



"Silencing the Critics" (Part 5)

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1 Peter 2:14b-15



13 Submit yourselves to every human institution, for the Lord's sake, whether to a king as one in authority, 14 or to governors as those sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing right you might silence the ignorance of foolish men. 16 [Act] as free men, but not as those using their freedom as a

cover for evil, but as servants of God. 17 Honor everyone. Love the brethren. Fear God. Honor the King.

– 1 Peter 2:13-17, As translated from the Greek New Testament by T. Bartolucci.

I. The Believer's Submission to Civil Authority: Silencing the Critics (2:13–17)

The phrase "silencing the critics" comes from verse 15 which forms the heart of the passage

- A. The Command for Submission (2:13a)
- B. The Motive for Submission (2:13b)
- C. The Extent of Submission (2:13c-14)

"Respectfully submit to civil authority so that the critics be silenced."

- 1. Peter focuses on two specific reasons why these governments and leaders are given by God in verse 14
 - a. For the punishment of evildoers; For the praise of those who do right

D. The Reason for Submission 2:15

- 1. Peter has much to say about "the will of God" (cf. 3:7; 4:2; 4:19)
- 2. They will literally be muzzled
 - a. Phimoō (φίμωω) A graphic word meaning "to muzzle" or "to gag"
 - (1) It's translated "speechless" in Matthew 22:12
 - (2) It's used of Jesus putting the Sadducees to silence with his wisdom in 22:34
 - (3) It's used of Jesus quieting the storm in Mark 4:39
 - (4) It's used of muzzling an ox in 1 Timothy 5:18
- 3. This "ignorance" is largely spiritual in nature (cf. Prov. 1:7)
 - a. Compare 2 Corinthians 10:3-5
- 4. The Apostle Paul and Acts 23-25 (Paul as a model citizen)

In the final chapters of Acts we find Paul a prisoner of Rome. He had many enemies among the Jews who were angered at his allegiance to Christ, so angry that they plotted to murder him.

Near the end of his 3rd missionary journey, these enemies of the cross had him arrested in Jerusalem on false charges. That began a long period in which Paul was required to appear before several magistrates to defend himself.

First of all, in Acts 23, he is required to face the Jewish Sanhedrin. It was the Sanhedrin that formed the ruling body of the nation of Israel. They held final authority in religious matters, but had only limited authority in matters of civil law (occupying Rome held that position).

Paul appears before the Sanhedrin, as Luke records it in 23rd chapter of Acts. Note Paul's opening statement in v. 1:

And Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day."

In other words, "My conscience is clear, I can look you in the eye and say that I have not done wrong with my life before God or men." I don't know that he said anything wrong, but the High Priest, Ananias, reacted to his words by having him struck on the mouth. Paul's reaction?

"God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! And do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?"

We may sympathize with Paul. It was a violation of the Law according to Deut. 25:2. But his knee-jerk reaction was out of line. Remember what he later wrote:

1 Corinthians 4:12 . . . when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;

Those words reflect the conduct of Christ (1 Peter 2:23).

Remember, it was Jesus who stood before the High Priest in John 18 and who was also struck on the face, but his response was much different:

"If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?"

It was as if Paul were being tested. God had him struck on the face in same manner as his Lord, but his reaction was not in keeping with that of his Lord.

4 But the bystanders said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"⁵ And Paul said, "I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

Paul realized that it was he who was in violation of the Law & he apologized for it. He humbly acknowledged his sin.

There have been times when I have done the same thing, when I have reacted, even toward those in authority, w/anger & have spoken out of turn & have had to likewise acknowledge my sin in doing so.

Lesson #1 - When we fail to respect authority we must repent and apologize for our sin.

Paul went on to share his hope in the resurrection which resulted in a debate between the Sadducees & Pharisees on the matter and such a riot ensued that the commander, fearing for Paul's safety, ordered him to be taken away.

Paul was to have other opportunities to model godly behavior before worldly authorities. He appears before the Roman governor Felix in chapter 24. Felix fails to pass a sentence on Paul, & instead has him imprisoned for two years. Felix is later relieved of his duties by the Emperor Nero for mishandling a riot in Caesarea and Porcius Festus is installed in his place.

In Acts 25 Paul appears before Felix. This is two years later! Remember Paul has been in prison for two years! And it was during that time that he had some of his most fruitful ministry - in prison. He wrote the four prison epistles at that time. He also evangelized the members of Caesar's household (Phil. 4:22).

Lesson #2 - Don't underestimate how God can use you, even during times of your life when it seems otherwise.

Early in Festus' rule over Judea Jewish leaders petitioned him to retry Paul on the charges against him. They wanted him sent to Jerusalem so that they could kill him (v. 3). Festus decided to keep Paul in Caesarea and he replied, "if you want to charge him, you meet with me there." (v. 5) As vv. 6 and 7 indicate, the charges were false.

Remember what Peter said in 2:12?

Keep your behavior excellent among the pagans, so that in whatever they accuse you as evildoers, they may see your good works and glorify God in the day of visitation.

Of Paul's conduct, one writer observes:

"The inability of his Jewish opponents to make any of their accusations stick emphasizes that Paul and other early Christians were good citizens . . . In spite of the frequent false allegations that the followers of Christ were nothing more than a sect of political revolutionaries, they were stellar examples of innocent, law-abiding subjects—a status all believers today should strive for. When Rome eventually persecuted and killed many in the early church, it was not because Christians were revolutionaries but because they refused to worship the emperor." [John MacArthur, Why Government Can't Save You, 122]

In v. 8 Paul answers the charges against him: "I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."

I'm not guilty of either sectarianism (violation of Jewish law), sacrilege (violating Temple law) or sedition (violating Roman Law).

Festus was caught in a dilemma. He asks him in v. 9 "But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?"

Paul realized that would give the Jews what they wanted an opportunity to kill him, replies in vv. 10-11,

10 But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know. 11 "If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar."

This was Paul's right as a Roman Citizen. He could appeal to Caesar.

Lesson #3 - It is right and good to make use of legal means available to you.

Paul may have been first and foremost a citizen of heaven. But he was not afraid to make wise use of his Roman citizenship either. It got him out of a beating in Acts 22!

So Paul appeals to the Emperor and Festus accepts his appeal. He would go to Rome.

Remember, In acts 23:11 the Lord appeared to him and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."

So God uses two pagan rulers (Felix and Festus) and the Roman government to fulfill His promise that Paul would go to Rome. That, by the way, again is the doctrine of concurrence that we spoke of last week.

Lesson #4 - God can sovereignly accomplish His purposes without our interference.