

## Civil Rights Asserted

### Acts 16:35-40

By Phillip G. Kayser 4-6-2008

Patrick Henry was riding into the town of Culpeper, VA in March of 1775 when he witnessed something that turned his stomach. In the middle of the town square was a minister tied to a whipping post and being beaten with whips that were laced with metal. Patrick Henry wrote, “When they stopped beating him, I could see the bones of his rib cage. I turned to someone and asked what the man had done to deserve such a beating as this.”<sup>1</sup> The reply was that he was a minister of the Gospel who had refused to obtain a license to preach from the government. There were eleven others who were locked in jail. Three days later they were scourged to death. That was in America, the year before the War for Independence, and that was for preaching. We don’t live that far removed from the book of Acts. This was the incident that put fire into Patrick Henry’s bones to resist tyranny with everything that was in him. He started defending such ministers using the law against the government much as Paul used the bureaucratic laws of Rome against the tyrants in this chapter. And it took courage for Patrick Henry to do that because tyrants don’t like being stymied. And it took courage for Paul to assert his civil rights in this chapter. But there are very few citizens in any given age who have the guts to stand up to the government. And so the title of today’s sermon is *Civil Rights Asserted*.

#### I. An Unprincipled Citizenry Abuses Civil Rights

##### A. *Citizens asking the government to intervene in economics (v. 19)*

And I want to begin with the citizens because it is on the citizenry that I lay most of the blame for the erosion of our civil rights today. We like to speak against the tyrants in office (and they are to blame), but even tyrants in office can only go so far as the citizenry is prepared to let them go. Usually citizens get what they deserve in civil government.

There are three problems that I see with the citizens in these verses. Verse 19 shows citizens asking the government to intervene in their

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Sills. “Leaders Should Learn from Heritage,” *Religious Freedom Alert*, Vol. II, No. 1, February, 1986, 2, quoting a tract published by Christian Religious Freedom Council.

economic losses. **But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.** These investors had suffered a loss in the market place. That happens all the time. In this particular situation it was the Gospel that was hurting their business, but Luke says that it was a purely economic concern that drove them. The first instinct of these investors was not to compete on an even playing field (like the free market dictates). Instead, they go to the *government* to solve their problem.

And the sad thing is that many modern Americans do the same. They agree with licensing because they want to protect their interests. Of course they won't say it is to selfishly protect their interests. They will say (as these businessmen did) that it is for the good of the people. Modern Americans want political freedom, but they also want economic security, which always means eventually giving up political *and* economic liberty. Ludwig von Mises exposes this schizophrenic thinking when he said, "The idea that political freedom can be preserved in the absence of economic freedom, and vice versa, is an illusion. Political freedom is the corollary of economic freedom."<sup>2</sup> A statist government is usually a reflection of a statist people. If mortgage companies and home buyers make poor decisions (as they recently have), they will speak of a "national economic crisis" and want the government to bail them out and forgive part of their loans to the tune of billions of dollars. If automakers lose money, they snivel that unless the government bails them out there will be massive unemployment. If steel mills can't compete with Japan, they want to use the government tax system to punish the competition. Human nature does not change, and this verse simply reflects the centuries old love of the citizenry for a Messianic state. But with such economic security being provided there comes increasing political control. America is falling into the same trap today.

***B. Citizens promoting class interests (vv. 20-21)***

The second thing that I blame the citizens for is that they wanted the civil government to promote class interests. Verses 20-21 – **And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "these men being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.** They are pitting one class against the other. Of course, there was legal precedent for this that they

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<sup>2</sup> Ludwig von Mises, in the January 1949 issue of Plain Talk. A portion of this can be accessed at <http://www.mises.org/article.aspx?Id=814&FS=Laissez+Faire+or+Dictatorship>

are appealing to. The year before, Claudius started this promotion of discrimination against a subgroup - the Jews. (We talked about that before.) But based on that, the citizens here do not allow Paul and Silas to have any time to defend themselves. The group politics has already prejudiced everyone against them. So Paul and Silas are not given the opportunity to explain how they are exempt because of their Roman citizenship.

