next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul’s girdle,

and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, the will of the Lord be done.”

Here is one of the little problems of guidance that phases us in this particular passage. You can see that so far as the people were concerned when the prophets stood up and said, “Paul if you go to Jerusalem, you are going to be finally in bonds.” They immediately expressed their opinion, which was, you should not go. They did not like to think of the apostle being in bonds because it probably would mean that he was in danger of losing his life.

Now, the prophets of course did not say that he should not go. They simply said, “If you go to Jerusalem you are going to be in bonds.” This is what’s going to happen to you.” But the final determination of what was the will of God was something that God evidentially gave to the Apostle Paul, so what we have here is conflicting emotions on the part of the people, and on the part of the Apostle Paul. Although I wouldn’t want to call his emotions, but before we get to that and spend just a little more time on it, let’s notice first these words concerning Phillip the Evangelist.

Now, Phillip, if you’ll remember in the book of Acts is the original pioneer beyond Judaism, and one of the things that’s very interesting about Phillip is that he was one of those who was forced out of Jerusalem by the persecution of the Jewish leaders. And remember everybody left Jerusalem except the apostles. So Luke says way back in chapter 8 in about verse 3 in the book of Acts. We read this, “As for Saul he made havoc of the church entering into every house, and hailing men and women, committed them to

prison. Therefore, they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word, then Phillip.” So what we have is great persecution in Jerusalem. We have the leaders of Judaism carrying it out and Luke lays his hand upon one person, who is particularly responsible for it, and it is Paul the apostle. And one of the men who is driven out of Jerusalem is Phillip the Evangelists.

Now, isn’t it interesting here Paul comes to Ptolemais, and then he comes to Caesarea, and into whose house should he enter but into the house of the first one of these men who is driven beyond Judaism, and driven beyond the limits of the Judaism of Jerusalem by this very man Paul. So there are many unusual things they must have had to talk about as now both are in the faith. Well, Phillip is described here as being an evangelist, and also as being one of the seven.

Now, remember the seven are the deacons who were chosen way back in the 6th chapter, so he is an individual who is an evangelist but a deacon. He is uncalled, uncommissioned, unordained. Isn’t that striking? Unordained and yet he is an evangelist doing a good job. He was an individual who was a deacon, one of the seven. A man full of the spirit and faith, but for about twenty years now, he’s been practically an unknown. One might think, if he had just read up to this point, that Phillip was very in significant because nothing much is said about him, but here we learn that he evidentially has been engaged in a ministry of evangelism for a number of years, and so he was not obscure after all, even though Luke didn’t say much about him. I wonder where Luke got his source of material? Well, probably in this case from the Apostle Paul, but at any rate this many who has not been mentioned for so long, is now mentioned again and forever after we think of him as Phillip the Evangelist. There’s an interesting thing about this too. There is some clear evidence here that an officer of a church that is a deacon or an elder may have a spiritual gift of ministry.

Now, you see Phillip was a deacon in the early days in Jerusalem. But at the same time, he had the gift of evangelism. So he held both an office and he had a spiritual gift.

Elders is a term that refers to office. Elders may also have a spiritual gift. Some of them have gifts of utterance. Some do not because Paul says, “Let the elders that rule well all rule, be counted worthy of double honor especially those that labor in the Word and doctrine.” So not all elders are preachers. But all elders should be apt to teach and some elders may also have gift of teaching. All this I think is relatively plain in the word of God, but our churches so often today do not follow these things.

Well, we come to Agabus now. He was a prophet and he had come down from Jerusalem, we read. And he came into the meetings there where they’re meeting in Caesarea, and when he came into the meeting, and again we are to understand this most likely as occurring in the context of a meeting, like our Sunday evening meeting. We’ve always tried. At least the elders have in Believer’s Chapel to have the Sunday meeting as close as they possibly can to the kind of meeting that the early church carried out. The reason for that is that spiritual gifts may be freely exercised. A man could have a great spiritual gift and in some churches, since all ministry is in the hands of one many, they could never have an opportunity to minister their gift. That’s why it’s so important to have a scriptural practice of biblical principles in the meeting of the church at least once a week. So in the meeting of the church, as they were gathered around, Agabus, one of the prophets, stands upon his feet and he must have walked over to the Apostle Paul, because it says he took his girdle.

