

What Furthers HIS Mission is Gospel Unity

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[0:00] If you would take your Bibles and go to the book of Acts, please.

Chapter 21, if you're visiting with us, you can pull that black Bible in the chair in front of you. Pull that out and go to page 111, go towards the back of that Bible.

Page 111, you'll find Acts 21. We'll start in verse 17 and go to verse 26.

17 to 26 this morning. I'm sure all of your allergies are acting up with this wind, so forgive me for clearing my throat all the time.

Acts 21, starting in verse 17. I'll read our passage 17 to 26 and then we'll dive in. Paul and his companions, they're traveling to Jerusalem.

[1:12] They've arrived. 17. And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And now the following day, Paul went in with us to James and all the elders were present.

And after he greeted them, he related one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified God. 18. And they said to him, 19.

You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are zealous for the law. 20. And they've been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, 21.

Telling them not to circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs. What then is to be done? 21. 22. 23. 24. 24. 24. 24. 24. Do this that we tell you.

We have four men who are under a vow. Take them and purify yourself along with them. 25. And pay their expenses in order that they may shave their heads. 25. And all will know that there's nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law.

[2:23] 26. 27. 27. 28. 29. 29. 30. 30. 30. 30. 30. 30. 31.

30. 31. 31. 31. 71. 32. 33. that was in the Baptist press this past Wednesday article says International Mission Board President David Platt has asked Baptist state papers to encourage unity among Southern Baptists following the announcement next week which is going to be this week of how many IMB personnel have left the board through a series of voluntary resignation programs just a side note all of you would remember I've mentioned to you that the International Mission Board which is International Missions the right arm of the Southern Baptist Convention that sends out missionaries throughout the world they spent more money than they were bringing in so they have to downsize 600-800 personnel the article goes on Platt says as we announce a number next week at a February 23rd to 24th

IMB trustee meeting in Richmond, Virginia Platt says I know that the reality of so many IMB missionaries making transitions will set in in a fresh way across the SBC and I know there's an adversary who would love to use that to breed discouragement and division and disunity and I just want to ask you brothers and sisters for your help in encouraging the churches end quote from David Platt the article continues in response to a 210 million dollar difference between gifts from churches and expenditures since 2010 the IMB launched a two phase quote unquote organizational resets in August which included a voluntary retirement incentive VRI for personnel 50 and older with 5 or more years of service and a hand raising opportunity

HRO for all remaining staff and missionaries to voluntarily resign and receive a benefits package so why would David Platt ask this because he knows that this has the potential of breeding contempt and disunity among Southern Baptist churches oh wait a second why is that guy having to did you make him retire did you make him leave that's the potential that's why Platt's asked him let's this is going to possibly bring division disunity Platt knows just how important gospel unity is which leads

us to our passage acts just do it be who you are let God use us let God use you to fulfill his mission and in our passage today we will see what furthers his mission is gospel unity gospel unity we should take gospel unity we should take it seriously too we should think of it important too it should be significant to us as well what furthers his mission is gospel unity here's a statement for you we must be willing to surrender anything and everything for the sake of gospel unity within this local church and beyond since the gospel is most essential we must allow others to live according to their conscience in other words we give up our liberties for the sake of gospel unity now I'm not saying there's no need for diversity we should have diversity within our local churches and express it with love and grace yet we should be ready to surrender any type of expression that could offend others for the sake of gospel unity unity it's for the sake of gospel unity the gospel is the very fabric of this unity because as God the father has brought us near to himself through the blood of Jesus Christ establishing peace with us he has also established peace with each other through Christ's blood we have peace with each other now we have peace with God and therefore we can have peace with each other there's vertical peace and horizontal peace there's vertical reconciliation and horizontal reconciliation if we can't have horizontal reconciliation what makes us think we can have vertical reconciliation I mean it's the very fabric of the gospel and if people see churches that are fighting and conflicting and arguing over blah blah blah blah that things just don't matter well they have every right to judge us don't they how is that going to further the gospel it won't as Paul puts it in Ephesians chapter 2 which what we've been studying on [9:00] Wednesday nights we are one new man we're one new person all from different diversity now your body your whole body is not an eye it's not an ear what if your body was one big bunch of toes you would smell all the time ew but there's all these different parts but it works together together to walk to walk and to run to do all the things to do dishes to vacuum to lift weights to do all these things to work to sing and to talk to your grandkids but it's one body diverse but one in short Paul goes to Jerusalem and ends up showing his faithfulness to the law as a way to keep unity and peace with Jewish Christians some people have said that Paul got this all wrong and he was disobeying and he shouldn't have done this what are you crazy

