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A0916 – April 19, 2009 – Acts 16:35-40 – The Legal Impact Of The Gospel

We'll continue our study of Acts 16, the Invasion of Europe, and an event which we have said is oft overlooked by so-called neutral humanist historians who are anxious to keep history safe for autonomous man. As Paul and Silas set foot on European soil there's a series of collisions; a series of collisions that are important. It's important for you and for me because these are collisions that are repeated time and time again in our own day. And the more we degenerate as a culture the more we have these confrontations

The first collision we've seen is in the area of Economics. In this realm we see the word of God impact economics in two ways. One way we'll see more of in Acts 19 is by changing the value, not the price, but the value given to a product. Value is the price someone will pay for a product; it's not what's on the price tag. It's what price you put on the item. Value is not determined by labor, value is not determined by anyone else, value is determined by you. This is why government price controls will never work. When the government does that, the price is too high for most people to buy and so what this does over time is it stimulates the black market. Everywhere and always it has generated the black market, because people want the goods and people impute their value to the goods and it's up to the buyer and the seller, not the government. So there's always the black market. And so, if there is a strong enough influence of the word of God you can see a shift in demand due to the way people value products. A second way the word of God brings economic change is in Acts 16 where Paul exorcised a necromantic demon from a slave girl. This girl was telling people's futures and making the local crime syndicate a lot of money. And therefore, when Paul came in and through the word of God destroyed her abilities, this got people upset, they were upsetting the economic system. Paul had destroyed the product and now these men were out of work. And by the way, remember where the businessmen went after their product was destroyed? They went to the government. Why? To bail them out. It's always this way, when something goes wrong with the business the business turns to the government to save them. Same old story

over and over in history. So this is the first area we've seen the impact of the word of God

The second area is in the realm of how men solve problems. There is a biblical way to solve problems and a pagan way to solve problems. In paganism, the autonomous man is limited to the solutions of the flesh in solving the problems of daily life. And we saw the Philippian jailer try to solve his problem with his flesh. When he assumed, and he assumed wrongly, that the prisoners had escaped he immediately tried to commit suicide. This is the licentious solution of the flesh. The flesh can swing legalistic and try to solve the problem by operation bootstrap. I'm going to fix it, or it can swing licentious and try to escape the problem by drugs, music, sex or suicide. The pagan will swing toward one solution or the other, there is nothing else the flesh can do, and it's either license or legalism. The biblical man has a third option, which Paul and Silas opt for and this you can see in v 24 and 25. The men have been beaten and the men are all stretched out in the stocks and yet what do they do in v25? They pray and sing songs to God. Obviously their focus is on God, it's not on man and what man can do but on God and what God can do, so they are quite relaxed despite their circumstances. How can this be? Because these men believe God controls history. And if God controls history then I'm here for a purpose and I can relax and worship Him. If He wants me in this situation then He can get me out of this situation at His discretion. Just be sure to worship God in the situation. And then we come to v 31. After the jailer's first problem is solved by Paul and Silas his real problem surfaces. This man may have been tough on the outside but on the inside he was a bowl full of jelly. And finally the plaster façade came off and this man's soul was laid bare, a man who could not handle the pressures of being spiritually dead before God. And so, v 31, the solution, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved, you and your household." In v 32 Paul and Silas shared more of the word of the Lord with them and v 34 reports his whole household believed. This is the kind of thing God does when we respond properly to our suffering. God uses that to impact others for Him. So don't ever look at it as, "Why did you let this happen to me God," but rather, "I know you have a purpose for you work all things together for good," a radically different posture to the sufferings we face.

The third collision of the word of God in Europe is in the legal arena, Acts 16:35-40. There is an impact or a collision in every area of life because there are two presuppositions or starting points in life; either we start with God and His word or we start with man and his word. There are no other options and there is no point of agreement between these two. They are in utter and total collision with one another, they are diametrically opposed. There can be no fellowship between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. And so whether you're talking about economics, law, science or philosophy, these two

positions dictate a total conflict, which is exactly what Paul continues to face in Europe, a collision at every point. You think this man never gets a rest. No, this man never gets a rest because this man knows the word of God and the world is constantly opposed to the word of God, therefore constant collision. Now to see the collision in vv 35-40, let's read.

