



**Acts – Can I get a Witness?  
Wk. 75 “It’s Hard to be Humble”  
By Pastor Jody May 04/21/2024**

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**Acts 21:17-26 ESV**

**21 Paul Visits James**

<sup>17</sup>When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. <sup>18</sup>On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. <sup>19</sup>After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. <sup>20</sup>And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, <sup>21</sup>and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. <sup>22</sup>What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. <sup>23</sup>Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; <sup>24</sup>take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. <sup>25</sup>But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.” <sup>26</sup>Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.

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**[READ THE TEXT]**

**Pastor – “People of God, this is the Word of God.”**

**People – “Thanks be to God.”**

**[PRAY]**

**[ILLUSTRATION]**

As our nation runs headlong into secularism, or worship of the state, it has been doing its’ best, since to them there is no such thing as sin, to look to



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other things to post blame for sinful and criminal behavior. Just this past week I witnessed a horrific story.<sup>1</sup>

An Indianapolis mother has been found not guilty of neglectfully smothering her child to death - as a judge shockingly said he would have found her guilty of involuntary manslaughter or reckless homicide.

Dacia Lacey, 32, walked free after a judge ruled that prosecutors brought inappropriate charges of neglect of a dependent resulting in death, contending they didn't prove she killed her two-month-old daughter Alona on purpose.

The mother admitted to police that she smothered the infant with couch cushions while she was high on methamphetamines so she could 'get some sleep' in August 2022.

The state prosecutor was not willing to pursue the manslaughter charge, why? Because that baby has no rights yet, she hadn't lived a life full of mistreatment and hurt by a racial society, and since her mother had suffered more of that she was let of Scott-free and was merely called a bad parent by the judge. It was her upbringing, it was the drugs, it was the lack of education on being a parent, and she was tired. Everything else was blamed besides her own culpability, it seems that is on its' way out of our courtrooms in this land.

The Blame Game is perhaps the oldest way in the book to deal with guilt, and it has been happening since the beginning.

### **Genesis 3:11-13 ESV**

<sup>11</sup>He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” <sup>12</sup>The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” <sup>13</sup>Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

From the beginning I want us to see, that though it is not right blaming others for the actions you take, it is very natural for us to do it, to offer up self-justification and blame others for the choices we make. This is what makes us look for scapegoats all the time, to offer up others as a sacrifice for our sin, to blame others for what we do. It was what Jesus counted on, our

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13322013/Dacia-lacey-judge-not-guilty-smothering-baby.html>



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fallenness and desire to blame, because He knew we would blame Him for our angst ([Revelation 13:8](#)).

**[GOSPEL]**

Christ knew that the only way to defeat this desire was through **HUMILITY**. To allow Himself to be blamed for all that was wrong and to obey the Father to be obedient unto death ([Philippians 2:8](#)), and in return that harsh reality of an unjustified death ([1 Peter 3:18-19](#)) the Spirit uses it to open up our eyes to our need for a righteous justification. That is exactly what Christ can provide now, by being righteous all the way to death He imputes to us His goodness and in return we have now a perfect and divine justification. We don't have to worry about that blame game anymore, it had been placed on Christ and we are now free.

But old habits sometimes are very hard to break because we just don't like being wrong.

**[INTRO. & BACKGROUND]**

Paul was going to experience this truth firsthand, that people, even ones that have been saved, are still looking for scapegoats to assuage their feelings. He has been given the ultimate privilege of reflecting Christ in message and deed, but it will require of him the ultimate sacrifice as well. That doesn't bother Paul anymore, as he said earlier in **21:13** ***“For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”***

Good news for him, he won't have to go far to look for the opportunity to suffer for Christ. For in the very same town where Jesus was persecuted and falsely condemned, Paul will experience the same thing. No less by brothers that professed to love Christ, they are looking to blame Him for the way they feel slighted. This is the last time in Paul's life that he would be a free man, can you imagine the weight to know that? To know that by obedience to God you will no longer be able to enjoy the freedoms that everyone else gets to enjoy, you will be put away because people are going to blame you for how you make them feel?



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We are going to use his story today as a case study for that which overcomes the blame game and opens a way for us too, to be conformed into Christ’s image. We are going to look at **Paul’s life as a lesson in humility**, how to embrace it, so that the unity in the church may prevail, and she will be enlightened that she still suffers in proclivities to blame. We’re going to allow the natural flow of scripture to give us a form by which to go by. First, we will look at the **communion** of the saints between Paul and the Jerusalem elders, then we will look at the **concern** displayed by the Jewish elders over the hurt feelings of the Christian Jews in Jerusalem, and then lastly we will witness the **compromise** Paul was willing to make for the sake of the Gospel and the fame of Jesus. All these sections teach us something about humility through Paul’s life as he is attempting to bring glory to Christ.

