

The Great Stories of the Early Church
77-Paul in Roman Custody01
Dealing With Governmental and Religious Authority as a Believer 02
Acts 23:12-29

- 12 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.
- 13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.
- 14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.
- 15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.
- 16 And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.
- 17 Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him.
- 18 So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.
- 19 Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?
- 20 And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly.
- 21 But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.
- 22 So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.
- 23 And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night;
- 24 And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.
- 25 And he wrote a letter after this manner:
- 26 Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting.
- 27 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.
- 28 And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council:
- 29 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.
- 30 And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.

- 31 Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris.
- 32 On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle:
- 33 Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.
- 34 And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia;
- 35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

Introduction:

Sometimes in the course of a long series like this we need to pause and set our minds in order to remind ourselves of what is really going on. We do not want to get so lost in the story that we forget why we are here.

We are facing in this story the reality concerning the evil to which religious men are sometimes willing to go to maintain their position and defend their status quo.

Remember that this is the same general group which has already murdered Stephen, a man whose only crime was to repent of his sins, believe on Jesus Christ and commit himself without reservation to Christ's service. This group has also applauded Herod for killing the apostle James and for arresting Peter, presumably with the intent to kill him.

Acts 12:1-4

- 1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.
- 2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.
- 3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)
- 4 And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

This was the same group that had commissioned Saul of Tarsus, now Paul the apostle, to harass and imprison Christians.

Acts 8:3

- 3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

Acts 9:1-2

- 1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,
- 2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

Please understand, the prisons of that day were not for long term incarceration but to hold prisoners until their punishment could be determined and carried out.

And note, here and in the time of our text, they had nearly beaten Paul to death in the street, untried and uncondemned, and had nearly torn him to pieces in the council with the Chief Captain observing.

These were people who claimed to be worshipers of the One True and Living God, the God of Abraham, David, Isaiah, and Daniel. They believed and claimed that when they offered sacrifice every morning and evening that the smoke rose up to heaven and that God was pleased with them and what they were doing.

But now there is a conspiracy of 40 men who have taken basically a death oath to kill Paul and they are in league with the chief religious rulers of the Jews. Have you ever wondered where such hatred comes from? We have seen it played out before us over the last few years as men who supposedly are worshipers of the True God have brutally and savagely murdered people whose only sin was being a Christian and not a Muslim.

This group of Jews in our story was the same basic group and filled with the same hatred that had been behind the crucifixion of Jesus. But, again, why would anyone hate Him so fiercely?

Neither Jesus nor Stephen nor James nor Peter nor Paul were men who were doing evil to anyone. They were not thieves or murderers but we men who had not done violence to anyone.

Their crime was that they proclaimed a message that was so fundamentally offensive to these people that it stirred a deep and profound bitterness, anger and hatred within them.

The message? “You are not right with God. In fact, you are so wrong with Him that unless you repent of your sins and believe with all of your heart in His Son, you are going to be destroyed and cast into an eternal lake of fire. God has demanded repentance and faith from you on penalty of eternal torment.”

This is the message that has stirred the hatred and anger of unregenerate men from the very beginning.

Gen 4:1-5

- 1 And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.
- 2 And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.
- 3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.
- 4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:
- 5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

We know how that story ended. Abel was the manifest evidence that God required something more of man than Cain was willing to give.

Gen 4:6-8

- 6 And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?
- 7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.
- 8 And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

Wouldn't you like to be able to hear a recording of that conversation in which Abel undoubtedly explained to his brother how he viewed and worshiped God. Yet Cain, despite the open invitation of God and the counsel of his brother, hated him and killed him.

1 John 3:11-13

- 11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.
- 12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.
- 13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

The apostles all knew both theologically and experientially that the message of repentance is and always has been a message which stirs hatred.

Cain hated Abel because God had used the occasion of their sacrifices to manifest the reality that Cain was wicked and that his so-called 'worship' had been rejected by God.

You will recall, perhaps, that Jesus accused the religious Jews of hypocrisy for pretending to love the prophets when they actually hated them.

Matt 5:11-12

- 11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
- 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Matt 23:29-33

- 29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,
- 30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.
- 31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.
- 32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.
- 33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

And what was the message of the prophets that had stirred such hatred against them? “You are not right with God and judgment is coming upon you because of your sins.”

But not everyone who called himself a prophet was hated. There were prophets that were quite well liked in Israel.

Isa 30:9-11

- 9 That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD:
10 Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits:
11 Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.

Isa 30:9-11

- 9 For this is a rebellious people, false sons,
Sons who refuse to listen
To the instruction of the LORD;
10 Who say to the seers, "You must not see visions";
And to the prophets, "You must not prophesy to us what is right,
Speak to us pleasant words,
Prophecy illusions.
11 "Get out of the way, turn aside from the path,
Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel." NASU

We could bring the issue forward to our day and ask, “what kind of churches do people typically like?”

Or, we could ask another question, “when a church begins to weaken its’ message and soften the gospel, what is the first truth to be abandoned?” The answer is that it is the message of sin, condemnation, and repentance. Erase that and most people will have no problem with you.

