

“Ambassadors In Chains”

Acts 22:30 – 23:11

March 13, 2016

Intro: Let me ask you a personal question...

- What’s the last great thing you’ve read?

- State of “reading”... (Time Mag. 6/14/14)
 - 19 min/day average...
 - 10 min/day ave. for 25-34
 - 4 min/day ave for 19-24 year olds...

- Why do you read?
 - Fun?
 - Necessity?
 - Feelings
 - Impact or Change?
 - Self-help?
 - Christ-like?

T/S: This leads me to ask another question... This time it is more theological and introspective...

Why do you think God included narrative passages like the one we will look at today... when so much of the miraculous that Jesus did was left out of God’s Word?

I hope our time together today will help you to
answer that question (for you and others)
for the rest of your lives!

To... *Inform, Inspect, Inspire* us...

*** **Christian**: I pray that you will see that
there is a **24/7, 365 day** call on your life...
**and what you do with your time, talent,
and treasure is of eternal importance!** ***

T/S: CONTEXT...

Let's begin reminding ourselves where we are in the Word:

- A. Acts 1:8
- B. Ch. 1-7 = Jerusalem (local)
- C. Ch. 8-12 = Judea & Samaria (regional)
- D. Ch. 13-end = "ends of the earth" (global)
- E. Paul's 3 journeys...

- F. Now back in Jerusalem...**
- a. Paul came as a missionary**
 - b. Paul came expecting persecution**
 - c. Paul is now under attack & arrest...**

T/S: Let's jump in...

30 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.

- **Criticized**
- **Conflict**
- **Continuation**

1 And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day."

- **Confidence**
- **Connection**
- **Caring**
- **Commandments (Great)**
- **Conscience**

- **Weak – 1 Cor. 8:7-10**
- **Wounded – v.12**
- **Defiled – Titus 1:15**
- **Evil – Heb. 10:22**
- **SEARED – 1 Tim. 4:2**

* Illustration: *Window & Light*

It is possible for the conscience to be damaged, dysfunctional, even destroyed.

(vs. good, blameless, & pure)

2 *And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.*

- **Convicting** (of others)
- **Crushed** (at times)

3 *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?”*

- **Confrontational**
- **Call-out Counterfeits**
- **Corruption**

4-5 *Those who stood by said, “Would you revile God’s high priest?” 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.’”*

- **Confess (all sins)**
- **Concede (when wrong)**
- **Change (when needed)**

***** Major Pivot Point in Passage *****

6 *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.”*

- **Calculating**

- **Cunning** (aka Shrewd – Matt. 10:16)
- **Crying-out**
- **COMMISSION!!!** (not the obvious)

7 And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

- **Clamoring (by others)**
- **Confusing (to others)**
- **Challenging (of others)**

8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

- **Clarifying (at times)**

9 *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?"*

- **Chaos**
- **Convincing**

10 *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.*

- **Consistency (ups & downs)**
- **Continuation**
 - **Problems**
 - **Persecution**
 - **Providence**

11 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."

- **CHRIST!!!**
- **Courage**

Cheyenne Dog Soldiers

Cheyenne "Dog Soldiers" called "**the Spartans of the plains.**" 1 of 6 warrior societies... Each wore a "dog rope" sash, which was a rope with a "**picket pin**" (a pointed stake of some sort) that could be driven into the ground and, when connected to the horse, would allow it to graze without wondering away... However, when the picket pin was put in the ground and attached to the warrior, it was a **mark of resolve in battle. No turning back, no matter what!**

"Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them." – Joshua 1:6

- **Confirmation**
- **Comforted**
- **Confidence**

Gideon and God's 300...

Gideon began with 32,000... The LORD said "*you have too many*" because they will take credit for the victory, assuming their own strength & might secure the battle...

The point the LORD was making was that **HE controls the battle** & ALL the credit for our victories!

- 300 vs countless Mideonites!

- **300 = < 1% of 32,000**
- **300 = 3% of the 10,000**

Scripture calls Him "the God of all comfort"
([2 Cor. 1:3](#)). To the Corinthians Paul wrote:

[God] comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. ([2 Cor. 1:4-5](#))

This passage allows us to read about and

SEE

a beautiful

Christ & King

and a biblical

PORTRAIT of an AMBASSADOR!

(Privilege & Responsibility)

Do you see yourself in this “portrait?”

Ephesians 6:20!

I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should.

How much of your life is devoted to bringing God glory?

Does the answer to that question matter?

Does it matter to YOU?

Literally... what percentage of your time, talent, and treasure were/are dedicated to your professed King & His kingdom?

"Temporary investments, by definition, cannot & will not produce eternal dividends." -JDP

How virtue becomes virtue:

Quote: *"The Unquiet Grave"*

*"Courage is not simply one of many virtues, but rather, courage is the form of every virtue at its teasing stage."
...The soul is refined when convictions are proved through testing. When what we believe survives the threat (and application) of persecution & trial, the courage involved is transformational. That's how character is formed. Put simply, a virtue is a belief that has proved itself.*

Why this is important for YOU!

A. Ephesus = 2:5 & 7

5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent... **7** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

B. Smyrna = 10-11 key

10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. **Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.** **11** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. **The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.'**

C. Pergamum = 16-17

16 Therefore *repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.* **17** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. **To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.'**

D. Thyatira = 22-23 (23b) & 26-29

22 Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with **her I will throw into great tribulation**, unless they repent of her works, **23** and I will strike her children dead. **And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.**

26 The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, **27** and he will rule them... even as I myself have received authority from my Father. **28** And I will give him the morning star. **29** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

E. Sardis = 3-6

3 Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour **I will come against you.** **4** Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. **5** **The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.** **6** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

F. Philadelphia = 8-13 (8&12 key)

8 "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. **9** Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that **I have loved you.** **10** Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, **I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.** **11** I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one

may seize your crown. **12** *The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. 13* He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

G. Laodicia = 15-17 & 18-20 & 21,22

15 *“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16* So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. **17** *For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18* I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. **19** *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. 20* Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. **21** *The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22* He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Like the ancient general whose army was greatly out numbered, tired, and well worn...