Now, I don’t wear a girdle, so I don’t know exactly what this was, and how he took it from Paul, I don’t know whether Paul fought him a little bit and said, “Don’t take my girdle.” [Laughter] And Agabus, said, “The Lord told me to take your girdle.” If somebody said, “The Lord told me to take your pants.” I am afraid I would fight forever for that in a public meeting. [Laughter] But at any rate, some how or another, he got hold of Paul’s girdle, and like an Old Testament prophet, which incidentally indicates that these New Testament prophets were very similar to the Old Testament prophets, and that’s why they are given the name of prophet. So he took Paul’s girdle, and then he



didn’t bind Paul. He bound himself. As he said here, “He bound his own hands and feet.” The reason for that is that he is prophesying like the prophets of the Old Testament often did. Not simply in word, but in action, so he carried out a kind of parabolic act. He bound his hands and feet publicly so that everybody would have this object lesson. They didn’t have things like this, overhead projectors, and so they used the things that they could use. He just acted out what was going to happen to Paul, as I imagine he turned to Paul and said pay particular attention, but this is what is going to happen to you, “Thus saith the Holy Ghost, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.”

Now, he doesn’t say, “Paul you are not to go there.” He just says, “If you go this is going to happen to you.” But it’s natural for the individuals to reply, “Oh, Paul don’t go up there.” “And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.” So even Luke was trying to get the apostle not to go. This is quite interesting because you see that the prophet received his revelation directly from God. That’s what a prophet is. He receives his revelation directly from God. That is why, in my opinion, we don’t have any prophets today. We do not have anybody who is receiving direct revelation from God. We do have some who contend that they are receiving direct revelation from God, but either they’re prophecies do not come to pass or they are prophecies that are of great insignificance. They are just insipid prophecies. And I suggest that if you ever have any doubt about that, that you just try to collect some of the prophecies that the so called contemporary prophets are giving us.

Was Paul wrong? Well, some of the interpreters of the Bible like to say that the apostle was very wrong. For example one of the men who was man who taught me said that he was opinionated and a stubborn old man. That was Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse’s comment concerning Paul in this case. Well, in this case, I am afraid that it wasn’t the apostle who was an opinionated man. It was rather Dr. Barnhouse. What can we say about these prophets? Well, they were subject to the apostles of course we are told that

in 1 Corinthians chapter 14, and in the list of the spiritual gifts, they fall behind the apostles. We do now of course that prophets were not always right, because there were prophets who were false prophets, and are called false prophets. But so far as we can tell, the prophets of the Lord were always right.

Now, it was proper to judge the things that they said, but there is no indication in the New Testament that any New Testament prophet was ever worrying. We are told in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 in verses 20 and 21 that one should examine the things that are said, and receive the things that are proper and not receive the things that are not, but there is no indication in the New Testament of any prophet who ever was a true prophet and at the same time prophesied something falsely.

Now, we have had various indications of prophets I say down through the years, and the other night a man called me from the city of Tulsa and told me that there has now been a new appointment of apostles in the city of Tulsa. I don't know whether you've heard about this or not, and I haven't the documentation of it, only the account of this young preacher who called me and said, “Have you heard the latest thing?” And I said, “No, I haven't heard the latest thing, what is it?” He said, “That Oral Roberts have decreed that he and four or five others are apostles.” He said simply that Oral said it is decreed. And I said, “Well, who is it who has decreed?” He said, “Well, it is Oral. He has decreed that he is an apostle and Richard, his son has also decreed to be an apostle. And then Kenneth Copeland is an apostle, naturally. And a man by the name of Hagan, I think it's Kenneth Hagan, and another man by the name of Osmand I believe. I think there are five new apostles to add to the twelve of the New Testament now, headed by Oral, who has had visions and other kinds of things that are characteristic of ancient apostles and many modern apostles think they are having them too.

Well, it's amazing to me. It is just amazing to me that Christians can actually believe that statements like this are in accord with the word of God. I am just constantly

amazed at the gullibility and also the lack of knowledge of biblical truth by earnest sincere Christians who carry their Bibles to the church on Sunday morning.

Well, Paul went bound in the spirit. He says, “He went bond in the spirit.” And here he is told he is going to be bound in bonds. The prophets of course, or the people who listened to the prophet in this case misinterpreted the comments of the prophets because they sought to dissuade on the basis of it. Their motive of course was love for Paul, but Paul's motive was the work of God and the people of God, and so he replies to them. He said, “Why are you weeping? And why are you breaking my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, the will of the Lord be done.” So finally they came to acquiesce in what the apostle felt was the will of God for him.

I cannot help but think of Luther’s experience with reference to his visit to Worms, when Spalatin begged him not to go on, Luther said, “Though the devils in Worms be as many as the tiles upon the roofs.” And if you know the kind of structure they had, every house was filled with tiles. “Though the devils be as many as the tiles on the roofs, yet thither will I go.” And we are certainly glad that Luther went to Worms. And as a result of his ministry many of us are blessed through the doctrine of justification by faith, which was freed from the bonds of Romanism.

