

# FREEDOM of THOUGHT and

## Speech



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“Freedom of thought (also called the freedom of conscience or ideas) is the freedom of an individual to hold or consider a fact, viewpoint, or thought independent of others’ viewpoints. It is different from and not to be confused with the concept of freedom of expression.’ Freedom of thought’ is the derivative of and thus is closely linked to other liberties: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of expression. It is a very important concept in the western world but nearly all democratic constitutions protect these freedoms.”

<https://www.lawteacher.net/free-law-essays/constitutional-law/freedom-of-thought-conscience-and-speech-constitutional-law-essay.php>

These democratic laws have roots out of ancient Greece. In Athens, at the time of the Apostle Paul, the educated delighted in exploring ideas and discussing them. Some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were open to reason. They heard Paul and said, “What is this babbler trying to say... Then, they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, **‘May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.** (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas) (Acts 17:18b, 19-21).

Paul talked to them. “When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject’” (Acts 17:32).

The sharing of ideas and beliefs is sometimes met with opposition. Identifying the mature from the immature is visible in how they choose to respond. The Apostle Paul experienced a full range of responses: verbal attacks, false accusations, gang building, bullying, beatings, blaming and beating those associated with the accused, stoning, and imprisonment.

### ▪ VERBAL ABUSE

“On the next Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, **they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying**” (Acts 13:44-45).

There is a spirit of hatred that works to twist the truth, belittle, minimize, ridicule and falsify the words spoken. The Apostle Paul did not attack these Jews. Those filled with the spirit of hatred, attacked him.

- **FALSE ACCUSATIONS AND EXAGGERATIONS**

“Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, ‘These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved’” (Acts 16:16-17).

On a side point, this possessed slave girl was telling the truth. Maybe more people would have listened had they paid for what she shouted. However, Paul became troubled and turned to her and commanded the spirit to come out of her. This angered the owners of the slave girl because they no longer could make money from their fortune-telling business. So, they falsely accused Paul saying, “These men are Jews, and **are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice**” (Acts 16:20-21).

This led to Paul and Silas being severely flogged and thrown into prison without a trial.

The spirit of hatred knew the truth could not be told, so these demonic influenced slave owners chose something that would easily irate the Roman governors. In addition, they exaggerated their story to appear that Paul and Silas were throwing the city into a riot, when Paul merely commanded a demon to leave the body of a little girl.

Again, Paul was brought before Felix, the governor. The spirit of hatred is so common well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century that its characteristics are blatant and in-your-face. Tertullus used flattery to the extreme. To Felix, he said, “We have **enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude**” (Acts 24:2).

Flattery is often used to lure people into your gang. Tertullus lavishly used this tactic, to the point that any 21<sup>st</sup> century reader would say, “Enough! Now, I know what you are up to.”

Tertullus then falsely accused Paul and exaggerated. “We have found this man to be a **troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and even tried to desecrate the temple; so, we seized him**” (Acts 24:7)

Because Tertullus acted, likely outside of normal legal processes, he felt the need to justify his action of “seizing” Paul by lying “stirring up riots”, exaggerating “all over the

world”, labelling “ringleader”, falsely accusing by using the word “tried” it appears that an intervention took place that prevented the desecration of the temple.

Paul had only been there twelve days and yet, according to Tertullus, he was able to stir up the whole world. Paul came before Felix and without flattery simply said, “I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so, I gladly make my defense. You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or anywhere else in the city. And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers, as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So, **I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man**” (Luke 24:10-16).

It would do well for all of mankind to follow Paul’s example and strive always to do the right thing because God will resurrect both the righteous and the wicked. There is no escape for the wicked from God’s judgment and the sentence He orders.

Yet, the spirit of hatred lingers well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Partial stories are told by news reporters that tell a narrative they uphold or the narrative given to them by their superiors, knowingly falsifying the truth. Mankind is so easily deceived and used by the evil spiritual puppeteers.

#### ▪ **BEATINGS, GANG BUILDING, BULLYING AND BLAMING OTHERS**

In Thessalonica, “The Jews were jealous; so, **they rounded up some bad characters** from the marketplace, **formed a mob** and **started to riot in the city**. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, **they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials**, shouting, “These men who have **caused trouble all over the world** have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are **all defying Caesar’s decrees**, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus” (Acts 17:5-7).

