



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 21:17-40

Acts

"No Compromise"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are going through the book of Acts. And you'll remember from our recent studies, Paul has finished his third missionary journey. His missionary journeys as a free man are at an end, and he has made his way back from Greece, and then Asia Minor to Jerusalem, and he has come up to the city. And we read in Acts 21:17:

"After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it they began glorifying God; 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; 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. What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take 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 you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law. But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they

should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.' Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them. When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, 'Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.' For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut. While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. At once he took along some 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 up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he began asking who he was and what he had done. But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. When he got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob; for the multitude of the people kept following them, shouting, 'Away with him!' As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, 'May I say something to you?' And he said, 'Do you know Greek? Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?' But Paul said, 'I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people.' When he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the

stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect."

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and our time to study together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank you for this time together. We thank you for the blessing that it is to simply possess the Bible which is your inerrant Word and to read it publicly as we have done, but then, the added benefit of spending some time considering its meaning together. And we consider that a great privilege. This is how we're built up in the faith. This is how we reach maturity in the faith and are made useful.

This is how we learn about you and how you would have us to live. And so we pray, Father, for a special blessing and instruction from the Holy Spirit. And what a privilege that is, beyond estimation, that we who have believed in Jesus Christ not only have life eternal, but we have within us the third Person of the Trinity. God dwells, literally, within His children. He protects us and He guides us and He teaches us. We pray for that this morning.

As we have studied through the book of Acts, we have noticed how He opens hearts to receive the things that are said, receive the truth. And we pray that that ministry would go on this morning, that hearts would be opened by Him, that, supernaturally, we'd come into an understanding of the things that you would have us to know and to believe that we might walk in a manner worthy of our calling. So bless us to that end. Give us a hunger for your truth and a desire to serve you faithfully and well.

And we pray for those material and physical needs that we have as well. We thank you for the rain we have needed so greatly, and we thank you for it and for safety. And we for safety; we pray for those who'll be traveling in it that you give them safe travel. But it is a blessing, Father, to have the rain and we thank you for that. And we pray for the other needs that we have.

We think of those who have given us their names to pray for, whose names are listed in the Calendar of Concern on the prayer list. We pray for them; pray your blessing upon them. Give healing where it be your will. You are a God of miracles and you can certainly do that. But you do all things according to your will. You do all things well, and we know that your will is worked out perfectly in our lives, and we thank you for that.

Give encouragement where it is needed, strength where it is needed. Bless our nation. We face a day of great decision. The election is approaching and government officials will be chosen this people. And we pray that you give us wisdom as we cast our votes, and that by your grace we would have a wise government.

That is a gift from you, Father. We know that you raise up governments and you remove governments. You give wisdom to the people and we pray for that. Bless us this evening as we return to this place and as we celebrate the Lord's Supper. It is, as Howard has reminded us, a command that is given to us to do this in remembrance of your Son.

And so as we do that this evening, may we be blessed, sanctified, encouraged through the ministry that we will receive then and what we will receive now. Bless us as we sing our final hymn. May it prepare our hearts for our time of study together. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] The other day I read the description of a now-dead theologian, that he didn't have a political bone in his body. We know what that means. He did not live to please men; he didn't compromise. That's politics. Sam Rayburn, who was for many years the speaker of the House of Representatives, was famous for giving the advice to young congressmen, "To get along, go along."

That's the way politics works, by finding the middle course, the happy medium – by compromise. And in our system of government, it could be argued, I suppose, and, in fact, is argued that that is a necessary evil. Christianity, though, is different. It is not politics.

In the Christian life, in our walk with God, compromise is not necessary, but it is evil.

Which brings us to our text in Acts 21 where Paul visited the temple in Jerusalem and observed the Jewish rite of purification. Some call it Paul's compromise. G. Campbell Morgan, who preached for many years at Westminster Chapel in London, called it "the greatest mistake of his life." Well, was it? It's a good question to probe because it deals not only with Paul's life and whether or not he gives us an example for either good or bad, but it deals with the issue of compromise, the issue of courage, the issue of conviction.

But it also deals with the Christian's relationship to the law of Moses, how we are to live. Paul had much to say about the law. And understanding his position will answer this charge of compromise in Acts 21. We're clearly taught that we are not under the law of Moses. He makes that very clear in the books of Romans and Galatians, the books of 1 and 2 Corinthians and others as well.

