

1Corinthians 19-02-03b

Let's continue our study now in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and we're looking at the concept of a vow because we have a vow associated with Paul's activities in delivering this collection from the saints that are out in the Roman Empire back to Jerusalem. And we could spend quite a bit of time studying the concept of a vow, what it entailed, the examples in scripture are helpful in giving us some insight into what they were and why they were. But if you think about the examples we're familiar with, Samson was dedicated from birth as a Nazirite and you'd say, well, he was sort of an involuntary Nazirite, but he did keep the vow.

He did a lot of other things, but he did keep his vow and he never cut his own hair, that was done for him. But as you can imagine, the strength that God gave him to perform his special function in Israel, which as a judge was to be a deliverer for the Israelites from the Philistines. He was God's answer to the opposition and the adversity created by the Philistines.

God made special provision in and through Samson and he is a Nazirite. Well, by shaving his hair, that formally ends the period of the vow and the provision that went with it. And the reason he no longer has strength is, symbolically speaking, and God honors this even though somebody else shaves his head, God says, well, your hair, it's your fault, you told where the secret of your strength was and you indirectly ended your vow by giving somebody the shears.

And so God removes the special provision that pertained during the period of his vow. And it isn't until, essentially, his hair grows back and he takes a new Nazirite vow that he gets his strength back. So we gain a little bit of insight by thinking about that.

There is some argument that John the Baptist was a Nazirite and was dedicated to a special purpose and was, although he never did a miracle, no miracles at the hands of John the Baptist, but the power of his preaching caused all Jerusalem to come out and hear him. Jesus would say later, you know, you didn't go out in the desert to hear the wind blowing through the reeds, did you? You went out there because there was a man of power and conviction preaching repentance and getting ready for the kingdom of God, as predicted in Malachi. And he was set aside to that special purpose.

And for that, he voluntarily stays away from things that are not necessarily illegitimate but that would distract. And God provides, during that period, special enablement. And so the vow, whatever it is, is sort of a temporary covenant.

Party, the first part, is the one taking the vow. Party, the second part, is God. And you trust God for provision and for others to see that you are in the midst of a vow and to take up the slack.

If John the Baptist had had any responsibilities for his parents, somebody else would step in, somebody else in the family, because John is dedicated. John can't come in there when Zacharias and Elizabeth check out and need preparation and burial and so on. He's not going to be able to do that.

He's a Nazarite. Jephthah took a vow and over and above other provisions, we don't know for sure that it was a Nazarite vow, but he said, the first thing I see when I come back, I will dedicate that to the Lord. And he kept his vow.

And if you do a little bit of a concordance study on the word vow in the Old Testament, you will see that God sets great store in his people keeping vows that they make. Pay your vows, as repeated more than once in Scripture. If you make a vow, keep it.

So, as was pointed out during the break, this would indicate a measure of caution and care in making a vow. And in making a commitment before the Lord, you need to think this thing through. Again, as Jesus said about the man, what man getting ready to build a building does not sit down first and count the cost.

Don't commit to what you can't fulfill. And you need to have a pretty solid indication from God that he has already put in place what is needed for that vow. Samson already had the strength to whip Philistines with the jawbone of a dead animal.

And he did. It's interesting because that is a piece of dead animal, and yet we're not too worried about his sanctification status. It's kind of like David eating the bread from the table of showbread.

In a time of need, if God gives you the jawbone, use the jawbone. It may be unusual, but God made provision so that that became the weapon of choice and accomplished the purpose. There is a special dispensation, if you will, for those who have made a vow and are dedicated to keeping it.

And so this again goes back to the idea of divine guidance. Has God put me in a position where I see a possibility here, but it is going to require a special time? I'm going to have to do some unusual things to accomplish this purpose. I'm not going to be able to just continue in the normal ruts doing the normal things and being a regular citizen.

I am going to have to do extraordinary things. I'm going to have to set aside what is normal and what is ordinary. I'm not even going to take time for a haircut here.

