

What Men Intended for Evil

Acts 21:27-40

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on March 1, 2009

Introduction

W. Weeks tells the true story of a fishing fleet that got caught in a fierce storm off the coast of New Foundland. When night came, not a single vessel had returned to port, which made the residents extremely nervous. All night long the mothers, children and sweethearts of these men paced up and down the beach waiting and praying. And they began to lose hope that anyone was saved. To add to the horror of all the men being lost, one of the cottages caught on fire and burned to the ground with everything in it. However, when morning broke, the village rejoiced to see all the boats safe in the harbor. But there was one face that was sad – the wife of the man whose cottage had burned down. It was a total loss, and she cried saying, “O husband, we are ruined! Our home and all it contained was destroyed by the fire!” But the man said, “Thank God for that fire! It was the light of the burning cottage that guided the whole fleet to port!” From one perspective that night was an evil tragedy. From another perspective, the hand of a loving God crafted it. And yes, that morning they did thank God for that burned down cottage.

It is hard for people to see God’s purposes in troubling times like ours, just as I am sure that it was hard for Esther and Mordecai to see God’s sovereign purposes when they were in the middle of their disaster. If you’ve never read it, Esther is a fun story in the Bible to read. It shows the sovereignty of God in even the sinful decrees of a sinful government. It is a book that demonstrates par excellence that there is nothing outside of God’s sovereign control. Now it is true that God is not the author of sin, yet God somehow mysteriously and marvelously works even the wrath of man to praise Him. And all you have to do is look at the cross and you will see what I mean. The central event of history was the horrible sin of man’s crucifixion of Jesus. Yet God purposed every detail of that event for His glory and for our good. It wasn’t simply a situation where God allowed it to happen. No - He purposed the cross. And many Scriptures show that. He purposed the cross. And what men intended for evil, God intended for good.

Let me give you one more illustration. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Joseph’s gracious response to his brothers in Genesis 50:20.

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Joseph's brothers had horribly wronged him: hating him, throwing him into the pit, planning to kill him, and finally making a buck by selling him into slavery in Egypt. He had suffered for thirteen years because of their sin. But he trusted God through it all. When his brothers come before him, they are nervous that he will take it out on them, because finally, Joseph has been elevated to the position where he is the second most powerful man in Egypt. But Joseph says, No, I'm not in the place of God. And he then tells them, "**...you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good....**" In a discussion on the book of Job,¹ John Piper pointed out that this verse doesn't say "God *used* it for good." That's true, but that's not what the text says. The text says, "God *meant* it for good." God *meant* it; He *intended* it; He *purposed* it; He *willed* it. In fact, Psalm 105:17 says that God sent Joseph into Egypt. So there are two purposes in that passage: the purpose of men and the purpose of God. Joseph can rightly condemn what they did as evil and say that their purpose was wrong. But he could still trust God's overriding purpose.

And that is true of this passage of Scripture. What men intended for evil, God intended for good. This is not a situation out of control. This is not God's backup plan. No. The Jews intended to get rid of Paul once and for all, and God intended the exact opposite to happen through their very actions. It would have been impossible for Paul to preach to governors, kings and to Nero himself unless the Jews had engaged in this riot and tried to kill Paul. This is the first of numerous detailed things that God had to control in order to get Paul to begin turning Rome upside down.

And I think we can take the same comfort in our own day. What our enemies intend for evil, God intends for good. Evil men are but tools and pawns in God's hand, even though they act freely and without any idea of God's control. So I think we can take comfort from passages like this even though they describe the evil of man unleashed with incredible hostility. So this is going to be a two point sermon: the Jewish attack – what men intended for evil, and the Roman arrest – what God intended for good.

I. The Jewish Attack – What men intended for evil

A. The Culprits – Paul's enemies (v. 27)

The culprits are described in verse 27. They are upright, very religious looking people. He describes them as "**the Jews from Asia.**" References to these Jews occur 75 times in the book of Acts, and most of them show these

¹ <http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/MediaPlayer/3337/Audio/>

religious folks to be Paul's worst nightmare. They dog his steps everywhere he goes and cause him all kinds of trouble. One person said, "It's always easier to get religionists to fight for their religion than it is to get them to live it out." And that was certainly true of these Jews. Pagans had caused trouble for Paul, yes. But the pagans did not cause nearly as much trouble as the religionists.

