
THE TRIAL OF JESUS

Roy E. Cogdill

There has been more recorded in the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John concerning the trial of Christ than has been recorded of any other event even including his crucifixion. Two full chapters in each book are given to this story. It had been predicted by the prophets, and foretold by the Lord himself that he should be tried and rejected of men. The predictions and the prophecies concerning his trial and rejection by the rulers of the Jews became reality. The gospel records preserve for us the inspired account of that event.

From a legal point of view this trial represented the greatest miscarriage of justice and the greatest hoax that has ever been perpetrated against any person in all history. It was fraudulent from start to finish, illegal at almost every point and on every possible count. It was anything but a trial in which justice was in view in the desire of those conducting it. Jesus had incurred the enmity of the Jews for many different reasons. He had openly and positively condemned their sins. They did not like that any more than people like it today. They wanted to get him out of the way because of his exposure of their hypocrisy and ungodliness. He refused to adapt himself to their social conventions and religious traditions. Rather than recognize the class system of narrow bigotry which had been erected by the Jews, Jesus came into the world to seek and save the sinner; he associated freely with sinful people while here. He antagonized the Jews not only by refusing to yield to their social standards, but by violating their traditional religious prejudices as well. He based every stand that he took and every lesson that he taught on the will of God — not on the authority of men. God's will was his governor and his guide in all things. We hear him say, "For I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." (John 6:38.) This the Jews could not stand. They hated and despised him because he steadfastly refused to yield himself to their political plans, establishing an earthly kingdom and throwing off the yoke of Rome.

They were perfectly willing to make him king if only he would liberate them from the hated Romans. But instead of submitting to their plans, adapting himself to their program of political endeavor, he steadfastly adhered to the plan God had made — that he might come into the world and die for the redemption of humanity, that he might make possible the salvation of the souls of men and women.

This was why they crucified him. It had become fully obvious to them that he was adamant in his refusal to become their political leader. When he refused the crown (John 6:15), they were filled with rage. From that time forward they tried repeatedly to destroy him. They tried once to take him out and cast him off the cliff that he might fall to the rocks below and be killed. But Jesus had

delivered himself from them. On various other occasions they had sought him for the purpose of doing him harm or injury, or disposing of him completely. But Jesus' time had not yet come; and he patiently continued his ministry until the hour was fulfilled. When finally the hour came, he meekly submitted himself to their arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, commanding Peter to put up his sword. He knew the hour was near in which he should die for the redemption of the race, according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

After submitting to the motley throng of palace guards and fanatical Jews who had sought him out, he marched with the howling mob to the judgment hall of the High Priest and the Sanhedrin Council, the supreme court of the Jews. There he was tried in every way that a man should not be tried, in utter violation and disregard of their law, condemned to death illegally, and finally executed. It is of some of the particular illegalities of that trial that we want to study, and then will see what spiritual application such things ought to have to the life and heart of every man.

Jewish Government.

No one can understand what took place during Jesus' trial without some knowledge of the background of Jewish law and government against which the trial occurred. In Palestine at that time a two-fold government was in operation — a Jewish government and a Roman government. They had a vestige of the old Jewish theocracy still in existence. Most of its power, however, had been stripped from it by the conquering Romans. The conquer-

ors had set up the land of Judaea as a protectorate, or as a Roman province. Pilate, the Roman governor, had received his office from Tiberius Caesar, and was the chief authority in the land. Certain rights and privileges the Jews were allowed to retain. They could go through the form of a trial on a capital offense, for example, but having found the prisoner guilty, could not execute him without first going to the Roman governor and obtaining his authority and permission. The Jewish courts could try a man and impose sentence, but were powerless to execute the sentence assessed.

Annas was the High Priest of the Jews at the time Jesus was tried; but he had been deposed from his office for the very reason that he had tried to impose the death penalty on another occasion, and the Romans had appointed his son-in-law, Caiaphas, to be High Priest in his stead. From this incident it seems clear that the Romans had pretty well deprived the Jews of any real authority or power. They had a form of legally constituted authority, but it was a form with little power.

