

## 2 TIMOTHY 4:16-18 WHEN STANDING ALONE...

“At my first defense, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So, I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”<sup>1</sup>

**P**eter’s instruction concerning Christian apologetics has been often ignored, if not actually distorted. The Apostle to the Jews wrote, “In your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” [1 PETER 3:15]. His admonition is more insightful than we might imagine; the instruction to be prepared is given in the context of responding to attack against the faithful. Contemporary Christians are not anxious to speak of the challenges faced as followers of the Son of God, but it is nevertheless true that Christians can anticipate opposition and attack from those living in this dying world.

At some point, each Christian is quite likely to imagine that she or he is standing alone against sustained attack. Often, the attack comes from powerful entities representing civic authority or business interests. The assault against the faithful seems ultimately to gravitate to the Faith which guides the believer. At other times in today’s world, the attack will come from individuals who claim to want fairness—they are intent on compelling conformity of thought so that their opinions predominate. They will have seized upon some social position, novel acceptance flaunting mores hoary with age or they will be disturbed because of the zeal with which the Christian pursues God’s honour.

As disheartening as attacks may be when pressed by those identified with this dying world, the most painful attacks against worshippers of the Living God come from people with whom they have shared worship of the Christ. When Christians become vicious against fellow believers, the pain is intense, almost unbearable. Physical assault and slander may be anticipated from those who are set in opposition to the Risen Lord of Glory. Recall Jesus’ words: “If you find the godless world is hating you, remember it got its start hating me. If you lived on the world’s terms, the world would love you as one of its own. But since I picked you to live on God’s terms and no longer on the world’s terms, the world is going to hate you.

“When that happens, remember this: Servants don’t get better treatment than their masters. If they beat on me, they will certainly beat on you. If they did what I told them, they will do what you tell them.

“They are going to do all these things to you because of the way they treated me, because they don’t know the One who sent me. If I hadn’t come and told them all this in plain language, it wouldn’t be so bad. As it is, they have no excuse. Hate me, hate my Father—it’s all the same. If I hadn’t done what I have done among them, works no one has ever done, they wouldn’t be to blame. But they saw the God-signs and hated anyway, both me and my Father. Interesting—they have verified the truth of their own Scriptures where it is written, ‘They hated me for no good reason’” [JOHN 15:18-25, THE MESSAGE].

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

**DESERTED BY ALL** — “At my first defense, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me.” As he wrote these words, the Apostle Paul was imprisoned in what would be his final incarceration. Soon, execution of the sentence of death by sword thrust would be carried out. The aged missionary had stood before Nero to receive that sentence. He had stood trial once before when the Jewish religious leaders had clamoured for his death. On that occasion, he had been released, allowing him to continue his labours for the Risen Christ for a brief time. Now, however, he was again imprisoned; and this latest trial brought a sentence of death.

It was Roman practise to permit a defendant to bring someone into court to speak for him. Perhaps the Apostle had asked some Christians from Rome to speak on his behalf, and they had chosen not to do so. Those whom he might have asked were gone; so, it is quite likely that he had asked some from the community of Faith to speak for him. Either they were frightened or they felt they did not know enough about Paul to speak; thus, no one spoke for him.

We do not know why the Apostle felt so lonely as he wrote this missive. He speaks of being forsaken by Demas, said to be in love with this present world [see **2 TIMOTHY 4:10**]. Christians are always in danger of being seduced by this present world. Remember the warning the Apostle of Love issued: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world” [**1 JOHN 2:15, 16**].

Michael Bentley provides an illustration of what this might look like in contemporary terms. He quotes R.C. Lucas, who described an imaginary scenario in which Demas had been offered an excellent job on a religious television programme in Thessalonica. “Demas was very successful at [religious television] because he followed the producer’s instructions. He had been told that it was important to keep up the ratings, so he was to say nothing which would upset any viewer. Demas had to be grateful that so many people tuned into the programme each week. So that his popularity would not falter he had to be careful that he did not speak against the Jewish religion (many Jews were devotees of the programme) nor refer to those ‘awful letters’ which Paul had sent to the church at Thessalonica. As a result of his success, Demas’s wife was able to afford a brand-new kitchen; and he enjoyed many of the good things of this life which had been beyond his reach while he stayed with Paul.”<sup>2</sup>

The illustration is especially apropos in this day when adhering to the Faith will expose Christians to slanderous accusations and open hostility because of the Faith. Christians must decide whether they will embrace God’s will or whether they will seek the approval of those identified with this dying world. Loving the world does expose an individual to God’s censure, and that is never a good position for a Christian to occupy.

