

## 97-07-06b

Okay, we're ready now to resume. As I pointed out in the first session, and as I have just been reminded, we with great trepidation look at an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and say we think we made a mistake. But there is a reason for that, and that's what we want to look at in this portion of our study this morning.

Why is there any foundation at all for making this claim in the Scripture? Let me first of all direct your attention back to Acts 18. Again, this is in the portion of Paul's ministry when he is up in these regions that he tells the Romans he has been ministering in. After the things in Acts 17, Acts 18 says, After this he left Athens and went to Corinth.

He found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla. They, by the way, will be mentioned in Romans 16 as residing in Rome when Paul sends the Roman letter. But at this time they are in Corinth, and they had recently come from Italy because Claudius had commanded all Jews to leave Rome.

And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they worked, for by trade they were tent makers. And he argued in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded Jews and Greeks. He made his presentation because he was a Pharisee and he was steeped in the law, and he had done this in the past.

If you review Paul's career in Acts, you'll see that many times he would go to the synagogues and demonstrate from the Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, Your blood be upon your heads.

I am innocent. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles. And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titus Justus, a worshiper of God.

And it goes on from there. And it tells us in verse 11, he stayed a year and six months teaching the word of God among them. But throughout Acts, you find that the Jews were at odds with Paul.

You find this in verse 12, Galileo was proconsul of Achaia. The Jews made a united attack on Paul, brought him before the tribunal, and so forth. This ongoing schism between Paul and the Jews characterized his entire ministry.

And he did not endear himself to the Jerusalem church at the time when men from James came and Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles and Paul stood up and rebuked them all and said, You're hypocrites and you're saying one thing and doing another. And this was a desire that Paul had to try to gain the favor and the approval and the good opinion of the church in Jerusalem. But in Acts, after the passage we noticed before the break in chapter 20, where he said that he was

going to go, in 1921 of Acts, when he resolves in his spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.

Then he sends Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia. Paul continues, and in Acts chapter 20, he journeys through Macedonia and Greece. And again, the Jews make a plot against him in Acts 20 verse 3. And so he returns back through Macedonia as a result of that plot.

And Paul talked with them in Acts 20, and this is when you have Eutychus falling from the third story and being taken up dead. And in verse 13, after they were comforted, Eutychus is raised from the dead. Going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land.

When he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mytilene. Sailing from there, we came the following day opposite Chios. The next day we touched at Samos, and the day after that we came to Miletus.

For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. Paul wants to be back in Jerusalem with this financial gift on the anniversary of the founding of the church. He wants to be back.

He knows there will be a big assembly there in Jerusalem. All the Jewish believers will be at church. It's kind of like Easter Sunday, if you will.

And Paul wants to be there on that day when the maximum number of Jewish believers are assembled at the church to present this gift. From Miletus, he sends to Ephesus. This is Acts 20, verse 17.

He calls to him the elders of the church. When they came to him, he said to them, and then he gives this speech. From the first day that he set foot in Asia, he has taught them in public and from house to house, testifying of God's grace and so forth.

Look at verse 22 of Acts 20. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit, not knowing what shall befall me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. As soon as Paul began this journey to Jerusalem, as soon as he made up his mind, as soon as he decided in his spirit to make this journey to Jerusalem, God the Holy Spirit began to testify to him in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await him.

And I'm not sure how your English reads there, but it's very clear in Greek that the Holy Spirit is not saying that imprisonment and affliction awaits him in every city. The Holy Spirit is testifying in every city that imprisonment and affliction awaits him in Jerusalem. That's the point.

Now, there is a contrast here with what the Holy Spirit tells Paul in other places. You remember

the earlier ministry of Paul when he, in for example, the passage in Acts 18 that we just reviewed when he was testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. They opposed and reviled him and he said your blood be upon your heads and so forth.