"You are not under law but under grace," he wrote in Romans 6:14. In 2 Corinthians 3, he described the Ten Commandments as "the ministry of death in letters engraved on stones. In Galatians 3, he states that the law of Moses, in effect, he says, was temporary. It was in effect from Sinai to Calvary, and he describes it as being like a "tutor" or a guardian who had authority over a person when he was a child. But when that child became a man, then the authority of that guardian ceased to exist.

Generally, the analogy that he is giving us there is from the practice of a slave in a patrician's home in Rome, and how he would be in charge of that child until he grew to maturity. And then, at that point, the slave was just a slave. He never had authority over that child who had grown up. And Paul is saying the law was like that. It was given to Israel for a period of time and for a particular purpose.

It was given to prepare the nation for the coming of Christ and to lead the people to him. When Christ came in the fullness of time, as Paul puts it in Galatians 4:4, when He fulfilled the law and fulfilled

His purpose, God's people ceased to be under its custody. Now, the law still has value for us. It is the Word of God; it is inerrant. We profit from the study of it.

As we study the law and the prophets, as we study the whole of the Old Testament, we see Christ in it. It has doctrine as well as lessons for our conduct. We study the life of Moses; we study the life of David; we study the life of all of the great characters of the Old Testament and we learn lessons about how we are to conduct our lives. But the law itself, its rules do not govern our lives by directing and restricting our behavior. The New Testament does that with its instruction, with its examples.

And the Holy Spirit gives us understanding and wisdom to apply those principles to the various circumstances of life as we walk by the Spirit. That's how the Christian lives his or her life, walking by the Spirit. Paul is clear. Christians are not under the law as a code, as a rule of conduct, as a rule of life. We have been released from the law he said. Romans 7:7.

But that freedom that we have is real freedom, which means that a person is also free to observe the law if he chooses to do so, If by observing the law he will promote the gospel and remove a stumbling block from a brother. That's what Paul taught; he taught that in Romans 14. And that is what Paul did. And what he did in Jerusalem was consistent with that teaching and practice. He was not obliged to observe the Jewish holy days. He is free from the law, he could say.

But he was free to do that, free to observe those holy days, and he chose to do it in order to serve the cause of the gospel. That is the reason that Paul went up to Jerusalem. He went up on a mission of mercy. He went up to help the poor saints in Jerusalem. He went up to Jerusalem to be a witness to the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

So with that in mind, we turn to our passage. Paul arrived in Jerusalem at the time of the Feast of Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, which took place 50 days after Passover. And so these Passover pilgrims, those who'd come up to celebrate the feast were still there,

and that means the city of Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims and worshippers. Well, Paul and his friends arrived in the city at this time and they were warmly received by the brethren there. And the next day Paul went to see James and all the elders of the church.

Now, this was not Paul's first meeting with James and the others. Paul met James years earlier when he made his first visit to Jerusalem following his conversion on the Damascus Road. He was converted there as he approached the city of Damascus. He spent some days there, then he went out into the Arabian desert. He came back to Damascus.

He was driven out of the city or narrowly escaped with his life. He came up to Jerusalem and he met James and Peter, and John as well, the pillars of the church. So as he comes back on this visit, he already knew these men; he already knew James. And they had a common understanding about the gospel and the work of the ministry. That had been worked out when Paul, at a different date, a later time, had come up to Jerusalem from Antioch along with Barnabas and Titus, and there debated the issue of the gospel, the relationship of grace and law to the gospel, arguing very fervently that circumcision is not necessary for salvation.

That keeping the law is not necessary along with faith in Jesus Christ, that it is faith in Christ alone that one must have. And James, Peter, John – the pillars of the church – they all agreed with Paul. And they extended to Paul "the right hand of fellowship," he tells us, in Galatians chapter 2, meaning that they recognized that he would go to the gentiles. That's the ministry in the area to which had called him, while they would go to the circumcision. They would minister to the Jews.

So Paul became known as the apostle to the gentiles. Now, he comes back to Jerusalem and he tells these men all that God had been doing among the gentiles during his missionary journeys. As evidence of God's saving work, the great work that He had done, he had brought with him representatives from the gentile churches, the churches of

Greece and Asia. Men like Trophimus from Ephesus and **Secundus** from the city of Thessalonica, and others as well. They were trophies of grace, and Paul brought them along because they could bear witness of all the things that he had said.