Others who had been with the Apostle were now gone—“Crescens [had] gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.” There is no reason to attribute their absence to anything other than service before the Lord. Crescens was possibly in what we now know as France; Titus, having completed his work on Crete, travelled to what we know today as Croatia or Bosnia. Tychicus had been with the Apostle throughout many of his journeys, but now Paul had sent him to Ephesus. He enjoyed the Apostle’s trust, and so it was natural that he would be dispatched in Paul’s place to serve the churches. However, among those in the Roman congregation, none stood with the Apostle—all deserted when it meant standing against the world.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Bentley, **Passing on the Truth: 1 & 2 Timothy Simply Explained**, Welwyn Commentary Series (Evangelical Press, Darlington, England 1997), 298–299

**2 TIMOTHY 4:16-18**  
**WHEN STANDING ALONE...**

The history of God's people is the story of a few brave souls standing alone again and again. Though he had led Israel out of Egyptian bondage, Moses soon stood alone. "All the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin ... after they had departed from the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness" [see **EXODUS 16:1-3**]. Moses and Aaron stood alone.

The three hundred men under the leadership of Gideon were chasing the Midianites after God had given them victory. His men came to Succoth, asking the city to give his exhausted men some loaves of bread. The officials of Succoth denied them any help, tacitly aligning themselves with Midian. The same scenario was played out at Penuel. Gideon and his tiny band were forced to pursue Midian until they gained the victory without the help they desperately needed. The tiny band stood alone; nevertheless, God gave them victory [see **JUDGES 8:4-21**].

The Philistines were shaming Israel by sending a champion to strut before the Israeli armies, taunting them. A shepherd boy heard the taunts and was horrified at what he heard. After describing the boisterous taunting and the intimidation of the Philistine champion, the Word of God notes, "When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid" [**1 SAMUEL 17: 11**].

That shepherd boy determined that with the Living God on his side, something must be done to rectify the situation. Listen to the account provided in the Word. "The Philistine moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. And the Philistine said to David, 'Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?' And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, 'Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field.' Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand.'

"When the Philistine arose, and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground" [**1 SAMUEL 17:41-49**].

It is a dramatic scene—all Israel watched as a shepherd went against a seasoned warrior. The future of the nation hung on the action of a mere lad. And that lad stood alone—*not a single warrior would stand with the lad*. Yet, the young man was not alone; God was with Him. The hand of the Living God guided the stone to ensure that the giant was slain and the nation was saved. David stood alone, but he did stand.

After Amalekite raiders attacked Ziklag while David was away, David and his men were disheartened that their families had been taken captive. Blaming David for their loss, his men were prepared to kill the man whom God had anointed king. Listen to the Word of the LORD on this matter. "David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God" [**1 SAMUEL 30:6**]. David stood alone, strengthened by the unseen God, and God gained the victory through one man standing alone in the face of threat and danger.

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Alone, alone, alone against the world! That is an apt description of Elijah as he stood against the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah. You recall how Ahab had been reduced to searching for fodder and water for livestock because God's prophet had pronounced a drought. Then, Obadiah, one of Ahab's servants encountered Elijah, who commanded him to go tell the king that Elijah was found.

At last, "When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, 'Is it you, you troubler of Israel?' And [Elijah] answered, 'I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table'" [1 KINGS 18:17-19].

The account of the confrontation is dramatic, as the rough-hewn prophet of God stands alone against all the prophets of the false god with the people standing mute as they watch the confrontation. The proposal is simple, let each representatives of the entities worshipped present a bull as an offering. However, no one is to light a fire. If Baal will accept the offering, let him send fire to burn up the bull offered on the altar. If the Living God will accept Elijah's offering, He will send fire to consume the bull that is presented.

The multiplied prophets of the Phoenician storm god pray, falling into ecstatic trances after dancing wildly about their altar. When this failed to secure an answer to their prayers, according to their custom, they cut themselves with swords and lances, all the while dancing and loudly pleading for their god to hear. They believed that in showing their sincerity through self-mutilation, Baal would respond. They were not unlike the flagellants among Shite Muslims or among Spanish Catholics who attempt to elicit pity from their gods. All the while, Elijah taunts them, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened" [see 1 KINGS 18:20-29].

