

Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

PAUL BEFORE GOVERNOR FELIX—ACTS 24:24-25

DANNY DOUGLAS

Luke, the inspired historian, penned the Book of Acts, the fifth book of the New Testament. Often it is referred to as the history Book of the New Testament because it records the beginning and early growth of the church of our Lord in the First Century. It contains some of the preaching and work of the apostles and records cases of conversions to Christ (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Acts presents the fulfilling of the Lord's promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, His guidance of them **"into all truth,"** and the Lord's statement that: **"He shall glorify me"** (John 16:13-14). In Acts, we read how that He did glorify Christ Jesus, through the preaching and work which He guided the apostles to do (Acts 1:4-8; 2:4, 33; 3:6-26; 4:7-12; 4:31-33; 5:42; 9:18-22; 13:9; 15:1-6, 22-29; 19:17).

In Acts chapter 24, Luke writes of the beloved apostle Paul making his defense before the Roman governor Felix. The location is Caesarea, Palestine, several days after Paul had been assaulted in the temple in Jerusalem. Paul found himself a prisoner of Rome having been rescued from the Jews by the chief captain (Acts 21:27-39). In the meantime, let us consider events in chapters 21 through 24, leading up to Paul's defense in which he preached the gospel of Christ to governor Felix and all assembled with him (Acts 24:24-25).

After Paul was rescued from the Jews in the temple, he sought permission from his Roman deliverers to speak to the Jews. Having been granted permission, Paul stood on the stairs of the castle and spoke to the Jews in Hebrew. The apostle then gave an account of his former persecution of

"this way unto the death" and other matters (Acts 21:40-22:5). In this speech, Paul related how the Lord Jesus Christ had appeared unto him when he was on the way to Damascus, Syria to persecute saints:

And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do (Acts 22:6-10; cf. Acts 8:3; 9:1-5; 26:8-15).

In persecuting the church of Christ (*as that term is defined and used in the New Testament—Editor*), Saul was persecuting the Lord's church (Gal. 1:13; Acts 8:3) of which He is the only Head and Savior (Eph. 5:23-25).

In this speech, Paul related that he followed the directions of Jesus, going to a certain place in Damascus. Therein he was **"three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink."** Ananias, whom the Lord had chosen and sent to him, came to Paul and after the apostle received his sight by a miracle, Ananias informed him how his sins could be washed away by the blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5). As a penitent believer Ananias declared to Paul, **"And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord"** (Acts 22:11-16). True baptism is baptism into Christ, into Christ's death, wherein our Lord shed His blood, and, thus, into the church of Christ (Rom. 6:3-5; Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13; John 3:5; Acts 2:47). This baptism is necessary for salvation (Mark 16:16; 1 Pet.

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Contending FOR THE Faith™

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Ira Y. Rice, Jr., Founder
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Editorial...

WILL 2021 BE BETTER THAN 2020?

What Christian (as that term is defined and used in the New Testament and not in the sectarian/denominational sense) truly thinks that 2021 will be more open, friendly, and accommodating to the God of the Bible, the Bible itself, Biblical morality, Jesus Christ, the Gospel, and New Testament Christianity than was 2020? Who is it that has missed the fact that multiplied millions of American citizens voted people into office who are members of a political party that abhors almost all things related to Biblical morality, New Testament Christianity, and any religion that comes close to it? Who is it that will not see that materialists, secularists, atheists, and their fellow travelers have the upper hand in the federal government, the major news media, academia, entertainment, et al.? In other words, where is the person who is blind to the fact that those who hate the truth of God's Word now completely control the federal government—both legislative bodies, and the executive branch?

From the powers that be in Washington D. C., can we honestly expect fewer regulations, more freedom, less taxation, more religious freedom, more opposition to socialism/communism, greater promotion of the sanctity of life, greater opposition to abortion, fewer funds for abortion, greater freedom of speech, more support for Biblical marriage and the home, greater emphasis on legal immigration, less promotion of the LGBTQ crowd and their vile causes, opposition to the "cancel culture" movement, less gun control, etc.? Indeed, in order to be realists, we must expect the federal government more and more to tighten its strangling grip on all people, avenues, venues, and organizations who oppose their ungodly philosophies and lifestyles. We must realize that Godly matters will not only continue to be demoted, ridiculed, mocked, and defamed, but all who dare to oppose their moral turpitude will be militantly attacked with the full intent of the attackers to utterly destroy all who oppose them. Moreover, let it be clearly understood that 2021 is only the beginning of what may well be the complete dismemberment of America as it was established and as it has functioned over most of its existence.

