

Present Truth

2 Peter 1:12

Dear Readers,

February 2000

"Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour." (Titus 1:4) Thank the Lord that He has brought us safely to see this new year. I pray the Lord's richest blessing upon you in this coming year. May each of us make the most important resolution of our lives, which is to come to Christ, ask for forgiveness, and surrender our lives wholly to His leading. Even though January 1, 2000 did not bring troublous times, we know from Scripture that they are not far off. "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." (1 Thessalonians 5:3-6)

Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake

by Lynnford Beachy

"An unjust man is an abomination to the just: and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked." (Proverbs 29:27) The upright are an abomination to the wicked, because by their life, words, and actions they rebuke the lifestyle of the wicked. Therefore the wicked hate, and seek to persecute the upright.

"They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly." (Amos 5:10) The righteous, or upright, cannot help but speak uprightly, and because of this the wicked hate them. John wrote, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you." (1 John 3:13) Although the world may hate the righteous, the righteous are not to hate their persecutors. Jesus said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." (Matthew 5:44)

Paul wrote, "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." (Galatians 4:29) Those who are unconverted persecute the righteous. Notice that the righteous do not persecute the unconverted, but the unconverted persecute the righteous. Whenever you see persecution be sure the persecutors are following the Devil in his work. The righteous will never persecute others or they are not upright in their ways. Not all those who are persecuted are righteous, but all those who persecute are definitely not righteous.

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12)

Luke wrote, "And as they [the disciples] spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide." (Acts 4:1-3) The priests and leaders of the church were grieved that the disciples preached the gospel. The disciples were persecuted because of what they believed. The priests could not show from the Bible that they were wrong, so they resorted to force to keep the disciples from preaching the truth. When church leaders resort to force to get people to believe what they want them to believe, this is nothing less than persecution. Many church leaders do this even today. They cannot use the Bible to prove the gospel teachers are wrong, so they call the police to get them out of their presence, or resort to a more subtil tactics like slander-ing the person's character. This is nothing less than following the footsteps of Satan.

A lesson from the book of Acts

The book of Acts demonstrates how the gospel of Christ spread in the early church, and how many of the leaders of the established church system persecuted those who taught contrary to their accepted doctrines. When some of the dis-

ciples were apprehended for their preaching the church leaders said, “What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.” (Acts 4:16, 17) The church leaders used Satan’s methods of force and threatening to get people to do what they wanted.

After the church leaders made the decision to threaten the disciples, “they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.” (Acts 4:18-21)

A true man of God will not buckle under to the taunts and threatening of Satan’s children. “The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.” (Proverbs 28:1) When God’s children are asked and threatened not to speak the truth anymore, they are not to back down and keep quiet. When the Lord has called us to spread the truth among whatever group of people, we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard. Some people think that we are to respect the church leaders’ authority by doing whatever they say. If you listen to them when they tell you to stop preaching the truth and spreading truth filled literature, then you are obeying man rather than God.

When the disciples were preaching the truth and healing the sick “the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.” (Acts 5:17, 18) Notice who it was doing the persecuting. Those who claimed to be God’s people, the church leaders, laid hands on the apostles and put them in prison. Whenever the church leaders call for the government to persecute anyone, be sure they are not following the Lord, but that wicked one.

Although the church leaders forcefully restrained the disciples from preaching the gospel by placing them in a prison, the Lord had other plans. The account goes on, “the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught.” (Acts 5:19-21) The Lord commanded the apostles to speak the truth in the temple—notice where the apostles were sent. The very ones who

claimed to be God’s church were not even teaching the people the gospel truth. Therefore, since God had not given up on the people in the church, God sent His apostles to preach the truth to the people in the temple (the church that was not preaching the truth). God loves His people, and when the church leaders are not going to preach the truth, He has to send people who are not part of that church system to preach the truth to His people.

Jesus said it very well, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.” (Matthew 23:13) Even when God’s true messengers bring the truth into the church, most of the church leaders fight against it. They don’t want to hear the truth themselves and try, by force, to keep those who would hear the truth from ever hearing it. The blood of those souls will be required at the hand of all those professed ministers. May they see their wicked course before it’s too late.

We ought to obey God rather than men

While the church leaders were celebrating their victory over the disciples, “Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:25-29) When the church leaders commanded the disciples not to speak in the name of Jesus anymore, did they calmly sit in a corner with their mouths shut? No! They spoke boldly the words of truth.

The disciples did not end their discourse so abruptly. They went on to declare unto the church leaders, “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him. When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them. Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men....

And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.” (Acts 5:30-42)

The great concern of the church leaders

The reason the church leaders were so afraid of the people hearing the truth is that their position as church leaders was being threatened. They knew that, if the people understood the truth, they would lose their jobs as church leaders and the people would no longer give them the respect and support they thought they deserved.