If you look on down in Acts 18 at verse 9, the Lord came to Paul and spoke to him in a vision and said do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent, for I am with you and no man shall attack you to harm you, for I have many people in this city. And so he stayed a year and six months teaching the Word of God among them. Here's a case where there was great opposition and God gave Paul the Word that he was to continue.

He was confirmed in his course of action to stay and to teach, to continue presenting these things. He says do not be afraid, speak and do not be silent, I am with you and no man shall attack you to harm you. So when Paul is on the right track, he gets a confirming word from God to continue and to be bold and not be afraid.

Here in Acts 20 when Paul is talking to the Ephesian elders, he tells them that the Holy Spirit testifies to him in every city that bonds and imprisonment await him in Acts 20, 23. Imprisonment and affliction awaits him. And what is Paul's response to that word from the Holy Spirit? He says, I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

That is Paul's apostolic function. That is his commission. That is his call.

That is his gift. The question is, does accompanying the financial gift from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem accomplish that calling? In what way does that testify to the gospel of the grace of God to the Gentiles, which is Paul's specific calling? Now, there is a telltale remark that Paul makes in this regard when you turn back to Romans 15. I don't know if you noticed it when we read that through this morning, but look again at Romans 15, verse 31.

Starting in verse 30 of Romans 15, Paul says, I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me. This is a prayer request that Paul gives to the believers at Rome. Pray for me that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to whom? To God? No, that my service to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints.

Pray. Paul is concerned that his service is not going to be acceptable to the saints, and he wants it to be acceptable to the saints. Now, what have we studied throughout this entire letter about who it is we live to please? Who it is that we serve? What has Paul himself written in many places? What you do, do heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men.

Not being men-pleasers. We have the Apostle Paul to thank for the communication of that principle of truth. And yet here, Paul's prayer request, and I think unconsciously, his desire is that

when he brings that gift down to Jerusalem, it's going to be acceptable to them.

Now, let me ask you something. If there were not this rift, if there wasn't this disapproval of Paul down in Jerusalem, if there was just this wonderfully well-schooled, grace-oriented group of believers who were impoverished down there, and here comes a financial gift in love from another church, in what way could they not fail to receive that with gratitude? How could it not be acceptable to them if they're all on the same track of one mind, united in the faith, fellow believers, receptive and excited about the grace of God, and so forth? There would be no issue of acceptance of this gift. But in Jerusalem, there is an issue because of the source, because it comes from the Gentiles, and because it comes from outside the Jewish community.

Paul wants to happen, in this case, the same thing that happened when Antioch sent a gift down to Jerusalem. It's a worthy goal. It's a good thing that the church be unified.

It's a good thing that the poor be helped. Remember the commission? You can look it up in Acts when they had the dispute and they had the council get together and decide what requirements would be laid upon the Gentiles. Remember the Jerusalem council? They said they need to refrain from things strangled and from eating the blood, and what else? That they remember the poor.

Well, here's a great example of remembering the poor. Here are the Gentile churches remembering the poor. What a great way to come back and vindicate the Gentile churches.

They're doing exactly what the Jerusalem council said. They're remembering the poor. Here's this gift for the poor.

It's a good thing. Is it the best thing? Is it what God wants Paul to be doing as a priority? Is it his job to go back and accompany this gift? Why does Paul need to accompany this gift back to Jerusalem? Isn't his primary calling to be going? Why is it he can't go to Rome and preach the gospel to them? Why can't he go through Ephesus again and refresh the saints there with the teaching that only he can give? He's an apostle. There are many men who can guard a shipment of material goods back to Jerusalem.

Only Paul can lay the foundation. Only Paul can preach Christ where he's not yet been named. Only Paul can build up and strengthen pastors and elders and do the calling that he acknowledges throughout his writings.

And what is it that Paul has in his mind when he decides he has to go back to Jerusalem? My service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints. That is the telltale passage from Paul's point of view. He asks for prayer that his service for Jerusalem will be acceptable to the saints.

That he will be vindicated. That he will be approved by these believers. It's the very thing that he's been arguing against throughout this letter.