And we find the same today. If you were to ask almost any Christian leader this question: "Who has caused you the most trouble and stress in your ministry?" or "Who has hindered your ministry the most?" I believe that every one of these leaders would say that it was a fellow professing believer – what Paul addresses in chapter 22:1 as "**Brethren and fathers.**" This is true across the theological spectrum, whether you are thinking of a Dobson, a Doug Phillips, a Ken Ham, Rushdoony, Bahnsen, John Frame, Voddie Baucham, Mark Driscoll or a John Piper. It's true that homosexuals, evolutionists, and other pagans trash every one of them. But those who claim to be God's people often do the most hurtful and hateful damage. I have read some of the blogs and websites devoted to tearing down such leaders, and you can see that Satan is very busy at work within the church. You know, Proverbs talks about the foolish woman who tears down her own household, but Scripture considers it just as foolish when professing Christians tear down the church. So let's not forget the fact that Paul addresses these culprits as brothers and fathers. Israel had not yet been excommunicated. That would happen in the book of Revelation in about eight years.

B. The Citizens' Arrest – bypassing the temple guard (v. 27b)

Verse 27 gives the second C – the Citizens' Arrest. "**Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him.**" Just before this incident, Paul is probably breathing a sigh of relief because he has escaped this experiment unscathed for seven days. It's almost over. But suddenly Paul is spotted, the Asian Jews who knew him grab him and conscript the help of the crowd. And I believe that the crowd was conscripted because simply telling the guards would not have gotten Paul killed. They would have had to follow court procedure. These people want Paul judged by the multitude.

Critics of the Gospel don't bother playing fair today either. It's a different kind of crowd. Today your name is smeared in the media, through email, on blogs and through gossip columns. But the effect is just as powerful as stirring up a crowd at a lynching. People are judged without

recourse to law. Some of these blogs that put out several papers a day justify what they are doing by saying, “Hey. These leaders can respond to these accusations on this blog. We’ll give them free space.” But as some of these leaders have discovered, there wouldn’t be enough hours in the day to be able to answer every accusation that is being hurled to millions of eager gossip readers.

C. The Charges - hypocritical (v. 28)

1. Charge of Anti-Semitism (“against the people”) a) against a Jew who brought alms for Israel and b) from people racially prejudiced against the Gentiles

But it’s the charges that are the most hypocritical. Verse 28 says, **“crying out, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.)** They’ll keep leveling new charges both in this chapter and the next two, but let’s stop and think about the charges in this verse.

They are first of all accusing Paul of being against the Jews. What an amazing accusation! Essentially, they are claiming that he is anti-Semitic. Now those were fighting words in the mid fifties. You will remember that there was growing hatred among the Jews against the Romans and against any Roman sympathizers. So automatically this was poisoning the minds of these people against Paul. It doesn’t take much to make people begin to be leery of a given leader when he gets bad press. Nothing needs to be proved, but people might wonder, “Maybe there is something to this. Maybe we ought to avoid his ministry.”

What is particularly hypocritical about this charge is that Josephus points out a great deal of racial prejudice on the part of the *Jews* of Paul’s day. These are racists calling Paul a racist. Do we have that today? Absolutely yes we do. Some of the biggest users of the racist card today are themselves hyper-racist. It’s an old, old tactic, and we ought not to be sucked in by it.

But a further hypocrisy is that Paul is a Jew, who is currently practicing Jewish customs and who has brought a huge gift to help the Jewish people. How could he be against the people? But prejudice doesn’t listen to reason. And when false charges are brought against pastors and conservative politicians in this nation, you need to have your ears prick up and see if there is any substance, or if these are trumped-up charges like

happened in this chapter. If they are false charges, try to stop the gossip. The “Paul” who is being charged will not be able to stop it.