And those around me need to know this so that they can put a shoulder under the load while I am doing this special thing directly related to service to God. And I am expecting because I've had some indication from God that He will strengthen me and provide for me to accomplish this undertaking. Paul has taken a vow that we see over in Acts 18.18 and when it says that he is tarried in Corinth yet a good while, then took his leave of the brethren and sailed from there into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila, having shorn his head in Cancria.

This is backfilling a little bit. This happened before he set sail into Syria. Paul tarried there yet a good while and then took his leave of the brethren.

But before he took his leave of the brethren, he shaved his head in Cancria. Cancria is almost a

suburb of Corinth. It's back in that same area.

So before he sailed, he shaved his head. What does that mean? A lot of people that haven't really taken time to look at the Nazirite vow think, well, as soon as he arrived, he took a vow and shaving his head was a sign of the vow. No.

Shaving your head means the vow is completed. So we're left to speculate since we're not told what was the vow that Paul took and then completed when he left Corinth. I would guess, and it is a pure speculative shoot an arrow into the air and it comes down I know not where, but if I had to at gunpoint guess as to what the vow was that Paul completed at Cancra when he shaved his head, it would be his very strong statement in verse 6 of 18.

Your blood be on your own heads. I am clean. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles.

And what he's mainly talking about here is now on here in Corinth. As long as I'm in Corinth, I'm not coming back to the synagogue. I am not going to try to convert you Jews with all of my Pharisaic training and my credentials of Old Testament demonstration.

Your blood is on your own head. And the mention of blood on their own head, I am going to the Gentiles. I think Paul said, you know what, I'm going to dedicate myself to founding and developing and establishing and nurturing this Corinthian church that is in the house next door to the synagogue.

And I'm going to do nothing but that. And I think, I suspect he took a Nazarite vow to that effect at that point. Trusting God for enablement and for guidance and for support and everything necessary to get this Corinthian church founded.

And that's why I'm dwelling on it a little bit is you can see his care and concern in these two long letters to Corinth because it could well be that he had dedicated himself to them and nothing else for close to a two year period. When he finishes there and he's getting ready to sail and go elsewhere, he shaves his head meaning I am now free of my vow to go only to the Gentiles. And if I run across a synagogue in my further travels, I can still see if I can persuade them about Jesus Christ.

It makes sense to me. And yet there's another sense in which his Nazarite vow, if that's what it was in Corinth, actually reflected his entire commission. He was in some ways the Nazarite apostle set aside from the rest of the apostles, set aside in time, set aside in commission, set aside in training, set aside he's not a Galilean, he's not without formal theological education.

He is set apart in so many ways to be, in God's I think sort of sense of humor, the one that would seem most prepared to go to the Jews is the one that is sent almost exclusively to the Gentiles and the ones who have no form or comeliness that the Jews should desire them because what good thing can come out of Nazareth and who cares about the people in Galilee? Those are the ones sent to Israel and they have to get past their pride and respond, change their minds and believe the gospel disregarding the source or the seeming human

qualifications of the source. And God almost puts a bit of a hurdle there. You've got to get past the fact that Jesus doesn't look like the conquering Messiah to accept him at first as your Savior.

And the Jews have to get past the lack of Pharisee, Sadducee, elder, chief priest, scribe, credentials of the apostles to get the message. So God sends 10 or 11 Jewish fishermen and tax collectors and such to the Jews. Tax collector really? Matthew is going to be Jesus' representative to the Jews and he's a tax collector? It doesn't get any richer than that.

And then Paul with all of his Pharisee credentials and Paul has to be asking himself from time to time, you mean I sat at the feet of Gamaliel for all of those years and I'm off here? The Greeks don't care anything about my demonstrations from the law and my proofs that Jesus is the Christ. I'm trying to get them weaned off of idols and promiscuity and all kinds of aberrations and eating things strangled and what not. And it just, I think God's higher logic is something we often have to contend with.

So he shaves his head at Cancra. This is before he sailed. When you leave Corinth you go to Cancra, you get on a boat and you sail.

