



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

UNSTOPPABLE: God's Work in the World

We > Me – Acts 21:15–26

Tim Badal | February 3, 2019



Let's turn to Acts 21 as we continue in our series "Unstoppable," where we're seeing God's mission moving in the life of the Apostle Paul, his companions and the early church. We must also realize that God's unstoppable work didn't stop with them. God is at work in our communities and homes and lives as well. If we're not seeing that, it's not because God has gone on furlough or vacation. Rather, it means we're missing what God is doing in and through His Word and His Spirit today. If we're not seeing this, we need to ask ourselves why not? This morning we're going to look at a way to position ourselves to see God moving in wondrous ways.

For the last five or six chapters in Acts, we've been following Paul's missionary journeys. In this chapter he is at the end of his third missionary journey. In all his travels, his focus was on proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world. He had gone to cities primarily in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) and Macedonia (modern-day Greece). Some of these cities were prominent and others were smaller, but he proclaimed the gospel in all of them. In most of these cities there were people who opposed his ministry and rejected the gospel message. But in each case, there were always some, at least a few, who called upon the name of the Lord and were saved. As a result, Paul established churches in each city, then on return journeys he would often revisit these places to strengthen them so the gospel would continue to be spread.

On his third journey, Paul had two goals. He went to the existing churches to encourage them, but he also was collecting offerings from the Gentile churches to bring back to the church in Jerusalem that was very needy because they were going through a significant famine. Paul saw this as a great opportunity to unite Gentiles and Jews together, showing the Jews who used to consider the Gentiles to be less than dogs that, through Christ, there was no longer a distinction to be made between Jew and Gentile, between slave and free, but all were unified under the banner of Christ. For this reason, Paul was looking forward to being in Jerusalem. In Acts 18 and 19, he told people he was compelled to go to Jerusalem.

As we saw last week, at least three times the other Christians urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem where he would face great hardships. But Paul was determined to go. One reason was to deliver the money he had collected as a testimony of what was taking place in the Gentile churches. We also know that Paul loved Jerusalem because it was where he had grown up and, no doubt, he held it in high esteem. He hadn't been in the holy city for over five years. When he first entered the city and began to interact with the believers there, it was very good—but soon the troubles began for him.

Have you ever looked forward to a trip, or to someone coming to visit, or to some other occasion that you had planned and dreamed about, only to find out that when it came to be it fell apart? Even though it was good at first, by the end you wondered why you had ever looked forward to it. That's what Paul experienced in the first moments of his return to Jerusalem.

As you'll see in a few minutes, this is an odd passage and you might wonder what we can learn from it. But we know Luke wrote this for a reason, and the Holy Spirit included it in the Word of God because it would have value for us. What I think we can gain from this today is to see the great value of humility. Paul will demonstrate how his life was characterized by humility and we'll see

why it needs to be part of our lives as well. As we read this, ask yourself how Paul's humility was evident, then ask how we, too, might show humility and in what situations it should characterize us. Let's read Acts 21:15–26:

¹⁵ After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶ And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge.

¹⁷ When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. ¹⁸ On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ 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, ²¹ 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. ²² What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. ²³ Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ 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.

A couple years ago I was at a basketball game for one of my sons and a team came into the gym all wearing the same style of shirt. That's not uncommon, but on the back of the shirts was a saying that to be honest I didn't understand at first. It said, "We > Me." I was thinking, "Are they conflicted about who they are?" I wondered if that was their nickname, the We-Me's. That sounded kind of weird. Then I realized that the symbol between We and Me meant something. I was too proud to ask what it meant, so it took me a while. But when I got in the car after the game, it dawned on me: "We" is greater than "Me." It was a statement of humility. It said, "Because we're a part of a team, my personal desires and my statistics are not as important as those of the collective team. I'm willing to diminish so the team can excel."

This is a great reminder for any young person who is part of a team. It's not about you. There are some in professional sports who will claim to be the greatest, but in life, it's usually "we" that is greater than "me." Yet we don't live that way, as though we are dependent on the collective group. We don't live thinking our desires and prerogatives should be set aside for the greater effectiveness of the larger goals.

