

Paul's Sanctified Sarcasm

present - Perfective; denotes continuation of existing results. Refers to a fact which has come to be in the past but is emphasized as a present reality.

active - Believers produce the action of the verb from the standpoint of not wanting to fear the establishment authorities.

There was a difference between the believers at Philippi and those in the church at Rome. Those at Philippi possessed genuine humility and willingly submitted to the teaching authority of Paul and his associates, such as Silas, Luke, and Timothy.

Paul's mandate for them to continue to cultivate their souls fell on willing ears and their response to the mandate was to simply continue their current approach to life. They also had a desire not to be in fear of Roman authorities. For the Philippian believers such a fear never became a reality in their souls once they learned the principles of the Laws of Divine Establishment. As a result, they were able to maintain a low profile. They willingly submitted to Roman law while they quietly continued to cultivate their souls at Bible class.

Believers at the church in Rome however also had a desire not to fear the Roman authorities. But their desire not to fear was based on the fact they did have fear and desired to be rid of it.

Unjust, unfair, and unprincipled people in positions of authority breed fear in the souls of unbelievers and reversionists.

Nero and Roman archons at every level of government, from the tax collectors up to senators, were a source of fear to many in the Roman church.

Whenever fear enters the soul, it creates internal stress and emotional sins. The victim seeks to resolve his distress through human viewpoint and human energy.

These reversionists in the Roman church sought to remove their fear by removing Nero, or by crusading for political change, or by fomenting insurrection, or by announcing public opposition to governing authorities.

Such attitudes seem to have been prevalent among many believers in the Roman church. Everett F. Harrison describes their reactions to the Roman Zeitgeist in his exegesis of Romans in volume 10 of:

The Expositor's Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976, p. 136:

"Paul may be intent on warning the Roman church, which contained some Christian Jews as well as Gentile believers who sympathized with them over the plight of their nation, not to identify with any revolutionary movement advocating rebellion against Rome.

The expulsion of Jews from Rome by Claudius (noted in Acts 18:2) was not due to Christian proclamation of Jesus as Messiah, but to messianic agitation involving the expressed hope that the deliverer would bring release from the grip of Rome. Paul was not simply giving counsel of a general or universal nature, but was speaking to a definite historical situation that could have proved explosive from the Christian standpoint.

Jews who returned to Rome after the death of Claudius were hostile toward the state because of the way Claudius had treated them. These needed to be mollified."

Such believers had real reason to fear Nero and Roman authority. Their problem-solving device was to become involved in anti-authority activities in Rome.

Through this human energy they sought to remove the source of their fear and thus return to a halcyon time when there was no fear.