

# God on Trial

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, Bill says he doesn't want to embarrass me, but I do know, I missed it, but I got the tail end of it. I do know that I was announced last week as being one of the Spice Girls for Women at 10.

So, I don't take that too seriously. Actually, I thought that a better description of me would be... Is it going to work?

Oh, hang on just a second. Hang on, hang on, hang on. Just a minute. Down arrow. No, I know, but it's still... Is that going to work now? Okay, I'm going to get that here. I'm going to get this out of here.

A better description of me is a pepper pot. Oh, it's not working. Hang on. Sorry, I'm me. Oh, great. Okay, something's going wrong here. I don't know if you're aware of who a pepper pot is. A pepper pot is a middle-aged woman or elderly. It's a Monty Python character.

[ 1 : 07 ] And usually the fellows are dressing up like, Oh, ladies like this. And I thought for this day that I should probably have rented a gray wig. And then I realized I already had one.

I've got a picture of a pepper pot here. I'm sorry. I'm going to have to... But actually, all week, Spice Girls Pepper Pot, I've been thinking, I wish I were Harvey.

I wish I were Harvey. Because Harvey was such an amazing talk last week. So I just think I have to acknowledge that. And this will not match at all, but never mind.

Especially if we can't get started. There you go. Pepper pot. And I won't speak with their kind of voice.

I've been really irritating. There's something funny here. I don't know what's wrong with it.

Something's going wrong. So I may meet my husband up here the whole time. So the topic for this morning's talk is God on Trial.

[ 2 : 15 ] And that was kind of a... The main topic really was Christians in court. And I don't think it takes a degree in rocket science to determine why I chose to talk about Christians in court.

At this time, long before St. John's, we at St. John's voted to join the Anglican network in Canada. The Orthodox believers in this diocese were threatened in various ways by the authorities in this diocese for defending the gospel.

And of course, in recent weeks, the threat of secular court action is now becoming a reality. And the prospect of possibly losing our church properties before the courts, at least temporarily, is a danger, even if we think not a likelihood.

What I'd like to do today then is to, in a very humble way, because I'm not a lawyer, nor am I a theologian, is to bring us to the scriptures for a view on the subject of how our faith intersects with the hard reality of the legal world.

For the purposes of this talk, you'll see that I'm pretty loose about the legal world. I mean ecclesiastical and secular legal dimensions.

[ 3 : 37 ] And of course, in the New Testament, you have the Sanhedrin, and you have the Caesar that the Christians come before. And we have our own equivalent in, I guess, canon law and Canadian law.

Now courts are a hard reality, and when we finally come to court, the stakes are high. We have differences every day among us. But when things come to the point of our going to court, it means that all other means of negotiation have failed, that the two parties are real enemies, and that the outcome will be bad for one and good for another, but never totally happy all around.

The costs financially and personally are incredibly high. Under these circumstances, can Christians ever justify being in court as Christians?

And if so, what can be expected? So that's the first question we're going to look at here. After that, well, I've called the talk God on trial because C.S. Lewis actually already took a better title, God in the Dark.

But God on trial, God in the Dark, neither title automatically ties to the concept of Christians in court. Or does it? The question I hope to look at in the second bit is, who is on trial here anyway?

[ 4 : 59 ] And stealing an expression from David Short, I'm going to call it the Great Reversal. Now through looking at these questions, I hope you'll gain some insight into what our hopes and expectations are, should be in our present troubles.

And this will be a shorter third section, which I hope you'll participate in at the end of the talk. Okay. Well, why on earth would Christians be in court?

Oops. Never mind. I think we Western Christians believe that the last place a faithful Christian ought to be found as in court. We are called to be law-abiding citizens.

And as St. Peter says, well, there it is, in his first epistle, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

We're called to obey our earthly authorities as this quote from St. Peter, wait a minute, St. Peter commands.

[ 6 : 02 ] Yeah, here it is. So be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor or the supreme, to governors or to governors as said by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

For this is the will of God, that by doing good, you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

Honor everyone, lots of brotherhood, fear God, honor the emperor. So we're not to be law-breakers. Do not suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler, Peter says.