If there was anybody who should have been qualified to walk into a room with swagger, who should have been known as a celebrity, who could have been called the MVP for Christianity, it would have been the Apostle Paul. Yet when he came into the great city of Jerusalem, he arrived not with a swagger or boasting about himself, confident in who he was. Nor did he come seeking accolades or awards. Rather, he came with humility, because for him the church and the gospel were more important than anything he might do or receive himself. But he wasn't the first person in Scripture to model humility. Paul had heard how humility was modeled by his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In fact, in Philippians 2 Paul tells the church they should do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, they should seek to meet the needs of others first.

He encouraged them to have the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, *"who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."* The first model of humility is Jesus Christ, Who was God. If anybody should have been called the greatest, if anybody should have everything boasted about him, it should have been Jesus. But He showed us that His way is one of service and humility.

Oh, how our world needs humility. We need humility in our politics. We need humility in our sports. We need humility in our communities. We need humility in our families. We need humility in our marriages. And might I say this morning, we need humility in the church. Far too many of us in the church are more concerned about ourselves than we are about the cause of Christ or those around us. We need to realize, however, that humility is more than simply not bragging about ourselves. It's not just thinking bad thoughts about ourselves. C.S. Lewis put it this way: "True humility is not thinking less of yourself—it is thinking of yourself less." Paul was a man who was greatly gifted by God. You and I are people whom God has also gifted. We should not diminish these gifts, saying with pious fake humility, "I'm good for nothing." That's not true. God created you and me for a purpose, so we should be excited about the gifts we've been given. More importantly, we should use these gifts. And at times, we may even receive a degree of glory for our gifts, but we should never allow the spotlight reserved for God to shine on us to the detriment of others.

Paul had every reason to be in the spotlight, but for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of weaker brothers around him, he chose to honor them instead of himself. Humility needs to be the hallmark of all Christians. Let me give you five reasons why every

Christian must be humble. You can't be a good Christian if you are an arrogant Christian. The only way you can truly live out the Christian life is if humility is part of who you are and if it impacts everything you do.

First, humility is necessary to experience faith. You cannot come to know Jesus Christ as your Savior unless you recognize you are a weak, sinful, needy person and that God alone is able to redeem you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. You cannot have faith without humility, because an arrogant person believes they have no need for God. They think they can do everything on their own. When you came to Christ, you humbly said, "I need You, Christ, to do what I can't do." That's a humbling statement.

Second, humility is necessary in order to worship. You gathered here this morning in a building dedicated to Someone other than yourself. You joined people who were here to discuss, pray to and worship Someone who isn't you—and it isn't me. You heard songs that were sung that weren't about you but were about Someone else. People prayed prayers not to you, but to Someone else. Now you're hearing me open the Word and devote my entire message to Someone else and not you. To be a part of worship is to say for at least this time—and hopefully for much longer, because we are to worship at all times and in all places—we're saying, "Life isn't about me. It's about God and His Kingdom. If I'm going to worship, I must make myself smaller and make the One Whom I worship bigger."

Third, you need humility to obey. If you want to serve God and bring glory to His Kingdom and impact others with the gospel, then you'll need to do some things. Humility says, "Not my will, God, but Your will be done. I have ideas of what I want to do with my week, but Your Word is reordering my life. It's calling me to do something different. If I'm going to obey, then I must recognize that You are the Master and I'm the servant." You can't obey without humility. Thus the Christian life requires humility.

Fourth, you need humility to love. Why in the world would you seek the good of someone else if all you're focusing on is yourself? Love usually requires some level of sacrifice—why would you do that if you're too busy trying to fulfill your own desires? Married couples, you will never have a strong marriage if one or both of you are arrogant people. Arrogance happens when life revolves around me, my wants, my needs. Marriage can be a picture of love and beauty when we sacrifice ourselves, saying, "It's not about me—it's about you. It's about Christ living through me so I can love you in a way I can't do on my own."

Finally, you cannot serve Christ in the church without humility. To be part of a local church is to say, "I'm part of the body of Christ. I'm a hand or a foot or a finger or a shoulder." Whatever part you play, you're recognizing that you're only a part of something bigger.

In summary, humility is the essence of the Christian life. We can't live successfully as Christians without it. Yet sadly, some of the haughtiest people I've ever known claimed to be followers of Jesus Christ. That's strange, because our Savior Himself was never haughty. The people we learn about in Scripture who followed Him were not haughty. Yet we still struggle with pride. I'm here to say, as Paul once did, that I am chief among sinners in this regard. It's easy to say, "Look at what I've done."