The chief priests and Pharisees expressed this reasoning before Christ’s death when they said, “What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place [of authority] and nation.” (John 11:47, 48) The leaders of the Jews understood that if they let Jesus continue on, they would lose their position as church leaders. This they were not willing to let happen, and determined to kill Jesus. They were not as concerned about whether Jesus was speaking the truth as they were of the possibility of losing their position.

After these church leaders expressed their concern of losing their position, the high priest said, “Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put Him to death.” (John 11:49-53)

Notice how far these church leaders were willing to go in order to retain their positions. “The chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on Him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that He had spoken this parable against them. And they watched Him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of His words, that so they might deliver Him unto the power and authority of the governor. And they asked Him, saying, Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly: Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no? But He perceived

their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar’s. And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s, and unto God the things which be God’s. And they could not take hold of His words before the people: and they marvelled at His answer, and held their peace.” (Luke 20:19-26)

The Jews wanted to trick Jesus, so they gathered together unconverted men to act as if they were righteous and try to trick Jesus into saying something that would enable them to deliver Him to the government. When churches use the government to enforce their penalties they are following the footsteps of the papal power that was prominent during the Dark Ages. We can read from the pages of history how this misguided zeal has been the cause of the death of millions of martyrs.

The church leaders finally got their wish and were able to arrest the Son of God. “All the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death: And when they had bound Him, they led Him away, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor.” (Matthew 27:1, 2) The Jewish leaders delivered Jesus into the hands of the government. The government could find no fault in Jesus, but were compelled by the church leaders to crucify Him. It is a terrible sin for a church to use the government to enforce its penalties. The message Jesus was preaching was true and, since the church leaders could not prove their position from the Scriptures, Satan tempted them to use the strong arm of the government to come to their aid.

Once delivered into the hands of the government “one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?” (John 18:22, 23) Jesus had no faults, yet an officer smote Him as if He had done something wrong. If a person is to suffer punishment for a crime, they should have the right to know what they have done wrong. If I have done wrong, show from the Scriptures where I am wrong, then I will repent, but if not, leave me alone.

Martin Luther made this stand when he said, “ ‘I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the councils, because it is clear as the day that they have frequently erred and contradicted each other. Unless therefore I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture, or by the clearest reasoning,—unless I am persuaded by means of the passages I have quoted,—and unless they thus render my conscience bound by the Word of God, I cannot and I will not retract, for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience.’ And then, looking round on this assembly before which he stood, and which held his life in its hands, he said:

'Here I stand, I can do no other; may god help me? Amen!' ” (D'Aubigne, *The History of the Reformation*, book 7, chapter 8, page 245)

Government persecution instigated by the church

After the church delivered Christ up to the government, “the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto Him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped Him, and put on Him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand: and they bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head. And after that they had mocked Him, they took the robe off from Him, and put His own raiment on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.” (Matthew 27:27-31)

It was the soldiers of the government who crucified Jesus. The Jewish church leaders used the arm of the government to enforce their wicked goals. Would Christ ever use the arm of the government to force people to do what He wants them to do? No! Would the disciples ever have used the strong arm of the government to get people to do what they wanted them to do? No! Should we today, as followers of the Lord, use the strong arm of the government to get people to do what we want them to do? No! All “Christians” who have ever used the government in religious matters to get people to do what they want them to are truly following Satan, and are of their father the Devil; for he was a murderer from the beginning.

The first Christian martyr

There were many people murdered for their faith before Christ died. The book of Acts records the death of the first Christian martyred for his faith. “There arose certain of the synagogue... disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Then they suborned [or bribed] men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.” (Acts 6:9-15) Satan’s people use Satan’s devices. When the church leaders bribe witnesses to bear false witness they are certainly not God’s people, “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.” (Matthew 7:20)

Immediately after these men had given a false testimony about Stephen’s preaching, “Then said the high priest, Are these things so? And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,” (Acts 7:1, 2) Stephen goes on to give a long discourse about the history of the church, and then rebukes the church leaders for their actions. He said, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

“When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” (Acts 7:51-60) When men resort to force to get others to do what they want, or believe like they do, they are following Satan.

God sends His people to speak the truth

God often sent His messengers to the synagogues to preach the truth. Some think it wrong to go into another church and preach the truth to the people. Those who hold this view must say that Christ and His disciples were wrong to go into the synagogues of the Jews and reason with them out of the Scriptures. From the time Paul was converted he continually entered into the synagogues to reason with the Jews out of the Scriptures. “And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.” (Acts 9:20)

“When they [Paul and his company] departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.” (Acts 13:14-16) Paul went into the synagogue and sat down, and when he

had an opportunity to speak to the people he gave a long discourse on the history of the church, he then accused the church leaders of killing the Son of God. He said, "Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him. And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that He should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre. But God raised Him from the dead." (Acts 13:26-30)

Immediately after Paul's discourse, "when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium." (Acts 13:42-51) Those who, without Scripture to back up their position, are not willing to change, are driven to persecute those who are a reproof to them.

