

**Recap of 7/3/22 message by Chris Sommerfield – Acts 21:15-36**

1. Unity is extremely important for any organization. The same is true for the body of Christ. Larry Osborne noted in *Sticky Teams*, “I don’t think it’s an accident that Jesus predicted church growth but prayed for unity.” He was referring to the High Priestly Prayer, Jesus’ prayer just hours before his crucifixion. In that prayer he asks the Father to make the those who believe in Him to be “one.” Jesus says this multiple times and the purpose was to show that we are in Christ as the Christ is in the Father and that we are loved by the Father just as Christ is loved by the Father. Unity is very important.

2. In Acts 21:15-36 Paul gets to Jerusalem and the unity of the early church is already cracking. Jewish believers who were “zealous for the law,” the mosaic law, had heard rumors of Paul teaching Jews that they should leave the law of Moses behind, stop circumcising their children, and move on from tradition and Jewish customs. This was not true; Paul never commands Jewish believers to leave their Jewish roots or culture behind. The teaching is a conflation and confusion of what Paul was teaching the Gentile believers.

3. Much of Paul’s writing in the NT deals with the idea of freedom from the law and how-to live-in Christ. For some quick references, read Galatians (yes, the whole book, it’s not that long and it is all part of Paul’s argument regarding salvation, the law, and freedom in Christ, however, if you are short on time read at least Galatians chapter 5 for discussion on the law and liberty), Romans 6, and Romans 8. The purpose of the law is to show the standard of righteousness, to show us our sin. By grace through faith in Jesus Christ are we reconciled to God. The law of Christ is how we are to now live. Paul uses this language in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 when he talks about how he contextualizes his approach to non-believers as he is evangelizing. The question then is, what is the law of Christ? It is probably a reference Christ’s teachings which are summarized in His words when he was asked what the greatest commandment is. Jesus’ response was, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.” The whole of the law is summed up in these two commandments.

4. The cost of unity is high. Paul paid for it by being beaten and arrested. He writes in Ephesians that Jesus nullified the law in His flesh (that is, in His death on the cross), and the purpose for this was to destroy the dividing wall of hostility so that these two groups, the Jewish people and the Gentiles, could become one new group. Freedom in Christ is part of the blessing that leads to unity. Jews are still free to retain their Jewish heritage and distinctions as an expression of their faith in Christ, but they should not require others to observe a law that has been nullified by the Messiah. That develops into legalism and attempting to earn righteousness from God which cannot be done. We all come to Jesus as sinners by grace through faith and He takes our sin and gives us His righteousness so that together we can all worship as one.