In the Jewish system of courts which remained, however, there were three kinds of tribunals. There was a three-judge court, which was the lowest and most elementary form of government; this corresponded roughly to our local Justice of the Peace courts, or to our municipal courts today. Next above this lowest court, there existed in many of the cities, and wherever the people desired and approved it, a Junior Sanhedrin Council which consisted of twenty-three judges. Then over and above these courts was the senior or major Sanhedrin Council, consisting of 71 judges. Qualifications for men of the senior Sanhedrin were exactly prescribed by law. Jewish law provided for these three separate kinds of courts, and they existed and commonly tried cases within their respective jurisdictions.

In any study of the trial of Jesus it must be remembered that it had two parts or two phases — a Jewish part and a Roman part. In the Jewish phase of his trial, Jesus was first arrested and taken to Annas; then he was tried before Caiaphas, and then by the Sanhedrin Council of the Jews in two sessions, a night session and a morning session. This consummated the trial of the Son of God at the hands of the Jews. Being sentenced to death, he then began the Roman phase of his trial. He was taken first to Pilate. Pilate examined him, and sent him to Herod. He was tried by Herod, and returned to Pilate. Again Pilate examined him, and then turned him over to the mob, weakly trying to exonerate himself of blame by the symbolic act of washing his hands. So, while there were two phases or parts to the trial, there were in reality six separate trials: before Annas, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin; and before Pilate, Herod, and Pilate again.

Jewish Law

There were a number of sources from which law came then, just as a number of sources fix our law today. If one were to examine the source of law in our generation, he would find that in many states law is statutory primarily. For example, Louisiana is recognized in our nation as being the state in which we find the most complete example of statutory law. But according to the old English common law, not every statute had to be enacted by a legislative body. Much of the body of the English law, in contrast with Roman law, was derived from the **decision of the courts**, rather than from legislative enact-

ments. And when a decision of the courts had not been made to guide in the trial of a given case, then customary practice was given authority. Customary practice ran according to this rule: In the absence of a statute, and in the absence of the decision of a court, if a thing had been customarily practiced over such a long period of time that the memory of man ran not to the contrary (nobody could remember when such was not the practice), then this customary practice became the rule and the law to govern in the decision of that particular case.

The Roman practice, however, was to codify their law; and everything had to be provided for in statute. While the State of Louisiana is the principal statutory state in the nation, the State of Tennessee is recognized as the principle common law state among us. Texas is a combination of both statutory and common law.

Just as we receive our laws today from these various sources, the laws in the time of Christ, both Jewish and Roman, were likewise gathered over the centuries from various sources. Particularly was this true of Jewish law. Among the Jews, they first of all went back to the statutes that had been given in the law of Moses, and in the prophets and the Psalms. The law that had been thus delivered was recognized as the primary source of authority. But to that original and primary statutory law there had been added the traditions of the elders, and a vast bulk of oral law, delivered by word of mouth from one generation to the next. From generation to generation these traditions had been handed down, and had received such respect and honor from the Jews that many Jews thought that Moses, in addition to the written law, had actually delivered by word of mouth a great body of oral law!

When, therefore, we study the trial of Jesus, we must remember that not all the "law" that was violated by his persecutors is to be found in the statutory law; much of it is in the traditions of the elders and in the common practice established by the courts. It is this great bulk of law, from all sources, that we find the Jews so ruthlessly ignoring and over-riding in their frenzied effort to destroy their prisoner. In three or four articles to follow, we want to point out some of the most obvious and glaring of these illegal procedures and actions.

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The Arrest

Clear evidence that Jesus Christ was the victim of illegal procedures in every phase of his arrest and trial is abundantly found in the writings of the men who have recorded for us the story of that trial. To begin with his arrest was in violation of Jewish law. Their law prohibited all proceedings at night. On a religious charge, especially, their law provided that a man could not be deprived of his liberty, and could not be taken from his home and loved ones, at any hour between sunset and sunrise. But Jesus was arrested, as best we can determine, sometime after midnight; and was actually put on trial between two and three o'clock in the morning.

A second provision of Jewish law so clearly violated in these proceedings was their specific prohibition of a man's turning "state's evidence." In our law any man who is an accomplice of the accused, or who has been guilty in the perpetration of a crime, may decide to testify for the state, and may turn against his colleague or partner. But the Jewish law permitted nothing of the kind. It clearly forbade such. No accused man could have any accomplice or co-worker appear against him either in the charge in the court as a witness, not yet for the purpose of identifying him at the arrest. Neither by word nor by deed or act was such a man permitted to accuse his former associate. Any man who had taken part in a crime was barred from the Jewish courts as a witness against anybody else involved in the same crime.

