**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**ACTS-073. GALLIO by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"14. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong: or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: 15. But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters."*

*Acts 18:14-15*

There is something very touching in the immortality of fame which comes to the men who for a moment pass across the Gospel story, like shooting stars kindled for an instant as they enter our atmosphere. How little Gallio dreamed that he would live for ever in men's mouths by reason of this one judicial dictum! He was Seneca's brother, and was possibly leavened by his philosophy and indisposed to severity. He has been unjustly condemned. There are some striking lessons from the story.

**I. The remarkable anticipation of the true doctrine as to the functions of civil magistrates.**

Gallio draws a clear distinction between conduct and opinion, and excepts the whole of the latter region from his sway. It is the first case in which the civil authorities refused to take cognisance of a charge against a man on account of his opinions. Nineteen hundred years have not brought all tribunals up to that point yet. Gallio indeed was influenced mainly by philosophic contempt for the trivialities of what he thought a superstition. We are influenced by our recognition of the sanctity of individual conviction, and still more by reverence for truth and by the belief that it should depend only on its own power for progress and on itself for the defeat of its enemies.

**II. The tragic mistake about the nature of the Gospel which men make.**

There is something very pathetic in the erroneous estimates made by those persons mentioned in Acts who some once or twice come in contact with the preachers of Christ. How little they recognise what was before them! Their responsibility is in better hands than ours. But in Gallio there is a trace of tendencies always in operation.

We see in him the practical man's contempt for mere ideas. The man of affairs, be he statesman or worker, is always apt to think that things are more than thoughts. Gallio, proconsul in Corinth, and his brother official, Pilate, in Jerusalem, both believed in powers that they could see. The question of the one, for an answer to which he did not wait, was not the inquiry of a searcher after truth, but the exclamation of a sceptic who thought all the contradictory answers that rang through the world to be demonstrations that the question had no answer. The impatient refusal of the other to have any concern in settling such matters was steeped in the same characteristically Roman spirit of impatient distrust and suspicion of mere ideas. He believed in Roman force and authority, and thought that such harmless visionaries as Paul and his company might be allowed to go their own way, and he did not know that they carried with them a solvent and constructive power before which the solid-seeming structure of the Empire was destined to crumble, as surely as thick-ribbed ice before the sirocco.

And how many of us believe in wealth and material progress, and regard the region of truth as very shadowy and remote! This is a danger besetting us all. The true forces that sway the world are ideas.

We see in Gallio supercilious indifference to mere theological subtleties. To him Paul's preaching and the Jews' passionate denials of it seemed only a squabble about words and names. Probably he had gathered his impression from Paul's eager accusers, who would charge him with giving the name of Christ to Jesus.

Gallio's attitude was partly Stoical contempt for all superstitions, partly, perhaps, an eclectic belief that all these warring religions were really saying the same thing and differed only in words and names; and partly sheer indifference to the whole subject. Thus Christianity appears to many in this day.

What is it in reality? Not words but power: a Name, indeed, but a Name which is life. Alas for us, who by our jangling have given colour to this misconception!

We see in Gallio the mistake that the Gospel has little relation to conduct. Gallio drew a broad distinction between conduct and opinion, and there he was right. But he imagined that this opinion had nothing to do with conduct, and how wrong he was there we need not elaborate.

The Gospel is the mightiest power for shaping conduct.

**III. The ignorant levity with which men pass the crisis of their lives.**

How little Gallio knew of what a possibility was opened out before him! Angels were hovering unseen. We seldom recognise the fateful moments of our lives till they are past.

The offer of salvation in Christ is ever a crisis. It may never be repeated. Was Gallio ever again brought into contact with Paul or Paul's Lord? We know not. He passes out of sight, the search-light is turned in another direction, and we lose him in the darkness. The extent of his criminality is in better hands than ours, though we cannot but let our thoughts go forward to the time when he, like us all, will stand at the judgment bar of Jesus, no longer a judge but judged. Let us hope that before he passed hence, he learned how full of spirit and of life the message was, which he once took for a mere squabble about words and names, and thought too trivial to occupy his court. And let us remember that the Jesus, whom we are sometimes tempted to judge as of little importance to us, will one day judge us, and that His judgment will settle our fate for evermore.