

Acts 28

Paul's challenges and ours.

(How does Paul show us how to be like Jesus?)

1. Much attention has been given to the identity of the Apostle Paul in recent years.
2. In this chapter we have a series of snap shots, which reveal a lot about the man, Paul.
3. We will see that Paul was, in many ways, like Christ and that he showed us something of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.
4. We might look at this chapter in terms of challenges that we face in following Christ.

The challenge of personal assessment.

“¹ And when they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta. ² And the natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all. ³ But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. ⁴ And when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they {began} saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." ⁵ However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. ⁶ But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and {began} to say that he was a god.

1. Note that Paul shook the viper into the fire. He was not into “animal rights” as some would wish in our day.
2. The two extreme views of Paul (murderer or god) reveal the tendency within human nature to “read into” data and jump to unwarranted conclusions. Too often we want to see people as black or white, good or evil, right or wrong when they are in fact more complicated.
3. People may tend to think too much of us or too little. In both cases we are to keep our heads.
4. Sometimes it is the way we see ourselves in light of our circumstances that needs correction. When we do something that is powerful we may think we are better than we are or when bad things happen to us we may conclude we are worthless.

Romans 12

“¹ I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, {which is} your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. ³ For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you **not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.**”

1. Note that before we are asked to think of ourselves with sound judgment we are asked to a) understand God's grace toward us (ch.1-11), b) offer our bodies as living sacrifices as a service of worship.

2. If we are trying to prop up a wounded ego with our “confidence” we will have trouble.
3. It also should be noted that our confidence is established in the context of community where others have different strengths and abilities.

Personal assessment

<i>Areas of confidence</i>	<i>Areas of confusion</i>	<i>Areas of concession</i>
Those areas of my life where I have faith to be bold and assertive and am not easily intimidated.	Those areas of my life where I have doubts about my place and ability.	Those areas of my life where I know I need to defer to others who have abilities that I do not have.

1. Confidence in areas of confusion or concession is generally not helpful or well received.
2. Passivity in every area of ministry or life does not reflect humility but rather irresponsibility.
3. Confusion about our place and ability can be clarified with experience and feedback.
4. Two mistakes we can make: to believe nothing or everything people say about you (good or bad).

The challenge of ministering to others.

⁷ Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days. ⁸ And it came about that the father of Publius was lying {in bed} afflicted with {recurrent} fever and dysentery; and Paul went in {to see} him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him. ⁹ And after this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured. ¹⁰ And they also honored us with many marks of respect; and when we were setting sail, they supplied {us} with all we needed.

1. The symptoms of the sick man suggest “Malta fever” which was identified in 1887 as coming from the milk of goats.
2. As a prisoner who had just escaped death through unusual circumstances and efforts, Paul could have felt sorry for him self or felt that he deserved a time out for personal attention. What we see him doing is responding to needs with compassion and power. As Christians we are not ever off duty with respect to the ministry of love.
3. Paul’s power to heal is identified as a sign of an Apostle. II Cor.12:12 “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you”
4. Paul’s ministry of compassion won for him respect and support. There is a lesson here – Personal support is encouraged through investing ones self in the welfare of others.
5. If we want the culture to show us respect, we can start by doing something about the needs around us. Too often we demand respect from the secular public so we can do “our in house” ministries. We might do better if we commit ourselves to

serving the public good in some meaningful way. I Pet.6:10 “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

The challenge of receiving ministry from others.

¹¹ And at the end of three months we set sail on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island, and which had the Twin Brothers for its figurehead. ¹² And after we put in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. ¹³ And from there we sailed around and arrived at Rhegium, and a day later a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. ¹⁴ There we found {some} brethren, and were invited to stay with them for seven days; and thus we came to Rome. ¹⁵ And the brethren, when they heard about us, came from there as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

1. Paul was not above needing support and encouragement from other believers.
2. Fellowship with fellow believers had the effect of drawing Paul to worship and being encouraged to continue his ministry.
3. The experience of Christian community involves both giving and receiving ministry. We should not be inexperienced with both the giving and receiving of ministry.
4. The NT often addresses our relationship with “one another.”
 - a. Positive exhortations:
 - wash one another’s feet – Jn.13:14
 - love one another – Jn.13:34
 - be devoted to one another in brotherly love – Rom.12:10a
 - give preference to one another in honor – Rom.12:10b
 - be on the same mind toward one another – Rom.12:16; 15:5
 - build up one another – Rom.14:19
 - accept one another – Rom.15:7
 - admonish one another – Rom.15:14
 - greet one another – Rom.16:16; I Cor.16:20
 - wait for one another – I Cor.11:33
 - have the same care for one another – I Cor.12:25
 - through love serve one another – Gal.5:13
 - bear one another’s burdens – Gal.6:2
 - show tolerance for one another – Eph.4:2
 - be kind to one another – Eph.4:32a
 - forgive one another – Eph.4:32b
 - speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs – Eph.5:19
 - be subject to one another – Eph.5:21
 - regard one another as more important than yourselves – Phil.2:3
 - teach and admonish one another – Col.3:16
 - comfort one another – I Thess.4:18
 - encourage one another – I Thess.5:11a; Heb.3:13
 - build up one another – I Thess.5:11b
 - live in peace with one another – I Thess.5:13

