

July 30, 2017

Church Planting  
*Uncompromising*  
Acts 21:17-26

**Opening words:** Webster defines compromise as *a deal between different parties where each party gives up part of their demand*. Life has taught me there is a time to compromise. As a matter of fact, there is a beneficial side to compromising. There are four benefits to compromising. It creates:

1. Partial Satisfaction
2. Saves Time
3. Future Benefits
4. Mutual Benefits

There is a time to compromise, but this is equally true: There is a time not to compromise. One should never compromise on their core values. That is what this message is about today.

This is sermon number fifty-two in my sermon series, *Church Planting*. You remember my task. During the summer months, I am preaching through the Book of Acts. Why make a major time commitment to the Book of Acts? Because, Acts is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who created the church originally and it will be the Holy Spirit who must revive the church again. Human effort is not enough. Our scripture reading for today is Acts 21:17-26. This week's message is called *Uncompromising*.

**Acts 21:17-26** <sup>17</sup> When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly. <sup>18</sup> The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. <sup>19</sup> Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. <sup>20</sup> When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. <sup>21</sup> They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. <sup>22</sup> What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, <sup>23</sup> so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. <sup>24</sup> Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. <sup>25</sup> As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality." <sup>26</sup> The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, *"All compromise is based on give and take, but there can be no give and take on fundamentals."* I completely agree with that quote. If you agree with that quote, say, **"Amen!"**

Like last week, we find ourselves today in the twenty-first chapter of Acts. Paul's journey from Ephesus is over. According to the seventeenth verse, when Paul and his companions arrived in Jerusalem, they were warmly greeted. The next day, Paul and his companions go to visit James, the half-brother of Jesus and the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He is not alone. He is surrounded by the elders of that congregation. Paul held their attention, as he told them about what God had done among the Gentiles. When the report was finished, they praised God. Then, the scene takes a sad turn. It all begins innocently enough. The Jewish believers in Jerusalem report on the progress God had made in their city. There are thousands of Jews who now believe in Jesus. That is a good thing. The problem is, they are Jewish-Christians. They believe in Jesus but they also believe that their old Jewish ways have some value. The law shouldn't be discarded like yesterday's trash. They believe the law still has value and should be practiced. They believe Paul has ignored the law during his time with the Gentiles. It does not sound like a big issue to us, but it was a big issue to them. However, it is an issue we still deal with today. Are we saved by grace or by works? In our reading for today, Paul does something completely unexpected. He compromised. He followed the law, but his core values remained intact. Let me ask you this question: When was the last time you compromised?

As Americans, we understand the value of compromise. It is one of the things that makes us unique. President Obama reminded us that our country was not founded on a Revolution, it was founded on compromise. Let me give you just one example. There are many.

In 1819, our country had twenty-two states. Eleven were free states and eleven were slave states. That balance was vital to maintain the union. That balance was disturbed when Missouri applied for statehood. Things looked bad until a compromise was reached. We call it the Missouri Compromise. In 1820, Missouri and Maine joined the union together. Missouri was permitted to join the Union as a slave state. Maine, which lacked the population required to apply for statehood, joined the Union as a free state. The balance was maintained and the Union was preserved. It delayed a civil war for another forty years. Americans are no stranger to compromise. Could it be that one of the dysfunctions in Washington DC today is that we have forgotten the art of compromise? When you fail to compromise, bad things happen. Let me ask you these questions:

**How many friendships do you know that have shattered because no one will compromise?**

**How many marriages do you know that have ended because no one will compromise?**

**How many churches do you know that have been crippled because no one will compromise?**

There is a time when a compromise is the only logical thing to do. In the scripture lesson for today, Paul compromised because it was the only thing to do. His compromise preserved the unity of the early church. There is nothing wrong with compromising secondary issues. However, you should never compromise your core values. We can never ever compromise the core values of the church. Our core values separate us from the rest of the world. With that in mind, say, **"Amen!"** Today, I want to look at three of our core values.

### **The Divinity of Jesus**

In December 1903, after many attempts, the Wright brothers were successful in getting their "flying machine" off the ground. Thrilled, they telegraphed this message to their sister Katherine: "We have actually flown 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas." Katherine hurried to the editor of the local newspaper and showed him the message. He glanced at it and said, "How nice. The boys will be home for Christmas." He totally missed the big news – man had flown! That is the story of many during the month of December.