These citizens bank on a common sinful tendency in humans to like similar people and to dislike those who are different from us. They wanted justice for themselves, but were denying justice to these Jews. But when you do that, it plays into the hands of tyrants. In the 1700's Thomas Paine said, "He that would make his own liberty secure must guard even his enemy from oppression; for if he violates this duty he establishes a precedent that will reach to himself." In other words, if you play group politics, it will eventually come back to bite *you*. You could see this in ancient Rome. When laws were initially waived for certain subgroups, and the Federal government got away with it, it wasn't long until the same laws were being waved for Roman citizens and eventually even the senators themselves. It was a gradual taking away of their liberties, but it started with those Senators failing to defend the liberties of all. Promoting class interests of any kind always backfires.

And I think America would do well to heed this principle. We have all kinds of class and group based laws. There are laws protecting certain economic interests, or racial interests. There is a homosexual lobby, a Muslim lobby, and a Jewish lobby. But this isn't new. America should never have discriminated against blacks in the early years. A black citizen should have had all the rights of any other citizen. And even those who were not citizens should have had the advantage of justice. Deuteronomy 1:16 says, **And I charged your judges at that time: "Hear the disputes between your brothers and judge fairly, whether the case is between brother Israelites or between one of them and an alien. Do not show partiality in judging..."** And in your outlines I show verses that demonstrate that the poor were not to be favored above the rich or vice versa. The majority was not to be favored, nor an Israelite nor an alien. Even the unempowered were not to be treated preferentially. The government's job is justice, not group politics. I'll let you read those verses yourself.

**The poor were not to be favored:**

Exod. 23:3 "...and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit."

Lev. 19:15 "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly."

**The rich were not to be favored:**

Exodus 23:6 "Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits."

**The majority was not to be favored:**

Exodus 23:2: “Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd.”

**An Israelite could not be favored over a person of another race:**

Exodus 23:9 “Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt.”

Deut. 1:16: “And I charged your judges at that time: Hear the disputes between your brothers and judge fairly, whether the case is between brother Israelites or between one of them and an alien. Do not show partiality in judging...”

**No preferential treatment for the “unempowered”**

Deut. 1:17 “Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of any man, for judgment belongs to God.”

Deut. 27:19 “Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow.”

Ezek. 22:29 “The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice.”

But if we are going to apply these verses properly, then it means that we cannot support modern affirmative action for blacks or other minority groups because it is giving favors based on race and based on class. It is answering discrimination with another form of discrimination rather than answering discrimination with Biblical justice. And it has backfired. Now there are all kinds of subgroups who are claiming the same preferential treatment – women want special rights, homosexuals want rights that no one else has, and the list goes on. The government should be blind to color, economic status and political position. Moses said, “**judge the people fairly... do not... show partiality... follow justice and justice alone.**” (*Deut. 16:18-20*.)” Supreme Court Justice John Harlan said, “...our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful. The law regards man as man, and takes no account of his surroundings or of his color when his civil rights as guaranteed by the supreme law of the land are involved.” (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, dissenting opinion). Well, I think that statement is Biblical, even if it is applied by some in unbiblical ways.

**C. Citizens unwilling to stand up for the civil rights of all (v. 22)**

The third thing that I blame these citizens for is an unwillingness to stand up for the civil rights of all. Verse 22 says, **Then the multitude rose up together against them...** and then the citizens stand by as the magistrates give them an unjust beating without a trial. They don't worry about it because they don't like the Jews anyway, so no big deal if they are

being denied a justice. I already read Thomas Paine's statement that if we don't stand up for the civil liberties of our enemies, the precedent that is set will come back to deny our own civil liberties. Allan Dershowitz said, "I think it was H. L. Mencken who once said that in America they go after the S.O.B.'s first. And nobody cares about them. They establish bad precedents on them, and then they go after the rest of us."<sup>3</sup> And that's exactly right. It is a critical principle that we stand up for the civil rights of all, whether they are Muslim, atheist or comedians.

Now civil rights means *Biblical* civil rights, not the ridiculous rights that people want to claim for themselves uniquely. Neither the Bible nor the Constitution gave an absolute right to free speech. (Courts have always said that you don't have the right to yell, "Fire!" in a crowded auditorium to create a stampede.) The Constitution certainly did not see the crime of homosexuality as a civil right. But homosexuals should be accorded the right of a fair trial like anyone else. Any rights that are truly God-give rights should apply to all.