WHAT ARE CHRISTIANS TO DO?

Godly people will do as did their faithful brethren who lived in the corrupt Roman Empire. Romans chapter one makes clear that today the West, and especially the United States, each day comes to embrace and promote more and more the ungodly living that characterized the Roman Empire. However, we must remember that God in His wisdom brought His church into being in that debauched culture and the society it created and sustained. Read again what Paul said about what had become common to that wicked culture and society (Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21) It was that church that obeyed the Lord, going into the midst of the evil Roman empire to declare the Gospel, God's power to save men from sin (Mark 16:15; 1 Cor. 9:16; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 2:2; 4:1-5; Phi. 1:17; Jude 3). Moreover, those brethren endured persecution

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3:21). The command to be baptized is preceded by hearing and believing the Gospel (Acts 18:8; Rom. 10:17); repentance (Acts 2:38; 3:19), and confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of God (Acts 8:35-39).

In his speech, Paul informed them that he went to Jerusalem after his conversion to Christ, and as he prayed in the temple, he fell into a trance, and Jesus appeared to him, saying:

Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles (Acts 22:18-21).

Indeed, he had a part in the stoning of Stephen, over whom devout men **“made great lamentation”** (Acts 7:58-8:2).

When he ended this speech, the Jews were ready to kill him, but the chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, where he gave instructions to examine Paul by scourging. However, when Paul informed the centurion that he was a Roman, they did not carry this out (Acts 22:22-29).

The next day, the chief captain **“commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.”** At that time, Paul said, **“Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”** Afterward, a disruption took place, in which: **“there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both”** (Acts 23:7-8; cf. Mark 12:18-27).

“The night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11). The next day it was learned that certain of the Jews, more than forty, had **“bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.”** Paul’s nephew informed him and then later, the chief captain, Claudius Lysias, of this murderous plot. Therefore, he made plans to transfer Paul to Caesarea in the night. With two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to guard Paul, the apostle was safely delivered to Felix the governor in Caesarea (Acts 23:12-35). This was the fourth time the chief captain had played a part in saving Paul’s life (cf. Acts 21:30, 31; 22:22-24; 23:10; 23:21-33). As might be expected, the Jews criticized Claudius Lysias, the chief captain for this (cf. Acts 24:7).

May the forgoing account of the deliverance of the apos-

tle Paul out of the hands of the Jews cause us to trust in God’s providence as we faithfully labor to do His will. We do not know how God will exercise His providential care over us, or who He may use, but we can be sure that He will watch over His faithful children (1 Pet. 3:12; 5:7-11; 2 Tim. 4:16-18; Mat. 6:25-34; Phi. 4:19).

Five days later, the high priest, the elders, and a certain orator named Tertullus came to Caesarea to accuse Paul before the governor, Felix. Tertullus accused Paul of being a, **“pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes,”** and one who went about to **“profane the temple”** (Acts 24:1-9). **“Pestilent”** comes from the Greek word, *loimon*, and it refers to a pest, plague, pestilence. Concerning **“pestilent”** brother H. Leo Boles states:

The second charge was that he was “a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes;” this was a charge of heresy, and was the chief offense that the Jews had against Paul. However, here Tertullus makes it an offense against the laws of the empire, as Paul was teaching a religion that was not licensed by the state; in this charge Paul is accused of introducing strange gods. “Sect of the Nazarenes” is used here with a sneer as applied to Jesus and his followers. “Sect” is from the Greek *hairesis*, and is the word from which we get “heresy.” The third charge was that he had profaned the temple. This was not true. Tertullus identifies himself in this speech with the Jews, as he is pleading their cause (*Gospel Advocate Commentary on Acts*).

