

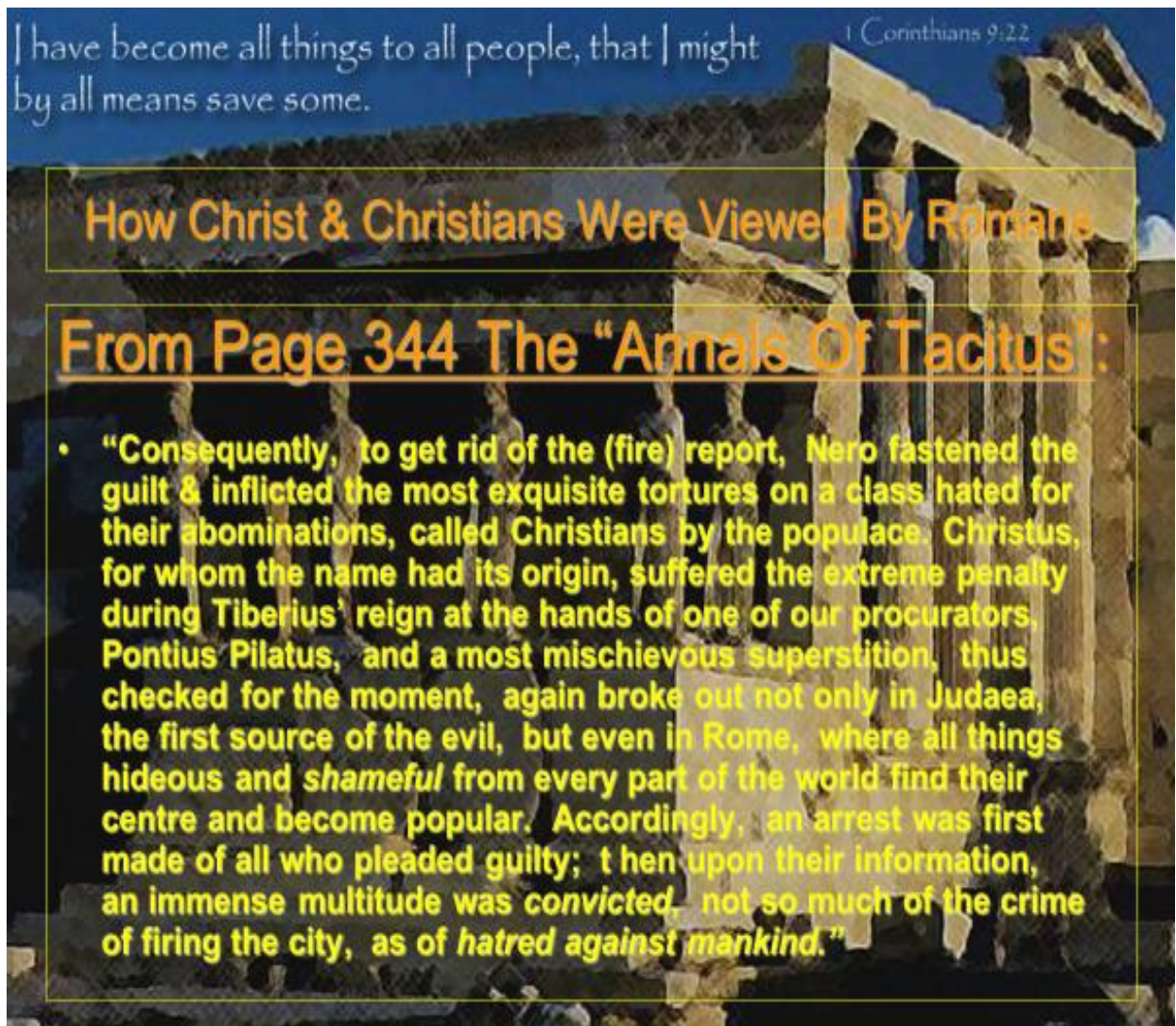
**Did The Writing Of One Bible Verse
Determine Paul's Fate Before Caesar?**



by David Lee Burris

Bruce Longenecker in *Thinking Through Paul* pages 172 – 173 Sets the Stage:

“No more than seven years after Paul wrote these [Roman] Christians, the emperor Nero targeted them to be scapegoats in a vicious and sadistic pogrom. In AD 64, much of the city of Rome burned down. Rightly or wrongly (probably the latter), popular opinion was that Nero himself had instigated the destruction of the city (if only to gain acreage for a newly positioned palace). In order to squelch the view and to distract attention from himself, Nero set upon the Christians, blaming them for anti-imperial subversion and the burning of the city. He ensured that many Christians experienced prolonged and excruciating deaths in the public arena. Perhaps as they were dying from their torture, some Christians recited words of comfort from Paul’s letter to them (phrases from Romans 6:8, 8:11-39, 12:1) – although this, of course, is mere speculation.”

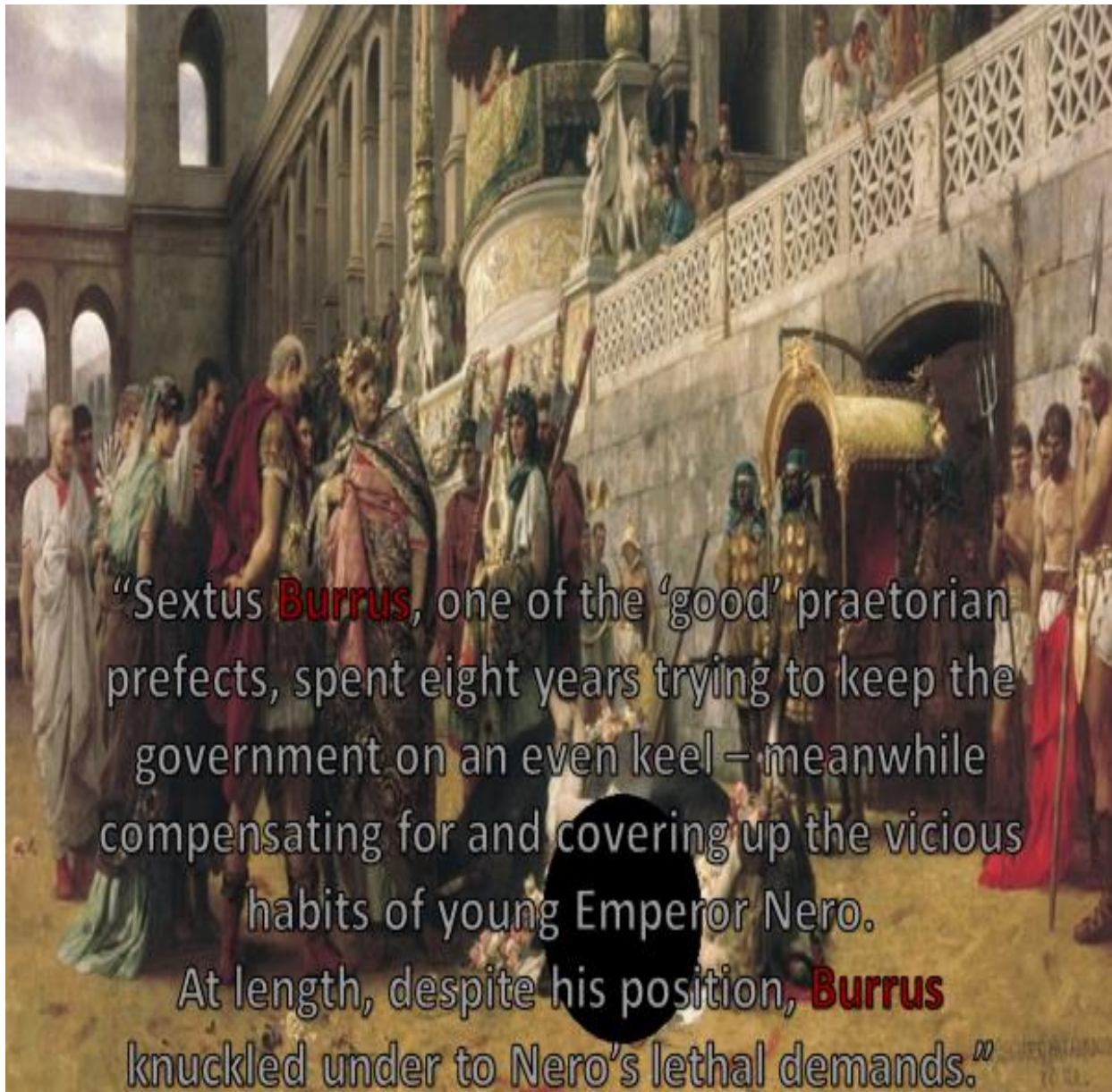


I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. 1 Corinthians 9:22

How Christ & Christians Were Viewed By Romans

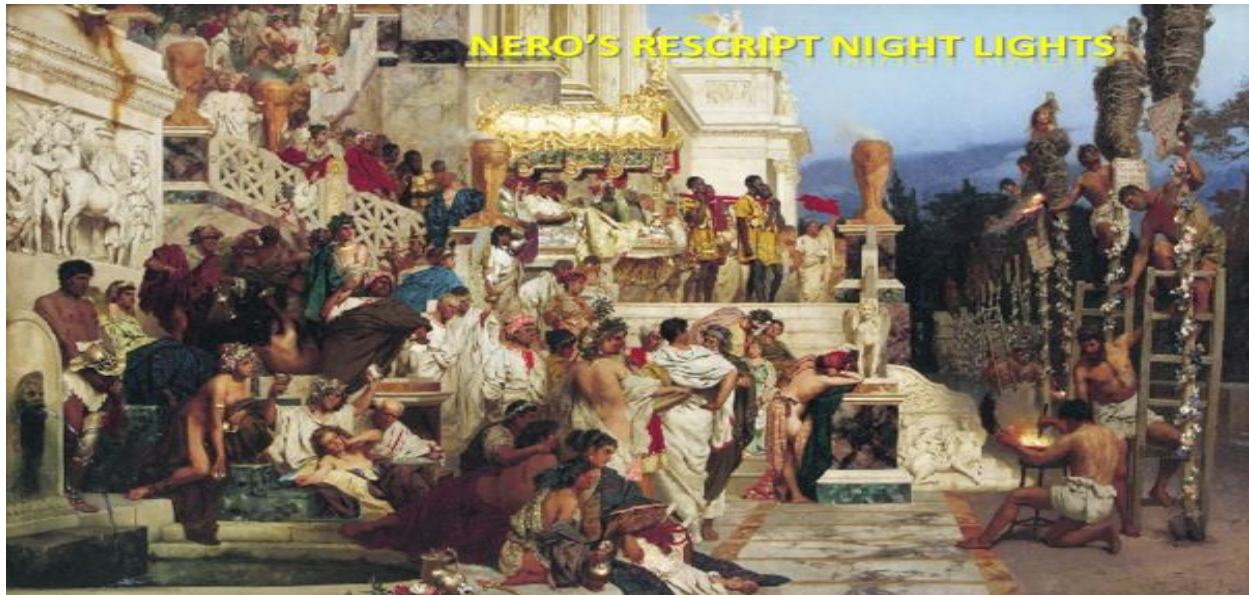
From Page 344 The “Annals Of Tacitus”:

- “Consequently, to get rid of the (fire) report, Nero fastened the guilt & inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, for whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during Tiberius’ reign at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and *shameful* from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then upon their information, an immense multitude was *convicted*, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of *hatred against mankind.*”



Bruce Longenecker in *Thinking Through Paul* pages 173–174 Extending Rationale

“The decimated and vastly depopulated groups of Christians in Rome may be referred to in 2nd Timothy 4:16 (written perhaps in the late 60s), which reads: ‘At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.’ In one reconstruction of the last stages of Paul’s life, this passage is understood as referencing Paul’s appearance in the halls of Roman justice in 66/67 or thereabouts, and demonstrating that Christians who survived Nero’s pogroms found it necessary to keep their head down and maintain a low profile, even when Paul himself was being tried before the emperor.”