Yet the Jewish court itself, the Sanhedrin, made arrangements with Judas, who had been a partaker in all that Jesus and his disciples had done for the last three and a half years, to betray Jesus into their hands, and to identify him by a kiss on the cheek. They wanted to make no mistake as to the identity of the prisoner. Jesus had delivered himself upon so many different occasions that they were carefully guarding against any false move this time. So the bargain was made with Judas, and the price of thirty pieces of silver was paid; the signal was agreed upon, a kiss apparently of love and friendship. This arrangement was entered into by the Sanhedrin on the one side and Judas on the other — Judas, an accomplice and a co-worker in every single thing they were going to charge against Jesus. Yet their own law clearly said that no man's life, nor his liberty, nor his reputation should ever be endangered by the malice of one who had confessed himself to be a criminal.

A third violation of their own law in the arrest of Jesus was in the fact that they arrested him without a proper warrant. Their law provided, as does ours, that no arrest can be made without proper court authorization. Yet in this case there was no warrant, no authorization issued by any court at all. It was simply an understand-

ing on the part of the Jewish mob who went out after him that the Sanhedrin desired his arrest. They seized him, deprived him of his liberty, and rushed him to trial without any kind of court authority at all.

A fourth violation was the fact that no duly authorized officer of the court was present to effect the arrest. Christ was not arrested by a soldier or any officer sent out by the court; rather, he was seized by a mob, a motley gang who came out with sticks and stones and clubs for the purpose of taking him in charge and bringing him to trial. So instead of an orderly and legal procedure according to their own law, the arrest of Jesus Christ was illegal, unlawful, and disorderly from every point of view. We would describe it in our day as mob violence, pure and simple.

The Indictment

But the gospel writers record for us facts that not only show the illegality of the arrest, but equally reveal the illegality of the indictment. Indeed, the examining trial that preceded the indictment was itself illegal.

The very lowest court among the Jews was a three judge court. They did not, in those days, have a jury system such as we have today; and in order to insure that justice would be administered, they provided that no man should be tried before less than three judges. Instead of twelve jurors, as is our custom, they had three judges. Even the smallest crime or misdemeanor must be tried not before one judge, but before three. They made no exceptions to this.

Yet, looking at the record of Jesus' trials, we see that he was actually examined privately. In fact, Jesus appeared in five different stages of his trial before a court of a single judge; before Annas he appeared privately. Before Caiaphas he was privately examined. Before Pilate there was a private hearing. Before Herod he was tried by a single judge; and finally before Pilate again he appeared before one judge. Five of the six stages of his trial, therefore, were in violation of this fundamental provision of Jewish law.

Not only was the court procedure illegal, but the indictment itself was illegal. The Sanhedrin did not, and, by Jewish law, could not, originate charges. This Council existed only for the purpose of investigating charges made by others — not for the purpose of making charges itself. Yet the very charges on which Jesus was tried, both in his Jewish trial and in his Roman trial, were charges that originated with the judges of the Jewish court. They were the ones who had charged him with sedition under the Jewish law, with attempting to destroy, and with promising and prophesying the destruction of the seat of Jewish government. They said that when Jesus taught that all of these things would be destroyed, and that when he had said, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will

raise it up', he was actually seeking to overthrow the Jewish court and its authority, and desired the destruction of the Jewish nation. Thus he was guilty of sedition. They charged him likewise with blasphemy. They charged him with saying that he was God; that he was Christ, the Messiah. In such a claim as that he is a blasphemer. Of course, they did not believe that he was the Messiah, and they rejected all the evidence that substantiated that claim. But the charges of sedition and blasphemy originated with the judges themselves; they came right out of the Sanhedrin Council.

When they took him before Pilate, they charged him with treason against Rome. They accused him of desiring to be a king himself, and of raising an armed rebellion against Caesar; therefore, being guilty of treason, he ought to be put to death. This charge came from the Jewish judges. They had witnesses to try to substantiate the charges; but the charges were made, and the accusation came, from the judges themselves — a clear violation not only of Jewish law, but of all recognized procedures in every civilized nation on earth.

