

# The Misunderstandings of Life

by Warren Wiersbe

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*The sermon highlights the importance of obeying the Word of God and not compromising one's principles, even in the face of misunderstanding and opposition.*

**Duration:** 36:52

**Scripture:** Galatians 1:1

**Topics:** "Faithfulness To God", "Spiritual Discipline"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of not compromising on the word of God, even when others may suggest otherwise. He uses the example of the apostle Paul, who faced opposition and misunderstanding but remained faithful to God's calling. The speaker encourages listeners to obey the word of God and not go on detours in their spiritual journey. He warns against waiting until God has to discipline us severely to get us back on track. The sermon emphasizes the need for believers to fulfill God's purposes in their lives and not to underestimate the consequences of compromising on biblical truth.

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## Transcript

At one time or another, each one of us has been misunderstood. All of us know what it is to have either our motives or our actions or our words misunderstood, and of course it hurts. Fortunately, most of the misunderstandings that we go through don't have tremendous consequences.

But here in the life of the Apostle Paul, we have several misunderstandings that produce tragic consequences. The Apostle Paul and eight of his friends have arrived in Jerusalem for Pentecost. I imagine there were some two million people in Jerusalem.

As you know, the Jewish men were required three times a year to go to Jerusalem to worship, and Pentecost was one of those required feasts. Paul, in coming to Jerusalem, wanted to bring an offering to the Jewish believers. He had taken up a missionary offering, really, from the Gentile churches, and he was going to bring it to the Jewish believers.

He had a great burden on his heart to reach his people for the Lord Jesus, such a burden that he wrote to the Romans he himself would be willing to be accursed if they might be saved. God had warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem. As we saw in a previous message, it's my conviction that Paul should not have gone to Jerusalem, but there he is, and trouble is going to start.

Here in this passage that we read today, we find the Apostle Paul involved in three misunderstandings. Paul was a Christian, and yet the church misunderstood him. Paul was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and yet the Jews misunderstood him.

Paul was a Roman citizen, and yet the Roman captain misunderstood him. Every place Paul turned that day, somebody was misunderstanding him. I think that part of the reason was that Paul misunderstood God's will, and he wasn't supposed to be there to begin with.

Let's take this first misunderstanding, verses 17 to 25 of Acts chapter 21. The church misunderstood Paul. They misunderstood his message.

Now, Paul and his friends arrive in Jerusalem, and they come and they bring the offering. I can't begin to picture what an exciting scene that must have been. Here were all of these Jewish believers.

Here is James. This, of course, is not the Apostle James. He had been martyred.

This is James, the half-brother of our Lord, who was the leader of the Jerusalem church, and the elders of the church were there. And this is Paul's fifth visit now to Jerusalem, and he comes in and he has these men with him, Luke, Timothy, and Trophimus, and Secundus, and these other men who had come from the Gentile churches, and they came and presented the offerings and said, these offerings represent the love of the Gentile churches. You Jews have ministered to us in spiritual things.

We want to minister to you in material things. And, of course, they accepted the offering. But no sooner had they accepted the offering than they began to accuse Paul of doing something that he hadn't done.

Notice the charge that they make. They say, now, we are informed that wherever you go, you're teaching the Jewish believers not to keep the law. Now, we don't have any record here that they gave the Apostle Paul much of a chance to discuss this situation.

I'm always afraid of those people who come and say, now, we heard, my Bible says, in the mouth of two or three witnesses, let every word be established. If someone comes to you and says, I heard this, say, do you know what's true? They were informed. I'm always afraid of these religious informers.

May I say to you quite lovingly, don't believe everything you read in all religious publications. I have read in some religious publications absolute lies about people. That's unfortunate, but it's true.

They said, we've been informed that you teach the Jewish believers not to obey the law. Now, how's Paul to answer this question? Have you ever been on a witness stand in a court and been asked a question that could not be answered yes or no? If you answer yes, you're not telling the whole story. If you answer no, you're not telling the whole story.

If they said to Paul, are you doing this? In one sense, he could say no. In another sense, he could say yes. You see, doctrinally, Paul was saying we are no longer under the law.

