

Examined and Denied

John 18:12-27

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Introduction: We do not typically equate murderous hatred with religion but perhaps we should. It was not the secularists or the “sinners” that sought Christ’s death but the religionists. Religion is the number one obstacle to knowing God and has historically been the main opponent to the preaching of the pure gospel of the Cross. It is fitting that the very religion that was established in the Bible became the instrument to kill the Son of the God of Creation. How much more the false satanic religions that abound in our world today.

Yes...the Romans were involved, but only because they had the authority to execute. Otherwise Pilate would not have been bothered with a religious dispute like this.

Why is religion always at odds with the preaching of the Cross? Because the gospel strips them of their authority and power and declares all men equal before the God of Creation. Pride...and particularly religious pride cannot tolerate that assertion. This is why religion always creates elaborate rituals and special individuals through whom everyone must approach God. The religion and its leaders declare themselves indispensable for salvation. The Gospel says they are NOT! It is Christ Alone!

Almost everything that takes place on this night is illegal according to Jewish law, but this does not seem to bother these men who have made “keeping the law” their life’s work. On this night...it is more important that they murder Jesus than keep their own law. Let’s read the account.

John 18:12-27 ¹² So the *Roman* cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, ¹³ and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴ Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people. ¹⁵ Simon Peter was following Jesus, and *so was* another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also *one* of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." ¹⁸ Now the slaves and the officers were standing *there*, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself. ¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. ²¹ "Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said." ²² When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" ²⁴ So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. ²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You are not also *one* of His disciples, are you?" He denied *it*, and said, "I am not." ²⁶

One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" ²⁷ Peter then denied *it* again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

While the religionists are scheming to kill Jesus, there is another drama playing out in the lives of two of His disciples....One disciple in particular is front and center. The Jews are cruel and homicidal, but Peter is good intentioned, but weak. He follows Jesus right into the courtyard of Annas. But he lacked the courage and strength to stand firm. This is so reminiscent of Peter's adventure walking on water. He was bold but weak. He wanted to serve and please Christ, but found that he lacked courage. Most Christians are more like the other 11. They played it safe. If you don't try then you can't fail. Holding back and staying quiet are always the safe options.

The two principle players are the religious Jews [acting in one accord] and Peter. Let's look at both:

The Jews:

The Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him [12]: The Jews knew how to work the system. They pretended to be in agreement with the Roman occupation in order to keep their own power. Accordingly they enlisted the Roman cohort for the arrest, but they took Jesus directly to The High Priest.

They led Him to Annas first [13a]: Annas is actually the High Priest and was appointed so for life. The problem was that the Roman occupiers were looking for ways to weaken the nationalism of the Jews and therefore deposed Annas about 15 years before this time. The Roman's appointed a series of men to hold that office, but the Jews recognized only the one High Priest. John reveals this just a few verses later when he calls Annas the High Priest.

John 18:19 ¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching.

Annas had a huge axe to grind with Jesus. Annas controlled the selling and money exchanging going on in the temple court. We know how Jesus felt about that. He threw them out and tipped over their tables on two separate occasions. Jesus was a threat to Annas' massive and corrupt money making scheme. **One Example:** When people brought their sacrificial animals to the temple, Annas would have them declared unfit to sacrifice and make the people purchase the ones he had at greatly inflated costs.

He was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year [13b]: Caiaphas was appointed in 18 AD. Annas held the real power in Israel. Besides his son in law, several of his own sons served as High Priest during this time.

Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people [14]: Caiaphas is absolutely not neutral. He had already expressed the opinion that Jesus should die rather than have the Romans take away the power of the Jews. John wants us to know that there was no truth seeking going on with Caiaphas or Annas for that matter. This trial would make a mockery of Jewish Law.

John 11:48-50 ⁴⁸ "If we let Him *go on* like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, ⁵⁰ nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish."

PETER AND JOHN:

Simon Peter was following Jesus, and *so was another disciple* [15a]: So...here is an insight into these two men. Although all the disciples forsook Him and fled in the Garden, these two circle back and follow the arresting party to the courtyard of Annas. Both had found some measure of courage to at least follow Jesus to His initial hearing.

The "other disciples" is probably John. John does not name himself in his gospel account. At the cross he calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved." These two men had seen from a distance where they led Him and followed. It was most likely John.

Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest [15b]: Somehow John was known to the high priest. His father's fishing business was big enough to require the hiring of servants.

Mark 1:19-20 ¹⁹ Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. ²⁰ Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.

At least one non-biblical source says that John used to deliver fish to the High Priest's house while still working for his father. His genealogy suggests that he came from a priestly line. Perhaps he was known because of that. Bottom line...he was known there.

Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. [16]: John goes out to bring Peter into the courtyard. This would be a common courtesy to Peter who had also followed. John could use the companionship of a brother disciple.

Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also *one of this man's disciples, are you?*" He said, "I am not." [17]: Now remember...Peter was a tough guy in many ways. He was rugged and humanly speaking he had a lot of courage. He was bold. Peter was the one who always spoke when everyone else just looked around and bit their tongues. Peter was the one who got out of the boat. Peter was the one who spoke first and said...

Matthew 26:33-35 ³³ "*Even* though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away." ³⁴ Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this *very* night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." ³⁵ Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You."