In addition, he presented a gift to James and the elders that he had collected from these gentile churches for the needy saints there in Jerusalem. A famine had occurred in that area of the world and it had seriously and severely affected the members of the church. And so they brought this generous gift to the people there in the city. Luke doesn't mention it here. He does mention it later in chapter 24.

But this was the main reason that Paul had come up to Jerusalem. He had collected a gift from the gentile churches. And many of them were quite poor. The Macedonian churches were poor saints; they had very little to give. In fact, Paul had discouraged them from giving, but they had insisted and prevailed upon him.

And out of their poverty they gave to help these saints in Jerusalem. And so he brings this gift which is proof that the faith of the gentiles was not in word only but in deed as well. They had an active faith; they had a living faith. And it was an evidence that they saw themselves as being in unity with the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, that they were not two groups, Jewish believers and gentile believers but one body, one people.

And this was tangible evidence of their belief in that and their great concern for the Christians of Jerusalem. Well, the leaders of the church were very impressed by what they heard, what they saw and what they had received. They praised God for His grace, and they pointed out to Paul the great work that God had been doing among them there in the city of Jerusalem. They pointed out the many, many Jewish converts to the faith. "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed."

But there was something that concerned them, a rumor that had been troubling the church. And they speak to Paul of this in verses 20 and 21. The Jewish converts are described as "all zealous for the

Law." They have believed the gospel, but they continued to live as observant Jews, practicing the Jewish traditions, observing the law. Now, we're not told why they did that, what their motive was.

Some certainly did it because it was their custom. They'd grown up doing that, and they didn't want to offend the Jewish population of Jerusalem. And so they continued to live in a way that would not be offensive to their fellow citizens. But others probably were immature in the faith. And they did not yet understand fully the freedom that they had in Christ, their freedom from the law.

In fact, early in Paul's ministry, after his first missionary journey, men from Jerusalem came into Galatia and those southern churches with a different gospel. He **really** writes the book of Galatians to address this false gospel in which these men said it's necessary to believe in Christ, but that's not enough. One must always obey the law. One must undergo the rite of circumcision. And no doubt these men, or some of those men, still exercised some influence in the church.

And so there were people, many of them, who were zealous for the law. But a rumor had circulated in the city that had an effect upon these believers, and it caused division there in the church. It was a report that Paul was against the law and the Jewish traditions. Not only did he tell gentile believers that they were not obligated to keep the law, but he also was persuading Jewish believers not to observe the Jewish customs and not to circumcise their sons. Now the report was false.

Paul's position on this issue is plain from his letters. He rejected the teaching that gentiles needed to be circumcised for salvation. That was a false gospel. Salvation is by grace through faith, plus nothing. Not faith plus circumcision, not faith plus baptism or any other kind of ceremony. This was, in Paul's words, "a different gospel which is anathema." Cursed, he said.

Christians are not commanded to be circumcised. But in itself circumcision is nothing. It makes no difference for one's standing

with God. It doesn't help, but it doesn't hurt either. If a Jewish father wanted to circumcise his son and conform to the ancestral traditions, Paul didn't object to that.

In fact, before taking Timothy on the second missionary journey – you'll remember from our studies in this book – Paul had him circumcised. Timothy was from a mixed family. His mother was a Jewess and a believer in Jesus Christ. She was a Christian woman, as was his grandmother. But his father was a pagan. He had not converted, and so Timothy had not been circumcised.

And so Paul had him circumcised before this second missionary journey so that Timothy would not be an obstacle to preaching the gospel. They would be traveling to different cities, and as was Paul's custom they would go into the synagogue, and it would be known that Timothy was an uncircumcised man. So to keep that from being an obstacle to the preaching of the gospel, he circumcised him. It's no compromise of the gospel. It was to promote the gospel.

And Paul was equally flexible in other areas as well regarding diet, regarding food, and the observance of days such as the Sabbath. As long as this was not a matter of salvation; as long as it was not an issue that would compromise the purity of the gospel, Paul said, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." Romans 14:5. In other words, these are matters of conscience between the believer and the Lord God, and he must work things out between himself or herself and the Lord.

