

Resisting Injustice

Acts 22:22-30

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 3-22-2009

Introduction

Benjamin Franklin once said, “Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch. Liberty is a well-armed lamb who is contesting the vote!” Verse 22 gives a vivid description of what could happen to minorities if a true democracy was in force: **“And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live.””**

Last week someone was telling me that technology could enable a true democracy to work today. He said that we wouldn't need any government officials other than people hired to carry out our wishes. We wouldn't need a congress or a senate. All we would need is an executive branch to carry out the will of the people. We could be the legislators. Of course, such a thought is horrifying to me, but I let him talk on. He said that you could have every person in America carrying a PDA with special software that let you introduce ideas at any time, and the rest of the people would vote on the ideas that were streaming to their PDA's throughout the day.

Can you imagine two hundred million legislators and everyone voting on their PDA every day? Well, maybe it wouldn't be quite that many people since we only have a population of three hundred million. But what a stupid idea! Apart from the ease with which electronic voter fraud could happen, just think about the results without voter fraud. It might feel good for the first few minutes to know that you are introducing legislation, but things would bog down to an absolute standstill within days.

For example, if you got fed up with paying property taxes, you could introduce a three-sentence bill that abolishes that form of taxation. Nowadays that would be a pretty popular bill, so it would likely pass. However, most people would forget that two weeks ago they voted to approve raising the public school teacher's wages, and 100% of those wages came from property taxes. So when the teachers don't get their wages, they quit, and twenty-five million parents who no longer have free babysitting are outraged, and introduce remedial legislation, absolutely bogging down the system. By some miracle, one bill does manage to survive the mess, and

© Copyright 2009 by Phillip G. Kayser. Permission is granted to all readers to download, print, and distribute on paper or electronically any Sermons, provided that each reprint bear this copyright notice, current address, and telephone number, and provided that all such reproductions are distributed to the public without charge. They may not be sold or issued in book form, CD-ROM form, or microfiche without prior permission.

Phillip G. Kayser • Dominion Covenant Church • 307.N 41st Ave. Omaha, NE 68131 • 402.934.3300

people vote to confiscate the wealth of minorities, thus allowing the teachers to go back to work.

I think you get the point. Even if such a system were feasible, there would eventually be idiotic bills with unintended consequences that would make things come to a screeching halt. And there would be no way of knowing or preventing unintended consequences from happening without the executive imposing some order into the system. But then you are getting away from pure democracy, which all democracies eventually do. Democracies provide no protections whatsoever for the rights of the 49% who happen to disagree with any new legislation that was passed five minutes ago – including legislation like what these guys would have passed if they had a democracy – **“Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live.”** There is no reason a democracy couldn’t say that about 49% of the population that they didn’t like. It happened in Rwanda. The massacre was a popular movement fanned by the winds of the radio stations.

We call that mobocracy, and what is going on in verse 22 is mobocracy. It is the most consistent expression of democracy. And those who have experienced mobocracy are scared to death by it and tend to turn away from that to a heavy-handed ruler who can fix the problems and establish order. There is always a pendulum swing from democracy to either dictatorship or oligarchy (which is the rule of an elite). But we all know how tyrants like Mugabe can function when they get into power. Yeah, they really fix it, just like this commander fixed the problem. But they also give arbitrary commands like the one given in verse 24. This commander is probably very frustrated with Paul. He’s given Paul a chance to calm the crowds down. It seemed like it worked for a while, but since Paul spoke in Hebrew, the commander doesn’t have the foggiest notion what he said. And he’s frustrated that Paul has somehow succeeded in riling up the crowd again. This commander’s job is on the line. He has to maintain peace. So he’s not too happy with Paul. After a few lashes with a scourge he knows he will get Paul to talk, and he will get to the bottom of things.

He’s probably thinking, “I have no idea what this guy is doing, but he has definitely given me a headache this morning. Scourge him.” It’s an arbitrary command. Those who have actually survived a scourging end up despising the tyranny of a dictatorship, an oligarchy, and even the tyranny of a republic that ignores its constitution. And you can see why. You can suffer under centralized government just as you can suffer under mobocracy. The Roman scourge was made up of multiple leather strands that had sharp pieces of metal attached to their ends. When those thongs streaked across

your back or wrapped around your chest, they grabbed chunks of flesh and yanked the flesh right off the bones. It was a horrible instrument of torture, and sometimes it led to death.

