

## THE BIBLE CLASS.

## PAUL'S ROMAN CITIZENSHIP.

(For Aug. 22nd.—Acts xxii. 23—xxiii. 35.)

BY PHILIP A. NORDKILL, D.D.

That Paul escaped from Jerusalem with his life, and was enabled to continue his work in any measure was due to two facts; first, Christianity had not yet been put under the ban of the empire as an illegal religion, and, secondly, Paul enjoyed the invaluable political privilege of being a Roman citizen. To the latter fact his deliverance from possible death at the hands of the Romans, and from the murderous hatred of his countrymen was mainly due.

## PAUL'S APPEAL TO HIS ROMAN CITIZENSHIP.

Paul's treatment by the Jewish mob before his arrest and after his address on the castle steps convinced Lysias, the commanding Roman officer, that a notorious desperado had fallen into his hands. Not being acquainted with the Hebrew language, he drew the most evil surmises from the effect of Paul's speech on the populace, and felt justified in exhorting a confession from the prisoner by torture. This was a common mode of securing evidence from suspected persons, a mode which had been discarded in Christian lands only within a couple of centuries. Paul had already been partially stripped and bound fast to a post for the scourging, which might be so inflicted as to cause death, when a simple and quiet question put another face on the matter. "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" The proceedings were instantly stopped, and the prisoner unbound, while the centurion in charge hastened to Lysias with the excited exclamation. "You better look out how you treat this man, for he is a Roman." A few questions directed to the prisoner himself proved not only that in the matter of citizenship he stood on a higher place than Lysias himself, but that the latter had overstepped his legal authority on a vital point; for the Sempronian law punished "by the sentence of the people" any official, however high his rank, who should presume to scourge a Roman citizen. Lysias and all concerned were from that moment at the mercy of the prisoner, and this fact was clearly revealed in their subsequent treatment of him. In thus utilizing his Roman rights Paul taught that a Christian is not bound to accept without remonstrance any indignity that may be inflicted upon him, nor is he to court persecution. The fact that on at least previous occasions Paul had not availed himself of his right to escape such beatings (2 Cor. xi. 25) shows that, guided by the Spirit, he foresaw greater advantages to the Gospel from a patient endurance of sufferings, than from an exercise of his lawful rights. This certainly appears to have been the case in Philippi (Acts xvi. 19-40). In Jerusalem on the contrary, no suffering, not even death, would have softened Paul's enemies toward the Gospel.

## PAUL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN.

The next morning Paul was brought before the Jewish supreme court. His claim of innocence infuriated the high priest and drew from Paul a retort, about which men have differed as much as about the correctness of his course in following the advice of the elders. If it was not altogether Christlike, certainly the apology was. The hearing quickly degenerated into a storm of factions in which Paul's life was again in peril, and again he was rescued by the power of heathen Rome, which, in strong contrast to God's chosen people, threw itsegis over its imperiled citizen, while they would have murdered their countryman for bringing them a message from God.

## PAUL RESCUED FROM JEWISH PLOTS.

The failure of the Sanhedrin to condemn Paul convinced the more unscrupulous of his enemies that legal processes were too slow, if not in vain altogether. Cold-blooded assassination seemed to them the surest and safest way of annihilating him. But the plot was revealed, and again the power of Rome asserted itself in placing him beyond the reach of harm. Our view of this series of events is quite superficial if we see only their external features. Behind the hatred and malignity of the Jews, and behind the respect for law which characterized the Romans, unconsciously to themselves, the great power of the spiritual world struggled for supremacy around the person of Paul. Satan strove with all the might that he could muster to crush him. On the other hand, that Providence which sleeplessly watches over good men until their appointed work is done, guarded him from the malice of all his foes. In the defeat of the former we read a prophecy of an everlasting overthrow. In the victory of the latter, a preface of eternal triumph. The very means which the Jews employed to accomplish their nefarious ends were those which set in motion a series of

agencies whereby this messenger of the cross was planted in the very heart of the empire, comparatively free to accomplish his divine mission, and wholly removed from their power to oppose or to harm. So the powers of evil, in their conflict with God, continually overreach themselves, and are made blind instruments for promoting those gracious purposes of mercy which they imagine their fury hinders.