Later, the unbelieving Jews in Rome would also mischaracterize the Lord’s church, saying to Paul, **“But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against”** (Acts 28:22). The true church of Christ was not a **“sect”** then, is not now, and never shall be! It is the blood-bought church of God (Acts 20:28), of which Christ is the Head and Savior (Eph. 5:23-24; Col. 1:18); the Builder (Mat. 16:18), which He loves and for which He gave Himself (Eph. 5:23-25). Although it is spoken against, even today, the precious body and bride of Christ continues to be precious to God (Rom. 7:4; 16:16).

After Tertullus’s speech, Paul declared before Felix that it had been twelve days since he had gone up to Jerusalem to worship, and that those accusations made against him could not be proven (Acts 24:10-19).

He stated:

But this I confess unto thee, that after the Way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets; having hope toward God, which these also themselves look for, that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust (Act 24:14-15; *ASV*, 1901).

Although the Jews referred to the Way as a sect, Paul affirms that this was truly the way to serve and worship God, and that it is in accordance with the things written in the law and in the prophets. The hope which Paul had **“toward**

God” is the “**hope of eternal life**” (Tit. 1:2). In the Christian, this hope is “**Christ in you, the hope of glory**” (Col. 1:27). In fact, Christ is “**our hope**” (1 Tim. 1:1). This involves the resurrection. Jesus said:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28-29).

Paul declares his endeavor never to violate his own conscience or to bring an offence toward God or men, saying: “**And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men**” (Acts 24:16).

After affirming his innocence regarding the temple incident (Acts 21:27-39), Paul challenges the Jews there to bring any legitimate charge of evil against him and states that the real reason for their calling him into question is, “**...Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day**” (Acts 24:20-21). Felix then declared that when Lysias the chief captain came down he would know more of that matter, and gave instructions regarding Paul’s keeping (Acts 24:22-23). Luke records that Felix had come to a “**more perfect knowledge of that way**” (Acts 24:22). It is interesting to note that the way of the Lord is referred to in the Book of Acts as “**this way,**” “**the Way,**” or “**that way**” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; See *KJV & ASV*).

KING AGRIPPA AND GOVERNOR FESTUS

At this point, I will depart from Luke’s record of Paul and Felix to briefly consider Paul’s address to King Agrippa and Governor Festus. In this address, Paul would again speak of the efforts of the Jews to kill him (cf. Acts 21:29-31). Therein, he declared that it was through the help of God that he was able to continue on. He emphasized that the suffering of Christ, His resurrection, and the light He would shed forth unto the people and to the Gentiles was the fulfillment of what the prophets and Moses said should come:

For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles (Acts 26:21-23).

Christ was the first to rise from the dead to die no more (cf. Rev. 1:18; 1 Cor. 15:3-4, 20). Many things in this lesson and in Paul’s life are a fulfillment of the predictions which the Lord gave to Ananias concerning him:

But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake (Acts

9:15-16).

Indeed: “**all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution**” (2 Tim. 3:12; cf. Mat. 5:10-12).

I will now continue with Luke’s account of Paul before Felix. Some days after his first previous hearing with Paul (Acts 24:17-21), Felix sent for Paul to hear him concerning the faith in Christ:

And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee (Acts 24:24-25).

Paul always proclaimed the “**whole counsel of God**” (Acts 20:27) regardless of his audience. God and His true followers do not show respect of persons (Acts 10:34-35; Jam. 2:1; Acts 4:19-20; 5:29).

Rather than seeking the favor of this ruthless and powerful ruler, the selfless apostle declared unto Felix that which he and Drusilla most needed to hear—the message of Christ on righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come (Tit 2:12; Gal. 5:23; 2 Pet. 1:6; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12). One day, they would bow before Jesus Christ in the Judgment and give an account unto God (Rom. 14:10-12)! Paul’s love for God and for their souls would not allow him to preach anything but the truth (Mark 12:29-31; Eph. 4:15; 2 Tim. 4:1-2)!

Brother H. Leo Boles points out that Felix had: “murdered a high priest, had been tyrannical, had taken bribes, and had been an unrighteous ruler.” Also, in his commentary on Acts, he remarked that Drusilla under the influence of Felix had left her former husband, and that:

She was one of three daughters of Herod Agrippa I; her sisters were Marianne and Bernice: her father murdered James; her great-uncle, Herod Antipas, beheaded John the Baptist; her great-grandfather, Herod the Great, had the babes of Bethlehem killed (cf. Matthew 2:16-18; Jeremiah 31:15).