There is further violation of legal procedure in that the accusation brought against Jesus was vague, duplicitous, and uncertain. One of the requirements of Jewish law was that a charge must be certain, specific, particular. Nothing uncertain, vague, or indefinite would be considered. Yet when they brought Jesus before the Sanhedrin, they had the most uncertain, indefinite, and generalized charges that could be imagined.

Today if a man should be charged with half a dozen different crimes, he would be indicted upon only one count at a time. Each separate violation must be considered independently of all others. But in the case of Jesus they did not so separate the matter. They just lumped it all together in every vague accusation they could think about—that he claimed to be the Christ, that he was the bread come down from heaven; that he claimed existence before Abraham; that he said he was divine, was God; that if they should destroy the temple, in three days he would raise it up; and that all these things are to be destroyed, meaning Jerusalem and the whole Jewish nation. They did not specify; they gave no clear and definite accusation.

No court today would accept such an indictment. It was so clearly in violation of all accepted principles of legal procedure that a motion to quash would be immediately granted; Jewish law clearly provided that no such vague, uncertain accusation could be the basis for any kind of trial. And even in this instance, the major charge was dropped right in the middle of the trial and another was substituted in its place. But we will consider that in the next article.

THE TRIAL OF JESUS -- (III)

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One of the most amazing things connected with the trial of Jesus was the manner in which his accusers, right in the midst of the trial, changed their charge against him. They had brought him into court on the charge that he had threatened the destruction of Jerusalem. This amounted to sedition against the Jewish government; but when the witnesses did not agree among themselves, and it became obvious to all that no case could be made against him on this ground, they dropped this accusation and substituted another in its place — the charge of blasphemy.

Furthermore, this switch in charges was done by the very man who was sitting in judgment upon him, Caiaphas himself! It is well to remember that in no civilized nation on earth, and under no known law, can a man file a complaint against the prisoner at the bar and at the same time sit in judgment at the trial of his case. You can readily see why such would not be permissible. Caiaphas, however, was the one who filed the accusation against Jesus. When he saw that the trial was not going well, and that the witnesses were not agreeing among themselves, he took the role of accuser. So we find one of the judges, in fact, the high priest himself, the chief justice, so to speak, of the Jewish court, acting as both accuser and judge, as well as witness, in the case on trial.

The Procedure

Consider now the illegal aspects of the procedure of Jesus' trial. First, it was contrary to law because it took place at night. A capital offense, even after the arrest of the party, could be tried only by the light of the sun. Jewish law specifically provided that if a trial involving a capital offense were in progress when the evening hour came, the court should be recessed until the next morning. This was done that the witness might have due time to think about their testimony, and the judges might have due time for consideration. But this provision was ignored and disregarded when they tried Jesus. His examination began somewhere between two and three o'clock in the morning, and was carried right on without interruption through the rest of the night and into the day, and he was crucified on the very day of the trial.

In the second place, the procedure was illegal because the court convened before the offering of morning sacrifices. Here, again, the Jewish law was extremely detailed and specific: no court could convene to hear any kind of case before the offering of the morning sacrifice. But so eager were his accusers to condemn and destroy Jesus and to put him out of the way, that they convened immediately upon his arrest, ignoring their written law, disregarding the time honored practices of their courts. Their hatred for him was so intense that they were blind to all else.

A third illegal procedure was in the fact that the entire trial was conducted within a single day, with sentence passed, and execution completed. In less than

twenty-four hours Jesus was arrested, tried, condemned, and actually executed. Yet the Jewish law provided that no case involving a capital offense could be concluded in a single day. After all the testimony was in and all the evidence had been heard, the judges had to pass over at least one night before rendering their verdict. This was to give them time to reflect and meditate and weigh all the testimony. The Roman law was even more considerate of a prisoner than the Jewish law, for it provided that there must be at least ten days between the beginning of a trial involving the death penalty and the execution of any man adjudged guilty. Yet both Jewish law and Roman law were ruthlessly ignored in the trial of Jesus.

A fourth illegality in the procedure of this trial is found in that it was conducted on a day preceding a Jewish Sabbath, also on the first day of the feast of unleavened bread and on the eve of the Passover. This was prohibited and forbidden; yet the provision was ignored.