"Elijah said to all the people, 'Come near to me.' And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down. Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, 'Israel shall be your name,' and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, 'Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.' And he said, 'Do it a second time.' And they did it a second time. And he said, 'Do it a third time.' And they did it a third time. And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.

"And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.' Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, 'The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God'" [1 KINGS 18:30-39].

Or recall the account of when God's prophet, Micaiah, stood alone against four hundred false prophets all currying favour with the King of Israel. Jehoshaphat was uneasy at the slick prophecies of martial success, so he asked if there was not another prophet. Ahab replied, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil" [1 KINGS 22:8].

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So, a messenger is sent to fetch Micaiah; and when the messenger finds him, he advises, “Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably” [1 KINGS 22:13]. Of course, Micaiah asserts, “As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I will speak” [1 KINGS 22:14].

Threatened by the false prophets and the king, Micaiah prophesied that not only had God deceived the false prophets so that they would lie, but he warned that Ahab and Jehoshaphat would meet disaster on the battlefield. Ahab ordered that Micaiah be jailed, saying, “Put this fellow in prison and feed him meager rations of bread and water, until I come in peace.” Micaiah responded, “If you return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me” [see 1 KINGS 22:27, 28].

Though Ahab attempted to disguise himself, he was nevertheless killed just as God’s man had prophesied. The divine text reads, “A certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate. Therefore, he said to the driver of his chariot, ‘Turn around and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded’” [1 KINGS 22:34]. An unseen hand guided the arrow, ensuring that it would strike Ahab in the place where the missile would pierce his body, wounding him mortally,

Though the man of God appears to stand alone, truth cannot be silenced and the Word of God yet stands. It has always been thus throughout the history of the faithful. Savonarola stood alone against a corrupt church in Florence; and though it cost him his life, he preached with power and testified to the triumph of the cross.

Martin Luther, was haled before Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms. When challenged to defend what he had written, he reputedly responded, “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason—for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves—I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus, I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one’s conscience is neither safe nor sound. God help me. Amen.”<sup>3</sup>

Spurgeon was compelled to stand alone against the Baptist Union of Great Britain during the Downgrade Controversy. Long-standing friendships were broken; he and his congregation were excluded as schismatic by the divines gathered in assembly. When the Union censured the stalwart man of God, even his brother joined in celebration. They imagined that by excluding Spurgeon they saved the Baptist Union.

Standing for Christ will mean almost inevitably feeling very lonely when the battle is joined. Christ calls for brave souls who love Him supremely and who will stand firm against error. He has no need for timid individuals who, like religious gophers, poke their heads out of subterranean warrens to see which way the wind is blowing before showing themselves. There are quite enough religious sycophants who make decisions based on who may be offended by a given decision.

**RESPONDING TO DESERTION** — “May it not be charged against them!” If you will stand with Christ, you must know that you will experience desertion. If you put your faith in mere mortals, you must know that most people, including fellow saints, will flee when the enemy roars. What Christians must never do is react with choler or rage.

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<sup>3</sup> Elesha Coffman, “What Luther Said,” Christian History, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/what-luther-said.html>, accessed 6 May 2017; Background is provided by James M. Kittelson, “The Accidental Revolutionary,” Christian History Magazine-Issue 34: Martin Luther: The Reformer’s Early Years (Christianity Today, Carol Stream, IL 1992)

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There may be multiple reasons why a true Christian fails to stand firm when the lion roars. *The believer may be distracted* with other cares; and though we could wish they would stand firm, they may be running in order that they can stand again on another occasion. David ran from Saul when the king was determined to kill him. Was David craven? Or was he struggling to honour God in an impossible situation? Most people recognise that David was not a coward; however, he was determined to find the will of God even in that dreadful situation.

It is possible that *the believer could be overwhelmed* as result of other blows in her or his life. None of us can say where our own personal breaking point lies. Paul cautions followers of Christ, “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:12]. While it is easy to boast that one will stand firm before the trial, the evidence comes only with testing. Peter, boldly averred his courage Jesus foretold that He would be deserted. “Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.”’” You recall that Peter boasted, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” Jesus met this boast by warning, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times” [MATTHEW 26:31-34].

