

WHEN BEING A PEST IS A GOOD THING

by Carl McMurray

I believe the average Christian is an open, honest, peace loving sort of person. He minds his own business while he just wants to go to work, raise his family, and worship his God. He is saddened by the knowledge that people around him are lost, so as opportunity presents itself he/she will try and share the Good News with friends and co-workers in whatever way is available, whether it is an invitation to study, a pointed remark, or a word of encouragement. He tends to think that others are pretty much like himself... and this is where he often makes his mistake. Because often, they are not.

In Acts 24 Paul has been arrested and is appearing before Felix, the governor. Please note the “open and honest way” that these enemies present their “facts.” Note that this is the High Priest and some of the elders. They are religious men, leaders, respected by the people they serve. Notice the carnal tactics (2 Corinthians 10:4) they use in their discussion.

They begin with **name calling** in verse 5 as the apostle is labeled a “real pest.” This would be laughable if they weren’t after Paul’s death as the outcome of their words. We’ll come back to this later.

They move on to **dramatizing the situation** and **demonizing Paul** as they label him as one who stirs up dissension *Jews throughout the world* and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. The very situation that brought this case to the court, from chapter 21, puts the hollowness to this claim. Verse 12 is where Paul challenges them to prove that he caused a riot, or was even having discussion when they mobbed him. The accurate truth is that it was the enemies of the cross who were in the habit of rioting, beating Christians, flying into rages, and stirring up dissension. Likewise, since there is only one Leader and no ring that led the church, their characterization of Paul as one of the ringleaders can be seen as just language designed to inflame the argument and make it sound more serious than it really was.

In verse 8 they move all the way to **lying** about the situation when they accuse Paul of *trying to desecrate the temple*, when he wasn’t. He was there peacefully to fulfill his vow. They try to cast an innocent light on their own actions as they lied again, that they arrested Paul. The truth is, according to Acts 21:30-32, they dragged Paul into the street and were *beating him, intending to kill him*. Strange way to “arrest” someone. Of course once you start lying, it’s easy to keep it going. Especially when the one you are talking about is not there to defend himself. Their innocence is again played up as they claimed that the Roman commander rescued Paul with “much violence” and took him out of their hands. Acts 21:32 simply says that when the soldiers

ran up to the crowd, because of the riot, they stopped beating Paul. Not a word of Roman brutality. Quite contrariwise, all the brutal violence was on the part of the accusers.

Our last demonstration of the weapons of the ungodly in this place is found in 24:9. When the lies are bold and the story is told, then all the Jews who came to court that day got on the bandwagon and testified it was all true. Sure it was. **Because the crowd agreed, it must be true,** right? Wrong. Numbers of people testifying to something doesn't make it true and Paul calmly stood and confidently told the truth, calling on his accusers to prove their words, specifically pointing out that the ones who should have been present to testify were not even present. The whole charge was a pack of lies from beginning to end.

What can we learn from this? Only the fact that we need to wake up. Christians tend to think that everyone thinks like them and such is just not the case. Name calling, dramatization (trying to make things more ugly than they are), demonizing people (instead of talking with them), and lying are par for the course when Satan's bullies are on the attack. And if these things won't get the job done, then expect the crowd to be on the devil's side. That's where the majority stands usually, in the broad path and they will cheer for one of their own.

When you are faced with these things, just think about the fact that you are in good company. The apostle Paul sat quietly and listened to the half-truths and outright lies that were brought against him. Then he stood and told the truth, asking for proof of the charges. That is the tack that we also should take. The truth is that God loves us and Jesus gave His life to show that love and make up for what we could not do. The charges that need proof are many. Sin needs to prove it has a better end than godliness. Satan needs to prove that his reward is greater than the eternal one that the Father promises. Bullies need to prove that lying, dramatizing, slandering, and name calling is a better way to communicate the truth than calmly discussing it. And the crowd needs to prove how many people agreeing on what is wrong, suddenly makes it right.

Several associated lessons stand out from this account. Religious teachers, men of high esteem, and men that we love exceedingly are all still men. They can err. It is only the word of God that is right and can never be wrong. There will always be conflict between light and darkness so we need to make sure of the tools that we use to enter into that conflict and use the truth correctly. And lastly, although some may disagree, it appears to me that there are sometimes when it just the right thing to be called a "pest." When we are pestering Satan, that's a good thing.