

1020

THE GOSPEL UNHINDERED (Acts 28:14-31; read vs. 14b-16, 23-24, 30-31)

INTRODUCTION

I. WHY THE BOOK OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES IS UNFINISHED (ended abruptly)

- A. It is still going on.
- B. It is an unfinished fragment.
- C. We in the 20th century are writing our chapter of the thrilling story.
- D. To write the whole history was unnecessary. Enough was written, to reveal the secrets of power, to bring into the light the perpetual perils threatening the Church, to indicate directions, and to provide all that was necessary for the church to fulfil its mission until the consummation of the age.

II. PAUL'S FIRST ACTIVITY ON ARRIVAL IN ROME WAS THAT OF CALLING TOGETHER HIS OWN PEOPLE, VS. 17, 23

- A. They had no letters blaming him.
- B. This first meeting was followed by a more formal assembly. He talked from morning ^{until evening} to them of two things.
 1. First "testifying the Kingdom of God."
 2. Secondly, he persuaded them, arguing with them "concerning Jesus," from their own writings, from Moses, and the prophets.
- C. The picture ends with division, VS. 25

III. THE LAST TWO VERSES

- A. In his own hired dwelling, a prisoner, waiting the pleasure of the emperor.
- B. In order to do his Christian work in Rome he hired his own dwelling.
 1. He must be independent of the patronage of Rome if he would deliver the Gospel to Rome.
 2. There came an hour when a Roman emperor espoused the cause of Christianity, when he provided the house in which there should be the Christian worship of God, when he became a patron of the Xtn church.

3. That was the darkest and most disastrous hour that ever came to that Church.
4. The lesson here is plain:
When the **dictator** provides the house, he **can** dictate the message.
5. When the secular power govers the affairs of the church, the church will be used as a tool of the state rather than as an instrument of God.

C. There Paul kept open house, receiving all that came to him.

D. Two words tell his method.

1. "preaching", the proclamation of the herald
2. "teaching", lit. "disciplining" - the things concerning the Lord Jesus Xt.
An interesting addition in some texts tells us specifically what he taught: Some add: "saying that this is Christ (or "this Jesus is the Christ"), the Son of God, through whom the whole world is about to be judged."

This clause gives the full doctrine of the person of Jesus: to the Jews he is the Christ, to the Gentiles The Son of God, and to all men their Judge.

E. The last word here is, "none forbidding him" or "unhindered."

But Paul is in prison? - Unhindered! But Nero is on the throne? - Unhindered! That is the last word, flaming in light, thrilling in power, telling the secret of the new force right at the heart of the world, at its strategic center.

The strongest force among the nations today is not the caprice of kings, the decisions of parliaments, nor the vote of the electorate, but it is the **free** man of God with the clear message of the Gospel.

"I paused last eve beside the blacksmith's door, And heard the anvil ring, the vesper's chime, And looking in I saw upon the floor Old hammers, worn with beating years of time. "How many anvils have you had?" said I "To wear and batter all these hammers so?" "Just one," he answered; Then with twinkling eye: "The anvil wears the hammers out, you know." And so, I thought, the anvil of God's Word For ages skeptics' blows have beat upon, But though the noise of falling blows was heard The anvil is unchanged; the hammers gone.

More than a hundred years ago Voltaire declared that there would not be a copy of the Bible on earth in a hundred years. Voltaire is dead, and one can barely recall the date of his death. Today the Geneva Bible Society is using the very printing press on which his infidel prophecy was issued.

Millions of copies of the sacred Scriptures, in hundreds of languages and versions, are in circulation, like leaves of the forests, for the healing of the nations.