Scripture teaches that apart from Jesus, I can do nothing—and neither can you. Humility must be part of our lives. What is humility? It's more than just not bragging about ourselves. Paul shows us three things about humility that will help us understand what it involves.

The We > Me life involves sharing more about God's success than my own.

Humility is true of us when we share more about God's success than our own. Look again at Acts 21.

¹⁷ When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. ¹⁸ On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ And when they heard it, they glorified God.

The first thing Paul spoke of when he arrived in Jerusalem was what God had done. Of course, they greeted each other first, which demonstrated their love for one another. But after a few hugs, they sat down, then the first thing Paul wanted to relate to James and the other elders was what had transpired since the last time he was in Jerusalem five to six years earlier. We can see what his priorities were in the journey through this report. His focus was on Christ.

Let me ask you: where is Christ and the gospel ministry in your conversations with people, especially with other believers? When you gather as a small group or here as a church, when is Christ and what He is doing in your life or in the lives of others brought up in your conversations? Is it first? If not, what is first? We usually want to talk about our families, our work, the world situation—and Christ is fourth or fifth or sixth, or maybe He's not included at all. Paul demonstrates how humility comes when we stop thinking about our lives and our world and we start talking about Christ instead.

Every time I see Mario, our student ministry pastor, he asks, "Tell me what God is doing in your life." Maybe I don't want to talk about what God is doing in my life. I want to get to other things. But Mario insists that we talk about what God is doing. Part of the reason I don't like this—and why many of you wouldn't like that—is because we're not sure what God is doing in our lives. We don't have anything to report. In fact, some of us have to go back months or even years to have something to say. But I love Mario's intentionality. It tells me he understands that God should be at work in our lives every day and we should be able to speak of it at the drop of a hat. "This is what God is doing. This is how He's at work in my life, or in the life of someone I know."

After they exchanged greetings, Paul was excited to tell them about what God was doing and he was very specific in his report. One by one, he related the news from the churches he had visited. We are prone to be more general: "God is good all the time; all the time God is good. All right—let's go to dinner." Instead, Paul was eager to go into great detail about what God was doing in the churches.

We can tend to gloss over the specific ways God has revealed Himself to us. But then when we're asked about the ball game, we can remember the details of what happened with pinpoint accuracy—when the bad call took place, when the spectacular play was made. Or we'll talk about what our kids did in their sporting event. Whatever our hobby is, whatever we love the most—that's what we're ready to explain in great detail. Yet when someone asks, "What's going on at your church?" we'll say, "Good things are happening." "Well, what?" "I don't know." "What are you doing in your small group?" "Well, we get together and we pray."

I grew up in this church and years ago when I was in high school, we had evening church. One year a friend of mine and I had just returned from a retreat around 4:00, so the pastor wanted us to share what had happened on our retreat that evening. I'll never forget my friend standing up on the stage to share with the church. He said, "I'm here to tell you what happened this weekend. We drove somewhere and we ate some stuff. John shared some stuff. We played some games. Then on the last night it got kind of serious and we prayed about some stuff. Then I did it."

Everyone looked at him like you're looking at me. What in the world just happened? We had no idea. So John the youth pastor came running up, knowing this had totally fallen apart. He said, "What the young man was trying to tell you is he came to know Jesus Christ as his Savior." But that wasn't what he told us. To be sure, I remember how big his eyes got when he went up on that stage. He wasn't ready to speak in public—and I understand.

But how many of us respond like my friend did? "What did you do this weekend?" "We did some stuff. Went to church." "What did you do at church?" "Oh, we sang some songs, heard a message, did some stuff, then we went home." How much more detail can we give about what God is doing?

You see, humility came long before Paul was giving his report. Humility opened his eyes to see in detail what God was doing. If you're looking around and not seeing anything God is doing, you might ask yourself if you have bought into an arrogant kind of living that isn't concerned about what's going on around you. You walk in here, do your thing, then walk out with no thought of what is happening to others.