³⁵Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, "Release those men." ³⁶And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace." ³⁷But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out." ³⁸The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, ³⁹and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city. ⁴⁰They went out of the prison and entered *the house of Lydia*, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

Now, v 35, the next day has come and **the chief magistrates**, the *praetors* who sat in judgment over Paul and Silas in the marketplace the day before, **sent their policemen**. These are the *lictors*, each colony was allowed to have two of them. They carried the *fasces*, the rods, and this was their symbol. What this symbol stands for is you have rods and an axe head; the rods were used for corporal punishment and the axe for capital punishment. Another thing you observe is these straps or cords that bind the whole thing together. In Rome you had different states or colonies and each state or colony was represented by one of the rods and the cord that holds them all together is the Roman government. So the government controlled the colonies and if a colony rebelled against Roman government then the Roman government would reel you back in by force. In Rome the government created the unity of the state. And so what you have here is a very strong governmental system, a very centralized government, big government. Now that's for your extra knowledge, the issue in the Civil War was just this issue; if a state wants to break off do they have the right to do that? Is there a right to secession? And the north at that time said, "No." You are bound by the federal government; you will be bound by our cords, a fascist response. So don't be surprised, this is ancient stuff. It goes back to the Roman fasces which became the Italian fasces and finally the American fasces; it's a hallmark of pagan societies. And in the pagan society of Rome the two lictors were sent to the prison with this message from the *praetors*, **Release them**. They don't bother to come themselves, they issued the sentence. So notice v 36, the jailer comes to Paul and amplifies what the *praetors* said. Notice he

adds a little something **go in peace**. By which he means, go in the peace of Caesar, go in the peace of the kingdom of man, not go in the peace of Christ, not go in the peace of the kingdom of God. This is humanistic peace, not biblical peace. And with that we enter into the conflict of the gospel with secular humanist law. There are two principles of secular law that are at work against the Christian. These two principles are at work today in society against Christians, and increasingly we find ourselves pinned down by these two principles.

The first principle is that the government is the source of rights, that the government *grants* rights, rather than *recognizes* rights. And there's a world of difference between those two verbs, to *grant* a right and to *recognize* a right. You may not see much of a difference but there is a big difference. Take for example, the Second Amendment, where it says, "the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." That's talking about a right that exists prior to government. Government didn't create that right; government only recognized the right that was already there. And therefore since the government did not give us that right therefore they cannot take it away. But if, on the other hand, we say that the government is the source of rights, then we have made government the authority of all rights. And if the government is the source of rights and can give them as they see fit then they can just as easily take them away. This is a fundamental point we're making here, that it is a disaster to say that the government gives rights; never use that language, they do nothing of the sort. All the government can do is recognize rights; it does not create them.

The second principle is that Christianity is allowed to exist if it is for the "the good of the community." If it brings about peace. As long as Christianity doesn't rupture the *status quo* of the community it will be tolerated. The moment that Christianity does not further the good of the community, we shall eliminate it. If, for example, Christian parents start pulling their children out of public school and start to home school them then we'll make it illegal or near impossible. Why? Because the home school children are so far advanced over the public school children. It's an embarrassment. And further, always remember the pocketbook, more kids, more money. And finally, this creates division because now you have one set of kids getting trained in one framework and another set of kids trained in another framework. They have nothing to do with one another. One is the presupposition of God, the other is the presupposition of man and we can't get a unified community, a unified block of voters if we have two different frameworks floating around. So, to get uniformity in society we will eliminate all competing frameworks from the educational system. Just watch, it's coming, all for the good of the community. That way nobody thinks, we all

just follow the dogma of the secular system, once we've eliminated the Christian faith.

The ultimate question always goes back to the same thing, God or man. God gave human government in Gen 9; God gave the nation Israel a tremendous body of Law in Exodus-Deuteronomy, the OT law of Israel would be the supreme example of what divine law looks like. And therefore if a human government make laws that are based on God's laws then you're going to have righteous laws, but if a human government rejects the word of God then all you are left with is the word of man, there is no other place to turn, and man being finite and fallen can only produce law that is arbitrary. There is no higher authority than the word of man in pagan law which is the situation we face today in America. Actually our situation is quite interesting because we have two documents back of our law, the Constitution and the Declaration. The Constitution is a Reformation document, its concepts flow out of a biblical concept of law and Samuel Rutherford's Lex Rex based on Deut 17. The Declaration is an Enlightenment document, its concepts flow out of human rationalism. The two documents are totally at odds with one another, and in that respect we have a corrupt base, we're not pure in our base. If we were pure we might be able to hold on to a Republic, but as it is we have gradually moved to a Democracy and a Democracy tends toward an Oligarchy and an Oligarchy finally to Dictatorship. So, America, having flushed the Constitution down the toilet in favor of judicial legislation, we're left with arbitrary law. It's sheerly arbitrary, how do you "interpret" the law. Take Roe vs Wade, 1973, a decision based on nothing, a decision that said the fetus has no rights. Wade said the unborn child has no rights whatsoever; he's not covered by the 14th Amendment. An unborn child has less status in America than a black slave did before the Civil War. He is, what Francis Schaeffer called, a non-person. And therefore as a non-person he cannot be represented in court. This is what happens when the word of God is trashed and the word of man is set free. Set free alright, all except for the baby. The baby can't do a thing, just suck his brains out and throw it in the trash can, and by the way, use the brain for stroke experimentation. Once you've bought into arbitrary law where do you draw the line. That's always the problem with pagan law. It's purely subjective. Who's to say where we stop? If a fetus is a non-person then when your 90 year old grandmother no longer has a high quality of life what are we going to declare her as a non-person and legislate euthanasia? Many countries already have. I'd hate to live in the Netherlands because if you're an older person you have to get a special card that says, "Do not euthanize," because if you don't and you go to the doctor and they secretly determine you're a non-person, then man, we're just administering some medicine here and they shoot you up with poison and five minutes later your dead. That's it. All in the name of mercy not murder of course.