Well he's done in Corinth so his dedication ends at that point. Well quickly now let's just review what's going to happen with this collection. Turn again to 2 Corinthians.

We know that he discusses it at length in chapter 8 and chapter 9. Chapter 9 of 2 Corinthians, touching the ministering to the saints. It's superfluous for me to write to you. I know the readiness of your mind.

I know your willingness. You told me a year ago, you said in the previous chapter, that you were ready. And I've told the people in Macedonia about you and that encouraged their readiness.

This is the reason that we read biographies of missionaries and dedicated ministers. It's inspiring to see and it's encouraging to see other members of the body of Christ who have dedicated themselves to a task or God has used them to open the door of salvation by preaching the gospel in far off lands or in our native land in ways that you wouldn't necessarily think. People that have done all kinds of ministry that I have neither the ability nor the inclination to do.

But God sets those people aside and they are able to get things done. And to know about that is an encouragement. Paul uses the Corinthians as an encouragement to the believers in Macedonia.

He uses the Macedonians as an encouragement to the people in Corinth. So this is what he's talking about with boasting. We always think boasting is some sort of a sin.

I know the readiness of your mind for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia. He's basically saying, I share with them how wonderful it was when you responded to the voice of God and how it opened your heart and made you generous and sensitive and transformed you from the

idle worshiping godless pagans you were into saints of God and followers of Jesus Christ. Boast carries a lot of freight in English that is hard to shake.

But he's sharing the good news of this to those in Macedonia. Kia was ready a year ago and your zeal provoked very many. Your example has encouraged many others.

I've sent the brethren lest that talk of you should be in vain in this behalf so that you can be ready. And he goes on to talk about lest if they have Macedonia come with me and find you unprepared and then all of our talk about what a wonderful example you are would not prove out. So I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren that they would go before you and make up beforehand your bounty.

This is to collect that which has been set by week by week of which you had noticed before that the same might be ready as a matter of bounty and not as of covetousness. So he's saying this regular setting aside will make it easy to gather it to collect it and there's not going to be any bad motivation. Covetousness is bad motivation.

And if somebody says well I'll match whatever Bob gives well is he just making sure Bob doesn't outdo him in giving and he's covetous of a reputation. You remember the Ananias and Sapphira episode where they wanted to look like they were as generous as everybody else and that was a bad motivation and they died as a result in the early chapters of Acts. So Paul says he who sows sparingly verse six will reap sparingly he who sows bountifully will reap bountifully.

What is he talking about? Back in chapter 8 verse 13 and 14 it's not a matter of somebody doing without and somebody else having an abundance. We're looking for equality. We're looking for an exchange of blessing, mutual benefit.

It may be that for a time one is able to benefit the other later on that second person can be a benefit to the first. We watch for those opportunities and so to sow sparingly and reap sparingly if you're not looking for those opportunities to be a blessing to others you're probably not going to be the recipient of very many blessings coming back the other way because it is a mutual and the mutuality of it and the necessity of fellowship and the presence of other believers or knowledge of other believers and their situation is essential. How can the believers in Macedonia, in Achaia, in Corinth how can they be a blessing to the ones in Jerusalem? There is contact.

There are those who travel between and who let them know the need. Well there may come a future time or there may have been past times where the people in Jerusalem are the ones who financed and sent the apostles who were able to preach and able to establish these churches and bring them the wonderful grace of the Lord Jesus. And so there is an exchange.

There is a mutual edification and up building that is in view and if you don't invest in that and this investment is a spiritual investment. The material side of it is sort of incidental. To what extent are you interested in blessing and being blessed in fellowship? If you're not much

interested in it you're probably not going to get much out of it.

If you look for it and watch for it and plow whatever you have by way of spiritual benefit into it, whatever your gift is or your opportunity, you will receive. It is better to give than to receive, but you can't out give God, not in the material sense. You hear this in the prosperity gospel, you can't out give God.

Put in a hundred bucks, he'll give you back a thousand. Not at all. It's in the spiritual realm.