Paul had written Galatians. When you read Galatians, you find the apostle Paul with a club in one hand and a sword in the other. Then every once in a while, he puts it down, pours in some medicine, and he picks it up and starts all over again.

Two whole chapters right in the middle of Galatians. He said, I want to prove to you that we are no longer under the law. And he weeps over these people and says, have I wasted this time on you? Has God

wasted his grace on you? Why are you going back into celebrating days and months and years? Yes, Paul did teach that believers are no longer under the law.

But no, he was not teaching them to abandon the law. He was teaching them to fulfill the law. I pointed out to you in a previous message, there are two ways to destroy something.

If I hold in my hand an acorn, I can destroy this acorn by beating it with a hammer or I can destroy this acorn by planting it in the ground and it destroys itself by fulfilling itself. It becomes a tree. That's the way Jesus destroyed the law by fulfilling it.

He said, I haven't come to destroy the law, to annihilate it. I've come to fulfill it. And by fulfilling it, he destroyed it.

So yes, Paul did teach doctrinally, Christians are no longer under the law, be they Jew or Gentile. But Paul did not teach a vicious, critical, brazen, arrogant disrespect for the law. He taught that through the power of the Holy Spirit, we fulfill the law in our lives.

That's something different. So they had Paul on the carpet. Now, why did they accuse him of this? Well, they had been listening to some lies for one thing.

We've been informed that's what splits churches and that's what breaks up homes and that's what breaks hearts and that's what adds burdens to a pastor's life. Somebody going around saying, have you heard? Is it true? That's not important. Where there's smoke, there's fire.

Sometimes where there's smoke, there's hell. They were listening to lies. Got to watch out for that.

But even more than that, they were afraid. You see, Paul was a threat to them. Have you ever noticed how oftentimes God raises up people who become a threat to the church, especially a church that didn't want to move forward? You see, the Jerusalem church was a Jewish church.

Now, 10 years before they had had the Jerusalem conference, Acts 15. They had discussed this problem. Is the Gentile required to become a Jew to become a Christian? And they came to the conclusion that not only were the Gentiles not to keep the law, but the Jews were not obligated to keep the law.

But the Jerusalem church, having made this doctrinal conclusion, refused to practice it. I must be very careful in my choice of words. I'll put it this way.

The Jerusalem church was not a missionary church. It was only interested in reaching its own people and building its own little group. Let me put it another way.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, the veil of the temple was rent in two. And God says, Jew and Gentile can now come. But they were happy to have the Gentiles getting converted over in Ephesus, and Berea, and Thessalonica.

But don't do too much of that here at home in Jerusalem. Now, Paul, you see how many thousands of Jews have believed in the Messiah, but they're still practicing the law. Here is a church that was trying to mix the new and the old, and wanted the new to support the old instead of the old supporting the new.

Let me explain that. Have you ever noticed in life that it is the old that's supposed to support the new? When God brings a baby into the family, the baby doesn't take care of the parents. The parents take care

of the baby.

When new branches and roots, new branches and leaves appear on a tree, the roots take care of the new. Otherwise, the whole thing dies. Now, God said to these Jewish people in Acts chapter 10, wait just a minute.

It's not going to be a Jewish church. It's going to be the body of Christ, Jew and Gentile. And he sent Peter, and Peter won Cornelius in his household, and the Gentiles became a part of the body of Christ, and Antioch sent missionaries out to win the Gentiles and the Jews.

But this church was a closed corporation. This church, instead of using the old to further the new, tried to get the new to conform to the old. And when you do that, you're going to have trouble.

And trouble came. Whenever a church disobeys the teaching of the Word of God, God has to judge that church. We have an open Bible, and the Word of God tells us what the church is supposed to be and what the church is supposed to do.

And if we are not being and doing as God wants us to, he has to discipline us. And he did. The day came when this Jerusalem church was scattered.

The city was burned. The temple was destroyed. And whether they wanted to or not, they had to stop obeying the law.

Let's not wait that long. It's an awful thing when God has to move in with armies and fire and destruction to get people to obey the Bible. They suggested to Paul, and I'm interested in the way it says here in verse 23, do therefore this that we say to thee.