So don't think of America as the great example of Christian nation. We have forsaken the insistence that God's standards apply in the field of law. Finally, as of 2006 Liberty Institute has started training Christian Constitutional Lawyers. It'll be a few decades before they make a mark, if they ever get there. As it is the door is closed in the field of media and likely in the field of law as well. We have allowed the secularists to take the field. And the result of not standing up and fighting is that the humanists now are in control of every piece of major legislation; every conceivable theory of law is controlled by humanists and humanist thinking people. Now that's our situation very practically right now. It's brought on because man decided that man will originate laws himself; man is the source of rights, not God.

Now let's watch how Paul handles himself in such a situation. It was not foreign to Paul; Paul had faced Roman paganism in all of its purity before Christianity was even born. This is the first time Christianity has impacted Rome; watch what the Apostle Paul does. Let's use him as our model. Verse 36, **And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace."** Now, notice a little something there. Is that what the chief magistrates said? Did they say, "release them and go in peace?" No he did not, the jailer there has added that little bit, **go in peace**. And that is in fact what produces the conflict of v 37. Oh, I can go now on the basis that Caesar says I have the rights of freedom? I can go now in the peace of Caesar, as long as I submit to Caesar as the ultimate authority. But Paul does not believe that and therefore Paul stands up for his rights and in this he is a model for what you ought to be doing as a Christian.

The jailer, who had just become a believer, has made a mistake, the jailer has not just passed the word on, "go", but he's added that little phrase, **go in peace**. And Paul cannot let that stand; **go in peace** means that he goes along with Rome's arbitrary justice. He had no trial, he was a Roman citizen and should never have been beaten in the first place, even if he were guilty of the crime, and they did it in public to embarrass the Christian faith, and he says "I go in peace, do I? Not on your life am I going to go in peace."

So Paul stops and makes a legal stand here; his legal stand can be seen to be motivated by several things. One of the things is not personal vindication. This stand is not in that spirit. You misunderstand what Paul is doing if you interpret this as personal vengeance. It's not done in vengeance it's done in principle.

The first thing is that this is a lesson the jailer himself must learn. The jailer said, alright Paul, you're free, but he made this little mistake by adding, **go in peace**, go and operate in peace under Caesar, under the principle of the

Roman Empire. And though this man had been won to Christ he knew very little doctrine, and therefore Paul knew that the jailer had to be taught a lesson, the jailer had to learn that even as a Roman citizen you do not sell your soul to Caesar. You are sold to Christ and there can be no ultimate peace between Christ and Caesar. The two are in total conflict; there is no peace

The second thing is in v 40, there's a new congregation springing up in Philippi and he's going to teach them the same lesson, there can be no compromise in ultimate things between Christ and Caesar.

Now at this point Paul is going to make use of the 4th divine institution; human government. And it's a fully legitimate use of the institution. In days to come some of you are going to have to make use of the fourth divine institution and when that hour comes, don't be embarrassed as a Christian to make full use of the fourth divine institution if you have to—government. God gave it to you to use, to use as much as any humanist uses it. The fourth divine institution may not be run by Bible-believing Christians but it is the plan of God to maintain civility and order.

Paul is not going to be like many Christians, who in the name of piety would say, Oh, I'm going to let the Lord take care of this. Now, there is a time to let the Lord take care of it. But other times it's wrong to say that. Namely, when God has given you the tools to take care of it and then to say I'm going to let the Lord take care of it. That is not trusting the Lord at that point, that's doubting the Lord, that's not trusting that what God has provided is sufficient to handle the problem.