Again, the spirit of hatred seeks to increase power through numbers. They couldn’t find Paul or Silas, so they took their hatred out on the associates and lied and exaggerated to form a case. They accused Paul and Silas of causing trouble ALL OVER THE WORLD and ARE ALL DEFYING CAESAR’S DECREES.

It would be very good news if Paul and Silas had preached all over the world, because the job of getting the gospel out to all the world would have been completed. But, alas, they had only just started.

Yes, Paul and Silas were preaching that there is another king, Jesus Christ, but Jesus himself said, "**My kingdom is not of this world**. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now **my kingdom is from another place**" (John 18:36).

No need to worry Caesar, Christ's kingdom is not of this world. Critical pieces of information are often left out of the argument with the intent to sway ignorant people to their view.

The forming of gangs is a common practice. The spirit of hatred does not seek to make peace by following God's way of going quickly and privately first to resolve issues.

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. **First go and be reconciled to them;** then come and offer your gift. **Reconcile quickly with your adversary,** while you are still on the way to court" (Matthew 5:23-25).

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, **between you and him alone.** If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." (Matthew 18:15).

Again, "the Jews made a **united attack** on Paul and brought him into court... Gallio said to the Jews, '... I will not be a judge of such things.' Then **they all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court.** But Gallio showed no concern whatever (Acts 18:14, 15b-16).

There is no need to form a gang. Resolving issues God's way is simple. Go to that person privately with the heart to win them and achieve peace.

The spirit of hatred refuses to allow freedom of thought and speech. It is a spirit determined to control and police the beliefs of others through the use of force, abuse, condemnation, labeling, mockery, belittlement to achieve its goal of self-dominance.

The Apostle Paul experienced the full measure of the spirit of hatred. "Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, **in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.** From the Jews **five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned;** three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, **in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city,** in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, **in perils among false brethren;** in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: **my deep concern for all the churches.** Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity" (II Corinthians 11:23-29).

Paul was prepared to endure suffering for his deep concern for all the churches. He endured the spirit of hatred from his own countrymen, the Gentiles, in the city and the wilderness. There is no escape from the cruel and barbaric spirit of hatred.

Jeremiah also was prepared to suffer for God's Holy Spirit within him burned like a raging fire and though they tried to shut him up, they could not.

"So, the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' **his word is in my heart like a burning fire, shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot**" (Jeremiah 20:8b-9).

Only those filled with God's Holy Spirit recognize the passion for God's word that cannot be held back or silenced.

- **PREVENTION OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND RELIGION BY EXPELLING AND DISTANCING THEM.**

"The word of the lord spread through the whole region. But **the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region**" (Acts 13:50).

Even God-fearing people can be influenced by the spirit of hatred, which works aggressively outside of God's way that is private and kind, working to achieve peace.

Melchizedek of Genesis 14:18 is king of Salem. The word "Salem" means peace, perfect as without division—a type of perfect unity. That is the peace God urges Christians to achieve and those who do, Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

Sons of God are peacemakers.

Christians are not expected to believe anything and everything that comes their way. An example was provided by the Bereans who were **eager to listen** and **noble to test** what they heard without contempt prior to investigation. "They received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11). **All without embracing the spirit of hatred.**

Mankind does not like to be told that they are wrong. The Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah because he tried to show them where they were wrong. Prior to the stoning of Stephen, he said, "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: **You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him**—you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it" (Acts 7:51-53).

How will the Christians react when Christ corrects them? Jesus is urging the seven churches of Revelation to be humble and soul searching and overcome their misunderstandings, misconceptions, and falsehoods. Fortunately, Christ cannot be crucified a second time. The Christians who allow the spirit of hatred to consume them will not kill Christ as the Jews did. If

the Christians do not overcome as Christ has urged them, they will not rule with him and judgment will follow, for at his return, he will be our all-powerful King of kings and Lord of lords, not the sacrificial lamb.

To the **Church in Ephesus—the falling church:**

From **he** who holds the 7 stars (angels of the 7 churches) among the 7 lampstands, I know:

- Your deeds
- Your hard work
- Perseverance
- Don't tolerate wicked men
- You have tested them who claim to be apostles and are false
- Endured hardships for my name and not grown weary
- You have in your favor, you hate the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

**Repent:**

- You have **forsaken your first love**
- Remember the height from which you have fallen!
- If you do not repent, I will remove your lampstand from its place.

