

From a spiritual standpoint, the Apostle Paul was one of the greatest men in history. So much so that for many it is impossible to think of the writer of the Pauline epistles as out of fellowship. But like all of us, he had a sin nature. Paul's wrongdoing was not sin as such, that was included, but it was far greater than that. It really had to do with the last phrase in 1Jo 1:9 He ***"purifies us from all unrighteousness."***

Of all the men in history as believers in Jesus Christ, we have over 300 verses on the subject of Paul's wrongdoing. Paul had just finished writing two Epistles. These two great messages, the book of Romans, and the book of Galatians. The year was 58 AD and he had written these two great Epistles to the Jews and Gentiles about how keeping the Law is not a part of the spiritual life of the Church-age and other things related to legalism. Then he went out and violated the very principles that he taught.

This is why he wrote Col 3:25 ***"for he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality."***

He learned the lesson of Luk 12:48 ***"And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more."***

The nature of Paul's wrongdoing was rejecting the call of God upon his life for the purpose of building up and edifying the body of Christ. However, God the Holy Spirit gave him a doctrinal message and experiential message in the prison Epistles that changed his life. It was absolutely phenomenal and it was different than any other part of the word of God.

We are going to note that the biggest mistake that Paul made was not committing a sin, but refusing to operate in God's plan for his life and exercising his spiritual gift. Paul like all believers was given a spiritual gift from God. We are commanded to function under it and it is designed to build up and edify the body of Christ. Believers are to use their gift to maintain the local assembly that God has called them to. Spiritual gifts function only in the Pre-Designed Plan of God. Therefore, the importance of understanding 1Jo 1:9 and the filling of the Spirit is essential.

Now, what happened to the apostle Paul and how did he wind up in prison writing the book of Philippians? Act 21:18-20 ***"And now the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present [these are pastors of the local assemblies in Jerusalem]. And after he had greeted them, he {began} to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry [namely the grace of God]. And when they heard it they {began} glorifying God; [it would have been good if they had stopped there, but notice what they said]"***

What did they glorify the Lord for, the gift or Paul's message of grace? Well from the second half of verse 20, we know it wasn't the grace of 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;"***

The Jews at Jerusalem were being taught that living morally and following certain ascetic taboos was the Christian way of life. Don't drink this, don't eat that, don't go there. So, while Paul greets them and tells them in verse 19 about the grace of God among the Gentiles, they have something else in mind. They are disturbed by the presence of Paul but they are delighted to have the money Paul brought. Act 21:21-22 ***"and they have been told about you [or they have been indoctrinated against you], that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses," What, then, is {to be done}? They [the thousands of Jews who are zealous for the Law] will certainly hear that you have come."***

What should be done about this problem? What should be done to convince the Jews that you do keep the Law? Paul should have entered into a dissertation on the doctrine of grace. However, Paul is out of the geographical will of God being at Jerusalem. Once you're out of the **geographical** will of God, more than likely, it will be just a matter of time before you're out of the **viewpoint** will of God which is what God wants you to think. Then you will get out of the **operational** will of God, which is what God wants you to do, Paul is going to do something shocking.

When a believer is out of the geographical will of God, it is shocking to observe his volitional decisions. As long as Paul stayed in the geographical will of God he was fine. But out of it is where trouble begins. Notice what they say to Paul, Act 21:23 ***"Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow;"***

Paul should have evaded these pastors and avoided the Temple in Jerusalem. Just like we all need to learn that there comes a time when we should not be around certain types of people. Paul is going to do some things that

are totally opposite of what he believed. Remember Paul was warned on the three different occasions to stay away from the city. He refused the warnings because of sentimentality and emotional attachments. When a believer allows his emotions and his feelings to rule, he refuses good advice and he takes bad advice. Paul refused the good advice to stay out of Jerusalem and he took the bad advice to go into the Temple and offer the vow. Paul came to Jerusalem *out of* the geographical will of God. When he enters into the Temple to make a vow, he will be out of the operational will of God as well. One leads to the other.