Do you want to grow? Do you want to thrive? Do you want to be built up and connected with the rest of the body? You've got to make that something of an objective and to the extent that you do that it is going to return to you. So, I say this, he who sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly. He who sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

Sow and reap in the light of verse 14 of the previous chapter. This has been so misused in modern day. Every man according as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly.

Notice so let him give is all in italics. You can just scratch it out. Every man according as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity.

So, what is the verb here? It's in the previous verse. He who sows bountifully shall reap bountifully as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity. Sowing bountifully, not grudgingly.

Sowing bountifully, not of necessity. God loves a cheerful giver. And look at verse 8. God is able to make all grace abound toward you.

He doesn't say God is able to make all money abound toward you. God is able to make all bank balance material prosperity abound to you. God is able to make grace abound.

We're looking for grace. We're looking for the fruit of the Holy Spirit and being recipients of it. If somebody is being loving and joyful and peaceful and long-suffering, we always talk about have that fruit of the Spirit.

But you notice nearly all of those have a target, have somebody who receives the benefit of being loved, of being put up with, of being treated gently, of being treated with goodness, of being the beneficiaries of your self-control. If you're self-controlled, somebody else is getting the benefit of you not exploding all over the room, right? So, God is able to make grace abound toward you. If you sow bountifully, spiritually, you cultivate those opportunities.

You occasionally dedicate yourself in a special way as God provides and as God makes an open door available. God is able to make grace abound toward you so that you always having all sufficiency in all things abound to what? Every good work. This isn't a promise that you're never going to come short at the end of the month.

All sufficiency to abound for good work. If you desire to be a blessing to others and the only

real way you can do that is to make some sort of contribution, then God knows your heart. God will make it possible for you to do that.

You will have all sufficiency. You always having all sufficiency in all. Now, all doesn't always mean all.

Here, what is the all sufficiency in all things? It is God's provision of sufficiency for your good works. It may be a provision of time. It may be a provision of health.

It may be a provision of insight into having a special God-given, Holy Spirit-illuminated sensitivity to what would benefit somebody else. There are those among us who just have an instinct for the right thing at the right time. It's angelic.

It is as though God purposely spoke to these people in a dream and said, go and do, but it is an all sufficiency that God gives them to abound in that up-building, edifying good work. It glorifies the Lord Jesus. God provided them.

God gave them the insight. God gave them the sufficiency and the gift. And sometimes it might hopefully be the teacher.

God gives an insight. I don't know why I'm saying what I'm saying, but God provides it in a way that is beneficial in any one of our lives. And it's an all sufficiency to do what God would have us do.

But we have to be proactive in making our contribution. If God's going to use us to be that kind of blessing in someone else's life, we need to be ready, willing, and able to use that sufficiency, to set some of that sufficiency by and be ready when the time of collection comes. So as it is written, verse 9, he that has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor, his righteousness remains forever.

Righteousness. He that ministers seed to the sower, both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness. Seed to the sower, bread to the eater.

This is metaphor. We're not talking about strictly material things, although they might be included. This is in the realm of righteousness, in the realm of spiritual blessing and benefit.

Being enriched in everything to all bountifulness, which causes through us what? Thanksgiving to God. Let your light so shine, others see that righteousness and glorify your Father. That's what Jesus said.

The administration of this service not only supplies the need of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings to God. This ultimately turns everyone's attention to the source of every good and perfect gift, doesn't it? There wouldn't be a church, there wouldn't be saints, there wouldn't be the Holy Spirit, there wouldn't be God's abundant provision for these things, and

we get to be the agent. We get to be the means by which it is delivered.

The proving of this ministration glorifies God for your professed subjection to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution to them and unto all. And by their prayer for you, who long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. Notice, sometimes the abundance and the return and the equality in abundance is their intercession and ministry in prayer.

I don't have a way to reciprocate a recompense in an action or in a return gift of any kind, but I will pray down God's blessings on you day by day by day. I will Nazarite myself in the area of prayer and make it a point to lift you up before the God's throne of grace every single day, because He has used you to be a blessing to me. And that is an ample equality return of spiritual abundance.

