

Christians Identified By Courageous Behavior¹

We have always thought it interesting that when Paul completed his confrontation with legalistic Judaizing teachers among the Roman disciples, he concluded his arguments for grace with the euphoric declaration of courage that seems to be a doxology (Read Rm 8:28-39). In these concluding statements, he encouraged the grace-educated and grace-driven disciples among the Roman disciples with exhortations as “*we know that all things work together for good to those who love God*” (Rm 8:28). And, “*what will we then say to these things [concerning the revelation of the grace of God through the gospel]? (Rm 8:31). “He who spared not His own Son . . . how will He not with Him also freely give us all things” (Rm 8:32). “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rm 8:35). “But in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rm 8:37).*

In reference to the discussion that follows, and for those who are most sincere in their efforts to be Bible-believing and gospel-based disciples, Paul concluded his revelational doxology with the encouraging words of Romans 8:38,39 (Please read). It takes a great deal of courage to stand firm for grace in the midst of a religious world that is obsessed over either religious ceremonies or meritorious religious traditions that work against the grace of God.

- **True leaders and change:** A very profound historical statement was made by the Spirit-inspired Luke in Acts 6:7. It is a statement that is often casually read, and thus not fully appreciated in the historical context in which Luke wanted us

to gain courage from individuals who took a stand for Jesus. We believe that the Holy Spirit directed Luke to make this historical statement to encourage restorationists to carry on with restorations regardless of any opposition that may come from a religious world that has been led away from the God of love, which God did not spare His own Son in order to extend grace to the world. Therefore, we read with interest concerning courageous religious leaders in the first century:

*So the word of God increased. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. **And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.***

It might encourage some to reconsider this statement when we assume that the time involved here was during the **five-year period** after the Pentecost of Acts 2. The priests who obeyed the gospel during this period could certainly have included some of those early priests who were in the courtyard of the temple five years before Luke's statement when the judgment was made by the high priest, and other religious leaders (the priests), to turn Jesus over to Pilate in order to have Him crucified. So in Luke's indirect statement of encouragement here, some of the voters (the priests) against Jesus during that trial were by the time Luke recorded the historical statement of Acts 6:7, disciples of the One whom they had earlier called out to be crucified. **Little did those priests know during the trial of Jesus that the sacrificial crucifixion for which they cried out was all in the plan of God to save their own souls.** Their repentance during the years after the crucifixion, was indeed a testimony to the fact that they could change when they learned more, especially when their souls were involved. They could change even though they had formerly been caught up in the furor to crucify the One who revealed the love of God for them.

• **Spiritually generating restoration and change:** In the context of the plea of what we are promoting in this study, this point is very important. When one begins to understand that “the church” that he or she is promoting is actually advocating religious beliefs and behavior that are possibly far removed from the church about which we read in the New Testament, then things begin to happen in the hearts of sincere people. It is as Nicodemus, who, in the night, secretly came to Jesus (Jn 3:1,2). He realized that the twelve-year-old Nazarene carpenter’s son with whom he and other priests had possibly encountered in the temple about eighteen years before was now working miraculous signs that proved that God was with Him (See Lk 2:41-52).

Nevertheless, at this time about eighteen years later, and after that Temple discussion with the twelve-year-old “boy Jesus,” Nicodemus still did not have the courage to come to this “boy” Jesus in the daylight hours during His earthly ministry. After the crucifixion, however, it seems that he himself was beginning to connect the dots between prophecy, fulfillment, miraculous signs, and that twelve-year-old boy with whom he possibly discussed profound matters of the law in the Temple many years before (See Jn 19:38,39).

In the early struggles of a restoration, one must often, in the quietness of his own home at night with the word of God, be challenged by the word of God concerning his personal beliefs, and thus determined with courage to carry on with the change of restoration regardless of all opposition.

When one is startled by the difference between the early church and the religious group to which one may be a member today, then one should be motivated to take ownership of the painful task of restoring the first century Christianity of the New Testament. It is then that one, if honest and moved by faith in the road map of the word of God, starts to take action to restore what is defined as a Christian by the New Testament.