So we see in this chapter that the mobs can give injustice and the civil government can give injustice. This is why our founding fathers in America didn't like democracy and they didn't like unrestrained government of any other form. They set up a limited republic, not a democracy. Their view of human nature was total depravity. Even the non-Christians of that day had no illusions about the niceness of man. They were all so pessimistic about human nature that they wanted to restrict the depravity of the crowds (whom they had personally seen tar and feather individuals that they didn't like – a horrible torture). And they wanted to restrict the depravity of those in civil government, because they had first hand experience of the horrible abuses that the civil government can heap upon you if *their* depravity is not restrained. So we are going to look at eight tools of restraint.

I. Boldly bring a prophetic witness against your culture (v. 22 with previous verses)

And the first thing we see in this passage is that Paul was willing to bring a prophetic witness against his culture. He spoke up. Verse 22 says, **“And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live.’”**

Paul was willing to bring an unpopular message to his culture because he feared God more than he feared man. He was willing to speak the truth because he loved the truth more than he loved his own comfort. If our desire is simply to get along with everyone, then we will keep putting up with more and more tyranny in government and evil in our society. We must speak up.

Paul didn't have to speak to this crowd to protect himself. He was already in the protective custody of the Romans. So why did he speak up? I believe it was because Paul was passionate about the advance of Christ's kingdom, and of Christ's liberties, and of Christ's truths. All of those things flowed from the Gospel, and he couldn't stop from speaking.

And it was a similar passion among America's founding fathers that made them speak up against injustice. Patrick Henry spoke against injustice regardless of the outcome. He defended people in court when it seemed like a hopeless cause. He was willing to stand alone to see American liberties defended. In fact, of all the early American patriots, he is by far my favorite.

He was clear-sighted, bold and courageous. He was Biblical. He knew the truth, loved the truth, and spoke the truth, even when it was not popular. And I would encourage you to buy his collected writings. He was an amazing patriot.

But there were many other patriots who were willing to speak out even if it meant jeopardizing their lives. Sam Adams, one of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention, and later the governor of Massachusetts, said this to those who wanted peace at any price:

If you love wealth more than liberty, the tranquility of servitude better than the animating contest of freedom, depart from us in peace. We ask not your counsel nor your arms. Crouch down and lick the hand that feeds you. May your chains rest lightly upon you and may posterity forget that you were our countrymen.

That was a man who (like Paul) brought a prophetic witness against his apathetic peers. Speaking an unpopular message is not optional if we are to once again restore our liberties in America. I am sick and tired of the cowardly politicians, preachers who won't tell people what they really think. They aren't putting up a banner that people can rally around. They give mixed signals. Even conservative ones do. We need men who inspire us with their boldness and uncompromising stands for truth. And if we can't find them to vote for, maybe some of us need to run for office. But all of us need to speak out. We must not fear the cries of our neighbors in verse 22 or the punishment of tyrants in verse 24.

Without Jonah's, Ninevehs won't repent. Without Daniels, Nebuchadnezzars won't repent. Without Paul's, we won't see empires like Rome beginning to crumble to the Gospel. Paul doesn't have much success in *this* chapter, but his boldness to speak out leads him in the last chapter to be winning many in Caesar's household to the faith. Are you willing to speak a prophetic message against our culture? It's really part of the bad news that leads to the Good News of the Gospel.

II. Don't idealize the anarchist or radical libertarian viewpoint. Realize that depravity can make mobs capable of anything (vv. 22-23)

The second thing that must be in place is realism about depravity. Depravity means that man's nature is so tainted by sin that apart from grace and other restraints it leads men to do evil. So many political solutions and citizen solutions assume that man is basically reasonable and good. Even Welch, the ultra-conservative founder of the John Birch Society, insisted that the solution to our problems is education. But that is not true. Men,

women and children are constantly rebelling against the truth. Education is not our Savior, even though it is important.

Look at the picture of total depravity that is painted in verses 22-23. And keep in mind that these are honest, upright citizens that you would never expect such things from.

Acts 22:22 And they listened to him until this word, and *then* they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a *fellow* from the earth, for he is not fit to live!”

Acts 22:23 Then, as they cried out and tore off *their* clothes and threw dust into the air,

These guys are showing no restraint, and as a result, their sinful hearts are being exposed. There are numerous things that can remove such restraint and cause civil people to no longer be civil. A mob will do things they are later embarrassed by because peer pressure has pushed them to conform. Peer pressure can be something that unleashes everyone’s sinful passions.

