

Paul Is Confronted by the Reformed Church

Text: Acts 21:12-40

A simple definition of “reform” means to make changes in something in order to improve it. It is from this word from which we receive the word “reformation.” Theologically and historically the Reformation was a time when Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, John Knox and others came out of the Roman Catholic Church in order to reform it. Many of the basic doctrines of the Baptist church synchronize with the doctrines of those early reformers. How I praise God for the monumental and lasting influence of the Reformation that swept through our world in the 1500s. Although most all the reforms to the Catholic Church were good, like a child’s resemblance to his or her parents, the Protestants still bear a striking resemblance to “Mother Rome.”

Charles Spurgeon wrote, “We believe that the Baptists are the original Christians. We did not commence our existence at the reformation, we were reformers before Luther or Calvin were born; we never came from the Church of Rome, for we were never in it, but we have an unbroken line up to the apostles themselves. We have always existed from the very days of Christ, and our principles, sometimes veiled and forgotten, like a river which may travel underground for a little season, have always had honest and holy adherents. Persecuted alike by Romanists and Protestants of almost every sect, yet there has never existed a Government holding Baptist principles that persecuted others; nor I believe any body of Baptists ever held it to be right to put the consciences of others under the control of man. We have ever been ready to suffer, as our martyrologies will prove, but we are not ready to accept any help from the State, to prostitute the purity of the Bride of Christ to any alliance with the government, and we will never make the Church, although the Queen, the despot over the consciences of men.” (From The New Park Street Pulpit, Vol. VII, page 225).

God used Paul in his inspired writings to chart the course for the early church. Our ethic and way of life as Christians has often been referred to as Judeo-Christian, and rightly so. The roots of our faith are anchored in the Old Testament Scriptures. The New Testament is the new covenant bought by Christ’s precious blood. I Peter 1:18: “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers. But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.” Luke 22:20b: “...This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you.” Acts 20:28b points out that we are “...the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.”

God said in Isaiah 43:19: “Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.” The church is not a new and improved concept of Old Testament worship. Mark 15:38 informs us that when Christ died “...the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.” The Old Testament approach to God has changed. Hebrews 10:19, 20: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh.”

Paul now returns to Jerusalem, the epicenter of the early church, only to find out that metaphorically the Jerusalem Church is keeping the middle wall of separation between the Jew and the Gentile (Ephesians 2:14) in the Temple. Tradition says the

keepers of the Temple attempted to literally stitch the torn curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. It was also said to have been unsuccessful. Whether this was done literally or not, it was certainly being done by the compromising believers who wanted to hang on to worship in the Temple and at the same time not offend non-believing Jews.

I. RESOLUTION TO THE WILL OF GOD

Acts 21:14-16

I love the phrase found in Acts 21:14b, "...The will of the Lord be done." Any Christian who filters his or her actions through these words will always be on the right path. Have you made this your watchword?

I believe Paul was excited to bring some of the converts from other churches to Jerusalem with him to see where it all began.

II. REPORT OF THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE CHURCH

Acts 21:17-20a

Paul and the team seemed to be warmly welcomed. When Paul had explained how God had blessed the extension of the Church deep in the heart of the Gentile world, the brethren at Jerusalem seemed genuinely glad and glorified God for the report.

III. THE COMMAND TO CONFORM TO THE REFORMED MOVEMENT

Acts 21:20b-24

The elders at Jerusalem wanted to make it clear that although many now believed on Christ, they had certainly not changed their mode of worship, which included keeping the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. The elders were also giving forth unfavorable rumors on Paul.

Paul had come to Jerusalem with offerings from sister churches to help bail out the poverty stricken Jews. But now the meeting went south very quickly. These compromising believers were testing Paul by ordering him to purify himself before coming to the Temple and also to pay the fee for purification for four men that we don't think Paul even knew at the time. They wanted to make sure Paul was under the authority of the ceremonial law. John 1:17: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

IV. THE ATTEMPT TO BECOME ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN

Acts 21:25-26

Paul said in I Corinthians 9:20-22: "And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." Paul is willing to go through the Old Testament rituals that he might win his fellow Jews. Romans 12:18: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Romans 10:1: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."

V. PAUL REMAINS UNDER CONTROL, WHILE THE CROWD GOES OUT OF CONTROL.

ACTS 21:27-32

Paul realizes now that this is a trap. Paul was accused of bringing Greeks into the Temple and polluting it. The elders at Jerusalem deemed the penalty was death; they physically threw Paul out of the Temple and attempted to kill him and would have done so, had not the captain of the band and his soldiers stepped in.

VI. PAUL DISCOVERS THAT HIS EXTREMITY HAS BECOME GOD'S OPPORTUNITY

Acts 21:33-40

The Puritan, John Flavel said, "Two things destroy the peace and tranquility of our lives; our bewailing past disappointments, or fearing future ones." He also said, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." Later, Spurgeon said, "Your extremity is God's opportunity. The difficulty all along has been to get to the end of you; for when a man gets to the end of himself, he has reached the beginning of God's working. When you are cleaned right out, and have not anything at all left, then all the mercy of the covenant of grace is yours." Corrie Ten Boom said something similar, "I soon discovered that man's importunity is God's opportunity. He uses our problems as building materials for His miracles." She also said, "Faith is like radar that sees through the fog--the reality of things at a distance that the human eye cannot see."

God, in His providence was setting up Paul to give his testimony and re-establish the truths of the Lord Jesus and His apostles. Galatians 1:11, 12: "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

-Pastor Pope-