- **Change often inspires opposition:** Taking action to restore that which has been forgotten, will inevitably give rise to much opposition. Opposition will come from those who seek to continue what they believe to be the “old paths,” but actually are not old enough, that is, old enough to be traced back to the first century. We must not think that restoring our walk according to the authority of the word of God will be any different than what Jesus and the early Jewish Christians experienced when they left the Jews’ religion in order to be disciples of Christ. In doing so, they were confronted with the hostility of the Jewish leadership. Nevertheless, some priests in the Jewish leadership were as Nicodemus who later became an outspoken disciple of Jesus. They eventually accepted the fact that there was too much evidence that pointed to the fact that Jesus was actually sent from God.

Unfortunately, those who want to protect the old traditional ways, or possibly their own leadership positions “in the church,” will most assuredly rise up as they did against Jesus. After the cross, traditional Jewish leaders also rose up against the apostles and Paul. They stoned Stephen outside Jerusalem (At 7:54-60). Now reconsider the historical statement of Acts 6:7 in the context of this great opposition against the early disciples that resulted from their preaching the truth of the gospel.

When courageous leaders stand up against misguided religiosity, great things will happen. Necessary beliefs that are based on the word of God will stimulate change, or at least adjust our thinking to believe in a way that brings us more into alignment with the identity of the gospel-driven Christians that we read about in the New Testament.

- **Persistent opposition:** Every restorationist must understand that in order to restore the church of the New Testament, **there**

will always be opposition. People simply feel satisfied to remain within the confines of their own religious (“church”) bondage. These people will continually rise up in order to oppose any change in the established traditions of the fathers.

There is a sense of security in bondage: The first thing a long-time released prisoner wants, who initially stands free on the outside of a prison, is to turn around and walk right back into the bondage of the prison. By this time in his life he has become “institutionalized,” and thus finds it quite frightening to stand free outside prison walls. Prison bars give him a sense of security. It is the same with those who have for years lived behind the bars of religious traditions.³

Most people in the bondage of traditional churchianity⁴ find it too frightening to step outside the security of their traditional religiosity and trust only in the word of God as the final authority in all matters of faith.

We would assume that those who take a stand to bring people outside the prison walls of traditional or experiential religion will find it difficult to convince others that we must restore the authority of God’s word in all matters of faith. We must restore the gospel as the prime motivation to get us where God wants us to be. As a Christian, the gospel must be our spiritual center of reference in all matters of faith.

• **It takes courage to escape the bondage of religion:** We must never forget that religion brings us into the bondage of ourselves, and there is no freedom in bondage. After reconsidering who Jesus was, those priests of Acts 6:7 found enough courage to finally believe that He was the Christ and Son of God. They finally had enough courage to take the plunge into

3 - RESEARCH: **Biblical Research Library**, Book 49: *Escape From Bondage*, www.roger-e-dickson.org

4 - By “churchianity” we mean to encompass all those religious beliefs and behavior that religious people, in the expression of their faith, presume to be “the church” of the Bible, which beliefs and behavior have no authority as such in the Bible.

Christ through the waters of baptism. They joined the host of those who would base their faith in the will of God. And certainly, they willingly joined with those about whom Peter about thirty years later wrote in 1 Peter 4:16: “*Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name.*”

Today, we can ask for no less from other religious leaders to follow the example of those Jewish priests about whom Luke wrote in Acts 6:7. One may initially come in the night to ask questions. However, the brave must eventually step forward in daylight hours, as Nicodemus eventually did, in order to reveal his or her loyalty to Jesus and His word (See Jn 19:38,39).

The struggle of the Christian is often against zealous religionists who have brought themselves into the bondage of their own religious heritage.

We would conclude this point with John’s statement in Revelation 21:8:

But the cowardly and unbelieving and the abominable and murderers and immoral people and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, will have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

And, “*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*” (Ep 4:10).

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