Paul is going to offer a vow. God never authorizes any believers to compromise doctrine by offering vows. Vows today are an act of legalism. They are an act of legalism generally committed by believers minus doctrine. Vows are a system of penance or a system of works minus grace and proper motivation. For Paul to take a vow is to renounce everything that he has been teaching about the grace of God.

Act 21:24 tells us what they suggest in some detail. ***“take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses in order 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.”***

The vow starts by going into the Temple. When they went into the Temple they would declare their intention to take a vow. When they declared their intention they had to do certain things.

First of all, they had to let their hair grow. They could not cut their hair until their vow was over.

Secondly, they had to go on a certain type of diet.

Thirdly, they had to come up with a large financial offering within 30 days.

This is why they made their vow publicly; hopefully some rich man with a guilty complex would pay for the vow.

Today instead of vows like this we have dedication services, pledge cards, etc.

Paul has already brought all this money and the pastors at Jerusalem figure that Paul could stand the expense and pay for four of these men. So here are four young Christian men, and they're broke, in the Temple making vows.

So they say, Act 21:24 ***“take them and receive purification yourself along with them,”***

Every blessing Paul ever had, he received from doctrine and grace.

Now they want him to earn and deserve his blessings. They want him to make a vow.

So, Paul must let his hair grow, he must abstain from all wine, good foods, and become an ascetic. Then at the termination of the 30 days, Paul was to present himself in the Temple with his money and then the shaving of the hair and the burning of it on the altar.

In other words, they are saying that we want you to join our fraternity of legalism Paul. Join the brotherhood! And this is not the law of expediency, this is a compromise of Bible doctrine.

Now, they also remind Paul in verse 25 of the decisions of the first council noted in Act 15:20-27.

Act 21:25 ***“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.”***

Why are the Gentiles warned to keep themselves from things offered to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication? Everything mentioned here occurs in a Gentile Temple. The Jews were actually saying to the Gentiles "Get out of your Temples." Inside of a Gentile Temple they offered things to idols, drank blood, strangle animals, and they would consummate the service with fornication.

All of these things occurred inside the Gentile Temples.

Now, the Gentile believers were told to stay out of their Temples.

They told the Gentiles to stay out of their Temples but the Jews remained in their own. In Jerusalem, we have a legalistic and ascetic Temple. And the operation in each Temple was different.

In Jerusalem you have morality and self-righteousness whereas in the Gentile Temples you had immorality and lasciviousness.

Both are against the grace of God. They are two types of degeneracy, immoral and moral. The operation in each Temple was different. The practice in each Temple was different.

There's a great deal of difference between a Gentile Temple and a Jewish Temple but the concept is the same. One compromises with lasciviousness and the other with asceticism, but both deviate from God's grace.

Paul's problem in all this is threefold:

First, his emotional attachment to Judaism. It's often been said that a person never gets entirely away from his background. Paul's background was Phariseeism. We are all to some extent drawn to our background. Secondly, Paul failed to apply doctrine to the situation. He knew the doctrine but he failed to apply it, Jam 4:17 ***“Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.”***

When people become too emotionally involved with their problems, they fail to apply doctrine at the right time. Thirdly, Paul failed to realize that love must be directed toward doctrine first and not toward people first. Paul loved those at Jerusalem but they didn't love him. Paul got loyalty and love mixed up. His love for doctrine should not have been compromised for his love for people. Paul should have followed his own advice of Gal 5:1 ***“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”***

Paul took these four born-again believers who were legalistic and who were against the grace of God, and he not only associated and identified himself with them, but he paid their way.

The pastors of Jerusalem were actually encouraging believers to go into the Temple and become religious. Religion is the worst thing in the world. Religion shuts up the kingdom of heaven from men, Mat 23:13, and keeps individuals out of heaven. It devours the money of the innocent and extorts from its victims, Mat 23:14, produces children for hell, Mat 23:15, is a business and a very profitable one, Mat 23:16. Religion appears moral and outwardly righteous but it is depraved within, Mat 23:27. Religion is man seeking to gain the approval of God by human works, either for salvation or spirituality, whereas, Christianity is God doing something for man through grace and therefore God receiving all the glory. Religion is the greatest opposition to the truth, it is ritual without reality.