Now, in verse 15 through verse 17, we read further, “And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem. There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.” Incidentally that text, the Authorized Version says “And brought with them one Mnason of Cypress” Most of the modern translations render it something like, “Brought us to the home of Mnason and old disciple.” Rather than Mnason going up and then Paul lodging with him in his house in Jerusalem rather, he lived in Jerusalem a Hellenistic Jew and the apostle is going to his house in Jerusalem.

Now, Mnason is called an old or ancient disciple. I wonder, the Bible doesn’t say much about Mnason, what is meant by this old. Some have said, the adjective means from the beginning. That is he was one of the early disciples, rather than a man old in age although he wouldn’t necessarily be quite old now. The old is really old in relationship to discipleship. He is a disciple of many years. Well, there is a lovely sense of appreciation it seems to me, in this. Here is a man who had been a disciple evidentially from the beginning. He had known the Lord perhaps personally. He had known Calvary. He had known the resurrection. He was there at Pentecost. Most of the friends perhaps were gone, but there was one person who was still with him, and that was the Lord. A man who after many years is nevertheless still a very faithful and loyal minister of Jesus Christ. There is something, I think, very precious about that. It always is an encouragement to me to be with a man who has been a Christian for many, many years, and who has remained faithful.

I heard a humorous story some years back about a southern prisoner of war, who in his prison kept irritating his captors by referring to the Battle of Chickamauga, which as you students of the Civil War may remember is a battle that was won by the Southerners, and so finally the people in the prison because so exasperated with him, that they took him to general Grant, who heard his story, and then he said to this young Southern boy, he said, “Either you pledge allegiance to the flag of United States of America, or I am going to assign you to the worst prison we have, and I am going to keep you in solitary confinement.” And after thinking for a few minutes, like most Southern boys, he came to the right decision. He said he would pledge allegiance, which he did. And then as he was leaving, he turned to the general, and he said, “General would you give me permission to utter one sentence?” And the general said, “Yes.” He said, “General the rebels sure whipped us at Chickamauga. Didn’t they?” [Laughter]

Now, there was a man who was loyal to his convictions. And Mnason, this must have been a highlight in his life, to be able to entertain the Apostle Paul in his house.

There is something rather lovely about that I think. Then of course there is a loveliness in the fact that it probably cost Mnason a little bit to have Paul in his home, because remember we look at this from the background of many hundreds of years, and we know of course Paul was called to minister to the Gentiles, but you can see in this very chapter, that the Christians in city of Jerusalem are still stumbling a little bit over that fact that the gospel is going to the Gentiles and that Paul is telling them that they are not under the law and that the temple is no longer the proper place of worship that flows out right here in the verses that immediately follow. So to have Paul staying in his house was something that might have caused this old man something among his friends there in the city of Jerusalem. But he is a person who is open to new ideas like Paul's ideas, and the principles that the apostle is now proclaiming, are principles to which he is open. It is also good to see an old Christian who is not so inflexible in his ideas that he learned when he was young that he's not able to relate at all to the present situation.

Many years ago I was at Eerieside Bible conference a few times, conference, famous conference. Many of the great Bible teachers of many years ago, seventy-five years ago, used to attend that conference. Dr. Chafer used to go there, and I was invited years ago when the conference was on the downgrade, and they used to have a book room there, and a book table out. And I was standing over by the book table one time and an old Christian was standing by me and in the course of the conversation, a book that was lying before us he noted, and he said, “Have you read that book?” And I don't remember whether I said I had or I hadn't. I don't even remember what the book was, but he did say, he said, “You know there are some departures from the faith in that book. And he mentioned a departure or two. And then he said, “And also I don't like another thing that the author has done. He spelled the word savior, s-a-v-i-o-r. And not s-a-v-i-o-u-r.” He said I don't like to see the way that they are moving away from the language with which we are accustomed. The spelling with which we are accustomed.” He didn't realize of course that was simply the English way of spelling as over against an American

way, but he was holding fast to a truth. You have got to spell savior, s-a-v-i-o-u-r in order to be sound in the faith. Well, I like to see a person who is willing to accept some new ideas and spell savior s-a-v-i-o-r without abandoning the faith.

Notice he is called a disciple. He is not called a preacher a genius, an apostle a deacon. The word, in spite of the way they world may feel about his, the word of God gives him this glorious epitaph of disciple. After all you couldn’t ask for anything more than that to be called by the Holy Spirit a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Now, one last thing that I think is very interesting. The apostle is going to be associated with individuals who take a vow. So let me read verse 18 through verse 26, and make a comment or two on it.

“And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, (By the way that tells a great deal about what Paul taught concerning the law. Paul taught that men were not under that law, and so here they were taught to forsake Moses, saying that,) they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. (They are going to hear that you are in town Paul.) Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men, which have a vow on them; (Now, vows were taken when an individual wanted to give thanks to God for something or when he wanted to get something from the Lord, so he would take a vow, and it may last for a week or two or whatever.) They take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: (By the way it was a custom to do that.) and all may know that those things,

whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. (This is a reference to the Jerusalem conference, remember?) Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, (That is these individuals.) until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.”