2. Anarchism (“against...the law”) by people who a) are bypassing the temple guard and b) are breaking the law

The second charge is that Paul is against the law. That’s a pretty vague accusation, but if the media spreads the charge of ethics violations, illegal activity, or tax fraud, it doesn’t have to be true for it to wipe out a congressman’s reputation. I have been disgusted at the smear campaign that a city agency is bringing against a city candidate this year. It’s all innuendo of scandalous conduct without ever saying that he is ever engaged in scandalous conduct. Because there was one little part of a large bill that dealt with surveillance of pedophiles, they are tarring this guy and others on the city council for voting against it, and they are tarring them with something to hide – implying that the something to hide is that they he is a pedophile trying to protect other pedophiles. I’m not saying that I am for or against this candidate. I wasn’t planning to vote for him. But the tactics stink. They remind me of the mobocracy here.

But what I think is most atrocious about the Jewish charge against Paul is that these Jews are violating the law *themselves*, and they are doing with a high hand. Like immoral Congressmen who accuse other Congressmen of immoral conduct, these people who are accusing Paul of lawlessness *are themselves lawless*. Let me read you some of the more blatant violations of law that are going on in this riot.

First, Deuteronomy 25:1-2 and other passages (Is. 43:9; Imp. Deut. 17:4,6; Acts 23:3; Luke 22:63-65) indicate that a person must be treated as innocent until proven guilty. There is nothing Paul has done, and nothing witnessed by the crowds that could have justified this action. Paul has just finished fulfilling a Jewish vow, so has visible evidence in his shaved head that he is not acting like a Gentile. No one takes the time to investigate.

Second, Deuteronomy 16:18 and numerous other Scriptures insist that there must be a public trial before an official court before punishment can be inflicted on anyone (Deut. 16:18; 17:4,5; cf. Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7; Amos 5:12,15; Zech. 8:16). They have kind of ignored that part of the constitution.

Third, not only may a person not be beaten prior to a trial, but also, if he deserves a beating, he must be beaten in front of the judges (Deut. 25:1-2; Is. 43:9; Imp. Deut. 17:6; Acts 23:3). The beating they inflict on Paul is not lawful.

Fourth, even after it is brought to the civil magistrates, Deuteronomy 17:4 demands a thorough investigation. No such investigation is happening. They plan to kill him right then and there.

Fifth, Deuteronomy 17:1-17 and other passages (19:15-21) insist that circumstantial evidence is not enough. There must be corroboration of witness and evidence reduced to writing (Job 31:35). This is all based on shouted hearsay.

Sixth, the accused has the right to cross-examine his accusers (Deut. 19:18; Prov. 18:17; Job 40:2; Psalm 50:21; Is. 50:8). Well, they are not giving him a chance.

Seventh, the accused has the privilege of making a self-defense according to Deuteronomy 1:16-17 and other passages. Paul tries, but they shout him down.

Eighth, according to Exodus 22:10-11, the witness had to take an oath before testifying against the accused.

I think I have given enough to show the utter hypocrisy of this charge that Paul was against the law. And it reminds me of the tactics that go on in Washington DC and in many a courtroom – A Congressman associated with homosexual prostitutes calling other people unethical?! Give me a break! Murderers telling proliferators that they are immoral?! Politicians engaged in theft on a grand scale trying to pin some vague tax evasion charge on some other politician!? Come on! The same kind of rank hypocrisy happens today. And in the future it may come against you or me or some other leader. And it might be easy for us to get frustrated with such people if we do not realize that God is sovereign, and what they intend for evil, God intends for good. God intends those kinds of attacks to happen. Read John 12:40 some time and you will realize that a God-given blindness has been given to these people where they cannot see straight. It's a God-given blindness. That's John 12:40. I think that's exactly what is happening in our nation. Otherwise, how can you explain the insanity that is coming out of DC?

3. Against the temple, when in reality Paul was there to get purified.

The third charge that they bring in verse 28 is that Paul is against the temple. If Paul is against the temple, why is he in the temple, and why is he getting purified according to Mosaic Law, and why is he submitting to the temple regulations for Nazarites?