The Conviction

We have considered illegalities in the arrest of Jesus, in the indictment, and in the procedures of his trial. Let us look now at the verdict.

One of the strangest and most peculiar provisions of any criminal law known in history was the provision of Jewish law that in case of a unanimous verdict of guilty — the prisoner must go free! There were seventy-one judges in the senior Sanhedrin council. The Jewish philosophy was on this wise: In case all seventy-one of those men agreed as to the guilt of a prisoner, this was *prima facie* evidence that no one had taken the prisoner's part, and no defense had been made in his behalf. Human nature was such that regardless of how strong a case might be presented, there would be at least one in any

group of seventy-one men who would differ from the rest. If no such divergence appeared in the verdict, then the prisoner had not been given a fair trial, and must be released. The gospel writers have recorded for us the fact that all the judges did agree; two of them say the high priest "with the whole council" concurred in the verdict. It was unanimous. Thus, legally, Christ was free, and should have been released immediately. But this safeguard for a condemned man was ignored.

In the second place, the verdict was rendered without any defense having been made by, or for, the accused. If they had called upon Jesus Christ to offer evidence that he was not guilty of what they had charged him with, don't you know he could have done it! If they had wanted to know why he claimed that he was the Messiah, he could have given them passages from their own prophets, hundreds of them, and could have shown them that he had fulfilled these prophecies in fact and in reality. If they had asked him for proof of his divinity by miraculous powers, he could have given them conclusive demonstration. But they were not interested in a defense of any sort; and they utterly forgot the right of the prisoner to offer a defense. There were many who could have been called upon to testify. Although Peter had forsaken him, John was still present. He could have testified; gladly he would have done so, for he was loyal right to the end. But the Jewish court gave him no chance to offer testimony. They refused to admit evidence in favor of the accused.

A third illegality in the verdict was that it was based upon an uncorroborated confession. Our own American law today provides that no man can be executed or sentenced upon his own confession in the absence of corroborating evidence. We have instances in the papers every day which show why the law makes that provision. Some man who wants to dispose of himself, or perhaps attract attention to himself, or who is demented, will confess to a crime of which he is not guilty. Evidence may show that he was many miles from the scene of the crime, and could not possibly have committed it. If an uncorroborated confession were accepted as the only requirement for sentencing or execution, thousands of innocent people would have been imprisoned or executed. But the Jews DID accept the uncorroborated confession of Jesus Christ, and condemned him to die upon his own testimony.

When Caiaphas saw that the trial was about to collapse into a farce, and that the hired witnesses were hopelessly contradicting each other, he took charge himself, and demanded of the prisoner, "I adjure thee by the living God, art thou the Christ?" Jesus could have held his peace; there wasn't any law that could have forced him to testify. A man cannot be forced to testify at his own trial. The reason for that provision is that a man on trial will have conflicting demands upon him. He is being required to tell the truth on the one hand, and has taken an oath to that effect; but on the other hand, the truth might be damaging to him. Hence he has conflicting emotions and conflicting obligations. So the law excuses a man and does not require him to testify in his own trial.

But Jesus was not excused. All the testimony they could find was not sufficient to convict him or to establish their charges. So as a final desperate measure Caiaphas tries to force him to testify against himself. We will consider that in the next article.

THE TRIAL OF JESUS -- (IV)

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When Caiaphas saw that the trial in the Jewish court was going badly, and that the witnesses were not in agreement with one another, he took charge himself, becoming both judge and prosecuting witness, and said, "I adjure thee by the living God, Art thou the Christ?" Jesus could have refused to testify here. The law exempts a man from giving testimony in his own trial. Jesus exercised this right when he was before the imposter Herod and Herod sought to question him. He uttered not a word; and was within his legal rights to remain silent. He could have done the same here, but he did not. In response to the question of Caiaphas, he replied, "This thou sayest because I am." In other words, he is telling his inquisitor that if he were not the Christ, if he were an imposter and a deceiver, he could easily have been exposed; but the very fact that they have to resort to asking him to testify himself is evidence that they have no case against him, and that he is indeed the Christ. That is the import of the statement; hence, from the Jewish point of view Jesus has now acknowledged the very thing wherein they had accused him; he has claimed to be the Christ, God's Son. So far as they were concerned this was blasphemy. The Jewish court so held.