Paul did this I'll put it differently James asked Paul to be sensitive to Christian Jews who continue to practice and they continue to live according to the law as Jewish Christians and James is telling Paul be sensitive to them Paul was a loyal Jew who reached out to Gentiles who reached out to non-Jews which should not be considered anti-Jewish he was committed to the gospel unity showing it by honoring James' request with these four men who were under a vow but why would Paul do something like this why would he even bother with this when Jews from the province of Asia totally misrepresented him which is what we'll see in a moment I mean think about it he had money from all the Gentile churches which we find out in other letters in 2nd Corinthians he could have just brought the money and then split the next day right Paul was willing to put himself at risk for the sake of Jewish Christians who valued the law he valued gospel unity he valued the gospel brothers sisters how far are you willing to go to keep the unity of the gospel to what extent will you keep gospel unity in this church what or which preferences are you willing to give up for the sake of gospel unity are you even willing to die for gospel unity so that you won't offend your brother or sister because you love them too much and you love the gospel you love Jesus Christ too much is not the gospel worth it is not

Jesus Christ worth it is this not a practical way we as a local body can live at the very gospel we proclaim to others you can be reconciled to God you can have peace with God but you can have peace with God well that makes a lot of sense there's infighting in the churches and yet we're telling people how you can have peace with God and yet we don't have peace with each other in a local church local churches they argue over the stupid color of the carpet it's ridiculous why is it happening it hasn't happened here we'll change the color the carpet next week friends it's going to be hot pink so Daniel picked it out so you have a problem just talked to Daniel after the service thank you he'll take comments afterwards they argue over these stupid silly idiotic moronic things and then we proclaim the gospel we say

God loves we say God forgives we say God loved the world in this way he gave his one and only son and yet we're not willing to give that's what God did he gave himself for sinners are you here today you're not a follower of Jesus Christ God gave himself for sinners you do deserve wrath you do deserve his judgment and yet he will save you and show grace and compassion because he sent Jesus who lived who died for sinners and rose from the dead turn away from your sin and put

your trust in Jesus Christ alone and he will save you that's the gospel he'll bring peace you're his enemy he'll become a friend that's the gospel should we not show that in our commitment to gospel unity another question make sure you read the first part of the statement eternally speaking amongst us as church members are we willing to give up our eternal relationship with each other over this ridiculous election why

[15:02] I'm for Trump why I'm for Hillary why I'm for Bernie why I'm for Cruz why I'm for Marco why I'm for blah who stinking cares look and you might be like wait a second Jim go vote I'm with you on that okay look at the first word eternally speaking keep things in check friends eternally speaking are we really willing to give up relationships that we're going to have forever for that another example someone offends you over something that they do are you willing to throw away that eternal relationship because of that where's the commitment to the gospel where's the commitment to loving each other within and because of driven what's driving us what's motivating us is the gospel these preferences go both ways things you think you should not do and things you think you have the freedom to do do we flippantly hold our freedoms in the face of other believers music alcohol politics things that we wear

I understand modesty I get that not too tight not too short I understand that I get that but is it well it's gotta be five inches below the knee or else it's sin really music alcohol clothes politics TV movies how you spend your money to what end are we willing to show grace to each other if the gospel is most essential shouldn't we be willing to give up anything and everything no matter what it is except for the gospel itself shouldn't we shouldn't we be known by this people that are diverse and yet we're so committed to Jesus Christ who's the center of the gospel right by all means Jewish believers could continue to live by the law of Moses as long as it did not replace salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone and as long as it does not alienate or compromise associated or reaching out to Gentiles live according to your conscience don't judge another another's way of living be sensitive to those within the believing community other ways you can put that that's right other ways to describe and define what is gospel unity Paul never persuaded Jewish Christians to live like Gentiles he just told them to be sensitive and he displays it here so there's our introduction let's go to our text now I'm going to give you three questions and I'm going to look at a key statement like a concluding statement three questions we'll first dive into question number one who needs gospel unity those weak in faith 17 to 21 who are the ones who need gospel unity everyone needs it but specifically our text those weak in faith notice how it begins in verse 17 they finally arrive

