

Godly Living and Teaching Brings Persecution

“Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day” (Acts 24:21)

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I am honored to be a part of such a fine lectureship by faithful Christians. The theme “Lessons From The Word ‘Except’” is exemplary. The very force of the word ‘except’ is powerful in its teaching. Many times Bible teachers have overlooked or ignored this powerful term and have taught falsely endangering the souls of many starting with themselves. It is our aim through these studies to call those back to the old paths and observe the landmark of the word ‘except’ as it is used throughout the Bible. We will not address every instance of this powerful term, but these lessons on its force will translate to every place it is used.

The origin for the English word ‘except’ is in the Latin word ‘excipere’, which meant to take out. The English word in the prepositional form means: not including; other than. In the verbal form it means: to exclude (*Compact Oxford Dictionary*, p. 379). The phrase that has meant most to me in my Biblical studies concerning this word has been: the force of being one, and only one. When this thought is applied in the texts using the word ‘except’ one cannot go astray easily in interpretation. People may not want to recognize there are conditions and exclusions in Christianity but God has made it so. We must recognize and obey these conditions and exclusions so we may be saved and save the souls of many who hear our voice.

The verse assigned me is found at Acts 24:21, “Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.” As with most verses we must consider its context, both immediate and extended, to get the true and full force of the statement. Paul was ‘on the spot’ so to speak for prior words and actions. False accusations were being made that created confusion showing the strife and contention present. Paul was trying to keep the principals focused on the facts so he would get justice. Do not miss this point. Paul was not trying to wriggle out of some fault but was trying to get what should come to him (Acts 25:11). He honored God’s institution of government by desiring it to work as it had been designed, to punish the evil doer and protect the obedient (Romans 13:1-5). We could unclog our judicial system if everyone entered court only when they had to and with this disposition!

But why was Paul in this predicament of being accused before government officials? Couldn’t the Apostle exercise himself in such a way that he would be above suspicion? Do not miss this lesson either. “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). The Apostle Paul found himself in prison more than once. He even had been stoned and left for dead! The Apostle Peter also had a prison record. James had been beheaded at the command of the king! Unlike criminals, people may suffer a like experience for doing good works. Are you as a Christian doing good works? There could be a penalty to pay to the secular courts of jurisprudence. Will you be willing to pay the price, if necessary, without shame? Paul and Silas were not ashamed in prison for denouncing evil and preaching the Gospel. They sang hymns even at midnight. Peter would take the pulpit and preach to those who knew he had been in jail. Shame

is attached to evil practices not good works. Paul was thankful for God's institution of government and exercised his rights to save his life (Acts 25:11). God used His institution of government to send Paul into Rome's Emperor's courts and palaces with the Gospel. The Emperor was Nero!

Paul, in Acts 24:21, concisely states he is being accused because of one thing he has said concerning the resurrection of the dead. This was the only thing of merit that could be brought against him. All other charges were false and those making them were false accusers. What could these charges be? What were the circumstances that gave opportunity for them to be made? We must go to the extended context to find these answers. We must at least go back to Acts 21:15 to understand fully what Paul means in my assigned verse. It is even good for you to go back and study what we would call Paul's third evangelistic tour, starting at Acts 15:36, and its results for greater understanding. Paul's fellow countrymen were irritated and agitated at his work among them and the Gentiles all over Asia Minor (Acts 21:21-22). This word did not need AT&T to get to Jerusalem before Paul! Paul was always under scrutiny as were all the Apostles and faithful Christians. Today, that includes you. These Jews had a wrong perception of what Paul had actually taught. They had fled to extremism to shelter themselves in perceived justification of their hatred toward him. People do this today. Paul had taught that salvation was only in Christ and not Moses. The people perceived he taught they were to utterly abandon all that Moses had said, even to not circumcising their children! The facts do not support this belief. Paul had Timothy circumcised because his mother was a Jewess (Acts 16:1-3). He kept Titus from being circumcised because he was a Gentile (Galatians 2:3). He would later instruct the Corinthians that circumcision was nothing (1 Corinthians 7:19). It is in this context of evil perception that eventually lands Paul in bonds in Caesar's court!

