

Paul had tried to help the Jerusalem Jews realize that he was not opposed to Jews obeying the Laws of Moses by going through a purification ritual with several other Jewish brothers in Christ. When the time came for them to bring a sacrifice, the Jews who had come from Asia Minor saw him in the temple. They wrongly assumed he had brought Trophimus with him and thereby defiled the temple. Trophimus was a Gentile who accompanied Paul in the streets of Jerusalem. They started beating Paul until the Romans intervened. Paul was given a chance to speak to them, so he shared the story of his conversion from one who persecuted Jesus and His followers, to an ardent follower of Jesus as the Messiah. But when he told them God sent him to the Gentiles, pandemonium ensued. We have seen how something very similar happened to Jesus when He preached in the synagogue of Nazareth and spoke of Gentiles receiving His message (Luke 4:24-28<sup>i</sup>).

*<sup>22</sup> Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live." Acts 22:22* In John 19:15<sup>ii</sup> we read that the crowd cried out before another Roman ruler regarding Jesus, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" History was repeating itself, for Paul had said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Galatians 2:20<sup>iii</sup> Was it the thought of a Gentile in the temple, or was it the fact that the Messiah was to be a light to the nations (Isaiah 49:6<sup>iv</sup>)? If Jesus was the light of the world (John 9:5<sup>v</sup>), did they think they would lose their special status with God? What they did not understand is that it is by faith that we are children of Abraham, the father of faith, not by flesh and blood (Romans 4:3-5<sup>vi</sup>; John 8:37-39<sup>vii</sup>). It reminds me of the introduction to the Gospel of John. *<sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.* John 1:11-13 There are promises to the physical descendants of Abraham, but becoming a child of God is a spiritual birth through faith (John 1:12<sup>viii</sup>; Romans 8:14-15<sup>ix</sup>). That is what Jesus taught Nicodemus in John chapter three (John 3:5-6<sup>x</sup>). Proclaiming this need to humbly come to God and be reborn will anger those who think they are just fine because of their works, whether those works are religious or secular. They think, "How dare you tell us we are not good enough!" But no one is good enough (Romans 3:23<sup>xi</sup>). That is the point of the Gospel and the reason we need a Savior.

*<sup>23</sup> And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, <sup>24</sup> the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this.* Acts 22:23-24 The Greek here is unclear with what the Jews did with their robes. Most likely they took off their outer robe and shook it as a sign that they considered Paul worthy of judgment. Lysias, the tribune, had no idea why they were in such an uproar over what Paul had said. Lysias would most likely have not been able to understand the Hebrew

with which Paul defended himself so he proceeded to have Paul examined by scourging. Roman interrogation was brutal. If they didn't think you gave an honest answer, the whip came down over your back. (See illustration) It would be similar to how Jesus was scourged before the crucifixion (John 19:1<sup>xii</sup>), but on this point the similarity with Jesus differed as Paul would escape the scourging with the flagellum,<sup>xiii</sup> a whip of leather strips with bone and metal attached to them.

*25 But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?"* Acts 22:25 God chose Paul, a Jewish man who knew the Scriptures and had Roman citizenship, to go throughout the Roman world with the Gospel. That privileged Roman citizenship spared Paul in some situations and enabled him to continue to spread the good news. Romans could not be scourged without a trial and conviction of a serious crime. If they scourged him, they could have been prosecuted. Paul may have waited until he was bound to speak of his citizenship so as to have some legal leverage over his captors.

*26 When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen."*<sup>27</sup> *So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes."* Acts 22:26-27 The centurion in charge of interrogating Paul warned the tribune. Lysias then put the question to Paul in a straight forward way. To lie about Roman citizenship was punishable even to the point of death (cf. Epictetus, *Diss.* 3.24, 41; Suetonius, *Vita Claud.* 25), which is why he would expect an honest answer. Paul may have carried a small wooden engraved note regarding his citizenship, but even if he did not have one, the risk to Lysias was too great to doubt Paul. It was Lysias duty to have asked Paul about his status, something he failed to do. Paul's name was somewhat unusual, and in the eastern part of the empire it was usually given to those of higher social status (Ludemann, *Early Christianity*, p. 241). Apparently Lysias hadn't even asked Paul his name. Paul said he was a citizen of Tarsus, but at that time one could have dual citizenship (Acts 21:39<sup>xiv</sup>).

*28 The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I am a citizen by birth."* Acts 22:28 By A.D. 50 the corruption of selling citizenship had become a real problem with Roman officials under the emperor Claudius, whose name the tribune had taken. That suggests he'd become a free man through someone in Claudius' service. Claudius Lysias may have been trying to get Paul to admit to bribing an official for his citizenship. However, it turned out to benefit Paul, for Paul was legally born a Roman citizen, which put him on a higher social order than Lysias. This was another advantage he now held in his confinement.

*29 So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.* Acts 22:29 The soldiers knew there could be serious repercussions for treating a Roman citizen as they had treated Paul. This would work in Paul's favor in the coming days.