That's from Paul's point of view. From God's point of view, does Paul get a word from the Lord that says do not be afraid to go to Jerusalem. Speak and do not be silent.

Deliver the gift and do not be intimidated for I am with you and no man shall attack you to harm you for I have many people in Jerusalem. Not at all. The Holy Spirit testifies in every city that bonds and affliction await Paul in Jerusalem.

Now, what is Paul's response? He makes application of the Word of God. My life doesn't count for anything. I'm willing to endure that affliction for the cause of Christ.

It's a good application. And it's all through the trials that he's going to undergo. And it sounds great.

It sounds noble. How could anyone find fault with that? The only reason we can find fault with it is that God the Holy Spirit is warning him away. Now, let me ask you this.

Why doesn't God the Holy Spirit simply come and say, Paul, don't go to Jerusalem? Remember when he desired to cross over into Macedonia at an earlier phase of his ministry and he got the word, don't go. He wanted to go and he was told, no, don't go. Why didn't God just do that here? I would submit to you that as we grow and as we mature, God expects more from us than just response to do's and don'ts.

That's what we do with our children, isn't it? We set up rules and we say, do this, don't do that. We watch over them. And when they start to do something wrong, we say, stop, don't do that.

As they grow, we expect them to come to discernment and to figure out what they're supposed to do on their own. And that's the exercise. That's the test.

Can you, given a mission and given a set of priorities, figure out the best thing to do? This is the mature believer who has his senses exercised to discern good and evil, who can go on to make application in gray areas, who knows when it's okay to eat meat offered to idols and when it's not, who knows when it's okay to circumcise and when it's not, who knows when to apply the law of love and when to apply the law of supreme sacrifice and so forth. And things are not as clear. It's a function of maturity.

It's a test for an advanced believer. And that's the test that Paul has here. God should not have to tell Paul where to go and where not to go at this point.

Paul ought to know better. He has all the information he needs to make this decision. And God the Holy Spirit has said, bonds and affliction await you in Jerusalem.

He's not getting the confirming word from God that he gets when he's doing the right thing. He's getting a warning word. Now, let me ask you again.

Can you remember back in Acts chapter 11, the situation with the prophecy of famine in Judea? Acts 11, 27, In these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world. And this took place in the days of Claudius.

The disciples determined everyone according to his ability to send relief from the brethren who lived in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. Turn with me to Acts chapter 21, verse 7. This is shortly after Paul kneels and prays with the Ephesian elders.

They weep and embrace and kiss, sorrowing most of all because of the word he had spoken that they should see his face no more. They bring him to the ship. They parted and set sail.

And they went several places that Luke talks about in the first part of 21. And then in 21, 7 of Acts, When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemaeus. And we greeted the brethren and stayed with them for one day.

On the morrow we departed and came to Caesarea. And we entered the house of Philip the Evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. And he had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

While we were staying for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. This is the same Agabus that we saw back in Acts 11. What does Agabus have to say here? Coming to us, he took Paul's girdle and bound his own feet and hands, and said, Thus says the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this girdle and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

When we heard this, we and the people there begged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned, but even to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, The will of the Lord be done.

Now, the ministry of a prophet is to communicate the Word of God in the early days of the church, where you don't have the completed canon of Scripture. There was the need in the early church for New Testament truth to be communicated, things that would guide the decisions of the church when they didn't have a body of written foundation from the apostles to refer to. Here comes a prophet.

This is a confirmed prophet. This is Agabus, the same one with whom Paul was associated in that earlier ministry of ministering a gift. What does Agabus have to say here? Is Agabus confirming and supporting this trip to Jerusalem with the gift? Agabus makes a special trip to Paul.

If Paul is doing the right thing, why does Agabus even need to show up? Does Paul need some preparation? Does he need to prepare himself mentally for affliction? How much affliction has Paul already been through? How many times has he been in prison? How many times has he been beaten? How many times has he endured hardship? He's already been to Lystra and has been stoned and left for dead. He's been let down out of a basket. He's been through all kinds of things.