Humility says, "I'm going to take my eyes off my schedule, my time, my preferences. I'm going to pay attention to the needs around me." If anyone should have kept his eyes on himself, it would have been Jesus. He had a lot to worry about. He knew the problems of the people and how much they needed Him to rescue them. We're often told that Jesus looked up—but not to the sky. It says, "He saw the crowds." Then the Gospel writers tell us more specifically about a certain person Christ saw who needed healing, or the condition of the crowd. Humility forces us to take our eyes from being focused inward to looking outward. Who around us needs to be encouraged? Who is seeing God work in their lives? We should want to hear their stories.

In Acts 21:19 we read about the ministry that came about through the work of Paul and his companions. Is that what we read? No. It says, "*He related one by one the things that God had done.*" Paul had good reasons to boast, because his ministry had truly been successful. He had seen thousands of people come to know Christ. He had healed people of their diseases and exorcised demons. He had even raised people from the dead. From a human standpoint, he could have said, "Guess what I've done? I've done things no one else can say they've done. I am a celebrity. I'm important." But Luke reports that Paul told them these were things God had done and this is confirmed by what we read in verse 20: "*And when they had heard it, they glorified God.*" They did not glorify Paul. You see, arrogance is revealed in more ways than just when we say nice things about ourselves. It can also be revealed based on how people respond after talking with us. When Paul spoke to others about what God was doing in his life, their attention was directed to God and not to Paul.

When people hear you talk, do they leave glorifying God or glorifying you? Do they go away thinking about how great our God is or are they thinking about how great a parent or employee or athlete or student or spouse you are? We need to be careful with

this. Notice that Paul did mention himself in verse 19, when he shared what God had done *“through his ministry.”* It’s not that he told them he didn’t have anything to do with it. He acknowledged that he had a part, but he also said the glory belonged to God. He was the conduit, the instrument by which God worked, but God was the One Who was changing lives. Paul was just privileged to be a part of that.

Oh, how that would change how we communicate about our parenting, our promotions at work, or the accolades we get at school. We need to acknowledge that God was the source of any success. He does great things through average and ordinary people like us. Humility shares about God’s successes and not our own.

How important this is for us as a church, for me and the elders. It’s not about our ministry. It isn’t about our name. God has grown this church in many ways, and we need to recognize it’s not because of us—it’s because we serve a great God. Apart from the Holy Spirit we can do nothing. So when we speak, we should never lead people to believe it’s the pastor and elders who are doing the works. Instead of speaking about our giftedness, we need to speak of our brokenness, dysfunctions and issues. People need to know we serve a great God and we want to introduce them to Him. Not only has He changed our lives, He can change theirs as well. When we point people to God and His successes, we can help them understand why they need the gospel. But when we point people to ourselves, we can make them think they’re okay like we’re okay.

The We > Me life involves standing steadfast even when misunderstood and maligned.

Humility provides the guardrails that keep us from going off the cliff when people do things against us. In our text today, everyone was excited about Paul being there. There were greetings and rejoicings.

But as I read this passage, it seems that Paul was doing well, but James and the elders had left something to be desired. Yes, they glorified God—and that was great—but then they said to Paul, *“You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law.”*

I don’t know if I’m right, and James and the elders can beat me up in heaven if I’m wrong, but I think there’s some one-upmanship going on. Look at the phrases they used. *“How many thousands...”* That seems to be exaggerated to me. *“All of them are zealous for the law.”* Why would they say that? It sounds like two brothers were having a *“What about this?”* moment. Paul has just spoken about all God is doing, but they wanted him to know they had some things going on there as well. *“We have thousands coming to know Jesus.”* And then, to make it better than the Gentiles, *“All of them are not only believers in Jesus Christ, but they’re also zealous for the law.”*

That would have been an affront to Paul. We see in verses 15 and 16 that he had brought others with him. *“After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge.”* It continues, *“When we had come to Jerusalem...”* There was a group of people with Paul and we know who they were from earlier verses—they were Gentile believers. This means that what James and the elders were saying was not good. I think they were essentially saying, *“Our disciples not only do what your disciples did, Paul—they believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ—but our Jewish disciples are also zealous for the law. What about your people?”*

Now it seems to me that we’ve got a problem here. This is one of the greatest omissions in the book of Acts. Remember, one of the reasons Paul was going to Jerusalem was to give them money. All of these men brought sacks of money from the Gentile churches, from some people who were in great poverty themselves. We’re told in 2 Corinthians 8 that out of extreme poverty the Macedonia church gave generously. These men had traveled a long distance carrying this money. These weren’t gift cards that could be kept in their pockets. They had the concern that someone could rob them on the way. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they set these gifts before the people, but we see nothing said about this in the text.