4. Paul has broken a law worthy of the death penalty (v. 28b)

The fourth charge is the most serious of all. It can be found in the second part of verse 28 and all of verse 29. It says, “...**and furthermore, he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.**” (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.” The words, “they supposed” should not be in our vocabulary when we are judging other people. Suppositions can get us into trouble. All judgments should be made based on solid evidence.

Let me illustrate the difference. There was a Fox News reporter who was trying to get close-up pictures of the fires that were spreading through a valley, but he was blockaded on every level. He got permission to charter an airplane and while driving to the local airport, called to reserve the flight. He was told that a twin-engine plane would be waiting for him on the tarmac. He spotted the plane warming up outside the hanger, jumped in with his bag, slammed the door shut, and shouted, “Let’s go.” The pilot taxied out, swung the plane into the wind and took off. Once in the air, the photographer instructed the pilot, “Fly over the valley and make low passes so that I can take pictures of the fires on the hillsides.” “Why?” asked the pilot. “Because I’m a photographer for Fox Cable News, and I need to get some close up shots.” The pilot was strangely silent for a moment, and finally stammered, “So, what you’re telling me, is... you’re NOT my flight instructor?”

Suppositions can frequently get us into trouble. But to make suppositions like this one in verse 28 that could damage a person’s reputation, career, or even his life are frankly immoral. It should never be done. Yet we can be guilty of the same when we buy into propaganda about some public figure simply based on hearsay.

Now the reason this charge was so dangerous was that the Romans had given Jews permission to give the death penalty for one crime, and one crime only – if Gentiles walked beyond a certain point in the temple the Jewish authorities were allowed to inflict the capital penalty. But that’s the caveat – Jewish *authorities* were allowed to inflict the capital penalty. And there were signs everywhere written in Latin and Greek that said this: “No Gentile may enter within the railing around the sanctuary and within the enclosure. Whoever should be caught will render himself liable to the death penalty which will inevitably follow.” And we have two such postings that have been preserved till today. So this was a serious charge on which to be making *any* suppositions. And the hypocrisy of this can be seen in the three questions in your outline:

a) Where are the Greeks? (v. 28)

First, where were the Greeks that they claimed Paul had brought into the temple? That's the heart of the accusation, so where are they? They should have grabbed the Greeks. If they witnessed Gentiles coming in prior to this and didn't do anything about it, they show themselves hypocrites. If they have just seen Gentiles coming in, where are they?

b) Why kill Paul instead of Trophimus? (v. 29)

Second, if Trophimus has come into the temple, why not search for him and bring him to court? Why go after Paul?

c) If Paul is trying to defile the place, why is he getting ritually purified?

Third, if Paul is a Nazarite with four other Nazarites, in the portion of the temple known as the chamber of the Nazarites, then we have clear evidence that Paul was identifying himself with Jews, not Gentiles. How could a guy that the Jewish priests have obviously approved for the past seven days of Nazarite ceremonies be in a conspiracy to defile the temple? It just doesn't make sense.

D. The Conjecture – without evidence (v. 29)

I've already dealt with the fourth C – conjecture. But let's look at five further contradictions that we see in verse 30.

E. The Contradictions (v. 30)**1. Disturbed with no evidence**

“And all the city was disturbed...” Why disturbed when there is no evidence? This is mob psychology. As we will see in verse 34, they don't all really know what the event is about. They just know that Paul is bad. Let me tell you something – if mobs get unleashed in Omaha, you better have an equalizer ready. Mobs don't listen to reason. They only listen to one thing, and the Romans show that one thing – strength.

2. Moral outrage producing immorality

Second contradiction – moral outrage producing immorality. **“...and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple.”** We've already dealt with this contradiction – moral outrage by immoral people. We see this all the time in DC, Lincoln and other state capitols and city councils. But you can see immoral manifestations of moral

outrage in churches as well. I kept an advertisement signed by 100 pro-abortion and pro-homosexual clergy that stated their outrage at our supposed immorality of calling homosexuality sin.