How many times did the Holy Spirit come and warn Paul that he was about to endure affliction? The Lord Jesus Christ showed Paul that at the very outset. Remember what the Lord says in the vision to Ananias on the day that Paul is confronted on the road to Damascus? The Lord appears to Ananias and He says, there's going to be a man named Saul that's going to come and visit you. I will show him what great things he must suffer for My name's sake.

Jesus gave that message to Paul up front. He said, listen, this is going to be a hard road. You're going to have affliction.

You're going to have persecution. You're going to put up with a lot to accomplish this apostolic mission. Why now? Why didn't the Holy Spirit come and warn Paul to stay away at Lystra and not get stoned apparently to death? Why did the Holy Spirit not warn Paul away from all of the other imprisonments and beatings and 40 lashes minus one and so forth? It's only in this mission to Jerusalem that God comes and warns him and says, this is what's going to happen if you go.

This ought to be enough information for Paul. This ought to be enough information to make a decision. Now, Paul makes a wonderful selfless declaration.

He is willing to die. He's willing to sacrifice for the name of the Lord Jesus. And it's interesting because this is the rationale that many of us use today.

When we get busy for the Lord, when we decide that we're going to do something good in the Christian life, and we start to encounter opposition and we start to encounter affliction, we start to encounter difficulty and so forth, we have to make a decision in our lives too, don't we? When it starts to be a real uphill grind and we start to wonder, well, is this an obstacle to test my faith? Something that I should persevere through? Or is this God closing the door and saying, this is not something I should be doing? Well, we don't get a blinding light and a vision from God saying don't do this or continue on forward. I am with you, do we? And Paul in the early days of the church does get those things. When he's supposed to continue, the Lord comes and says, don't be afraid, Paul, I'm with you.

I've got many people here who will support you. And when Paul is going in the wrong direction, God the Holy Spirit says, bonds and imprisonment await you. Now, again, we ask the question, why doesn't he just say don't go? Well, what is the exercise? What is the goal of leaving us here in this life after salvation? We're supposed to learn how to discern the Lord's will from the

principles that He teaches us.

It would be an easy thing for God to say, Paul, don't go. And Paul might not understand it. He might not go through any sort of rationale or any exercise of faith.

He got a word from the Lord, don't go, just like in Macedonia. And so, he shuts down the operation and does not go. But this is for Paul's benefit and it's for our benefit.

This is enough information for Paul to make the right decision. The prophet Agabus comes as the Holy Spirit has testified in every other city that Paul has visited since he made this decision. And he says this is what the Jews at Jerusalem are going to do.

They're going to bind the man who owns this girdle and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. What is Paul's mission? Paul is supposed to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. Paul is supposed to lay the foundation, to be an eyewitness to the resurrected Lord.

Going to the Jews and being imprisoned by them is not a good way to accomplish that goal. Ah, but you say, didn't Paul have a wonderful ministry from prison and so forth? Yes, he did. And God works all things together for good.

But this is a warning. Why does the Holy Spirit come and warn Paul? Does he need warning for affliction? No, he's been through worse than what the Jews are going to put him through. He's been through worse than this before.

He doesn't need mental preparation for this. He's already ready to go and to die. And he's had that attitude all along.

The Holy Spirit is warning him because this should be enough information to remind him that he doesn't have to go justify himself in front of the Jews. It's important for us, Jesus faced that same type of decision in Capernaum. He ministered the grace of God to people and they received it.

And he could have stayed there and continued to give that gift to the people in Capernaum. But he left and he didn't come and continue to give that gift day after day, that gift of healing and that gift of wellness to those people in Capernaum. Why? What does Jesus say in Mark 1? Remember our Scripture reading this morning? When Peter comes and finds him in the dark after he has gone out by himself and prayed and meditated with his father, Jesus says, let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there.

For this is why I came out. And so he goes throughout all Galilee. And he could have stayed Capernaum.

