

Overcoming the Tendency to Blame God (for Our Choices) – Part 1

Acts 21

Introduction:

1. Have you ever noticed how we love to blame others when things fall apart? Did you know that this human characteristic goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden?
 - When God confronted Adam about his sinful choices, Adam basically blamed Eve, and even God! – “...*the woman **thou** gavest to be with me, **she** gave me of the tree...*”
 - Eve blamed the serpent – “...*the **serpent** beguiled me, and I did eat.*”
2. Do you think God ever gets blamed for bad things today? It happens all of the time. When problems and bad circumstances enter people’s lives, they will turn and look toward the heavens to lay blame at God’s feet.
3. God is not the author of sin, death, confusion, and evil. God is a good and gracious God. Problems enter our lives for many reasons, one of which is choices that we make.
 - As Adam worked the fields with sweat pouring off of his head, he could think back to the perfect environment of Eden, and the fact that it was his own choice that led to this. It wasn’t, “God, why are you doing this to me?” It was **Adam’s** choices, not God’s.
 - As Eve would also work and toil alongside her husband, and experience pain in child-bearing, she could think back to her own choices that she had made.
4. Here in our text, the apostle Paul is bound with two chains by the chief captain in Jerusalem (vs. 33). This would end Paul’s public ministry as a free man.
 - No longer would Paul have the liberty to decide where he would go and preach the gospel. He was now in the hands of the Roman government.
5. Paul had entered the temple, and the Jews from Asia (who hated Paul) tried the same method as they did in Ephesus (vs. 27-29). A mob scene commenced (vs. 30-31) and the Roman officials came to Paul’s rescue, but they arrested him in the process (vs. 32-36).
6. How could this happen? The greatest apostle in the New Testament was mobbed, arrested, jailed, and eventually executed. A person might ask, “Why would God do this to Paul?”
7. Isn’t it sad that we look to blame God? God did not do anything to Paul! Paul brought all of this on himself. Paul made a series of choices that led to all of these problems.
8. People must understand that choices always have consequences. There are several lessons we can learn from Paul’s mistakes. How can you make godly choices in your life?

First, by determining to follow God’s instructions and warnings

1. While in Ephesus, Paul had decided to visit Jerusalem. Acts 19:21

- He said, *“I go bound in the spirit...”* This is referring to **Paul’s** inner spirit, **his** desires, and, and **his** personal will.
2. After leaving Ephesus, and after much traveling, Paul reaffirmed his desire to visit Jerusalem, attempting to arrive there by the day of Pentecost. Acts 20:16
 3. To understand Paul’s desire to minister in Jerusalem, we must consider several things:
 - Paul himself was a Jew and, before his salvation, he was a religious leader in Judaism.
 - Paul had led the Jews in the persecution against the followers of Christ, imprisoning and beating Jewish believers in every synagogue, and helping to stone Stephen.
 - When he became a believer in Jesus Christ, he naturally desired to go to Jerusalem, tell them of his conversion, and declare that Christ is, in fact, the Son of God.
 - He felt like his testimony might turn the Jews to Christ, but Christ told him to depart out of Jerusalem because they would **not** receive his testimony. Acts 22:18
 - God also informed Paul that his ministry would be far away from Jerusalem and would be to the Gentiles. Acts 22:21
 - Even though Paul reached scores of Gentiles with the gospel, his heart kept bleeding for his people, Israel. Romans 9:1-3, 10:1
 - He felt responsible for leading Israel in their opposition to Christ and stirring up hatred against Christ. His heart was to undo all the harm and damage he had done to the cause of Christ. So now we understand his heart and passion in wanting to reach Jerusalem.
 4. But the problem was that God had not instructed Paul to go to Jerusalem. In fact, God had warned Paul repeatedly of the danger that lay ahead if he persisted.
 - The disciples at Tyre – Acts 21:3-4
 - Agabus the prophet – Acts 21:10-11
 - Paul’s companions in travel – Acts 21:12-14 (In other words, “We’re leaving it in God’s hands. God will have to stop him because we can’t convince him.”)
 - Numerous other warnings – Acts 20:22-23
 5. Going to Jerusalem was something that made sense to Paul, and something that he purposed in **his** spirit to do (Acts 19:21, 20:22), but God’s instructions and warnings told him otherwise.
 6. Paul’s intentions were noble and sincere, but good intentions and a sincere heart do not validate our actions, nor do they nullify the consequences.
 7. Where do we find God’s instructions and warnings for us today? We discover them in God’s Word, rightly divided. You cannot scorn these instructions without repercussions.
 - **Example:** A teenager or young adult becomes involved in sexual promiscuity and contracts an STD. That young person can complain, “Why is God doing this to me?” But God had nothing to do it. It was a natural result of scorning God’s warnings.

- **Example:** A married couple can ignore God's instructions about wise stewardship, go and buy things on credit, and live above their means. When they cannot pay their bills or lose their home they can say, "Why is God doing this to me?" But this was a self-inflicted wound.
 - **Other Examples:** You lose your job due to a lack of a proper work ethic, you encounter health problems due to abuse of your body, etc.
8. Paul was so determined in his spirit to go to Jerusalem that he ignored God's warnings and justified himself. We all are quite capable of doing this, aren't we?
9. There is a law of sowing and reaping found in God's Word. Galatians 6:7-8
- This law deals with the choices we make every day. We must make godly choices that are in line with the warnings and instructions of God's Word.
 - May we all learn from Paul. If we persist in choices that violate God's instructions, it can literally change the course of our entire lives.