When asked to surrender, he called for a volunteer from his troops and then instructed the soldier to drive his own sword through himself – an order the soldier obeyed.

Then the general told the visiting representative to go back to his general and tell him that this smaller army was filled with men of the same heart, zeal, and commitment to fight – for the glory of their king.

May the same be said of us... for our King is worth all we have to give!

Let's Pray!

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³⁰ But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he (the Commander) released him (Paul) and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them (the chief priests & all the Council).

¹ Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day."

² The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.

³ Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?"

⁴ But the bystanders said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"

⁵ And Paul said, "I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.'"

⁶ But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!"

⁷ As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an

angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

⁹ *And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"*

¹⁰ *And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.*

¹¹ *But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."*

22:30 Unable to ascertain the Jewish charges against Paul, **Lysias decided to turn to the Sanhedrin in his attempt to establish a substantive accusation.** It is unlikely that Roman officials had the authority to summon a Sanhedrin. Many interpreters thus assume that Lysias did not request a formal meeting of the Sanhedrin but only convened its members for an informal hearing. Some even suggest that the meeting was held in the Tower of Antonia rather than the council chamber of the Sanhedrin. In any event, **Paul was released from confinement in order to appear before the Jewish high court. Lysias's decision to consult this body was a logical one.** They would surely have heard about the riot against Paul, and it would be the Jews who understood most clearly the legal ramifications of the incident.

23:1–2 Placed before the Sanhedrin, Paul seized the first word: “*Brothers, I have lived as a citizen before God with all good conscience to this very day*” (**23:1**, author’s translation). The implication is that he had nothing on his own mind to condemn him, that he had been faithful in his conduct toward God in every respect. **Such a remark was itself something of a provocation. If Paul’s life as a Christian left him in complete innocence before God, then the Sanhedrin members who did not share his commitment to Christ were the guilty parties.** It is small wonder that the high priest Ananias immediately ordered him to be struck on the mouth for blasphemy (v. **2**). **Ananias’ action was completely in character. Josephus depicted him as one of the very worst of the high priests, known for his pro-Roman sentiments, his extreme cruelty, and his greed.**

23:3 **Given Ananias’s character, Paul’s angry response is altogether understandable:** “*God will strike you, you whitewashed wall*” (v. **3**). **Paul’s words were prophetic. Less than ten years later, Ananias came to an untimely end at the hand of Jewish freedom fighters.**

The image of the whitewashed wall was particularly appropriate, expressing the sheer hypocrisy of this one who stood there in his fine high-priestly vestments, symbolic of his role as intercessor between the people and God.

His character and his actions belied the outward appearance. **Jesus used the same image to depict hypocrisy, referring to the practice of whitewashing tombs as a warning to people that the defilement of dead bones lay within** (**Matt 23:27**).

Paul may also have had in mind Ezekiel's image of a crumbling wall covered with whitewash to conceal its decay, ready to fall with the first rainstorm (Ezek 13:10f.).

Paul saw Ananias's action in having him struck as in itself a demonstration of **the high priest's hypocrisy. There he sat in his role of judge, and yet he was himself in need of judgment because his striking Paul was clearly against the law (v. 3b).** No verdict had been reached, no deliberations even begun, and yet the action of the high priest had already pronounced judgment. This was scarcely Israelite justice (cf. [Lev 19:15](#)).

23:4-5 It was then pointed out to Paul that it was God's high priest he had just reviled (v. [4](#)). **The emphasis on his being the representative of God shifts the focus from the man to the role, and in that respect Paul's demeanor underwent a radical change as well.**

It has often been questioned whether Paul really did not recognize the high priest. His reply would seem to indicate: "I did not realize that he was the high priest" (v. [5a](#)). Paul may have said this with a mild tone of irony: *"He didn't act like a high priest should; how could I recognize him as such when he was so totally out of character?"*

Now that the focus was on the role, **Paul made clear that he respected the office. He even quoted [Exod 22:28](#)** to underscore that he did respect God's representatives in accordance with the Torah. He was a law-abiding Jew in every respect.

23:6 At v. **6** the whole proceeding takes a radical turn.

Still holding the floor, **Paul stated what he saw as the real reason for his trial—his “hope in the resurrection of the dead.”**

This is often seen as a clever ruse on Paul’s part to divide the assembly and divert attention from himself.

Luke seems to prepare for such an understanding by noting that both Pharisees and Sadducees were present in the Sanhedrin. Paul without doubt sought to align himself with the former group by affirming that he was himself a Pharisee and a son of Pharisees. **Neither his mention of his Pharisaic affiliation nor of the resurrection is without relevance to the situation.**

The resurrection was the issue that separated Paul from the rest of the Jews. It was the real issue behind his trials, and in his subsequent defense speeches Paul constantly insisted on that fact.

The Pharisees in fact believed in the *concept* of the resurrection. A resurrection of the dead constituted a major part of their hope in God’s final deliverance of his people. They were thus theologically “ripe” for the Christian gospel

...that Christ had risen from the dead and that this proved him to be the hoped-for Messiah.

The Pharisee Paul had come to see this.

**Other of the Pharisees had become Christians
(cf. [15:5](#)).**

**Even in the Sanhedrin it was the Pharisaic
segment that had on an earlier occasion come
to the defense of the Christians
([5:34–40](#)).**

**In short, for Paul and for Luke, the natural fulfillment of the
Pharisaic hope was in Christ.**

**It was no accident and certainly
no ruse that he made his appeal to the
Pharisees in the Sanhedrin.**

23:7–8 With Paul’s mention of the resurrection, a violent discussion erupted in the Sanhedrin (vv. 7–8). This body largely consisted of the high priestly aristocracy and the ruling elders, who were primarily Sadducees.

The Pharisees were in the minority and were represented among the scribes who sat in the Sanhedrin.

Luke explained in a narrative aside that Sadducees rejected the concepts of resurrection, angels, and spirits, while the Pharisees believed in them all.

