

Acts 21:17-26

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Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0 : 00] Please take out your copy of God's Word, which I hope you have with you today. I pray that it's well read and treasured in your heart. And turn with me to the book of Acts chapter 21.

We've now been in our verse-by-verse exposition of the book of Acts for quite some time. This is Luke's second account of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The first, the Gospel according to Luke, of Jesus' earthly ministry.

The second now, of Jesus' ascended ministry. He's working in the lives of His church by the power of His Holy Spirit. And so we see Him still at work.

And the main character in our past study, quite a few chapters now, has been Paul and Paul's missionary journeys. He's completed his third missionary journey.

He has traveled now to Jerusalem. And the series of events we're going to see in the coming chapters are hastening him along to Rome. So we find ourselves in the conclusion of Luke's account, witnessing these things.

[1 : 10] Our text for today is verses 17 through 26 of Acts chapter 21. And before I lead us in reading that, let me remind you that this is God's Word to us.

It's written for His glory and our good. And we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands. And I begin reading in verse 17.

When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. On the following day, Paul went in with us to James and all the other elders were present.

After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through His ministry. 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. 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.

[2 : 20] What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow. 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. 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.

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 will be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.

So upon Paul and his companions arrival in Jerusalem, we find them received gladly by the brothers. These brothers are likely those Christians in close relationship with Mason of Cyprus, who we find out in verse 16 of chapter 21, Paul and his companions are lodging with.

So those that are in close relation, moving in and out of his home. The next day they visit James and all of the other elders of the church of Jerusalem.

[3 : 43] Here I think the word for church being used in a broader sense. So likely church is as there's many, many, many believers now in Jerusalem, but all of the elders that were in Jerusalem were gathered.

It is now almost three decades since the church of Jerusalem was founded on the day of Pentecost. Tradition holds that all of the apostles are now on missionary journeys, or in the case of James, the son of Zebedee, not the James that we're referring to in this text, but James, the son of Zebedee,

martyred.

The James of our text is James, the brother of Jesus, who is now serving alongside other elders to oversee the church. It would appear that he has taken the place of Peter, a spokesman on behalf of the elders.

In verse 19, we are told that Paul does not give them a sweeping overview of his ministry amongst the Gentiles, but rather he related one by one the things that God had done.

Rightly, Paul speaks to the power of God through his working, right? He tells them the story one by one of the things that God had done through his ministry.

[5 : 06] And it has its proper effect among the elders. What do they do when this happens? They hear the telling of what God has done. They glorified God. The elders of the church of Jerusalem recognized that God's amazing grace was working in an ever-broadening way amongst the Gentiles.

That God would call those outside of Israel to himself, and that he would not require them to keep the ceremonial or civil laws was difficult for Jewish Christians to understand.

But further, so fierce was their sense of national identity. Remember, that they are a conquered people, right? They're living in their land.

They're living in Jerusalem, but under Roman rule. And the suggestion that Jews were no longer bound by the ceremonial or civil law and not justified by the moral law, but now justified only by the grace of God in Christ's perfect life and perfect sacrifice, was not always easy for them to wrap their minds around.

Paul speaks to this issue in Ephesians 2, verses 11-18. In this case, he's writing to Gentile believers, but he speaks to this.

[6 : 29] Beginning in verse 11, Paul writes, Therefore, remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, Gentiles and Jews, which is made in the flesh by hands, remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off been brought near by the blood of Christ, for he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. So Paul speaks to this very issue that the gospel has gone forth to Gentile believers, to Jew and Gentile alike, and he's broken down the dividing wall of hostility between the two.

That we now have redemption in Christ alone, by grace alone through faith alone, in Christ alone. The law never justified anybody before God.

It was difficult for the Jewish population to always wrap their mind around this. People professing to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ had gone forth, they'd gone out into Gentile churches.

[8 : 23] We call them the Judaizers, right? And they went out and they said, yes, faith in Christ, but also circumcision, but also ceremonial, sacrificial law.