- seek after that which is good for one another – I Thess.5:15
- stimulate one another to live and good deeds – Heb.10:24
- confess your sins to one another – Jas.5:16a
- pray for one another – Jas.5:16b
- keep fervent in your live for one another – I Pet.4:8
- be hospitable to one another – I Pet.4:9
- use your gifts to serve one another – I Pet.4:10
- clothe ourselves with humility toward one another – I Pet.5:5

b. Negative exhortations:

- do not judge one another – Rom.14:13
- do not bite and devour one another – Ga.5:15
- do not become boastful, challenging one another – Gal.5:26a
- do not envy on another – Gal.5:26b
- do not lie to one another – Col.3:9
- do not speak against one another – Jas.4:11
- do not complain against one another – Jas.5:9

The challenge of telling the Gospel story.

16 And when we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.

17 And it happened that after three days he called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they had come together, he {began} saying to them, "Brethren, though I had done nothing against our people, or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. 18 And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there was no ground for putting me to death. 19 But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar; not that I had any accusation against my nation. 20 For this reason therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel." 21 And they said to him, "We have neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you. 22 But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere."

23 And when they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. 24 And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. 25 And when they did not agree with one another, they {began} leaving after Paul had spoken one {parting} word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, 26 saying, '*Go to this people and say, "You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; 27 For the heart of this people has become dull, And with their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes; Lest they should see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I should heal them."*'" 28 Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen." 29 [And when he had spoken these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves.]

30 And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

1. Paul was given an opportunity to “offer a defense of his hope (I Pet.3:15).
2. Notice that Luke talks about “some being persuaded by the things spoken.” This suggests that the way Paul argued for the Gospel was important. Conversion is not to be always relegated to the mysterious subjective work of the Spirit. It might be noted that there are three agencies implied in the dynamic of conversion.

Agencies of conversion

<i>The persuasiveness of Paul</i>	<i>The providence of God</i>	<i>The predisposition of the Jews</i>
Vs.24 “some were being persuaded by the things spoken”	Jn.12:40 “He has blinded their eyes, and He hardened their heart”	Vs.24 “others would not believe” Vs.27 “they have closed their eyes”

- a. The Scripture respects the presence of each of these agencies without explaining how they relate to each other.
- b. Why do people reject the Gospel? They have not been persuaded by good preaching, they have not had a predisposition to receive it, they have not been called by the Holy Spirit.
- c. God's hand in human decisions is a major theme in the New Testament. (I am highlighting the providence of God, not because it is the most important function in the Biblical doctrine of conversion, but because it is the function that is hardest to understand or accept.)

Election onto salvation:

- **Jn.6:37** — “all that the Father gives Me shall come to Me . . .”
- **Jn.6:44** — “No one can come to me unless the Father . . .”
- **Jn.17:2, 6, 9** — “All whom thou has given Him (the Son). . .”
- **Acts 13:48** — “As many as had been appointed to eternal life . . .”
- **Eph.1:4-8** — “. . . He predestined us to adoption as sons . . .”
- **Rom.8:29-30** — “Whom he foreknew he also predestined. . .”
- **Rom.16:13** — “. . . chosen in the Lord . . .”
- **II Thess.2:13** — “. . . chosen . . . for salvation . . .”
- **I Pet.1:2** — “. . . chosen according to the foreknowledge of God . . .”
- **Col.3:12** — “. . . those who have been chosen of God . . .”
- **II Tim.2:10** — “. . . for the sake of those who are chosen . . .”
- **I Thess.1:4** — “Knowing . . . His choice of you . . .”
- **I Pet. 5:13** — “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you . . .”
- **Rom. 11:5,7** — “. . . according to God's gracious choice . . .”

Election onto repentance and faith:

- **Acts 5:31** — “. . . to grant repentance to Israel and forgiveness . . .”
- **Acts 11:18** — “. . . God has granted to the Gentiles repentance . . .”

- **Rom.12:3** — “. . . God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”
- **Eph.2:8-10** — “. . . and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God . . .”
- **II Tim.2:25** — “. . .if perhaps God may grant them repentance . . .”
- **Acts 9:15** — “. . .he is a chosen instrument of Mine . . .”