The Sadducees’ rejection of resurrection is well attested. **The Sadducees only accepted the books of the Law as Scripture, and they saw no reference to resurrection in these.** Angels and spirits, however, are found in the Pentateuch; and the Sadducees’ denial of them is not attested anywhere other than in [Acts 23:8](#). It is most unlikely that the Sadducees rejected the existence of angels and spirits as such. To what, then, was Luke referring? He may have meant that the Sadducees rejected the eschatology of the Pharisees, which involved an elaborate hierarchy of good and evil angels. Or perhaps it was the idea that an angel or a spirit can speak through a human being as an agent of revelation that Luke depicted the Sadducees as rejecting (cf. v. 9). A final possibility is that the reference was a further elaboration of their rejection of the resurrection—they rejected an afterlife in an angelic or spiritual state.

23:9–10 Whatever was intended, it soon became clear that the Pharisees were Paul’s defenders. Not only did they not find the resurrection a ridiculous idea, they were even willing to grant that God may have spoken to Paul through a spirit or an

angel (v. [9](#)). It is possible that they were trying to give some explanation for Paul's Damascus road experience.

The dispute at this point became so violent that Lysias had to send a messenger to bring down troops in order to prevent Paul from being torn to shreds between the two opposing groups (v. [10](#)).

Whereas Lysias's original seizing of Paul could be seen as an arrest ([21:33](#)), this time there is no doubt the tribune served as his protector.

[23:11](#) Alone, under detention, the following night Paul had a reassuring vision (v. [11](#)).

The Lord had certainly prepared him well for the events that had just transpired in Jerusalem ([20:23](#); [21:10f.](#)).

Still they had been particularly trying—the mob in the temple square, the arrest, the attempted scourging, the violence of the Sanhedrin. To what was it all leading?

The Lord's words assured him that there was a divine purpose in all that had happened to him.

As he had borne his witness in Jerusalem, so would he bear it in Rome.

Paul had already expressed his own desire to visit Rome ([19:21](#)).
Now the visit received the Lord's endorsement.

**The key word is, of course,
*“testify.”***

**All Paul's troubles the past two days
had ultimately derived from his testifying
to Christ before the Jews.**

Now his trip to Rome and all of the legal hassle in between also
would be a testimony.

With v. [11](#) the final portion of Acts is mapped out.

- New American Commentary

Paul Before the Sanhedrin ([22:30-23:11](#))

THE COMMANDER STILL had to get to the bottom of the case. As it obviously concerned a religious issue, he decided to order the Sanhedrin to look into the matter ([22:30](#)).

Longenecker explains that "as a Roman military commander, he had no right to participate in the Sanhedrin's deliberations. But as the Roman official charged with keeping peace with Jerusalem, he could order the Sanhedrin to meet to determine the cause of the riot." When Luke says that Paul was "released" ([22:30](#)), he probably meant that he was released from confinement to appear before the Sanhedrin.

Paul's first statement to the Sanhedrin proclaimed that he had fulfilled his "duty to God in all good conscience" ([23:1](#)). This is consistent with what he said elsewhere ([24:16](#); [Phil. 3:6](#)). He was not talking about fulfilling requirements for salvation through a life of obedience. He clearly argued that no one can do that ([Rom. 2-3](#)). Rather, by Jewish standards of measuring faithfulness relative to conscience, he had lived a blameless and exemplary life.

The high priest Ananias orders that Paul be struck on the mouth for this statement ([23:2](#)). Paul responds with a typically human reaction to this slap. He calls the high priest a hypocrite and says that God will strike him too, for he had violated the law in commanding this ([23:3](#)). It was a miscarriage of justice to strike a person before being convicted, and in this case he had not even been properly charged. Paul's comment about Ananias proves to be prophetic, for within ten years the high priest had to flee to

Herod's palace, his house was burned, and he was eventually killed. He was known as a greedy, corrupt, and violent man.

When Paul was told that he had spoken these strong words to the high priest, he made a godly retraction of his typically human reaction (23:5). Why did he not recognize the high priest? Sir William Ramsay's suggestion that this was because the meeting was run like a Roman assembly, presided over by the commander, is now generally rejected. The explanation I heard in my youth was that Paul suffered from poor eyesight, perhaps because of the blinding that took place on the road to Damascus (as evidence, [Gal. 4:13-15](#) is often cited, where Paul said that the Galatians would have given their eyes to him). Longenecker is probably nearer the truth: Since this was not a regular meeting of the Sanhedrin, the high priest was likely not in his usual seat or wearing his robes of office. Also, because Paul had visited Jerusalem only sporadically during the previous twenty years and Ananias had become high priest in A.D. 48, about ten years before these incidents, Paul would not have recognized him.

As Paul's first line of reasoning was not going to work, he adopted a new line. **The issue at stake here was the resurrection of the dead, which the Pharisees accepted but the Sadducees rejected. Was this simply a crafty ploy used by Paul to divide the group? Certainly there is wisdom, possibly even shrewdness, here. But he was also using a strategy that pointed to the heart of the Christian gospel, which was indeed a fulfillment of Pharisaism, so much so that a real Pharisee should actually become a Christian. He even calls himself a Pharisee here (23:6).**

Bruce's paraphrase of [verse 6b](#) helps us understand his point:
"The charge on which I am now being examined concerns the national hope, which depends for its fulfillment on the resurrection of the dead."

Paul agreed with the Pharisees that the Jews' national hope depended on a future resurrection. Here he is saying that the first stage of this resurrection has been fulfilled with the resurrection of Jesus.

Paul clearly presented the connection between the resurrection of Christ and the hope of the Jews in his speech to Agrippa (26:8, 23) and in 1 Corinthians 15:16-28.

Paul's statement results in total confusion in the Sanhedrin, some siding with Paul and others against him. Some even consider the possibility that an angel or a spirit revealed Paul's message to him (23:9). The commander has to intervene and take Paul away from the scene.

The next night the Lord stands near Paul and encourages him by telling him that he is going to testify in Rome (23:11).