They heaped onto the Gentiles burdens that weren't theirs to bear. This is not the gospel of Jesus Christ. But I think we have to really work, we really have to have some imagination to try to put ourselves in the shoes of first century Jewish believers, right?

People who had in their minds devoted their lives to God, have been exposed to the proper way to be restored to Him in Christ, but yet still holding their national identity and their customs all the same.

So there's a lot of confusion, I think, in these days for them. And this sets the stage for the conflict of our text, which is presented to Paul in verses 20 through 22.

Elders say to them, there were many, many believing Jews. And these Jews are zealous for the law. I take that to mean the ceremonial law, right?

[9 : 37] James is referring to, right? Because of the text that follows and the things that Paul is asked to participate in. Luke is not suggesting that they didn't believe, that they weren't followers of Christ, right?

They're shown here to be believing Jews, right? But they still held to the customs. And they had heard, and they had believed a nefarious rumor that Paul was seeking to strip Jewish believers of their national and cultural identity.

Paul most certainly taught Gentile believers that they were not to circumcise their children or walk according to Jewish customs. But that's not the concern here. If you look in verse 21, they've been told about you, that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles, right?

Scattered amongst largely Gentile populations, there were Jews. And recall as we've been studying through Acts that Paul's primary strategy was to go first to the synagogue in a town and to find the Jewish populace.

They had a basis for which to believe in God, right? They had read the Old Testament Scriptures. It was a starting point for him to minister the gospel in those places. And so there are Jews mixed in amongst Gentile believers.

[10:58] So Paul did teach this to Gentile believers, but not to Jewish. We can read Paul's strong words to the Galatian believers concerning this very matter in Galatians 3, 1 through 3, right?

So the Church of Galatia was infected by Judaizers, right? Many of them were being convinced that they needed to be circumcised in order to please God.

And Paul says this to them, O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

Let me ask you only this. Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish, having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Well, Paul's rebukes were sharp to Gentile believers who were beginning to believe that they were justified by the law and therefore keeping it for their justification.

[11:59] But Paul did not instruct Jewish believers to forsake their customs and therefore their national identity. He was very pleased to have Gentiles in matters that were not sin and Jews in matters that were not sin maintain their national and cultural identities, but united as a new people who were ultimately identified by Christ.

The Jerusalem elders are not concerned about Paul's teaching, right? They know this to be true of him. What they are concerned about are the many Jewish believers who have been misled to believe that Paul was erring, and they are concerned about the division that this will cause.

They say, they will certainly hear that you have come. This is going to cause an uproar amongst the church in Jerusalem.

So they devised a plan for Paul to participate in a Jewish custom, which brings us to our outline for our study of the rest of this text. This morning, I will ask three questions and work by grace to answer them for your benefit.

And those questions are as follows. Number one, what was the custom Paul was asked to participate in? What was the custom that Paul was asked to participate in?

[13:29] Number two, why was Paul asked to participate in the custom? Why was Paul asked to participate in the custom?

Now, I will answer the first two questions in brief. I hope. That's my plan. And then spend the majority of our time together answering the third, which is, number three, why did Paul participate in the custom?

Why? Why did Paul participate in the custom? Number one, what was the custom Paul was asked to participate in? Verse 23, in the first part, the first part, the first part, the first part of verse 24. Verse 24, the elders say, we have four men who are under a vow. Take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads.

And the vow that these four men were under was called a Nazarite vow, which you may recall we considered a bit as Paul participated in the same type of vow recorded in Acts chapter 18, verse 18.

[14:43] The details of the Nazarite vow are expounded upon in Numbers chapter 6. So if you would like to study the matter at length, I invite you to do so. It's very interesting.

But for our purposes, I'm going to give us a brief version of what a Nazarite vow was and what it was meant to picture. The Nazarite vow symbolized total separation to God.

It was usually made to express gratitude for provision or protection or in seeking future provision or protection. The person who made the vow was to abstain from alcohol and other products derived from grapes, so vinegar would be an example, let their hair grow long and cut their hair during this period of time and avoid contact with dead bodies, which seems like the easiest of those

expectations to me.