But lack of peer pressure can also be a problem in some situations. For example, a person will sometimes watch pornography when he is by himself that he perhaps would not dare to watch when others are around. So when accountability is removed, total depravity can easily break forth.

Government sanction of evil is another thing that can remove restraint. This is one of the reasons why homosexuality and abortion has become acceptable in most American circles. It’s now legal. God-given restraints have been removed.

But nowadays there are some conservatives who are so focused on the abuses of government that we see in verse 24 that they want no civil government. They think that if they could only get rid of government, everything would be OK. Well, I’m sorry, but there were parts of the Wild West that I would not want to have experienced. Why? Because there was no restraint to the passions of mobs, individuals or the wild Indians. Point II says, “Don’t idealize the anarchist or radical libertarian viewpoint. Realize that depravity can make mobs capable of anything.” Murray Rothbard has popularized anarchism, which believes in no government. But that is so naïve once you understand what depravity is all about.

Alexander Hamilton, one of the writers of our Constitution, said,

Why has government been instituted at all? Because the passions of men will not conform to the dictates of reason and justice without constraint.¹

Paul would have been a dead man if it hadn't been for the constraint of the Roman garrison. Libertarianism and Anarchism fail the doctrinal test of total depravity. They are naïve and unworkable. Murray Rothbard's book is a magnificent contribution to economics, but it messes up on a few axioms and as a result messes up on a few conclusions. If he had put total depravity in as one of his starting premises, his outcome would have been much better.

III. Allow for a strong enough government to restrain the passions of mobocracy (v. 24a). But put restraints on the powers of government lest they too be tyrannical (v. 24b)

But point III tells us not to go to the other extreme. While verse 24 indicates that we need to have a strong enough civil government to restrain the passions of mobocracy, the government too can be equally unjust. Don't put your trust in either. As Psalm 146:3 says, **“Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help.”** I don't trust sovereign government any more than I trust “sovereign” individuals. Yes, the Roman commander rescued Paul from the Jews, but look at the torture he plans to give Paul himself. And as we read this, consider the torture that America has used to extract information from their detainees. Verse 24 says, **“...the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him.”** That is an injustice. The commander doesn't know if Paul is guilty of anything. He doesn't really care. What he cares about is having 1) information, 2) control, 3) peace, and 4) no intrusion upon the status quo. Magistrates generally are more interested in maintaining the status quo than they are in justice. Anything that interferes with state control can become the enemy of the state, whether that is Christianity or humanism. Even humanism can be a threat to humanism if it is overthrowing the status quo or doing the opposite – impeding government progress.

Benjamin Rush once said,

Absolute power should never be trusted to man. It has perverted the wisest heads, and corrupted the best hearts in the world.²

Recent presidents have wanted us to trust them with more power, and have appealed to the dangers of terrorism. That's government asking for the

¹ Hamilton, Madison, Jay, etc. *The Federalist on the New Constitution Written in 1788* (Washington: Masters and Smith, 1857), p. 69

² Benjamin Rush, *Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania*, Selected Writings, as quoted in *The Founders Constitution*, “Bicameralism,” p. 362.

power of verse 24 in order to control the power of verse 22. But let me ask you which is scarier: a private terrorist with very limited power or a government that creates terror with almost unlimited power? I would take the private terrorist any day because at least I have a chance of fighting back. Now mobs are a little scarier, but mobs usually respond to force pretty fast. Civil governments don't. It is insanity to trust the Federal government with ever increasing measures of power and intrusions into privacy. It's to ignore the doctrine of depravity.

Let's just talk about torture. It has been illegal to use torture in America from the founding of our nation until recent times. It is certainly unbiblical to force information or testimony out of anyone through torture or any other means of pressure. No man was required to testify against himself.³ But many conservatives have ignored the Geneva Convention, the

³ In Acts 23:3 Paul gives the standard interpretation of Deuteronomy 25:1-2. He says that it is not lawful for authorities to so much as slap a prisoner prior to a trial and conviction. (If the prisoner was putting up a fight, that was an entirely different question and force could be used to subdue him.) Of course, people might object that this was only a protection for a citizen, not an enemy combatant. But unless the foreigner was on the field of combat, Scripture was quite clear that "One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you" (Ex. 12:49). This did not preclude interrogation (Judges 8:14) or offering mercy to people who voluntarily gave helpful information – a kind of plea bargaining (Judges 1:24-26). In fact, on the field of battle enemy soldiers knew that their fate was death unless they had worthwhile information to give. Since information was a weapon on the field of battle, an enemy who withheld information during the heat of battle could be considered to be armed and could be killed. This was why plea-bargaining was so powerful on the battlefield. Failing to plea bargain could mean death. But God never allowed torture to extract information. This provision was probably for the following reasons:

1. **All men are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28; 9:6) and torture degrades that image.** Even after a trial and conviction, this image of God in man meant that no one could be given more than forty lashes in a beating because that would make him "degraded" (Deut. 25:3 NASB). It didn't matter that a horrendous criminal might deserve more than that, this was the limit of degradation that was allowed in the Bible. Nor were there other forms of physical pain beyond beatings and capital punishment that were allowed for any one crime. Torture appeared to be off the radar of Biblical justice.
2. **Even after capital punishment was inflicted, the body of a criminal had to be treated respectfully** lest the land be defiled (Deut. 21:23). Certain forms of torture transgress this line.
3. **Authorizing torture trusts government too much.** Since civil government is made up of depraved individuals (Rom. 3:10-18), unrestrained power in the hands of such would be corrupting. We have seen what the power to torture has done to degrade governments in even "civilized" countries. Why would we want that in America? Since this sermon largely deals with the issue of depravity, nothing more needs to be said on this point.
4. **The golden rule** – do unto others what you would have them do to you (Matt 7:12). No one would want to be tortured if captured by the enemy.
5. **Many commentators have pointed out that the torturer himself is dehumanized.** As Alexander Solzhenitsyn worded it, "Our torturers have been punished most horribly of all: They are turning into swine; they are departing downward from humanity."
6. The New Testament says that **"every transgression and disobedience [in the Old Testament] received a just penalty" (Heb. 2:2).** To the degree that we deviate from God's law, we deviate from justice. Since the Old Testament nowhere shows torture as a just use of civil force, to use it is to deviate from justice and to buy into pragmatism.
7. **Torture erodes the character and testimony of a nation.** God wanted the Gentiles to be jealous of the liberties that His law brought to Israel (Deut. 4:6-8). Torture has ruined America's grand testimony. As McCain said, "What I ... mourn is what we lose when ... we allow, confuse, or encourage our soldiers to forget that best sense of ourselves, that which is our greatest strength—that we are different and better than our enemies, that we fight for an idea, not a tribe, not a land, not a king ... but for an idea that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights."

Constitution, historic law, and the Bible in their so-called fight against terrorism. I've read the Red Cross documents and the employee corroborations of American torture using beatings, suffocation, hypothermia, sleep deprivation, etc., and it is sickening; absolutely sickening. Yet it is legal. It amazes me that we have been willing to entrust to the CIA the degree of power and control that we have. I hope all of you have opposed the Patriot Act, the policies on torture, and the invasions of privacy that have risen to new heights in the past couple decades. Giving any government that much power fails the doctrinal test of depravity.

IV. Appeal to laws to which government officials are subject (v. 25). This is the genius of our Constitution. But it does no good if no one knows about it or appeals to it.

Point IV shows another way to have godly opposition to injustice - appeal to higher laws. Verse 25 says, **“And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, ‘Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?’”** Paul knows the answer. He's not asking for information. This is a rhetorical question that is being respectful. But it is a powerful question. Paul is appealing to two higher Roman laws known as the Lex Porcia and the Lex Julia. Those two laws made it clear that Romans could not be bound or scourged without a trial proving their guilt. Nero later began to ignore these two laws, but at this stage, every soldier involved in this scourging could have gotten into deep trouble. So there is a higher law that protects Romans.

Well, this is the genius of the American Constitution. It was designed to restrict the government and protect citizens. But it only acts as a restriction if someone appeals to it. If Paul hadn't appealed to higher law, he