But there is something that stirs an anger deep in the soul of an unregenerate soul when confronted with the idea that he has sinned against God. And men have almost totally stamped out that message in our day.

Allow me, if you will, to lay the case before you. Paul developed the doctrinal position in the book of Romans that men are sinners without hope apart from the mercy of God.

In v.16 of chapter one we find these words.

Rom 1:16

- 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Notice that he began with the words, “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” These are interesting

words and they are said against a backdrop. The gospel as he preached it made people upset and he had already suffered much at the hands of angry men because of the gospel.

Now, we have heard, and it is true, that ‘gospel’ means “good news,” and it does but look at the next two verses.

Rom 1

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

In the gospel two things are revealed and they are the central elements of the news, the righteousness of God and the wrath of God against the ungodliness of men.

The gospel affirms the supreme holiness of God, His absolute moral perfection and consistency. Because God is the very essence of moral purity in its most absolute form, He, as the scriptures say in another place, is “angry with the wicked every day.” He has declared through Ezekiel, “the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

The Perfection of God is set against the imperfection of man as a basic premise of the gospel. Now, if you have noticed, men do not like to be told that they are wicked. They do not like to have their sins exposed for all to see or to be confronted over them. Yet this is where the gospel starts and things do not get better as it goes along.

Rom 1

19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

Not only is God Holy and man wicked but there are evident things concerning God that He has placed in front of their eyes and minds, His Eternal Power and Godhead, revealed through the things that He has made, leaving man without excuse. There is no place to hide from the inevitable reality of the existence and power of God. This Universe nor the things in it can be rationally explained outside of an intelligent and omnipotent Being as Designer, Creator and Sustainer. The more man learns of the Creation the more obvious it becomes that it is infinitely and elegantly designed.

But this reality is distasteful to man, as Paul pointed out.

Rom 1

21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

Refusing, out of wickedness, to honor God as God and be thankful to Him, men turned in their vain (empty, useless, worthless) imaginations to envision the Creator as something less than themselves, something they could comprehend, master, and control.

But the effect of making this decision had a horrendous impact upon the moral consciousness and nature of man so that he became deranged and depraved morally, descending into an abyss of immorality and wickedness.

Rom 1

24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:

27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,

30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:

32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

Not only did they descend into wickedness, but sin itself in all of its depravity became their entertainment.

In order to proclaim the gospel, these things must be said and men really do not like to hear these things said, which is the reason that Paul needed to talk about not being ashamed of the gospel.

Paul continued to explain that religious men are not exempted from the problem, even the most religious of men known to the ancient world, the Orthodox Jew.

Rom 2

1 Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.

2 But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which

commit such things.

- 3 And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?
- 4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?
- 5 But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;
- 6 Who will render to every man according to his deeds:

The reality is that the unconverted religious man is as wicked as the man whom he condemns because he has no control over the wickedness of his own heart. The things he condemns in others he practices himself, only in secret, or maybe in the privacy of his own mind, but he does practice them and he knows that he does.

And even though he knows more about God than the rank heathen, and knows that God is good, he does not seek God in repentance for his wickedness but continues on sinning more and more, saving and storing up more and more judgment against himself for the Day of Judgment.

Oh yes, there is more bad news. All of man's wickedness is going to be called to account by God once this life is over. He is going to give everyone exactly what is coming to them and He does not care who they are.

Rom 2

- 7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:
- 8 But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath,
- 9 Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;
- 10 But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile:
- 11 For there is no respect of persons with God.

It does not matter if one is Jew or Gentile.

Rom 2

- 12 For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;
- 13 (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.
- 14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:
- 15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another:)

- 16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.
- 17 Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,
- 18 And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;
- 19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,
- 20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.
- 21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?
- 22 Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?
- 23 Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?
- 24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.

Angry yet? The Jews were fuming by this point.

Yet Paul continued on, finishing his point with this set of quotations from the Jewish scriptures.

Rom 3

- 10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:
- 11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.
- 12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.
- 13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:
- 14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:
- 15 Their feet are swift to shed blood:
- 16 Destruction and misery are in their ways:
- 17 And the way of peace have they not known:
- 18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.
- 19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.
- 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

By this time the man who does not know God is ready to scream in the face of the one who is proclaiming the gospel of the New Testament, "I am not like that!" But it is a lie and he knows it is a lie, so he is left with two choices: bow and admit the truth asking for forgiveness sincerely, or rage against the information and the one who has brought it.

This is why Paul was hated so and why the men were bound to silence him whatever it took.

This, my friend, has been the message of all true churches and all true ministers from the very

beginning. Man apart from the New Birth, the Grace of God, True Repentance and True Faith is in a hopeless situation, so hopeless that there was only one being in the Universe Who could solve it, God Himself.

So, the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory.

God made Him to be sin for us and He bore our sins in His Own Body on the cross that we might be saved... but only those who will honestly own their sins, confess them and repent of them, believing on the Work of Christ as their only hope.

Do you understand now why they hated Paul? Jesus said that they will hate you too if you take this position on the matter.