When Paul went to that last Jerusalem conference, nobody told him what to do. He says in Galatians chapter 1, I went up to Jerusalem by revelation. God told me what to do, and God told me what to say.

He said I would not give place to those people for one hour, that the truth of the gospel might remain. But now we find the Apostle Paul, may I use the term, compromising. Now, as I said last Lord's Day, I'm not worthy to carry this man's shoes.

I'm not even worthy to preach his letters. But in the word of God, we're told that some of God's great servants compromised. Abraham did it when he went down to Egypt.

He compromised. Many of God's servants disobeyed God. David did.

Paul did. Here's Paul who wrote, If righteousness come by the law, then is Jesus Christ died in vain. Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

He wrote that. They say now Paul, in order to let everybody know that you really don't fight our doctrine, would you go down to the temple and share in the sacrifices? Can you imagine Paul who wrote Galatians and Romans and I think Hebrews? He says I'll do it. Now at this point someone says wait just a minute pastor, wasn't Paul practicing his philosophy of being all things to all men? I hear that quoted so often.

First Corinthians chapter 9 verses 20 and 21 where Paul says to the Jew I am become as a Jew that I might win the Jews. To the Gentiles I'm become as a Gentile that I might win the Gentiles. I'm become all

things to all men that I might by all means win some.

Now some interpret that to mean that Paul was a chameleon. Now you've seen chameleons. A chameleon is that little lizard.

You put it on green, it turns green. And you put it on brown, it turns brown. You put it on scotch plaid and it has a heart attack.

They say when Paul was with the Jews he ordered lamb chops, but when Paul was with the Gentiles he ordered pork chops. That's not what that verse says at all. Because you see the churches that Paul worked in were combined Jews and Gentiles.

And if he were living a double life, a hypocritical life, a deceptive life, it would have gotten around. And one of the Jews would have come and said I heard you had some pork chops the other day. Another Gentile would have come and said I heard you did.

And he would have had trouble. That's not what Paul's talking about at all. Wherever Paul went he taught the truth of the word of God.

He cautioned the Gentile believers not to cause the Jews to stumble. And he cautioned the Jews not to cause the Gentiles to stumble. It was not an easy thing to keep harmony in these churches when you had people coming from two different backgrounds.

But Paul didn't compromise. Paul wasn't all things to all men in that he agreed with everybody he was with. When Paul talks about being all things to all men he's talking about his evangelism.

I do this myself. You do it. I'm sitting next to somebody on a bus and he says you know I go to the Lutheran church.

And the first thing I say is you know my father was raised in the Lutheran church. And immediately I have identified myself with that man. And somebody else will say to me well you know my family came from Sweden.

I'll say well my family came from Sweden. I have identified with them. When Paul talks about all things to all men he's not talking about Christian living.

He's talking about evangelism. You find the point of contact where you can be one with somebody and then lead them to Jesus Christ. Now many witnesses don't do that.

They find the point of disagreement. And they have an argument. And they come home and say I had a great chance to witness today.

I sometimes wish those kind of people would get hoof and mouth disease. Stop visiting and stop talking. Paul did not say all things to all men.

I'm a chameleon. I'm a hypocrite. He said I find that place where I can enter that man's life.

Every salesman does that. No when Paul went down to that temple and shared in those sacrifices he was compromising. And I can just see Paul walking into the temple.

And I wonder if he remembered the words of the Lord Jesus when he said about the temple behold your house is left unto you desolate. I wonder if he remembered as he saw those sacrifices it is finished. The blood of bulls and of goats cannot take away sin.

I wonder if he remembered the words of Stephen who was stoned because of Paul when Stephen said the most high does not live in temples made with hands. In fact the very things they accused Paul of they accused Stephen of. I wonder if when Paul went into the temple to share in this ritual he didn't remember Acts chapter 15 where he had fought eyeball to eyeball with those Judaizers who wanted to mix law and grace.

I wonder. But I can tell you what happened. It didn't work.

They said oh if our members hear that you're here, if all the Jews that believe Paul hear that you are in Jerusalem they're going to come there's going to be a fight. There's going to be division. Now let's stop it right now.