After the Lord had warned that he would crumple, Peter doubled down, boasting, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you” [MATTHEW 26:35]. When Peter delivered this brash boast, the remainder of the disciples said the same. All meant well; all intended to be brave in the face of the demonic assault. Intentions are not actions, however. John, writing many years after Matthew wrote, recalled that Jesus said, “Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone” [JOHN 16:32].

It is always possible that you have sought *someone who only pretends to be a Christian*. Because they are an unbeliever, they could not stand regardless. It is of no benefit to speak ill of such people, pleading with them or raging against them, they cannot stand. They will create an excuse if one is not immediately available. We must learn to emulate our Saviour. “To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten” [1 PETER 2:21-23].

The Apostle was putting into practise what he had taught. Recall that he wrote the congregation in Colossae, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful” [COLOSSIANS 3:12-15].

Paul would have heard the words of Jesus repeated at some point during his service. Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” [MATTHEW 5:44]. Paul had been present when Stephen was stoned. He had heard the final prayer that escaped Stephen’s lips, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” [ACTS 7:60]. What a powerful example of Christian character that must have been for the persecutor.

No doubt Paul was disappointed; he likely felt as if he had been let down when standing alone; perhaps he even felt betrayed. Nevertheless, he demonstrates great understanding of the pressure believers were then facing. Would you actually stand firm if in standing it would mean that your livelihood was threatened? Would not continue to stand with a fellow saint even if it meant that your family was threatened? If by standing, your life was threatened, or your ability to provide for those you love was threatened, would you eagerly stand?

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Roman Christians were suffering greatly; we glimpse their persecution in Hebrews. “Time would fail me to tell of ... others [who] suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated ... wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” [HEBREWS 11:32-38].

The persecution the Christians in Rome were then experiencing may not have been as widespread as the suffering of Christians in Muslim lands today, but it was nevertheless severe. Before we speak disparagingly of the failure of saints in Rome to stand with Paul when he needed someone who would stand with him, let us in humility before the Lord confess that we don’t understand the price they paid to bear the Name of Christ. In deep humility, each Christian hearing my words needs to heed Peter’s teaching on this matter. “If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name” [1 PETER 4:16]. And when we meet those who suffer, we are well advised to cut them some slack.

*Scripture is easy to read and difficult to put into practise.* Consider what was written to these Roman Christians before Paul stood trial in Rome. “As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand” [ROMANS 14:1-4].

Accepting one who is weak in the faith is easy, until you welcome him. Avoiding quarrelling is easy, until someone voices an opinion that differs from your view of matters. Christians are well-advised to carry their opinions lightly on their fingertips, to avoid being hasty in pronouncing judgement on others, to be gracious in accepting the failures of others as you count failure. The Apostle continued his instructions to the saints in Rome by admonishing them, “Let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” [ROMANS 14:19]. Excellent advice! Let us seize upon this truth and put it into practise.

What is essential to our continued growth in Christ is to note the example we are given; Paul did not rail against the failure of other Christians; he pleaded with God to not hold it against them. He was prepared to let God judge motives and actions, trusting that the Lord was always working, bringing to completion His perfect will. I often cite the words of the Psalmist, reminding myself of Who is in charge of my life.

“I trust in you, O LORD;  
I say, ‘You are my God.’  
My times are in your hand;  
rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!”  
[PSALM 31:14, 15]

Because He rules my life, and rules the life of each child of God, we accept the reality of the Apostle’s words to the Church of God in Corinth. “We are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:6-10].

**RESORTING TO OUR HIGH TOWER** — “The Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.” A short while ago, I cited Peter’s teaching concerning our response to evil. I did not read the final statement the Big Fisherman included. Listen again to **1 PETER 2:21-23**, focusing especially on the final phrase. “To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but *continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*” Jesus continued entrusting Himself to God who judges justly.

Paul stood before Nero, and though no fellow saint stood with him, the unseen God stood with him. What Nero could not see, and what no human observer of that court could have seen, was that the Risen Christ stood beside the Apostle. Jesus had been Paul’s Advocate before the Father, just as the Apostle of Love has written of the situation for all who have been born again. “We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” [**1 JOHN 2:1**].

