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**Will Recognize Tradition Without Compromise To
Testimony
Acts Chapter 22**

Lord, we give You thanks for this evening as we dive into Your word. We are beginning to realize the purpose of the church and Your plan for our lives. Lord, guide and direct through the power of Your Spirit. We will listen to what You have to say to us. Lord, may we submit to what You are doing in and through our lives through the church. We give You thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.

All right. Please take your sheet. We have these little synopses of the different chapters. I guess that synopsis is a word. Synopsis. Is that a word? We will go through that. I want to talk through it. If you have your sheet and if you put your Bible alongside it, open up to Chapter One. You can turn the pages as you go. Maybe that will help. We will walk our way through this wonderful Book of Acts. At the very top of your sheet, what you see in Chapter One is that we have given it the heading that the church bears

witness to Christ and specifically to Christ as its hope. The reason that we put that title is because of the fact that what is being conveyed at the very beginning of the chapter is that Christ was saying goodbye to His disciples before He was taken up into the heavens. He told them, “You will be My witnesses.” As he leaves—would that not have been a magnificent sight! It would have been amazing to have been there to watch our Savior ascend into heaven. As He left, the angels:

(Acts 1:11) “They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

You begin to realize that the church is not expecting to fix the world. The church is expecting the Savior to come and fix the world. The hope is in Him. One of the reasons why this is a very necessary doctrine is because there are whole denominations that fundamentally preach that we, by virtue of our buildings and our programs, are literally ushering in the kingdom of God. This is not true. That would mean that man was ushering in the kingdom. I know that their argument would be that we are filled with

the Spirit of God, that is how we can do it. But Scripture does not point to the church being the answer to changing the world. Scripture makes reference to the church being here and occupying the world until He comes and sustains a sense of truth. As Scripture tells us, we are guardians of the truth until He comes. But as you read clearly in Revelation, it is Christ who comes with all of His holy ones. When He comes, everything will be changed. That whole tribulation deal makes it clear that the world is not in better shape when Jesus arrives. It will be in worse shape. That is why Paul said to Timothy (I Timothy 4) that things will proceed from bad to worse. “But you remain firm and stay true.” Therefore, the church is waiting for the return of Christ. John wrote,

(I John 3:3) “And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”

He talked about the fact that we are looking for that day.

(I Thessalonians 4:16) “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel

and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”

(I Thessalonians 4:17) “Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and we shall always be with the Lord.”

It is God who will transform the world through his Son, Jesus Christ. I think it is very important that the establishment of this doctrine is laid right away in the Book of Acts. It shows that the hope is for and in Christ. I think it is both interesting and not a mistake that they find themselves in an upper room where they are waiting for Christ. What the chapter then conveys as well is that the church is not to sit around and wait, but that it is to be busy until He comes.

(I Thessalonians 4:11) “and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you,”

(Titus 3:8) “This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, that those who have believed God will be careful to

engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.”

Titus Chapter 2 is strong in this. Everything we do is to be done as unto the Lord.

(II Peter 3:11) “Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,”

Scripture is establishing this doctrine. Right away you see the church taking care of business, not sitting in the upper room. They were praying. They were waiting for God, but they still brought in another apostle because of Judas’ betrayal. They were actively awaiting the power of the Spirit. Why is it that they did not do anything in Chapter 1? The main reason is because the power of the church is the Spirit of God.

That is the point of Chapter 2. If the church is not empowered by the Spirit of God, then there is no reason for it to exist because there is no life. The church is a dead body without His life breathed in. The hope is that you and I, when we receive Jesus Christ, will receive the Spirit

of God within us. Then things will change. The way that we think changes. The way that we perceive things changes. The Spirit of God should be leading us. If the Spirit of God is not leading the church, the problem is a matter of someone's personal desires; people begin to manipulate whatever they want done. That is one of the reasons why it is very important that people are full of the Spirit of God and that He is leading the church. What does it look like to be full of the Spirit of God? Well, it does not mean that you are dancing around and rolling on the floor. I have been to some churches that believe that. As a part of my studies, I was asked to visit different churches. I visited one church that had a special service called "Laughter of the Spirit." Everybody on the stage was laughing out loud. The people in the audience did the same, and that was fundamentally a service. It did not get much more complicated than that. Everybody was laughing, and some were rolling on the floor. Some were rolling on the stage. Some had a bit more fervor than others, but they were laughing. It got out of hand. I remember the pastor coming up a couple of times and going, "Okay. Now we need to calm down." When he started doing that, people started laughing louder. I think