NERO'S RESCRIPT NIGHT LIGHTS

Socially Christianity Was Considered A Threat To The Organization Of Society
Christianity Politically Intolerable Viewed As State Within A State



ROMAN OUTLOOK -

I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.

1 Corinthians 9:22

Tertullian 196 AD: Pagans Backlash

"The Christians are to blame for every disaster and every misfortune that befalls the people. If the Tiber rises to the walls, if the Nile fails to rise and flood the fields, if the sky withholds its rain, if there is earthquake or famine or plague, straightway the cry arises:
The Christians To The Lions!"

THREADLINE DISCUSSION ON A CHRISTIAN BLOGSITE INCLUDED THIS POSTING:



I have
FOUGHT the
good fight

I have
FINISHED
the race

I have
KEPT the faith

2 Tim 4:7

Some Christians believe and teach that we should always honor and respect those in authority, regardless of the evil that they commit. This persuasion is often based on some text found in one of Saint Paul's (aka the Apostle Paul) letters, Romans 13. However, as we examine one of the last acts of Saint Paul's life, we find a very different story. Let's consider the case of Paul and Nero.

Just about everyone has heard of Nero, the infamous Roman Caesar who supposedly played the fiddle while Rome burned. After he was widely suspected of setting fire to Rome himself, Nero cowardly deflected the blame and punishment onto Christians. The Roman historian Tacitus described the situation as follows:

"To get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.

"Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind [a hate crime?]. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to torture-stakes, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car."

The preceding gives us a hint regarding two of the emperor's compulsions; he loved chariot racing, and he hated Christians. His participation in chariot racing was initially limited to silly board games which he designed, but eventually that did not prove enough to satisfy Nero. He soon began practicing chariot driving in his garden, in front of a forced audience, his slaves. Even that, however, did not prove enough – Nero wanted nothing less than to win the chariot races at the Greek Olympiad. Another Roman historian, Seutonius Theodore Antikas describes how Nero worked that plan in his favor:



"Nero's best idea, however, was to postpone the 211th Olympiad from 65 to 67 AD to allow him more time to practice and train his teams of horses so that he himself might win at Olympia...."

So Nero went to Greece, where he entered his ten-horse chariot in the [tethrippon](#) event in the Olympiad, which was a dream come true for Nero. There was the minor problem that the teams were supposed to consist of four horses rather than ten, but Nero overcame that issue, most likely through bribery. During the race Nero was thrown off of his chariot, was helped back on by spectators, and was subsequently thrown again. Unable to continue the race after the second fall, Nero nevertheless was proclaimed the victor! The duly bribed judges decided that Nero deserved to be declared the victor, because he certainly would have won *if he would have finished the race!*

Nero [returned to Rome](#) a self-proclaimed hero:

"Returning from Greece ... he rode in the chariot which Augustus had used in his triumphs in days gone by, and wore a purple robe and a Greek cloak adorned with stars of gold, bearing on his head the Olympic crown and in his right hand the Pythian, while the rest were carried before him with inscriptions telling where he had won them and against what competitor. His car was followed by his clique as by the escort of triumphal procession, who shouted that they were the attendants of Augustus and the soldiers of his triumph. Then through the arch of the Circus Maximus, which was thrown down, he made his way across the Velabrum and Forum to the Palatine and temple of Apollo. All along the route victims were slain, the streets were sprinkled from time to time with perfume, while birds, ribbons, and sweetmeats were showered upon him."

Nero's glory was not long-lived; a few months later (in AD 68) he had to resort to suicide in order to not suffer at the hands of Galba, who overthrew him. The Greeks quickly eliminated Nero's dubious "Olympic victories."