In 4.15, not only are we to be law-abiders, but we're not to quarrel all about worldly things, preferring rather to give your cloak, walk the second mile or turn the cheek.

Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? The next verse, but even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. So this little verse in Peter, 1 Peter 3.14, is the exception, the narrow door through which Christians have always entered the courtroom if they're entering faithfully.

[ 7 : 20 ] Looking through the scriptures, we see that, for righteousness' sake, can look in practice different on the surface. How believers get into court having differing circumstantial details, but always the same underlying cause involving a clock clash between God's righteous kingdom and the rulers of the world, both secular and religious rulers as we've noted.

Men's greed, doctrinal dispute, or envy may be the presenting cause, but the good news of Jesus, the proclamation of the gospel, is the flashpoint between God's world and the authorities and principalities of this world.

It's a battle for authority between two kingdoms. And this is the way we find ourselves before rulers and magistrates. For righteousness' sake, may seem a rare exception, but in the Bible, particularly the New Testament, we'll see that court appearances follow the faithful almost like the signs following.

If we go by the New Testament, Christians do end up in court, not as an occasional problem, like some fallout or byproduct of the Christian faith. Legal conflict is to be seen as a core issue for which we should be alert and ready.

Now, as Jesus gathered his disciples around him and taught them during his earthly ministry, he made it clear on many occasions that they will be dragged before the magistrates, before authorities, both secular and religious.

[ 8 : 47 ] To him, this was clearly a crucial teaching and also, as all four gospels note, sorry, that which he reiterated before he sent disciples out to teach in towns and villages and also, as all four gospels note, with great urgency, he reiterated it before his own trial and crucifixion.

Now, many of the passages refer, these last passages refer to the last times of the last days, so we should have no qualms in applying them to ourselves as modern Christians. Jesus was well aware that we needed warning about this.

Here's one of the passages from Mark 13. But be on your guard, for they will deliver you over to councils and you will be beaten in synagogues and you will stand before governors and kings for

my sake to bear witness before them.

And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given to you in that hour.

For it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. And brother will deliver brother over to death and the father his child. And children will rise against parents and have them put to death.

[10:02] And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. Well, I think for our situation or for any situation there are four things that we can glean from this passage for our benefit.

The first thing we learn from Jesus is that we're not to be surprised or caught off guard by finding ourselves in court situations. Initially, when I was making this talk I had a slide I gained from Monty Python I thought it would be a bit much.

But, you know, our methods, you know, the Spanish Inquisition, our methods are three. Fear, surprise, surprise, you know, whatever. So, we're not to be surprised. In verse 9, Jesus says, be on your guard for they will deliver you over to councils.

You will be beaten in synagogues. You will stand before governors and so on. And in verse 13, you will be, when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, we will be brought to trial.

Christians, not we specifically, maybe, but Christians will be brought to trial. In Canada, under our thinning veneer of civilization, we live in relative safety. So our legal problems that we're experiencing seem perhaps just an unlucky turn of events, which we could have avoided by doing this or that.

[11:17] However, if we see our troubles in the light of Jesus' prophetic word, we should understand that they are of the same stuff as persecutions of Christians in other parts of the world where the results are much more violent.

I don't know if you've ever read this book, *Their Blood Pries Out*. It's a modern, just modern, this author gives modern day examples of various troubles that Christians have around the world.

It's about 10 years old and there are other, we know of, for example, a more recent example in Orissa in India where the Christians are being treated very, very badly.

So, you know, we can see our troubles as a minor version of these things. So I think we have to know and Jesus makes it clear that the true church is always going to be marked by persecution of some form.

Now, the real surprise is just how much the courts enter in in here, in the New Testament. I was astounded to realize the proportion of the New Testament which involves court appearances or trouble with authorities, with believers either in trial or waiting for judgments or being thrown in prison, punished for some way or other.

[12:35] We do know that parts of the New Testament were actually written from prison. We know that Paul wrote *Philippians*, for example, while he was in Caesar's, under Caesar's, I was going to say care.

What do I mean? Not quite care. In custody. In Caesar's household, or in Caesar's prison. And also, in *Ephesians*, Paul says of himself, I'm an ambassador in the chains.