what they were trying to convey was the joy of the Spirit. I remember telling Connie that it was an eerie sound because it was a forced laughter. Have any of you ever been to such a service? The bottom line is that if the Spirit of God is dwelling within you, you will proclaim Jesus Christ. This is the evidence because it is from the Spirit. He is the Spirit of truth who bears witness to Christ. The person talks about Jesus. He points to Jesus. He does not point to himself, which is the way man normally thinks. The way man normally thinks is to point to himself or to another man. For somebody to point to the One who died on the cross, rose again, and lived long ago is a strange phenomenon. There has to be an extra power there that is moving him to do such a thing. We preach, as Paul would say, Jesus. Every time you see different ones in the Book of Acts filled with the Holy Spirit, what were they doing? They were proclaiming the mighty deeds of God. They were proclaiming Christ Jesus and pointing to Him. This is what you will see within the passage. The church is empowered and enlivened by the Spirit of Christ. I would say this: the church will be powerless and ineffective, lacking in power, and lacking in boldness if in fact the Spirit of God is not leading.

Chapter 3 talks about the fact that you and I will, by virtue of being a part of the church, serve in and by the name of Christ. In other words, it is Christ whom we elevate, not silver or gold; we do not see them as a source. Remember Peter's words to the lame man:

(Acts 3:3) "But Peter said, 'I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!'"

We should be walking in the power of God. We are not serving to edify ourselves. I know this is a strange thought, but we serve without bringing attention to ourselves. Our desire is to serve Christ. At any time that a person feels like he has to let everybody know what he is doing, I always wonder for whom is he doing it? Is he doing it for me? Do not do it for me. He will not get any value from me. We serve in the name and by the name of Christ, and we believe that is where the power of Christ is.

In Chapter 4, he talks about confidence. Within the passage, you see Peter speaking. They were amazed that Peter and these guys who were Galileans were speaking

with such confidence. Where did their confidence come from? Well, the passage tells us:

(Acts 4:8) “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers and elders of the people,’”

They were filled with the Holy Spirit. What does that look like?

(Acts 4:13) “Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.”

Obviously, that confidence had not come from their education. It did not come from their backgrounds. It must have come from some other source that went far beyond them.

(Acts 4:31) “And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.”

The church functions in the confidence that comes by the authority of Christ. We do what Christ tells us to do. If He says to stop, you have to stop speaking. We believe that the authority of Christ trumps all other authority. There will be times that the church goes against what is perceived to be either the tradition of a nation or perhaps patriotism, but we have to do what God tells us. We have a higher authority that goes beyond the nation.

According to Chapter 5, the church believes that it is the guardian of the truth of God.

(I Timothy 3:15) “but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

We guard the truth along with the Spirit of God. With Ananias and Sapphira, the Spirit of God revealed how He does not take kindly to lying, especially by individuals within the church. There is one phrase in that I want to make note of from the story of Ananias and Sapphira. You remember that they held back some of the money. They

said they were giving it all, but they held back some of it. Peter said:

(Acts 5:4) “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”

Once you step out and you say, “I am doing this for God,” it better be for God. You know? It is like Ecclesiastes.

(Ecclesiastes 5:5) “It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.”

It is the arrogance of people who say that they are doing this for God. If you say that, you had better be sure that you are doing this for God. Because if you are not, read about Ananias and Sapphira again. God does not take kindly to the hypocrisy that was or is in the church. The indictment in verse 4 is: “Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” The wife went along with what Ananias did, so Peter:

(Acts 5:9) “Then Peter said to her, ‘Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test?...’”

By lying, they both fell dead immediately. Throughout Chapter 5, the truth is elevated and protection of the truth is conveyed.