The typical length for a Nazarite vow was 30 days. But there are some biblical exceptions to this, like Samson and Samuel and John the Baptist were all lifelong Nazarites.

They kept a vow of this nature for the entirety of their lives. The vow would be ended through a purification ceremony, part of which was the shaving of the head and an offering made of the hair that was shaved off.

[16:10] Now, we cannot know with certainty how it is that Paul was to purify himself along with them. We just don't get the details in the text.

I read a lot of commentary this week of people guessing at what was happening here. He would not have had time to begin a 30-day vow in order to join them in its completion.

There is no hint in the text that it took that long for it to happen. In fact, in verse 27, possibly it was only seven days from the time he agreed to do this to the time that it actually happened.

So, he wouldn't have been able to begin it that way. Now, there was a Jewish custom of purification for one returning from Gentile lands back to Jerusalem.

They were seen as unclean, so there was a purification process they were meant to go through upon coming back into Jerusalem. So, maybe this is the purification he underwent before going to the temple with them.

[17:11] But, and this is my guess, I want you to know this, my postulation, in Acts 18.18, Luke states that Paul shaved his head, but we see no record of him making an offering of the hair.

We see no record of him traveling to Jerusalem in order to make that offering. In the following chapters, we see him hastening, he's working quickly to make his way to Jerusalem, and the law made provision for travelers upon completing such a vow to save some of the hair and offer it at a later time.

So, maybe, again, my postulation, maybe, he completed his vow along with the four men, even though that 30-day period had already passed when he was on his last missionary journey.

So, maybe he still had that hair and he still intended to make that final sacrifice along with him. We cannot know with certainty how he participated in the purification, but the point is that Paul participated.

He participated in the purification custom. And not only did he participate in the vows of the four men, but also he paid their expenses, which would have been charged as part of the offering.

[18:33] So, he came alongside and showed clearly that he was not against the Jewish custom. So, this was the custom that Paul was asked to be part of.

Secondly, why was Paul asked to participate in the custom? We're hinting around this for sure and we'll get into this more as we answer the third question. But if you look at the last half of verse 24 and verse 25, we can see that the Jerusalem elders wanted the rumor laid to rest.

They said, this is going to be a problem. Let's get out ahead of it. Let's be wise in the way we deal with this potential issue that's before us.

The last half of verse 24, they say, thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you. There's nothing in what they have been told about you. It's false that you yourself also live in observance of the law.

As a Jewish believer, you yourself are keeping the customs. At the same time, they wanted Paul to know that they did not desire to lay any burden on the Gentile believers.

[19:47] They were not Judaizers. They wanted to be clear of that. They did not expect the Gentiles to conform to their Jewish national identity and culture, but to be sensitive to it.

Working to maintain the unity of the Spirit. So they tell Paul in the last part of verse 25 that they sent a letter with their judgment that they, being the Gentiles, should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what has been strangled.

And from sexual immorality. Which was a restatement of the decision made at the Jerusalem Council in A.D. 49. So about 11 years earlier.

They're just restating the very same thing. There are some culturally sensitive issues as it pertains to Gentiles and Jews. Don't do those things.

Love your brothers in the faith who are Jewish. And of course, sexual immorality is not negotiable in that list. You can read more about this in Acts chapter 15.

[20:52] And I would encourage you to go to our website if you'd like to hear a sermon. Clay preached it on that text as well to understand to greater degree what they mean in sending this

letter.

But the point being that the Jerusalem elders did not want Paul to think that they were laying the burden of ceremonial law on top of Gentile believers.

Now, thirdly, why did Paul participate in the custom? Well, for the same reason that the Jerusalem elders wanted him to. Paul did not want to see the unity of the Jerusalem church, the unity between Gentile believers and Jewish believers severed.

But rather, he desired to see it flourish and was willing to submit to the instruction of the Jerusalem elders to see it so. And I love that. I love that the apostle Paul comes to Jerusalem, right, having apostolic authority, and the elders say, hey, we have a suggestion for you.

And he follows that suggestion, right, coming to their city and the church they were given charge to oversee, and he follows their suggestion. This text today serves as an example of Paul's desire to become all things to all people, as he states in 1 Corinthians 9, 22.