Moreover, brother J. W. McGarvey, states:

Drusilla... was a woman of remarkable beauty, the lawful wife of Azizus, king of Emesa, but was now living in adulterous intercourse with Felix. Concerning Felix, Tacitus testifies, that “with every kind of cruelty and lust, he exercised the authority of a king with the temper of a slave.

McGarvey also remarks on Felix’s statement regarding a “**more convenient season**”:

It is a sad warning to all who thus procrastinate, that to neither Felix nor Drusilla did the season ever come which they thought convenient to listen to such preaching. Felix was soon dismissed in disgrace from his office; and Drusilla, with a son by Felix, perished in that eruption of Mount Vesuvius which engulfed the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum (*Acts of the Apostles*). [Information in the last sentence is from Josephus,

Antiquities].

The fearless “John the Baptizer” (Mark 6:24, *ASV*–1901) had declared unto Drusilla’s uncle, Herod Antipas (i.e. Herod the Tetrarch, Mat. 14:1), that he was living in adultery with his brother’s wife (cf. Mark 6:14-29; Mat. 14:1-12). Likewise, the courageous apostle Paul unashamedly preached Christ to this adulterous couple, in condemnation of the lives they were living (Acts 24:24-25)! Many in the church today are treating the Lord’s law on marriage, divorce, and remarriage (cf. Mat. 19:4-9), and other matters, as a light thing. They will not deal with sin in such a bold manner! We need more preachers like Christ, John, and the apostles, who will **“preach the word,”** and be **“instant in season and out of season”** (2 Tim. 4:1-2; cf. Mat. 23:27-28)! We need those who will **“spare not,”** and who will show God’s people their transgressions (Isa. 58:1)!

Paul preached unto them **“the faith in Christ.”** The expression, **“the faith,”** refers to that which is to be preached, namely the New Testament (Gal. 1:23; Acts 24:24); to be obeyed (Acts 6:7); the teaching of Christ, in which Christians are to continue as obedient church members (Col. 1:23; 2 John 9; John 8:31-32). It is that for which we must contend earnestly: **“contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints,”** (Jude 3, *ASV*, 1901). It has been once and for all delivered to man by the inspiration and revelation of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Gal. 1:10-12; 1 Cor. 2:10-13; Eph. 3:3-6). It is not to be tampered with in any way (cf. Rev. 22:18-19; 2 Pet. 3:16)! All who so do will be accused (Gal. 1:6-9)!

The fact that Paul reasoned with his hearers is proof that reasoning is required of those who preach, and also of those who hear the truth (Acts 17:2; 18:4, 19; 24:25). The Lord said through the prophet Isaiah, **“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord...”** (Isa. 1:18). Many want to put feelings before reasoning and coming to a logical conclusion concerning the truth. Consequently, they allow emotions to cloud their thinking, and they follow that which seems right rather than what is right (Pro. 14:12; 16:25).

The effect of Paul’s preaching was that, **“Felix trem-**

bled” (**“was terrified,”** *ASV*, 1901). However, he did not obey the gospel of Christ in order to be saved from his sins (Heb. 5:8-9; Mark 16:15-16). Rather than obey the Lord, he did as many do, he postponed his obedience to the Lord, saying: **“when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.”** We know that such a season never came for the governor, and it will never come for those who procrastinate or look for an easier way to follow Jesus. Christ said: **“...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”** (Luke 9:23).

The salvation of the soul is of the utmost urgency! **“... Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation)”** (2 Cor. 6:2b). We must not delay: **“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord”** (Acts 22:16). Like Saul, one must immediately respond, as he, **“arose, and was baptized”** (Acts 9:18). The earnestness of this plea is supported by the fact of life’s brevity and uncertainty, as James warned: **“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away”** (Jam. 4:14). But we must never forget that there are two appointments we all must keep—death and the Judgment (Heb 9:27)! Furthermore, not only may death and the Judgment overtake the unprepared soul, but we also may harden our heart against the truth of God’s Word. **“Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness”** (Heb. 3:7-8). Moreover, if one falls into sin as a member of the church, that erring church member must urgently seek forgiveness by repentance, confession of sin, and seeking the prayers of the faithful to God for one’s forgiveness, as did Simon of Samaria (Acts 8:22-24; cf. Jam. 5:16; 1 John 1:9). Let us be ready to meet Jesus Christ, Who said: **“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come...Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh”** (Mat. 24:42, 44). Jesus also said, **“And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch”** (Mark. 13:37).