Election of individuals:

- **Acts 13:48** — “. . . as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”
- **Gal.1:15** — “God . . . who set me apart, even from my mother's womb . . .”
- **Jer.1:5** — “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you . . .”
- **II Thess.2:13** — “. . . God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation . . .”
- **Rom.9:11** — “. . . for though {the twins} were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to {His} choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls. . .”

Assignment to retribution:

- **Rom.9:22** — “God . . . endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction . . .”
- **I Pet.2:8** — “. . . they are disobedient to the word, and to this {doom} they were also appointed.”
- **Rev.17:8** — “. . . whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, . . .”
- **II Thess.2:11** — “And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false.”
- **Jude 4** — “For certain persons . . . who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation . . .”
- **II Cor.4:3-6** — “. . . if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing . . .”
- **Prov.16:4** — “The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.”

3. The fact that Paul received a mixed response (like Jesus) should encourage us when we are unable to persuade some of the good news of the Gospel.
4. In conclusion we see the providence of God in bringing Paul to Rome through hopeless circumstances. We also see Paul's patience in following Christ as he faces hopeless circumstances. At a time when there are many (sometimes conflicting) models of Christian discipleship, Paul's witness needs to be studied and followed.
5. This interesting editorial appeared in the New York Times last week. Coming from a nonbeliever, it reflects a welcomed and refreshing insight. Sometimes, those who are put up front as models of the faith do not reflect the image of Christ in the best way.

**Who Is John Stott?
By DAVID BROOKS**

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"Tim Russert is a great journalist, but he made a mistake last weekend. He included Jerry Falwell and Al Sharpton in a discussion on religion and public life.

Inviting these two bozos onto "Meet the Press" to discuss that issue is like inviting Britney Spears and Larry Flynt to discuss D. H. Lawrence. Naturally, they got into a demeaning food fight that would have lowered the intellectual discourse of your average nursery school.

This is why so many people are so misinformed about evangelical Christians. There is a world of difference between real-life people of faith and the made-for-TV, Elmer Gantry-style blowhards who are selected to represent them. Falwell and Pat Robertson are held up as spokesmen for evangelicals, which is ridiculous. Meanwhile people like John Stott, who are actually important, get ignored.

It could be that you have never heard of John Stott. I don't blame you. As far as I can tell, Stott has never appeared on an important American news program. A computer search suggests that Stott's name hasn't appeared in this newspaper since April 10, 1956, and it's never appeared in many other important publications.

Yet, as Michael Cromartie of the Ethics and Public Policy Center notes, if evangelicals could elect a pope, Stott is the person they would likely choose. He was the framer of the Lausanne Covenant, a crucial organizing document for modern evangelicalism. He is the author of more than 40 books, which have been translated into over 72 languages and have sold in the millions. Now rector emeritus at All Souls, Langham Place, in London, he has traveled the world preaching and teaching.

When you read Stott, you encounter first a tone of voice. Tom Wolfe once noticed that at a certain moment all airline pilots came to speak like Chuck Yeager. The parallel is inexact, but over the years I've heard hundreds of evangelicals who sound like Stott.

It is a voice that is friendly, courteous and natural. It is humble and self-critical, but also confident, joyful and optimistic. Stott's mission is to pierce through all the encrustations and share direct contact with Jesus. Stott says that the central message of the gospel is not the teachings of Jesus, but Jesus himself, the human/divine figure. He is always bringing people back to the concrete reality of Jesus' life and sacrifice.

There's been a lot of twaddle written recently about the supposed opposition between faith and reason. To read Stott is to see someone practicing "thoughtful allegiance" to scripture. For him, Christianity means probing the mysteries of Christ. He is always exploring paradoxes. Jesus teaches humility, so why does he talk about himself so much? What does it mean to gain power through weakness, or freedom through obedience? In many cases the truth is not found in the middle of apparent opposites, but on both extremes simultaneously.

Stott is so embracing it's always a bit of a shock - especially if you're a Jew like me - when you come across something on which he will not compromise. It's like being in "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," except he has a backbone of steel. He does not accept homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle, and of course he believes in evangelizing among

nonbelievers. He is pro-life and pro-death penalty, even though he is not a political conservative on most issues.

Most important, he does not believe truth is plural. He does not believe in relativizing good and evil or that all faiths are independently valid, or that truth is something humans are working toward. Instead, Truth has been revealed. As he writes:

"It is not because we are ultra-conservative, or obscurantist, or reactionary or the other horrid things which we are sometimes said to be. It is rather because we love Jesus Christ, and because we are determined, God helping us, to bear witness to his unique glory and absolute sufficiency. In Christ and in the biblical witness to Christ God's revelation is complete; to add any words of our own to his finished work is derogatory to Christ."

Politicians, especially Democrats, are now trying harder to appeal to people of faith. But people of faith are not just another interest group, like gun owners. You have to begin by understanding the faith. And you can't understand this rising global movement if you don't meet its authentic representatives.

Not Falwell, but Stott."