

**Bible e-Study** on the book of Acts (21:21-24)

**The law is Good?!**

*“21 They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. 22 What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, 23 so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. 24 Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.” [Acts 21:21-24](#)*

**NUGGET** – This section of Acts has caused me some concern. It seems, at first blush, that St. Paul is being told to abandon the freedom of the gospel for the binding of the law. And in truth the second part is true. There is a measure to which Paul confines himself under the law.

Now bear in mind that he has just returned to Jerusalem after years on the mission field and he has come with an offering for the assistance of the church in Jerusalem from the churches he has come from. And he has also reported to James and the other leaders of the church on all that has happened regarding the growth of believers in Jesus Christ.

But growth in the numbers of believers in The Way has not happened only where Paul has been but also among the Jews in Jerusalem. And while they are given the freedom of the gospel, they, like Jesus, are yet Jews as well. Therefore the law still has its proper place in their day to day lives, again, just as it did for Jesus.

So Paul submits to the needs of the law in ceremonial cleansing. Again he has been in the hinterlands for years and before entering the temple area needs to take part in the proper things to do. He does what the leaders say to do as a way of accommodating both his heritage and his fellow Jewish believers, both old and new. And in truth he also does this to honor what God has given through the law to the Jews. This does not abrogate the gospel. Paul does not do these things *in order* to appease God or to strive for self-righteousness apart from the grace of God.

Rather living by grace St. Paul is free to honor the ceremonial laws in joy and freedom. This is no different than what we do in honoring the 10 commandments and the laws of the land we live in. As to the secular laws, we obey them because as Christians we are *called* to do so, as long it does not cause us to disobey God.

And in the case of our nugget verses, St. Paul is obeying God by doing what the law says. Paul here gives us a wonderful example of being *free* to obey rather than obeying out of compunction, fear or an effort to attain holiness apart from Christ. He is showing his fellow Jews that he remains a Jew just as they are, yet one who trusts for his salvation in the grace of God alone.

**APPLICATION -**

1. St. Paul presents us with a gracious example of true humility here. He accepts what the leaders of the Jerusalem church guide him into doing for the sake fellow believers. Where in your life can you also be an example of humble service for the sake of fellow Christians?

**PRAY** – Holy God in heaven above, You have made us free by the grace of Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Guide us to use our freedom, not for our own indulgence but in service to our neighbor through the various vocations and occasions You place us in. In Jesus name, Amen.