

## Overcoming the Tendency to Blame God (for Our Choices) – Part 3 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**

**Second, by refusing to give heed to bad counsel**

**Third, by resisting the urge to attempt good by doing wrong**

1. As we pointed out earlier in this message, Paul’s intentions were noble and sincere, but good intentions and a sincere heart do not validate our actions, nor do they nullify consequences.
2. Paul 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. His heart wasn’t to do evil. Paul truly wanted to lead his countrymen to Christ.
3. Paul believed that through his compromise (taking an Old Testament Nazarite vow and offering animal sacrifices), he could soften the hearts of the Jewish people toward him. vs. 21, 23-24, 26
4. He thought these compromises would open a door for a fruitful ministry to the Jewish people. Paul could not have been more wrong about this. vs. 27-31, 36
  - Paul was very naïve to think that he could satisfy his accusers by observing some little Old Testament ceremony, or by making a token compromise.
  - Paul compromised what he knew was right in order to appease the elders at Jerusalem and to accommodate the lost people in Jerusalem. It landed him in prison, and he lost his freedom to travel and preach the gospel. It did not work.
5. Remember this – you never appease evildoers by compromising with them. You must expose their evil if you are to do any good. Ephesians 5:11
6. Doing evil that good may come is a very bad and dangerous policy. It defiles and destroys.
  - Christians do this often, and so do churches. It is very common today for churches to water down the gospel and resort to worldly tactics in order to “reach people.”
7. One of the most often referred to passages that is used to justify compromise is 1 Corinthians 9:20-22. Let’s read it together. This passage has been misused and mishandled by so many churches that want to validate a worldly mindset to ministry.
  - Their philosophy is that we must appeal to the carnal, worldly nature in order to have a platform to speak the gospel.
  - In other words, let’s become like the world (do wrong), in order to reach the world (do right).
  - This is not at all what Paul is advocating in this text. This would contradict clear teaching he gave in other portions of Scripture. Romans 12:2; Philippians 2:15; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17
8. So what does Paul mean when he says, “...unto the Jews I became as a Jew...” vs. 20
  - In context, he is speaking of his willingness to not eat offensive meat. 8:13

- Even though Paul knew that he was free from the law (vs. 19), Paul would gladly submit to the dietary restrictions of the law when he was trying to reach Jews with the gospel. Paul would gladly lay aside his rights so as to not knowingly offend them. He refrained from what might offend.
  - Paul was a Jew. Most likely there were meats, such as pork, that Paul did not personally care for, but when Paul was with Gentiles he would eat their meat so as not to offend them. vs. 21
    - **Illustration:** If I had a conviction against eating pork, but was invited to a lost person's house for dinner and they served pork, I would eat it. Why? So as not to offend and lose the chance of reaching them with the gospel.
  - When Paul refers to the weak in verse 22, he is referring to those with a weak conscience (8:7). Paul did not want to do anything - or lead them to do anything - that would defile their conscience and hinder himself in reaching them with the gospel.
9. Paul made himself a servant of all. Why would he lay aside his personal rights and take on such a servant's heart? The answer is in verses 19 and 23. He did it for the gospel's sake. He wanted to win lost souls to Jesus!
10. Does this contradict other Scriptures such as Galatians 1:10 or Ephesians 6:5-8?
- Not at all - we do not compromise the gospel or sound doctrine in order to please or serve people. This would be serving others in the wrong way. We are, first and foremost, the servants of Christ.
  - But we **should** possess a servant's heart towards others and not knowingly offend people. As we serve others, we are doing it as unto the Lord for the advancement of the gospel.
  - **Illustration:** If we are missionaries in a culture that doesn't wear shoes inside a building, we should honor this and not knowingly offend. But if we are in a culture that doesn't wear a stitch of clothes, there is a line you cannot cross.
11. So this text is not teaching that we become like the world in order to win the world. You don't become like a drunkard to win a drunkard, like an adulterer to win an adulterer, like a drug addict to win a drug addict, etc.
- Paul was not teaching that it is fine to compromise God's truth in order to win people to Christ.
  - The Bible teaches that we live a life that is distinctly different than the world and shine as a lights in the darkness. While we do this, we also share the gospel, and it provides conviction to the lost, which is essential for true salvation.
  - But when a believer or a church simply blends in with the world, there is no conviction. The world sees no real, pressing need of salvation.
12. It is never right to do wrong to do right.
- **Illustration:** A young man dates and marries a lost woman in order to win her to Christ. A person cheats on his taxes so he can give more to God. A believer goes to the nightclubs and bars with her lost friends in order to witness to them.

- It is never right to do wrong to do right. This kind of thinking leads to bad decisions and ungodly choices, which will have bad consequences many times. When things fall apart, it is easy to blame God and say, “God, why are you doing this to me?”
13. A person might look in our text and ask, “Why would God do this to Paul?” God did not do anything to Paul! Paul brought all of this on himself. Paul made a series of choices that led to his problems.
14. We must understand that our choices always have consequences. How can we keep from making ungodly decisions in our lives?
- First, by determining to follow God’s instructions and warnings
  - Second, by refusing to give heed to bad counsel
  - Third, by resisting the urge to attempt good by doing wrong