"Soon after his death in 68 AD, Nero's name was scratched from the lists of the Elean officials, and the counterfeit 211th Olympiad was declared as 'Anolympiad' [non-Olympiad] by the ten Hellanodikai judges."

Meanwhile, much the same was occurring in Rome.

"In Rome, Nero's successor, Galba ... proposed to the senate that every statue erected in honour of Nero's Olympic victories be destroyed and that the huge bribe Nero was purported to have paid the Elean judges should be returned to Rome. It appears that the venerable emperor had in fact bribed the Hellanodikai with a ten thousand drachmae "package deal" (one thousand per judge), an exorbitant sum by today's standards. The anti-Neronian measures were carried out to the last detail by his Roman successors."

During that short period of time (AD 67–68) between Nero's "victory" in an unfinished race & his inglorious death, he was widely considered a buffoon. As the victory memorials went up around the city of Rome, and Nero's self-composed songs about his exploits were performed, the common people were just as aware as Galba and others that his victory was false. One can imagine the parodies, graffiti, and jokes which circulated throughout Rome, ridiculing the "hero" Nero. Some examples of this are recorded by Jürgen Malitz, who [states](#):

"... he was treated with the utmost abuse and scurrility. On top of one of his statues was placed the figure of a chariot with a Greek inscription that 'Now indeed he has a race to run; let him be gone.' A little bag was tied about another, with a ticket containing these words: 'What could I do?' – 'Truly thou hast merited the sack.' Some person likewise wrote on the pillars in the Forum 'that he even woke *the cocks* with his singing.' And many, in the night-time, pretending to find fault with their servants, frequently called for a *Vindex*."

[Note: This call for a Vindex was a [double entendre](#), which could be understood either as a request for [arbitration](#) (with the servant) or a call for [Gaius Iulius Vindex](#) to liberate them.]

Into this scene enters the [Apostle Paul](#), a Greek-speaking Jewish Roman citizen. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem for "disturbing the peace" (or something like that ... [Acts 21:27–28](#)), and fearing for his life, he appealed for an audience before the highest Roman civil authority, Caesar ([Acts 25:11–12](#)). Unfortunately for Paul, the Caesar to whom he appealed was Nero, who as we have seen above, was not particularly fond of Christians, nor was he completely sane. Even the Romans soon realized the error (humanly speaking) of Paul's appeal, for [Acts 26:32](#) says, "Agrippa said to Festus, 'This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.'" But the appeal stood; Paul was sent to Rome.



The timeline of Paul's life is a little fuzzy; some scholars place his death as early as AD 60, and others as late as AD 68. In the [later death scenario](#), Paul was put to death by Nero in spring AD 68, after Nero's "victorious" return to Rome and shortly before Nero's own death through suicide that summer.