If I were to give this one main point today, I would say it like this.

**MP:**

**Humility is key in our Sanctification and for winning others to Christ.**

**1. Communion over the great things being done.**

<sup>17</sup>When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly.

Ok, so they have been brought to a man’s house named Mnason of Cyprus (v.16), who lived in Jerusalem, who is known as an early disciple, and his home was going to be their base of operations while in Jerusalem. Just a couple of things here. First Mnason of Cyprus is a Greek name for a Jew, this man grew up in Cyprus, so he was truly Hellenized, taught in Greek traditions of education and philosophy. It also says he was an early disciple meaning he could have been one of the original 72 ([Luke 10:1-24](#)) or one of the original converted disciples from Pentecost ([Acts 2](#)). These facts lead us to believe that Mnason was ready to welcome Gentile believers and Jews who would be perhaps viewed as unclean by the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. This all makes him a more liberal minded man, needed to facilitate the relationships and perhaps tensions between the mother church in Jerusalem and the Churches of Asia Minor. **It is important to note liberal minded does not necessarily mean corrupt**, the church has always had a need for people who



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are willing to love those presented as less lovable, they are the unifiers making sure the church doesn't forget how to love.

<sup>18</sup> On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

Paul after getting a day to collect his thoughts and get a little rest goes into the elders of the church of Jerusalem. You also have to notice that they don't mention any apostles, which most scholars agree that if they were there they would have been mentioned. Where are they, well by this time they are all off starting churches, evangelizing, and some by this point had been martyred already. That means the church has raised up elders, of which James, Jesus' earthly brother, is the front man. Based on Jewish traditions and early church records they would have enough elders to appropriately represent the tribes in this church, so you are looking at least at 70 elders if not more, some speculate up to 100.

This is a huge formal meeting, in a place big enough to hold all the leaders at one time, so all the church in Jerusalem would know it was taking place. By the way when we say all of the church, we are talking tens of thousands of Jews. Now why would we say this? In the words of John MacArthur:<sup>2</sup>

*Well, I'm not sure how many, but I know by the 5th chapter of Acts there were at least 20,000. And if there are 20,000 at the 5th chapter of Acts, and we're a good 20-plus years later, you can believe there are a lot more.*

This brings us to a very large ordeal, all the elders present, that would have communication with all the thousands of believers in Jerusalem, and on top of that it is the national Jewish holiday of Pentecost.<sup>3</sup> Pentecost meaning 50, so this is 50 days after Passover, celebrating the last harvest of grain for the year for the Jewish calendar, while for the Christian it is the day the HS came down and the birth of the church happened through the preaching of the Apostle Peter. Making this a big time of celebration and high traffic. So, all eyes are on what's going on here in this room at this moment! (Like the state of the Union address)

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gty.org/library/pdf/sermons-library/1784>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/day-Pentecost.html>



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It is at this point in front of all these witnesses with the recorders for communication that Paul begins his formal debriefing.

<sup>19</sup> After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

**Communion:** a group of people sharing an interest and interchanging thoughts or emotions, and intimate communication.<sup>4</sup>

We see that Paul doesn’t rush this process, but what he does is spend his time by meticulously going thought one by one, all the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. That means Paul obviously has to add in all the problems, the long nights, the time in jail, the multiple beatings, the backstabbing by other Jews. But also, please note **who gets all the glory, God!** Nothing in his report then is outside God’s will, it was all done for God’s glory. What a glorious time for Paul, to tell the Jews that which they should have been doing 1,000 years ago, evangelizing the pagans with the good news of God, it has now happened, thanks to God’s intervention through the sending of the Spirit!

**Paul was humble and gave credit where credit was due.** Where all the Pharisees had gone before him and would claim credit for taking disciples, to put a yoke of law living upon young Jews, Paul has taken thousands of Gentiles, and he has turned right around and has given credit to God for everyone one of them!

Listen right now you may be in a position to give God glory and you are missing the chance or the point. You may be a graduating senior, you may be an aspiring athlete, you may be an up-and-coming employee, you may be blessed with a bountiful investment portfolio, you may be a proud grandparent, whatever you are today, please know **that all you have is by God’s grace alone**, so that you can make much of Him! Don’t waste an opportunity to share a message about God with those around you, whether it came through a success OR through a trial of perseverance. (**Penn State Wrestlers**).

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/communion>



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**LP**

**When we practice humility God gets the glory!**

<sup>20</sup> And when they heard it, they glorified God.

The elders knew this was God, for it couldn't have happened any other way. But they want to share with Paul some good news themselves! So proper humility begets glory sharing, important to keep in mind.

