

Arrested For Being a Christian

Matthew 7: 21-23

Introduction: In the first century, many people were arrested for being Christians. The evidence against them was so overwhelming that they were put to death. People back then, not unlike people today, hated those who followed Christ. Their hatred for Christ ran so deep that they took pleasure in finding, convicting, and torturing Christians to death. That was 2000 years ago. What about us today? If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

I. The need for evidence.

A. In order to make a conviction stick, there must be evidence. Evidence, according to Webster, is an outward sign; an indication. It is something that furnishes proof.

B. For example, Thomas required proof that Jesus was resurrected. He wouldn't believe Christ was Lord without proof (John 20:24-29).

C. In order to prove that we are Christians, we will need evidence (2 Cor. 13:5). Each of us should know whether there is sufficient proof of our own faith.

II. Christians are followers of Christ.

A. They are like Christ. Therefore, we must prove Christ is our Lord. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

B. Unfortunately, many of us don't keep His commands. We just call ourselves Christians. Jesus asked in Luke 6:46, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?"

C. Therefore, the jury in our case must be able to distinguish between those who do the Lord's will and those who make pretense of obedience by wearing His name (Matt. 15:8; James 1:22). During the Roman Empire, for example, the government would test the accused by telling them to denounce Christ or die.

III. Talking the good fight is not enough.

A. Peter said he was a follower of Christ (Luke 22:33). However, Peter failed to prove his commitment to Christ (Luke 22:34; 54-62). He even swears and curses to prove he wasn't a Christian (Matt. 26:74).

B. Peter failed the test in order to avoid personal hardship for his faith. If Peter were in our trial, he wouldn't have been convicted. Would you have done any better?

C. Many people are just like Peter. They appear to be strong and committed Christians. They attend church services every week. This appearance lasts only as long as every thing goes their way with minimum personal sacrifice. Then something challenges their faith and they stop attending; quit keeping His commands. From then on, like Peter, they follow Christ from a distance (vs. 54). They follow just close enough to create a false assurance of heaven but far enough away that they encounter no hardships for their faith.

D. Christians deny themselves and bear up with the daily sacrifices for Christ (Lk. 9:23-26). What would our jury say if our faith is so shallow that we can't even go to a Sunday worship service?

E. Before Polycarp was burnt at the stake, the herald declared in the middle of a packed stadium, "Polycarp confesses that he is a Christian." The jury of his peers in the stadium cried out, "This is that teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods; he that teaches multitudes not to sacrifice, not to worship." – Guilty as charged!

IV. Could we prove our Christianity to a jury?

- A. By our speech (James 1:26)?
- B. By our works (James 2:14-26)?
- C. By our attendance at every service (Heb. 10:25)?
- D. By our labor for the lost (1 Cor. 3:8-14)?
- E. By our involvement in church (Eph. 4:1-3; 1 John 3:16)?
- F. By our treatment of other people (Rom. 12:9-18)?
- G. By the fruit we bear for the Lord (John 15:4-8, 16)?

V. Or do we think we can provide the jury with an excuse they will accept?

- A. Jesus didn't except any excuses (Lk. 9:59-62).
- B. Excuses were offered in the parable of the Great Supper (Lk. 14:15-24).
 - 1. "Bought a piece of land" likely given out of business pursuits; to busy with work.
 - 2. "Bought five yoke of oxen" is being distracted by the cares of life. Got to wash the car, plant the garden, mow the lawn.
 - 3. "Married a wife" is putting family before the Lord. Maybe the wife wouldn't approve of you going to church. For the sake of peace in the relationship have me excused (Lk. 12:51-53).

Conclusion: The truth is, if you can't prove to a jury that you are a Christian, you definitely won't be able to prove it to Christ (Heb. 4:12-13)! If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?