It doesn't have to be, oh, you made me this loan, let me pay you back. It can be, it's all in the spiritual realm. By their prayer for you, who long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you, thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.

It all ends with the greatest gift of all, which is the Lord Jesus Christ. All other gifts come in and through Him. We are in Him, He is in us.

Every good and perfect gift is distributed through the Lord Jesus Christ. We are His body, so those gifts continue to flow through us to one another. And what a privilege, what a great grace it is.

And rather than being a source of awkwardness or covetousness, as He says here, or pressure or some other negative, there is this abundance and there is this ability to both give and receive in that realm of grace. So that is the nature of the gift and the collection. It is very well intended.

And it could easily have been delivered to Jerusalem by representatives from these churches with an apostolic letter. And what could Paul do? What he was commissioned to do. What is Paul's commission? What's his commission? What did Jesus communicate to him in the street that is called Straight after he got struck blind? Sending you to the Gentiles, going to the Gentiles.

He did not say, oh and by the way, you're also going to be the brinks truck that's going to take gifts down to Jerusalem. But he's determined to go to Jerusalem. Turn to Acts chapter 19.

It came to pass while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper borders, came to Ephesus. This is where he writes Corinthians from. He finds these that haven't gotten the baptism.

Verse 8, he went into the synagogue in Ephesus and spoke boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. Why can he do that? Shaved his hair in Cenchrea. That's why.

He made a bold declaration that he's just going to go to the Gentiles, but he's back in the synagogue. Some were hardened and believe not, spoke evil of the way. He departed from them and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of Tyrannus.

Tyrannus is a Roman name. Tyrannus is a Latin name. This is a Greek speaking guy.

So he's done the same thing now in Ephesus that he did in Corinth. He's no longer in the synagogue and any of the Jews that did respond have now followed him to the school of Tyrannus. Continues for the space of two years, all they who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

The idea is, Paul, I am sending you to the Gentiles and such Jews as may be scattered out there with them are going to come as well. But if you target the Jews first, how many Greeks are going to be in the synagogue? You can go to the school of Tyrannus and as many Jews as want to come can come. But if you go into the synagogue, how many Greeks are going to be in there? None.

The Jews consider the synagogue kind of like the temple. You get the court of the Gentiles, you wait outside and we'll tell you what we heard if you're interested when we come out. So every time Paul goes into a synagogue, it seems like bad things start happening.

God brought special miracles by the hands of Paul. From his body, handkerchiefs, diseases depart, evil spirits go out. Then, verse 13, certain of the vagabond Jews, these are the dispersed Jews, exorcists took upon themselves to call over them who had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preaches.

This is absolutely the funniest section of the entire Word of God when you're looking at it. They were the seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and a chief of the priests who did so. He's a chief priest, but he found out that the name of Jesus is effective.

When Paul speaks under the authority of the Lord Jesus, demons have to leave, and this is part of his apostolic equipment. So they say, well, if Paul says this name and the demons leave, we'll try it. So the seven sons of Sceva try this, and the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them and overcame them and prevailed against them so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

This was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus, and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Many that believed came and confessed and showed their deeds. Many of those who used magical arts brought their books together, burned them before all men, and counted the price and found 50,000 pieces of silver.

So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. But I'm going to go to Jerusalem first.

Now he's already gone to Jerusalem first in Corinth when he went to the synagogue and got Sosthenes beat up. He's already done this in Ephesus, and now he's determined that he's going to really go to Jerusalem, go all the way to the actual Jerusalem before he goes to Rome. Is Paul supposed to see Rome? Evidently so, and God's going to send him to Rome, but Paul decides he's going to Jerusalem first.

Well, if you skip down now forward, he says goodbye to the Ephesian elders in chapter 20. I've coveted no man's silver in verse 33. You know these hands have ministered to my necessities and to them that were with me.

I've shown you all things, verse 35 of 20 of Acts, laboring you ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. Support those who are unable to support themselves. When he had thus spoken, he knelt down, prayed with them all, wept much, fell on his neck, kissed him, sorrowing for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more.