In Chapter 6, the church is to be managed by Spirit-filled followers of Christ. We use the word “managed” because there are people chosen by the church whom I will call deacons. If you need people to wait on tables, then you could have anybody. But Scripture says, “No. They have to have the same standards as those who are overseers.”

These have to be people who are perceived as filled by the Spirit of God and who have a reputation that is good in the community. You see in First Timothy Chapter 3 and Titus 1 the lists that are given. Scripture tells us that we cannot have substandard leadership in any position in the church when it comes to managing or organizing the church. I have seen much damage happen within churches where people were simply filling spots.

Someone mentioned to me the other day a church in

which they were involved. I do not remember who it was. It was no one here. The pastor had either left the church or retired, and they have been looking for a pastor for quite a few years. They have what is called a pulpit committee to do the searching. I do not know if any of you are familiar with these terms. A pulpit committee is basically a group of people who have been chosen to represent the general audience and to find a pastor. It is like sheep going out to look for a shepherd. Anyway, they were to find a shepherd that fits their vibes. Some churches have bylaws that state that they have to have a certain number of deacons and elders. I have seen churches that do not have enough deacons and elders so then go around asking, "Would you be a deacon? Want to be a deacon?" Or they go around asking people whom they want to have as a deacon. Then they get one. Wow. We got one. We got another. We filled the spot, so we will have a quorum today. Their hope is to build this facade. The result, unfortunately, is that you have men and sometimes women who are making decisions based on their own desires rather than what is Spiritually correct. In other words, does this elevate the name of Christ? Is it according to Scripture? I had a conversation with

somebody the other day who said, “Well, I am being led by the Spirit of God.” I said, “Well, the Spirit of God will never lead contrary to Scripture. Scripture will complement the Spirit. The Spirit of God will complement Scripture. They work in harmony. He is the Spirit of truth, and they always work in harmony” The apostles said:

(Acts 6:4) “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

(Acts 6:5) “The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.”

Is that not interesting? They told them to:

(Acts 6:3) “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”

The criteria to this day remains unchanged.

(1 Timothy 3:2) “An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.”

The list goes on. More is found in Titus 1. It is telling us that the church is managed by Spirit-filled followers of Christ.

In Chapter 7, the church is led by courageous proclaimers of Christ. Who is the courageous proclaimer that we see in Chapter 7? Stephen. Great text. He takes us through a lot of the Old Testament as he begins to proclaim Christ to the Ethiopian eunuch. This is Stephen who was a deacon. Now we see Stephen proclaiming boldly. We go, “Wow. They must have chosen the right guy because he is not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. We literally have evidence that Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit. Why? He was proclaiming Christ. He was proclaiming Christ boldly. Right?”

In Chapter 8, we believe that the church is moved and directed by the Spirit to share the Gospel of Christ. This sounds redundant, but I want to emphasize this in

Chapter 8. You know how people say, “The Spirit of God moved me.” If the Spirit of God is moving you anywhere, it is for the purpose of sharing the Gospel. I want to make that clear. If you like Cheerios, eat Cheerios. But do not tell me that the Spirit of God led you to eat Cheerios. I trust that you are walking in the Spirit in the sense that He is leading in your life, but the Spirit of God is going to lead you to proclaim the name of Christ. This is what we want to do when the Spirit of God is filling us. You see this in Chapter 8. Different ones are being moved from place to place. It is very clear why they were being moved. The things that are happening in their lives are for the very purpose of sharing the Gospel. One of the great stories in this text is about Philip and how he is moved to speak to the Ethiopian eunuch. Why is Philip moved? Why is he transported? In each case, it is clear why he is being transported.

(Acts 8:35) “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.”

