

## RIGHT OR WRONG?

Acts 19:21-41

"After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit (decided in his own mind), when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem." What prompted Paul to decide suddenly to go to the city of Jerusalem? The last time he had a similar desire to go there, he met with failure. The Holy Spirit did not lead him to go to Jerusalem at that particular time. Was it God or Paul who was responsible for this sudden change in plans? He simply purposed in his own spirit to go to the Jewish capital.

From almost the beginning of the journey, the Spirit of God repeatedly warned him not to pursue his journey toward Jerusalem. We know the results of his persistence in going to Jerusalem: his arrest there; his subsequent trials and defense before Felix, Festus and Agrippa; his perilous journey to Rome which involved a shipwreck.

Why was Paul so persistent in going to Jerusalem? He was never given a hearty welcome there, and when he did go, he never remained very long. We are not to blame the brethren there for not being more gracious. When we are out of God's will, we need not expect sympathy from others. And when we get out of the will of God, we must suffer.

Like many others, Paul put his feelings above the will of God. He allowed his love for certain classes to come in between his love for Christ.

### I. Paul's Plans And Helpers. 19:22.

Paul was planning to revisit the scenes of his first labors in Europe; and, in anticipation of his own speedy coming, he sent Timothy and Erastus to visit the churches of Macedonia. He kept Gaius and Aristarchus with him. Paul's master mind was also planning a longer journey. After passing through Macedonia and Achaia, it was his purpose to return the fifth time to Jerusalem. He also wanted to see Rome. He even purposed going far beyond the Imperial City in order to carry the Gospel into Spain. Paul's plan was swallowed up in the larger plan of his Divine Master. He says, "I must see Rome;" the Lord's "must" differs from Paul's, but it brings him to the same end,— "Thou must stand before Caesar." But Paul's work was not yet done in Ephesus.

### II. The Way. 19:23.

"The way" was one of the earliest names given to the Christian movement. It clearly expressed the thought embodied in it as applied to Christianity.

#### 1. The meaning of the name.

##### (1) A way is a road.

Christianity is a road. It is the road to God, to heaven, and to eternal life. The enemies of Christianity spoke more wisely than they knew when they attached the name to the Christian movement.

##### (2) A way is a manner of life.

Christianity is a way of usefulness, of practical and beneficial services. It is a way of godliness. It was different from any way of living the people of that day had known. It was so different that all were strangely impressed with it.

##### (3) A way is a plan by which a proper conclusion is reached.

Christianity is a way by which the sin question is solved, by which salvation is attained, and by which a fuller revelation of God is made. In previous times, God had dealt with these problems through prophets, priests, sacrifices, and ceremonial services, but through Jesus Christ there had come a new revelation of the will and purpose and way of God's solution of these things. It was a new way of human relationship. Those who became Christians suddenly developed a new interest in others. They loved their enemies. They prayed

for their persecutors. They went to their death with a prayer on their lips for the men who killed them.

2. Living up to the name.

- (1) The main problem of every Christian is to make his Christianity a real way for others to travel. Make it a real way to God, to righteousness, and to happiness. Make it so clear that others will not stumble as they seek to follow it. Let Christians make for Christianity a highway of righteousness. Let Christianity be such an attractive way of living that enemies will respect us, even though they may hate us; that seeing our good works, they will be constrained to glorify God.
- (2) Does our Christianity really offer a solution to the problems of life--the problem of sin, of happiness, of moral living, of human relationships, of heart hunger, of services? Is religion livable? Is it practical for all classes and conditions?

III. Demetrius The Silversmith. 19:24-27.

When Paul met Demetrius two positive characters faced each other. There could be no compromise between them for they stood for opposite things. Paul stood for one God while Demetrius stood for idols. Paul stood for truth; Demetrius stood for deception. Paul magnified righteousness above success; Demetrius magnified success above righteousness.

