

Paul's Defense and Departure from Corinth

Acts 18:12-22

For a full year and a half, Paul is teaching the Word of God in Corinth, before being brought to court by the Jews, and eventually leaving for points east – Ephesus, Antioch, and Galatia.

I want to bring you 1600 years later to another Christian hauled before another judge, not in a pagan city like Corinth, but a Christian city in England.

One of the most famous Puritans of all time, Richard Baxter of Kidderminster, was brought before the bar of Judge Jeffreys in the year 1684, to answer the charge of sedition.

He had preached on how the Bishops of England had broken the law of love when non-conformist ministers were driven from their homes, stripped of their property, and locked up in dungeons.

And so Baxter – himself one of these non-conformists – was charged for not using the Prayer Book of the Anglicans.

He was given no time to prepare. And as the 70 year old Pastor entered the court, the Judge nearly flew out of his chair at the sight of him.

His two lawyers had scarcely begun addressing the jury, when the Chief Justice interrupted them: “Ah...I know you well. I will set a mark on you. You are a patron of the faction. This is an old rogue, a schismatic knave, a hypocritical villain. He hates the Liturgy.” So the Judge turned up his eyes, clasped his hands, and began to sing through

his nose in imitation of what he thought to be Baxter's style of praying, "Lord, we are thy people, thy peculiar people, thy dear people."

The lawyer gently reminded the court that the late King had thought Baxter deserving of a bishopric. Jeffreys replied: "And what ailed the old blockhead, then, that he did not take it?" His fury rose almost to madness, he called Baxter a dog, and swore that it would be no more than justice to whip such a villain through the whole city.

When his other lawyer did no better, Baxter sought to defend himself, saying he had spoken highly of some Bishops. The Judge replied: "Richard, Richard, do you think we will let you poison the court? Richard, thou are an old knave; you have written books enough to load a cart, and every book as full of sedition as an egg is full of meat."

Baxter was sentenced to a heavy fine, which he would have to lie in prison until paid – a punishment that was thankfully pardoned.

This account brings before us the troubles Christians have had in the courts of this fallen world.

Thankfully, Paul did not have to raise a finger or speak a word of his defense, and the pagan Judge Gallio drove out his accusers.

But this would not always be the case.

Our message today will be easy to follow – remember 4-3-2-1.

Consider with me then how we find four very important truths lying in these lines.

At the very least, see first how important they are for us spiritually.

The Lord had promised Paul: "Paul, I will be with you; no man shall harm you."

Jesus did not say, “none shall oppose you” but none shall harm you.

And now Sosthenes, the replacement of the chief of the Synagogue, the convert Crispus, hauls Paul before the governor.

The charge is, to use the Latin, a *religio illicita*; holding an illicit religion, unapproved by the Empire.

The Jews sought to distinguish the Christians from their own approved religion, to leave them out in the cold, so to speak.

We might well guess at how Paul would have defended the church as a continuance of the Jewish hope; of worshipping according to the fathers claimed by Israel the Jews; of being the true circumcision; of both Jew and Gentile believers being the Israel of God.

But Paul does not have to say a word.

The words of Psalm 46 – “BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD” – seem to float over this passage.

See how the Lord Jehovah turns the heart of the king to do his pleasure.

Gallio dismisses the case; he sees right through it; this is no matter of wrongs or vicious crimes = roughly equivalent to our statutes of misdemeanors or felonies.

If it were, he would have taken this matter up; but since it is an internal debate over words, names, and your law – you see to it!

So see first how the Lord works in and over all the matters of our lives, even the court systems that we are under.

Second let us recognize the historical importance.

This is not a clever story Luke has made up.

We know of this man Gallio from the history books. The Bible is a historical book – of God’s dealings with men in history!

He was born in Cordova, Spain. His name originally was Marcus Annaeus Novatus, eldest son of Seneca, the orator who lived 50 BC to 40 AD.

And he was the brother of the famous Stoic philosopher, Seneca, 3 BC – 65 AD.

When his family moved to Rome in the time of Tiberius, he was adopted by the famous family of rhetorician Lucius Junius Gallio, and thus became known as Gallio.