**The divinity of Jesus is one of those things we can never compromise.** Lost in all the gifts, cards, decorations and parties of Christmas is the Incarnation. God took human form and entered this world. Jesus was fully God and fully human. It has been said, the Incarnation is beyond all human understanding. In Colossians 1:15 Paul writes, *"He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation."* Jesus was not just a good man. Jesus was God incarnate. It is a core value in our faith. If you promise to never compromise away the divinity of Christ, say, **"Amen!"**

### **The Sacrificial Death of Jesus**

One of Rembrandt's great masterpieces is his painting The Three Crosses. You can't help but be drawn to the center cross on which Jesus died. Around Jesus's cross is a crowd of people who came to witness the execution. Each one in that crowd expresses a different emotion. Hidden on the edge of the crowd is a single figure, almost hidden from sight. Art critics say this is a representation of Rembrandt himself, for he recognized that by his sins he helped nail Jesus to the cross. It isn't just Rembrandt's story, it is our story.

**We can never compromise away the sacrificial death of Jesus.** Somewhere in your life you must conclude that you too are responsible for the execution of Jesus. On Good Friday, we annually gather in a local mausoleum to be reminded of the terrible fact that Jesus, the incarnation of God, the Son of God, died for our sins. His perfection made him the perfect sacrifice for our sins. In Romans 5:8 Paul writes, *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* If you promise never to compromise away the sacrificial death of Jesus, say, **"Amen!"**

## **The Resurrection of Jesus**

When Leonid Brezhnev died in 1982, Vice President George Bush went to Moscow to represent the United States at the former Soviet leader's funeral. He reported later he was moved by the silent protest of his widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope. She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest. There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, and that that afterlife was possible because of the sacrificial death of Jesus. She hoped the resurrected Jesus would have mercy on her husband's soul.

**One of the things we can never compromise away is the resurrection of Jesus.** The resurrection of Jesus changed everything. Without the resurrection of Jesus there is no hope at a funeral. It is simply over with the bereavement lunch. With the resurrection of Jesus, there is hope of eternal life where all our problems are nothing more than a memory. Your belief in the resurrection of Jesus is not optional; it is required. It is the one thing that separates us from the rest of the world. Recently, I was asked about my favorite Bible verse. My favorite Bible verse is Romans 10:9. Paul writes, *"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* Many believe that was the first creed in the church. If you promise never to compromise away the resurrection of Jesus, say, **"Amen!"**

Let's go back to the scripture one more time. Paul is in Jerusalem surrounded by new Jewish Christians. They value the law and are upset that Paul isn't practicing the law. He is in a difficult spot. He knows the law is no longer necessary, but he knows it is still important to those new believers. To save the unity of the church, Paul does the unexpected; he compromises on some secondary points. However, there are certain key points on which he will never compromise. He would never compromise the divinity of Jesus. He would never compromise the sacrificial death of Jesus. He would never compromise the resurrection of Jesus. This is the question you must answer: How much are you willing to compromise?

One of the strange things about this job is that you never have a 'weekend'. For example, last weekend I had both a wedding and a funeral. That meant I was busy on Friday night with the wedding rehearsal, Saturday morning with the funeral, Saturday afternoon and evening with the wedding and the reception. I am not complaining. I am just saying that is one of the things that makes my vocation unique.

On Monday, my calendar cleared, so I had an opportunity to do some personal things. One of the things I had to do was get my tires rotated. It is not exciting, but it is necessary. I pulled my car into the shop and told the woman behind the counter what I wanted and sat in the small waiting room with some other customers. One by one people's names were called when their car was finished. Over the next few minutes the

crowd was whittled down to two, me and another guy. It was kind of uncomfortable sitting there with him. At first, we tried to ignore each other. We played with our cell phones and flipped through a few old magazines. At one point, he looked at me and asked, "Do you think the Indians are starting to come around?" I said, "Yes! The starting pitching is getting better and the hitting is becoming more timely". Then, I asked him if he thought the Cavs were going to trade Kyrie (Irving). A few minutes later we were talking about everything. Then, he asked me the worst question, "What do you do for a living?" I almost felt sorry for him. I said, "I'm a minister." He got that deer in the headlights look and I am certain he was thinking our Savior's name. Looking as guilty as sin itself, he confessed he didn't go to church. However, he did believe there was a God. Then, he got the courage to proclaim the next line, "It doesn't really matter. The only thing that really matters is believing there is a God." I said, "No, even Satan believes there is a God. The only thing that really matters is believing in Jesus". Do me a favor. Don't ever compromise Jesus. He is our only hope of salvation. The man must have been praying, because God heard his prayers. The woman behind the counter called his name and handed him his keys. Then, he silently nodded and walked out. Do you remember the words of Mahatma Gandhi? He once said, *"All compromise is based on give and take, but there can be no give and take on fundamentals."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**