"But the word of God is not bound." That is the inscription on a pillar in the crypt of a church in Rome built over the place where Paul is said to have been imprisoned. The heroic apostle, bound with a chain and awaiting death, is not disheartened, discouraged, nor dispairing. He has full confidence in the spread of the gospel and in the conquest of Christ, telling Timothy at Ephesus to be true to Christ and the gospel, for which, he says, "I suffer... unto bonds; but the Word of God is not bound" (2nd Tim. 2:9)

Once a French philosopher and skeptic was teasing Thomas Carlyle about his faith in Jesus Christ, and the skeptic claimed he could begin a new religion to replace Christianity. "Very good," replied Carlyle, "All you need do is to be crucified, rise again the third day, and get the world to believe you are still alive. Then your new religion just MIGHT have a chance."

The Word of God cannot be bound or hindered by the opposition of its enemies, but it can be hindered by the unfaithfulness of its professing followers - by the perversion of its essential message - or by the inconsistent lives of those who pretend to respect its authority.

Let us never forget that the central Word of this gospel is that of the mystery of the Cross, whereby the rebel may be made nigh again, and the chaos may give place to order, and all the weariness and wounding and woe may give place to rest and healing & happiness.

Where the Christian witness is true to this Kingdom and to this interpretation, the result is always that the witness

is unhindered; -- in spite of emperors, dictators, prisons, and chains.

"The word of God is not bound," and whatever may be the massed forces

against its testimony, it is THEY which must crumble and

pass and perish, as did Rome and Nero,

and not this word of the testimony.

May it be ours to be true to that testimony in life and speech,

to the glory of His name.

In proportion as we are so, the one word forever describing the Church will be the word with which this book ends --

UNHINDERED!

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HOW TO KEEP THE GOSPEL UNHINDERED

I. Keep the Church Independent from the State

Religious liberty and separation of church and state are key Baptist and American principles.

II. Keep the Gospel Message Free from Human Perversion (Galatians 1:6-9, 11).

A. We don't need another or a "different" gospel.

The one we have in the New Testament is quite sufficient.

B. Even if a few copyists errors or translators' imperfect translations are discovered sometime, this will not destroy my faith in the trustworthiness of the Holy Scriptures. Even if the best Hebrew text available today is obscure in places, this does not shake my faith in the Bible as the Word of God, for to me the essential point is whether the Bible is God's truth in revealing to us the way of salvation and His will for our faith and life as believers.

III. Keep the Christian Community Free from Internal Obstacles and Stumbling-blocks, I Cor 9:12, 19-27.

A. Job 9:12 and 11:10 ask the question, "Who can hinder him?"

1. From the Book of Job we learn that ultimately Satan can not hinder God's will. He may with God's permission test God's people, but Satan can not hinder the final working of God's will in the life of the faithful believer or in the world at large.

2. Neither can the World hinder God's church, unless we let the world into the church.

3. The Flesh can hinder God's working in the Christian only when the Christian voluntarily surrenders to the power and lust of the flesh. Mentally sick and morally weak persons typically try to avoid personal responsibility for the power of the flesh over them, but I do not believe we can normally accept their excuses in these matters.

B. It is quite true then that Christians can indeed hinder God's will and working in our own lives, in our families, in our churches, and in the world around us, when we are unfaithful to Him and disobey him in our lives and refuse to love and serve Him.

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THE GOSPEL UNHINDERED

Acts 28: 30-31, "And he (Paul) lived there (in Rome) two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered." (RSV)

INTRODUCTION:

I call your attention today to the last three words of this inspiring historical book of the New Testament: "openly and unhindered."

At this time period of the Apostolic Age the Roman Empire felt no need to restrict the missionary activity, or preaching, or worship of the Christians. Paul enjoyed, in fact, considerable freedom to continue his ministry while he was awaiting trial because of the Jewish charges against him. He was not actually in prison; he was under more of a "house arrest" as we would call it today. And during this time, for two years, he was free to receive all visitors who wanted to come to visit him, and he was free to teach and preach and write as much as he wished.