As he stood before Nero, Paul fulfilled the prophecy Jesus had made of him when Ananias was sent to the blinded persecutor. The Lord commanded Ananias, “Go, for [Saul] is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” [**ACTS 9:15, 16**]. This rabid rabbi, soon to be known as Paul, would carry the Name of the Risen Son of God before the Gentiles and before kings and to the children of Israel. His missionary journeys would carry the ardent preacher throughout the Roman Empire declaring that Jesus is the Anointed One of God to both Jew and Gentile. His message would penetrate Europe, invading even the centres of pagan worship in Macedonia, Achaia and Rome itself. Now, the aged saint stands before the most powerful man in that Empire in the heart of the Empire.

What was Paul’s defence before the Caesar? We know what the captive said when he was called to appear before Agrippa, Bernice and Festus. “I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?”

“I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

“In this connection, I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’



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“Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. For this reason, the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day, I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles” [ACTS 26:6-23].

His testimony to Timothy was, “Through me the message [was] fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles [heard] it.” Nero, that example of grossest wickedness, heard the message of life in Christ the Lord. God was fulfilling His promise of how powerfully He would use the erstwhile persecutor. Surely, God has a plan for you and a plan for me. Surely, in the hour of our extremity, God stands with us to accomplish His will.

I am certain that if you haven’t been compelled to stand alone, you will shortly stand alone; but *you will never be alone if you are a child of the Living God*. The old hymn is true:

I’ve seen the lightning flashing, I’ve heard the thunder roll;  
I’ve felt sin’s breakers dashing, trying to conquer my soul;  
I’ve heard the voice of Jesus, telling me still to fight on,  
He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone.

No, never alone,  
No, never alone,  
He promised never to leave me,  
Never to leave me alone.  
No, never alone,  
No, never alone,  
He promised never to leave me,  
Never to leave me alone.

The world’s fierce winds are blowing, temptations are sharp and keen;  
I feel a peace in knowing my Saviour stands between;  
He stands to shield me from danger when earthly friends are gone,  
He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone.<sup>4</sup>

**RESCUED FROM THE LION’S MOUTH** — “So, I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” As a Roman citizen, Paul would not be compelled to fight wild beasts in the arena. Some have imagined that he was referring to Nero, but we know that Paul was executed under Nero. It seems evident that the Apostle is referring to the devil.

You will remember that Peter said of Satan, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” [1 PETER 5:8]. The words Peter wrote and those from the Apostle Paul that are found in our text remind us to the words of the Messianic Psalm that pointed to the crucifixion of our Saviour.

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<sup>4</sup> Ludie D. Pickett, “Never Alone,” 1897

**2 TIMOTHY 4:16-18**  
**WHEN STANDING ALONE...**

“Deliver my soul from the sword,  
my precious life from the power of the dog!  
Save me from the mouth of the lion!  
You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!”

[PSALM 22:20, 21]

Paul knew that the Lord had rescued him, ensuring that the ministry assigned when he was called was fulfilled! He was granted freedom—freedom to stand before the most powerful individuals of that ancient world and declare the Word of the Living God. No one of those important men would be able to say before that great assize, “I never heard of Christ the Lord!” Neither can you claim that you have not heard of Christ the Lord, how He loved you and gave His life because of you. Paul was given freedom to speak of the salvation of the Lord, how that salvation is offered without cost to all who will receive it. The old man knew that whatever the emperor did to his body, Paul was secure in the arms of the Saviour. He was delivered from the snares of the enemy and he was free in Christ.

To you who hear me this day and who yet live in fear of what others may think, you are in slavery to your fear. To any who have failed to receive the gift of life in Christ the Lord, having put off making a decision until a more opportune time, you are in thralldom to your flesh. To Christians who shrink in fear at what may happen, you have permitted yourself to be held captive to the unknown. Only the Christian who stands secure in the Saviour is safe. Only the child of the Living God who refuses to cower before vicissitudes and blind alleys of this broken, darkened world is truly free. Too many who pretend to be Christians are enslaved by their own fallen desires. Too many who imagine that going to church will compel God to accept them are yet trapped in sin.

Listen to this promise of the Lord God. If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. Freedom is ours when with the heart one believes, standing ever after in a right relationship with the Father and when one openly agrees with God that He has conquered death, raising Jesus from the dead. Here is the freedom we long for; here is the freedom we desire—freedom from fear, freedom from condemnation, freedom to be all that God calls us to be is found in Christ the Lord. Therefore, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be set at liberty.” Amen.