3. Coming together to tear apart

Third, the people run together to tear something apart. They have a unity of purpose to destroy all unity. We know that it isn't a true unity, because when the officers are trying to figure out what is wrong, verse 34 reports "**some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult...**" etc. What unites them is that they have a common enemy they can take their frustrations out on. I'm sure some of these people didn't have the foggiest notion of whether Paul was guilty of the charges or not. They were simply so frustrated with Gentile abuses that they wanted to take their frustrations out on someone. That is always a danger in any country. Minorities (like these Jews) can do the same hateful things because they have become frustrated with abuses perpetrated against them.

4. Fastidiousness with temple purity but willingness to lynch without a trial

The fourth contradiction is fastidiousness with temple purity. Commentators point out that it would have been the guards who would have quickly shut the gates. They are the only ones authorized. They didn't want a riot within the temple proper, because someone might get killed and that might defile the temple (2 Kings 11:15-16; 2 Chron. 24:21). But those same guards don't protect Paul from harm or mob disregard for the law. They don't insist on justice or a court hearing. And Jesus pointed out the same problem with the Pharisees in his day. They strained a gnat out of their tea, while swallowing a camel. They were fastidious about tiny details of the law, but they failed on big issues of justice, mercy and faith (Matt 23:23-24).

But lest we point the finger, we need to realize that it is all too easy for us to do the same. We can pride ourselves in conforming to a standard of social behavior and fail to be just, merciful and living by faith.

5. Closing the doors on Paul closes the doors on God

All of this rejection of God and Gospel would lead to Israel being rejected by God. And according to some commentators, that is symbolized by the shutting of the temple. Because Paul, God and Gospel are shut out of the temple, Israel itself would be shut out of the temple and out of God's kingdom.

So all of this is a rather fast paced story telling how the Jews intended evil against Paul. But though God is not mentioned in this narrative, like He is not mentioned in the story of Esther, it is clear that God is indeed beautifully working things together for the invincible advancement of His kingdom.

II. The Roman Arrest – God intended for good

A. Intervention in the nick of time (vv. 31-32)

First, God brings the Romans in to save Paul in the nick of time. Verses 31-32:

Acts 21:31 Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Acts 21:32 He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

These guys aren't stupid. They know how to control their rage when their life is on the line. They have already witnessed the rough hand of Felix brutally suppressing revolts. So as soon as they see the soldiers, they stop beating Paul. God's providence is at work. God makes sure that the commander is alerted at just the right time. But do be aware of the fact that bringing out swords here made a difference, even though it was a mob. In the LA riots, the mobs left the storeowners alone if they had shotguns. That's one thing they understood. They didn't even have to fire the shotguns.

B. Change of jurisdiction (vv. 33-36)

Second, God makes sure that Paul is taken out of Jewish jurisdiction and into Roman jurisdiction. It was critical that this happen for God's plan to work. Obviously God could have gotten Paul rescued from the Sanhedrin too, if He needed to. But God has other plans, and verses 33-36 show them unfolding. Verse 33:

Acts 21:33 Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done.

By binding Paul, the commander changed Paul's jurisdiction. He took Paul out of Jewish custody and into Roman custody. He was no doubt bound with a belt by the Jews (just as Agabus had prophesied), and now he is bound by chains. From here on in Roman law would have to be followed,

and this was essential to get Paul to Rome, rather than to the Sanhedrin. The Greek indicates that the commander repeatedly asked his questions of the crowd, and was apparently getting nowhere.

Acts 21:34 And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks.

The tumult and violence of the crowd was needed in order to keep the commander from working out a deal with the Jewish leaders. Can God control the hearts of crowds? Yes he can. At the time of the Exodus under Moses, Scripture says that God changed the hearts of the Egyptian population so that they gladly gave away their wealth. And God was controlling the crowds here too.

This was a scary spot to be in for even 200 tough soldiers, so the commander wanted to get Paul out of there right away. This too is God's providence at work. Verses 35-36:

Acts 21:35 When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob.

Acts 21:36 For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, "Away with him!"