[22 : 19] I want to look at the larger portion of Scripture in 1 Corinthians 9, but before we do, let's first look at an example of what Paul is not doing, right, in this activity, right, and the activity that he would condemn in doing this.

So, turn with me, please, to Galatians chapter 2. So good to hear real paper pages flipping.

Thank you. Now, I mentioned previously, the letter primarily written to the church of Galatia was written because of the Judaizers, right, because they had ceased believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ, right, that our justification comes by grace alone through faith alone, in Christ's person and work alone, but they had begun to add to that laws, right, to begin to find themselves justified by those laws.

And so he writes this letter to them and he uses as an example, a poor example, Cephas. So Galatians chapter 2 verses 11 through 14, by recounting an event in order to instruct the Galatian church.

It says in verse 11, but when Cephas, now Cephas was Peter's name in Aramaic. So Peter is the Roman version, Cephas is the Jewish version of his name.

[23 : 56] So Paul here is referring to him by his Jewish name to the Galatian church. But when Cephas came to Antioch, Antioch was kind of Paul's home base, his home church, all of the missionary journeys, left from there and went back to there.

That's how we know they concluded. He went back to the church that commissioned him to go out. So when Cephas Peter came and visited him in Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned.

For before certain men came from James, James from our text today, so elders from the church, Cephas was eating with the Gentiles. But when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, if you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?

So you see what's happening here. Peter ceased associating with the Gentiles, instead associating with the party that was called the circumcision party, those that were trying to have people circumcised in order to keep the law.

[25 : 31] But he did so out of concern for himself at the end of verse 12, fearing the circumcision party. He ceased associating with the Gentiles out of concern for himself, and Paul rebuked him publicly and sharply for this.

In today's text, Paul participates in the Jewish custom for the sake of others, not for himself, for the sake of others.

And this brings us to 1 Corinthians chapter 9, so join me there. 1 Corinthians chapter 9, verses 19 through 23. 1 Corinthians 9, 19 through 23, which we'll spend the majority of the rest of our time on together.

Paul writes, for though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.

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.

[26 : 55] those outside the law 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.

To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

So Paul begins, in verse 19, saying that he is free from all. Having been justified through grace by faith in Christ, he is free from the condemnation of the law and anyone who would place burden upon him for it.

This we often call Christian liberty. We've been given freedom in Christ. many will say that this text is about Paul foregoing or laying aside or not exercising his Christian liberty.

And I disagree entirely. I think it's wrong to say, well, I am free, but I'll no longer be free. No, we are free.

[28 : 16] We are free in Christ. He didn't forego the use of his Christian liberty, but he used it. he used the fact that he is free for the good of others.

He made decisions within that freedom for the good of others. He willfully bound himself to the service of other people's souls.

Jesus stated in Mark chapter 10 verse 45, for even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Now, we don't get to give our lives as a ransom for many in the way that Jesus did. But we ought to model our lives after our Lord's, following him, being followers of Jesus Christ, not to be served, but to serve.

Paul modeled his ministry after that of our Lord. Fill in the blank in the quiet of your mind, for to me to live is...

[29 : 32] If you put any word in that blank other than Christ or some variance of that matchless name, then you're faced with two options.

number one, you are not a follower of Jesus Christ. It's very possible that you have never tasted and seen the goodness of God to us in Jesus Christ.

That you couldn't possibly say, for to me to live is Christ. This is from Philippians 1.21. He is my greatest treasure. I would gladly give up all else for the sake of his name, that I might gain more of him.

It is possible that you have not been saved by his grace and you need to repent and believe in him. The other option is that you are a follower of Jesus Christ, but you just have simply stopped following.

You have forgotten that Jesus came into the world to seek and to save the lost, and you have started living for yourself. And of this, you need to repent.

[30 : 43] We need to join with Paul in saying, for to me, to live is Christ. We need to follow him and follow his example in laying our lives down for the sake of others.

Beginning in verse 20 of 1 Corinthians 9, Paul gives us some of the particulars. He says to the Jews, I became as a Jew.