I'm not sure exactly where he's in prison there, but he was in prison more than once, of course. And we also know that John wrote the book of *Revelation*, or received his revelation while in exile on the island of Patmos.

So these are Christians already having been convicted. He's a Christian already convicted. Of course, the best example of the centrality of the theology of the Bible is the passion of our Lord. His trial and suffering being the focal point of our salvation. A real eye-opener for me was the exercise I made of going through the *Acts of the Apostle*.

[13:47] And on the day of Pentecost, in the power of the newly given Holy Spirit, Peter proclaimed this powerful word, this Jesus hath God raised up, we are all witnesses.

And this is sort of marks the beginning of persecutions of the church. And if you look at, everybody should have this sheet, I actually just gave a short synopsis of the various legal problems and court problems and authority problems that the Christians had through the book of *Acts*.

So you can see, really, the surprising thing is, if you'll count all these chapters up, 19 out of the 28 chapters of *Acts*, have something of this nature. I couldn't help, so, yeah, that's about two-thirds of *Acts*, so just a simple math here.

I couldn't help putting in, just sneaking in, it's not one of the ones you count, chapter 15, the Council of Jerusalem, because when I read it, it made me think so much of Gafcon that I just wanted to stick it in there and tell you that.

Anyway, so it appears from the passage that we have here that Jesus did not promise a prosperity gospel, and it's just as well for otherwise the disciples might have fallen away had they been shocked.

[15:07] As Jesus said the night before he died, I have said all these things to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. I think we can maybe hear in that they will put you out of your churches.

Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. Now, the second lesson, I said there were four, from our passage is not to have unrealistic expectations about the outcomes of the trials and councils that we'll face.

When I initially read the words do not be anxious in verse 11, I think that, yeah, in the middle of verse 11, I immediately, you know, sometimes you read the Bible this way, you immediately jump to conclusions and I immediately thought, right, Jesus is going to say that everything's going to be okay, everything's under control, but actually, that's not what he says here.

This, you know, it obviously is under control, but that's not what he's telling us. Far from it, the situation he's describing is something, described as something to endure. So verses 12 and 13, and brother will deliver brother over to death, the father his child, and so on, and they will have you put to death.

You will be hated by all for my name's sake. So we learn that we will be betrayed even by family members who will have us put to death in some circumstances in the world, and we will be hated, and that can be here in Canada.

[16:37] In John 15, Jesus warns his disciples that the world will hate them, just as it hated him. Will hate us just as it hated him. A servant is not greater than his master.

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. So as the book of Acts progresses, in your little sheet here, I didn't actually put what happened to the various people, but if you went down through these various stories, you would see that the hatred expressed towards believers increased in intensity.

Chapter 4, Peter and John just spend a night in prison and get told off. In chapter 5, they're back again, and this time they're beaten severely. In chapter 7, Peter is stoned to death.

By the time we get to chapter 12, James, the brother of John, has been beheaded by Herod, and at the same time, Peter was also slated for beheading, but he was miraculously released, though he was later crucified.

we understand upside down. That's not in the Bible, obviously, but Paul is stoned at one point, like Stephen. He does survive, but then ends up spending several years in various prisons, various uncomfortable situations, until he dies, as a gay Christian has it, by beheading by Nero.

[17:56] So far, we've learned that we will likely end up in court, but we've also learned that the outcome isn't necessarily going to be what we're looking for.

Okay, the third thing in our passage is that God has a plan for the court appearances, and the plan is for us to testify or bear witness on his behalf to the authorities we will face.

Verse 9, you will stand before governors and kings for my sake to bear witness before them. Now, just a note about being witness. All the troubles that we just talked about came to the disciples because they were witnessing to the death and resurrection of our Lord.

It may be helpful to know that our word for witness is from the Greek word *martis*, from which we also get the similar sounding word *martyr*.

Yeah, so you can probably see why Christians why for Christians the word for witness began to be associated with death or deep suffering for the faith. So, when we talk glibly about witnessing about Christ for our faith, we might bear that in mind.