Amidst all of the confusion of these days, the apostle receives assurance that God is working out his purposes, and that one of Paul's great dreams is going to be fulfilled—he will go to Rome.

BRIDGING CONTEXTS:

Helpful Illustration

*"The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it" (John 1:5). In other words, Jesus "came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (1:11-12). **The Jewish mob belonged to the majority of God's people who were rejecting the light; Paul belonged to the minority who received him and carried on the tradition of bearing the light.** But when he as God's servant told them about God's command to take the light to the Gentiles, as promised in the Scriptures, they cried, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!" (Acts 22:22).*

Paul also shared a common commitment to the biblical tradition with the Pharisees in the Sanhedrin. This **tradition, however, had now become traditionalism. When they were now confronted with a necessary implication of their tradition—the resurrection of Jesus as the forerunner of the resurrection for which they hoped—they rejected it and persecuted any who accepted it.** Too much of their comfortable traditionalism had to be given up if they were to accept the truth that their tradition implied.

This incident shows how a theologically orthodox people can become so comfortable in their orthodoxy that they become hardened to change. The conservatism of the Jews had become a dead traditionalism, which persecuted the agents of change whom God sent their way.

The LORD's vision encouraged Paul ([23:11](#))—a feature that occurs several times in Acts.

**At times of special need,
God appears to his servants
in some supernatural way
and gives them a glimpse of himself
that encourages them to persevere
in the task they have been given
([4:31](#); [18:9-10](#); [27:23](#)).**

**We can call this the comfort of the God of all
comfort (cf. [2 Cor. 1:3-4](#)).**

**God knows when we need special help to
overcome discouragement and to
persevere in a difficult call. And at just
the right time he sends us that comfort.**

The comfort Paul received was in the form of an affirmation of the sovereignty of God. This time of uncertainty eventually resulted in Paul's fulfilling one of his greatest ambitions: to preach the gospel in Rome

CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE

No unnecessary suffering. Even though Paul was willing to suffer death for Christ's sake, he did not take on unnecessary suffering (21:13). Some second-century Christians are said to have gloried in suffering so much that they desired it in unhealthy ways. New Testament Christians did not give in to such excessive morbidity. Today too we can challenge people through the law to ensure our own rights and protection as long as we do not dishonor God. Especially when Christians are being illegally ill-treated because of their principles, it may be good for them (and for society in general) if they protest the way they are being treated.

I do not think God intends a battered wife to bear her pain silently when she is being physically abused and treated as a subhuman by her husband. A child must be encouraged to protest sexual abuse that he or she may be facing. Workers who are underpaid should appeal to their employers to be fair. Furthermore, **QUOTE: if the Bible leaves room for us to speak up on behalf of ourselves for our protection, how much more important it is for us to speak up for others who are being dehumanized or treated unjustly.**

Because of the sinfulness of the human race, in spite of all the advances in labor rights in the world, there are still situations where people are badly exploited. Christians ought to speak up on their behalf and try to secure their legitimate rights. These are results of Christians getting close to people. They see needs and realize that as Christians they can and must do something.

- NIV Application Commentary

"Paul the prisoner" ([Acts 23:18](#)) was the name the Roman soldiers used for the apostle, **a designation he himself often used** ([Eph. 3:1](#); [4:1](#); [2 Tim. 1:8](#); [Phile. 1, 9](#)).

Paul was under "military custody," which meant he was bound to a Roman soldier who was responsible for him. Prisoners under "public custody" were put in the common jail, a horrible place for any human being to suffer ([Acts 16:19-24](#)).

Paul's friends could visit him and help meet his personal needs.

It is sad that we don't read, *"And prayer was made fervently by the church for Paul"* (see [Acts 12:5](#)).

There is no record that the Jerusalem church took any steps to assist him, either in Jerusalem or during his two years in Caesarea.

Paul and the Jewish Council ([Acts 22:30-23:10](#))

Having discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen, the Roman captain now had two serious problems to solve. First, he needed to let the prisoner know what the official charges were against him, since that was Paul's right as a Roman

citizen. Second, he also needed to have some official charges for his own records and to share with his superiors.

He was sure that Paul had done something notorious, otherwise why would so many people want to do away with him? Yet nobody seemed to know what Paul's crimes were. What a plight for a Roman official to be in!

Key Contextual Truth

The logical thing was to let Paul's own people try him, so the captain arranged for a special meeting of the Jewish council (Sanhedrin). This group was composed of seventy (or seventy-one) of the leading Jewish teachers, with the high priest presiding. It was their responsibility to interpret and apply the sacred Jewish Law to the affairs of the nation, and to try those who violated that Law. The Romans gave the council permission to impose capital punishment where the offense deserved it.

The captain and his guard ([Acts 23:10](#)) brought Paul into the council chamber and stepped aside to watch the proceedings. **Knowing how the Jews in the temple had treated Paul, Claudius remained there on guard lest his prisoner be taken from him and killed. No Roman soldier could afford to lose a prisoner, for that might mean the forfeiting of his own life.**

The loss of a prisoner against whom the charges were nebulous would be especially embarrassing for any Roman officer.

As Paul faced the council and examined it carefully, he decided to start with a personal approach. "Men and brethren" immediately identified him as a Jew and no doubt helped win the attention of his countrymen.

The Greek word translated "lived" means "to live as a citizen." It gives us the English word *politics*.

Paul affirmed that he was a loyal Jew who had lived as a good Jewish citizen and had not broken the Law. His conscience did not condemn him even though the Jews had condemned him.

***"Conscience"* is one of Paul's favorite words; he used it twice in Acts (23:1; 24:16) and twenty-one (21X) times in his letters. The word means "to know with, to know together."**

Conscience is the inner "judge" or "witness" that approves when we do right and disapproves when we do wrong (Rom. 2:15).

Conscience

*does not set the standard;
it only applies it.*

The conscience of a thief would bother him if he told the truth about his fellow crooks just as much as a Christian's conscience would convict him if he told a lie about his friends. Conscience does not make the standards; it only applies the standards of the person, whether they are good or bad, right or wrong.