That is why we are moved and directed. I think one of the purposes of Chapter 8 is to help us see that God is moving

people for this reason. In Chapter 9, the church is an agent of affirmation and advocacy for all who will believe in Christ. The church is a place where we support Christians. I cannot overemphasize that. The church is not a place where we support Muslims. The Church is not a place where we support Jehovah's Witnesses. It is not a place where we support atheists. We do not support homosexuality. What we support are believers. We stand behind believers. If you want to follow Christ, you will not have a greater advocate in this church than me. I will stand behind you and encourage you. But if you do not want to follow Christ, you will not have a whole lot of encouragement from me. I would trust that, as I begin to proclaim Christ, there is an impetus in your heart to desire to follow Christ. But the church is for the purpose of encouraging believers. You see within the text not only Barnabas, but Ananias as well. It is very interesting that Ananias had to encourage Saul who had been a blasphemer. There have been many times when someone with a sordid past has walked through that door. But if they receive Jesus Christ today, I am there to encourage them. I am thrilled that God has changed them. God has made them into a new person. Now, that does not mean

that we will give them the keys to the nursery. It does mean that we are going to stand behind them as long as they pursue Christ. We are advocates and encouragers of such people. We do not look at a person's past. Your past is past.

(Philippians 3:14) “I press on toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Today, if you want to do what is right and follow Christ, I am with you. I would hope that the whole church is with you, strongly supporting you. The church is an agent of affirmation and advocacy for all who believe.

Chapter 10 is telling us that the church is the venue by which disciples of Christ are guided and united. God is going to use the church. It is very important that people understand that individuals do not have the luxury of leaving a church to go out into ministry alone, even if they feel led by God. God ordained the church to send people out. God has ordained the church to do the moving.

Chapter 10 conveys that truth. We see the involvement of the church. I would tie Chapter 10 with Chapter 13 where the Word of God is being sent out. In Chapter 13, Paul was

sent out by the church at Antioch. Paul has already been saved close to ten years. Think about this. Paul had been schooled from childhood in Judaism. He became a member of the Sanhedrin. He knew Scripture better than most. On top of that, he saw Jesus. On the road to Damascus, Jesus talked directly to him. He went into the temple where Jesus talked to him. We will see that in the text today. You are thinking, “Okay. He does not need to be sent out by the church. Even so, Paul does not go out until the church at Antioch sends him. What is God doing? He is establishing the authority of the church. Jesus told His disciples,

(Matthew 28:18) “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’”

(Matthew 18:18) “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

Who is He talking to? His disciples who were directed to establish the foundation of the church through the Holy Spirit. The church was the venue through which the

disciples of Christ were guided and united. Who or what unites us? Think about it. What unites us? If you love Christ, we are united. Instantly, we are united. We gather together because we love Christ. It does not matter what your background is. It does not matter if you were a Roman soldier in this chapter like Cornelius. It does not matter if you are Greek. It does not matter if you are Jew. We are drawn to those who seek the truth and embrace Christ.

In Chapter 11, the church is unreservedly non-prejudicial by virtue of submission to the Spirit and words of Christ. Where did I get that phrase from? Why would I summarize it that way? Do you remember the incident in Chapter 11? Is it not in Chapter 1 where Peter testifies:

(Acts 11:12) “The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man’s house.”

(Acts 11:17) “Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?”

(Acts 11:18) “When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, ‘Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.’”

God is not a respecter of persons. The church should also not be. There should be nothing prejudicial in the church. In fact, the church should have been non-prejudicial before the country figured out that it was a bad thing. Unfortunately, too often we follow behind; but this has been the case all along. It should not be prejudiced towards anyone. It does not matter who they are. I do not care what your background is. Instantly, you become my brother and sister. We have tried to make it our practice to welcome all without prejudice. I can understand certain cultures not feeling comfortable with a white Caucasian guy from Ireland. But the fact is that within us is the Spirit of God who says, “You are my brother. I can tell you that I feel as much at home in India with the brethren as I do here. Some of us do not speak the same language. Sometimes we sit around and smile with tea. But you will hear a thousand and one hallelujahs and a thousand and one amens. That is a common language. They love God. I am drawn to them because they do that. Unreservedly

non-prejudicial by virtue of submission to the Spirit and His words. In Chapter Twelve, the churches where people believe are moved to glorify God. Peter reported on how the Lord did these things. He began to talk about this, “God is doing this...” It was always about “God did this.” The end of the chapter ends with Herod who tried to take credit for feeding the people of Tyre and Sidon.

(Acts 12:22) “The people kept crying out, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’”

Herod’s clothing sparkled in the sun which caused them to think he was a god.

(Acts 12:23) “And immediately, an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.”