Date	Life of Paul	Contemporary Events
36	Paul's conversion	-
37	At Damascus	Death of TIBERIUS and accession of GAIUS (Caligula)
38	Flight from Damascus to Jerusalem, then to Tarsus	-
39 - 43	Paul preaches in Syria and Cilicia, making his headquarters in Tarsus.	Death of Caligula; accession of CLAUDIUS. Judea and Samaria given to Herod Agrippa I. Invasion of Britain by Aulus Plautius.
44	Paul brought from Tarsus to Antioch; stays there one year before the famine.	Death of Herod Agrippa I. Cuspius Fadus, procurator, succeeds to the government of Judea.
45	Visits Jerusalem with Barnabas to relieve the famine.	-
46	At Antioch	Tiberius Alexander made procurator of Judea.
47	At Antioch	-
48	First Missionary Journey - from Antioch to Cyprus, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe	Agrippa II (Acts 25) made king of Chalcis.
49	... and back through the same places to Antioch	Cumanus made procurator of Judea
50	Paul and Barnabas attend the Council of Jerusalem	Caractacus captured by Romans in Britain; Cogdinus, father of Claudia (? 2 Tim. 4:21) assists the Romans in Britain.
51	Second Missionary Journey - from Antioch to Cilicia, Lycaonia, Galatia	-
52	... Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth (writes 1 THESSALONIANS)	Claudius expels the Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2).
53	At Corinth; writes 2 THESSALONIANS	Tetrarchy of Trachonitis given to Agrippa II; Felix procurator.
54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spring: leaves Corinth and reaches Jerusalem at Pentecost; goes to Antioch Autumn: Third Missionary Journey - goes to Ephesus. 	-
55/56	At Ephesus	-
57	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spring: writes 1 CORINTHIANS Summer: leaves Ephesus for Macedonia where he writes 2 CORINTHIANS in Autumn. Winter: goes to Corinth, writes GALATIANS 	-
58	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spring: writes ROMANS, leaves Corinth, going by Philippi and Miletus to ... Summer: ...Jerusalem at Pentecost. He is arrested and sent to Caesarea. 	-
59	At Caesarea	Nero murders Agrippina
60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Autumn: Sent to Rome by Festus 	Felix is recalled and is succeeded by Festus
60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Autumn: Sent to Rome by Festus Winter: Shipwrecked at Malta 	Felix is recalled and is succeeded by Festus
61	Spring: Arrives at Rome At Rome	Embassy of Jews comes from Jerusalem to petition about the wall.
62	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spring: Writes PHILEMON, COLOSSIANS, EPHESIANS Autumn: Writes PHILIPPIANS. 	Burrus dies; Albinus succeeds Festus as procurator of Judea; Nero marries Poppaea.
63	Paul acquitted at Rome; goes to Macedonia and Asia Minor	Daughter Claudia born to Poppaea
64	Paul goes to Spain (?)	Great fire at Rome; Roman Christians blamed and persecuted by Nero.
65	In Spain (?)	Gessius Florus made procurator of Judea; conspiracy of Piso and death of Seneca.
66	Summer: from Spain (?) to Asia	Jewish War begins.
67	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer: Writes 1 TIMOTHY from Macedonia Autumn: Writes TITUS from Ephesus. Winter: At Nicopolis 	-
68	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spring: In prison at Rome, writes 2 TIMOTHY Summer: Paul executed at Nero's orders. 	Death of Nero in middle of June.

During this imprisonment in Rome, whenever it was, Paul wrote his last epistle, which was his second to Timothy. Shortly thereafter, the Saint was put to death. While held in Rome by Nero, Paul wrote ([2 Timothy 4:7–8](#)):

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."

Note the *sous entendu* meaning – "I, unlike Nero, have finished the race, in completing the course I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness rather than a cheater's crown, which the Lord, the righteous and incorruptible judge, will award to me ..." [all text in italics added by me]

Was this Paul's intent? Did he really mean to poke Nero in the eye? Paul was certainly aware of all the anti-Nero talk and activity going on around him. The contents of his prison letters surely were reviewed by the emperor's officials; could he have unintentionally penned his words that carelessly? As a Christian, I believe Paul's choice of words was intentional and God-honoring; God's Word is inspired, not a word of it was written by accident.

Assuming the [late timeline](#) is correct, the only conclusion I can make is that the Apostle Paul, for whatever reason, and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, intentionally penned these inflammatory words, which very likely contributed to his condemnation. The fact is, a few short weeks later Saint Paul was dead, martyred by Nero.

The Apostle Paul's example makes it clear to us that it is not a person's rank in the state which determines whether he is worthy of respect and honor. As we hear the chorus of statist saying that "we should respect our president" or any other government official, we can remember the Apostle Paul who, like the Lord Himself, was "no respecter of persons." *

Sometimes resistance, or just a good poke in the eye, is exactly what is needed; Christians can follow the example of Saint Paul in good conscience, and in good fun. Though there may be consequences, we need to have confidence in the rightness of our cause and in the goodness of the Lord, and let the chips fall where they may. – *Greg Heller*

* We must still respect the office even when the office-holder deserves little respect. - D.L. Burris