But the tendency is for some to not care if so-called terrorists have not been given a fair trial, or Habeas Corpus or other Constitutional rights have been denied. Our liberties are slipping in America and we largely have ignorant evangelicals and other citizens to blame because they have a blind loyalty to the party. If civil rights are being denied to terrorists, no one squawks. But how do we know that they really are terrorists? Many have never had a trial. Just as Paul and Silas were beaten without trial, these hapless souls are waterboarded without trial. Some argue that this has not been that frequent. But whether one or one hundred, it doesn't matter - we should not tolerate such denial of civil rights to anyone, whether citizen or non-citizen. Deuteronomy 1:16 is quite clear on that.

Warren Friton said, "Place me not with those who are weak of mind and willingly give up the rights of others, for these poor ignorant souls know not that the rights they give up are their own!" In 1748, Montesquieu said, "The tyranny of a principal in an oligarchy is not so dangerous to the public welfare as the apathy of a citizen in a democracy." This is why President Andrew Jackson said, "But you must remember, my fellow-citizens, that eternal vigilance by the people is the price of liberty, and that you must pay the price if you wish to secure the blessing. It behooves you, therefore, to be watchful in your States as well as in the Federal Government."<sup>4</sup> So the citizens have a great responsibility to assert all civil rights.

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<sup>3</sup> Allan Dershowitz on *Justice and the Citizen* on the Achievement TV Network.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Jackson, Farewell Address, March 4, 1837.

## II. A Tyrannical City Government Abuses Civil Rights

### A. *Appeal to Rome but ignoring Roman law (v. 21)*

But let's look next at the tyrannical action of this colony's magistrates. And we will start by looking at their handling of law. Verse 21 gives the charge that upset the magistrates: **They teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.** They appeal to a tyrannical law that was passed by executive order of Emperor Claudius in 49 AD, one year before. The tyranny of executive orders is not new. And this ancient executive order that expelled all Jews from Rome was contrary to their constitution, and ignored the most basic of Roman laws – that there must be a trial. Why did the Senate not stand up to the Emperor? Probably because many of them were already accustomed to circumventing the law themselves. Their laws were as conflicting and confusing as American laws have become. Their tax code was even more of a mess, and it led to increasing tyranny. As Dan Pilla says, “A confusing law is one which cannot be complied with. Consequently, it is a law which can be abused, twisted and misrepresented by those who are in a position of authority with respect to the law.”<sup>5</sup> Many in the Senate were corrupt. They had compromised themselves and were therefore powerless to stand up for principle even when they wanted to. One commentator on public policy said, “Most people prefer to believe that their leaders are just and fair, even in the face of evidence to the contrary, because once a citizen acknowledges that the government under which he lives is lying and corrupt, the citizen has to choose what he or she will do about it. To take action in the face of corrupt government entails risks of harm to life and loved ones. To choose to do nothing is to surrender one's self-image of standing for principles. Most people do not have the courage to face that choice. Hence, most propaganda is not designed to fool the critical thinker but only to give moral cowards an excuse not to think at all.” (Michael Rivero) I think that is a great commentary on what was happening here, and I don't need to amplify.

### B. *No right of self-defense (v. 22)*

A second thing that I blame the civil government for was that they did not give Paul and Silas the right to self-defense. That was an inalienable right for Roman citizens. But look again at verses 20-22. There is the charge in verses 20-21, there is the raucous opposition of the multitude in the first

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel J. Pilla, *41 Ways to Lick the IRS With A Postage Stamp*, (Saint Paul: Winning Publications, 1995), p. 15.

part of verse 22 and then immediately the penalty is inflicted. They couldn't protect themselves. It appears that they didn't even have time to say, "Hey, I'm a Roman citizen. You can't beat me." Paul did that elsewhere. But they are being railroaded into punishment immediately. There was no right of self-defense.

