

## Paul's Illness: Divine Intervention to Keep Him from the Theater; Spiritual Gifts & Spiritual Common Sense; Prisca, Aquilla, & the Asiarchs Protect Paul

**Acts 19:30** - And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him.

1. Even though weak physically, Paul remains steadfast spiritually. The phrase "wanted to go" indicates his intent is to objectively address his adversaries with a clear presentation of the gospel.
2. The Greek word translated "wanted" is the present middle participle of the verb **βούλομαι, *boulomai***, a word that expresses a mental disposition of thought that motivates physical action. Paul desires to go evangelize and teach.
3. Paul is not emotional about this. His mental state is the exact opposite of the mob's. Had he reacted to the riot with emotion the verb would not have been *boulomai* but **θέλω, *thelō***, which refers to emotional reaction that causes one to spring into action and in certain cases to do so without regard to the consequences.
4. Paul is sick for a reason. Had he gone to the theater the results would have most likely resulted in injuries that would have hampered his duties as an apostle or even his death.
5. God prevented Paul from going into harm's way for the good of the completed canon, the establishment of local churches, and the furtherance of the gospel in the first century.
6. God accomplished His desire by the actions of surrogates. The disciples that prevented Paul from going to the theater are Prisca and Aquilla, a conclusion reached by comparing two passages of Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:8 and Romans 16:3-4:

**2 Corinthians 1:8** - We do not want you to be unaware, fellow believers, of our affliction which came to us in Asia [ **specifically Ephesus** ], that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life.

**Romans 16:3** - Greet Prisca and Aquilla, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,

**v. 4** - who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

7. Prisca and Aquilla were willing to sequester Paul in their own home while an unruly mob sought him for evil purposes. The couple prevented Paul from leaving his sick bed to confront them.
8. The application of one's spiritual gift must occur under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Once a person comes to realize his spiritual gift, he too often leaps at every opportunity to put it into action. Spiritual common sense becomes an important counterbalance to this desire.

9. Paul's rationale to go and preach the gospel to the union workers of Ephesus was noble in thought but irrational in application.
10. These men were driven by economic concerns to protect their livelihoods and to defend the religion that provided them great prosperity. They were unbelievers who if they ever had any objectivity toward the gospel of Christ that notion was not operative on that day.
11. If Paul had traveled from the home of Prisca and Aquilla and walked down the thoroughfare of the Acadian Way to the Great Theater in his debilitated condition, the maddened mob could have easily killed him. There was a clear and present danger and God did not want Paul on duty that day!
12. Over my tenure as a teaching pastor, I have on several occasions been asked to go on international excursions to present the gospel to unbelievers and teach doctrine to the saved; to travel to far off places; areas exotic and areas depressed.
13. But biblical principles instruct me not to do this. In every generation of the Church Age there is a client nation. By definition, that nation provides the freedom necessary for its citizens to freely choose the religion of their choice.
14. The system under which Christianity functions includes (1) the evangelism of the lost by evangelists or by believers in one-on-one presentations of the gospel, (2) a point of assembly where those who are saved may gather, revealed in Scripture as a local church, and (3) the presentation of doctrine to them through intensive Bible study by a man with the communication gift of pastor-teacher.
15. God assigns a man with this gift to each local church and his duty is to lead that portion of God's flock by consistent instruction utilizing the literal-grammatical-historical system of hermeneutics.
16. Some men with the gift of pastor-teacher are led by the Holy Spirit to exercise their gift not in the local church but on the mission field. Such individuals are thus led to nations that will openly host them but whose citizens are primarily unbelievers.
17. I was not led to exercise my gift as a missionary but as a local pastor *within* client nation America.
18. I did not choose this church. God did. This church asked me to come and deliver trial sermons which I did on November 30 through December 1, 1984. On December 19, 1984, I was informed by its Board that I was selected by the congregation to become their pastor and I accepted.
19. This means that Grace Doctrine Church is where I was assigned and I am to stay put and teach doctrine to that portion of God's flock that assembles here until I die.

20. PRINCIPLE: A primary and overriding obligation of a pastor-teacher assigned to a local church is to lead his congregation to spiritual maturity. I am commissioned to “encourage you and all the more so as we see the day approaching.”
21. I don’t know when the Lord will call me home but until then my job before Christ as Head of this church is to teach doctrine until either disabled or dead.
22. Were I to be lured by the celebrity of going abroad to wow and woo a group of people, I would be violating my assignment to the sheep that assemble here. You are my first and only obligation.
23. When a person lives in a given geographic location, his body becomes acclimated to his surroundings. He builds up immunities to the various germs, viruses, and toxins common to that area. When he travels to a foreign location he enters into an environment that is potentially hostile to his system and he can become a target for the diseases and illnesses common to that region.
24. In Paul’s case, a serious illness protected him from exercising his spiritual gift at a time when he needed to remain secluded. This was not a time to intervene into the problems typical of the devil’s world but rather to allow God to take care of the details.
25. As we move through this passage we will learn that Jesus Christ controls history and on this occasion He does so through the function of the laws of divine establishment, which more times than not are the only ways rebellious heathen can be restrained.
26. After Prisca and Aquilla restrained Paul from going to the Great Theater a delegation of the city fathers showed up to discourage him further:

**Acts 19:31** - Also some of the Asiarchs [ Ἀσιάρχης, *Asiarchēs* \ā-shī'-ārkh\ ] who were friends of his sent to him a message and repeatedly urged him not to venture to the theater.

1. First of all who are the Asiarchs? The title is given to certain man of honorary rank in the Roman province of Asia. They were delegates of individual cities to the provincial Council which regulated the worship of Rome and the emperor. They were probably assembled at Ephesus, among other places, to preside over the public games and the religious rites at the festival, in honor of the gods and the emperor, when they sent word to Paul and gave him a bit of friendly advice, not to present himself at the theater.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Morris O. Evans, “Asiarch,” in *The International Standard Encyclopaedia*, James Orr, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 1:282.

2. The presence of all ten men in the city informs us that these events occurred in May A.D. 54 during the month-long Artemisium, the festival of Artemis. The city of Ephesus was the site of much revelry including the phallic cult. There was much ado in town and the Asiarchs presided over the entire affair. Interestingly, these men knew Paul and, considering him a friend, sent him a message to lay low.
3. These men were in charge of the festival and thus responsible to maintain order. They did not want Rome to discover they could not keep the peace and thus wanted to avoid a circumstance they feared could end in Paul being killed.
4. Meanwhile, back at the theater things continued to heat up:

**Acts 19:32** - So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together.