The church is very strong in intentionally giving God the glory. We believe that we are moved for the very purpose of glorifying God rather than man. We often talk about music and the role of music. Music is a wonderful thing. To worship in music is to worship with your emotions. We

know music with its crescendos and decrescendos. It tells you when to get loud or soft. It tells you if this is a syncopation beat or other. If you think about how the music is written, it is written in such a way as to convey emotions. The words you hear should tie into the music. It appeals to that sense of emotion. This is what I am feeling in this. It could be elation which would be bouncy and high up there. If it is sad, it is low and slow. It could be country music. There are many types of music genres. The emphasis is that you can feel it. Because of that, music in and of itself is not a bad or good thing any more than emotions are bad or good things. However, Scripture says that emotions should be led by God, not by you. For instance,

(Philippians 4:6) “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

(Philippians 4:4) “Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice!”

Our emotions should be led by God's direction and not by our own personal feelings. You have emotions, and they vary. You will be angry from time to time.

(Ephesians 4:26) “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.”

(II Corinthians 10:5) “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”

The problem with music often is that we focus on our emotions. When emotions control us, often the results are not good. For instance, if God is saying rejoice always but you are singing the blues, I do not think that is a good thing. If music takes the stage and focuses on the singer or the song, to me it is not grand. You could go to an opera with a great singer, and it could sound great. But if it is pointing to the grandness of man, it is wrong. Music is to glorify God. You are to glorify God. When man gets elevated or if we allow our emotions to carry us away into all kinds of other places, it is inappropriate. We believe that we are called to rejoice in God's Word and to glorify

God. Chapter 13 says that the church is called to rejoice over the Word of the Lord. It starts off with sending Paul out to ministry, but toward the end, people were rejoicing and ask that the word of God be spoken again to them. What does a church celebrate? Does a church celebrate a new building, or does it celebrate that the Word of God is going out? If they celebrate that the Word of God is being preached, they are on target. That is a great church. I am thankful there. There are many good churches that send out the Word of God and are glorifying God and rejoicing over that. In Chapter 13, the church gathers around God's goodness, not man's approval. That is the key point. You see a tremendous difference between the worship at the beginning and the hostility that comes at the end. The reason why God put me in a ministry is because I am drawn to worship. I am not drawn to be in front of people. I think that God knew what He was doing when He made me. On the other hand, my brother at two years of age was standing at the front of the church quoting the Christmas story, not blinking an eye. No problem. But I tried to recite something and could not get past the second word. You know what I mean? I told God at a very early point, "I'll do anything you want. But I will not be a

preacher. I will not do that.” I do believe that God chooses to use the weak and the foolish things. I do believe that God does not want us to boast in ourselves.

What we see in Chapter 14 is that there is a tendency in man to elevate man. God used Barnabas and Paul to heal a lame man, and the people reacted:

(Acts 14:12) “And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.”

(Acts 14:14) “But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out”

(Acts 14:15) “and saying, ‘Men, why are you doing these things?...’”

Their response is heartening to me. It is encouraging to me. In their minds, the worst thing that you could do was elevate them. The crowd then turned to the other extreme and became hostile.

(Acts 14:19) “But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.”

That is from one extreme to the other. But, within the context of this, you see the saints gathered together because they love the Lord. They were not coming to see a personality. They wanted to talk about God. In Chapter 15, the church is committed to the standard of grace. We are not committed to the standard of tradition. We are not committed to the standard of control, of prominence, prestige, or of entertainment. We are not committed to any of those things. We are committed to the standard of grace. We believe that it is the grace of God that is the highest of standards. It is His favor upon us. Grace means the favor of God. What is it that we want more than anything else? The favor of God. That is what I want. How do you find that? Well, you submit to His will and obey His word.