Other information related to this subject: Witnesses were required of the prosecution but not the accused (Deut. 19:15). To require witnesses would violate the right to remain silent. The accused always had the right to remain silent. (Implied in Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15 and affirmed by Christ's silence in Mark 15:3-5; Matt. 27:14). The implication in the Old Testament was that the prosecution had the responsibility of bringing witnesses and that the accused did not. Only the accuser was forced to testify. It is true that a witness could not refuse to testify at a criminal trial if called to do so. For example, Leviticus 5:1 says, “If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible.” But notice that there is no torture; simply punishment. Jesus was mocked and beaten prior to trial (Luke 22:63-65). This is a violation of the civil court principle of being innocent until proven guilty (something unique to the Bible). (Deut. 25:1-2; Is. 43:9; Imp. Deut. 17:6; Acts 23:3). There was to be no coerced testimony (even Achan whom God had already tried and convicted was only asked to give a voluntary confession in Josh 7:9-26). Thus Paul rightly protested when he was treated as guilty until proven innocent (Acts 16:37) and the trial of Christ (as much of a Kangaroo court as it was!) was stymied in their attempt to prove Christ guilty because he refused to give information despite torture. This however does not mean that a person cannot be condemned when he testifies to his own guilt. See for example 2Sam. 1:16 - For David had said to him, “Your blood be on your own head. Your own mouth testified against you when you said, ‘I killed the LORD's anointed.’” It should be noted that in a combat situation a person who surrenders is still considered hostile and could be killed if he was not willing to give information

would have been scourged. This is why I keep encouraging people to know your Constitution. The Constitution is a tool that won't work unless it is used. We need to keep asking, "Is it lawful to do such and such?" And if they say "Yes," point to the specific Constitutional provisions if it is not.

But let me talk about how our Constitution understood the doctrine of depravity. Listen to the distrust of government shown in the Preamble to the Bill of Rights:

The conventions of a number of the States having at the time of their adopting the Constitution, expressed a desire, in order to prevent *misconstruction or abuse of its powers, that FURTHER DECLARATORY and RESTRICTIVE clauses should be added.*"

The Bill of Rights is very pessimistic about man's nature. And almost all the founding fathers were just as pessimistic.

The Kentucky Resolutions said it very well,

"... confidence in the men of our choice... is everywhere the parent of despotism [in other words, if you put too much trust in civil government you will almost always end up with tyranny. It goes on]: free government is founded on jealousy and not in confidence; it is jealousy and not confidence which prescribes limited constitutions to bind down those whom we are obliged to trust with power... In questions of power then let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the Constitution."⁴

Lord Bryce said much the same. He said,

Someone has said that the American government and Constitution are based on the theology of Calvin and the philosophy of Hobbes. [Let me stop there. Both were utterly pessimistic about the nature of man. And by the way, this is where the hilarious title for the cartoon strip, Calvin and Hobbes came from – two philosophers who were pessimistic about human nature. Anyway, Lord Bryce continues:] This at least is true, that there is a hearty Puritanism in the view of human nature which pervades the instrument of 1787. It is the work of men who believed in original sin, and were resolved to leave open for transgressors no door which they could possibly shut . . . The aim of the Constitution seems to be not so much to attain great common ends by securing a good government as to avert the evils which will flow, not merely from a bad government, but from any government strong enough to threaten the pre-existing communities of the individual citizen.⁵

If trusting the civil government with ever increasing power to deal with terrorism does not bother you, then you need to get a healthy dose of the Puritan thinking that dominated the discussions at the Constitutional Convention. They saw the Constitution as a Restrictive Document and the

⁴ "Kentucky Resolutions," in Oliver J. Thatcher (ed), *The Library of Original Sources: 1800-1833*, (New York: University Research Extension, 1907), p. 102

⁵ Lord Bryce as quoted by E. L. Hebden Taylor, *The Rock from Which America was Hewn, the Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, op. cit., p. 181

Bill of Rights as a Bill of Restrictions. Our Constitution has almost been lost, but it is perhaps not too late to get citizens all across our nation to start appealing to it just as Paul appealed to higher law in his own day.

V. Use interposition of lower officials to protect from bad actions of higher officials (v. 26).

The fifth tool at our disposal is given in verse 26: **“When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, ‘Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.’”** Paul appealed to the centurion who in turn warned his superior that what he had commanded was not lawful. This is one of many forms of interposition. Blacks Law Dictionary, fourth edition, defines interposition this way:

The doctrine that a state, in the exercise of its sovereignty, may reject a mandate of the federal government deemed to be unconstitutional or to exceed the powers delegated to the federal government.