Maybe this happened to you this past Christmas. You saved and sacrificed and invested time and energy to give a certain gift to a person you love, thinking it would be life-changing for them and that your relationship would be deeper and sweeter because of what you’d given. But the person who received the gift had no response at all.

Humility would keep a person from losing their cool, but arrogance would think, *“How dare you? Do you know what we did to collect this money? Do you know the impact it’s had on those who gave? We’re not going to talk about another thing until you acknowledge the gift that was given.”* You might even think that’s the right way to respond, and from a human point of view it would be. But Paul knew the Gentiles were watching him, so he knew he needed to show them the road to humility, not the road to winning an argument. Some of us—and I struggle with this myself—care more about winning the argument than trying to win

a person. I care more about winning a debate than I care about someone's feelings. But Paul didn't go there, even though he had reason to feel offended.

Then what did James and the elders do? Apparently, they did nothing to acknowledge the gift. By the way, some scholars say the reason for this might have been racism—that this offering came from Gentile dogs. Or they might also have seen it as another one-upmanship move from the Gentiles. Regardless of what happened, the gift appears to have been misunderstood.

Then this was compounded by them telling Paul, "Our disciples have a problem with you. They're zealous for the law and they've been told that you teach all the Jews..." When someone uses all-inclusive words like "all the time" or "everybody," it usually is a sign of arrogance. They're trying to eliminate any other options. "Everybody hates your guts, Paul. We're glad you made it to Jerusalem, but we want you to know they're all ticked off at you."

Why? "Because 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. What then is to be done?" They leveled this accusation against him, an accusation that is never validated anywhere else in Scripture, which means it was gossip. The elders had essentially told Paul, "People are gossiping about you. There's a story going around. We don't know who started it, but we've been told that you tell Gentiles they need to get rid of all things Jewish."

I would say to them, "James, elders, you know Paul. You were part of the Jerusalem Council. You know Barnabas who has spoken on Paul's behalf over and over again. Why didn't you tell the people not to jump to conclusions? Paul's a good man. Give him an opportunity to speak." But they didn't do that. They told Paul it was his problem, implying it wasn't their job to protect him.

Have you ever felt the great blow of being accused of something or being gossiped about, and you find out it was shared in a circle of people you consider to be your closest friends and confidants? But instead of taking those arrows for you, those friends stepped back and said, "You're going to have to talk to him."

At minimum, the elders should have said, "If these things are true, let's give Paul an opportunity to speak on his own behalf." But they didn't. They simply told Paul that people had a problem with him, and he was the one who needed to fix it. They even told him the way to fix the problem, then he was on his own after that.

Humility is needed when we're misunderstood and maligned. What arrogance says when someone maligns or misunderstands me is, "Who do you think you are? I'm Tim Badal. I'm an important guy. I work hard. You don't know what I have to do. You don't know the struggles I have. How dare you say something about that? How dare you malign me that way?"

Does that mean we should not feel hurt when we're maligned or mistreated or misunderstood? No, we should be. But our defensive response is an arrogant one, not a humble one. We tend to say, "Oh, yeah? Well, I'll misunderstand you. I'll malign and mistreat you." Arrogance says, "I deserve the opportunity to do that." But Jesus says, "Do not repay evil with evil; instead, repay evil with good." How do we do that? With humility.

How could Jesus not revile when He was reviled against? Humility. He was more focused on the needs of others than on His own pain. We too can realize we don't have to figure out how to fix our reputation. Rather, we need to show love and forgiveness and compassion to those who are persecuting or misunderstanding or mistreating us. We need humility instead of holding grudges, instead of getting into bar-room fights. We need humility so that misunderstandings don't turn into mass chaos. Paul remained silent, and the reason he could do that was that the gospel was more important to him than his reputation. That's a humble way to live.

The We > Me life involves sacrificing personally so the mission of God moves forward.

The elders told Paul, "You need to prove to the Jewish Christians how Jewish you are. We have a plan for how this can be done. Now, the Gentiles don't have to do this, because we've already told them what practices they need to observe. This isn't a salvation thing—it's a living life together thing, living in harmony with one another thing."