In Chapter 16, the church seeks and draws the true, the honorable, and the devoted of heart. There are three significant individuals within that chapter. One is Timothy. Right? Timothy was drawn to go with Paul, which does not make any sense to me after seeing Paul stoned in his own neighborhood. But he still wanted to go. He was drawn. Lydia was drawn. Here she was, a wealthy

businesswoman; but she was drawn and literally begged Paul to come into her house and have the study in her house. We would not expect to find somebody in the prison who was searching, but we find the Philippian jailer who had a longing in his heart. Those who are drawn to the Word of God are honorable and devoted of heart. In Chapter 17, we see that the church is despised and rejected by man's religion and his reasonings. The poster child for this is Athens, which had many different faiths and a lot of different beliefs. But the one that they cannot seem to bear was Christianity. I do not know what is threatening about Jesus' love for people. I cannot figure that one out. It shows that there is a force in the world that goes beyond man, and that evil force is Satan himself. In Chapter 18, the church is the ambassador of God's irrepressible truth and grace to the world. We are ambassadors of Christ. Our devotion is not to self. It is not connected to the convenience of circumstances, of ideal conditions. Paul continued to preach even though he did not have money. His calling was irrepressible. He had to tell somebody. If it is a part of your life, you cannot keep quiet.

In Chapter 19, the church believes that there are true riches and celebrates them. We do not celebrate the riches of the world. We clarify what is valuable and what is true. It is not about popularity, reputation, prosperity, or riches. It is about proclaiming the way, and we believe that that is the true riches. If you are following Christ, Jesus will say over and over again, "Peace be with you." What He is talking about is a sense of well-being. Where does that sense of well-being come from? Is there anything that you would trade for a sense of well-being, for a good night's sleep, for a sense of being content with the day? Where do you get that from? I know that riches cannot buy that. The things of the world cannot bring contentment to you. However, we have a source that will bring it to you.

In Chapter 20, the church is orchestrated and motivated by the Spirit of exhortation. There is a power of encouragement that is being expressed in Chapter 20 and a sincere care for those who proclaim the truth. It unites our hearts. I remember taking a class in the Old Testament at Biola. The professor, Dr. Sailhamer, was in front of the class. He loved the Lord and was a brilliant guy. The first day he was sharing some of the Old Testament Scripture.

He started reading, stopped, and began quoting it in Hebrew. He started sharing it in Hebrew. Then he said, “Now let me tell you what that is about.” I talked with Dr. Sailhamer almost every day because I was drawn to this man. He had what I was longing for. He had sincerity in his heart. You can tell when somebody is teaching a class and when he loves the Word. In fact, he was infatuated with it. The treasures that came out were marvelous. It changed my heart at that time. I am not a jogger, but I would get up 5:00 in the morning to jog with Dr. Braderick. He came by the house. “Ready to go, Gary?” Yeah. I am ready. If you have ever jogged in the hills of, Glendale, California, you know how steep they are. For somebody who does not like to jog, it was an effort. But I wanted to talk. We talked the whole time that we were running. When you are with somebody who loves the Lord and wants to talk about the Lord, I want to be around them. Don’t you? It is a wonderful thing. The encouragement and motivation and exhortation of those who are proclaiming the word of God is magnetic. You are drawn to, you embrace, those how love the Lord. We often had speakers at Biola University. Often, and I do not know why, they would come to my house. We would sit down and talk about the

Word for hours. It was such a wonderful time together. If you look in the passage, you can understand why those people were saying, “I do not want to leave you.” They were holding on to Paul because they loved talking about and hearing the Word of God.

In Chapter 21, the Word of God or the church is where the mature are compelled to go the extra mile. Paul, all through this chapter, was answering a higher call. It is very different from the world because rarely will anyone in the world willingly go the extra mile for me. Scripture tells us differently. Scripture says, “You have to go the extra mile.” I have often thought of men whom I have highly respected. They would more willingly be taken advantage of than to take advantage. Though they had the position to take advantage of others, they would release that position. They would give more to the other than they received. God is not a debtor to any man. God blessed Paul. This is the opposite of Jesus’ words in:

(Matthew 23:4) “They [Pharisees] tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.”