Paul with his entourage Luke is with them that's why you see the we there's a warm welcome maybe there's a representative delegation from the church 18 following day Paul went in with us to James all the elders were present James was a leader or the leader of the Jerusalem church notice no apostles were there no Peter no John no Thomas they're not there and how Luke describes this in verse 18 it conveys some type of like a formal meeting because in 19 he greeted them and then Paul related one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry and when they heard it they glorified God that first part of verse 20 Paul reported all these things God was doing how many responded to the gospel it's a positive report

James and the elders are excited and yet they're nervous there's a little bit of tension and you end up seeing what that tension is but Paul Paul was the representative for the Jerusalem church of missions ministry towards the Gentiles they knew that they're excited little side note get the time frame it's 57 AD Jewish nationalism was on the rise seven years later would begin the revolts in Jerusalem 64 65 AD 66 a major revolt and then until 70 AD that's when Romans said that's it we're done and they came in and wiped out everybody in Jerusalem remember that so Jewish nationalism 57 AD it's beginning to rise and there's a little bit of political unrest so any reaching out to

[21:15] Gentiles these loyal Jews they viewed it with great suspicion and the Jerusalem church is caught in the middle between a rock and a hard place here they wanted to preach to Jews but they wanted to reach out to Gentiles so this is what's going on so it's happening so they're excited and yet the air is tense they're so glad they go over like God they praise the Lord because of the work among the Gentiles but God was bringing Jews and drew some to faith in Christ too we have a concern you see brother 20 how many thousands are among the Jews of those who believe and they're zealous for the law this large group of Jews thousands who had responded to the gospel were zealous for the law of Moses they kept it and they aimed at keeping it they were going to

continue to keep it in other words as God had worked among

Gentiles he also worked here among the Jews in a big way and they paid honor to the Torah they were zealous for the law in reference to their lifestyle as Jewish Christians they were Christians they followed Christ they followed Jesus but they followed the law that's what they did in terms of their lifestyle they lived by the law and they have been told about you verse 21 they were falsely told you're teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses forsake is actually the word which means to apostatize or to defect from Moses how two ways one by not circumcising their children and two you tell them not to walk according to the customs of the law this is only partly true he did not teach

Jews not to observe the law but he also did not insist on observing the law where Gentiles were involved in other words Paul taught Gentile Christians to be sensitive to their Jewish brethren but also for Jewish Christians to be sensitive to their Gentile brethren but there's false reports he's telling them all the Jews are among Gentiles bail the law of Moses don't circumcise your children don't walk according to those customs forgive them false charges false accusations in no instance whatsoever did Paul encourage Jewish converts to abandon the law or its customs but he clearly taught the new Jewish converts that the law is not a requirement for salvation nor is it needed to sustain one's salvation you live it according to your conscience in other words observing the law was not an issue of gaining

God's approval or acceptance one must live according to their conscience holding their liberty in Christ with grace and sensitivity what's essential is the gospel the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ repent and trust in him alone that's what's essential and sustaining gospel unity among them that's what's essential that is what's most important Paul taught Gentiles that they did not need to become Jews to receive God's grace he taught Jews that their Jewishness and abiding by the law did not gain them anything with God and he taught for both of them it is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone that salvation so Paul knew this he knew these were false accusations shouldn't they just blow off these false accusations come on that's not true well yes of course but isn't gospel unity more important friends the fact that Paul went ahead and did something to show that unity in the gospel was much more important than his liberties that's huge that shows grace for the sake of gospel unity and to win people to the gospel from every context Paul felt the freedom to live in Jewish ways among Jewish people but not in Gentile company and for the sake of gospel unity and to win people to the gospel from every context we should be free to live according to our conscience but not to the detriment of our Christian brethren gospel unity and so who needs this those who are weak in faith those who think they have to abide by this and do this those are the ones that need to understand gospel unity is what we need we need gospel unity now what's the thing that brings gospel unity you surrender your liberties that brings gospel unity you surrender your liberties 22 to 24 22 to 24 so what are we going to do they're confident of Paul's true gospel centered liberty sensitive orthodoxy they're totally convinced of it but not the others they'll all hear that you're here so do what we tell you we have four men who are under a vow take them purify yourself along with them pay their expense in order that they may shave their heads and all we know there's nothing to the things that they've been told about you but that you yourself walk also walk orderly keeping the law these guys were under a vow pay the price of the offering everyone will know you respect the law and still see it to be valid by honoring it why do we have to do this the vow purification he would do was probably for gentile uncleanness as he would approach the temple in other words returning from gentile territory if Paul would follow the law he would need to do a seven day period of ritual purification before coming for temple worship that's what he would have to do according to the

