

The School of Tyrannus – A Biblical Example

Commentary for October 11, 2007 — A 1978 Article by Dr. Ernest L. Martin

ASK is a non-denominational organization devoted to uncovering the full biblical teachings of God. All of us, however, should be honest enough to admit that we can never totally accomplish that ultimate goal (because of human frailties), but we wish to do the best we can.

A true biblical research organization must advocate an environment in which free and open discussion on all subjects can take place. This is often difficult among those intimately connected with church oriented groups or those having denominational bias. This is because they have a natural tendency to defend their denominational positions in any research they undertake.

It is not that we are against denominations,¹ but we have found that true biblical research demands an atmosphere unfettered by institutional restrictions. Thus, ASK has no denominational ties.² This allows all who are associated with us to express themselves freely on matters relating to the Bible. And what a blessing from God it is. It gives us a liberty in Christ that we should all cherish.

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.”

• *Galatians 5:1*

On the other hand, look at the difficulty Paul experienced in bringing new truths to those associated with the established denominations of his day. This is not to be unkind to those institutions, but it is a fact that many of their members had their minds already made up on most subjects. Yet Paul spoke fearlessly in the established synagogue at Ephesus:

“And he went into the synagogue, and spoke boldly for the space of three months, disputing [reasoning] and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers [certain ones] were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, ...”

• *Acts 19:8–9*

Some members in that organization hardened their hearts against the new teachings of Paul and persuaded other members not to listen to such “evil” teaching. There are always traditionalists who wish to retain the teachings they have been reared in. This is understandable. But with Paul the situation became so intolerable that:

“... he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing [Greek: reasoning] daily in the school of one Tyrannus.³ And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”

• *Acts 19:9–10*

What was this “School of Tyrannus”? Such schools were well known in the Greek world. **“The school was a public hall for lecturing and discussion”** (Speaker’s Commentary). These schools were places where open and free symposiums could take place on almost any subject.⁴ It was

1. Denominations are losing appeal and membership in America and Europe. *DWS*

2. “ASK” was inserted where “Foundation for Biblical Research” occurred in the 1978 original. *DWS*

3. The manuscript D Syriac (Western text) adds after “Tyrannus” (Acts 19:9), **“from the 5th hour unto the 10th.”** This would mean that they spent 5 hours learning and studying as a group. *DWS*

quite common for the free exchange of ideas to be given in “market places” (Acts 17:17) or any open place of a city where people could congregate for such purposes, for example Mars hill in Athens (Acts 17:22).

This was also done in organized schools. Paul took advantage of such places and utilized them often. Ephesus was no exception. Paul left the denominational environment of the synagogue and stayed two whole years in the School of Tyrannus teaching on a daily basis. There were no restrictions placed on Paul in the “School.” Clearly, the spread of Christianity was aided tremendously through these types of institutions where open and free discussions were allowed — and even encouraged!

However, Paul’s experience in trying to work within already established religious organizations was seldom successful. True, he was able to teach in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia for two weeks — but that was all the authorities could take:

“The Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.”

• Acts 13:50

They also taught in the synagogue in Iconium. Again they were run out of the city (Acts 14:1–6). Later, Paul spoke in the established synagogue at Thessalonica, but again the authorities prohibited his teaching in a short three weeks (Acts 17:1–9). He went to the synagogue in Berea. Even though the people were more noble than the others because they were more scripturally oriented (Acts 17:11), he was still expelled from the city (Acts 17:13–15).

Being in the Temple of Jerusalem was even worse. Paul made no attempt to dispute in that sacred enclosure (Acts 24:12), but when he went in to perform the acts of purification, he was apprehended and put in prison (Acts 24:18, 26:21).

These events show the normal reaction of people when they find their traditional and “comfortable” doctrines being disturbed by new teachings. There was almost always hostility to the teaching of Paul in established organizations. But conversely, when Paul spoke in the market place, on Mars hill, in his own hired house, or in the School of Tyrannus, there was no uproar, no persecution. Why? Because these were the designated places in which free and open discussions or lectures could take place.

Some of the philosophers disagreed with Paul when he lectured on Mars hill, but he was not persecuted. Many even said: **“We will hear you again of this matter”** (Acts 17:32). They were willing to listen. Though Paul was certainly persecuted by both Jews and Gentiles for his teachings, this was not done in places designated for open and free discussion. These facilities advanced the teachings of Christianity in a profound way.

From the very start of ASK, we considered ourselves an institution similar to the ancient “schools” — an organization devoted to open and free discussions on all biblical subjects. In such a context, true research and learning can thrive. This is needful in our age which downplays the necessity for full biblical teaching. Institutions like the “School of Tyrannus” can be of real help today as they were in the time of Paul. ASK is such a “school.” We pray that you will be behind our efforts to uncover the full teachings of the Bible. The open and free environment for learning that we have in ASK is the very thing needed to accomplish the task. We hope we can be useful to you and to all of God’s people as Paul used the “School of Tyrannus.”

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4. Some scholars speculate that this may have been a private synagogue rather than a public meeting hall. A private synagogue would be more open to ideas than the public synagogue at Ephesus. DWS