Rome was not the enemy. The early church had enemies, but Rome was not yet the enemy of the church. As far as Rome was concerned, Paul and the other Christians were free to worship and proclaim their gospel message openly and unhindered.

And in our day we observe that the church may have various hindrances to its worship and ministry, but the real enemy is not necessarily what we think it is. The greatest enemies of the church and of the

**Lord's work are not on the outside, but on the
INSIDE.**

"Backwater on the wheel..."

I Cor. 9:12, "...

**I. There are many things which can NOT hinder the
Gospel.**

(SEE NEXT PAGE NOTES)

II. There are some things that we can do to avoid hindrances to the Gospel.

A. First, we can and must keep the Church separate from the State.

1. Baptists and many other Protestant Free Churches have long believed that there can not be genuine religious freedom, as we know it in the USA, without separation of Church and State, as well as the free exercise of religious faith and practice guaranteed and protected by the government. That is to say, that we do not expect the government to support any particular religion or church, or religion in general, but we do not allow the government to interfere with the free and voluntary practice of religion according to the faith and conscience of all of our people. To have this system, we feel we must have separation of Church and State, allowing no interference or meddling into the affairs of religion by the government, and, at the same time, no interference with or capture of the government by any religious church or body, whether Christian, or Catholic, or Protestant, Baptist, Mormon, Jewish, Muslim, or whatever.

2. For over 300 years Baptists and the majority of other Christians and Jews in our country have supported this understanding and practice of the separation of Church and State. It has served all of us well. And for over 130 years, beginning in 1845, Southern Baptists voted consistently in resolutions at their annual conventions for separation of Church and State. No one ever suggested that this political and religious position was a "myth" or the result of Communist or atheistic conspiracy until after the fundamentalist

takeover of the SBC beginning about 1979 and reaching its climax in the late '80s. Immediately after the fundamentalist takeover and exclusion of the Moderates they successfully reversed the denomination's historic stands on the separation of church and state.

3. One evidence of this new state of affairs is the fact that the present SBC leadership has consistently supported a voucher system of making public tax funds from general government revenues available for the education of elementary and secondary students in parochial schools, where they are taught the doctrines and beliefs of particular religious churches. The ones who will benefit primarily from any voucher system like this are Roman Catholic schools, for they have by far the largest religious schools systems in the nation. One Roman Catholic Cardinal (Bevilacqua) has publicly said, "If we can get [a voucher plan] through in one state then that's the foot in the door. That's what I want....Let it go through the courts to remove that notion of separation of church and state."

4. We should all rejoice that the voters in California on the 2nd day of this month defeated one such deceptive voucher initiative at their polls, by a margin of more than 2 to 1 (70% to 30%), they rejected parochaid, as voters have done again and again in state after state. But the parochaid seekers will never give up; they will be back time after time and try to offer the same old package of sorry goods in bright new packages and try to justify them with other flimsy reasons.

5. It is sad that some conservative evangelicals have supported the cardinals and bishops and other people

like William Bennett. Among those mistaken conservative evangelical leaders are James Dobson, Pat Robertson, Rev. Jerry Falwell, and others who agree with them.

6. James Dobson launched his Focus on the Family Center in Colorado in the late '70s, and he has offered some good common sense advice for Christian families especially on various aspects of child-rearing, but he started leading his movement toward the Religious Right in the '80s. Today his center prints and distributes almost as many videos and pamphlets critical of the separation of church and state and promoting other Religious Right issues, as it prints and promotes material solely for Christian family causes.

7. Many good Christians were misled to give generous contributions to the Old Time Gospel Hour, but they didn't intend for their gifts to go into illegal political action committees for conservative congressional political candidates to tear down the wall of separation between church and state. Earlier this year the IRS fined Jerry Falwell \$50,000 for doing just exactly this!

8. Too many of these folks would make the United States into a Theocracy, rather than a Democracy, if they could.

As James Dunn puts it, the problem with "theocrats" is that each wants to be "Theo"!

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