But look at the Roman trial in comparison with this. In the Roman trial the charge was not blasphemy, but treason against Rome. The Jewish leaders, having now decided in their own courts that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death, next took him before the Roman governor, and with consummate hypocrisy and insincerity, informed the Roman official that Jesus was trying to foment a rebellion against Rome, claiming that he was a king! They accused him of doing the very thing they had tried to persuade him to do, and which he had refused. (John 6:15.)

It would be difficult to imagine an act of more blatant hypocrisy and cynical dishonesty than this. They had tried to persuade Jesus to become their king; indeed, had tried to force him into such a role. He refused. Then in anger they had turned against him because of his refusal, had condemned him to death; and are now trying to persuade the Roman governor to confirm their death sentence by charging Jesus with doing that which they knew he had not done, but which they themselves had tried to get him to do. Only the Roman court could give the final sentence of death. These hypocritical Jews well knew that Pilate would look with contempt upon their charges of blasphemy; so they had to trump up some other charge, even a patently false one, to trick the Romans into agreeing to their wishes.

But Pilate, much to their chagrin and discomfort, acquitted the prisoner. He declared, "I find no crime in him." Thus, legally, Jesus should have gone free. The Sanhedrin, by its unanimous verdict of guilty, had legally freed him; now the Roman governor has likewise acquit-

ted him. When the Jewish judges of the Sanhedrin came into the quarters of the Roman governor, bringing Jesus as a prisoner from the Jewish court, they made their charges against him before Pilate. Then, according to the record, Pilate took him apart from them and tried him. The result of that examination is seen when Pilate came back to the Jewish leaders and said, "I find no fault in him."

That is the verdict. That is the decree and judgment of the court, the Roman court this time. Had Jesus received his legal rights, he would have walked forth from Pilate's judgment hall a free man. Any further trial would have violated the principle of being tried again on a charge of which he was already acquitted; in legal terms, he would then be undergoing "double jeopardy." Having rendered a decision, the Roman court had fulfilled its obligation. By every principle of law and justice, Jesus was now free.

— But the howling mob put up such a furious clamor that Pilate weakened, and yielded his consent to a further trial of Jesus. He sent the prisoner to Herod, hoping to shift responsibility to that source. Herod was unable to do anything about the case, however, and sent the prisoner back to Pilate. Then Pilate, to his everlasting shame, sold his birthright for the sake of popularity as the governor of the Jews, and actually delivered over to the hands of a mob a prisoner whom he, as judge, had pronounced innocent of any crime. Thus Pilate's name has become a synonym and a byword down through the annals of time for all that is cowardly and dishonorable. And the reputation is a just and deserved one. The Roman

trial was a farce from every point of view, as was also the Jewish trial.

Yet there is a very real sense in which every one of us this day is actually passing sentence, actually passing judgment upon the Son of God. The measure of faith we have in our hearts, the way we live, the readiness with which we submit to Christ's authority and will are all a very real indication of our judgment. We are either saying that he is worthy of our faith, our obedience, our sacrifice and service, or else we are saying that we count him unworthy of such. Every day that we live, Jesus is on trial before us. No man can go through a single day of his life without actually passing judgment, by what he does, on Jesus of Nazareth. There is no way to avoid this. Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man will open the door, I will come in and sup with him." The Son of God is begging for admission into our hearts and lives; he is asking for our respect, our confidence, our trust, that he may, in righteousness, redeem our souls and save us from eternal ruin. When men refuse to do the will of the Lord, they pass judgment on Jesus and reject the Son of God as much in fact as did Pilate and the Jewish court so many centuries ago.

Every person who reads these lines is actually in the same position as was Pilate — called upon to render a decision concerning Jesus Christ. Whether we accept his word or reject it is the issue for us to determine. Jesus says that when we reject his word we reject him; when we accept his word we accept him. He told the apostles that whosoever received them also received him; whosoever rejected them also rejected him. No man can refuse to do the will of the Lord without rejecting Christ. The issue is clear and simple. There is no way to evade it or avoid it. If it be true that Pilate was in a sense on trial, then it is equally true that every one of us is in the same sense on trial. In all our study of the trial of Jesus, let it never be forgotten that we are also studying our own trial — and our own destiny.