And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law,

The elders listen to his story, they interpret the movement as an act of God, they praise Gods and then they share some good news of their own. That is Christian communion, praising God together for all good things! But here at the end of their sharing of some extremely good news, news that would make Paul ecstatic, for remember Paul has a strong desire to see his own people accept the Lord, they tag the good news with a small statement, **“They are all zealous for the law.”**

**2. Concern over the snubbing of Jewish ways.**

<sup>21</sup> and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs.

At this point in our story, I was like wait a minute, there were some things going on here that I didn't just like.

**First, they have been told.** Like whom told them? **katécheó**: to teach by word-of-mouth **Original Word**: κατηχέω – from where we get the word catechize.<sup>5</sup> it means to instruct by teaching, so in other words these Christians, thousands of them, have been catechized to think that Paul had been teaching other Jews to forsake the law of Moses, to give up being a Jew! To not circumcise would be to turn your back on OT prophecy and commands. That fact though is that is the farthest from the truth, remember

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2727/esv/mgnt/0-1/>



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Timothy ([Acts 16:1-6](#))? On purpose Paul took Timothy and placed him under the law, for his dad was Jewish, so that the Jews they talked to would know that is exactly what Paul was NOT DOING! So needless to say, Paul has never asked a Jew to give up their beliefs or way of living, but he has most certainly challenged living by law and not by faith for **SALVATION**, as you can see in his letter to the Galatians written 6 years earlier.

**Galatians 3:1-2; 7-9; 26-29 ESV**

3 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. <sup>2</sup> Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

<sup>7</sup> Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” <sup>9</sup> So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

<sup>26</sup> for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

It seems that Paul in defending the Gospel against non converted Jews in Galatia, that his enemies took that opportunity to spread that news around that in Christ the meaning of no more Jew meant to leave all of it behind, your culture, your heritage, **which meant a lofty opinion of oneself being the chosen of God and that the suffering you endured by the Gentiles was all in vain - that's where the hurt feelings come from that Paul must now atone for.** It is the Christian now that has become the chosen people of God, for the Gospel treats us all the same, saving us by faith, not by cultural rituals, national heritages, and moralistic rule following. Paul has hurt the feelings, not on purpose, of many Christian Jews in Jerusalem for they were not ready to leave their Jewishness behind, they were **zealous** for the law.





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<sup>22</sup> What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. <sup>23</sup> Do therefore what we tell you.

**Secondly**, the other thing I saw that raised my ire a little, was **they asked a rhetorical question and then answered it for themselves**. Paul, you are a smart guy, but you are not going to give an argument here, that isn't helpful. Therefore, you will do what we say.... And I am like, wait a minute here **who is the Apostle?** And right here we learn a little more about the humility of Paul, we learn how we can handle a tough situation when we are falsely accused, we can learn how to deal with life when the Gospel is the most important thing not our own personal offenses.

**Practical lesson - Paul submitted to the authority in the church** even though Jesus was Paul's ultimate authority. He could have rose up with power, he could try to explain away all the false accusations, but instead he chose silence instead of testimony. Paul saw the elders as the leaders for their church, they had told Paul what was necessary to help the issue, he conceded for love of unity and kept his mouth shut. If Jesus could be led as a silent lamb to a slaughter, then Paul could be led by those that love the church with an enlightened heart knowing it was for the better outcome.

## **LP**

### **Humility promotes unity in the church.**

Alright, here's the plan to use Paul as a scapegoat and to appease the feelings of everyone just a little bit.

We have four men who are under a vow; <sup>24</sup> take these men and purify yourself along with them and **pay their expenses**, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law.

These four men, they are under a Nazarite vow, it is time to shave their heads but like you they have been out and about the Gentile towns, touching the unclean. Take them to the temple for purification. Before they can cut their hair and burn it as an offering representing the time they refrained from whatever for whatever the cause or reason of their fast was, they needed to



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be purified by temple standards before being allowed in for the offering. That required 7 days + the fee to get you in. Paul, we want you not only to pay for yourself but to pay for these guys because that is a show of your piety, of your love for Jewish customs, and you will be held in high regard because of it.

Not only has Paul been falsely accused, not only has there been people who have taught other Christians lies about him, not only has he chosen to remain silent and take their judgment, but he has now been commanded to pay for not only his purification but for the other four men. All so he could play the game, to get everyone to see, he’s someone you can trust. Oh, man this would make me sick to my stomach, it’s playing church politics because some believed a lie about you, and their feelings are hurt and now you have to be the bigger man and make restitution. Well, I guess it could be worse, they could have asked him to apologize right?

<sup>25</sup> But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter ([Acts 15:23-29](#)) with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.”