This is already happening in America with people who have been merely suspected of being terrorists. In 2006 (against the complaints of Senator Leahy and others), the protections of the Posse Comitatus Act and the Insurrections Act were removed in one fell stroke. Later, the *Military Commissions Act of 2006* suspended the ancient protection of Habeas Corpus. This means that a person who is merely suspected of being a terrorist can be whisked away in the middle of the night and taken to some remote jail without any charges, any right to trial, any relatives being notified where the person is, and you can't force the government to show just cause in court as to why he is being held in custody. That was the purpose of Habeas Corpus – to protect against government tyranny. A pastor could be taken away and you would never know where he went. And if you think I am blowing this out of proportion, read the objections of the Senators and Congressman who stood against this. It is tyranny plain and simple. Yet many conservatives applaud because they trust their president and they believe he has good intentions, and after all, it is being used against terrorists! So it *must* be OK. But as Milton Friedman said, "Concentrated power is *not* rendered harmless by the good intentions of those who create it." James Madison wrote, "All power in human hands is liable to be abused." "It is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties. We hold this prudent jealousy to be the first duty of citizens"<sup>6</sup> We must not be accustomed to such tyranny in America. We need Habeas Corpus back.

**C. *No cross examination of the witnesses (v. 22)***

A third thing that I blame these magistrates for was denying the right of cross-examination of the witnesses.

**D. *They were treated as guilty until proven innocent (v. 22).***

A fourth thing that I blame them for was that they treated Paul and Silas as guilty until proven innocent. One of America's most treasured possessions is the treatment of defendants as being innocent until proven guilty. You don't have that in a lot of countries. In America, the burden of proof lies with the plaintiff. A simple accusation is not enough to bring the

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<sup>6</sup> James Madison, *A Memorial and Remonstrance*, 1785: Works 1:163.

threat of punishment. We still have that civil right in our courts. But this right has been completely taken away in the Federal agencies. Several of America's agencies have been authorized to impose fines and fees without a proper trial. I was reading some of the debate on this in Congress, and it does appear that OSHA, the IRS and other agencies do indeed take the position of guilty until proven innocent. Once accused, the burden of proof is on you to prove that you are innocent and that you don't have to pay this fine. In the meantime, interest and further penalties keep accruing.

Thankfully, there are citizens who have stood up for their civil rights and Congress has listened on occasion and has cut back on some of the most onerous positions. I read a very humorous portion of the Congressional Record of March 15, 1995 that compared King George of 1775 to our modern Federal agencies. It quotes the Declaration of Independence - "He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance." It then went on to say,

This is exactly what Washington, DC, has done, and what this agency has done.

OSHA has driven our employees out of business, it has harassed our businesses, and operates in conflict with the principles of the Constitution. In fact, our employers and our business men and women in this country are guilty until proven innocent. Here is another regulation that will send swarms of new officers into our workplaces, harass our people who are trying to create jobs, keep jobs in this country, and make sense out of an agency that is totally out of control.<sup>7</sup>

Yes, these things have repeatedly happened even in the good ol' USA! I hope you can see that the book of Acts is a very relevant book.

### *E. Group politics (v. 20)*

The fifth thing I blame them for was giving into the desires of the multitude to pander to group politics. And I think I have said enough on that.

### *F. No free speech (v. 21)*

The sixth error they engaged in was to oppose free speech. Verse 21 says, **and they teach** [this is their crime – they teach] **customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.** One of the fundamental rights guaranteed in our Constitution is the right to free speech. It has been abused by pornographers and Gossip magazines in ways never intended by the Constitution. But that should not make us sour on the right to free speech. These citizens did not like the free speech of Paul and Silas. It bothered their sensibilities. But as Dr. Thomas Sowell once said, unless we are willing to tolerate imperfections in others, we will lose our freedoms.

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.house.gov/mica/fs031595-1.htm>.



He said, “As long as human beings are imperfect, there will always be arguments for extending the power of government to deal with these imperfections. The only logical stopping place is totalitarianism -- unless we realize that tolerating imperfections is the price of freedom.” Now there is a limit to that even, but it must be the Bible that describes any limits to free speech.

**G. *The excessive nature of the punishment (vv. 23-24).***

The seventh thing that I blame those magistrates for was the excessive nature of the punishment. We spoke last week of the welts, bruises and broken skin inflicted by the severe caning. We spoke of the miserable conditions in the stocks. All government knows is the use of force, and we ought to be very, very careful about giving the civil government more authority than it already has. George Washington is credited with this quote, though I couldn't track it down. But he (or someone like him) said, “Government is not reason, and it is not eloquence; it is force! Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master: never for a moment should it be left to irresponsible action.” We should hate and despise all forms of tyranny and pray for the day when the governments of this world will bow to the perfect law of liberty – God's law. That's what the book of James calls it – the perfect law of liberty.

