

Text: Acts 27.1-44

We completed Acts 27 last week, but before we move on to ch. 28, I want to address a topic suggested by a Tom Constable comment at the end of his discussion on Acts 27.

From the bulletin, you probably noticed my title for today's message:

Smarter Than the Average Bear

How many of you recognize that phrase? How many know where it comes from?

Of course, that is one of cartoon character Yogi Bear's catchphrases. Yogi and his friends were a part of my "misspent youth" as they say. His favorite activity was stealing "pic-a-nic baskets," perhaps not the best example for young people to follow.

In reading up on him, I discovered that the baseball player, Yogi Berra, sued the company that created Yogi Bear for defamation. Their defense was, "pure coincidence!" Yogi Berra withdrew the suit, but nobody believed the defense.

So back to Acts 27.

Tom Constable's comment comes in his discussion of Acts 27.30-32.

Ac 27.30-32 But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the *ship's* boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow,³¹ Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved."³² Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the *ship's* boat and let it fall away.

We will find at the end of the chapter that everything Paul said in this chapter was true: they should not have left Fair Havens, they would run aground, and they would all survive the wreck.

In vv. 30-32, Paul intervenes when the sailors attempt to abandon ship, and the centurion heeds his word this time. This event was part of the Lord's preservation of all the souls on board.

Here is Constable's comment on this:

"There is no adequate basis for concluding that simply because God gave Paul insight and wisdom during this voyage that all Spirit-filled

Christians, therefore, have more wisdom than unbelievers. God gave Paul a measure of intelligence and perception that He does not give all of His servants. Some Christians think that they can assess situations and that people should follow their advice simply because they are Christians or 'Spirit-filled Christians.' Jesus taught that often unbelievers demonstrate more wisdom than believers, unfortunately (cf. Luke 16:8)."¹

In other words, what Constable is saying is that Paul wasn't "Smarter Than the Average Bear," and neither are we.

Now, you might wonder who would say they have special insight from God simply because they are Christians.

Probably the movement most associated with this idea is the "Prosperity Gospel" movement. Here is a sample from an article on the Kenneth Copland Ministries website (Note!! We strongly oppose the teachings of Kenneth Copland and false teachers like him.)

"He didn't own a pair of shoes until he was 12 years old. With only a fifth-grade education and having come from a poor family, he had not been given the opportunity to succeed in life. Yet this man from Texas had become a multimillionaire.

"Without any formal education or training, he had become very wealthy through investments. In fact, he had never lost one dime in a single investment! How did he do it? He once shared the secret with his friends:

"I always do this. When someone comes along with an idea, I don't allow myself to think about it mentally. Instead, I go into my closet and pray. I wait as long as it takes until I hear something. Sometimes it can take as long as three days. I come out for some meals and a little sleep, but mainly I remain quiet and alone with the Lord until I know by an inward witness what I am to do.'

"He shared that there were times when an idea seemed like a really good one that would surely bring a return, but his inward witness told him not to invest. At others, it seemed like a dead-end

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ac 27.30.

opportunity, but his spirit told him to move ahead and invest. Every single time, he made the right choice.

“Following the inward witness gave him special insight into the supernatural and how to become financially prosperous. This man took the time to develop and train his human spirit to be led by the Spirit of God, and you can, too! It won’t come overnight, but you can enjoy this special insight and guidance in every area of your life, as you train your human spirit.”²

This comes from an article called, “4 Ways to Be Led by the Spirit of God.” A quick glance down the list of these “ways” seems to be good advice:

1. Meditate on the Word of God
2. Be a Doer of the Word of God
3. Put the Word of God Above All Else
4. Instantly Respond to Your Spirit

Well, I guess step four might be a problem. But the author guarantees that if you become a doer of the Word of God, you will have special insight.

“Once you set out to be a doer of the Word, revelation will come. As you practice being obedient in even the small things, you’ll find that you’ll begin to hear God more and more each day.”³

I am sure the lady who wrote this article is sincere, but she is thoroughly confused about the Christian life and the purpose of God’s Word.

In this message, I want to look at the things Paul says in our chapter, consider Paul’s position in the church, and consider our relationship to truth as we are taught by God the Holy Spirit.

Proposition: God gave us authorities to follow, he didn’t make us authorities in ourselves.

² Misty Robinson, “4 Ways to Be Led by the Spirit of God,” Kenneth Copeland Ministries Blog, February 26, 2019, <https://blog.kcm.org/4-ways-to-be-led-by-the-spirit-of-god/>.

³ Robinson.

