

Acts: The Spirit, the Church and the Spread of God's Word

How To Be Used By God

In Times of Unrest

Acts 21:17-26

Grace Fellowship Church / Pastor Peter LaRuffa / June 21, 2020

I. You need to POINT TO GOD - not yourself!

Acts 21:19-20 - ¹⁹ After greeting them, he related one by one **the things that God had done** among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ And when they heard it, **they glorified God**.

As far as people are concerned, Paul was a really big deal. As far as Paul was concerned, he wasn't. Rather, he accurately saw himself as just a pipeline through which God sent unbelievable grace to work in people's lives.

Rom. 15:17-19 - ¹⁷ In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. ¹⁸ For I will not venture to speak of anything except **what Christ has accomplished through me** to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ...

II. You need to PARTICIPATE WITH OTHERS - not defend your prestige!

Acts 21:20-21 - ²⁰ "...You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, ²¹ and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. ²² **What then is to be done?** They will certainly hear that you have come.

Paul was being accused of teaching Jewish Christians to completely abandon their Jewish heritage, but this was completely false.

3 Defenses for Paul (that he did not use)

- A. *"If I really taught this, why did I have Timothy circumcised?" (Acts 16:1-3)*
- B. *"If I really believed this, why would I have taken a Nazirite vow?" (Acts 18:18)*
- C. *"How can I be accused of both advocating circumcision (Gal. 5:11), and abrogating it in Jerusalem?"*

Paul said none of these things in his defense. He wasn't primarily concerned about what people thought of him. His greatest concern was to do whatever he could to reconcile people with God through Jesus Christ.

III. You need to PAY A PRICE - not protect what's yours!

Acts 21:23-26 - ²³ Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; ²⁴ take these men and **purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses**, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. ²⁵ But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality." ²⁶ **Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.**

2 Cor. 5:16-21 - ¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

If you want to be used as an ambassador of **reconciliation**, you can't be obsessed with **your rights** or **your reputation**.

1 Cor. 9:19-23 - ¹⁹ For though I am free from all, **I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.** ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. **I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.** ²³ **I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.**

IV. You need to be like your SAVIOR instead of yourself!

Philippians 2:5-11 - ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Questions for Personal Reflection and/or Community Group discussion:

- (1) Is there someone in your life whose company and conversation usually leaves you thinking much of Christ?
- (2) Recall a time when you could've defended yourself, but instead chose not to. Why did you do that? What ended up happening as a result?
- (3) Pastor Peter said he thinks two of the greatest hindrances to American Christians standing for Christ is an obsession with their rights or their reputation. Do you find one or both of these consume your thoughts?
- (4) If you prayerfully asked God to help your rights and your reputation to take a backseat in your heart and mind, how do you think that would affect your conversations with others? How might it affect your conduct on social media?
- (5) Pray for God to show you where you can be "salt & light" instead of "halt & fight."