And they accompanied him to the ship. It came to pass, chapter 21 of Acts, after we parted from them, put to sea, came with a straight course to Kos, the day following to Rhodes, from there to Patara, finding a ship, sailing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set forth. When we sighted Cyprus, we left it on the left hand and sailed into Syria and landed at Tyre.

Tyre, of course, is now in Lebanon. There the ship was to unload her cargo, and finding disciples, verse 4, we tarried there seven days, who said to Paul, finding disciples, you could actually reverse that, we tarried there seven days, finding disciples, who said to Paul through the Spirit, capital S, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. Paul, remember the last time he was pressed in his spirit in Corinth and went to the synagogue and all kinds of bad things happened in Sosthenes, got mauled and assaulted and mugged? Well, these disciples speak through the Spirit.

This is their gift, this is their contribution. They say, you should not go to Jerusalem. When we had accomplished those seven days, we departed and went our way, and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city, knelt down on the shore and prayed.

When we had taken our leave of one another, we took ship, and they returned home again. And when we finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais and greeted the brethren and abode with them one day. The next day we that were of Paul's company departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and abode with him.

You remember Philip and the Ethiopian and the daughters and such, virgins who prophesy, tarried there many days, came down from Judea a certain prophet named Agabus. This is the same Agabus who predicted the famine earlier on in Acts. When he was come to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own hands and feet and said, Thus says the Holy Spirit, so shall the

Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owns this belt, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

When we heard these things, both we and they of that place besought him not to go to Jerusalem. Now you always hear this preached as though Paul answers, What mean ye to weep and break my heart? I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. This is an admirable impulse.

Paul writes in Romans, I would give up all of my future blessings in God's kingdom for the sake of the Jews. He's got a heart for them and it presses him. But guess what? That particular desire of his heart wasn't given by God.

I mentioned a week or two ago that people like to misconstrue that verse, you know, trust in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart and they say, whatever desire I have, I'm trusting God, so if I have a desire, it's a God-given desire. It's not the desire that is God-given. He will certainly guide us, but he's not going to guide us by planting a desire in us that isn't confirmable and doesn't make sense also in terms of circumstance, provision, the counsel of fellow believers and so on.

You're not just going to have a desire that runs counter to everything else. He put a desire in the heart of Titus to go and minister to the Corinthians and that was a wonderful thing, but that was also supported by apostolic authority, by an obvious need, by the provision made for the journey and to be able to preach and all the rest of it. Titus had a demonstrated thing and that desire was one of many factors, not an only factor.

Here he says, I'm ready not only to be bound but also to die at Jerusalem and when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying the will of the Lord be done, which of course is what's going to happen. But you notice that Paul gets two direct warnings from God the Holy Spirit through people in the church in two different places telling him not to go to Jerusalem. He's not supposed to go.

Well, what happens when he does? Very quickly now, verse 15, we took up our luggage, went to Jerusalem, certain of the disciples from Caesarea and Cyprus come with him, came to Jerusalem brethren and received us gladly. Day following Paul went with us to James and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

This is what Paul has been wanting to do all along is to bring together the Jewish side of the church and the Gentiles to demonstrate to the Jews in Jerusalem that Christianity is not just an outgrowth and an advance on what had become Judaism or Old Testament law, but it is a whole new thing where the Gentiles are equal participants and equal partakers of the grace of God. He is very pressed in his spirit to get them to accept this. So he declares particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

He's telling them about the handkerchiefs and about the demons and all the rest of it. When they heard it they glorified the Lord and that's it. They glorified the Lord, now we're off on a new tangent.

They didn't glorify the Lord and say, well Paul let us send you on your way so that you can get back to that wonderful work. They said, you see brother, how many thousands of Jews there are who believe and they're all zealous of the law. And they are informed of you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses saying that they ought not to circumcise their children neither to walk after the customs.

True or false? Have you read Galatians? What does Paul say about circumcision to the Gentiles in Galatia? Galatia is a region. What does he tell them? Those who encourage you to be circumcised, I wish they were circumcised right out of the body. I wish they themselves were cut off.