Other definitions include any lower magistrates (like this centurion) who oppose injustice. There have been lawyers, judges, juries, county sheriffs, county commissioners, city councilmen, city mayors, city police, state governors, state legislators, state electors, national guards, and army officers who have risked their necks and their careers to protect justice. Some have been successful and some have not. But I consider even the failures to be good in that lower magistrates were doing their duty. By the way, even churches can engage in interposition. From the time of Ambrose in the 300’s AD and on, churches have used church discipline to bring wayward politicians to repentance for murder, unjust trials, refusal to oppose abortion, etc. If you want to learn more about interposition, join Judge Roy Moore’s group. But you know what? We can’t even get churches in Omaha to excommunicate their abortionists, let alone to discipline their ungodly politicians. We need more interposition.

VI. Reason with government officials respectfully in language they can understand and/or care about (vv. 27-28)

A. Paul’s goal is not to anger the commander, but to win the commander to a position

The sixth tool that Paul uses is reasoning and communication that bureaucrats can understand, or at least information that they will care about. Look at verses 27-28: **“Then the commander came and said to him, ‘Tell me, are you a Roman?’** [Paul immediately got his attention. This is obviously interesting information to the commander. We’ll see why.] **He**

said, ‘Yes.’ The commander answered, ‘With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.’ Paul said, ‘But I was born a citizen.’”

Note first the calmness with which Paul speaks. He is not using language designed to anger the commander. That would be counter-productive. He is trying to win the commander to a position. And if we can be as gracious, it will help our cause.

B. Paul brings this commander to realize that it is in his best interests to treat Paul well.

1. To have purchased citizenship (v. 28a) means that this commander did not have deep connections.

Paul brings this commander to realize that it is really in his best interests to treat Paul well. Government officials frequently don’t care about your interests, so Paul appeals to his interests. “Look, this is in your best interests.”

So let me explain what he was doing. Obviously this Roman commander had newly acquired his citizenship and the rights that went along with it. He knows the protections of citizenship. It appears that he had bought citizenship from emperor Claudius (who died in 54AD), because people would take on the name of their patron when they did so. But since he personally bought the right (which was considered by some a corrupt way of achieving citizenship), it is unlikely that he has deep connections with other relatives and friends. He’s got the bare citizenship.

But the commander was astonished that the scrawny and battered man in front of him could be a Roman citizen. He didn’t look rich. How could he buy his citizenship? He didn’t look Roman. How could this common Jew have purchased Roman citizenship? It seemed inconceivable.

2. To have been born with citizenship (v. 28b) means that Paul’s family is in high society in Roman circles. He’s got connections.

Paul says that he hadn’t purchased it. “**I was born a citizen.**” That’s one more astonishing thing. This meant that Paul belonged to a powerful and well-connected family in Tarsus. It was only recently that purchasing citizenship would have been possible, but Paul’s family obviously had citizenship in the past. So Paul’s family must have done the empire a favor. Anything that happened to Paul might bring personal repercussions to these soldiers. Paul doesn’t have to say a lot. We have seen in the past that Paul’s family may have disowned him. But Paul doesn’t have to volunteer that

information. Paul just gives the most basic of information to protect himself and to win this centurion into doing the right thing.

And we need to learn how to reason with government officials in ways that will win them rather than alienate them. We need to be thinking about how their personal interests can on occasion align with Christian interests. Now it's true that in chapter 23 Paul gets mad after he is slapped and breaks that rule, but he quickly reverts to the principle that a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still. Much better to win an adversary than to humiliate him.

VII. Make sure that government officials are held accountable and therefore have something to fear (v. 29). Make the most of bureaucratic regulations.

The seventh tool for resisting tyranny is to realize that all government officials fear something. Some might fear their wives, or fear public opinion, or fear shame or fear exposure. In this case, it was fear of repercussions from above. Verse 29 says, **“Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.”** His soldiers didn't want to have anything more to do with this. They backed off. Even if the commander had insisted that they beat Paul, they had a right to not do so. They didn't want to get in trouble. And the commander himself was afraid of getting in trouble. Look at all the witnesses.

In bureaucracies, officials advance by following the rules. And if you know the rules of a bureaucracy you can sometimes slow down injustice and other times actually advance justice. This is the premise that Dan Pella uses in his books for taking on the IRS. He uses IRS rules to stymie the IRS, and he does so very effectively. If you want a tongue in cheek look at how bureaucracies work, read Dilbert. It's much more fun than reading some of the technical books, but there is a lot of truth exposed in those cartoon strips. All bureaucrats fear something. Know what that is, and leverage it.