Faith my friends is living without scheming. If the only way you can maintain your testimony is to scheme there's something wrong with your testimony. Paul lost his testimony because he compromised.

Now we have all sorts of invitations today to compromise. The end justifies the means. We broadcast this service so my choice of words must be very careful.

There are winds blowing today where people are saying now don't worry about doctrine. The important thing is love. And if we can just reach out and love everybody regardless of what they believe.

I don't believe that. I believe in love. But my Bible says speaking the truth in love.

And Paul gives us a beautiful illustration here of the fact that the end does not justify the means. They use the wrong means and never reach the end. What was he trying to bring? Unity? What was the result? A riot? What did he want to do? Witness to the Jews? What was the result? They closed the door on him.

Which leads me to say this. Obey the word of God regardless of what religious people may say or anybody else may say. Obey the word of God.

Don't compromise. I'm not passing judgment but I think I would have preferred had Paul stood up and said now just a minute. Just one minute.

I'm not going down to that temple. I'm not participating in this ritual. That would be denying everything Jesus died for and Stephen died for and I've almost died for.

No. Unity at the price of truth is not unity. It's hypocrisy.

In fact years later James himself was to write in one in his little letter that he wrote. The wisdom that's from above is first pure then peaceable. We don't have peace at any price and for that reason there are some fellowships your pastor will not be in.

There are some associations Moody Church will not be a part of and they will call us fanatics and cranks. We'll not be unkind about it but we are going to obey the word of God. He was misunderstood by the church and as a result he ended up a prisoner.

I drop this into your heart as we move into the second misunderstanding. There's no record that the Jerusalem church lifted one finger to help Paul. They got him into hot water and let him stay there.

Now back in the early part of the book of Acts when Peter was in trouble the church got together and prayed and God performed miracles. The Jerusalem church got Paul into problems. I read no record here that they tried to get him out.

They may have. I don't think they did. Misunderstanding number two.

Paul goes to the temple now and he's misunderstood by the Jews. Paul loved his people. Oh how burdened he was for the nation of Israel.

In fact this is why he was in Jerusalem. I think against the will of God. Years before Paul had said oh I want to reach my people and God had said to him get out of Jerusalem.

They will not listen to your testimony concerning me. I'm going to send you the Gentiles. That was Paul's calling.

I think in disobedience to the will of God Paul went down to the temple and immediately trouble. Notice what happens here. They misunderstood him.

He's down there in the temple and they see him and immediately they jump to conclusions. Most people get their exercise that way. Jumping to conclusions.

They had seen Paul walking with one of the Gentiles. That's the first thing. Paul walked with a Gentile in the city.

Second thing. We saw Paul in the temple. Conclusion.

Therefore Paul brought Gentiles into the temple. That's the way people reason these days. You know your heart, your eyes see what your heart desires.

Did you know that? The person who comes to church with a critical heart will see things to criticize. The person who comes to church with an open heart will find God's truth. These Jews didn't like Paul.

Now this should have said something to the Jerusalem church when the enemy didn't like Paul. It should have said something to them. And one of the Asian Jews from Ephesus saw Paul and immediately starts an opera.

It's amazing what one person can do. I hear people say well Moody church is a large church and one person can't do too much damage. Are you sure? They supposed.

Oh they supposed that he had defiled the temple. They didn't stop and get the facts. They just supposed.

You see religious people don't need facts. They just need suppositions. Oh how many problems you see among the people of God because somebody jumped to a conclusion.

Away with him. Kill him. This is rather interesting.

They charged him with something he was not guilty of. They said this man is against the people. That means he's against the Jewish nation.

He wasn't against the Jewish nation. He loved the Jewish nation. He was risking his life to be there for the Jewish nation.

He's against the people and he's against the law. He wasn't against the law. He was for the law fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

He wrote in Romans, do we destroy the law? No we fulfill it. We establish it. He is against the temple.

Well he wasn't against the temple. He was building a different temple, a church. By the way these are the very accusations that they brought against Stephen a few years before when Paul was leading that persecution.

The chickens were coming home to roost. Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. And they jump on Paul.

Isn't that amazing that religious people who want to keep their temple pure will kill a man to do it. It's wrong to bring a Greek into the temple. It's so wrong we'll kill anybody who does it.