**H. *There was arbitrary and (apparently) changing justice***

**1. Verse 23 assumes a serious crime for which they will later be tried, but punishes without trial.**

Quickly compare verses 23 and 35 and you will notice yet another evidence of tyranny. There was arbitrary and (apparently) changing justice. Let's read verses 23-24 first: **And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.** The outer part of these prisons was a part of the prison where prisoners had freedom to walk and talk with friends and relatives, but the inner part was for the worst criminals. This demand that the prisoners be kept securely indicates that they had plans to bring further charges and penalties against them.

**2. Verse 35 assumes no serious crime, but arbitrary whim.**

But look at the sudden change in verse 35: **And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, “Let those men go.”** People have

puzzled over the sudden release. Was it conscience bothering them? Was it a realization they hadn't followed the law? Was it superstition over the earthquake? Was it that they didn't want to be bothered with the case any more? We aren't told. But justice seems to be changing. If they are as bad as the earlier verses make them out to be, they shouldn't be released. If they are fit to be released, then the punishment was unjust. And such inconsistencies in our modern justice system have made many people cynical. Some people with horrendous crimes get off with very little punishment while others with minor crimes sit in jail for years. Scott has had to deal with such arbitrariness in the justice system. Pray for him. That man's case that Scott is working on needs to be heard.

*I. The lower magistrate, though a new Christian, was still used to “following orders” and seemed to have no inclination to interposition (v. 36).*

The last area of blame is that there was no interposition of lower magistrates on any level. Interposition is a doctrine that used to be alive and well in American government. It is where a lower magistrate has the right to defend a citizen against the tyranny of a higher magistrate. So a higher magistrate is abusing a citizen and the lower magistrate interposes himself between the two. And interposition is not only the right, it is the *duty* of such lower magistrates to do so if they believe the higher magistrate has broken the law. Examples of interposition and nullification would be the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions of 1798, the Hartford Convention of 1814, the South Carolina Ordinance of Nullification of 1832 and many others where local county governments have interposed themselves between the state and a citizen.

But in this passage there are no levels of magistrates who appealed to Roman law or protested. They just meekly went along with what the higher magistrates were doing. Verse 36 – **So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace. Go in peace??!!** They have been almost beaten to death! It's odd that this new believer sees no need to remonstrate or treat this as unusual. He has been so used to following orders that questioning a higher magistrate seems out of the question (until Paul gets on his case). But Rome did place laws above a magistrate (at least in theory). When Nazi war criminals were tried for torturing their prisoners, their excuse was “We were just following orders. Everything we did was according to the law.” And the court did not buy that. It insisted that even the state must be subject to law.

In fact, in this whole issue of interposition, there are three assumptions that our founding fathers had. The first assumption was that all men are totally depraved and checks and balances need to be put in place to hold these evil tendencies in tension. James Madison said, “If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.” But he went on to say that they are not angels, but self-seeking sinners. John Adams said this in 1772: “There is danger from all men. The only maxim of a free government ought to be to trust no man living with power to endanger the public liberty.” Those may seem like cynical words, but it was precisely such a Calvinistic worldview that led to American liberties. Read the founding fathers. They made frequent statements about man’s depravity.

The second assumption was that no human authority had absolute sovereignty. Only God was unlimited in His sovereignty. All other sovereignty is delegated.

The third assumption was that all magistrates are therefore subject to a higher law and can be judged by that law.

And the fourth assumption was that without self-government and courage of the citizens, our republic would not stay the same for very long. In 1798 President John Adams said, “Our Constitution was made only for a religious and moral people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other.” Or as Bertrand de Jouvenal said much more graphically, “A society of sheep must in time beget a government of wolves.”