This is going to be his headquarters up in Galilee for the next three years. Anytime he's up north, he's going to operate. They often stay at Peter's house.

What a great thing to cultivate the goodwill of the people in Capernaum. But Jesus doesn't stay there and do that because he looks at his mission in the light of his calling. His express instruction from God.

He says, I'm going to preach the gospel of the kingdom. And that's what he does. And he's not distracted by pleasing people.

And I think that that's the mistake that Paul makes here. And I say this with trepidation. It's a large thing to criticize an apostle.

But we know the apostles made mistakes. We know Peter made mistakes. And I think the believers who contributed to this gift did so not grudgingly or out of necessity.

I think they did it cheerfully and willingly. It was an opportunity presented to them by the apostle. I think the gift itself may have been a very worthy thing to do.

It may have met a genuine need down in Jerusalem. The question is, was it necessary for Paul to accompany this gift back to Jerusalem? He has the opportunity to go forward to Rome, to go to Spain. Spain is a relatively new province in Rome.

There are many people there who can benefit from the preaching of the Gospel where Christ has not yet been named. Paul is uniquely equipped to go there because he's a Roman citizen. They probably speak Latin over there.

And apparently, Paul could converse in regions west of the dividing line between the Greek-speaking world and the Latin-speaking world. And this is a unique opportunity for him. He's an apostle entrusted with the mysteries of Christ.

And to be diverted by a secondary good thing of going back. He wants to be there on the day of Pentecost and be associated with this wonderful gift. And I think in his mind, he's thinking back to Acts 11.

And he's thinking back, they're going to have to accept us now. Here's proof. And he calls it proof.

Turn back now to Romans 15 where Paul says, as he writes to the Roman church, in verse 26, Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it since they have received spiritual benefit. They ought to return material benefit.

And so he says, I am going to deliver this gift under my personal seal. When I have come to Jerusalem and have delivered what has been raised, notice in verse 28, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit. This is a phrase that was used of tenant farmers who used land to raise crops.

And they would harvest those crops. They would pick the fruit or whatever. They would put it in sacks and then they would put their seal on it.

It was a seal of ownership. And they would then ship this to market. And when Paul says that I may seal to them this fruit, he says I'm putting my seal of ownership on this fruit.

This is going to be a vindication of mine. And he has his personal imprimatur, if you will, on this fruit. And he wants to accompany it and have it associated with him when he arrives in Jerusalem.

And that's why he asks for that prayer that his service to Jerusalem might be acceptable to the saints. This financial gift is supposed to be a way of vindicating his service, his function as an apostle. Because the financial gift is not Paul's financial gift.

It's a gift of the churches. They have rendered a service. They have offered freewill offerings to help these poor people out.

But Paul wants to use this as a means of vindicating himself. And this is the problem that we face. And it's one of the applications that we make from this very letter of Romans that we do not do what we do to seek vindication in the eyes of other believers.

We don't try to somehow associate ourselves with something good even when it's something that we have seen before that was totally legitimate. Paul has seen this before and has seen the wonderful way believers can be united through the mutual function of spiritual gifts. He says, boy, if that could just happen with the Jerusalem church, what a wonderful thing it would be.

And everything about it is good. Gifts to the poor are good. Service to the saints is good.

His preaching to the Gentiles is good. Helping the Jews come to a recognition of the legitimacy of the Gentile churches is good. But is it best? Is it for Paul at this time? God the Holy Spirit comes and witnesses time and again.

Every time Paul goes to a city, a prophet there, somebody under the ministry of the Holy Spirit warns Paul about going to Jerusalem. They never say don't go, but the warning signs are there. And Paul is the most advanced believer in the church age.

If anybody ought to be able to interpret these warnings from the Holy Spirit, it's Paul. But Paul makes an application that sounds great. He says, I'm willing to suffer and die for the cause of Christ.