To bring the community together in a true perception of Paul's Gospel he was requested of James and the elders, pillars in the church, to pay the charges of men who were to be purified in the temple. James and the elders did not ask Paul to sin in so doing. This is a parallel to circumcision, it was nothing. Apparently there were forms and some ceremonies that could still be observed by Jews until the law was fully terminated in the destruction of Jerusalem AD 70. Paul, who had withstood error on every hand, complied. At the end of this process came the accusations from the Jews. Notice the fertile field from which the accusations came (Acts 21:28). This is the man that teaches against Moses! Now the new accusation that he had brought a Gentile into the temple! Study this clearly. It would have been against everything Paul, James and the elders were trying to accomplish to have committed this act. Now look closely at the evidence behind the accusation. Previously these Jews had seen, some of them may have just heard it of a few, Paul in company with an Ephesian named Trophimus in the city of Jerusalem. They assumed, supposed, that he brought him into the temple! No facts and no evidence! Do you not see that they were operating from their false perception that Paul was trying to destroy Moses and the law? They would never have made this statement if they knew the true reason Paul was participating in this role.

Their charge was enough to "move the city" and cause the temple doors be shut after Paul was forcibly removed. The mob now started beating Paul with the intention of killing him. Here is a Christian suffering because he was living and acting righteously! In my opinion Paul would have died that day had the government not intervened. God has provided and continues to provide for His children. Paul was now bound by the government, but he was alive and in a more secure

environment. Confusion reigned and the officials did not know who they had or what he had done. Accusations were readily flying and the multitude was upset. Usually the greater number of citizens is not all wrong. Usually when the energy is against one, he has done something against the norm of society. Usually when these are religious people and the tumult came from the temple, the people may be believed to some degree. The officials had even mistaken Paul's identity. They thought he was an Egyptian that had been causing trouble (vs.38)! Paul was still not free. If government does its work, the truth will be found through appropriate and unbiased investigation. Now the evidence unfolds. Paul speaks in Greek to the Roman official; he is not Egyptian. Paul identifies himself as a Jew from a Roman provincial city. He speaks in Hebrew to his fellow Jews.

With official license Paul speaks to his contentious countrymen. He tells them of his prodigious credentials. He identifies himself with their beliefs, even to their hatred for Christianity, before he became a Christian. With the stage set, the crowds assembled listening to his every word and without regard for himself Paul preached the Gospel to them! He even applied the lesson with the profound reversal of belief and activity in his own life. From persecutor to preacher, from antagonist to Apostle, executioner to evangelist his very life set a decision before the people. Their announcement erupted out of the silence. A loud, wrong decision was announced as they called for the death of Paul.

Paul was taken into the castle. He was safer but not yet in safety. He was now bound for a purpose. He was to be scourged, beaten to get a confession or better evidence. The Roman military knew how to scourge with effectiveness. Paul's discourse did not agree with the amount of violence placed against him by the people. There had to be more he had done! The alternative was true and would be found. The people were acting irrationally. Paul's Roman citizenship was learned and communicated to the proper government officials, the scourging did not take place and the bonds were loosed. Paul's credentials of citizenship were greater than those in authority over him. On one hand he was a free born citizen while the official had bought his for a great sum of money. On the other hand he held dual citizenship, Roman and Heavenly.

Paul would next find himself before an assembly of Jewish chief priests and the Jewish governing council. Paul tried to gain leverage in this meeting by openly speaking first to state his intention, only to receive a punch in the mouth! Get the lesson dear readers. Do not get discouraged and give up. Paul then saw a weakness in the assembly and used it to his advantage. He cried out the truth that he repeats in our assigned text. He was charged only because he taught the doctrine of the resurrected Christ. This infuriates the Sadducees because they did not believe in spirits, afterlife and resurrection of people from the dead. The infuriated Sadducees would infuriate the Pharisees, as they did believe in the resurrection of the dead. The assembly now was divided and arguing among themselves. At least half the assembly now stood with Paul on the doctrine of the resurrection. The strife and contention were so strong that the assembly was disassembled as Paul was taken back into captivity for safe keeping! Notice, the Lord is pleased! Paul had accomplished good things. He would be protected and sent to Rome! Yet, he was not free.