James and the elders told Paul about four men who had taken a vow, probably the Nazirite vow, similar to the vow Paul took earlier when he came to Jerusalem with his hair in a bag so he could present it to the priest. It's not that Paul needed to do something new, but they told him to join the men in their vow—and not only that, they told him to pay for both his vow and the vows of the other men. Paul may have been looking forward to meeting with the people in Jerusalem, eating good food and fellowshiping with them. But he was told that he had to reside in the temple, refrain from eating the wrong foods, and shave his head—all for what most commentators think was about a week long. Instead of being able to mingle with the people, Paul had to be set aside

until the time of purification was over—even though it probably wasn't what he had planned to do. So Paul did what he was told to do. He got his hair cut. He didn't touch anything that was forbidden for a Nazirite to touch. He couldn't do any celebrating. Even though he was near people he loved and wanted to be with, instead he found himself bottled up in the temple, waiting for the purification to be completed. Why would he do that? Because of humility.

Let me ask, when it comes to your own life, are you willing to submit as Paul did to the leaders around you—whether government leaders or bosses or parents or church elders? It takes humility to do this. Every one of us thinks we should rule the world. When someone has been put over us, we don't like to submit. But Paul did and this is how. He submitted even when it went against his personal feelings. He didn't want to do this, nor did he feel he needed to. Nowhere does it say he wanted to take an oath and pay for it and for those of other men. But he did.

How arrogant are our personal feelings? "Well, that's not going to make me happy." Some of us came in with arrogant ideas. "I hope they sing these songs. I hope the music isn't too loud. I hope Tim doesn't preach too long. I hope...." Those are all arrogant things. They're personal feelings and they're all about self. Paul realized it had nothing to do with what he wanted, but if his actions would serve to advance the gospel and help other people, he was willing to do it. Are you willing to sacrifice your personal feelings for the sake of others?

Second, what about your plans? Paul gave up a week of his life to do something he didn't think needed to be done. He did it for the sake of others. "I'll go with these four men and I'll pay for them so they can accomplish what they believe they need to do to have a right relationship with God. I'm willing to do this for the unity of the church."

Are you willing to change your plans for the sake of another? Let's be honest. Are you willing to change your plans for your spouse? For your boss? For the person in need of help? Our plans are arrogant plans. The fool says, "I'll go do this. I'll go do that." He has his life all planned out, with no thought that God or someone else may need him to change those plans.

Finally, are you willing to submit your prerogatives? Paul had already fulfilled this vow. His desire was to be with the people, not to take another oath and hang around with four guys doing the Nazirite thing or to pay the temple tax. He would be around Jewish non-believers in the temple. Paul didn't want to do it, but he was willing because humility called him to it.

What prerogative, what right, do you have that you need to give up for the sake of another? Why would we do this? Did Paul do it because he received a reward when he was done? "And the Kiwanis Club gives the Humility Award to the Apostle Paul. Let's give him a hand." Was it so Paul could say proudly how humble he was? Why did he do it? He did it for the same reason you and I should do it. It's not so people will look at us and say, "Wow, what a humble guy or gal."

Let's look at 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 to see why Paul did what he did.

¹⁹ For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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. ²² 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. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Why are we humble? Because as we are, we show the world Who Christ is. By being humble, we show the world that the walk of the Christian is a humble walk. As we model humility, it provides a contrast to the world we live in. We turn the world upside down, saying, "Those who think they are first need to become last, and those who are last shall become first."

As we do this, we model the gospel of Jesus Christ so others might participate in it. Sadly, we will get to heaven one day and the great sin we will have committed will be the sin of arrogance. Those who have that sin will be consigned to a place called hell, because arrogance will tell them they don't need a Savior. Arrogance will tell them other people don't matter.

The two things God is most concerned about is loving the Lord God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength—that requires humility. And the second commandment is as good as the first: to love our neighbors as ourselves. We can't do that unless we're humble. If we want to be close to God, if we want to be close to others, then humility has to be our calling card. Paul modeled it for us, and he did so by sacrificing greatly. You and I will also sacrifice greatly when we choose humility instead of pride and arrogance. When we do this, we allow an unbelieving world to share in the blessings of being close to Christ. Isn't that worth it? I think so.