VIII. Make the most of the court system (v. 30), but don't put your full confidence in it (23:1ff).

The last tool for resisting injustice is to make the most of the court system. Verse 30 says, **“The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from his bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.”** Paul is going to have

some fun with this court in the next chapter. I'm looking forward to preaching on it in the future.

But when I speak of this as a tool for advancing justice, I do so *not because judges are exempt from the problem of depravity*. We are going to see a lot of depravity in the next chapter. But it's just another check and balance. The courts can become a tool for resisting or slowing down injustice because it can pit one depraved person (with his own self-interest) against another depraved person. It's actually the principle that makes the Free Market system work so well – for one pagan to profit from another pagan consistently he needs to restrain his own depravity and serve the other person's interests well. And God uses all of these things to slow down evil in the world. Praise Jesus! It's kind of the tower of Babel syndrome where the humanists have a hard time getting along. Why? Because they are depraved. I can just see God telling the angels to watch what's going to happen next, and smiling as things come to a grinding halt in the next chapter.

In these chapters God has used ungodly government to stop the injustice of individuals and mobs. Of course, they didn't know they were serving justice. They were serving their own self-interest. Probably the only reason the commander risked his own safety to rescue Paul is that he thought he had captured the wanted Egyptian and would get a promotion. But God used this for His own purposes anyway.

Then God uses the rules of an ungodly government to stop the injustice of a lower branch of the same ungodly government. And He used an even lower magistrate to interpose himself between Paul and a higher magistrate. Then God uses the crowd riots to get the commander to want the Jews to settle things. But in the next chapter God pits two factions within the Jewish government against each other, and throws the ball back into the Roman court. He was in control the whole time. And God continues to be in control of depraved mobs and governments today.

But it's also important to realize that Paul was not a pawn. He's got a free will, and he makes the most of it. He sought to take control of the situation. Paul was actively using these tools to his own advantage. And this whole section in chapter 22 gives us a bit of a Biblical philosophy of civics. Since the sixteenth century, Calvinists have pointed out that your view of the Gospel shapes your view of culture and civics. Certainly your view of depravity does.

Many people cynically think that the only time we can breath a collective sigh of relief is when our Congress takes a recess. But it's really worse than that because the courts keep plugging along with *their* depraved decisions that *also* need to be resisted. We've talked about depravity in the other branches of government; let's consider how our founding fathers thought of depravity in the courts. Thomas Jefferson said,

[T]he opinion which gives to the judges the right to decide what laws are constitutional and what not . . . would make the judiciary a despotic branch. . . . [T]o consider the judges as the ultimate arbiters of all constitutional questions [is] a very dangerous doctrine indeed, and one which would place us under the despotism of an oligarchy. . . . The Constitution has erected no such single tribunal.⁶

He was horrified to see the steadily growing power of the Judiciary in his own day, and he said,

We already see the [judiciary] power, installed for life, responsible to no authority . . . advancing with a noiseless and steady pace to the great object of consolidation. The foundations are already deeply laid by their decisions for the annihilation of constitutional State rights and the removal of every check, every counterpoise to the engulfing power of which themselves are to make a sovereign part.⁷

He saw exactly what was going to happen, and we are suffering from that. In another place he said,

It has long been my opinion, and I have never shrunk from its expression... that the germ of dissolution of our Federal Government is in the constitution of the Federal Judiciary – an irresponsible body...working like gravity by night and by day, gaining a little today and a little tomorrow, and advancing its noiseless step like a thief over the field of jurisdiction until all shall be usurped from the States and the government be consolidated into one. To this I am opposed.⁸

And we too need to oppose it with all that is in us. We may not have much power. We may only be able to give the resistance that we will look at in the next chapter. But it's painfully obvious that our founding fathers would have rolled over in their graves if they could have seen how bad the judiciary has gotten. It looks as out of control today as the Jewish Sanhedrin had become in chapter 23. If you have any illusions of the natural goodness of judges, those illusions will very quickly be set to rest if you are willing to read a few hundred pages of judicial decisions from the last fifteen years. They have begun to get insane.

⁶ Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, volume VIII, 1801-1806 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1897), p. 311.