GREAT ILLUSTRATION:

Conscience may be compared to a window that lets in the light. God's Law is the light; and the cleaner the window is, the more the light shines in. As the window gets dirty, the light gets dimmer; and finally the light becomes darkness.

A good conscience, or pure conscience (1 Tim. 3:9), is one that lets in God's light so that we are properly convicted if we do wrong and encouraged if we do right.

A defiled conscience ([1 Cor. 8:7](#)) is one that has been sinned against so much that it is no longer dependable.

If a person continues to sin against his conscience, he may end up with an evil conscience ([Heb. 10:22](#)) or a seared conscience ([1 Tim. 4:2](#)).

Then he would feel convicted if he did what was *right* rather than what was wrong!

Paul had persecuted the church and caused innocent people to die, so how could he claim to have a good conscience? *He had lived up to the light that he had*, and that is all that a good conscience requires.

After he became a Christian and the bright light of God's glory shone into his heart ([2 Cor. 4:6](#)), Paul then saw things differently and realized that he was "the chief of sinners" ([1 Tim. 1:15](#)).

Ananias the high priest (not to be confused with Annas in [Acts 4:6](#)) was so incensed at Paul's saying that he had "lived in all good conscience" that he ordered the nearest Jewish council members **to hit Paul across the mouth. (Jesus had been treated in a similar way—[John 18:22](#).)**

This was, of course, illegal and inhumane; for, after all, Paul had not even been proven guilty of anything. Certainly the high priest would be expected to show honesty and fairness, if not compassion and concern ([Lev. 19:15](#); [Heb. 5:2](#)).

Paul responded with what appears to me to be justified anger, though many disagree about this. When called to account for what he had said, Paul did not apologize. Rather, he showed respect for the *office* but not for the *man*.

Ananias was indeed one of the most corrupt men ever to be named high priest. He stole tithes from the other priests and did all he could to increase his authority.

Ananias was known as a brutal man who cared more for Rome's favor than for Israel's welfare.

In calling the high priest a "whited wall," Paul was simply saying that the man was a hypocrite ([Matt. 23:27](#); see [Ezek. 13:10-12](#)).

Historical Death of Ananias

Paul spoke prophetically, because God did indeed smite this wicked man. When the Jews revolted against Rome in the year 66, Ananias had to flee for his life because of his known sympathies with Rome. The Jewish guerrillas found him hiding in an aqueduct at Herod's palace, and they killed him. It was an ignominious death for a despicable man.

Paul's reply in [Acts 23:5](#) has been variously interpreted. Some say that Paul did not know who the high priest was. Or perhaps Paul was speaking in holy sarcasm: "Could such a man actually be the high priest?" Since this was an informal meeting of the council, perhaps the high priest was not wearing his traditional garments and sitting in his usual place. For that matter, Paul had been away from the Jewish religious scene for many years and probably did not know many people in the council.

The quoting of [Exodus 22:28](#) would indicate that Paul may not have known that it was the high priest who ordered him to be smitten.

Again, note that Paul showed respect for the office, but not for the man who held the office. There is a difference.

Having failed in his personal approach, Paul then used a doctrinal approach. He declared that the real issue was his faith in the doctrine of the Resurrection, a doctrine over which the Pharisees and Sadducees violently disagreed. Paul knew that by defending this important doctrine, he would divide the council and soon have the members disputing among themselves, which is exactly what happened. So violent was the response that Claudius and his men had to rush down to the floor of the council chamber and rescue their prisoner for the second time!

Was Paul "playing politics" when he took this approach? I don't think so. After his unfortunate clash with the high priest, Paul realized that he could never get a fair trial before the Sanhedrin. If the trial had continued, he might well have been condemned and taken out and stoned as a blasphemer. The Asian Jews, if given opportunity to testify, could well have added fuel to the fire with their false witness. **No, the wisest thing to do was to end the hearing as soon as possible and trust God to use the Roman legions to protect him from the Jews.**

There is a second consideration: Paul was absolutely right when he said that the real issue was the doctrine of the Resurrection, not "the resurrection" in general, but the resurrection of Jesus Christ (see [Acts 24:21](#); [26:6-8](#); [28:20](#)). Had he been given the opportunity, Paul would have declared the Gospel of "Jesus Christ and the Resurrection" just as he had declared it before Jewish congregations in many parts of the Empire.

The witness in Acts centers on the Resurrection
(see [Acts 1:22](#); [2:32](#); [3:15](#)).

Jesus had stood trial before the Sanhedrin, and so had His Apostles; and now Paul had witnessed to them. What great opportunities the council had and yet they would not believe!

Paul and the Lord Jesus (Acts 23:11)

A few years after Paul's conversion, when Paul's life was in danger in Jerusalem, Jesus appeared to him in the temple and told him what to do ([Acts 22:17-21](#)). When Paul was discouraged in Corinth and contemplated going elsewhere, Jesus appeared to him and encouraged him to stay ([Acts 18:9-10](#)). Now, when Paul was certainly at "low ebb" in his ministry, Jesus appeared once again to encourage and instruct him. Paul would later receive encouragement during the storm ([Acts 27:22-25](#)) and during his trial in Rome ([2 Tim. 4:16-17](#)). "Lo, I am with you always" is a great assurance for every situation ([Matt. 28:20](#)).

The Lord's message to Paul was one of *courage*.

"Be of good cheer!" simply means "Take courage!" Jesus often spoke these words during His earthly ministry. He spoke them to the palsied man ([Matt. 9:2](#)) and to the woman who suffered with the hemorrhage ([Matt. 9:22](#)). He shouted them to the disciples in the storm ([Matt. 14:27](#)), and repeated them in the Upper Room ([John 16:33](#)).

As God's people, we can always take courage in times of difficulty because the Lord is with us and will see us through.

It was also a message of *commendation*.