I. The example of Paul in Acts 27

This part of our message is review

A. Paul's advice about the storm (9-10)

1. Most commentators think Paul is not prophesying here
2. Since there was no loss of life, this is thought to be Paul's well-informed opinion rather than prophecy

B. Paul's report of the prophetic vision (21-26)

1. Here there is direct revelation from God
2. Specific prophecy uttered: You will stand before Caesar, all with you will survive

C. Paul's warning to the centurion regarding the sailors (31)

Again, this isn't a prophecy as far as we know: just canny opinion

D. Paul's encouragement to all to take a meal (33-34)

And here, no prophecy, and again simply human wisdom

Now, Paul clearly was well-informed, wise, and sometimes had direct revelation from God concerning events – Paul's special insight is indisputable.

II. The position of Paul in the church

A. In the church: called to be an apostle

1. Essential role: one speaking for God, God's messenger, God's envoy
 - a. Authorized directly by God (Gal 1.1, 15-16)
 - b. Spoke for God through the Spirit (Jn 14.26, 16.13, Gal 1.11-12)
2. Authoritative voice in the church: apostles settled questions by their own decisions (no other figures in the church have this authority) (Jn 20.22-23, 2 Cor 10.8)
3. Identified by power to work wonders (Mk 6.13, Lk 9.102, Ac 2.43)

B. In this voyage: a privileged prisoner

1. A citizen of Rome, on appeal to the emperor

2. Operating in the assurances of God: “You will see Rome, you will see Caesar”

We saw one of the references here, but there are several in the book, reviewed in an earlier message.

The point here is that we must distinguish between the powers and privileges of apostles and those to whom God gave direct revelation, and ourselves, who are not apostles nor receive direct revelations.

III. The authority available for believers

A. Our sure authority: the revelation given by the apostles

1. All Scripture is inspired by God (2 Tim 3.16)
2. The Word supersedes experience (2 Pt 1.19-21)
3. The apostolic Word comes through the ministry of the Spirit through the apostles (Jn 14.26, 16.13, Gal 1.11-12)

B. Our growing maturity in spiritual life, brought about by the Spirit and the Word

1. “The anointing” (the Spirit) teaches us all things (1 Jn 2.27)
2. The Spirit guides you in your prayers (Rm 8.26, Eph 6.18)
3. The Spirit aids you to overcome the flesh (Rm 8.13, Gal 5.16-17)

C. Our persistent fallibility, despite our growth through the Spirit

1. The epistles warn believers against self-deception (though we all have the Spirit) (Jas 1.16; Gal 6.7; 1 Co 6.9, 15.33)
2. Peter provides an example after many successes and despite his apostleship
 - a. Founding sermon of the church (Ac 2)
 - b. Mighty testimony in Jerusalem (Ac 1-12)
 - c. Opens the door to the Gentiles (Ac 10)
 - d. Stumbles so Paul must rebuke him (Gal 2)

What are we saying? We are saying that we have a sure source of authority, we have a faithful guide to maturity (the Spirit) and we struggle with persistent human fallibility.

D. Our warning from our Lord Jesus Christ (Lk 16.8)

the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light

1. The warning does not mean that we know nothing, nor that we cannot grow in grace
2. But it warns us against that pride that thinks we know better simply because we are Christians

Conclusion:

What lies behind this message? Do I think our people are likely to fall for the prosperity gospel message and think you are likely to think God is going to give you direct guidance as you make decisions in your life?

No, but I do think we need to be careful about what we believe about things the Bible doesn't address.

My wife and I chose to home-school our children. We made that choice because we felt we couldn't abide the academic weakness of the public school system in our day.

We chose the "delivered curriculum" model of ABeka for our kids, though we thought other good options were also available.

Then we met others who had very different perspectives than we did:

- One extreme: those who zealously promoted "unlearning" because the public system was "too structured"
- Another extreme: the call for a return to curriculums from a hundred years ago or more, with derision for the academic needs of our own day

I offer home-schooling as an example: there are many other areas where Christians vaunt their opinions over the wisdom of years of church history or the collected wisdom of human experience.

- We've seen this in the varied response to the Covid crisis (I have my opinions, too)
- We see this in Christian attitudes towards government, and willingness to assign conspiracy to those in power, or who disagree

We are very sure of ourselves, and of our research — such as it is — yet how different are we from those who think the Spirit speaks to them specially?

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Proposition: God gave us authorities to follow, he didn’t make us authorities in ourselves.

Smarter than the average bear? None of us are. We need to settle our certainties in the Scriptures and hold our other beliefs tentatively.

⁴ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ac 27.30.