"Peter may well have been nerving himself to face some stiff challenge, But instead he was asked a simple question from a little slave girl. Her question incidentally implies the

answer “No”. “You aren’t one of the disciples of this man too, are you?” And Peter went along with this. “I am not,” he said. The question suggested a line of escape. Peter gratefully took it up. Almost certainly he did not reflect where it would lead him. One committed, he must have found it hard to go back on his denial.” *Leon Morris*

Now the slaves and the officers were standing *there*, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself. [18]: So no Peter is in under false pretenses. Can you imagine the look on John’s face [who was known to be a disciple] when Peter says this right in front of him. Peter went over and joined the slaves and temple police who were trying to stay warm.

The Jews:

The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. [19]: The account now goes back to Jesus and the Jewish leaders. They have dragged Jesus into the courtyard with John following. While they are getting ready to question Jesus, John is letting Peter in and now the hearing begins.

It was not legal for the High Priest to question the accused. In fact...Barclay states that...

“one curious feature of legal procedure in the Sanhedrin was that the man involved was held to be absolutely innocent, and, indeed, not even on trial, until the evidence of the witnesses had been stated and confirmed. That is the point of the conversation between Jesus and Annas. Jesus was reminding Annas that he had no right to ask him anything until the evidence of witnesses had been taken and found to agree.”

Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. [21]: This is where Jesus challenges the legality of this proceeding.

"Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said." [21]: Annas and everybody standing there knew that bringing witnesses was the legal and proper thing to do. They were conducting a Kangaroo Court and Jesus was calling them on it.

When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" [22]: Powerful people do not take kindly to being corrected or embarrassed. They always seek to silence their opponents because their pride makes them think that they cannot be challenged. We see this in politics in our time. Honest discussion of the issues is NOT allowed. The opposition to the government must be silenced when possible.

Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" [23]: Jesus comes back with majestic calm. It was illegal to strike a prisoner this way and everybody there knew it. Some years later...Paul, the lawyer stood before the same people and suffered a similar injustice.

Acts 23:1-3 Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." ² The high priest Ananias

commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth. ³ Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?" ...**Paul was a Lawyer!!!**

So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. [24]: Jesus had called Annas on the illegalities of what he was doing. Annas was hoping to get a quick resolution but now he would have to send him to the Roman "puppet" high priest where they could get the result they all wanted....condemnation whether or not he is guilty.

PETER:

John 18:25-27 ²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You are not also *one* of His disciples, are you?" He denied *it*, and said, "I am not." ²⁶ One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" ²⁷ Peter then denied *it* again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, [25a]: While the mock trial is going on Peter is standing by the fire with the guys who had gone out to arrest Jesus. These are the guys who saw him swinging his sword. The only possible explanation for the question is that it is dark. It is hard to make out facial features in the dark even on a full moon. They are not illuminated by a charcoal fire rather than a flame....and so they ask.....

"You are not also *one* of His disciples, are you?" He denied *it*, and said, "I am not." [25b]: This question again begs for a negative answer and Peter is quick to give it. This is his second denial in a matter of a few minutes.

One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" [26]: Now things have gotten a lot more serious. Peter had tried to kill this slave's relative and now he is being confronted with his presence in the garden.

Peter then denied *it* again, and immediately a rooster crowed. [27]: Once Peter had started down this road the denials had to keep coming. Some people spend their entire lives trying to deny that they know the Lord. Mercifully Jesus limited Peter to three denials.

CONCLUSION: If ever there was a scene intended to make a point...this would be it. Jesus is preparing to die for His people and they are denying that they even know Him. Here are the ultimate contrasts between righteousness and sin, selflessness and selfishness, strength and weakness. Luke adds some detail to this account that we do not have here. Peter's makes his final denial just as they are leading Jesus bound out of the courtyard

Luke 22:61-62 ⁶¹ The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times." ⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly.
Now if you are expecting me to say at this point that you should be stronger, better and more righteous you will have missed the entire point of this account. The point is that

men....good men....courageous leaders are still fallen and weak men in need of God's righteousness, God's strength and God's selflessness. We do not come by these things humanly.

God allows us to fail precisely because we imagine ourselves to be way more than we actually are. We think we can provide for ourselves when it is the Lord that gives us all that we possess. We even think, as did Peter, that we will not fail to own Christ and we will not be weak in our hour of trial....but we are wrong. Paul, a great man, was always seeking help from the Lord for his weakness:

2 Thessalonians 3:1-3 Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as *it did* also with you; ² and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith. ³ But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil *one*.

You need to know God's purpose in failure and weakness. Satan and many Christians will tell you that you should be stronger in faith. That you should not fear, but the truth is that our Lord wants us to be weak and fearful and to fail long enough to realize our true condition in this world. Our righteousness, our strength and our courage come from Christ and are applied to us and formed in us by the Holy Spirit. God has His purposes for you....even in failure. Jesus had told Peter this, but he was too dull of spiritual understanding to realize. Jesus said...

Luke 22:31-32 ³¹ "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; ³² but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

I am not going to tell you to be good or strong or righteous or courageous. I am going to tell you to cling to Christ. To embrace your weakness and failure and to expect God to give you all that you lack. We need to stop trying to be what we are not and start trusting Christ to make us what we should be. It is your destiny!

God could stop you from making bad choices. He could keep you from failure and sin, but allows both for you benefit. But success in life makes us proud and independent of God, while weakness causes us to turn to Christ and be strengthened by Him. In the first instance we glorify ourselves and in the latter we exalt our Savior. Peter did finally understand this fully by the time he wrote his first epistle...He said....

1 Peter 5:6-11 ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ⁸ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. ¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.