[19:10] No, it's not necessarily going to give you what you want, humanly speaking. So, though there is no happy outcome promised for us in court, there at least is a greater purpose at work.

verse 9, we'll stand before governors and kings in order to bear witness and you can check out the big names at this sheet here on Acts, the big names who engaged Paul while he was in captivity. He saw every high guy there was. Verse 10, the gospel will be proclaimed to all nations. Of course, the gospel is preached outside of court as well.

Jesus intended that. In fact, that's how we get there in the first place. Nonetheless, from this context, the verse suggests that the purpose for being in court is also for the spread of the gospel. I love the description of the court scene in Stephen in Acts 7 before he is martyred. How else, how else ever would you get the power brokers, the Sanhedrin, everybody, listening to the gospel being taught through a whole Bible overview I mean, he's got this captive audience and they get the whole works.

[ 20 : 26 ] Paul himself took every opportunity he could while he was in captivity to going from official to official to preach the gospel. I think he must have been pretty intense in Acts 26, 28, Agrippa says, in a short time would you persuade me to become a Christian?

How can you expect it so fast for me? Okay, the fourth thing we can get from our passage here is that we are not to worry about what we should say because the Holy Spirit will give us the words. Our court testimonies are important enough to God that his own spirit stands with us in the courtroom and speaks through us. Verse 11, Now I think this is an amazing bit of comfort because courts can be intimidating.

It's very comforting to know that we needn't worry about the words we use because the Lord himself knows best how to bear witness to himself.

We just say what we know. The other wonderful thing is that when the gospel is on trial the Lord himself is present in the courtroom and God is on trial there too.

[ 21 : 48 ] A few years ago I don't know if any of you saw it it was a little nature movie that was out called The Bear I think and this little bear you follow the little bear he's orphaned so he's trying to survive and you follow him through his survival as he's by himself.

At one point he's drinking in a stream and you're looking from the point of view of the bear and a cougar comes right up to him a cougar growling and threatening and the little bear of course you think he's redundant well you think as yourself as the little bear we're done for now but the little bear decides he's going to just challenge the cougar anyway so he stands up and does the bear kind of threatening back and the cougar girl is running off and you're thinking whoa why was the cougar afraid of this little guy and then the camera pans around behind the little bear is this huge big grizzly bear I think that's such a good picture of you know we and our weakness in court have gotten his strength you know behind you know yeah so okay on the other side of the sheets that you have you'll see printed up chapter 4 of Acts we're not going to look at every bit of that but I thought you'd have it all in front of you and we see in Acts 4 that after a night in jail

Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin because they've the problem was that they had healed the blind man the lame man at the beautiful gate and that they were preaching Jesus now all the big shots are there rulers elders scribes verse 5 they're all ranged about them you have to picture them ranged about them and they're described in verse 13 as uneducated common men these fishermen sitting there with all these educated people around them we have Annas Caiaphas and all who are of the high priestly family and those are the men who so recently sentenced Jesus to death so the picture is power versus weakness but John and Peter now after having received the Holy Spirit they're quite different from the from the way they were when they ran away from when the Lord was when they abandoned the Lord before his death they're quite different now and the council council demands from them by what power or by what name did you do this rephrased who gave you the right to perform healings in our temple we're the religious authorities here we have ultimate power not you that's the cougar right filled by the Holy Spirit there you go

Peter answers and you can sense God is now in the courtroom then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit said to them rulers of the people and elders if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man and by what means this man has been healed let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified whom God raised from the dead by him this man is standing before your well this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you by you the builders which has become the cornerstone and there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved that's incredible and you kind of wonder okay do they understand and they do who is on trial now basically Peter is telling them you crucified him this one is standing here ready to judge you to me it's such an amazing the tables are turned and it's stunning I think so now the authorities themselves are actually on trial in God's courtroom it's a bigger courtroom now than that little one they're in so we see that the gospel somehow gets Christians into the courtroom so that they can witness to the authorities about the Lord Jesus and we've seen that the Lord God himself by his

Holy Spirit takes much interest in these court appearances and provides testimony the testimony they give and with God showing up through Peter's bold defense this trial transforms into something much bigger than the religious leaders bargained for and I think you could we can really see here the clash between their temporal power and the heavenly power and authority of God a clash between the two kingdoms