*<sup>30</sup> But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them.* Acts 22:30 Since Lysias can't interrogate him, he thought that by bringing Paul before the chief priests and council he might learn what the commotion was all about. He probably now had an interpreter there who could translate the discussion from Aramaic to Latin. He must prepare a statement of facts about the case to present to a Roman ruler who will judge Paul to be innocent or guilty of a crime under Roman Law.

*<sup>1</sup> And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day."* Acts 23:1 Paul is not hanging his head as if he has done something wrong. He knows he has the truth on his side. He also knows that the leaders of the nation are resisting the work of God in rejecting Jesus and the gospel message. He looked them right in the eye with all conviction and told them he had lived according to his conscience. That tells us that even when Paul persecuted believers, he was doing what he believed was right (1 Timothy 1:13<sup>xv</sup>). Then when he went to the Gentiles with the gospel he whole-heartedly believed he was obeying God. Not many of us can say our entire life was lived in good conscience before God!

*<sup>2</sup> And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.* Acts 23:2 Here we have one more similarity with Jesus at his trial before the same council (John 18:22<sup>xvi</sup>). While the setting is really a Roman pretrial to determine the facts of the case, the high priest felt he could order Paul to be struck. *Everything we learn from Josephus about this chief priest suggests that the action he is said to take here is quite believable and in character. The son of Nedebaeus, Ananias was appointed by the brother of Herod Agrippa I (Herod of Chalcis) in a.d. 47 and remained in power until a.d. 58 or 59 (cf. Ant. 20.103). That he was far from priestly in character is shown both by his acts of bribery and by his allowing his servants to steal the tithes intended for the priests (Ant. 20.205–13). That he was prone to violence is shown by the fact that he was summoned to Rome because of his part in the ambush of various Samaritan pilgrims (Ant. 20.131). Ananias was also known for his pro-Roman sentiments, and this in the end got him killed by Jewish zealots when the Jewish war with Rome started in a.d. 66 (War 2.441–43; cf. 2.426–29<sup>xvii</sup>).*

*<sup>3</sup> Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?"* Acts 23:3 The high priest was to determine if Paul broke Jewish law in any serious way, but while doing so began by breaking Jewish law (Leviticus 19:15<sup>xviii</sup>). Jesus had also alluded to Jewish law being broken when He was tried by the high priest who would ask that for Him to be crucified (John 18:21<sup>xix</sup>). We have every right to ask that law be upheld.

Apparently, Paul saw right through Ananias. A whitewashed wall was a reference to a wall that looked good on the outside but was crumbling within, in other words, a hypocrite. Did Paul discern this when he looked on them intently? Were his words a

prophetic utterance? In A.D. 66, which was just eight years after this event, the zealot leader Menahem executed Ananias for his cooperation with Rome. Luke most likely penned this account before that came to pass.

*<sup>4</sup> Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?"* Acts 23:4 Paul had been away from Jerusalem for the last five years and away from Jewish leadership for decades and may not have recognized him. Apparently, for this sudden meeting, Ananias did not wear the robes of the high priest.

*<sup>5</sup> And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"* Acts 23:5 Paul gives somewhat of an apology by declaring his ignorance and quoting the Septuagint version of Exodus 22:28<sup>xx</sup>. We can only speculate whether the abuse caused Paul to reply in the flesh or whether it was a prophetic utterance, or if God determined to bring Paul's words to pass because Paul was correct in his assessment of the character of Ananias and Ananias' illegal action (1 Samuel 3:19<sup>xxi</sup>). Nevertheless, Paul put the Word of God above his feelings and apologized for his ignorance. We should take note that there will be times when we are in the right, but the Word of God or the Spirit of God will have us humble ourselves and submit to those God has placed in authority.

We have a real problem with this today in the Christian church. Depending on your side of the political spectrum, we curse the opposing sides' leadership. They may be evil, but God put them in office for His purposes. In Romans 13<sup>xxii</sup> and Titus 3<sup>xxiii</sup> we are told to be subject to the powers God puts in office and to speak evil of no one. We may criticize immoral or illegal practices, but we should refrain from personal attacks and all the contentious rhetoric that is dividing our culture. Stand for principles but leave the personal attacks to the ungodly. May God help us all. Amen?

*<sup>6</sup> Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial."* Acts 23:6 Lysias wants to know what the charges should be if any. Paul cuts to the chase and says it is because they don't believe Jesus rose from the dead, proving that He is the Messiah. The issue of resurrection was the chief point of contention between the Sadducees and Pharisees. Paul grew up a Pharisee and was even more convinced of resurrection of people of faith when he saw Jesus had risen from death (Philippians 3:5-6<sup>xxiv</sup>). He will speak of this in upcoming trials (Acts 24:15<sup>xxv</sup>). The Apostles were witnesses of the resurrection (Acts 1:22<sup>xxvi</sup>). It verified the fact that Jesus is the Messiah and that His sacrifice for sin was accepted (1 Corinthians 15:13-17<sup>xxvii</sup>).