Now let's talk through Chapter 22. In this chapter Paul gives us his defense. It is an interesting chapter in the sense that the church is called to recognize the tradition in which they live. Let me put it this way. We live in America. You guys know that? As Americans, we live among people who are patriotic. In many respects, we should be patriotic because we live in America. That is our country. That is the place where God ordained that we be born. These are all good. We recognize many of the traditions of Americans, such as the Fourth of July and other things that we celebrate. This is not a bad thing. However, what needs to happen is a recognition of those traditions without compromising our testimony. This is where I think many times the church falls short. We blend many of the traditions of the world in that we lose our sense of testimony. Then on the other hand, you see churches that are strict about their testimony to the extent that they do not recognize the value of our traditions and of our nation. Both, I think, are wrong. In this chapter, you see Paul as he is—both Roman citizen and Jewish—as he begins to declare his defense. Ultimately his purpose is not to defend himself because he knows he will die for the sake of the Gospel. It is not to stay out of trouble, but it is

for the purpose of making clear his testimony. I want you to see some of the things that he does in the beginning. He knows that his audience is composed of Jews. What do you think he does? He talks in Hebrew. Of course. It makes sense. It is not awkward.

(Acts 22:2) “And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became quiet; and he said,”

He was talking to his fellow countrymen. This comes off of the heels of Chapter 21 in which, at first, some of the people thought that he was an Egyptian insurrectionist.

(Acts 21:38) “Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the 4,000 men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?”

From what I understand of the history of that incident, this Egyptian came in and lead his followers to the Mount of Olives. The way that Josephus records it is that he had 30,000 followers. Luke recorded 4,000. From what we understand, 400 were killed on one day, 600 were killed

on another day, and 200 were imprisoned, which was enough to stay the insurrection. The leader escaped. They thought that maybe he spoke fluent Greek. When Paul spoke a lot in Greek, they thought that maybe he was the Egyptian.

(Acts 21:39) “But Paul said, ‘I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city, and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people.’”

He then talked about this pedigree again in Chapter 22.

(Acts 22:3) “‘I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.’”

Once again, he related to what was important to his audience; clearly, he was not making this up. He was a Jew. He was dealing with Jewish beliefs and customs. He did not tear down these customs. He recognized them. He tells them where he was born. Tarsus was known as one of the greatest cities of education in the known world. The others were Alexandria along with Athens and Tarsus.

These were the metropolises of great education and of learning. When Paul said this, he was pulling out some cards. It was true that he was born there. He knew what pressed their buttons. He was attuned to their life, their beliefs, their customs, their information, their established way of thinking about things that were important to them. There are certain audiences where, if you want to have a platform, you have to be from certain schools or something to which they relate. Of course, the Lord can supersede those. However, if God has given them to you, then you use them. Paul began to talk about being well educated; he was not some hooligan off the streets. He was from Tarsus but brought up in Jerusalem, his home. He was educated under Gamaliel. Gamaliel was the grandson of the great Hillel. If you were to read some of the Talmud, it lists Gamaliel in the Talmud. In fact, Gamaliel was perceived to be one of the greatest intellectuals of Judaism. I think the way it reads in the Talmud is that he had a reputation for purity and piety. Strangely enough, he was one of the Jewish writers in the Talmud who stuck up for women who got divorced. He always felt that women got the short end of the stick and needed to be protected more. Paul was educated under

this man, a renowned teacher. In fact, the Jews say that when Gamaliel died, piety and purity died with him. That is how much he was respected. Paul has not thrown out his name without a reason. Look back in Acts Chapter 5. In Verse 29, Peter told the Council that he and the disciples must obey God rather than men. The Council members then thought they were insurrectionists. Actually, they were declaring that they were witnesses of God and that they must obey God. The Council took this to mean that the disciples wanted to be troublemakers.

(Acts 5:33) “But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them.”

(Acts 5:34) “But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time.”

(Acts 5:35) “And he said to them, ‘Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men.’”

(Acts 5:36) “For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.”

Interesting side note: Theudas went to the Jericho River and tried to make the water part.

(Acts 5:37) “After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered.”

He raised an insurrection because he did not like the taxes. Remember that all the world was to be taxed?

(Acts 5:38) “So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action should be of men, it will be overthrown;”

I think this was wise counsel. Let the Law take care of it. That is what he was saying.

(Acts 5:39) “but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.”

You hear the wisdom in his words.

(Acts 5:40) “They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them to not speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them.”

