

# Explore the Bible Series for July 20: Galatia: Facing troubles

July 16, 2008

- Acts 14:1-4, 11-23

“I am following Jesus, so why do so many bad things keep happening to me?” At one time or another, every believer has asked this question.

Some seem to believe that committing his or her life to God and seeking to obey him should be the end of struggling with difficult situations. They move out in obedience to God’s call assuming God will simply remove any hindrance or resistance. Then when troubles come, they react.

Some become disillusioned with the Christian life and perhaps try to run and hide from life. Others complain to God and others. Still others seek to summon up the will power to overcome the difficulty within their own strength. God, however, never promised following him would be easy.

In fact, throughout the Bible, we can see following God often leads directly to problems because obedience to God puts us on a path contrary to the “way things work” in the world. God allows believers to encounter these times in order that we might grow stronger. God desires followers who will be committed to keep following him regardless of any obstacles. The life of Paul as recorded in the book of Acts provides us with ample examples of how we might do this.

## **Rejection and dependence (Acts 14:1-4)**

As Paul journeyed as a missionary throughout the Roman Empire, large numbers of people came to accept the gospel and were saved. Many today

read verses such as Acts 14:1 and think that that is how their own personal efforts at witnessing should be. As long as they are genuinely sharing the good news, they feel they should find nothing but success as many come to believe based on their testimony. When they meet resistance, they can quickly retreat into doubt and discouragement.

When we read the story of Paul, we see one who faced resistance greater than any we encounter today. There were many well-educated people who were directly contradicting Paul's message and seeking to turn people against him. These people also convinced many Paul should be killed. Yet verse 3 indicates Paul did not leave at the first sign of trouble. He remained faithful to his calling to preach in the face of hostility, depending on God for protection. God is looking for believers who will refuse to run or be side-tracked by trouble.

### **Misconception and explanation (Acts 14:11-18)**

As a way to strengthen and validate his message, Paul was given the ability by God to perform miracles. This gift, however, occasionally led some to see Paul as superhuman or divine. Paul then had to correct their misconceptions and direct their attention away from his miraculous acts to the God who was responsible for the gift.

Most believers today are not confronted with that kind of accusation, but often have to correct other misconceptions of those to whom they witness. Many outside the church look at the Christian life as a life of rules and regulations which take most or all of the fun and spontaneity out of life. They may see faith in Jesus as merely a crutch for the weak-minded. Believers need to be aware of such misconceptions and be prepared to deal with them honestly and explain the fallacy behind them.

The life of Paul clearly shows we never should allow anything to shift the

focus away from Christ. Whatever misconceptions or false ideas we may encounter, we always should quickly refute them and clearly explain the truth.

### **Persecution and faithfulness (Acts 14:19-21)**

Everywhere Paul went, he faced resistance and persecution. Often this was people from other areas following him and seeking to stir up distrust or hostility toward Paul. Soon false stories and accusations about Paul spread throughout the Roman Empire so that Paul was assaulted even as he traveled between towns. The level of persecution also escalated from verbal arguments and attacks to physical assault and attempted execution.

It certainly would have been understandable if he had altered his plans or stopped. Yet through all of this, Paul remained committed to fulfilling his call to spread the message. He simply refused to allow other people to distract him. His faithfulness even led him to return to places where he previously had been persecuted, even when friends tried to convince him not to go.

As we have mentioned, seeking to share the gospel often will place us at odds with those who do not believe. But God is calling his followers to press on through resistance and even persecution in our mission. Jesus told us we should even rejoice in our persecution knowing our faithfulness will have a great reward in heaven (Matthew 5:11-12).

### **Recognition and acceptance (Acts 14:22-23)**

In this world, there will be trials and difficulties. Accepting Christ and seeking to follow him does not remove those troubles and may bring its

own problems. Believers need to accept that and not allow it to cause them to give up.

Indeed, one of the most effective witnesses to the truthfulness of the Christian message is when a believer maintains their witness in the face of resistance. The world's way is to seek the path of least resistance, so when an unbeliever sees someone maintain their commitment in spite of persecution, he or she is motivated to ask why. Persistence through obstacles leads to a recognition and acceptance of the truth. And God is looking for believers to demonstrate that kind of commitment whenever they face trying times.

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