

## 267 Truth and Soberness

In Acts 21.27 – 25.27 we learn of Paul, in trouble with his Jewish accusers, having to face a constant mixture of hostility, danger, false accusations and deep frustration. Then in Acts Chapter 26 we reach another of Paul's speeches in his own defence, this time before Festus and the "tinpot king" Herod Agrippa II. As always on such occasions, Paul recounted his own impeccable Jewish credentials (26.1-12), his dramatic encounter with the Lord Jesus (vv 13-18), and his subsequent Gospel ministry to Jew and Gentile (vv 19-25) – all of which were demonstrably true.

Festus finally had enough and shouted out, "Paul ... much learning doth make thee mad!" (26.24). But Festus was the one who was mad, wasn't he? He simply had no answer when confronted with the testimony of this awkward yet unbowed and wholly reasonable figure. We are blessed with Paul's reply – "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and soberness" (v 25). Paul then pointed out that none of the things of which he had spoken had been done "in a corner" (v 26b), which yet again was the simple truth: all that he said could be easily verified.

Paul serves as a solid example for Christ's people these days. He "knew his stuff" very thoroughly, and was thus able to present Christian Truth clearly and confidently wherever he was. For us these days, with the blessings of the completed Word of God, faithful Bible teachers, numerous study aids and the Holy Spirit Himself "guiding us into all truth" (John 16.13), we too can and should "know our stuff", like Paul: namely, WHAT the Bible actually teaches, and WHY it is trustworthy as "the Word of God".

This need is timely. The promotion of so-called "British values", consisting, so we are told, of such things as liberal democracy, tolerance and respect, remains a political priority, and Amanda Spielman, Director of Ofsted, (the body responsible for standards in schools), is again targetting "faith schools". This primarily means some Muslim schools, though, to avoid any whiff of discrimination, there are many examples of Ofsted inspectors being blatantly hostile in Bible-based Christian schools as well.

Mrs Spielman does not seem to realise that every school in the land is a "faith school" of one sort or another: that is, each school unavoidably operates within a set of values, (though it is more accurate to think of these as "beliefs" or "assumed truths"). So the debate in our schools is not over faith- or non-faith schools, but over genuine-truth-promoting- and genuine-not-truth-promoting schools, (that is, the promotion of falsehood). Politicians assume that the belief in "British values" is the ultimate "assumed truth" to be found in schools, and is thus to prevail over any rival beliefs by Headteachers and Ofsted inspectors applying so-called "muscular liberalism". But these much-vaunted "British values" are really only a few watered-down remnants of the far higher, greater, fuller, truer "values" of the Christian Faith which have been so influential in making this country what it is. So the notion that "muscular liberalism" can see off the Christian Faith is laughable - akin to a pip-squeak like Festus trying to expose falsehood in the case put forward by Paul.

Thanks be to God, the belief that the Holy Bible truly is the Word of God, and hence the location of ultimate truth and the “values” to be promoted in British schools, is thoroughly well-grounded. It has nothing to do with “madness”, be that charge made by a Festus or an Amanda Spielman or anyone else; rather, it has everything to do with Paul’s unanswerable declaration of “truth and soberness”. Indeed, any madness that may exist is to be found in the ranks of those doggedly trying to ditch the Bible altogether. Christians can warmly welcome any debate concerning Truth, be it with “muscular liberalism” or with any other system of Bible-denying “values”.

The Christian Faith as made known in the Holy Bible has been the bedrock of our society, including our education system, for centuries, until the clammy hand of liberalism took over. For our contemporary politicians unashamedly to restore the Christian Faith to that original place of bedrock across our society, (where, constitutionally, it still is, believe it or not), would be a fine step, away from madness and back towards Paul’s “truth and soberness”. It wasn’t so long ago that daily Christian assemblies and lessons called “Scripture” were the norm in British state schools. Such basic Christian rhythms positively shaped the morals of our society, and it is surely no coincidence that as the Christian Faith has been exchanged for we-know-best liberalism, those morals have descended into their present shambolic state.

Paul calmly replied, “I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness” – and it falls to us to do the same today. How our politicians and these Ofsted officials need our robust Christian input, our support if and when possible, and our prayers (eg., I Timothy 2.1-6).

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