Paul was Jewish, you remember, but he picked up the customs of the Jews. In order to what? Win Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law, though not being myself under the law.

And he's saying that is, right, his righteousness and our righteousness does not come from the law. So in the case of our text today in Acts 21, right, he participated in the custom, fully recognizing that he was not justified by the custom.

Much in the same way, we might participate in a church fellowship. We're not justified by coming to church, right, but it is a good and proper thing for us to do, right?

[31 : 56] It's commanded to us, it's a good thing for our soul, it's a means of grace to us, so we participate in that way. He goes on to say in verse 20, that I might win those under the law.

Verse 21, to those outside the law, he's not talking about Gentiles, people who are not Jewish, to those outside the law, I became as one outside the law. So he may have picked up and eaten something he may not have eaten in a different context.

And then the parenthetical, not being outside the law of God, here he's referring to the moral law of God, but under the law of Christ.

But under the law of Christ. Beloved, Christianity is unique from every other religion in the world because every other religion in the world can be boiled down to this. You must act in order to be accepted by God.

Do the following things in the right way and enough of it and maybe you'll be accepted by God. This is a frightful proposition. If you know yourself at all, you'll know you'll never do enough.

[33 : 08] It's impossible. My wickedness so often far outweighs any good that I could do. You act to be accepted. Christianity is the opposite of that.

We are accepted and therefore we act. And this is a proper understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is floating out there a teaching that there is a heresy called lordship theology.

And we believe that. So this is what I'm talking about right now. But there are people out there even in our own denomination that would suggest that those who would say that the evidence of your salvation is that you pursue Christ as your lord that that's heretical.

They would suggest that you can have Jesus as your savior and not as your lord. And that is a lie from hell. The book of James says it's our work that evidences our faith.

It's that shows that we are in fact in Christ. That we're regenerate, we've been made different, that we've repented, we've turned from our sin. We no longer love the things we used to love.

[34 : 29] We now love God and his ways. This is the truth of the gospel. Which is why I want to be careful when we try to preach the way we should go.

There are things we should be doing as Christian people. They're good for us. They're good for the kingdom. They're evidencing. You want to have assurance of your salvation?

Start working it out. With fear, trembling. Start being obedient to the commands of God. And when you find there's no inclination in you for those things at all, you have no desire to pick up and read and obey, you're not in the faith.

Jesus is not your Savior because he's not your Lord. You find in you that impulse, as small as it can be sometimes, in your heart and in mind, as cold as it can be, that impulse to want to please God, to want to walk in his ways, to recognize that his counsel is good.

I'm a child of the Most High. This is where our assurance comes from. I can stand before you in all my failings and say to you, I am possessed by God.

[35 : 44] He has saved me and he is keeping me because he's working in me. I know this to be true because I am laboring in obedience and I'm seeing him work in and through me to accomplish his good pleasure.

That's what Paul means when he says, not being outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ. Don't let anybody sell you a cheap grace theology that simply says, make a decision, and that's what's expected of you.

So much more, so much better, so much good, and it gives the evidence that we are, in fact, in Christ. And so Paul says, to those outside the law I became as one outside the law, that I might win those outside the law.

To those outside the law I became as one outside I read it again. Verse 22, excuse me. To the weak I became weak that I might win the weak. And I believe here Paul is referring to those who are weak in faith, who still have not quite wrapped their mind around the goodness of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ, who still think the customs, have some value, have some importance, ultimate importance in their pursuit of God.

He goes, that's okay, they're weak in faith, but I myself, I myself can observe these things that I might win the weak. They become all things to all people that by all means I might save some.

[37 : 30] And here's the driving force behind Paul's desire to give his life away, to use his liberty for the sake of others, to willfully bind himself to the service of other people's souls.

Verse 23, I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. The blessings of the gospel are far better than anything that we may be permitted to experience as a result of our Christian liberty.

The blessings of the gospel are better, far better, immeasurably better than anything you might experience temporally because of your Christian liberty.

being set free from the law is not meant to serve your temporal whims, but your eternal soul. Jesus Christ kept the law perfectly because we could not.