This is true. This is an absolute true statement. Paul does encourage the Gentiles not to worry about circumcision.

What else do they charge him with? Neither to walk after the customs. You're not under law but under grace. By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

How often and how forcefully has Paul made this point? The law is gone. The law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. Read the epistles.

He is all over the Gentiles being free of the law. Don't need to be circumcised. Don't need to walk after all of these Jewish customs detailed and actually brought to the front as traditions by the Jews.

What is it therefore, James says in verse 22, the multitude must needs come together for they will hear that you have come. In other words, they're going to come down here because they've heard that you're here and they're mad at you and they think that you're a heretic and a blasphemer and a bad guy because you tell the Gentiles they don't. These are people who are zealous for the law.

What does he say in Romans? They have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. Well, these are the zealots. Now, if you've ever dealt with somebody that's zealous for their point of view, what you think would be utterly persuasive rolls off like water on a duck.

So very quickly here, the multitude is going to come together and hear once they hear you've come. Do therefore this that we say to thee. We have four men who have a vow on them.

They've already taken the vow and there's four of them. The vow is on them now. The vow we talked about in number six.

You take them and purify yourself with them. Paul has just come from Gentile lands. It's going

to take him a week to get purified enough to go into the temple.

He's got to do sacrifices and rituals and things. So purify yourself with them. Pay their expenses so that they can shave their heads and all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning thee are nothing.

What? It's the core of Paul's message. But do some law-based rituals to appease them and so that they will know that the core of your gospel message to the Gentiles is nothing. Now remember back at the beginning this morning I said that Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles.

Why can he give orders to the Corinthian church? Why can he give orders to the church at Galatia? What was the basis of those orders? He says, as I have ordered in all the churches. What's his authority? He's an apostle. What's the rank structure here? Apostles, then prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

In other words, apostles go in this day and establish a church, appoint a pastor like Timothy or Titus and then travel on. Who guides whom? Do pastors tell the apostles what to do or do the apostles tell the pastors and the churches what to do? What's the flow of authority here? What's the authority here? What's the flow? James, a pastor, not even an apostle, he's the half-brother of the Lord, but he's been accorded standing by the Christian Jews because of that association, which has no authority with it. If I'm the brother of a general, I don't get to go give orders because my brother is the general, much less my half-brother.

But James has been accorded all of this respect. Peter fears him. Remember? Peter was eating with the Gentiles, but when men from James came Peter said, ooh, guys that are zealots for the law won't like this.

And so he abstains and Paul upbraids him for it. Paul upbraids Peter for paying too much attention to zealots of the law. Remember that? What's happening here? James tells the apostle Paul, do this.

And it's a strong imperative in verse 23, do this that we say to you. We've got a situation here. So Paul, apostle, me, the evident pastor or some sort of a leader in Jerusalem, do what I tell you.

We have four men who have a vow. Paul had no say in this vow. It's already underway when he gets there.

But he says, purify yourself with them, join yourself to them, identify with them, and pay their expenses. What's Paul going to have to come up with here? Four ewe lambs, four male lambs, four rams, four meal offerings, four drink offerings. What's he going to pay for this with? He's a tent maker.

But what has he got with him? The offering from the Gentiles. So how is he going to pay all of these expenses? He's an itinerant apostle. He's not made of money.

He doesn't have a personal fortune from which he can draw this. Where is he going to get the expenses to pay for this? He is going to have to pay all of the stuff he said to the Corinthians and to the Galatians and to those in Macedonia about giving out of liberality and focusing on the needs of the poor and those who would someday be able to reciprocate. Now what's he going to do? This money is going to be spent to finance Jewish vow takers for some unknown vow in an effort to appease people who are unhappy with Paul.

And in some abstract way, this will draw everybody together. Well, God is not in it. The Holy Spirit didn't say, Paul, I'm sending Agabus to you to tell you to go down there.

