

Acts 21:4, 8-14 (NIV)

⁴Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

...

⁸Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven.

⁹He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

¹⁰After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

¹¹Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

¹²When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.

¹³Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

¹⁴When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

44-21-01-Danger vs. Devotion

contradictions, guidance, warning, courage, obedience

Acts 21:4, 8-14

Obedient devotion to Christ overcomes what opposes it.

INTRODUCTION: (text as "Scripture reading")

–It's wise to heed good advice for decisions and directions in our lives, **SO** *what do we do when we're sure God has led us in a direction, but friends and family—those we love and respect—warn against it? What if they turn out to be actually right about our devotion leading us into danger?* Paul's example, in facing these questions, allows us to *explore the quality of our own devotion to Christ and to see how **HOM.idea**.*

I. Mixed Messages Endanger Our Devotion to Christ

A. *...especially when holy voices oppose our devotion's holy choices:*

1. Paul *was sure of God's guidance*— **Acts 20:22**, "And now, **compelled by the Spirit**, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there." (But he knew the possibilities— **20:23**, I only know that in every city **the Holy Spirit warns me** that prison and hardships are facing me.)
2. **Then, in Tyre**— **Acts 21:4**, *Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul **not to go** on to Jerusalem.* (Both messages are Spirit-given but seem at cross purposes.)

B. What's it called when 2 truthful messages *seem contradictory*?

[**hint:** It's the *reason for disagreement in a medical diagnosis: a pair o' docs.*]

1. **God uses paradoxes**— **Prov 26:4-5**, *Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.* (They **seem contradictory**, but both are true, when God leads us to apply them in the right context.)
2. [**Bible Commentators** try in vain to resolve the paradox of Paul's *mixed messages*.] But this is the bottom line: *Paul's confidence in his original divine guidance was being confirmed*, "that in every city **the Holy Spirit warns me** that prison and hardships are facing me."

TRANS: [In *becoming an RN*, my divine guidance was similarly opposed. Many who loved and prayed for me felt they'd heard from God and urged me not to go to nursing school. But I obeyed God's leading, and, while it took years, those loved ones finally joined in confirming that I'd chosen the right path.] If I had heeded those dear voices, I'd have disobeyed God's leading. When *mixed messages endanger our devotion*, **obedient devotion overcomes opposition**.

II. Suffering Encircles Our Devotion to Christ

- A. Paul had this again confirmed in Caesarea through “a prophet named Agabus” – v.11, *Coming over to us, he took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, “The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.’”*
- B. Paul had been a persecutor of the church, so he knew what he faced by *devoting himself to obediently follow Jesus*.
1. He knew that Jesus had given this warning to all believers in John 15:20, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”
 2. Later, Paul taught this himself, saying in 2 Tim 3:12, In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.
- C. What did Paul do with this prophetic confirmation of the suffering facing him? – v.12-13, *When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, “Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”*

TRANS: Our suffering for Christ (in this country) is rarely more severe than a *frown* or an *insult*. The *question* Paul’s example of obedient devotion raises is, “*Are we willing to suffer socially or physically for the name of the Lord Jesus?*” Is our own **depth of devotion to Christ** of such an **obedient quality that it will overcome whatever opposes it**? If not, then we need to learn the secret of Paul’s devotion... and it’s this:

III. God’s Guidance Engenders Our Devotion to Christ

- A. Like Paul, *every believer needs a personal encounter with Christ*. [Paul, in chains after arrested in Jerusalem, told King Agrippa of encountering the risen Christ as he went to Damascus to persecute Christians – Acts 26:14, “We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’” Jesus quoted that *kicking-against-the-goads* phrase right out of well-known Greek literature where it was used as an allusion to “*fighting against the gods.*”
- B. Paul spent the rest of his life *devoted to obeying Christ’s guidance*. (It was a *lifelong listening to Christ*, and if we’d have **devotion to Christ that overcomes what opposes it**, we must spend our lives listening for His voice and obeying when He says, “Follow Me.”)

CONCLUSION:

– Listen to good advice, *but if it opposes God’s Word* or your personal guidance from Jesus for a decision or a direction, then follow the peace

Christ always gives with whatever He truly tells or shows.

– You already know that obedience may means suffering, if for no other reason than that Satan and his demon hosts will oppose your devotion. So never let suffering or persecution turn you aside from God’s leading. – And as you listen for His daily guidance, remember His words in John 16:33, which I’d like to sing to conclude:

These things have I spoken unto you,
That in Me ye might have peace.
In the world ye shall have tribulation,
But be of good cheer... Be of good cheer,
For I have overcome the world.