To the **Church of Smyrna—the persecuted church:**

From him who is the **First and the Last**, who died and came to life again. I know:

- Your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich!
- The slander of those who say they are Jews but are not but are a synagogue of Satan.
- You will suffer persecution for 10 days, some of you will be imprisoned to test you, some will die

**To him who overcomes**, you will not be hurt at all by the second death and will receive the **crown of life**.

To the **Church of Pergamum—the compromising church:**

From **him** who has the sharp, double-edged sword. I know:

- Where you live—where Satan has his throne
- You remain true to my name
- You did not denounce your faith in me, even in days of Antipas (my faithful witness who was put to death in your city)

**Repent:**

- You have people who hold to the teaching of Balaam (who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality)
- You have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.
- Repent! I will soon come to fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

To the **Church of Thyatira—the pagan-influenced church:**

From the **Son of God**, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze; I know:

- Your deeds, love and faith, perseverance, you are now doing more than you did at first

**Repent:**

- You tolerate that woman, Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent for her immorality but she is unwilling. She will be cast into a bed of suffering and will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead.
- All churches will know that I search hearts and minds and I will repay each according to their deeds.
- Now, to those who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, hold onto what you have until I come; I won't impose any other burden.

**To him who overcomes:** I will give authority over the nations to rule with a rod of iron and dash the wicked to pieces. I will also give him the morning star.

**To the Church of Sardis—the dying church:**

From him who holds the seven stars. I know:

- Your deeds, you have reputation of being alive but you are DEAD. Wake up!
- Strengthen what remains and is about to die
- Your deeds are not complete in the sight of my God
- A few of you have not soiled your clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white. I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

**Repent:**

- Remember what you have received and heard and obey it

If you do not repent, I will be like a thief and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

**To the Church of Philadelphia—the loved church:**

From him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens, no one can shut; and what he shuts, no one can open. I know:

- Your deeds
- Before you, is an open door that no one can shut
- You have little strength
- You have kept my word
- Not denied my name
- You have kept my command to endure patiently
- I will keep from you the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole earth

**To the Church in Laodicea—the unrighteous church:**

From the words of the Amen (Jesus Christ), the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know:

- Your deeds are neither cold or hot. I wish they were one or the other!
- You are luke-warm and I will be spit out of my mouth
- You say:
  - You are rich

- Acquired wealth
- Need of nothing
- But, you are:
  - Wretched
  - Pitiful
  - Poor
  - Blind
  - Naked

**Repent:**

- Buy gold refined in the fire so that you may become rich
- Buy white clothes to wear to cover your shameful nakedness
- Buy salve to put on your eyes so that you can see

Those who I love, I rebuke and discipline. Be earnest and repent.

Overcoming is a personal commitment of each Christian individually. Paul urges Christians to test and work relentlessly towards salvation. “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:17b).

Paul encouraged testing ideas and beliefs without embracing the spirit of hatred, rather embracing God’s spirit of love, which is “patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is **not proud**. It is **not rude**, it is **not self-seeking**, it is **not easily angered**, it **keeps no account of wrongs**” (I Corinthians 13:4-5).

Many groups rise and fall in the 21<sup>st</sup> century declaring hatred to those who don’t support their beliefs. Those who delight in the word of God in this evil age will be persecuted—not supported, hated—not loved, labeled—not respected because “The word of the LORD is offensive to them [those opposing it]; they find no pleasure in it” (Jeremiah 6:10b). The spirit of hatred is alive and well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century even within democracies that have established laws to protect the freedom of thought, speech, and religion. We live in an evil age where people violate these laws continually without remorse; they feel completely justified. Such is the world of this evil age.

A better world is coming. Christ will rule with the faithful, God-fearing and God-serving people and they will teach the world how to think freely, critically, logically debunking the foolishness of the wicked. They will both teach and live the theology of Almighty God. The world will see their peaceful example—a unified, unbroken, non-divisive example void of the spirit of hatred and “Many nations will say, ‘Come, **let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.**’” The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Micah 4:2, Isaiah 2:3).

How wonderful that will be! Finally, the spirit of hatred dies.

*Compiled by Janette Andrejowich*