DO NOT QUIT, PREACHERS

(Jer. 9:1-3)

Benard Kagaga

Jeremiah was disappointed by the departure of the people of Israel from God and he wanted to quit being a prophet of God (Jer. 9:1-3). However, the Word of God was burned in him and the great prophet could not cease his work for God (Jer. 20:9). I have been asked by many if I ever thought of quitting preaching and getting to a more stable line of work. But those who asked this do not know what preach-

ing is. It is the one of most stable and noble works one can do. Remember, God had only one begotten Son and He a preacher.

I know the life of a preacher of God’s Word is difficult and fraught with extraordinary amount of stress (2 Tim. 3:12). But what kept Jeremiah going is what keeps me going. I know if I stop using my preaching talent, my soul would be lost (1 Cor. 9:1; 2 Cor. 5:10-11). Preachers do not quit! Indeed, let us encourage faithful brothers not to quit preaching and also exhort the Lord’s church to produce more sound gospel preachers (2 Tim. 2:2). All must understand that they

will be lost without the Lord in their lives (Eph. 2:1-3, 11, 12). All who have reached the age of accountability during this Christian age and are not faithful members of the Lord's Church are sinners (Rom. 3:23). In their unsaved condition, eternal torment in Hell is their final destination (Rom. 6:23a). But if we obey the Gospel of Christ, becoming and remaining faithful members of the church of Christ, we are assured of eternal life when this life is over (Eph. 2:4-6; Heb. 6:19).

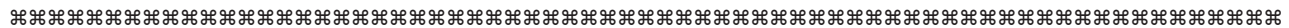
The tragedy of quitting preaching and ceasing to be faithful in the Lord's church is very harmful. To quit teaching the Gospel is to quit doing what the Lord commanded the church, His spiritual body, to do. In ceasing to teach the truth one has ceased to faithfully serve the Lord (Eph. 1:22-23). Outside the church there is no hope of salvation (Gal. 3:26, 27; Eph. 1:3; Heb. 6:46). To quit faithfully serving the Lord in His church is to forget that the church was bought with the blood of Christ. It truly reveals how little such brethren think of the purchase price for the church—the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28; Rev. 1:5).

Christians must understand that although other weak and unfaithful brethren may disappoint them, Jesus never will. It is true some have been led away from Christ by the

poor examples of some Christians (2 Tim. 4:9-11), but this should not be a reason for brethren to quit preaching and cease to be faithful in the Lord's Church. We know that mere men are not our standard. Jesus will never let us down (Heb. 13:5b). The world and false brethren will forsake us but the Lord will never do so (Psa. 142:4-7). Take Paul's inspired statements to the saints to "**set your [Christians] affection on things above...**" (Col. 3:2 Emphasis added BOK) and live by them.

Do not quit preachers! Do not quit Christians! To quit means to reject Christ and His judgmental Words (John 12:48). To quit is to reject the purchase price of the church—Christ's blood (Mat. 26:28; Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:7; 1 John. 1:7). Thereby such brethren cut off their fellowship with Christ, God the Father, and faithful children of God (2 John. 9-10). Remain faithful to Christ in His church (Gal. 3:26-28) and have eternal hope for the heavenly home. Preach the Word! (2 Tim. 4:2).

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FRUSTRATING THE WILL OF GOD

Roelf L. Ruffner

For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him (Luke 7:28-30, NKJ).

What is the will of God for your life? Many citizens of this dying world think it is to be happy and successful in this life, making a lot of friends and money. If this is your course in life and you believe it has God's blessing, you are deluding yourself. Here are the words of a man who seemed to the world successful and happy.

So he said, I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided? (Luke 12:18-20).