Everything he thinks about, he can rationalize this. And this is the thing about our minds and our spirits and our hearts. The most wonderful gift that we have in terms of our human acquisitions is our intellect, our ability to reason.

It's what separates us from the animals. But it's also our greatest pitfall because we can rationalize and we can convince ourselves that something is good and that something is right because everything about it is good. Well, you can't argue with giving a gift to the poor.

You can't argue with uniting the church. We have to look at these things as we grow and advance. Our tests are not as easy as the sort of shell game, you know, find the sin.

Which shell is the pea under? And that's the sin. And so we eliminate the sin and everything else is okay. We have to become more discerning.

And as Paul tells the Philippians, he says, I pray that you will come to discern the better things, that you will come to know the difference between what's good and what's best. All things are lawful, not all things are edifying. And Paul himself is our best witness to this truth.

So when we think about this, and the principle is true, even if I am wrong in seeing this in the life of Paul, this principle is definitely true. We have to be careful when we embark upon doing something that we justify on the grounds of it being the will of God, and we apply the Word of God to it. And the key thing to look for in this particular case is, who are we trying to please? Whose opinion are we most concerned with? We make a contribution, we put ourselves out on behalf of someone, and who is it that we are trying to gain approval of? Would we be just as willing and just as happy to do this thing if we knew ahead of time that there would be no approval? That's what the Holy Spirit tells Paul.

The Holy Spirit says, if you're trying to go to Jerusalem and offer this gift to be acceptable to the saints, forget it. The Jews are going to lock you up and turn you over to the Gentiles. So if that's the rationale, which Paul says it is in Romans 15.31, pray that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints.

The Holy Spirit has already told him, your service is not going to be acceptable to the saints. If that's why you're doing it, don't even bother. Bonds and affliction await you in Jerusalem, not acceptance and unity.

That's the clue. That's the key for application. And Paul has to be perceptive enough and humble enough and objective enough to realize that he's not going to make himself acceptable.

He's not going to be vindicated in the eyes of the Jerusalem church. And he needs to focus on his primary calling, and that is presenting the Gospel to the Gentiles. Now, he's going to go, and subsequent events are going to bear this out because Paul is going to go so far as to join with a group of Jewish men and take a vow and go engage in some Mosaic Law ritual, which he has stridently argued against in Galatians and in Romans.

But he's going to go and try to show that he's not offensive to the Jews. And when you read on down in Acts after he gets to Jerusalem, that's what he does. And it doesn't curry their favor.

The very thing that he does is to try to make himself favorable backfires. And it's the occasion upon which these men take a vow and say they won't eat any food until they kill Paul. I don't know whether they actually did that or not.

It doesn't say that they all starved to death. Paul obviously was not killed by them. But here's the point for us.

We have to do what Jesus did. Jesus was faced with a decision like this. Should I stay and do a good thing? Should I leave and do a better thing? How did Jesus sort this out in His humanity? He got up early and went off by Himself and communed with God the Father.

He spent time in the presence of His Father. He meditated on who He was and why He was here. And by the time Peter and the other disciples show up to find the Lord and say, come on back, we've got a big opportunity to minister, Jesus says, no, we're leaving.

We're going to leave the big crowd. We're going to leave the opportunity to minister and to heal. And we're going to go preach the Gospel because that's why I came forth.

Paul, I think, when you read Acts and you see how caught up he was arguing in the synagogues, ministering, traveling, going here and there, I wonder if perhaps he wasn't taking that time that Jesus took to stop and meditate and reflect on His priorities and on His decisions. God the Holy Spirit comes to him and gives him some warning flags. Agabus, the very prophet, isn't it interesting that it's associated with that earlier ministry of a gift.

Agabus was a prophet that ministered there and Agabus comes back. And God's saying, this is not the same, Paul. Here's Agabus again, but he's not saying there's a famine coming, help these people out.

He's saying, if you go, you're going to be bound. You're not going to accomplish your purpose in going. And I think Paul missed that and I think Paul got in trouble.