Paul never denied that Jews could continue to live culturally as Jews live. Paul generally lived that way himself. He lived as a Jewish man. He was free to do that, but he was also free to conform to gentile customs when he was among the gentiles. And he did that when it served the gospel, as he explained in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22, where we see his attitude or his position, his philosophy toward the law and grace crystallized so succinctly.

He said that he became a Jew to the Jews; he became a gentile to the gentiles. He became weak to the weak, meaning he restricted his

liberty for their sake and the sake of the gospel. "I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some." That was the principle by which Paul operated. But that principle had been distorted by his enemies. They had accused him of committing apostasy against Moses and attacking the law.

James and the elders didn't believe the rumor, but it was very much alive in the city. It was dividing the church, and it had become an obstacle to their ministry. And so they asked, "What, then, is to be done?" You're in the city. Everyone will know that you're in the city and they'll know that you visited us.

They'll know that you've given us this very generous gift. And yet, this rumor will be an obstacle to that. It will frustrate all of that. So "what, then, is to be done?" They had a proposal. And they give it in verses 23 and 24.

"Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take 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." It was a very common practice for Jewish men to take a vow, the Nazarite vow. And in doing that, they would abstain from meat and wine, and they would not cut their hair for a short time. But that vow became very expensive.

At the end of it, the head was shaved and then the hair was burned at the door of the temple. And then the person had to make an offering of two lambs. Now, for a poor person, the law made provision for his or her poverty, and when an offering was to be made a person could offer a dove, which was very inexpensive, because the cost of a lamb was exorbitant. But in this vow, two lambs were to be offered. And then, in addition to that, a ram, then loaves and cakes with meal and drink offerings.

And so for a poor person, that was exorbitant, very costly to do. And because of that, it became customary for wealthy Jews to take

upon themselves the expense of these poor people. They would pay for it, and that was considered a great act of piety. It became very customary. And this is what the elders asked Paul to do. To pay the expenses of these four men who, probably like many of the Christians in the church at Jerusalem, were very poor.

And so out of Paul's own pocket, he would pick up the expense, not just for one but for all four. And they wanted him also to purify himself. Now, what that means is Paul was considered ceremonially unclean because he'd been out in the Diaspora. He'd been in the gentile lands. That's where his ministry had taken place.

For many years he'd been with the pagans. And the Jews considered a man who had been out in the pagan world to be defiled by that. And so when he or she came back into the land, they would go through a rite of purification so that they would be ceremonially clean. And so to do that, Paul was asked to go through this ritual of purification that lasted seven days, and thereby the Jews would see that he's not opposed to the law. In fact, he's conforming with the tradition.

And that would become obvious to them because all this is to be done in the temple, in a very public place. And it would be publicly demonstrated that his thinking, his conduct was not as the rumor had insisted. He was not hostile toward them and their traditions. Now, this was their idea. This was not Paul's idea, but Paul listened.

He was in their city. They knew the situation better than he did, and he was willing to do whatever he could do to relieve them of embarrassment and remove this impediment to the ministry. And so completely consistent with his policy of becoming all things to all men, Paul willingly became as one under the law for those who were under the law, who lived under the law. He became as a Jew to the Jews, obedient to the law. We read in verse 26, "Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification,

until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them." What happened next was completely unanticipated.

The elders of Jerusalem were thinking in terms of the Jews of Jerusalem, the Jews of the land. But Jews from Asia were there as well. This is the time of the Passover and Pentecost, that 50-day period of celebration. And many from all over the world had come up to Jerusalem. And there were men from Asia, men from Ephesus who were there, who hated the apostle Paul who had a significant ministry in that city, and they recognized him.

So when the seven-day period of purification was at an end and Paul was in the temple, these men grabbed him and began yelling for help. "Men of Israel," they said, "come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." Well, Paul had not brought gentiles into the temple. But they assumed that he had done that because earlier in the week they had seen Trophimus in the city, who they knew from Ephesus.

They knew that he was a Christian, evidently an outspoken, vocal Christian. Seeing him, they assumed that he had been brought into the temple by the apostle Paul. It wasn't true, as I say, but that statement inflamed the crowd and a riot occurred in the temple. Now, you remember how the temple was structured, that it was divided into courts. There was first the outer court of the gentiles which was not the temple proper but was connected to the temple complex.