It made sense and it showed that he had a level head. The fact that Paul had been a student under him was probably one of the reasons why Paul ended up being a member of the Sanhedrin. I think that Gamaliel had the title of President of the Sanhedrin. He was well known in that office which was probably one of the reasons why Paul was included.

In Chapter 22, we have already read Verse 3. What had Paul done? He claimed that he was Jewish across the board, had not torn down their traditions, and was a part of them. He did not argue whether any of that was right or wrong. He claimed to be one with them and established that what they valued the most was what he did as well. It is the same approach that he had when in Athens and established what they valued the most. It would be erroneous for the church to go around attacking all of the things that the world is doing and the traditions that our country has. To say that is not a righteous pursuit.

That is not what the church should be doing. We have many good traditions. In fact, Scripture says that to show respect to what was right in the sight of all men. We have many good traditions in our country, and we should celebrate those. God has not called us to fight our nation. We are called to submit to our nation. Paul began to say that they were on the same page. Then he began to share that he had persecuted the Way. After that, he shared his testimony. He purposely included things that were offensive to them. We would tend to say, “Well, wait a minute, Paul. You recognized your traditions which were acceptable to them. But now you throw in the name of Jesus the Nazarene. You could say a lot of things. You could say He was a good man; you could make it general. You could talk about the God of our fathers. You could talk about that.” But instead:

(Acts 22:8) “And I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, “‘I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.’”

If you think about it, he did not skip a beat in making it clear that he was a follower of Jesus the Nazarene.

(Acts 22:12) “A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there,”

So now he had their attention again. See what I am saying? He was not ignoring these things. He looked for opportunities to draw them in and to be together.

(Acts 22:14) “And he said, ‘The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth.’”

The God of our fathers. You hear that phrase? That was very uniting.

(Acts 22:15) “For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.”

(Acts 22:16) “Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”

(Acts 22:17) “It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance,”

(Acts 22:18) “and I saw him saying to me, ‘Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.’”

Paul saw Him again. That is a great phrase, isn't it? Sometimes we think of the road to Damascus as the only time when he saw Him. But he saw Him again in Jerusalem. Why did Paul have to get out of Jerusalem? Because they were not willing to accept his testimony.

(Acts 22:19) “And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You.’”

Surely, they could see the change in him, that there must be something?

(Acts 22:20) “And when the blood of Your witness, Stephen, was being shed, I also was standing by approving and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.”

(Acts 22:21) “And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

To the Gentiles? Okay. That was where they drew the line. That was enough. They did not mind him talking about their Father. They did not mind him talking about their country. But they did mind him going to the Gentiles sent by Jesus. That is where they drew the line. What I am encouraged about in this passage is that he did not skip a beat. There was nothing different in this testimony than what happened in his earlier testimonies. I think what often happens is that we go too far in both ways. We are not willing to compromise. We do not tell people how terrible the world is and how terrible our country is. We are Christians. We do not smoke, we do not chew, we do not run after what the world does. Right? We make that division. The Bible says that we recognize the traditions, but we do not compromise the testimony. We also see in the text that, when we walk away, we are not walking away as insurrectionists. We walk away as one who is telling the truth. See? That is why it is important that the church does not get into all these debates. You know? The news people ask, "What do you think?" We have no comment. No comment. Why should I get into your fight? You want me to talk about Jesus? I will be glad to talk

about Jesus with them. If you want the camera to move away, all you have to do is start talking about Jesus Christ. Before long, it will move away. But be thankful for your country. Be thankful for the things that God has given you. Be thankful for the place that He has given you. Look for those good things in this world. Make sure that you do not compromise that testimony. That has to be clear. This is a great text that references the foundation of the church and the fact that we recognize tradition without compromise to our testimony. I bet you are dizzy going through all of this!

Prayer

Father, we give You thanks for this wonderful book, the Acts of the Apostles, and how the apostles desire to lay Your foundation. We begin to see what is important, what is not important, how to do things, how not to do things, what being led by the Spirit looks like. Your word bears witness with the Spirit that these are truths. This is the way we should live. Lord, help us as You guide and direct us into our neighborhoods and the places where we are. May we not be known as troublemakers or divisive

individuals, but may we be very clear about what we believe without any apology. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.