When you read the account of Paul's days in Jerusalem, you get the impression that everything Paul did failed miserably. His attempt to win over the legalistic Jews only helped cause a riot in the temple, and his witness before the Sanhedrin left the council in confusion. **But the Lord was pleased with Paul's testimony, and that's what really counts.**

Finally, it was a message of *confidence*:

Paul WILL go to Rome! This had been Paul's desire for months ([Acts 19:21](#); [Rom. 15:22-29](#)), but events in Jerusalem had made it look as though that desire would not be fulfilled.

What encouragement this promise gave to Paul in the weeks that followed, difficult weeks when leaders lied about him, when fanatics tried to kill him, and when government officials ignored him.

In all of this, **the Lord was with him and fulfilling His perfect plan to get His faithful servant to Rome.**

- Bible Exposition Commentary

A tragic theme running through the thrilling story of the growing church in Acts is the sad reality of Jewish opposition to the church and the gospel.

Along with the apostolic preaching of the cross, Luke chronicles the rising tide of Jewish antagonism. **Having rejected and executed the long-awaited and hoped-for Messiah, Israel as a nation subsequently rejected those who preached the message of forgiveness and salvation in His name.**

GREAT CONTEXTUALIZATION

The opposition began when the church began—
on the Day of Pentecost, after the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit and miraculously spoke in other languages. Some in the crowd mocked and ridiculed them, scornfully deriding them as if the apostles were drunk (2:13).

That relatively mild opposition stiffened after Peter's sermon following the healing of a lame man (3:12-26). The Jewish authorities were annoyed "because [the apostles] were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (4:2). Determined to put an end to this dangerous new teaching, "they laid hands on them, and put them in jail" (4:3). The next day, the Sanhedrin "commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (4:18). But refusing to be intimidated, "Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard'" (4:19-20).

The opposition from the Jewish leaders continued, as recorded in chapter 5, when the Sanhedrin again arrested and imprisoned the apostles (5:17-18). That frantic attempt to stifle the preaching of the gospel failed when God sent an angel to miraculously release them from prison (5:19-20).

They then boldly resumed preaching in the stronghold of the authorities—the temple ([5:21](#)). Further threats by the Sanhedrin ([5:28](#)), and even a beating ([5:40](#)), did not deter the apostles from teaching and preaching the gospel ([5:42](#)).

The next outbreak of persecution involved **Stephen**. That fearless and powerful preacher crushed his Jewish opponents in debate ([6:9-10](#)), so frustrating them that they finally arranged for false witnesses to lie about him ([6:11](#)). **He, too, was then brought before the Sanhedrin** ([6:12-15](#)), where he gave a masterful sermon defending both himself and the Christian gospel ([7:1-50](#)). He closed that message with a stinging indictment of the Jewish leaders for their hardhearted rejection of the truth ([7:51-53](#)). Furious, they drove him out of the city and stoned him to death ([7:54-60](#)).

The murder of Stephen was the catalyst for the first widespread persecution of the church ([8:1](#)).

That persecution, lead by the zealous Pharisee Saul of Tarsus ([8:3](#)), scattered the Jerusalem church ([8:1](#)) and spread the gospel further ([8:4](#)).

Further persecution, this time directed against the church's leaders, came from Herod. Seeking to please the Jewish authorities, he executed James and arrested Peter ([12:1-3](#)). Peter was miraculously released from prison ([12:7-11](#)) but was forced into seclusion ([12:17](#)).

After Paul's encounter with the glorified Christ on the Damascus road, he became Christianity's leading evangelist. Ironically, Paul, once the chief persecutor of Christians, now became the most persecuted of Christians.

Jewish opposition first arose against him in Damascus shortly after his conversion (9:23). He met further opposition from unbelieving Jews throughout his missionary journeys. On the island of Cyprus, he confronted a Jewish false prophet (13:6-8). The unbelieving Jews at Pisidian Antioch, filled with jealousy, opposed Paul's teaching (13:45). At Iconium (14:2), Lystra (14:19), Thessalonica (17:5ff.), Berea (17:13), Corinth (18:6, 12-13), Ephesus (19:9), Corinth again as he began his trip to Jerusalem (20:3), and after his arrival in Jerusalem (21:27ff.), Paul faced the hostility of his countrymen.

As chapter 23 opens, Paul again faces Jewish opposition. As seen in the previous section, he had been attacked in the temple grounds by a Jewish mob and savagely beaten. Only the intervention of Roman soldiers saved his life.

Claudius Lysias, the commander of the Roman forces in Jerusalem, tried unsuccessfully to find out what Paul had done. He allowed him to address the angry crowd from the steps of Fort Antonia. But Paul's mention of his commission to the Gentiles (22:21) caused the riot to break out afresh.

Lysias then decided to use a brutal Roman interrogation method (scourging with a *flagellum*) to extract a confession from him. The discovery that Paul was a Roman citizen halted that proceeding, since it was illegal to so examine a Roman citizen.

By now thoroughly frustrated and perplexed about how to proceed, Lysias decided to summon the Sanhedrin. Accordingly, **on the next day, wishing to know for certain why Paul had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought him down and set him before them.** Whether Lysias at this time **released** Paul from imprisonment or from his chains is not clear. Given his alarm at having put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains ([22:29](#)), probably the former is meant.

Some have questioned whether Lysias had the authority to have **ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble.** But this was not a formal convening of the Sanhedrin. Lysias, still **wishing to know for certain why Paul had been accused by the Jews,** naturally turned to the highest Jewish court for clarification. **He would not have turned a Roman citizen over to the Sanhedrin for trial before determining and evaluating the charges against him.** Nor does this hearing have the hallmarks of a formal trial. There were no charges made against Paul, nor did any witnesses testify against him. Further, it does not seem that this meeting took place in the Sanhedrin's normal meeting place on the temple grounds. Lysias **brought Paul down and set him before** the Sanhedrin somewhere outside of Fort Antonia. Roman troops were readily available to rescue Paul ([23:10](#)) if things got out of hand again.

Paul's appearance before the Sanhedrin marks the fifth (and last) time that body was called upon to evaluate the claims of Christ.

