

## Talking To Pilate (2)

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Pontus Pilate, governor of Judea during the time of Jesus, seems to be a man with conflicting interests. He spends such a great amount of time and energy trying to release Jesus, yet seems to fall so quickly when he is unable. Perhaps Pilate reverses his kindness because of frustration with the Jews; if they are going to be so unwilling to cooperate, he would have nothing more to do than to grant their wishes to the extreme. Another theory about the scourging is that Pilate may have believed that a thorough beating would be enough to satisfy the bloodlust of the Jewish mob. If Jesus was an innocent man, Pilate may have thought, then it would be better to beat Him and appease the crowd than to execute Him. Of course, this does not work because we see that the crowds cried all the more, “*Crucify, crucify!*” (John 19:6). When Pilate suggests that they go crucify Him themselves, they accuse Jesus of claiming to be the Son of God, which puts yet another layer of fear into Pilate’s heart. When it becomes obvious that the affair is about to explode into a riot, Pilate washes his hands and hands Jesus over to His doom.

The hand washing of Pilate is interesting. Just because Pilate washes his hands and proclaims his own innocence in the matter, does that absolve him of all responsibility and sin? While some would argue that it does, consider a few things about this scenario. First, Pilate had the authority to release Jesus at any time (John 19:10), so why did he not do it? If he honestly believed that He was free of any wrongdoing, then why give in to the multitudes and do what is obviously wrong? There were other Roman officials who remained stalwart in their determination to ignore the raucous affairs of the Jewish crowds, such as Gallio, proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12-17). Second, just because we disassociate ourselves from a crime, yet still commit it, does not mean we are free from responsibility!

- Jesus still died, and Pilate had an opportunity to do something about it.
- Despite the fact that Pilate is viewed in slightly sympathetic terms in John’s account, Jesus still reaffirms that what Pilate did was a sin (John 19:11).
- We do the same thing today with doctrinal debates. Instead of picking sides and standing for something, we metaphorically wash our hands by not participating in a fight, or not showing up for a controversy when the truth needs a representative.
- Being an approving witness to sin is just as bad as being the sinner (Romans 1:32, Proverbs 29:24).

### Pilate’s Authority and God’s Authority

*“You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin”* (John 19:11). Just as the idea is confirmed in Romans 13, the governments of this world are established by God for the fulfillment of His purposes. Also, notice the phrase at the end of the verse. Some have viewed this as proof that there are degrees of punishment for sins – since Pilate’s sin was not as bad as the Jews’ sin, he will not be punished as much for it. But that is missing the point, and it is illogical to assume such things. From other passages (Romans 1:28-32), it is clear that all sins are lumped together as equally punishable. Furthermore,

just because the Jews' sin was greater than Pilate's, that does not somehow mean his sin was good! Some will go to such an extreme, but we have to realize that Pilate's sin may have only been slightly less horrible than the Jews' sin.

The final argument made by the Jews is that if Pilate does not execute Jesus, he will be causing his own political demise. The argument is that Caesar is the only valid king in the land, and it is treason for Jesus to claim any authority. In the end, the Jews explain that Caesar is their only king (John 19:15). What a transition from their previous mentality! At one point, many of the Jews were eagerly seeking to crown Jesus king and now they wanted to crucify Him. Is it possible that some of the same people who were praising Jesus with shouts of "Hosanna" only days earlier were now crying, "Crucify Him"? Sin and self-will drive us to do some pretty heinous, regrettable things – a fact that Peter points out not too long after these events in Acts 2. In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, the apostle makes it clear that the present crowd bears responsibility for having Jesus killed. Fortunately, it's nothing but a message of hope in the end, as the very crime that made them guilty also facilitated the sacrifice that made their salvation possible!