The Bible reveals the will of God for humanity. It is vastly different than the hedonistic lifestyle of our present age and is much more concerning. "**Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judg-**

ment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Ecc. 12:13-14). All have this responsibility—to obey the Creator, prepare for the end of all things and the judgment day (2 Cor. 5:10).

Many today defy the will of God for themselves by ignoring the Gospel of Christ and living contrary to it: lewdness, lying, covetousness, drinking, and drug abuse; lives which deny any connection to God.

Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness (Eph. 4:18-19).

Luke 7:28-30 shows us that our eternal destiny relies on our trusting God enough to obey Him; especially when it comes to His plan of salvation. "**So Samuel said: Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams"** (1 Sam. 15:22).

SETTING AND AUDIENCE

John the Immerser was thrown in prison by King Herod Antipas. He sent messengers to Jesus to ask Him who He was. After they left, Jesus praised this prophet of God. John had been

the trail blazer and herald for the Messiah and His coming kingdom. **“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”** (Mat. 3:1,2). He was the first to preach the necessity of repentance and baptism for the remission of sins; in this case for the Jews of his day (John 1:4).

The tax collectors or publicans were public contractors who supplied Roman legions, managed the collection of port duties, and oversaw public building projects. They often gouged the people in their role as tax collectors (*Wikipedia*). To the Jews in Palestine, they were seen as collaborators and traitors.

The Pharisees were a Jewish sect which was strict in their interpretation of the Law and the customs. They were respected by the people, but many were hypocrites.

The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do...Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (Mat. 23:2,3; 27,28).

THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE WILL OF GOD—Verse 29

Those Jews who had acknowledged sin in their lives and repented, accepted God’s plan of salvation for them as offered by John (**“justified God”**). **“Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, Teacher, what shall we do?”** (Luke 3:12).

Jesus said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him (Mat. 21:31,32).

They considered God just or righteous in making these commands. By submitting to baptism for the remission of sins they declared that God’s will concerning repentance and John’s baptism was right. **“Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight—That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge”** (Psa. 51:4).

People today need this repenting heart of faith. **“I thought about my ways and turned my feet to Your testimonies. I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments”** (Psa. 119:59,60). Like the ancient Jews who submitted to God’s plan, they can rejoice knowing that they have believed in Jesus, confessed Him as God’s Son, repented of their sins, and obeyed Christ’s command to be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 8:39; Gal. 3:26, 27; 1 Cor. 6:11).

Baptism in water is not only a command of Jesus Christ; it is one of the elements of the new birth into the kingdom of God.

Jesus answered and said to him, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus said to Him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born? Jesus answered, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5).

Incidentally, ancient heresy made baptism (immersion) into sprinkling and pouring water on babies and the dying. This, of course, implies that babies are sinners from birth which teaching is contrary to the Scriptures (Mat. 19:14).

Man-made religious doctrine relegates baptism to an afterthought, what the saved does to join a denomination, not necessary for salvation. The Baptist position: “Baptism does not accomplish anything in itself but is an outward personal sign that the person’s sins have already been washed away by the blood of Christ’s cross.” But the Scriptures say differently.

There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 3:21). **And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord** (Acts 22:16).

REJECTION OF THE WILL OF GOD – Verse 30

God’s will for the Pharisees and the lawyers of John’s day was the same as for the publicans and sinners—their salvation. **“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”** (1 Tim. 2:3-4). By not repenting and being baptized for the remission of their sins they rejected or nullified the will of God (Luke 3:7-8). **“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in”** (Mat. 23:13). In essence, the penitent publicans and sinners loved God more than the Pharisees did (Luke 10:27).

Today, with Christ’s command to be baptized, people frustrate the will of God for their lives by not obeying God’s Plan of Salvation and rejecting baptism for the remission of sins. They are no different from the ancient scribes and Pharisees—rejecting the will of God. Where are you, today?

Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness! (Mat. 7:21-23).

END NOTES

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Publican> as of December 31, 2020.

<https://www.studylight.org/commentary/luke/7-29.html> as of December 31, 2020.

<https://everythingwhat.com/what-is-the-meaning-of-baptism-in-water> as of December 31, 2020.