So don't be afraid to take a stand if God had given him the tools to handle it. And so, for the sake of the jailer, for the sake of the new congregation and for the sake of justice, Paul makes his stand and he does in verse 37, **But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out."** "The reply of Paul is a marvel of brevity and energy, almost every word has a separate indictment showing the utter illegality of the whole proceeding."ⁱ Paul didn't like these slime balls trying to worm their way out of responsibility. And he's not going to let them out of their responsibility. So the first thing Paul says he has a problem with is the public beating, without a trial. There are several things there, so let's think about what Paul is doing. What most Christians would do of course is say, "Oh great, we got out of this jam, let's get out of town, that's the fuzzy wuzzy was a Christian response, the "I'm taking this as a hit for Jesus response." Paul, rather, made a big deal.

One reason Paul made such a big deal is because it violated law and order. Law and order was given by God in the fourth divine institution, which is human government. Gen 9 is the first time in history that humans had the right to govern other humans. And therefore all law and order kept by men is given by God. There is no human government but that which God has given. Men can corrupt the law, that's the problem here. But what this means is that Roman law is subservient to God. God is King not Caesar. And therefore because you have corrupted law and order under Caesar, I bring you to account for that. There had been no respect for law and order here by the Roman officials. And what this will do in the long run is prepare them for the gospel, because now Paul is pressing home the fact of absolute standards. Hey guys, there are standards of absolute justice out there and you're violating those standards. Don't think you can play that game and get away with it. God made government and God made Rome, so you're not the ultimate judge, God is the ultimate judge. Caesar is not over all, Christ is over all. And here you are as His representatives on earth and you have no trial? Do you think I'm going to let you get away with that? "Even slaves in Roman law had a right to be heard."ⁱⁱ

A second reason Paul made such a big deal is that they were beat publically but they were released secretly. What is this? You beat us in front of the whole town, now you want to send us away in secret? Uh, uh, I don't think so says Paul, you've opened the can of worms in front of all these people, now you have a responsibility to let us go in front of all these people. You don't beat someone, destroy their character in front of 10,000 people and then sneak off and release them. Uh, uh, if 10,000 people saw our character trashed, you're going to stand in front of 10,000 people and show we had no such character. This is a biblical principle; always stretch the boundaries of information as far as the involved parties, never more, never less.

Then another thing, and this was serious, who did they beat without a trial? **men who are Parthians?** No, **men who are Romans.** Paul and Silas had Roman citizenship. We don't know how they got it. Paul's family perhaps purchased Roman citizenship, but they did have it, and it was a tremendous privilege. Now, you want to talk about trouble, these chief magistrates had violated Roman law. You couldn't beat a Roman citizen like this. The *Lex Valeria* B.C. 509 and the *Lex Poecia* B.C. 248 made it a crime to inflict blows on a Roman citizen. Cicero says, "To fetter a Roman citizen was a crime, to scourge him a scandal, to slay him—parricide."ⁱⁱⁱ That's why in v 38, boy, when word gets back they beat Romans they were afraid. Why? Because now Paul and Silas could take them to trial, that's why. Paul and Silas had the upper hand legally. The tables had been turned and now they could file charges against the praetors.^{iv}

Verse 39, **and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city.** That word **kept begging** is in the imperfect, it means they were literally down on their knees asking them over and over, “Please leave town.”^v You can only imagine what would happen if they stuck around and the whole town found out the injustice of their praetors. They themselves would have been run out of town. Paul could have stayed and they could have had their big legal battle. Paul could have taken them to trial and they could have taken Paul to trial for the previous days proceedings. But Paul opted not to because it would have meant that he couldn’t preach for many months because of the mechanics of the slow process of getting the thing to trial. He had made his point to the jailer and the new believers so, verse 40, **They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.** And so by now there were other converts and before leaving they head over to Lydia’s house, where perhaps the church was meeting, exhorted them and departed, notice they departed which signals the end of the “we” section and indicates that Luke stayed in Philippi and was their first pastor.

ⁱA.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Ac 16:37.

ⁱⁱ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Ac 16:37.

ⁱⁱⁱ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Ac 16:37.

^{iv} A question that obviously arises is, “Well, why didn’t Paul and Silas tell them the day before that they were Roman citizens?” A number of explanations have been given, but the best one is that they did claim to be Roman citizens but were beaten anyway. Cicero reports a most disgraceful and illegal proceeding, how a Roman citizen was publicly beaten in the marketplace of Messina in Sicily despite his protest, *civis Romanus sum*, “I am a Roman citizen. We’re not told, but we can speculate that once the race and religious cards had been played, and the mob rule began it didn’t matter what Paul and Silas said, they were going to be beaten, such is the nature of paganism, always resorts to mob rule. The *praetors* gave into this because it was their job to restore order, so they often did this kind of a thing just to satisfy the mob and get the people calmed down.

^vA.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Ac 16:39.

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