[28 : 38] Jewish law so as he began his purification week there would be an offering on the third day and then there would be another offering on the seventh day which would be the completion the fulfillment of that purification and he's also paying the cost for those four guys so that's an act of charity a pious act of charity he would show there's nothing to these false accusations he's following the law he walked orderly he was keeping the law so see keep in mind Paul Paul would stay then in Jerusalem for seven days every day he was there his life was more and more in jeopardy because he was there longer he could have just blown in here's the money

I'm out see you later no not going to happen I'm not going to do that somebody is going to get wind of me being here and they're going to try and kill me I'm not going to do that this ritual would be like an act of confession confessing the validity of the law in the temple for the Jewish people Jewish

Christians yet his action would not be compromised in the truth of the gospel implying the need to obey it in addition to faith in Jesus Christ he didn't teach that Paul didn't believe there should be you do this in addition to faith in Jesus we should know that I mean this should not surprise us with Paul because he has stated that he would become a Jew in order to win Jews to Jesus Christ though he was no longer religiously a Jew 1

Corinthians 9 for though I am free from all I have made myself a slave to all that I might win the more to the Jews I became as a Jew I might win Jews to those who are under the law as under the law though not being myself under the law that I might win those who are under the law to those who are without laws without law though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ that I might win those who are without law to the weak I became weak that I say I am going to contextualize no friends this verse should be used to show I am going to let go of my liberties for the sake of the gospel for the sake of unity so

I will not offend so for conscience sake this is how how do you do gospel unity you let go of your liberties to win souls and to not offend which leads us to the third question who are the ones who give gospel unity the ones who are strong in faith they are the ones who should be giving gospel unity see you would think the ones who are strong in faith what's your problem I'm okay with this how come you have a problem with this no instead they should say I'm going to give them my liberties for your sake verse 25 interesting it's the Gentiles who are strong in faith not the Jews 25 but concerning the Gentiles who have believed we wrote having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrifice to idols and from blood and from one strangled and from fornication it's those who are strong in faith that show the importance of gospel unity as far as Gentile practice was concerned the elders in James are what we said a few years ago Acts chapter 15 abstain from meat sacrifice to idols from blood swustering and fornication now the last part we can figure out fornication moral code yeah we got it but what's about the other ones what's that all about as we talked about this last time these behaviors were typical Gentile and they offended the Jews fornication yeah obvious right what about the meat sacrifice idol blood strangled what's all this see these were done within pagan idolatry and worship and so they're regarded as sinful too in the least they were offensive and so we talked about last time we looked in Acts chapter 15 when everything was going on these

[34:00] Gentiles are coming to faith and the elders along with the apostles they came together they said look this is what we should present to them this is how they can show their sensitivity to their Jewish brethren in reference to fornication what's strangled into blood and meat sacrifice to idols because of the connection of idolatrous worship the call was to be faithful to the one true God being moral in worship and also being sensitive to issues of unclean animals and eating strangled animals without draining blood in other words be gracious to the Jewish brethren keep peaceful relations with your Jewish brothers and sisters be careful Gentiles not to have any association with things that promoted idolatry do you have the freedom to do that yes you have the freedom you can eat that meat sacrifice idols but what it comes across is you are worshipping that idol when you go into the temples and you're like hey what's going on