I talked about at the beginning that's the great reversal okay I just have a title page for this one I'm just looking at the time here okay now there's a peculiar thing about our world God created this beautiful place in which we live in I don't know if you were as stunned as I was totally overtaken by last Sunday as I was but the color of the leaves and just the way the sun was shining and the air seemed so moist and alive I was totally impressed with how beautiful God's world was and how beautiful our creator is we have a very generous God and beyond that to think that this God holy and tender loves us and desires us to live among him in friendship is mind-blowing but the peculiar thing is this ever since the beginning of the world it's been a human trait to question God's motives to question his wisdom to question our necessary submission to him it's a deeply set inclination to make ourselves

[ 27 : 49 ] God judge in his own world our kingdom against his to put God on trial so to speak the kingdoms of the world have been arrayed against the Lord ever since Eve attended to the whispers of the lying serpent the first couple began judging God in the garden Satan questions them did God really say what you won't die look he just wants to keep you from being like him like a God this is by the way a woodcut from Durer's Small Passion has a little series of woodcuts from about 1507 we'll see some more of them Paul's Psalm 2 describes human rebellion against God this way I'll just read the first bit why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain the kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed saying let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us human rebellion but actually if you are looking at the bottom part of your

Acts 4 you'll see that Peter and John and the other Christians in their prayer refer to this now when I was a couple weeks ago Jesse Ruck came up to me and said oh you're speaking on God on Trial are you going to be speaking about the BBC docudrama that's coming that's come out and I wasn't even aware of it so it's a very interesting example though I think of this human tendency to put God in the dark so to speak so the play itself the docudrama is it's it's an adaptation by a play by Elie Wiesel called The Trial of God and it's on tonight for the first time in Canada right Jesse when is it going to be on 9 o'clock on PBS right okay yeah so here's the synopsis from the BBC site who are we to judge good question awaiting their fate in a somber block house in Auschwitz a group of men struggle desperately not only to survive but to make sense of their existence as they wait to discover whether they have been selected for the gas chambers these prisoners driven to the limit by the cruelty of the Nazis demand to know the answer to the question what is the nature of a God that can allow so much suffering

I think that's the biggest judgment of God suffering people bring up God on trial is the extraordinary tale of how these men attempt to settle their dispute by putting God in the dock charged with breaking his covenant to protect his people before three judges a gallery of witnesses is called to give testimony so there's more in this but that's now I haven't seen it obviously it hasn't come out yet here and it's possible it could be a modern equivalent of the story of Job but I don't think so but from the comments on the IMDB blog these would be English writers I don't think God escapes severe human judgment now I haven't corrected any of the grammar or anything of these things I just copied them straight out so here this drama brought up many issues about who God is and what he has done for the world and as the man at the end rightly argued God is not good I vote God guilty watching this although harrowing and extreme reaffirmed my belief that it is not God that is guilty but that God does not exist to believe or worship in a God whose actions as mentioned in the film including mass murder of innocent people the Noah's Ark story and then to oversee such action as the Holocaust is clearly nonsensical and of course he refers everybody to the God delusion so Jack will have to go talk to him and and so on so the God delusion now needs to be part of religious studies in England according to this person to answer the questions given that situation I would have found all loving merciful God guilty of the charges you know when I read this kind of thing I just I don't know I don't know what you feel but this is a quote from C.S. Lewis the ancient man approached God or even the gods as the accused person approaches his judge but the modern man the roles are reversed he's the judge God is in the dock he's quite a kindly judge

that is people mankind if God should have a reasonable defense for having been the God who permits war poverty and disease he's ready to listen to it the trial may even end in God's acquittal but the important thing is that man is on the bench and God is in the dock okay now you can see that the rebellion which began in Eden is so deeply inbred that the natural man doesn't even question it anymore as C.S. Lewis said we're on the bench

God is in the dock and we Christians understand this attitude to be one of sin our own problems in the Anglican Church of Canada are similar they have to do with religious leaders wanting desperately to break free of the implications of the gospel that they're meant to uphold and who themselves these leaders are standing in judgment on God's word to do it while there may be a generous admission among them of God's existence unlike Dawkins God is made to change according to their human learning and democratic process this is just a statement just a bit of a statement from the Bishop of Montreal in the fall here the diocesan synod with the benefit of scientific and medical knowledge we know sexual orientation is a given and a gift from God in the lives of people our challenge is to determine how all persons may rejoice and celebrate this God-given gift so that it honors our creator and gives dignity to all so God and the Bishop here would probably say the God of the Old Testament is considered an unjust judge who stands corrected by our higher scientific and of course moral understanding you notice too