This is so much like what the crowds said with Jesus that it is uncanny. But I would like to point out that God was using this increasing hostility of the Jews against Christianity *to force believing Jews to abandon the ceremonial law that they were so tightly clinging to*. As Paul had demonstrated in his epistles, the ceremonial law was a dividing wall of partition just like this dividing wall in the temple was excluding Gentiles from the temple. And the increasing hostility that can be sensed in this chapter could not be pacified by the moderating actions of James and the church. They couldn't have their cake and eat it too. Within eight or nine years Hebrews and Revelation would be written and God would be definitively calling all believers to come out of Judaism, out of the synagogue or to be judged with Israel. This forty-year transition period was about to come to an end. This middle wall of partition was to be a shut door forever, and God's purpose in the sinful events of this chapter was to force Christians to get over it. It may have seemed like God was not in control. But God was orchestrating these events for the good of the whole church.

C. Preliminary innocence established (vv. 37-40)

1. Paul's respectful demeanor (v. 37)

Of course, Luke ends this chapter by giving us preliminary evidence of Paul's total innocence. Even the commander will begin to see this shortly. Verse 37: **"Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, 'May I speak to you?'"** Paul is showing a very respectful demeanor. He is not demanding, sullen or angry. This is not the character of the revolutionary that the *commander* was expecting. And so it takes him by surprise. And respectful demeanor will get Christians much farther in political circles than angrily protesting all the time. I like the title of one book that was recently recommended to me. It is called, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry Church." And it shows how demeanor can totally turn off a commander like this. So when you get tangled up in politics, remember Paul's demeanor. Sinners in the hands of an angry God is an OK thing, but sinners in the hand of an angry church is usually counterproductive.

2. Paul's fluency in Greek shows standing (v. 37)

Continuing in verse 37: **"He replied, 'Can you speak Greek?'"** It was not surprising that Paul could speak in Greek. Most Jews could. What was surprising was likely that Paul spoke Greek without an accent, like an educated Greek would. Paul was probably so dirty and roughed up, it was no wonder that the commander was assuming he was a revolutionary. Now it may be that the Egyptian they were after didn't speak Greek, but most commentaries doubt it. Verse 38:

3. Paul is not the revolutionary Egyptian (v. 38)

Verse 38: **"Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?"** Josephus speaks of this revolutionary as leading numerous Sicarii assassins to the Mount of Olives where he promised to take over Jerusalem and free them from Rome. This was one of many false Messiahs during the first century. Rome obliterated that Jewish army, but the leader, escaped into the desert. So it is no wonder that the commander wanted to capture this guy. It's probably part of what kept Paul from getting killed. The commander would have a great trophy and probably get a promotion if he could capture the Egyptian revolutionary alive. And God uses this to his advantage to keep Paul safe.

4. Paul is not a Gentile, and therefore has not broken the only law Jews could appeal to for what they were doing (v. 39a)

But Paul assures him that this is a case of mistaken identity. He says, **“I am a Jew.”** This would put to rest any accusations that he was a Gentile defiling the temple. It would take away any right that the Jews had to put him to death.

5. Paul is from Tarsus, not Egypt

Then he says, **“...a Jew from Tarsus...”** So he is not from Egypt, as the commander assumed.

6. Paul is a citizen of Tarsus

And he says, **“a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city.”** Paul’s citizenship in this highly respected city would mean that the commander would need to take him very seriously. It wouldn’t be till the next chapter that Paul reveals that he is a Roman citizen as well. I guess that *could* have been guessed from what Paul says here. But the commander obviously did not catch it, so Paul makes it clear in the next chapter so as to avoid a beating.

7. Paul speaks in Hebrew to the crowd, again showing his Jewishness

And then finally, Paul asks permission to speak to the Jews and give a defense. He said, **“and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.’ So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying...”** And we will look at his speech in the future. But this little exchange shows 1) presence of mind on the part of Paul, 2) shows his constant looking for opportunities to witness, 3) shows a respectful spirit, 4) and shows his Jewishness.

D. Paul’s speech would be one of many links in the chain that would lead Paul to Rome.

Paul’s speech would be one more link that would make it impossible for Paul to remain outside of Roman custody. He *needed* to be in Roman custody because God had a purpose for Paul that would be greater than *anything* Paul could have thought up in his wildest dreams. And because Paul focused on *God’s* purpose, he was able to remain steady.

Conclusion – what men intend for your evil, God can use for your good.

