

Acts 21

Christians can be confused and conflicted even when they are seeking to obey God.

(Following the leading of the Spirit can sometimes mean pain, misunderstanding, and rejection even by other Christians.)

- Four points of tension in discerning God's will are present in this chapter. The Holy Spirit and Common sense, Law and Grace, The Kingdom and Culture, Church and State.
- See [apptoteach .com](http://apptoteach.com) (theology file #205, #306, #307, #802, #803)

Christians can confuse the Spirit's leading and common sense.

"¹ And when it came about that we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara; ² and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. ³ And when we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴ And after looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and **they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.** ⁵ And when it came about that our days there were ended, we departed and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until {we were} out of the city. And after kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another. ⁶ Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again.

⁷ And when we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day. ⁸ And on the next day we departed and came to Caesarea; and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. ⁹ Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. ¹⁰ And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "**This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'**" ¹² And when we had heard this, we as well as the local residents {began} begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴ And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

- Paul was led of the Spirit to go to Jerusalem

Acts 19 "²¹ Now after these things were finished, Paul **purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem** after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

Acts 20 "²² And now, behold, **bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem**, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that **the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.**"

- Paul anticipated a hostile reception in Jerusalem by both Jews and Christians.

Rom. 15 "³⁰ I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. ³¹ Pray that I may be rescued from the

unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there,”

- Paul was bringing a gift from the Gentile Christians to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

I Cor. 16 “¹ Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ² On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. ³ Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴ If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.”

Rom. 15 “²⁵ Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ²⁷ They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.”

- How are we to understand the Spirit’s leading in these verses? It is best to understand the Spirit’s message to the church, as limited to a prediction of what would await Paul in Jerusalem. The church leaders added their assessment based on common sense that Paul should not go to Jerusalem. When we seek to be guided by God’s Spirit we must be careful that we do not “connect the dots” so as to conclude something that does reflect God’s will.
- The kind of message that we often get from the Spirit is something like this – “Don’t be afraid to live out My values.” “Abide, don’t be in a hurry.” “Trust Me to walk with you in the dark.” Etc. We can too easily confuse or add to these promptings by the Spirit, a message that is not from God – insisting on specific instructions, refuse to wait, demanding light, etc.
- Revelation from God’s Spirit can come from many sources (visions, epiphanies, impressions, circumstances, etc.) but often must be interpreted before conclusions about guidance can be made.

Acts 16:10 “And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

Christians can confuse human culture and Kingdom culture.

¹⁵ And after these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶ And {some} of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge.

¹⁷ And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. ¹⁸ And now the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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;** ²¹ and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.

- Our understanding of the relationship between the Old and New testaments is one of the great sources of division among believers. (See apptoteach.org theology files #104-108)

Seek to bring no offense except the Gospel.

²² "What, then, is {to be done}? They will certainly hear that you have come. ²³ "Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; ²⁴ 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. 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." 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.

- The conflict here is not over the Law as a means of justification but rather the Law as a reflection of Jewish culture. Paul was accused of attacking Jewish culture with his inclusion of Gentiles on the basis of their faith.
- It is striking that the feelings were so deeply embraced that they were willing to kill Paul. We should not be surprised at the cultural tensions within the church today between races, economic groups, education levels, contemporary and traditional worship language, etc.
- How can we resolve these tensions?
 1. We can anticipate these tensions. The Spirit is warning us today as He did Paul in the first century.
 2. We can be patient and show respect for different perspectives. Paul bends over backwards to not offend.
 3. We can, where possible defer to those who are “weaker” (less able or willing to be flexible).
 4. We can work to create an environment that reflects a variety of styles and cultural sensitivities.
 5. We can follow Paul’s example in being patient and gracious with those who would reject and even try to destroy us.

Seek to be gracious in the face of abuse.

²⁷ And when the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, {began} to stir up all the multitude and laid hands on him, ²⁸ 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." ²⁹ For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. ³⁰ And all the city was aroused, and the people rushed together; and taking hold of Paul, they dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. ³¹ And while they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the {Roman} cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. ³² And 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. ³³ 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. ³⁴ But among the crowd some were shouting one thing {and} some another, and when he could not find out the facts on account of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. ³⁵ And when he got to the stairs, it so happened that he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob; ³⁶ for the multitude of the people kept following behind, crying out, "Away with him!"

³⁷ And 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? ³⁸ 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?" ³⁹ 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.**" ⁴⁰ And 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, saying,"

- The outstanding lesson in this paragraph is the graciousness of Paul and his perseverance for the Gospel in the face of personal misunderstanding and injustice.
- Paul seems to trace the steps of Jesus as he is rejected by the Jews and exonerated by the Romans. As we will see in the next chapter, Paul's appeal to the Roman government as a citizen is an important part of his survival.
- The last chapters of Acts are dedicated to showing the early church that Paul was not rejected by the Romans but by the Jews.
- The harshest reaction against Paul came from the Jews (many who were his fellow believers) not the pagans. This should come as a warning to us. We can not always expect the fairest treatment from God's people.