[ 34 : 24 ] I don't know if you've read a lot of these I keep hearing this you notice how the Anglican church revisionists can deny God's word about sexual ethics on the basis of calling it a justice issue that's arrogant to say that God is unjust really that God's word is unjust but that's what they're saying this is a Rembrandt etching of Jesus before the people the historical and cosmic pinnacle of man's judgment of God takes place of course at the trial of Jesus he's innocent even according to their laws Pilate says I find no guilt in this man not for lack of trying the religious court called the Sanhedrin could also find nothing to pin on him their judgment finally fell in the religious court only when he acknowledged that he was the son of God who in the future would come on the clouds of heaven to judge they would understand so with one voice every authority both secular and religious condemns this innocent Jesus handing him over to the will of the bloodthirsty crowd in the sense to the death of a murderer endure a small passion it really came home to me how everybody was against the Lord and his anointed there is Jesus before Annas there is Jesus before Caiaphas there is Jesus before Pilate there is Jesus before Herod there is Jesus before the well the crowd or the soldiers in Pilate's palace and now here is Jesus before the people denied denied denied convicted so the trial of Jesus shows us most perfectly

I think the deep enmity of the world towards God religious authorities secular authorities the self-righteous and the self-indulgent like Herod cannot abide the presence of God in Christ I've been wondering recently whether that's the one thing that binds humanity together you know we call ourselves homo sapiens knowing men but I think it's rebellious men or judging men hateful men and having a common enemy of course is a very unifying thing isn't it since when I don't know if you remember this but since when would the Jewish religious leaders give allegiance to Caesar but on the day that day they called they said we have no king but Caesar and there's a very piercing line I just came across in a reading through Luke where Herod has just had Jesus visit him and he mocks him and gives him a purple robe sends him back to Pilate and this is the verse and Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day for before this they had been in enmity with each other

Herod and Pilate friends because they're enemies of Jesus now what better picture is there of God's judgment a man's judgment of God as the innocent son of God nailed to a wooden cross like the worst of human beings the murderer this is the Rembrandt etching again I don't know what will happen in the BBC trial of God tonight but I know that in this trial the son of God was convicted and it's exactly at the moment of putting God on trial and judging him guilty of death that our judgment stares us in the face because no matter how many arguments we amass against God the one who gave us breath cannot remain dead so we show what we're like when we do this but he rises again and I think this is why the resurrection of the dead is so offensive to the disobedience it's a major issue in the book of Acts and I think it's an issue in our church too as we know our former bishop once preached at this church that Jesus did not rise from the dead for all our self-idolatry and self-sufficiency we find that with the Lord risen we are standing in God's courtroom and we can't avoid it now

I'm conscious that we're running out of time here but I just wanted to make it bring because man has judged God I think it's very healthy for human beings to understand that there is a judgment I think our society has forgotten this and Jesus taught these are words from Luke 12 and why do you not judge for yourselves what is right as you go to your accuser before the magistrate make an effort to settle with him on the way lest he drag you to the judge and the judge hand you over to the officer and the officer puts you in prison I tell you you will never get out until you have paid the last penny it's very important for us very healthy for us to understand God's court is there now the irony in this teaching that I just read is huge because we think we can judge but Jesus says if you judge you know how to judge judge what's right you know you should make peace something's coming down the road you need to make peace so as traitorous humans we all stand under the accusation of God and are without excuse but it's that very point of course our understanding of that that we come to understand that we need to make peace with him the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom

I think it says in Proverbs so I'm just skipping along here I just wanted to kind of give us a picture of God's court and as I was thinking about this I realized that the whole history a lot of the history of our salvation has to do with the whole stamp of a court trial or a court of the courts or of legal problems so I'm just going to read some of the words here we have law in the celestial court there's transgression we have an adversary we have an accuser we have trespass rebellion treason bondage we have authorities prison judgment punishment chains and banishment we have innocence and guilt now all these words jar with our modern sensibilities but I think it's healthy to remember them and thanks be to God the court language of the Bible doesn't end with accusation and judgment for now through God's merciful intervention we are offered mercy

[ 41 : 22 ] John the Baptist preached in preparation for our redemption by teaching the people about confession good court word isn't it and even more wonderful because of the death of Jesus on the cross we have in him an advocate a lawyer if you will if any man sin we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous these are comforting words but you say them very often at church posted on the web there's a synopsis of a quaint but wonderful sermon by Charles Finney an American preacher from the mid 1800s and it's called Christ our advocate and in it he describes in very small fine legal detail what's actually happening in the celestial court and I think it's really worth reading I don't have time to tell you about it any more than that but I have a few copies if anybody wants to just look at it so to be more court language well we have in

Jesus name and intervention on our behalf we have redemption being brought back from our bondage we have acquittal before the judgment seat and as we accept the price paid by him we receive his righteousness we are justified by God we have reconciliation with God and glorious freedom in Christ I have come to set the captives free says Jesus here is the best code of all Romans 8 there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus for the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death for God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin he condemned sin in flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit so we grateful Christians are recipients of this wonderful transaction this court transaction that the Lord has brought us through and the only thing that or the major thing that the Lord asks us to do in loving return just out of love for him is to actually witness to what we've experienced to witness to him 2nd Corinthians 5 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 therefore knowing the fear of the Lord we persuade others so this is the amazing thing that in the celestial court we go from being afraid fearful sinful guilty sitting as the accused to being a witness to the goodness of God so accused by God witness for God I think it's just amazing and we know too that our witness bears fruit it may not always be easy as we've seen sometimes tribulations associated with the witness but there are there are results the famous saying by Tertullian that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church now our our suffering is smaller than that but I don't think even small suffering will be fruitless for the kingdom now I don't really have time I had some examples of how the sufferings the court sufferings and the general sufferings of the disciples actually had bore fruit in the salvation of various many people here but I won't go into that now because what I think we need to do is look ahead a little bit just to our own situation and see how we can understand our own situation in the light of what we've looked at so

I'm kind of skipping a bit here but I hope that's okay it's evident that I believe that our situation in the Anglican church bears the mark of a true

New Testament struggle it's argued that we are fighting over buildings but I don't believe that's the apparent subject for the court but I don't think that's the real cause and I think we do understand it's for the sake of the gospel some counsel us to abandon our buildings and I think there's a good reason humanly speaking that we don't abandon them there are legal reasons why we don't but I think there's also another reason and that's more important and that's the gospel itself so in order to gain these buildings the Anglican church keeps promoting the idea that we've left that we've left the Anglican church thereby abandoning the faith once delivered and really to kind of get up and leave would be to admit that false statement and leaving the buildings without attempting to keep them would be a public sign of acknowledgement that we haven't moved from the gospel it would be an abandonment of the gospel and I would suggest and this is maybe more dangerous that the diocese would then look like the bearer of the faith once delivered

I think it's really scary to think that if we just quietly walked off that's what people would think Christianity is about so having said that I think we need to be wise in the expected outcome the threat's real we may not have we may lose our buildings we may suffer in other ways but our chief purpose this is what we have to remember in standing in the court is to represent the gospel for the sake of those who might be saved already in this situation I know of one family member within this congregation for whom the gospel has finally caught the attention of this one resistant person just because of the court situation and the idea of standing firm on something that's so important and because the gospel is on display in our court situation we should be respectful of all because we are bearing witness to the Lord it isn't that we're going to win we shouldn't be thinking in terms of winning cases we should be thinking in terms of glorifying God so I hope that we can see and we can talk about this that our sufferings

[ 47 : 45 ] I think anyway our sufferings within the diocese are not out of God's purview and are to be used for the extension of the kingdom of God of the beloved son I'm going to give you a quick summary of what I've been trying to say and then we can talk so we are to respect our authorities we're told and should only enter court for righteousness sake nonetheless getting into trouble with the courts is part of the normal Christian life