The first was when Jesus Himself stood before it ([Mark 14:53-65](#)); the second involved Peter and John ([Acts 4:5-22](#)); the third followed their arrest of all the apostles ([5:21ff.](#)); and the fourth was the trial of Stephen ([Acts 6:12ff.](#)).

Five times the peerless communicators of the gospel had proclaimed the truth to the Sanhedrin, and five times its members rejected it. Not only did they condemn themselves ([John 3:18](#)), but their rejection also symbolized the nation's rejection of Messiah.

The Sanhedrin (from the Greek word *sunedrion*, "council") was the religious ruling body of the Jews in Roman-occupied Israel.

The Sanhedrin's authority was final in matters involving Jewish law, while its authority in civil matters was limited.

Roman governors (such as Pilate, Felix, and Festus) and Roman-appointed rulers (such as the Herods) wielded the political clout in Israel.

Although Jewish tradition traces the Sanhedrin's origins to the seventy elders who assisted Moses ([Num. 11:16](#)), it actually dates from postexilic times. After the Jewish revolt against Rome (A.D. 66-70), the Sanhedrin lost its remaining vestiges of political power. Driven from Jerusalem, it reconvened at Jamnia but was limited to considering religious questions.

Three main groups composed the Sanhedrin. The High Priests consisted of the president of the Sanhedrin, former presidents (such as Annas, Luke 3:2; Acts 4:6), various officials (such as the captain of the temple guard, Acts 5:24), and others "who were of high-priestly descent" (Acts 4:6). The Elders included members of the priestly aristocracy (such as Nicodemus, John 7:50) and wealthy individuals (such as Joseph of Arimathea, Mark 15:43). The Scribes, mostly drawn from the ranks of the Pharisees, were experts in Jewish law.

Two main religious factions dominated the Sanhedrin: the Sadducees and the Pharisees (cf. [23:6](#)).

The Sanhedrin had its own police force (cf. [5:24-26](#)) and could mete out punishment for violations of Jewish law (cf. [5:40](#)). They did not, however, have the right of capital punishment ([John 18:31](#)) unless the case involved the desecration of the temple.

Luke presents Paul's appearance before the Sanhedrin in four scenes: the confrontation, the conflict, the conquest, and the consolation.

The Confrontation

*And Paul, looking intently at the Council, said,
"Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly
good conscience before God up to this day."
([23:1](#))*

Never one to be intimidated or back away from a confrontation, Paul stood for a moment looking intently at the Council before beginning to speak.

Looking intently is from *atenizō*, which means "to gaze upon," "to fix one's eyes on," or "to stare." Some have seen this as further evidence of Paul's poor eyesight; others suggest that he was looking to see whom he could recognize. But more important, **Paul's look was one of conscious**

integrity. He knew he was innocent of any wrongdoing, and he had complete confidence that God was with him. Because of that, he did not cower in fear or guilt.

Paul began by addressing them, surprisingly, as "brethren" (the Greek text reads "men, brethren").

The customary way of addressing the Sanhedrin was "Rulers and elders of the people" ([Acts 4:8](#)) or "Brethren and fathers" ([Acts 7:2](#)). But **Paul, unlike Peter or Stephen, had close ties to the Sanhedrin. He undoubtedly knew many of them, having probably once been a member of the Sanhedrin himself** (cf. [Acts 26:10](#)). Some may have been students of Gamaliel along with him. Certainly many were fellow Pharisees. **He had surely worked with some of them to eradicate the Christian church.** All this familiarity with the Sanhedrin prompted him to address them as equals.

Even more disconcerting to the Sanhedrin was Paul's bold assertion "I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day."

As those who knew him could attest, he had always been motivated by a desire to please God

(cf. [24:16](#); [Gal. 1:14](#); [Phil. 3:6](#)).

QUOTE:

By making this claim, Paul put the members of the Sanhedrin on the defensive. Since he had acted in obedience to God, by opposing him they were actually fighting God.

That Paul had **lived his life with a perfectly good conscience before God** does not mean all his actions had always been right. It does mean that Paul felt no guilt for anything he had done, in spite of the Sanhedrin's accusations. **It should be noted that the conscience does not determine whether actions are morally right or wrong**—Paul's conscience had once permitted him to persecute Christians. Conscience is the faculty that passes moral judgment on a person's actions ([Rom. 2:14-15](#)). But it does so based only on the highest standards of morality and conduct perceived by that individual. It is thus neither the voice of God nor infallible. **A conscience uninformed by biblical truth will not necessarily pass accurate judgments** (cf. [1 Cor. 4:4](#)). Before his conversion, Paul's had not.

It is possible for the conscience to be damaged, dysfunctional, even destroyed.

KEY: The Bible speaks of a **weak conscience** ([1 Cor 8:7-10](#)), **wounded conscience** ([1 Cor 8:12](#)), a **defiled conscience** ([Titus 1:15](#)), an **evil conscience** ([Heb. 10:22](#)), worst of all, a **seared conscience** ([1 Tim. 4:2](#))—one so covered with scar tissue from habitual sin that it no longer responds to the proddings of divine truth.

Obviously, a conscience in one of those states will not always assess things properly.

On the other hand, the Bible commends a good conscience ([1 Tim. 1:5, 19](#); [Heb. 13:18](#); [1 Pet. 3:16, 21](#)), a **blameless conscience** ([Acts 24:16](#)), and a **clear conscience** ([1 Tim. 3:9](#); [2 Tim. 1:3](#)).

Such a spiritually healthy conscience results from the forgiveness of sin based on the atoning work of Christ ([Heb. 9:14](#); [10:22](#)).

Christians' consciences, informed by the standards of God's Word, are able to assess accurately their actions. **Christians thus need to strengthen their consciences by constantly exposing them to the truths of Scripture.**

Paul had such a fully and rightly informed conscience, and it was not accusing him.

(For a biblical study of the conscience, see John MacArthur, *The Vanishing Conscience* [Dallas: Word, 1994].)