### III. A Bold Assertion of Civil Rights (vv. 37-38)

#### A. *Paul Asserts His Rights*

Well, Paul does indeed show courage and boldness. He was not a sheeple. The magistrates could have tried to hush the whole affair up by killing Paul and Silas. That would have been risky since they could receive the capital penalty themselves if they were not careful. But it may have been equally risky to let him live. It was clearly a risk for Paul to stand up for his rights. But Paul refuses to quietly go away. Verse 37: **But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.”** Is Paul being pig-headed? Why doesn’t he just count his blessings and be glad that he isn’t dead? Why does he make a big stink? The damage has already been done. Let’s passively go about our business. But that’s not the way Paul thinks, and it shouldn’t be the way that we think. Milton Friedman said, “Eternal vigilance

is required and there have to be people who step up to the plate, who believe in liberty, and who are willing to fight for it.” Thomas Jefferson warned the nation, “If once [the people] become inattentive to the public affairs, you and I, and Congress and Assemblies, Judges and Governors, shall all become wolves. It seems to be the law of our general nature, in spite of individual exceptions.” (letter to Edward Carrington, 1787)

***B. Paul’s demand for a public apology terrifies the magistrates (vv. 38-39)***

Well, when Paul tells them what they have done and insists that they publically apologize, they are terrified. As one commentator says, “It was a chastened and frightened group of city officials who arrived at the prison shortly afterward, full of apologies, wanting to make amends, begging forgiveness, politely requesting the two injured men to come out of prison, and pleading with them to go quietly on their way.”<sup>8</sup> I think that’s a good summary of verses 38-39.

Why would they be so afraid? Because they had violated the Valerian Law that forbade magistrates from handcuffing citizens, beating them, imprisoning them or putting them into stocks without a fair trial. Everything they had done was illegal. They had also violated the Porcian Law. According to Roman law, these magistrates could be severely punished, kicked out of office, have the political rights of Philippi reduced and even have their privileges as a colony suspended. This could mean that the city’s tax exemption could be revoked. Everyone would be upset with these magistrates including the members of the city. It’s no wonder they were afraid. Paul does not ask for the full extent of the law to be pressed against them. He simply asks for a public apology and public escorting of them out of the jail so that the whole community could see that a civil right had been violated. By not pressing charges, Paul was doing them a favor, and by making this apology public, they were doing Paul a favor (as we will soon see).

***C. Why he asserted his civil rights***

**1. Because it was Biblically lawful to do so**

Let me outline what I believe were the fundamental reasons why Paul felt it important to assert his civil rights. He did it first, because it was Biblical to do so. Paul was standing in a long tradition of prophets, priests

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<sup>8</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring Acts*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1986), p. 334.

and citizens in the Old Testament who stood up to tyranny and were zealous in protecting the rights of citizens. And the New Testament has its own examples. John the Baptist rebuked Herod for his tyrannies in Luke 3:19. It was Biblical.

2. Because it was a patriotic thing to do and he had the courage to be a true patriot.

Second, it was the patriotic thing to do. Throughout the book of Acts, Paul takes a degree of pride in his Roman citizenship. There is nothing wrong with patriotism, so long as it is not a blind patriotism. In fact, I would go so far as to say that if you do not resist tyranny, you do not love your country very much and you are not much of a patriot. Edward Abbey said, “A patriot must always be ready to defend his country against his government.” The dictionary defines a patriot as one who loves his country, and it is hardly loving to allow the country to slide into despotism. But it takes courage to be a patriot. To insist on your civil rights when it could mean your death is a selfless act of courage that is in the best interests of your country. Jo Ann Roach said, “When the rights of just one individual are denied, the rights of all are in jeopardy!” If that is the case, then it is patriotic to stand up for those rights.

3. Because it would be useful. Unless they publically apologize, they might feel free to do this again. If they publically apologize, news might spread for Paul’s future protection in other cities.

Thirdly, it was useful to do so. Bringing these magistrates to a duly chastened state immensely aided the spread of the Gospel. Unless these officials are made to publically apologize, they might feel free to extend their tyranny to others. And if they publically apologized, the news would spread to others cities and make other magistrates more cautious about caning him without a fair trial.

4. Because it was a small thing that he was able to do.

The fourth reason is expressed well by Edward Everett Hale. He said, “I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do. What I can do, I should do. And what I should do, by the grace of God, I will do.”

5. Because he had friends he would leave behind

The fifth reason was that he was going to be leaving some friends behind, and he no doubt hoped that this would aid them in securing their own religious liberties.

6. Because bureaucrats are basically cowards who try to stay out of trouble, and the laws of a bureaucracy can be used against them.

