

WEEKLY REFLECTION

What a 180-degree change from how Paul was treated in our last two passages of Acts!

While the brothers received him gladly as he arrived (Acts 21:17), the Jews at Jerusalem had gotten the wrong message. They believed that Paul was teaching them to forsake the way of Moses and the Law. (v.22) As a gesture of goodwill, Paul was advised to prove his observance of the Law, but his actions were interpreted otherwise.

Instead, the Jews who saw him at the temple stirred up the crowd on false charges of defilement against the temple. (v.28b) Not only those in the temple, but the whole city was stirred up to the point where the Roman tribune and soldiers had to intervene. Despite all this—despite the people seeking to kill him, the violence and viciousness of the crowd—Paul insists on speaking to them. (v.39) He speaks to them in the Hebrew language, not primarily to prove his innocence, but to defend the way of Jesus and God's call for him to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. Yet the crowd's heart is unchanged.

Church, were you ever falsely accused or wronged, not just by people around you, but by a brother or sister in the faith? Did you feel upset, unseen or unheard though your intentions were good? Our own hearts demand justice, but Paul wasn't looking for vengeance or retribution. He had come to expect this kind of treatment from the warnings the Holy Spirit had given Him, and he only wanted a chance to defend the gospel.

Paul was calm and collected in the face of danger because he was focused on the One who had sent him there. He understood the immense weight of what he had received, and he was determined to make it known. Will you do the same, church? The next time you feel unjustly wronged—will you focus on the grace of God that you have received, and choose to let that move you instead?

QUESTIONS

QUESTION ONE:

What is a lighthearted or funny example of a time when you completely misunderstood someone's intention, or they misunderstood yours? How did that make you feel, and how did you (or didn't you) solve the misunderstanding?

QUESTION TWO:

When Paul was wrongly accused and beaten, he chose not to retaliate with anger and violence. Instead, he tries to show the crowd how he used to be just like them, and he shares his story of receiving grace that ultimately led to his transformation.

Why is it so difficult to extend grace to others, especially when we know we are "in the right"? How does remembering Jesus' forgiveness for our sins, paid by His death upon the cross, shift our perspective of viewing the coworkers, family, or friends who misunderstand or wrong us?

QUESTION THREE:

Think about the people you spend time with, whether at work, with family, or with friends. Where do you feel misunderstood, underappreciated, or tempted to respond aggressively or defensively? What is behind those feelings of rejection and / anger, and how can you invite Christ in? How can you practice being "quick to listen and slow to speak" in those situations, loving the way that Paul and Jesus would?