Beyond that was the court of the women where Jewish men and women could enter. Next was the court of Israel where just Jewish men could enter. And then, following that, the court of the priests where only priests could enter. And that was where the sanctuary itself was located, with the holy place, and then the holy of holies into which only one priest once a year could enter in. So it became progressively restrictive as one entered the temple.

Gentiles could enter one court but not another; women and men into the next court; then just men; then just priests; then just one priest. So the gentiles could come to the temple. They could stand there in the outer court, and it was a way of letting them see the worship of God and, perhaps, be influenced toward it. But they could not go beyond that outer court.

In fact, there was a wall that separated the court of the gentiles from the court of women. And on it was inscribed, both in Greek and Latin, the warning that any foreigner, any alien found beyond that barrier in that court would be put to death. So Paul would have never brought his friend, Trophimus, into the temple. He wouldn't have put his life at stake and he wouldn't have put his mission at stake as well. But that was the accusation.

It was as false as all of the other charges against him. He never taught against the law. He knew that the law was the Word of God. And, in fact, he wrote in Romans 7:12 that "the law is holy." It can't give life. That wasn't its purpose; it wasn't given to give life. It was given to expose sin and show people their need of a Savior.

That's why it's a "ministry of death inscribed in tablets on stone," because this law which is perfect sets the standard, and we cannot meet it. And as we look at our lives in light of that standard of perfection, and examine ourselves inside and out, and our thought life as well as our deeds, we realize how far short we all fall and how much we need someone to save us. That's the purpose of the law. And that is what it did for Paul. He realized that he was a lost man through it and, as a result, he loved the law for what it did for him, just as he loved the Jewish people.

He didn't preach against them. He loved them. He tells us in the first verses of Romans 9 that he would perish in hell, if it were possible, in place of his people. And he didn't preach against the temple either. But these were the charges that were made against him.

And they stirred up the people to such a frenzy that they fell on Paul and they dragged him out of the inner courts, out of the court of

the Israelites, out of the court of the women and into the outer court, the court of the gentiles. And there they intended to kill him. It's ironic isn't it? They accuse him of bringing gentiles into the temple and defiling the temple in that way. And yet, they're prepared to kill him, which is a defiling act.

But they're not going to do it in the temple. They don't want to defile the temple, so they take him out through the courts. And Luke writes, "Immediately the doors were shut." John Stott writes, "The slammed gates seem to symbolize the final Jewish rejection of the gospel." Maybe. Outside, they began beating the apostle, trying to kill him.

And they would have, but it wasn't Paul's time. As Whitefield said, "We are immortal till our work is done. And God had much work for Paul to do. So, providentially, the commander of the Roman garrison heard the trouble and sent soldiers. The garrison was stationed next to the temple. So they were able to arrive on the scene just in time and rescue Paul.

The commander arrested him. He put Paul in chains, and then he tried to find out from the crowd who this man was and what he'd done. But it was too chaotic. People were shouting different answers. One person was shouting one thing, another another thing, and the crowd was very intense; it was violent.

He knew that Paul's life might be at stake and violence might happen to others there with the Roman guards. And so Paul was taken into the barracks while the mob followed shouting, "Away with him!" meaning remove him from the earth which means "Kill him." Thirty years earlier, the mob had shouted those same words against Christ. So in rejecting Christ's apostle, the people were again rejecting Christ. But in this case, it was Rome who came to the rescue.

The commander thought he knew who Paul was. He thought that Paul was an Egyptian revolutionary who had claimed to be a prophet and caused a disturbance three years earlier. Josephus writes about this individual. He led a large band of followers to the top of the

Mount of Olives, and he told them to wait for his command, and when he gave it the walls of Jerusalem would collapse and they could enter and defeat the Roman garrison inside. Instead, the Roman troops descended the Mount of Olives; they put down the uprising; they captured and killed many.

Others escaped into the wilderness, and one of them was this Egyptian rebel, this false prophet. He escaped the Romans. And so the commander assumed that Paul was he; that he had returned and the people were venting their anger against him for being an imposter. But when they entered the barracks or came to the top of the stairway entering into the barracks, Paul spoke to the commander, and he spoke to him in educated Greek. And the commander realized that Paul was someone else, someone other than this Egyptian.