Billy good to see you can I have that meat not a problem awesome the Jewish brothers they see you doing that oh that guy's worshipping he's doing idolatry that's sinful and they could be promoting idolatry don't do that the elders were saying we still abide by that be careful not to have any association with things that promoted idolatry or could come across as promoting idolatry it's just as important to have gospel unity as keeping these commands respect the practices respect their cultural concerns that will lead to peace by the way it served as a testimony to non-Christian Gentiles that they the Christian Gentiles have changed the way they live we live for the Lord Jesus now we don't live for these idols anymore we don't live for that they're the ones that give they're the ones that give gospel unity because they're the ones that decide to give up their liberties it's those who are strong in faith leads us to our last statement key statement or concluding statement so to speak the gospel unity put into action or the gospel put into action or gospel unity put into action I put those in parentheses because you see the whole thing happening here in verse 26 because this is he does it he was proclaiming it and now he does it himself then Paul took the men the next day he doesn't go you know what I'll do it next week in a couple days no the next day right after he meets with them he purified himself went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them there would be sacrifice on the third day for him and there would be sacrifice on the seventh day and then he paid for them to do

their sacrifice Paul was sensitive to Jewish Christians whose consciences would have been violated if this falsity was proved true one writer puts it like this quote into this mine field of ritual requirements and prohibitions

Paul willingly stepped perhaps anticipating the dangerous consequences that followed end quote why did he do this because he was committed to gospel unity he did not want to offend I don't have it on the screen but 1 Corinthians chapter 8 1 Corinthians 8 12 Paul says so by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak you sin against Christ why is gospel unity so important because if that person who's weak in faith you make them stumble you are sinning against Jesus Christ so what does Paul say so if food causes my brother to stumble I will never eat meat again that would be horrible can you imagine no more steak oh that would be horrible holy cow

Dave you're with me on this that would be horrible I will never eat meat again that I might not cause my brother to stumble that's how committed he was to gospel unity Paul was asked to show cultural sensitivity for the sake of gospel unity without compromising the gospel self we must be willing to let go of any and even all of our liberties for the sake of gospel unity in this body and for the sake of gospel proclamation that comes out of this body Paul willingly restricted his freedom for the sake of gospel unity and really this is an act of kind generosity taking the time to give to another which is another way we display the very gospel that we proclaim we give should that person weak in faith should they not see that that is absolutely ridiculous they get offended by that yeah they should but you give on their behalf we give to another for their sake it is giving to someone even though we may think that they do not necessarily deserve it did we deserve

[40:13] God's grace his love his mercy his kind generosity in the Lord Jesus Christ no not at all yet he gave up his absolute rights to save us to show that he is gracious to sinners I mean as Americans yeah we got rights when you think about it the only one who has rights is the one who's the creator of everything he's got rights and he gave up his rights so we can live he gave up those rights he took on flesh he lived a perfect life and he was obedient to the point of death even death where on a cross so that he can show he's gracious and kind loving and merciful to sinners he how far are you willing to go to keep the unity of the gospel how far are you willing to go to what extent will you keep gospel unity in this church what or which preferences are you willing to give up for the sake of gospel unity are you willing to die for gospel unity

Paul was he was willing to go the farthest even risking his own life remember I told you he stayed in Jerusalem for seven days the next verse and when the seven days were almost over he was putting his life more and more in jeopardy every single day he's there the second the third the fourth he was putting his life in jeopardy he was willing to do that for the sake of the gospel now that's truly living out the gospel of Jesus Christ isn't it that's what you see in Paul father help us help us as a church to make the gospel to be certain that the gospel to be sure that the gospel the Lord Jesus Christ is what is most essential to us in this church so that we will display peace and grace and compassion to each other as we proclaim the gospel as we proclaim that you give that people will see us and they will say you go to that

Cottonwood Bible Church wow that's a really kind bunch of people they're really kind to each other you guys are for real may your grace work in us may your compassion be the motivation in us take some time and ponder what we've seen in God's word this morning think ponder mull over in your minds and after a few moments of silence do our time of giving sing our last two songs with our closing prayer so sit think ponder and pray and pray with our wearing and help all of