## FOR THE SABBATH SCHOOL.

## S. S. ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO.

The Normal Examination of the Sabbath School Association of Ontario will be held on Friday, September 17th. Application forms have been mailed to all normal students so far as the names are known to the Association. If any are desiring to write on the examinations who has not received an application form, will send name and address to the Corresponding Secretary, 25 Manning Arcade, Toronto, full instructions will at once be sent. The names must be received before September 1st.

The 32nd Annual Provincial Convention of the Sabbath School Association of Ontario, will be held at Hamilton on Oct. 27th, 28th and 29th. The programme committee have been at work for some time and expect to present one of the best programmes ever given by the Association. Professor Excell will have charge of the music during the Convention.

JESSIE A. MUNRO,  
Corresponding Secretary.

## INTERNATIONAL S. S. LESSON.

LESSON VIII.—THE EXCELLENCE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE.—AUG. 22.

(1 Cor. xiii. 1-13.)

GOLDEN TEXT—"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."—1 Cor. xiii. 13.

TIME AND PLACE—A. D. 57. Written from Ephesus to Corinth.

INTRODUCTION—Our last lesson was taken from the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and from that part of it which related to certain matters of controversy which had been prominent in the church at Corinth. We now have another lesson from the same epistle, but in this all questions of controversy are left behind, and the great principle of Christian love as controlling and moulding the Christian life is presented.

VERSE BY VERSE.—1. "Tongues."—Referring to the gift of tongues conferred on the early church on the day of Pentecost and afterwards. "Charity."—In the Revised Version the word is translated *love*, and means the principle of Christian love—love to God and love to man. Charity in modern English has a more restricted sense, and stands for acts of benevolence. "Sounding brass."—Some kind of musical instrument is referred to, probably something like a gong. "Tinkling cymbal."—Also a musical instrument, much like that now known by the same name. They illustrate a noisy profession of religion, which is not moved by the principle of Christian love.

2. "Gift of prophecy."—This was another of the miraculous gifts bestowed on the early church. It was a speaking under divine guidance, resulting in foretelling future events. "Mysteries, . . . knowledge."—The truths of divine revelation. "Faith, so that I could remove mountains."—A miracle-working faith. "I am nothing."—*I. e.*, I am nothing as a Christian.

3. "Bestow all my goods, . . . give my body."—Though I am very benevolent, very self-sacrificing. Men have often been willing to purchase their salvation by giving their wealth, or by suffering, but this profiteth nothing, *i. e.*, it is of no avail in the work of salvation. Unless the principle of love is the great motive prompting such gifts and such sacrifices, they avail nothing.

4. "Suffereth long."—Endures patiently. "Envieth not."—Is not vexed at the good which others enjoy. "Vaunteth not."—Does not boast. "Is not puffed up."—With pride.

5. "Unseemly."—Discourteously. "Not . . . provoked."—Easily should be omitted.

8. "Prophecies shall fail, . . . tongues shall cease."—They would cease to be special gifts to the church.

10. "That which is perfect."—The full revelation of love seems to be meant here in contrast with those gifts which were only temporary and partial.

11. "When I was a child, etc."—This is an illustration of the tenth verse.

12. "Now."—In the present life. "Through a glass."—Or rather, in a mirror. "Then."—In the future life. "Face to face."—We shall then see things, not as they are reflected, illustrated to us by earthly comparison, but in their reality. "Even as also I am known."—*I. e.*, perfectly.

\*An Exposition of Lesson 34 in *The Bible Study Union Sunday School Lesson* on "The Three Great Apostles."