**A Study in Protest**

The apostle Paul enjoyed a rare status in first century Roman society: he was both Jewish and a Roman citizen. As such, he was entitled to rights and privileges not afforded to non-citizens. He had the right of appeal to Caesar if he felt he wasn’t being judged fairly in a lower court (Acts 25:11). He also had the right to due process before being punished (Acts 16:37). These rights should sound familiar; US citizens expect the same treatment. So it is appropriate for us to consider how Paul responded when subjected to unjustifiable brutality and unlawful imprisonment. His behavior provides a valid example for Christians in a free society today.

Paul and his preaching companion, Silas were both Roman citizens. While in Philippi, they were dragged before city magistrates and falsely accused of promoting illegal activities (Acts 16:20-21). With no real investigation of the facts, the leaders ordered that Paul and Silas be beaten with rods and thrown into prison overnight.

When morning came, the magistrates sent their policemen to release them. It was only then that they realized that they had made the grave error of severely beating and imprisoning two Roman citizens without due process! They were frightened and with good reason! So how did Paul handle this delicate situation? Verse 37 tells us.

“They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out!”

As a Roman citizen, Paul had the perfect right to protest the way he had been treated and he took advantage of that right in a way that was peaceful, lawful and that presented no harm to anyone else.

There are lots of folks in our society who have no regard for God’s word or the example of His apostles. This study is for the benefit of those of us who love God and want to please Him. As US citizens, we have the right to publicly express our displeasure peacefully. No one has the right to destroy property, harm the innocent or steal, either in the eyes of God or the law.

In Romans 1, Paul described in detail those of depraved mind, those filled with wickedness, greed, murder, strife, malice, insolence; apt adjectives for rioters and looters. “Although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them” (v.32).

We should support the rights of others to protest peacefully, whether or not we agree with their point of view. But there is never justification for rioting and looting and we must take care never to suggest otherwise.

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