After being punched in the mouth after his first comment, Paul knew that he would never get a fair hearing from these Jewish rulers (the Sanhedrin) who had already rejected Jesus as the Messiah. They heard Paul's testimony the day before and wanted him dead. So Paul used this point of contention to divide and conquer. It gave Lysias information to present to his authorities, that this was a religious argument and not a

civil matter or the breaking of any Roman law. Paul may have been hoping it would cause some of the Pharisees to rethink their rejection of Jesus as Messiah.

*<sup>7</sup> And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. <sup>8</sup> For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. <sup>9</sup> Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?"* Acts 23:7-9

The high priest and majority of the Sanhedrin were Sadducees. The two different groups wore a different style of clothing. While the Pharisees now side with Paul, they still aren't willing to say that Jesus was the Messiah. Pharisees also reached out to make Gentiles into Jewish converts (Matthew 23:15<sup>xxviii</sup>), so they had that in common with Paul as well. During the time between the uproar in the temple and this pretrial, it had probably been determined that Paul had not brought a Gentile into the temple, so that was no longer the issue.

*<sup>10</sup> And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.* Acts 13:10

Lysias was nearby to make sure that Paul's life was not in danger. As soon as things got out of hand, he sent his soldiers to bring Paul into the safety of the barracks, an area where no religious Jew would intentionally enter of their own will.

*<sup>11</sup> The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."* Acts 23:11

What a beautiful verse! If you have ever had the Lord stand by you and reassure your heart, these words remind you of those special times. If we will get quiet before the Lord and let the Word or the Spirit speak to us, we will find the courage we need for whatever we must face. When Jesus first called Paul, He told him he would carry His name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15<sup>xxix</sup>). He had done this to some degree already, but now he was on his way to witnessing to even higher authorities (Acts 27:23-24<sup>xxx</sup>). The gospel of Jesus is for every segment of society, every social standing, every ethnicity, and every culture. There is not a man, woman, or child who does not need to hear the liberating gospel of Jesus.

Paul was on his way to testifying of "the facts about" Jesus in Rome, the center of the world's power. He would be successful in sharing the facts about Jesus with the whole palace guard (Philippians 1:13<sup>xxxi</sup>). And what facts are those that Luke has recorded? Jesus was born of virgin, God incarnate, to live the perfect life, take our sins upon Himself and receive the wrath we deserve for those sins, and then die but after three days rise from death and ascend into heaven to send the Holy Spirit to live in us. Those are the facts we are to share with the world. It is the only real hope in this world and it is based on historical facts. It is the only heart transforming power. Be courageous brothers and sisters, and testify to the facts about Jesus.

## Questions

- 1 What led up to today's passage?
- 2 Why were the Jews so angry?
- 3 How did Paul gain a favored status with Lysias?
- 4 Why was there a pre-trial?
- 5 What kind of a person was Ananias?
- 6 Do you think Paul's response was angry or prophetic?
- 7 How do we violate Exodus 22:28? Does the New Testament teach the same?
- 8 How did Paul humble himself before the Word?
- 9 What issue did Paul use to divide the Sanhedrin?
- 10 Was Paul skirting the real issue or was it the real issue?
- 11 What are the facts of Jesus we are to share? Why?

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### <sup>i</sup> **Luke 4:24-28 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. <sup>25</sup> But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, <sup>26</sup> and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. <sup>27</sup> And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." <sup>28</sup> When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.

### <sup>ii</sup> **John 19:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

### <sup>iii</sup> **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

### <sup>iv</sup> **Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

### <sup>v</sup> **John 9:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

### <sup>vi</sup> **Romans 4:3-5 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

<sup>4</sup> Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. <sup>5</sup> And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,

### <sup>vii</sup> **John 8:37-39 (ESV)**

<sup>37</sup> I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. <sup>38</sup> I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father."

<sup>39</sup> They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did,

### <sup>viii</sup> **John 1:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

### <sup>ix</sup> **Romans 8:14-15 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

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<sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

<sup>x</sup> **John 3:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

<sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

<sup>xi</sup> **Romans 3:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

<sup>xii</sup> **John 19:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.

<sup>xiii</sup> Paul was previously beaten with rods which was not as severe as what he was facing here. See Acts 16:22

<sup>xiv</sup> **Acts 21:39 (ESV)**

<sup>39</sup> Paul replied, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people."

<sup>xv</sup> **1 Timothy 1:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,

<sup>xvi</sup> **John 18:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?"

<sup>xvii</sup> Socio-Rhetorical Commentary: Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary.

<sup>xviii</sup> **Leviticus 19:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> "You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.

<sup>xix</sup> **John 18:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said."

<sup>xx</sup> **Exodus 22:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> "You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

<sup>xxi</sup> **1 Samuel 3:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.

<sup>xxii</sup> **Romans 13:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Titus 3:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, <sup>2</sup> to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Philippians 3:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;

<sup>xxv</sup> **Acts 24:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Acts 1:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection."

<sup>xxvii</sup> **1 Corinthians 15:13-17 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

<sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

<sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.

<sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.

<sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

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<sup>xxviii</sup> **Matthew 23:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

<sup>xxix</sup> **Acts 9:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

<sup>xxx</sup> **Acts 27:23-24 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship,  
<sup>24</sup> and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.'

<sup>xxxi</sup> **Philippians 1:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.