By faith, he grants us his perfection. Jesus Christ died the death that we could not to cancel the debt of our sin. By faith, he grants us forgiveness.

[38 : 37] This is the liberty that we now have, and it is to be used for our joy in Christ, and it is to be shared with others for the magnification of our joy.

I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share with them in its blessings. So what are you unwilling to give up for the sake of others?

Do you practice your liberty in service to yourself, or in humble service to the kingdom of God?

Today's text gives us an example of Paul's love for others, seeking their good at his expense, literal, his expense.

He paid for the ceremony. Paul desired to preserve the unity of the church in Jerusalem for the sake of the individuals of the church, but also for those outside the church who watched it with great care.

There are a lot of examples that we could talk about when it comes to Christian liberty and how to best serve in our community. So many that I thought, you know, I'm just going to give one from my life that's really simple.

[39 : 53] The way I dress on Sunday mornings is a practice of my Christian liberty for your sake. I know that I don't dress impressively.

That's by design. Come to a wedding sometime. I'll put on duds for you. I'll wear my bow tie and my pocket square for you. But as I prayerfully considered, how do I love and serve Christ Family Church Dahlonga when I step up onto the stage?

It seemed appropriate to me to try to mitigate the offense that I might give to a guest who expects me to be in a suit and tie. And those people exist in our culture. And I can tell you that if I were the pastor of a church that expected that, I would gladly do it.

It would be no problem at all for me to put on a suit. It wouldn't be my favorite thing. I wouldn't want to get suits dry cleaned all the time. I'd probably ask for a dry cleaning line item in our budget. But I would do it.

I would don a suit every single Sunday so that I wouldn't offend anybody so that they could hear the truth being preached. On the flip side of that, I think that if I wore a suit, jacket, and tie every Sunday, you guys would think that I was separating myself from you and I wouldn't be relatable to you because some of you aren't even wearing shoes right now.

[41 : 14] And I think that's okay to be clear. So I try to hit the middle of the road, tuck my shirt in when the shirt's meant to be tucked in, not this morning, throw on a jacket, yes, the same jacket every Sunday, which I am hot in.

I'm warm up here at the moment. That is an example though, right? And I don't feel bound by that. If the demographic of our church suddenly shifted dramatically and I was expected to wear a suit, I would exercise my Christian liberty in donning a suit every Sunday morning for the sake of the gospel that I might share with you in its blessing.

On your bulletin this morning is a quote from Charles Spurgeon, which I'd like to read. He wrote, My brethren, let me say, be like Christ at all times.

Imitate Him in public. Most of us live in some sort of public capacity. Many of us are called to work before our fellow men every day. We are watched.

Our words are caught. Our lives are examined, taken to pieces. The eagle-eyed, Argus-eyed, which if you don't know who Argus is, he was a hundred-eyed giant in Greek mythology.

[42 : 33] The Argus-eyed world observes everything we do, and sharp critics are upon us. Let us live the life of Christ in public. Let us take care that we exhibit our master and not ourselves, so that we can say, it is no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me.

And in conclusion, I want to give you just another example, but an example from history, a better example than my Sunday morning attire. In the mid-1800s, Hudson Taylor went to China as a Christian missionary.

While he was there, he founded the China Inland Mission in order to work in the interior of China, a place that very few missionaries had ventured. It was extremely dangerous in his day.

Taylor argued from the example of the Apostle Paul, let us in everything not sinful become like the Chinese, that by all means we may save some.

In saying that, Taylor was taking a different approach than most of the missionaries at the time, who expected converts to Christianity to adopt Western culture.

[43 : 50] people were even given English names, forbidden from speaking in their own tongue.

Hudson Taylor grew his hair out. He wore it in a long braid. He strictly ate Chinese food. He wore traditional Chinese clothing and he learned their language and stories. Taylor recognized forcing his culture on the Chinese wouldn't work, so he became like the Chinese as much as he could without sinning in order that he might save some. May we be more like Hudson Taylor, more like the Apostle Paul, and most importantly, more like our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Let's pray together. Let's pray.