Paul as assurance of the Gospel and as a sign that you know we are on your side, we want you to know again, we will not require the Gentiles to do the same, to follow these laws. We only ask them to stop those practices that would show themselves following other gods.

I want to point you now to the place where Paul decided to act in humility, because if you wait till the pressure is on you, we will rarely choose to be humble even for sake of unity among the body.

**1 Corinthians 9:19-23 ESV**

<sup>19</sup> For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I **might win more of them.** <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. **I have become all things**



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**to all people**, that by **all means I might save some**.<sup>23</sup> I do it all for the **sake of the gospel**, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Paul **wrote this 1 year before his arrival at Jerusalem**. The Spirit had laid this on him that this is what he was called to do. Paul had decided way before he ever got to Jerusalem that for the sake of Christ, he must become all things to all men, so that at the appropriate time he would choose humility for unity.

**LP**

**Humility comes from a desire to see Jesus glorified more than your desire for personal vindication.**

Loved ones, there have been numerous occasions where I have taken attacks from those that misunderstood me, that told rumors about me, that have talked about me behind my back over these past 20+ years. BUT praise God, because the Lord had been working in my heart way before those things ever happened, I chose to be quiet so that it would not cause dissension in this body. Because the sake of the Gospel is more important than my feelings and my offenses.

You see, we all have to become people that believe our feelings are not more important than the ability, as Paul would say, *that by all means we might save some*. How have you been at work lately, have you been letting your coworkers or perhaps your boss know exactly how you feel? Do your neighbors get an earful from you every time to they do something you don't like? Do the teachers in your school appreciate your emails when they get them? **Family, have you learned to be humble so you can be all things to all men in order to save some?** When we learn to do that, we can accomplish our last point here.

**3. Compromise over stumbling blocks for unity.**

<sup>26</sup> Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.



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Luke was good to record Paul’s emotions when necessary. Luke doesn’t comment on any negativity from Paul, not even parting words. As a matter of fact, I was shocked at the silence from Paul when they confronted him with this problem. Paul already knew and was prepared that he must suffer well for the sake of Christ.

Paul, in humility, he compromises, he lays down his innocence and his right to be heard so that the Gospel may go forth, and the Jews watching him that aren’t saved might have a more favorable opinion of Jesus. Everything that Paul does now from this point forward, as a prisoner for Jesus, everyone will **remember what he did more than what he says**. He is going to have to show that Jesus is worth it, it has been his goal to finish the course this way ([Acts 20:24](#)).

Are you ready to finish this way? Do you look at the world and understand that everything you do, the lost are looking at you, the weak will copy you, and they are waiting for an opportunity to turn away from Christ?

**[CHALLENGE]**

Today let us practice more of proper communion with the saints, and when we come together let us work at making sure that God gets the credit for all things in our lives. If you are successful give God the credit for it, when you are having a hard week, then tell people what God is teaching you, but **in all things let us strive to make much of God**. Let us downplay our need to be recognized, admired, or appreciated, those things should not be our fuel for life, for great is our reward in heaven ([Matthew 5:11-12](#)).

Today let us practice proper concern for warranted fears by those around us. Take the time to hear reasons why people don’t like God, why they don’t like your opinion, and look to answer not with vehemence but with patience. Practice humility by never compromising truth but perhaps stop being overly concerned about misspoken truths about you. People’s opinions about you matter less than what God thinks about you ([Matthew 5:11-12](#)).

Today let us practice proper compromise, not in what we believe but in how we think we should respond to our critics. Jesus called us to love not just our



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neighbors but our enemies as well and to do so with kindness, in such a way it is like heaping burning coals on their heads ([Proverbs 25:21-22](#)). Today, maybe there is someone that needs to see less complaining from you and more action on what you believe.

**MP:**

**Humility is key in our Sanctification and for winning others to Christ.**

May the Lord bless us in our endeavors towards humility, and may we come to see the fruit of it, that it was not in vain.

**[PRAYER]**

**[CALL TO OBEY]**

**Elder –**

John 14:23 says, "Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

Church, if we love Him, we will keep His Word.

**[COMMUNION]**

**PJ will go through the act of communion with the congregation.**

**[CONFESSION OF FAITH]**

\* The Congregation will stand

**Elder –** "Christians, what do you believe?"

**Congregation –**

**[OFFERING+LAST SONG] –**



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**[BENEDICTION]**

Go in the name of the Father, that provided our escape from the blame game through the gift of His Son so that we may share in the Son’s Righteous Justification.

Go in the name of the Son, that gloriously chose humility instead of vindication for the false accusations of this world, creating the way of Salvation for His people.

Go in the name of and power of the HS, that opens our eyes to how to keep unity in the church by modeling the humility of our Lord, so that some might be saved.