

THOSE CRAZY CHRISTIANS!

What do we mean when we say someone is a maniac? Sometimes we mean that the person is behaving wildly, perhaps even dangerously. “He drives like a maniac!” But it can also be used of someone who is simply delusional or is babbling nonsense.

Our word “mania” is taken from a word Luke used in Acts 26 as he wrote of Paul’s defense before King Agrippa II, and the challenge from the Roman governor, Felix. Paul had presented a sketch of his previous life as a violent persecutor of the church, followed by his conversion and subsequent work as preacher of the gospel of Christ. Governor Felix, who had invited Agrippa to hear Paul’s defense, interrupted the apostle to say in v. 24, “Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!” “Beside yourself” and “mad” are from the same word: mania. In essence, Festus was saying, “Paul, you are a maniac! Much learning is driving you crazy!”

Paul’s response to the governor uses the same term: “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason” (26:25). No, Paul was not a maniac; he was not crazy. To the contrary, his words were those of truth (not delusion or nonsense). Another Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, had scoffed at the very idea of “truth” (John 18:38). Some people do the same today. Mention truth in the absolute sense and you are likely to be told you are delusional!

Paul also said that his words were those of “reason.” That term is elsewhere translated “sobriety” and “sound mind.” It is the very opposite of “mania.” It’s the same word that Luke used in Luke 8:35 to describe a man who had formerly been inhabited by a legion of demons, but had been healed by Jesus. The evil spirits had caused the poor man to live in the cemetery and go without clothes. But after Jesus cast out the demons, the people in that area found the man sitting

clothed and “in his right mind.” Here in Acts 26, Paul was not a maniac, but just the opposite. Paul was no babbling kook. Note his calmness as he replies to the governor as “most noble Festus.” Paul was not particularly upset by the insulting remarks. He had written earlier to the Corinthians that the unbelieving world looks upon Christians as fools (1 Corinthians 4:10). So now he simply continued reasoning with King Agrippa as he had been doing before Felix interrupted.

After hearing Jesus’ claim to be the Good Shepherd, His critics also accused Him of being mad; they attributed it to His having a demon! (John 10:20). To their hard, unbelieving hearts, the Lord’s words probably sounded like the raving of a madman. But more receptive people realized that “these are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” (10:21).

Do not be surprised if our own unbelieving world thinks Christians are crazy! Why should the world view us any more favorably than it viewed Jesus? Jesus was not intimidated by the insults of His critics. Paul was not intimidated by Festus’ rude remarks. Christians today must not permit themselves to be silenced by the world’s scorn and ridicule. Unfortunately there is some real craziness going on in the name of religion, and we wisely distance ourselves from that. But if the world thinks we’re crazy, it just might be because we’re doing something right.