He entered government service as a praetor for a period of 5 years, before being assigned as proconsul of Achaia – similar to our governors.

There is an inscription at Delphi recording his holding this important office – a one year term – appointed by Claudius.

We can even narrow down his term as running from July of 51 to June of 52!

So you might see how the Jews might take this new appointment as opportunity to get rid of Paul.

We also know something of his character.

A man by the name of Dio Cassius praised his wit; his brother praised his uniform disposition – “no mortal is pleasant to any one person as Gallio is to everybody.”

He was known for tolerance and kindness.

We know that Gallio fell sick and after his service over Achaia, went on a cruise to recover his health.

We also know that he, along with his brother, Seneca, the tutor of Nero, fell victim to that madman; he forced them both to commit suicide.

So dear ones, know surely that God's Word is not some myth built up by clever human minds.

It seems to take more faith to believe the Bible is a myth than to believe the consistent testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ – exactly as He had promised.

The Bible is a historically accurate Book.

Then, let us see the importance here in the Lord's overruling the designs of the wicked.

Here are the Jews driven away from the Judgement Seat.

The Roman Governor had guards in the Market called 'lichtors', men carrying rods.

It looks like these were called now to drive the accusers of Paul and of the Christians away.

We probably cannot justify Gallio's ignoring the mistreatment of Sosthenes, the Jewish leader.

But one thing is for certain – this is the same treatment the Jews wanted for the Christians.

They wanted Paul and the church to be driven outside of what is legal, and be so abused at the hands of men.

But the God who hung Haman by his own noose, is here giving the Jews, who would not live in peace with Christians, a taste of their own medicine.

This is a lesson in divine retribution.

Job 4.8 says: “Those who sow trouble harvest it.”

¹¹ God *is* a just judge, and God is angry *with the wicked* every day.

¹² If he does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready. ¹³ He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts. ¹⁴ Behold, *the wicked* brings forth iniquity; yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood. ¹⁵ He made a pit and dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch *which* he made. ¹⁶ His trouble shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown. (Psa 7:11-16)

The last and chief importance demonstrates the need for the protection of religious liberties.

Understand that this decision by Gallio is made by the highest court to this point.

Gallio’s action would set a very high precedent – at least for a little while.

Here was a governor who refused to hear a case against Christians being an illicit religion.

And so, there is relative peace for the spreading Gentile church for the next 10 years or so.

We should take stock of the Lord's protections of His people by the civil government.

The church needs that protection in a world such as ours.

And we can see the development of those protections and freedoms throughout history.

We can see at last Christianity being licensed by the state under Constantine.

We can see the shift from making the King's brand of Christianity of the accepted religion, and the King protecting all forms of Christianity.

But this makes it only so far as religious tolerance.

A push forward was adopted by America – that the State does not **give** religion freedom, but God **does**; and the State only protects **what has been given** from above instead of playing God over the church.

But such has been greatly eroded in the West; and there has grown again an outward antagonism to Christ and His people.

Nowadays, when believers express opposition to ungodly ways, they are not only vilified in the public press, they even lose their jobs and families.

We should earnestly pray that this trend would be changed; that men and women would come to their senses; before Christians again are pushed underground further from living their faith.

Paul's departure from Corinth then is after many more days of ministry according to verse 18.

He heads eastward along the waterway to Cenchrea, where a church would be founded, according to Romans 16 – where Phoebe the servant is commended.

Here begins three important strands for future service by the great Apostle.

First, his concern is to return to Antioch, to report on the progress of the Gospel on this second missionary journey.

Missions is a whole-church work; Paul lives and breathes in that way; he would return to his home-base for encouragement, to the sending churches, as well as to rest himself for some time.

Do I have to remind you that you are part of a greater work; that missionaries are your servants sent forth; that you stand with them?

How have you helped your missionaries recently? How can you help them? Much in every way: Encouraging them verbally, praying for them faithfully, giving for them sacrificially.

Secondly, Paul seems to have concern to shore up Jewish Christian support.

The vow that is taken points to his faithfulness of being a Jew to the Jews.