Now, this is a strange thing. This is the reason why some feel that Paul here made a mistake. G. Campbell Morgan said, “This is the greatest mistake of the ministry of the Apostle Paul.” And as I said, Dr. Barnhouse called him an opinionated stubborn old man, and he too felt that he was wrong in doing this.

Now, evidentially Paul taught that we were not under the law, that we did not have to observe, circumcision. We did not have to observe the customs, but many of the people in Jerusalem did not yet understand that relationships that Christians in the present age understand to the Mosaic Law. And so the elders and James were very much on edge that the apostle was here, because they knew that there might be a tremendous uproar if word got out that Paul is there, that he is teaching, that we were not to observe the law.

Now, the apostle back in chapter 18 in verse 18, has already undertaken a vow, when he left Corinth and sailed to Asia Minor, he undertook a vow, and that is mentioned in Acts chapter 18 in verse 18. How can we explain Paul then? Does he not say in Galatians, “Stand fast in the liberty where with Christ hath made us free.” Does not Paul teach that we are not under law then how can he associate himself with these individuals who have taken upon themselves vows, and was often the custom, rich people paid the price of the offerings that they had to make at the conclusion of their time of vow, and actually so associated himself with them as if to say, “I too do keep the Mosaic Law.”

How can we explain Paul's statements about freedom then, with his actions here? Well, I think if we'll just remember one thing, it will become clear.

We as believers are free from the law. That is plainly stated in the Bible. We need not go into all of the text that make it plain, but there are many of them that make it plain. But now, when we say that we are free from the law, we must say that we are totally free, therefore we are not only free from the law, but we are free to voluntarily put ourselves under the law if we wish.

Now, if the gospel is at stake, and if a person thinks that if by doing this, and if we in the context of the particular act suggest that a person is saved by keeping the law, then of course we cannot do it, and that's why Paul would not allow Titus to be circumcised, but at the same time supervise the circumcision of Timothy, because no gospel was at stake in the case of the circumcision of Timothy, but only the opening of doors to minister in the synagogue, where as in Titus' case, it was taken in the context of you must be circumcised in order to be saved, and Paul said, “We will not circumcise Titus. We will not permit it.” So in other words the apostle taught a true freedom, freedom from the law, freedom to be under the law, if we wish. F.F. Bruce has a very, very good statement, which I like. He says, “A truly emancipated spirit such as Paul's is not in bondage to it's own emancipation. A truly emancipated spirit is not in bondage to it's own emancipation.” In other words if we are truly free, we are free to live apart from law, and we are free if the occasion makes it desirable to live under law.

Now, let me illustrate and then we are going to close with just reading a text. What that means in a practical way is, let's take one illustration. This is not an important illustration, but it will illustrate the point. Let's take the tithe.

Now, the tithe was an Old Testament income tax. Everybody had to tithe. They had to pay ten percent. Now, if you wanted to give, then you gave beyond that. The Bible speaks of tithes and offerings. Now the tithe is not a New Testament thing at all. Some time go home tonight. Get your concordance out. If you haven't got one, buy one.



You need one. Get your concordance out. Look at the word tithe in the New Testament, and see what it says. It’s very illuminating. All the references refer back to Old Testament times. We are not under the tithe, but we are perfectly free if we wish to give ten percent. We are perfectly free to be under the tithe if we voluntarily say, “I want to give ten percent.”

Now, we can give fifteen percent, and we can give twenty percent, and we can give five, if the Lord has prospered us in these ways. There are other principles that pertain, but the point is we are not under the tithe, but we may tithe. We are not under the law, but we may keep the law.

Now, let me close by just reading the passage in 1 Corinthians chapter 9. 1 Corinthians chapter 9, verse 19 or verse 20. I guess maybe 19. I will read that while you are finding. I want you to open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 9 and read these verses because they are here, and then you won’t say, “Dr. Johnson, said so and so.” But you will say, “Paul said, such and such.” Which is a little better you know. Anyway 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verse 19,

“For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, being (Now, lest you misunderstand me, Paul is saying I don’t mean lawlessness.) being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”

That’s the apostle’s principle. That’s the one that he practiced. You will find through the book of Acts, he does other things that suggest a contradiction to some

people, inconsistency, but the apostle was not inconsistent. We need to broaden our own ideas of what it is to be under law, and also to be what it is to be free. Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are thankful to Thee for these incidents in the life of the apostle. And we thank Thee for these great journeys, which were so remarkable and so important for us in 1983. We give thanks for him, but above all for Thee. For we know Lord that it was Thy grace through him that accomplished the work. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.