He was surprised because he spoke Greek. And then Paul gave his identity. "I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people." The commander must have been impressed with Paul because he allowed him to speak. And there was something very impressive about Paul.

He had a boldness about him. He had courage. He had almost been murdered by this ravenous mob; his face was bruised and bloodied; his clothes were ripped. He was in chains, and yet he wanted to face the crowd. And he wanted to face the crowd that he might speak to them of the grace of God and proclaim to them the gospel.

And the crowd must have sensed something commanding about Paul because when he "motioned to them with his hand – " this wild, angry, noisy crowd responded, "and when there was a great hush – " Now, that's where the chapter ends, with Paul beginning to speak to the Jews in their "Hebrew dialect," a prisoner of Rome. And he would be a prisoner of Rome to the end of the book. So was his decision to go to Jerusalem disobedience to God? Was his consent to enter the temple a compromise?

The result might suggest that. But I don't think so. He followed the Spirit's leading to Jerusalem. He followed his principles in going into the temple. And when we do that, when we are consistent with what we know the Word of God can teach, when we're consistent with it and when we do what we are to do, and we are following the leading of the Spirit, walking by the Spirit, we can be assured that trouble will sometimes occur.

What Paul did in Jerusalem was completely consistent with what he taught in his letters. We see that in Romans 14 where Paul deals with issues of diet and days, issues of the law, keeping Kosher and observing the Sabbath, and what we are to do when there are differences of opinion among us on these issues. And in the early church, there were difference of opinion on those issues. They were hot issues through the early church, both to Jews and gentiles alike, people who had been saved from the law, who had grown up under the strict rules of the law of Moses, or those who had come out of paganism without any rules.

And so Paul deals with these things in Romans 14, and there he gives a guiding principle, how we are to deal with these various issues. What is the rule that we are to follow? And there he states that the Christian is always to walk "according to love," which means always put the other person before you. Step down for their sake. We are free from the law with its rituals and ceremonies, its observance of diets and days.

We're free from that. But some people still had scruples about these things. Some people were still uneasy about their freedom. Paul calls them weaker brethren, and he counseled dealing with them by showing such people great concern, great deference to the point of not exercising our freedom for their sake. He also speaks about this in 1 Corinthians 8:7-11.

And what he says, in effect, is this. Don't let your freedom become an obstacle to those people who are weak in the faith, who still have an attachment to the law. For example, under certain

circumstances, follow their diet or follow their calendar so that they will not be made to stumble. And because Paul was free from the law – Jewish customs belonged to what are today, among theologians, called matters indifferent – he was free not to observe the law of Moses, but he was also free to observe it.

As F.F. Bruce put it, "A truly emancipated spirit, such as Paul's, is not in bondage to its own emancipation." And the fact that he was not under the law didn't mean that he could not observe the law, if by observing the law he would promote the gospel and remove an obstacle to one's witness. Paul's rule, as he put it in Romans 14:19, was "pursue the things which make for peace." That means remove obstacles to the faith. That's what Paul did in Jerusalem.

To the weak he became weak; to those who were under the law he became as one under the law. He didn't compromise the gospel. He observed the law in order to remove obstacles to the gospel and make peace. Now, that's how we are to live. We get an example of how we are to live from Paul's example here.

Sometimes, for the sake of others, for the gospel, we are to not exercise our freedoms. In Paul's case, the outcome was not peace. But the outcome is no proof that the plan was bad or the conduct was wrong. It is proof that the people in the temple were wrong. They rioted against Paul out of ignorance and prejudice.

They hated what he taught, and they didn't understand the meaning or the purpose of the law of Moses. They interpreted it, as we've already said, as a way of salvation, that a person gained acceptance with God by observing its numerous rules, its 613 laws. And they opposed Paul because he taught against that as a false idea. Paul preached salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and the Jews didn't like that. They were enemies of grace, and so enemies of the apostle of grace.

It shouldn't have surprised Paul. It shouldn't have surprised the believers. Jesus, the night he was arrested, warned his disciples of this very thing. In Luke 21:17, he said, "You will be hated by all

because of My name." That is why the course of events went as they did in the temple that day.