There next formed a large conspiracy to kill him. Paul's own nephew was the tool of relief for Paul in this predicament. Young people can do great things if they are alert and ready to serve. Paul would be covertly delivered to safety in another city by the government. Paul was delivered safely to Governor Felix with a letter detailing former events. Notice the evidence found through

investigation by Claudias Lysias. In his own hand he wrote that Paul had done nothing worthy of death, which the Jews demanded, or even bonds. With this evidence this honest government official could not and would not keep him bound. Next the accusers of Paul would make their case as best it could be made before Governor Felix in Caesarea. Because Paul was of Cilicia, a Roman provincial city, Felix agreed to hear the case.

After five days of preparation the accusers came. The High Priest, the elders, and spokesmen came to officially accuse Paul to procure his death. The following long thought out accusations were officially made: Paul was a pestilent fellow, deadly and harmful to public morals; a seditious fellow, using conduct and speech that incites rebellion against the government or authority, and this throughout the whole world; a ring leader of the sect of the Nazarenes; a profaner of the temple; convicted under Jewish law (Acts 24:5-7). A man guilty of these offenses would be worthy of bonds and death. Felix heard these charges and had in his possession a letter from a government official that said he was guilty of nothing! What is the evidence to back up the charges? The assent of Jews brought with the delegation to accuse!

On the other hand Paul offers to Felix a basis from which to judge. He points out that only twelve days are under consideration. Paul states that the accusers, nor any one else, had seen him dispute with even a single individual in the temple. He had not disputed with any individual in the synagogues. He had not disputed with any person in the whole city of Jerusalem! He was a peaceful fellow going about doing good things for those that accuse him of evil. Paul then offers up a confession. Yes, as he has been accused, he believes in and worships the same God his accusers do by the 'way' they call evil. Yes, he believes the things written in their law. Yes, he believes in the things prophesied by their prophets. Yes, he even believes their doctrine of the resurrection and shares their hope toward God! Paul confesses that he lives godly everywhere, purposefully. Yes, it is true that he was found by some, but not by these, in the temple, purified! He was not in company with a multitude. There was no disruption until his accusers assaulted him based upon supposition. If so, why didn't the eye witnesses come who had actually captured Paul to begin with? Their absence negated their claim. Even with the council present, no proven charge could be presented that he stood in violation of their assembly. He only said two things before that august assembly. He said he lived with all good conscience before God and man and that he agreed with them and believed in the resurrection of the dead. Where is the violation? Let the record speak!

1. Let us take a moment and consider all the accusations against Paul:
2. He teaches Jews to forsake Moses (Acts 21:21).
3. He teaches Jews to no longer circumcise their children (Acts 21:21).
4. He teaches Jews to no longer keep the customs of Judaism (Acts 21:21).
5. He teaches against his own people, he is either a hypocrite or a traitor (Acts 21:28).
6. He teaches against the Law of Moses (Acts 21:28).
7. He teaches against the temple (Acts 21:28).
8. He brought Greeks, Gentiles, into the temple (Acts 21:28).
9. He polluted the temple (Acts 21:28).
10. He was a seditious Egyptian, a leader of murderers (Acts 21:38).
11. He is a pestilent fellow, deadly, harmful to public morals (Acts 24:5).
12. He is an international seditionist (Acts 24:5).

13. He is a ring leader of the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5).
14. He with premeditation profaned the temple (Acts 24:6).

Now let us reason upon the evidence and see the validity of these accusations:

1. False: Moses taught of Jesus – the Jews should find Jesus (Deuteronomy 18:15).
2. False: Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:1-3).
3. False: Paul was doing this when apprehended (Acts 21:18-26).
4. False: Paul wanted his countrymen saved (Romans 10:1). He had brought alms to his own country (Acts 24:17).
5. False: (See #1 & 2).
6. False: He was apprehended in the temple (Acts 21:26).
7. False: They 'supposed' he did this by seeing days before with an Ephesian in the city (Acts 21:29).
8. False: He was purified in the temple (Acts 24:18).
9. False: He was a Greek / Hebrew speaking Jew from Cilicia (Acts 21:37-40).
10. False: He lived righteously and there was no evidence to the contrary (Acts 23:1).
11. False: He had not disputed in the whole of Jerusalem with any individual (Acts 24:12, 18).
12. True: Paul was an Apostle of Jesus to the Gentiles (Acts 22:14, 21; 24:14).
13. False: He was purified in the temple and had no dispute with any in the temple (Acts 24:12, 18).