Ah but when Jesus died he broke down that middle wall of partition. He ripped that veil. And he said I'm leaving this temple empty.

Your house is left unto you desolate. You're just playing your religious games. And they began to beat Paul.

Supposing that he had polluted the temple. Now I'm interested in what they did in verse 29 and in verse 30. They supposed that he had polluted the temple.

The crowd rushes into the temple and they close the gates. I have written in the margin of my Bible see Acts chapter 14 verse 27 where they said where the church said God has opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. How much how much clearer could God talk to Paul.

He had opened the door to the Gentiles. Now the Jews closed the door on Paul. No wonder Jesus said to him get out of Jerusalem.

They're not going to listen to you anyway. They closed the door on him. Watch me.

When the Jewish people in that temple closed the door on Paul they were closing the door on themselves. You see in just a few years that temple would be ruins. In just a few years that city would be ruins.

You know why? They wouldn't listen to the testimony of Paul and they wouldn't listen to the testimony of Peter and they wouldn't listen to the testimony of the early church. That nation that refuses to listen to God's word is destined for judgment. I don't care what that nation is.

So here's the Apostle Paul being beaten and being rejected because they misunderstood his good intentions. But you know good intentions out of the will of God are not going to be blessed very much. Paul's motive was right.

His method was wrong. He was out of the will of God. People come to me and they say well pastor I'm going to do this thing.

God doesn't want it. It's against the word of God. But I think it's going to all work out.

It'll all work out. No it won't. Oh it may eventually.

May eventually. But you're going to pay for it. Paul paid for it.

I've marked in my Bible in verse 24 where the people said to Paul now you pay their expenses. He paid. Biggest price he ever paid.

Arrested in prison in Caesarea Philippi for two years. A prisoner of Rome and finally off to the city of Rome. He was misunderstood by the Jews.

Finally and quickly he was misunderstood by the captain. I like this captain. His name was Claudius Lysias.

I like him. When he heard there was a riot he came with 200 men. Came down from the barracks right next to the temple.

Came down and when the Jews saw him come they stopped beating Paul. They would have killed him. God had other plans for Paul.

But this man misunderstood Paul. He thought he was an Egyptian. He thought he was a troublemaker from a few months before.

How often people look at us they don't even know who we are. What we're doing. And he comes down he chains him.

You weren't supposed to chain a Roman citizen. And they're about to scourge him later on. Discover he's a Roman citizen.

And they pick him up bodily and start to take him up to the barracks. And the crowd is calling kill him. Away with him.

Kill him. And Claudius Lysias thought that he was a great troublemaker but he wasn't. I must confess to you that in my life and ministry I have misunderstood some people.

There are people who I thought were real troublemakers but they weren't. And there are other people I thought were going to be such a great help to the work and they turned out to be the troublemakers. He arrests Paul and takes him up.

But I want you to notice what this man did. This Roman centurion did what the church didn't do. He gave Paul a chance to talk.

He did what the Jewish people didn't do. He gave him a chance to identify himself and tell what he was doing. Friends sometimes the unsaved pagan is more honest about things than the religious crowd or the Christian crowd.

I'm sorry to have to say that but it's true. There are times when unsaved people are more logical and more fair and more gentlemanly than are those people who profess to be religious. And when he found out that Paul was not that Egyptian I'm sure he apologized and he must have he must have released him from one of those chains because we read that Paul gestured with his hand.

But he treated Paul fairly and honestly which is not what the Jews did or what the church did. It's an interesting thing. This Roman centurion became a tool in the hands of God to accomplish God's purposes.

I want to wrap it up at this point and encourage you just a little bit. I believe Paul was wrong being in Jerusalem. I believe he was doubly wrong going to the temple.

But you know what? God overruled all of this for good. You see where God cannot rule he overrules and God overruled this for good. And Claudius Lysias that Roman centurion became God's servant to protect Paul.

And the Roman government paid the way for Paul to go to Rome. That's where Paul was going. Paul went to Jerusalem just to take care of this one little matter.