But Paul went to Jerusalem, as he said earlier, willing to die for the name of the Lord Jesus. And he almost did. He was the victim of religious intolerance not spiritual compromise. He acted out of love for the people. He acted out of love for the gospel. He acted out of love for Jesus Christ, and he gives us an example in that as to how we are to live.

But his example not only shows us a model of how we're to live, how we're to put others ahead of ourselves, how we're to become all things to all people, but it also shows us the outcome of living like that, of living for Christ, living selflessly, living according to the principle of love, living consistently. And it isn't always pleasant. No one was more consistent than Jesus Christ. No one taught more clearly. No one acted with more love and concern and kindness for others than Jesus did, and no one was more thoroughly rejected than he was.

Paul only experienced what Christ experienced. And we can expect to experience the same when we talk about grace and live according to it. But God is sovereign and that's the good news. He protected Paul and used all of this in His plan for Paul's life and ministry. The Lord was not sitting in heaven watching all of this unfold, wringing His hands, wondering what would happen.

All of this fit His plan perfectly. The visit to the temple, the rage of the Jews, the protection of the Romans were all used of God to get Paul to Rome. And that is the goal of this book. That is where the book of Acts ends, with Paul in Rome preaching the Kingdom of God. And he got there by this way, by this means.

It is another example of how God makes the wrath of man to praise Him. God blesses faithfulness; God blesses consistency. So we are to do what is right, teach what is true and trust God for the outcome. He is in control. Paul did that.

But I suppose the question that we could ask ourselves at this point is do we always do that. We are continually faced with the temptation to compromise our Christian principles and beliefs in order to please men, in order to gain favor. And in doing that, we feel like we gain some advantage for ourselves. That at least is the thought that goes through our minds as a motive, whether we articulate it or not. But whatever advantage that we might gain is only short term. It never lasts.

It never pleases God and it never helps His people in His work. There's a famous story about Henry IV who became king of France. He was the first of the Bourbon kings, grandfather of Louis XIV. He was a Protestant and a legitimate heir to the throne, but France was strongly Catholic and opposed his succession. Civil war resulted.

Henry was a very able general and marched on Paris, laid siege to the city but couldn't conquer it. He realized that he could never rule France as a Protestant king. And so, after considering his options, Henry concluded in a famous statement, "Paris is well worth a mass." And he converted to Catholicism. It was a huge disappointment for the Protestants of Europe and earned him absolutely no respect for the Catholics.

It ended tragically for Henry. Ten years later he was assassinated by a Jesuit priest. And it all proved that Henry had no real spiritual convictions. Well, do we? Every day we face temptation to compromise.

It may not be as blatant or obvious as the example I've given to you, but we face that temptation to compromise our principles. We should know this, that nothing is worth it, nothing is worth compromise. We walk a narrow way; we walk a selfless way. Paul followed it. There was not a political bone in his body.

Consistent with his freedom, he adapted to the circumstances in order to further the gospel. He restricted his liberty to help the church, and he trusted God for the outcome. And we can be assured of this. That whenever we trust God and we walk faithfully to His Word,

whether men understand what we're doing or not, God will bless us. So may God give us an enlarged understanding of His truth and His way, and may we live according to it.

May He strengthen our conviction to do that so that we would honor Him and be a blessing to the church. But of course, to honor the Lord God and obey His instruction, we must first believe in Him, and that means believing in His Son. So if you are here this morning without Christ, you must first come to a conviction of your sin and your need of a Savior. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All are in need of the Savior and Christ Jesus is that Savior.

He is God's eternal Son, who became a man in order to die on the cross and suffer the punishment of sin in our place. And all who believe in Him, regardless of who they are, regardless of the weight of their guilt and the amount of their sin, all who believe in Him are forgiven at that instant, eternally forgiven, given life everlasting, an inheritance among the saints that can never perish, never pass away. May God help you to do that, to see your need of a Savior, to look to Christ, to believe in Him. And may God help all of us who've done that to live lives that are consistent with His Word, to live lives according to proper convictions and not compromise. May God help us to do that. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace. We come to a text such as this and we see Paul living consistently with the principles that he had set forth; as all things to all men, and suffering consequences for it. May we be men and women who are consistent in our lives and faithful to you and willing to suffer, knowing that you are in control, Father, and you will work all things together for our good.

We thank you for that great truth, that reality. We thank you for the life that we have in your Son. May we live lives that please you and honor His name. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.