(To be continued)

THE TRIAL OF JESUS -- (V)

Roy E. Cogdill

One significant aspect of the trial of Jesus, often overlooked, is the fact that the very ones who judged him are destined, in time, to be judged by him. No doubt it would have helped both the Roman and the Jewish courts considerably in reaching their verdict if they had been aware that the prisoner before them would one day sit in eternal judgment over the whole race of men. For those judges to have recognized who their prisoner was would certainly have had a tremendous bearing on the kind of treatment they gave him. Not only so, but if they could have understood that the very conduct of the trial they were now carrying through would itself be a part of the evidence to be used by their prisoner when he came to sit in judgment on them, it would have caused them to be indeed more honest and fair and just in their conduct of his examination.

There is coming a time in which Jesus will judge the world. The Bible teaches that Jesus, who was judged by men, will one day be the judge of every man. To the idol-worshipping Athenians Paul declared that "The times of ignorance therefore God over-looked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent: inasmuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." (Acts 17:30,31.) This is the very "man" who stood a helpless and defenseless prisoner before Annas and Caiaphas and Pilate, and who was illegally tried and condemned by the Sanhedrin, with Nicodemus and Joseph, and all the other officers of that high tribunal participating.

The Bible teaches that Jesus is the "advocate" now of all who are obedient to him, and that he can plead their case in heaven. But there is coming a time when Christ will sit in judgment. He cannot be both priest and judge, both an advocate and a judge at the same time. When he comes again, in glory, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all the nations of the earth; and he shall separate the righteous from the unrighteous as a shepard separates the sheep from the goats.

The very decision that men make now concerning Jesus will itself determine the decision that Jesus then, as judge, will make concerning men. Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, and all others who had a part in the great fraudulent trial, the illegal and unjust verdict and execution, will stand in the final great day, that day toward which all other days are pointing, and will themselves be judged on the very conduct of the trial in which they took part. But as this fact holds true for all those men who had part in that illegal procedure so many centuries ago, it is equally true for all men today. The judgment that men today render concerning Christ, and the verdict

which they reach, will become the basis for the judgment Christ renders, and the verdict he reaches, concerning these men.

Nothing is more definitely taught in the Bible than that men shall be judged according to their works. There are many preachers and many creeds teaching that works have nothing to do with a man's salvation. But these creeds and these preachers are mistaken. Paul declares, "For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (II Cor. 5:10.) In that final day every man shall be judged and rewarded according to his works. "To them that patiently continue in well-doing seek for glory and honor and incorruption, eternal life; but unto them that are factious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, shall be wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that worketh evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Greek." (Rom. 2:7.)

The Apostle John gives a vivid picture of that final judgment scene in Revelation, chapter 20: "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works." Men may go through this life with their sham, their professed and pretended piety, with their hypocritical attitudes, their lives being filled meanwhile with ungodliness and unrighteousness; but they deceive God not for a moment. And in that final judgment every bit of sham and hypocrisy shall be stripped away, and all shall stand before Christ for the verdict.

The eternal destiny of our souls will depend upon our attitude toward Christ, and the judgment we now render about him. This was something that those who tried him in Jerusalem so long ago never understood or believed. Had they believed it, how different their verdict would have been! We today are in a position of great advantage over him. They tried Christ without comprehending at all the enormity of what they are doing. But you and I, every day that we live, can be sure with an absolute certainty that we are now trying Christ — and that Christ will one day try us. What are the verdicts men are giving today? Some, like Peter, are following "afar off"; others have even gone all the way with Peter and have denied the Lord completely when the opportunity came to "stand up and be counted." Some have secretly believed in him, but have held their peace, wishing his cause well, to be sure, but not willing themselves to suf-

fer for him nor to get into the work and make the sacrifices necessary.

What would Annas and Caiaphas and Pilate and Herod have given to have known, as we know, the identity of their prisoner? If they had known, as you and I know, that the prisoner at the bar was God's only Son, what do you think their verdict would have been?

And, having that knowledge, what is your verdict? Every day that you live you are writing down a line of the final decision. What sort of judgment are you rendering?