There are four men dedicated to me who have a vow and I want you to be purified with them and it will be a wonderful work that we do in Jerusalem. Go thou forth and I will make provision. He was told, don't go, don't go, and this is why, in my view.

Because when he gets there, so that they will know that all these things that have been said that are literally true about you will be as nothing. And that you walk orderly and keep the law. You need to put on a show here.

Well, he quotes the guidance that's been given to the Gentiles. So Paul took the men, verse 26, the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification until an offering should be offered for every one of them. When the seven days were almost ended, the Jews who were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help.

This is the man that teaches all men everywhere against the people and the law and this place, and further brought Greeks also into the temple and has polluted this holy place. For they had seen him before with Trophimus and Ephesians whom they supposed Paul had brought into the temple. All the city was moved, the people ran together, they took Paul and drew him out of the temple and the doors were shut.

So James' big plan here backfires. It's Paul's presence in Jerusalem that divides and splits and creates controversy and strife in the church. His participation with these guys in the temple and the vow just inflames everybody.

It's gasoline on what had been just smoldering discontent with Paul. They could talk about him, but he's off in the wild somewhere doing his thing and they could say, well, you know, that guy's not doing right. He's teaching the Gentiles to not be circumcised.

Well, now he's right in their midst. What do you think is going to happen? This is throwing a match in the powder keg. Well, you can read what else happens and he does eventually get to Rome, but it is a reminder that taking this vow is something Paul should have given careful and prayerful consideration to.

He had guidance from God against even being there, much less taking a vow that wasn't his initiative, it wasn't his free will. James tells him to take a vow. James tells him to underwrite and

support the vow of four other guys.

It is not from his heart. It isn't a covenant between himself and God. This is a suggestion to put on a show for people who are all about the show, who are dedicated to and vindicated by in their own minds keeping the works of the law.

And they've got a huge legalism problem and Paul is maneuvered into playing right into their hands and making a bad situation ten times worse. So all of the wonderful grace and righteousness of God reflected in the give and take and the mutual abundance that can flow in the church is discarded and set aside and part of that gift had to have been diverted for an illicit use in a human effort to make a human impression and change minds that have already been made up and God is just not in it. That's my view.

I believe with all my heart based on the Holy Spirit telling Paul twice, don't go, that he did the wrong thing in going. He did the wrong thing. It's backwards for James to be telling Paul what to do.

Paul is supposed to be the source of apostolic guidance to the churches, not the churches maneuvering Paul into doing something they think would be a good idea and Paul has railed against this very thing in his other epistles. So this is Paul as a fallible human being and of course he can wag his finger in my face when we all get to glory if I've got this wrong. But look at what the Word of God says.

Look at the principles. Look at what Paul himself has taught everywhere else and this is directly counter to it. It is an illustration and an example just as some of the failings of King David are in the Old Testament or even of Moses and other great biblical figures.

We all have feet of clay. Nobody in humanity other than the Lord Jesus himself is perfect and these things are written in the scriptures for our instruction. And so we can look at this and take heed to ourselves that if we make a commitment, if we set ourselves on a course that we are sensitive to and actively seek the guidance of God, the provision of God, if these men have been supposed to take that vow, why is it they can't fulfill it? Why does Paul have to buy their sacrifices for them? That was an ill-considered vow.

It was poorly thought out. You don't commit to what you can't fulfill. But these four guys did.

And so James says, wow, Paul just came with a big pot of provision here. Let's use that. Not supposed to do.

So it's encouragement for us to think, to pray, to soak ourselves in the scripture and ask and seek and knock so that when a door is open for us, it's God's door. And when we walk through, it's God's glory that is reflected. It's God's righteousness that is distributed and everyone is blessed.

Well we'll conclude our study with a final look at the end of chapter 16 next time. Let's close

here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the examples, both positive and negative, that are so helpful to us in examining our own lives to see if we are in the faith. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will minister these things to each heart. May all of us, both individually and collectively, be a credit to the Lord Jesus Christ and suitable representatives as his body on the earth to continue to be beacons of your grace, to be examples of your grace, and to show forth the Lord's death till he comes.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.