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for their faith, living righteous lives before their unrighteous neighbors (2 Cor. 12:10; 2 The. 1:4; 2 Tim. 3:12). They loved their enemies. Thus, they refused to compromise the truth of Christ's Gospel to any degree because it provided the only way of salvation (John 14:6; Gal. 1:6-10; 6:1, 2; 2 John 8-11). As Paul wrote of love, saying it, "**Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth**" (1 Cor. 13:6). They, therefore, refused to be silenced in their proclamation and defense of the Gospel (Acts 4:18-20), for it reveals the only truth that sets people free from sin and death (John 8:31, 32; 17:17; Luke 8:11; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12). With this great faith in God, Christ, and the New Testament system of salvation they were willing to and did die for the cause of Christ (Rev. 2:10; Acts. 7:54-60; 12:2). Christians must know that the hope of America, indeed of the world, is what it always has been—belief in and obedience to Christ (Rom. 6:17, 18; 2 The. 1:7-9; Heb. 5:9).

Regardless of the unfriendly and militant opposition that is launched against the church by Satan's minions, the truth of God has not changed. For almost two thousand years people have become Christians. The authority of Christ continues to read the same way and mean the same thing in our Lord's New Testament as it did in the first century (Mat. 28:18; Col. 3:17; John 12:48). Thus, the only way of salvation from sin remains the same no matter who, how many, from where it comes, or what persecutions the faithful must undergo because they will not compromise the truth of God's Word in life and doctrine.

We must use whatever is authorized by God's Word to preach Christ and defend the faith. We must engage in personal evangelism, for we are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and the leavening influence for good in this present evil world (Mat. 5:13, 14; Luke 13:21). The foregoing means we must live exemplary lives before our brethren and this present evil world (Gal. 2:20; 1 Cor. 11:1; Heb. 13:7). All other things being scripturally equal, we must with wisdom use our citizenship rights, as did the apostle Paul, to spread and defend the gospel (Acts 25:11). The question for us is this, do we have the faith in Christ and His gospel that those Christians of the first century had (Rom. 10:17; 2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:1; 6)? If we have it, do we have the courage of our convictions to do what must be done for Jesus who suffered and died for us on the cruel cross of calvary (Jam. 1:25)? James 2:14-26 was written to Christians because it is always easier to say what one ought to do than to do it. As the old bumper sticker asked, "**IF YOU WERE ARRESTED FOR BEING A CHRISTIAN, WOULD THERE BE ENOUGH EVIDENCE TO CONVICT YOU?**" To answer that question honestly ought to make

some church members ashamed of themselves.

RIOTING AND SUCH LIKE ARE FORBIDDEN

To the church in the Imperial city of Rome, and so to all Christians then and now, by inspiration the apostle Paul wrote, "**Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying**" (Rom. 13:13; Also see Rom. 3:8; 12:9; 1 Cor. 15:33; 1 The. 5:15; 3 John 1:11). The faithful do not engage in such things as a remedy for righting a wrong. Furthermore, they do not permit themselves to associate with people who advocate and engage in such disobedience to civil law.

Christians must learn to tell the difference in civil laws that, if obeyed, cause them to sin against God and those civil laws that are an inconvenience and an aggravation to them, but when obeyed one does not sin (1 John 3:4; Jam. 4:17). Jesus never taught the church to engage in "marches" of protests in the capitals of the provinces of Rome or in the city of Rome itself. He never taught the church to hold a "sit in" in the Roman senate house or storm the Imperial Palace to demonstrate their opposition to the evils of the society and the corrupt civil government of the Roman Empire.

First century Christians were taught to honor the king (1 Pet. 2:17), pay taxes (Mat. 22:21), obey the laws that governed them (Rom. 13:1-7; Tit. 3:1), and practice pure and undefiled religion (Jam. 1:27; Also see Gal. 6:10). God has the only way to defeat evil. Thus, Paul wrote, "**Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good**" (Rom. 12:21—as God defines the "good"). Paul instructed Timothy to pray for rulers with the following words,

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:2-4).

We must do the same, realizing that "**The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much**" (Jam. 5:16). Faithful children of God have always been determined to teach, practice, and defend the enriching principles of the Gospel of peace regardless of the consequences for so doing. This we will continue to do because it is the way that is right and cannot be wrong (1 Cor. 15:58; Also see 2 Tim. 4:5-8).

—David P. Brown, Editor