Several see the Nazarite vow of the Pentateuch here – of the need to offer the cut hair with one's sacrifice within 30 days in Jerusalem.

Thus Paul moves quickly to Jerusalem from Caesarea-Philippi, before going back to Antioch.

The news had reached the church in Jerusalem of his having withdrawn from the Jewish Synagogue in Corinth, and subsequent shame upon the Jewish leadership.

Perhaps fresh persecution had been unleashed in Israel's capital against the Christians, and the Jewish believers were wobbling.

A visit from Paul to them might be just the right thing.

Then thirdly, Paul takes aim at the greatest city of Asia Minor, Ephesus.

This return to Antioch are stepping stones to the third missionary journey, bringing Paul to where he had desired to go on the second journey, but was forbidden by the Holy Spirit.

Here the same Spirit shows us two roads which converge where Paul can stay now only a brief time.

Here are Priscilla and Aquila left in Ephesus – in order to bring Apollos along in his Christian growth, and the disciples in Ephesus who know only the baptism of John.

And here comes Paul behind Apollos, who has moved on to Corinth, and the extended work Paul is to do in Ephesus, which was the religious capital of sorts in the Roman Empire.

We will return to these things next week.

Here, however, let us close with two remarks:

We have seen four important elements regarding Paul's defense – spiritually, historically, judicially, and legislatively.

We have seen three paths ahead of Paul as he departs Corinth – to his home church in Antioch, to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, and to the church-to-be in Ephesus.

To bring these together, let us tie two matters together.

On the one hand, how we should strive and pray for better protections for the gospel's progress throughout the world.

I read how, a hundred years ago, President Teddy Roosevelt found it beneficial to park his navy off the coast of Turkey, as his diplomats held peace talks with the leadership there, in part, because of the restrictions against American missionaries.

We should pray that closed countries – whose leader's hearts are as hard as old Judge Jeffrey's – might be overcome by saner and stronger leaders.

We should pray for the continued benefits brought with our own military forces today throughout the world.

Paul commands you to seek such protection:

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. ⁷ For this I was

appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. ⁸ Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. (1Ti 2:1-8 NAU)

Alexander McLeod has a good word:

The Church of Christ is a kingdom not of this world, but the kingdoms of this world are bound to recognize its existence... Jehovah has raised Jesus from the grave to a throne in heaven (Eph. 1:20,21). He raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might and dominion. The Mediator, thus exalted over the highest grades of creature authority, demands of all his subjects to bow the knee before him. He requires of the powers that are named in this world, that in their official stations they would remove impediments to the progress of religion, and afford protections to his church. (Messiah, Governor of the Nations of the Earth, quoted on p. 223, You Are My Witnesses, Gordon Keddie)

But at the same time – and this is the second strand – we are not to wait for civil peace and liberties before pursuing the Great King’s Great Commission.

Jesus has said, Go! Make Disciples of All the Nations! Not just those which are opened to you.

This is about as close as Christianity gets to being subversive to nations.

But even that is framed, not in disobedience, but obedience.

Charles Hodge spoke well of the nature of this influence as that of leaven working through the whole lump, rather than a hammer coming down upon the heads of men.

What nation, what country, cannot do with more truth, more integrity, more godliness, more character in men, in families, in the workplace, in government?

What nation could not do with more humility, more love, more forgiveness, and more self-restraint, more self-government?

Those are the paradise-like qualities the gospel brings.

And if the people or churches coming in the name of Christ do not have these qualities, well, we must ask if the words of Jesus to the church at Philadelphia don't apply:

⁹ "Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie-- indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. (Rev 3:9)

So pray for greater peace, but continue to preach the peace of grace.

Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. (2Ti 4:2)

Take opportunities, make opportunities!

Why? Well, one, all-encompassing reason: the glory of God.

There is coming a day when we will all stand, not before a great Roman Governor, or a Caesar; not before the judgment of men, ancient or modern.

We all will stand before the true King and Judge of all the Earth, Jesus Christ, the Ruler of heaven and earth.

Gallio will stand before Him, as well as Pilate, Herod, and Nero.

And what will we do on that fearful day?

The Gospel alone will be our salvation, to the glory of God.