Now, God, again, worked it together for good. And there's no failure, there's no mistake that we make that God cannot foresee, that He's not already foreseen and worked into His plan. And Paul, despite any mistakes that he made, is still, as I said, the most advanced and the most influential believer in this age.

And God will use his imprisonments to make a big effect, but there are warnings from the Holy Spirit that Paul did not heed. They're unique warnings. He receives them nowhere else in his ministry but here.

And he gets no rejection like he gets in Jerusalem. It seems clear to me that he should not have been there to begin with. He could have sent others with that gift and accomplished two good things.

The same benefit to the poor saints, if that was indeed the goal. You know, Paul doesn't say, pray that this gift will go and truly meet the needs of the poor saints, does he? What's in Paul's mind with this gift? It's not, I have a burden for these impoverished Jewish believers. It says, pray that I will be acceptable to them.

And that's the telltale. That's the thing that can help us. Our warning from the Holy Spirit in our souls is who are we living to please? Who are we trying to impress? Whose approval and good opinion are we really looking for when we sacrifice ourselves and we say, I'm willing to do this very sacrificial thing.

This is going to cost me something. This is going to hurt me in some way, but I'm willing to do it. And we can say that this is in the name of God.

This is the Christian thing to do. This is the loving thing to do and so forth. But we have to look deep in our hearts.

And it takes time. It takes meditation. It takes going out by ourselves like Jesus did and communing in the presence of God the Father through the ministry of the Spirit and the Word of God to analyze the thoughts and intents of our hearts and be sure that we are doing this out of a belief that it's the best thing.

It's the better thing out of a list of good options. And that regardless of what people think, it's necessary and it needs to be done. God warns Paul away here and he says, that's not going to help.

It's only going to get you imprisoned. And this is what we often find. When we go out in human strength and when we have an idea of how to weave together good things to accomplish a purpose, we wind up being limited in what we can do.

We wind up with our options cut off. As a faithful pastor has pointed out, good decisions open up your options. Bad decisions shut options down.

Paul is going to have very few options once he is imprisoned. That doesn't limit God's options, but it certainly limits Paul's. So, I would offer you that as an understanding of what's going on with Paul in chapter 15 of Romans.

Many of the things that he says are true. It is a wonderful thing to receive spiritual benefit and to respond with material things, but we have to be alert for associating ourselves with the work of God and provision. Associating ourselves with the free will actions of other believers and somehow seeking to vindicate and justify ourselves in this fashion.

I think that's what Paul is doing here. In spite of his rationale, I think God had some things for him in other regions that would have been even more productive. The gift would have lost nothing without Paul's presence in Jerusalem, but Paul would have been free perhaps to visit Spain.

We don't know that he ever got there. We don't know that he ever made it to some of the regions that could have benefited from his ministry. That was left to others.

God sent other individuals in to fill those needs. Paul lost that privilege. It didn't hinder anyone from coming to Christ.

It didn't hinder anyone from growing in grace, but Paul lost the privilege of being the means by which that happened because he was seeking approval from his home crowd, if you will. So it's something for us to meditate on and to spend time thinking about in our own lives. Let's close in prayer.

Father, we thank you for the wonderful principles and promises and doctrines we have in your word. We thank you for the examples we have of faithful men who strove to please you in what they did. We have their strengths and their weaknesses recorded.

We have the benefit of the foundation that has been laid by the apostles and the cornerstone of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We've had a chance to review many of those truths this morning. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will use these things to enable us to be objective in evaluating our own hearts, our thoughts, and our motives, that we will not act out of a desire for self-justification, to vindicate ourselves or to seek approval from others, but that every thought, every word, and every deed will be held captive for Christ and that our lives will truly reflect your glory because the things that we engage in are motivated and undergirded by the ministry of the Spirit and the sure understanding of your word.

We thank you for the privilege of engaging in this life and facing these tests. We pray for wisdom and perception. We pray that as a result our walk will be worthy and the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ will be reflected both now and in the age to come.

We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.