And that's what I want to encourage you to do in the midst of our own historical situation. Focus on God's purposes, not man's. It is true that many liberals are intending evil against us. But don't focus on them. Don't be enemy focused. Be God focused; be promise focused. If you do, you too can have the presence of mind that Paul did to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. Instead of slinking into a hole, you can keep advancing knowing that you are invincible until it is God's time for you to die. Instead of singing, "Backward Christian Soldiers," you will be able to sing, "Onward Christian soldiers."

God's grace is so powerful that it not only changes and converts human hearts like Saul's, it controls men and movements, sin and righteousness, things visible and things invisible. Nothing is outside of God's control. God's grace must be our rearguard, foreguard; be above us and under us; be the beginning and the end of our faith. Let me read you a parody and then urge you to take the opposite. The parody reads:

Backward Christian soldiers, fleeing from the fight,
With the cross of Jesus, nearly out of sight.
Christ our rightful Master, stands against the foe;
Onward into battle, we seem afraid to go.

Chorus: Backward Christian soldiers, fleeing from the fight,
With the cross of Jesus, nearly out of sight.
Like a mighty tortoise, moves the Church of God.
Brothers we are treading, where we've often trod.
We are much divided, many bodies we,
Having different doctrines, but not much charity.

Chorus: Backward Christian soldiers, fleeing from the fight,
With the cross of Jesus, nearly out of sight.
Crowns and thrones may perish, kingdoms rise and wane,
But the cross of Jesus hidden does remain.
Gates of Hell should never 'gainst the Church prevail,
We have Christ's own promise, but we think that it might fail.

Sit here then ye people, join our sleeping throng;
Blend with ours your voices in a feeble song.
Blessings, ease and comfort ask from Christ the King,
But with our modern thinking, we won't do a thing.

Chorus: Backward Christian soldiers, fleeing from the fight,
With the cross of Jesus, nearly out of sight.

Anonymous

While that is a good description of the modern church, it is not a good description of Paul. And it is Paul's faith that I urge you to imitate. Remember that what men intended for evil, God intended for good. Trust Him, and move forward. Amen.

What Men Intended for Evil

Acts 21:27-40

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on March 1, 2009

Introduction

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- B. The Citizens’ Arrest – bypassing the temple guard (v. 27b)
- C. The Charges - hypocritical (v. 28)
 - 1. Charge of Anti-Semitism (“against the people”) a) against a Jew who brought alms for Israel and b) from people racially prejudiced against the Gentiles
 - 2. Anarchism (“against...the law”) by people who a) are bypassing the temple guard and b) are breaking the law
 - 3. Against the temple, when in reality Paul was there to get purified.
 - 4. Paul has broken a law worthy of the death penalty (v. 28b)
 - a) Where are the Greeks? (v. 28)
 - b) Why kill Paul instead of Trophimus? (v. 29)
 - c) If Paul is trying to defile the place, why is he getting ritually purified?
- D. The Conjecture – without evidence (v. 29)
- E. The Contradictions (v. 30)
 - 1. Disturbed with no evidence
 - 2. Moral outrage producing immorality
 - 3. Coming together to tear apart
 - 4. Fastidiousness with temple purity but willingness to lynch without a trial
 - 5. Closing the doors on Paul closes the doors on God

II. The Roman Arrest – **God intended for good**

- A. Intervention in the nick of time (vv. 31-32)
- B. Change of jurisdiction (vv. 33-36)
- C. Preliminary innocence established (vv. 37-40)
 - 1. Paul’s respectful demeanor (v. 37)
 - 2. Paul’s fluency in Greek shows standing (v. 37)
 - 3. Paul is not the revolutionary Egyptian (v. 38)
 - 4. Paul is not a Gentile, and therefore has not broken the only law Jews could appeal to for what they were doing (v. 39a)
 - 5. Paul is from Tarsus, not Egypt
 - 6. Paul is a citizen of Tarsus
 - 7. Paul speaks in Hebrew to the crowd, again showing his Jewishness
- D. Paul’s speech would be one of many links in the chain that would lead Paul to Rome.

Conclusion – what men intend for your evil, God can use for your good.