⁷ Thomas Jefferson, in S.E. Forman, *The Life and Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Indianapolis: The Bowen-Merrill Company, 1900), p. 280

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

Michael Paulsen, University Chair and professor at University of Saint Thomas School of Law said this:

The decision in Casey [which was in 1992], reaffirming Roe and itself reaffirmed and extended in Carhart, in my view exposes the Supreme Court, as currently constituted, as a lawless, rogue institution capable of the most monstrous of injustices in the name of law, with a smugness and arrogance worthy of the worst totalitarian dictatorships of all time. The Court, as it stands today, has, with its abortion decisions, forfeited its legal and moral legitimacy as an institution. It has forfeited its claimed authority to speak for the Constitution. It has forfeited its entitlement to have its decisions respected, and followed, by the other branches of government, by the states, and by the People. The enthusiasm of liberal intelligentsia for the Court's abortion decisions, the sycophancy of the law professorate, of the legal profession, and of our elected officials, and the docility of the American people with respect to our lawless, authoritarian Court rivals the pliancy of the most cowardly, servile peoples toward ruinous, brutal, anti-democratic regimes throughout world history. We suffer people to commit despicable acts of private violence and we welcome - some of us revere - a regime that destroys popular government for the sake of perverted, Orwellian notions of "liberty." After a twentieth century that saw some of the worst barbarisms and atrocities ever committed by humankind, at a time when humankind supposedly had progressed to more enlightened states, we still have not learned. The lesson of the Holocaust - "Never Forget" - is lost. We fail to recognize the amazing capacity of human beings to commit unthinkable, barbaric evil, and of others to tolerate it. We remember and are aghast at the atrocities of others, committed in the past, or in distant lands today. But we do not even recognize the similar atrocities that we ourselves commit, and tolerate, today.⁹

Conclusion

What an indictment against our current generation! And it is time that people across America wake up. There may come a time when I am put in jail for preaching Scripture and applying Scripture like I have this morning. But rather than getting discouraged over such a possibility, it should make us realize once again that the ultimate solution to our problems is not citizens or civic officers, but only Jesus Christ. Do not put your trust in princes; do not put your trust in man; do not trust in revolution; look to Scripture for your plan.

Many years ago R. J. Rushdoony said, "Not revolution, but regeneration is the Christian hope for man and society."¹⁰ That's why Paul preached the Gospel every chance he got. He knew that it was not revolution, but regeneration that was the hope for Rome ever crumbling to the Gospel. And crumble it did because there were hundreds of thousands of

⁹ Michael Stokes Paulsen, *The Worst Constitutional Decision of All Time*, 78 *Notre Dame L. Rev.* 995, 1003-1007 (2003). See <http://www.stthomas.edu/law/faculty/bios/paulsenmichael.htm>

¹⁰ R. J. Rushdoony, *Chalcedon Position Paper No. 105*.

Christians in the first three centuries who were willing to preach Christ and live Christ in every sphere of life. They were willing to think consistently with doctrines such as depravity, God's sovereignty, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints, etc. and to apply those doctrines in ways that absolutely transformed society.

The tools for resistance to injustice that we have looked at today are important, but they are only stopgap measures. They are not the ultimate solution. The story doesn't end in chapter 22. First century Christians transformed society by believing the Gospel and living the Gospel. Only the restored Gospel of the Reformation will turn America around. Let's us pray for God's mercies that He would give us a new Reformation. If he does, nothing can stop His grace. Amen.

Resisting Injustice

Acts 22:22-30

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 3-22-2009

Introduction

- I. Boldly bring a prophetic witness against your culture (v. 22 with previous verses)
- II. Don't idealize the anarchist or radical libertarian viewpoint. Realize that depravity can make mobs capable of anything (vv. 22-23)
- III. Allow for a strong enough government to restrain the passions of mobocracy (v. 24a). But put restraints on the powers of government lest they too be tyrannical (v. 24b)
- IV. Appeal to laws to which government officials are subject (v. 25). This is the genius of our Constitution. But it does no good if no one knows about it or appeals to it.
- V. Use interposition of lower officials to protect from bad actions of higher officials (v. 26).
- VI. Reason with government officials respectfully in language they can understand and/or care about (vv. 27-28)
 - A. Paul's goal is not to anger the commander, but to win the commander to a position
 - B. Paul brings this commander to realize that it is in his best interests to treat Paul well.
 1. To have purchased citizenship (v. 28a) means that this commander did not have deep connections.
 2. To have been born with citizenship (v. 28b) means that Paul's family is in high society in Roman circles. He's got connections.
- VII. Make sure that government officials are held accountable and therefore have something to fear (v. 29). Make the most of bureaucratic regulations.
- VIII. Make the most of the court system (v. 30), but don't put your full confidence in it (23:1ff).

Conclusion