But his destination was Rome. I told you in our last message it's easy for us to go on detours but don't think that when you've gone on the detour you're done for. Let me illustrate it.

Some of you have the idea that the will of God is like a machine. If one piece of the machine goes haywire the whole thing falls apart. Your automobile you're driving down.

I remember we were driving down the highway one time and all of a sudden bang there was a noise. I know nothing about a car and the whole car stopped. We blew a piston or some such thing.

I don't know what it was. A lot of folks have the idea that the will of God is like a machine and when one piece goes haywire the whole thing grinds to a stop. That's not true.

If that were the case none of us would be here today. Is there anybody here today who can stand up and say I have always lived in the will of God? I've met some Christians who have gotten on a detour and they've got this mechanical idea of the will of God and they think because they've gotten on a detour they're done for. The devil loves that.

My friend the will of God is not like a machine it's like a human body. You know your body is so wonderful when one part of your body isn't functioning right you know what happens? The rest of your body goes to work to compensate for it. My doctor friend has a word for this homeostasis.

It means that that when one part of your body isn't your gallbladder is not functioning correctly you don't just suddenly die. Now if this happens to your heart or your brain you could but if one part of your body isn't functioning correctly you don't suddenly die. You get pain.

You have difficulty but you keep on functioning. The rest of your body compensates for it. The will of God is a living thing not a machine and when you get out of the will of God on some detour and Paul's motive was right and his heart was right but his method was wrong God didn't say Paul I'm through with you you're done for.

He said no we can compensate for this and so where he didn't rule he overruled and God used the Roman government to get Paul to Rome. That's where God wanted him anyway. I want to encourage somebody here today who says pastor I've gotten on a detour some part of my spiritual organism is not functioning right.

You get back where you belong. Nobody wants to live with ruptured blood vessels. Nobody wants to live with organs that are not functioning.

You go to the doctor he said I'll give you some medicine or we'll operate and then the body's functioning again so with the will of God. When things are not what they ought to be we come to the great physician and say look balance it out for me but meanwhile he compensates for it. Listen to me Abraham got out of the will of God and God finished his work with Abraham.

If anybody was ever out of God's will Jacob for 20 years fighting God. God accomplished his purposes for Jacob. Moses.

Moses murdered a man and and and stayed in the desert for 40 years getting over it. God accomplished his purposes for Moses. Peter got out of the will of God.

God accomplished his purposes for Peter. Paul I think was out of the will of God and yet God overruled and accomplished his purposes for Paul. This is not an excuse to disobey.

There's a difference between disobeying with my eyes wide open rebelling against God and disobeying because of ignorance or a heart so full of love. My motive is right but my method is wrong. What I'm saying is this don't be afraid of the will of God.

He was misunderstood Paul was by the church. He was misunderstood by the Jewish nation. He was misunderstood by the Roman captain but he wasn't misunderstood by God.

God said that's my servant Saul. That's my servant Paul. You keep your hands off of him.

Okay you can put a chain on him but he's not the prisoner of Rome he's the prisoner of Jesus Christ. All right you can put him in prison but I've got some plans for him and God ruled and overruled and accomplished his purposes and so he will with you and me if we'll let him. His first purpose of course is to save us then to sanctify us and build us and use us for his glory.

Is he fulfilling his purposes in your life? If you're on a detour get back where God wants you to be. If you're not on a detour here's my final statement don't get on one. Obey the word of God don't compromise no matter what churches may say no matter what religious leaders may say no matter what your own heart and feelings may say obey the word of the Living God and God will see to it that your life is blessed.

Gracious Father we're thankful that between us and you there are no misunderstandings. You know us. Oh you knew us before we were born.

You know our thoughts are far off. You know our actions before we've performed them. You know every thought and intent of the heart.

Our problem Father is that we don't know ourselves. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked and who can know it. Lord we pray that as we read the word and as we grow in grace we'll come to understand your heart better and our own hearts better.

Deliver us from compromise. Don't let us be mean about it but help us to stand for the truth. Help us not to listen to rumors and lies.

Help us not to be afraid of what may happen if we obey. Help us to be afraid of what may happen if we disobey. And may the word of God control our lives we ask in Jesus name.

Amen.

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