

The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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What Are You Complaining About? (Part 10)

Exodus 16:7-12; Philippians 2:14

Last month we finished up considering the misunderstanding of Paul's actions. Not only were his actions misunderstood, but also *His Admonitions*. As we mentioned earlier, Paul and Silas had been in Philippi for "*many days*" (Acts 16:18), maybe a couple of weeks to a month. They had preached many times in probably many places in town. As was the case in other cities, some believed and some rejected the message. Most really did not care what happened until it affected "*the hope of their gains*" (16:19). As I mentioned concerning the misunderstanding of Paul's actions, you would think that everyone would have been happy that the girl was no longer possessed by the demon. But the men were making money off of her, and they were sorely upset.

After initially accusing Paul and Silas of troubling the city (Actions), they go on to say in Acts 16:21, "*And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.*" I will define some of these words to help us understand them better, and then make some application from them. The word teach means "to announce; to declare; to make known; to proclaim publicly." It is translated preach several times in Acts and the epistles. Paul was doing exactly what Christ had commanded believers to do, and the Philippians did not understand it. That is to be expected. It is not the first time that it happened in Acts, nor will it be the last. The same thing happens today. We can preach as clearly as possible, but unless the Holy Ghost convicts the heart and the people respond correctly to it, they will not understand it. They will think that it is a personal attack or an attack on their social standing or, as it is here, an attack on their national position. We must recognize that the natural man will not understand nor

-2-

appreciate the Gospel, and then determine to preach it anyway.

The men go on to say that Paul and Silas are teaching "*customs.*" This word means "a usage prescribed by habit or law; things one is used to." This same word is used when the people attack Stephen back in Acts 6. There they said that Stephen was trying to change the Jewish religion. Here the Philippians are accusing Paul of trying to preach his ideas. It reminds me of what we often face when preaching or witnessing. People will respond, "That is your opinion," as if what we are preaching is our own idea. Now some may teach their own ideas, if they stray from the Bible. But if one is preaching the Bible, then it is not their opinion or idea, but it is God's Word. We must be careful to stay in the Word and preach the Word, so one cannot accuse us of preaching our own ideas. Even then we must be prepared to be falsely accused. Paul was preaching the truth, but it was rejected, and he was misunderstood. The same thing will happen to us. We must make sure that we stay in the Word, so the accusation will be false.

The Philippians say that what Paul is teaching is not "*lawful.*" That word means "right or allowable." Then they state they cannot accept the teaching of Paul because they are Romans. They do not even try to make a rational reason for the rejection of Paul's preaching. They give their opposition a national or even a racist tone. They point out in verse 20 that Paul and Silas are Jews and in verse 21 they state that they are Romans. They do so to pit the national pride of the Philippians against Paul and Silas—and it works. The people are incensed.

It reminds me of what church planters have faced in foreign countries and even in other areas of the United States. I have heard missionaries describe how many foreigners reject the Gospel as "an American idea." Thankfully others see the truth and realize that the Gospel is not "American," but it is the only hope for the salvation of man's soul.

As I mentioned, church planters in America face opposition and misunderstanding. Many are often accused of trying to start “southern” churches in the north and west. Some may try that, but most do not. I have been accused by some of trying to preach in a “southern” style even though I am up north or out west. I reply as kindly as I can that I do not preach in a southern manner, but in a Biblical manner. Isaiah was told, “*Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet*” (Isaiah 58:1). Loud preaching is not southern, it is Biblical. One word for preaching is the same as town crier. He had to be heard. He was loud. A preacher should be too. I also remind them that Billy Sunday was not southern. He was from Iowa. He was loud. I have heard Englishmen and Irishmen preach. They were loud too. It is not a southern thing to preach loud. It is Biblical.

A natural man will not understand what a Biblical preacher preaches, the manner in which he preaches, the way the church worships, and the lifestyle of the church members, even though everything is done according to the Bible. We must be prepared to be misunderstood. As we have seen throughout the message, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, and even to our time, the world will not understand nor appreciate Biblical truth. We must not change what we preach to satisfy the unsaved. They must change and accept the truth of the Word of God.

Paul did not go to Philippi to make them Jews. American missionaries do not go to foreign countries to turn them into Americans. Southern preachers do not go up north or out west to change the people into Southerners. Paul, and true Biblical preachers of today, desire to see the unsaved become saved. Now in the process, some practices may need to change. If it is contrary to Scripture, it does not matter if it is a national practice, it must change. Some will say that it is a European custom to drink wine at the evening meal. It may be their custom, but it is wrong, and a true preacher will let them know that. Other examples could be given, but the Bible is the standard concerning every action in every country.

Following the misunderstanding came The Mistreatment. To get a better understanding of all that Paul endured during his entire ministry we will go beyond Acts 16 and look at some other passages. First, we see that Paul was mistreated *In what was Expressed*. In Acts 26, Paul is before Festus and Agrippa. Paul had been imprisoned a couple of years before, after being accused by the Jewish leaders of causing trouble. He had testified before Felix, and after Felix was removed, Paul had testified before Festus. On that occasion, Paul appealed to Caesar. Before Paul is taken to Rome, Agrippa comes to visit Festus, and Paul testifies before both of them. He uses the occasion to preach the Gospel.

After Paul gives his testimony and talks about the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, Festus cries out in Acts 26:24, “*Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.*” Festus uses the same word twice to describe Paul. The second statement is an explanation of the first. The words beside thyself mean “to be out of one’s mind; to rave; the words are used to describe one who so speaks that he seems not to be in his right mind.” It is interesting that the same words are used to describe Jesus in John 10:20. The word mad at the end of the verse is the noun form of “beside thyself.” Festus says to Paul, “You are insane because you have spent too much time in books.” It is always interesting to me that Peter and John were called “unlearned and ignorant men” in Acts 4:13 and Paul is called mad because he learned too much. The issue that caused these accusations were the same—Jesus. Peter and John were “ignorant” because they only spent time with Jesus. No one could call Paul ignorant because of his education, but he was “mad” because he only spent time with Jesus. May the world see us as ignorant or mad because we only spend time with Jesus.

Paul, throughout his ministry, was called troublemaker (Acts 16:20), disturber of the world (17:6), and crazy (26:24). The unsaved will attack us through their mouth. Often they will become so angry against the truth, the only reaction they can muster against us is verbally.

But Paul was also mistreated *In what was Endured*. In II Corinthians 11:23-27, Paul describes things that he had suffered throughout his ministry. He says that he had been beaten with whips and rods, had been stoned, had been shipwrecked, had been imprisoned, and many other things. In Philippi, he was beaten with rods. This occasion in Philippi was only one instance, but verse 22 says he was beaten, verse 23 says that he had many stripes, verse 23 also says he was jailed, and verse 24 says he was placed in stocks. The same was true of Silas, and what was the reason for their suffering? They cast the demon out and preached the Gospel.

We see how they responded in The Message. It was *Displayed in Singing*. In spite of all that Paul and Silas suffered they were singing at midnight when God sent the earthquake. (The words in Acts 16:25 indicate that they did not start at midnight but had been singing for a while.) Then it was *Displayed in Service*. After being released from prison, they ministered to the people in Philippi, and then traveled to Thessalonica and started a church. In all of this, there was no complaining. How could this be? They were filled (under the control) of the Holy Ghost (Acts 13:9; 13:52; 16:6-7).

If Joseph, Stephen, and Paul could face difficulty and even death without complaining, why can we not do the same? May God help us to never complain.