The sixth reason was that Paul knew how bureaucrats work. He would likely have a different strategy with Nero at a later time, but here he was dealing with petty bureaucrats. They stay in office by keeping their noses clean with higher-ups. But that means closely abiding by bureaucratic laws. Paul is simply using the law against the public officials. There are a few people who do so today, but America would be a different place if their number were legion. Dan Pilla has used this strategy with the IRS. But it takes knowing the laws inside out to be successful. A look through Acts shows that Paul *was* familiar with Roman law, but few people can be experts. According to Titus 3:13, Paul later found it necessary to hire the services of Zenas the Lawyer. Apparently he needed more expertise than he had as a paralegal. And today we desperately need godly, well-trained lawyers who specialize in various areas of law. America is becoming increasingly like Rome, which means we will increasingly need good legal help. One of the areas I would like to see changes in America is a citizenry who knows the constitution and that has become irate that magistrates are ignoring the Constitution left and right. Justice William O. Douglas said, [The purpose of the Constitution is to] “keep the government off the backs of people.” But it won’t work if no one knows the Constitution or presses its provisions. We’ve got to be like Paul and know the law. We’ve got to be like Paul and assert our civil rights.

#### **IV. The Satisfactory Result Asserting His Civil Rights**

***A. It set precedent in showing that magistrates are themselves subject to the law (v. 37)***

Let me quickly end with five satisfactory results of Paul asserting his civil rights. First, it set precedent to others that magistrates are not above the law. This is huge. It makes them pull in their talons a bit, and it gives citizens a degree of boldness.

***B. It took some of the edge off their arrogance and tyranny, thus protecting the church (v. 38)***

Second, it took some of the edge off the arrogance they had earlier displayed. Verse 38 shows this clearly.

***C. It made the magistrates beholden to Paul and Silas and fearful of offending them (v. 39). This made it less likely that the magistrates would punish members of the church who were left behind.***

Third, it made the magistrates beholden to Paul and Silas and fearful of offending them. Verse 39 says, **Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city.** No demands; they are simply asking favors. They didn't want to get into trouble with Rome, but neither did they want the responsibility of protecting them. So they ask a favor. It is clear from verse 40 that Paul and Silas weren't forced to leave the city. They stay in the city for a while, so it appears that they had worked out a deal. "We will leave now and not press charges against you if you leave our community of Christians alone." I can't prove that this was the deal, but it appears to be a reasonable reading between the lines.

***D. It helped give the fledgling church courage and boldness (v. 40).***

In verse 40 it gives the fledgling church courage and boldness. **So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.**

***E. It was a sedge way to leaving Luke to plant and solidify the church for a while and for Paul and Silas to move on (v. 40)***

I want you to notice the word "they." Verse 10 says, "we sought to go." Luke includes himself. And the "we" comes up in verses 11,12,13,16. But in verse 40 Luke says that "they" departed. It appears that Luke has been left behind. There is lots of speculation as to why he was left behind. Some have even speculated that he married Lydia. But all that we really know is that he stays in Philippi and does not leave until Acts chapter 20 when Paul makes his next trip to Philippi and takes Luke with him for further ministry. So most people conclude that Luke is responsible for the huge growth of the church in Philippi. Paul's assertion of his civil rights has opened the door for freedom of ministry for Luke and his small band of brothers and sisters.

Let me end by saying that it's not enough to admire the stands taken by Paul, Patrick Henry and others who have asserted their civil rights. We too must seek to make a difference in our nation. We too must seek to protect the liberties of our nation. Back in 1903, George Bernard Shaw said, "Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it." That is a profound statement. "Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it." But to dread the dangers of liberty is to be like the ancient Israelites under Moses who always wanted to go back to Egypt. They preferred the horrible slavery of Egypt because they knew exactly what to expect, never had to worry about a meal, and didn't have to face the dangers of liberty. They had a degree of security. They had a slave mentality. Unfortunately, many Christians today have bought into this slave mentality and want the government to do everything for them from education to welfare. It is asking for slavery.

But Christians have been delivered from bondage by our Lord Jesus Christ, and Paul's admonition is to **Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.** He commanded slaves to get their liberty if they could. Liberty is maturity. All bondage should be hated like the plague, whether it is bondage to sin, bondage to legalism, bondage to financial debt or bondage to tyranny. If liberty means responsibility, let us embrace it with glad hearts. Be patriots for the cause of Christ. Amen.