"And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the

Jews, and part with the apostles. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about." (Acts 14:1-6)

Paul's determination to preach the truth

Even after facing so much persecution for preaching the gospel, Paul continued to preach the truth to whomever would hear. "When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few." (Acts 17:1-4) Paul, in the face of persecution, continually entered into the synagogues to reason with the Jews out of the Scriptures.

After seeing how many believed on the Lord Jesus because of Paul's preaching, "the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go." (Acts 17:5-9) The unbelieving Jews took evil men of the baser sort to accomplish their goals. They knew that wicked men would be more willing to fulfill their wicked goals for them. Is it any worse to do the wicked deed yourself than to have someone else do it for you?

As soon as it was known how the Jews of Thessalonica had treated Jason, "the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and

stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.” (Acts 17:10-14) The wicked, unbelieving Jews continually stirred up the people against Paul, yet he continued to preach the truth. “Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.” (Acts 17:17)

The Lord instructs Paul to keep preaching

“And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.” (Acts 18:7-10) The Lord continued to push Paul onward to preach the truth wherever he went.

“And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat.” (Acts 18:12-16) The Jews persisted in trying to use the strong arm of the law to accomplish what they could not do by reason and Scriptural proof. The charges were so ridiculous that the judge wanted nothing to do with such foolishness.

Paul was a very persistent man. Even in the face of persecution he continued to preach the truth. “He came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.” (Acts 18:19-21) Paul wanted to be sure to make it to the Jewish feast, for there would be many Jews with whom he could reason out of the Scriptures, and this he did boldly. “And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.” (Acts 19:8)

Paul gets arrested

“The Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.” (Acts 21:27-32)

The wickedness of these church leaders had gone so far that the authorities had to step in to rescue an innocent man’s life from their hands. The Roman soldiers carried him off to be detained until the matter could be settled. The next day the Roman soldiers gathered the Jews together, along with Paul, to attempt to ascertain the problem. Again the Jews came very close to tearing Paul limb from limb, and would have except the soldiers rescued him again. Finally the chief captain sent Paul to Felix to be judged of him. The chief captain wrote the following in his letter to Felix:

“This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.” (Acts 23:27-29)

Paul was safely transported to Felix, “And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect [Greek: haireisis] of the Nazarenes: Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of

whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.” (Acts 24:1-9)

The Jews falsely accused Paul. They could not prove anything they said and had no witnesses against him. This type of case usually does not get very far in court.

“Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that *after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers*, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.” (Acts 24:10-16) Just because the majority of Christianity view a particular doctrine to be heresy does not mean that it is. The record of history shows that the majority are seldom right in religious matters.

The only reason Paul was brought before a judge was because of what he believed. He said to Felix, “Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.” (Acts 24:21)

Paul is brought before judges once again

After two years of waiting in prison, Paul was called to be judged by Festus. “And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove. While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.” (Acts 25:7, 8) Paul had done no harm to anyone, yet he was brought before judges as if he were a vile man.

“And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul’s cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the mor-

row I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.” (Acts 25:14-19) Festus further declared to king Agrippa, “For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.” (Acts 25:27)

A man can become so hardened that he thinks he is doing God service by falsely accusing, and even murdering, a man who believes differently than he on religious issues. Jesus warned us, “They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.” (John 16:2) Let us follow Paul’s example, and not the Pharisees’.

“He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.” (Proverbs 17:15) “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20)

Paul testifies before the king

Paul boldly spoke before king Agrippa, “And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope’s sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” (Acts 26:6-8)

Paul went on, “For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

“And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds. And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: And


when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.” (Acts 26:21-32)

The unconverted Jewish leaders had many false accusations to bring against Paul, which even if they were true, there would be no legal reason to keep Paul in bonds or kill him. There was no law against preaching the truth. Today many church leaders are seeking to make laws against preaching the truth if it goes against the views of the majority. May God deliver us from such unjust men!

Paul is taken to Rome

Paul was taken to Rome to be judged by Caesar. “And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to ap-

peal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.” (Acts 28:17-19) The government wanted to let Paul go because there was no reason for him to be bound, but the Jews spoke against it. The government allowed the church to tell it what to do, and religious persecution was the inevitable result.

Paul dwelt in Rome for two years preaching to whom-ever would hear. Paul was an outspoken voice for God in his day. How many people today can God rely on to preach His Word boldly even in the face of persecution? How many of us would be willing to go wherever God leads to preach His Word? God may call you to go into the highways and byways. He may call you to go into your local “synagogue” (various churches) to preach the truth to those whom He loves. Will you go? Let us preach the truth though the heavens fall. “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?” (Psalms 118:6) 

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