1. The spirit of Demetrius.

- (1) It was purely mercenary.  
He lived for one purpose--to enrich the individual at any cost, regardless of truth.
- (2) It built false shrines for the sake of gain without regard for truth or deception or injury to the people.
- (3) It is the spirit that motivates all wicked business--the liquor business, gambling, thieving, robbery, incendiaries, and kindred things. Men inspired with this spirit lose all sense of the value of honor, honesty, and virtue. They seek one thing only--their own wealth at the expense of everything.
- (4) It makes men willing to deceive, lie, mislead, and disappoint men for the sake of personal gain.
- (5) It would kill Paul, destroy his Gospel, and wreck civilization in order to enrich the silversmiths' coffers. Demetrius appealed to his business associates in this vein--if Paul is allowed to go on, our business is going to be ruined.
- (6) It takes advantage of the ignorance of the people, of their prejudices and their basic principles.

2. The spirit of Paul.

- (1) It exalts the individual above his business.  
The man is of more value than is his business. The man should be better than anything he owns or anything he can do.
- (2) The spirit of Paul condemns wickedness whether it is in the individual or in the corporation, whether it is in public or private life, whether it is done with the approval of the public or the disapproval of the public.
- (3) The spirit of Paul attacks evil principles rather than evil men. It hates sin but loves the sinner.
- (4) The spirit of Paul would honor truth and justice more than success.
- (5) The spirit of Paul magnifies one God, the all-wise Creator and Ruler of the universe, and calls all men to repentance before Him and to worship Him as such.

#### IV. The Riotous Assembly. 19:28-34.

The speech of the silversmith was a very crafty one, and it accomplished the end he desired. All the people whose business was in jeopardy were stirred up and filled with wrath. The whole city was thrown into confusion. When you interfere with a man's vested interests, you strike him at a vital spot. The people in the main did not know why they were agitated. They were angry, but did not know why. Their reckless zeal had blinded them to reason. They were as maniacs, some crying one thing and some crying another. A mob is never actuated by reason.

Prejudice is a large factor in wicked zeal. When Alexander arose to speak, they were willing to hear him until they learned he was a Jew. Then all was wrong. Nothing he could say had any meaning because they were filled with prejudice. There was in it a combination of race and religious prejudice. The multitudes rushed with one accord into the theater and seized Paul's companions.

Paul was ready to rush into the theater in defense of his colleagues. To have done so would have made his case worse. It was unnecessary and foolish to risk his life. Good men do not always use good judgment in promoting a good cause. Paul was never a coward, but he did not always distinguish between courage and judgment. A Christian without zeal is powerless, but a Christian whose zeal is not tempered with good judgment is foolish. The disciples kept Paul from doing a foolish thing. A chief of high authority also advised Paul against a rash act. A Christian needs good judgment coupled with his faith.

#### V. The Strategy Of The Town Clerk. 19:35-41.

It was not in human nature to endure the strain of such madness indefinitely. There came a lull in the commotion, and the man for the hour appeared in the person of the town clerk. We cannot but admire the skill with which he accomplished the end he sought. The proof that he was a sensible man is seen in his clear thinking and calm self-possession, and in his appeal to common sense and fair play. It makes plain the fact that even wicked and unjust men may have marks of fairness and justice. Let all things be tried in the court of common justice and decency. So often it is seen that when a man's cause is weak, he will become more violent in his efforts to defend it. The weaker a man's argument is, the louder and faster he talks. And in the case of the town clerk, there is every evidence of cold calculation coupled with common sense and honesty.

In considering the basis of sound conclusions, it is well to remember that the multitude or the tumult does not make a cause right or wrong. A lie multiplied by 10,000 voices does not become a truth. The church at Ephesus had no cause to tremble because a tumult was raised against it. Christianity must stand upon facts, and there is nothing so convincing as facts. The program of Christianity is one of a positive Gospel. If it condemns a wrong, it invariably holds up a positive truth to supplant the wrong destroyed. If it smites a god from the hands of a worshipper, it gives him the true God.