Now, based upon the evidence, Paul says, "Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day" (Acts 24:21). The one and only thing; excluding all other things; except this one thing I am called in question this day. This one thing was his proclamation of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. He did this when he told of the resurrected Christ he saw on the way to Damascus (Acts 22:6-16). His salvation, his reversal of life activity, his preaching and his devotion was fashioned by Jesus who had been alive, was dead and then was alive forevermore (Revelation 1:18). His own beloved nation would have to hear, believe and obey this same gospel of the resurrected Christ to be saved. He was teaching it to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles in all the world (Romans 1:16; 2:10). His life was not tranquil and void of suffering as he served the living God.

He endured "...stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

Paul's sufferings were not yet complete from these circumstances. He would be kept confined though with personal liberties. He would go through more testimony before Festus and his false accusers. He would testify before King Agrippa. He would appeal to Caesar and eventually arrive at Rome after arduous journey and peril of shipwreck. He would continue in his confinement for

years until freed under Nero. He would be imprisoned by Nero again and be put to death, for preaching the Gospel!

Time and again Paul was found innocent but continued to be bound. He was found innocent through investigation by Claudias Lysias, Felix, Festus and Agrippa (Acts 23:29; 24:26; 25:25; 26:32)! He was finally set at liberty in Rome, but only after having endured years of confinement from false accusations made when he was doing a good work toward those who apprehended him! The proclamation of the Gospel of the resurrected Christ is a powerful activity. We enjoy the goodness of the benefits of the Gospel and therefore we must receive the injustices mankind can heap upon us because of the Gospel. To only take the good and run to escape the bad would be cowardly and hypocritical. We are to be steadfast, always abounding in the work of the Lord. It will not be in vain (I Corinthians 15:58).

Now consider what little suffering we actually endure today. Yes, I know that all suffering is unpleasant. But in our present society we seem to view unpleasant events as events in which I will not participate. I agree that you will suffer if you hit your own finger with a hammer and that you should avoid doing that so you will not suffer. But I do not agree that you can quit teaching the Gospel and living godly to avoid persecution because it is unpleasant. I do not agree that you can quit your marriage because it has become unpleasant. I do not agree that you can forsake your children because they are unpleasant. The Bible does not agree with these positions either! What God has required we must always do in order to go to Heaven. Jesus said, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Dear reader, study the Bible and obey the teaching of the New Testament. Become a Christian and a Christian only. Do the will of God knowing that He will reward you (Matthew 7:21; Hebrews 11:6). Do not let any man beset you even if they have the authority to confine or kill you (Matthew 10:28). Let your faith be in God and not in man (1 Corinthians 2:5). It is God with whom we have to do (Hebrews 4:13). It will be sweet to hear Jesus say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:" (Matthew 25:34). Let us, like Paul, stay the course and keep holding before the world that one thing, salvation in the name of the resurrected Jesus.

Women of all ages, please consider preparing yourselves to be Bible teachers. Know your Bibles so you can be good servants of God. Be willing to marry preachers and share with them the travails and joys of preaching the Gospel. Stand stalwart and ready to hold up the hands of preachers by encouraging them to stand on the truth. Know the truth and be ready to refresh preacher's memories in troubled times with a "thus saith the Lord". "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies" (Proverbs 31:10).

Men of all ages, please consider going forth to preach having shod your feet with the preparation to preach the Gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15). First, consider the cost of going. Paul is a descriptive example of the suffering that can be endured. Preaching is not a good and consistent way of gaining earthly treasures. There are hardships placed upon many preacher's families by trial and relocating, sometimes often. Not all men will speak well of you (Luke 6:26). Many will

make angry faces (Jeremiah 1:17). You will work with tedious and emotionally charged events of people's lives (Matthew 19:9). You will stand between Christians and their worldly desires. Then, count the cost of not going. Lost souls that will never hear the answer to the most important question man will ever ask, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Many Christians will not receive your instruction from God's word that would edify them thus keeping them from being beset by sin. There would not be that penetrating lighthouse of truth shining forth from your post on the craggy shore warning of danger while guiding souls to safe harbor. No one can find their way home without the beacon of truth. Few men may ever know your work or remember your name, but you will be precious to the souls you save and to God.

Works Cited

Soanes, Catherine, ed. (2003). *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press