The Conflict

And the high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! And do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?" But the bystanders said, "Do you revile God's high priest?" And Paul said, "I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" ([23:2-5](#))

Outraged by Paul's bold claim to a good conscience, **the high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.** Ananias, the son of Nedebaeus, is not to be confused with the former high priest Annas ([Luke 3:2](#)). Ananias reigned for eleven or twelve years, beginning in A.D. 47, and was one of the most cruel, evil, corrupt high priests ever to hold office. According to Josephus, he stole from the common priests the tithes that should have gone to them, beating any who resisted (*Antiquities* 20.9.2). He did not hesitate to use violence to further his goals; in fact, a few years earlier the Romans had suspected him of complicity in atrocities committed against the Samaritans. They sent him to Rome to appear before Emperor Claudius, but he was acquitted (*Antiquities* 20.6.2-3). He was hated by the Jewish nationalists because of his staunchly pro-Roman stand. When the Jewish revolt against Rome broke out in A.D. 66, Ananias was promptly killed by the Jewish rebels ([Wars](#) 2.17.9).

In keeping with his cruel, violent character, Ananias ordered those standing beside Paul to strike him on the mouth.

The verb translated to strike (*tuptō*) depicts more than a mere slap to the face. It is the same word used in [21:32](#) to speak of the crowd's beating of Paul and of the Roman soldiers' beating of Jesus ([Matt. 27:30](#)).

Incensed at Ananias's outrageous breach of Jewish law, Paul retorted, "*God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall!*" He may have remembered Jesus' castigation of the Pharisees as "whitewashed tombs" ([Matt. 23:27](#)).

A more likely allusion, however, is to [Ezekiel's denunciation of false prophets as walls plastered over with whitewash, doomed to fall in the flood of divine judgment](#) ([Ezek. 13:10-16](#)).

Since Paul had not even been formally charged with a crime, much less convicted of one, he could not legally be beaten. He angrily rebuked Ananias, asking him, "**do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?**" **Paul was more indignant at the flouting of the law than at the pain inflicted by the blow itself.**

Some have wondered how to harmonize Paul's strong language with his declaration to the Corinthians that "when we are reviled, we bless" ([1 Cor. 4:12](#)). They point out, in contrast, the example of Jesus, who "while being reviled, did not revile in return; while suffering, uttered no threats" ([1 Pet. 2:23](#)). When Jesus was struck in violation of the law, He merely asked, "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" ([John 18:23](#)).

The answer is, of course, that Paul was not Jesus. Jesus was the sinless Son of God. Paul, while no doubt the godliest man who ever lived, was still a sinner. He vividly described his battle with indwelling sin in [Romans 7:14ff.](#); **this was one time when the flesh prevailed.**

Shocked by Paul's stinging rebuke of the high priest, **the bystanders said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"** Revile translates *loidoreō*, which means "to reproach," "to insult," or "to abuse." It is used in [John 9:28](#) when the Jewish leaders insulted and mocked the blind man whom Jesus had healed. Paul used it in [1 Corinthians 4:12](#) to describe the opposite of blessing. Peter used it to describe the abuse heaped on Jesus ([1 Pet. 2:23](#)). The noun form appears twice in the New Testament, both times in lists of vices that characterize unbelievers ([1 Cor. 5:11](#); [6:10](#)). The adjectival form also appears twice in the New Testament. [First Timothy 5:14](#) describes reviling as an activity of Satan, while [1 Peter 3:9](#) forbids Christians to do it.

The use of *loidoreō* shows that the people felt Paul's strong language was not some calculated legal ploy to take advantage of Ananias's violation of the law but an expression of anger. It was something, as he himself acknowledges in [verse 5](#), that violated God's law. **Although an evil man and a disgrace to his office, the high priest still occupied a God-ordained position of authority. He was not to be reviled but respected (cf. [Deut. 17:8-12](#)).** "The high-priest stands before God. To abuse him, especially in the discharge of his office, is blasphemy" (H. Hanse, "*loidoreō*," in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967], 4:293-94).

Being the humble man that he was, Paul immediately acknowledged his error, exclaiming, "I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" He offered only the excuse of ignorance for his outburst, although it had been provoked by the high priest's illegally ordering him to be struck. He quickly admitted that he had violated God's express prohibition against slandering a ruler ([Ex. 22:28](#)). **He even quoted the passage, to show his respect for and submission to the Word of God.**

Paul's reaction was that of a mature Christian. He saw his sin in relation to how holy God was, not how bad the high priest was.

And **when he realized his sin, he immediately confessed it and submitted to the authority of Scripture.**

Christians who thus deal with sin in their lives will save themselves much chastisement (cf. [1 Cor. 11:31](#)).

Skeptics have found it incredible that Paul would not recognize the high priest. Various explanations of his words "**I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest**" have been offered. Some see in them another manifestation of Paul's poor eyesight, arguing that he could not discern who spoke. Others hold that Paul was so angry that he did not stop to consider to whom he was speaking. Still others believe Paul spoke ironically; since Ananias had not acted like the high priest, how should Paul have recognized him? But the simplest, most straightforward explanation is to take Paul's words at face value. Since he had seldom visited Jerusalem in recent years, he likely did not know Ananias by sight. That this was not a formal convening of the Sanhedrin, but an informal gathering somewhere outside Fort Antonia, offers further support for this view. Paul would have recognized the high priest had he been wearing his high priestly garments and sitting in his official seat.

Whatever the explanation for his failure to recognize the high priest, Paul did not offer it as an excuse. By admitting his error, Paul accepted responsibility for his words. Such a humble, non-defensive attitude is the mark of a spiritual believer.

The Conquest

But perceiving that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" And as he said this, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.

For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. And there arose a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.

([23:6-10](#))

Paul's confrontation with the high priest convinced him that he would not receive a fair hearing from the Sanhedrin.

Accordingly, **perceiving that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!"** As previously noted, two main religious factions dominated the Sanhedrin: the

Sadducees and the **Pharisees**. Those two factions were socially, politically, and theologically at odds with each other.

Being himself a son of Pharisees, Paul appealed to them for support. He cried out, "I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central truth of Christianity. Paul asserted that the issue was his belief and proclamation of that truth (cf. [24:21](#)). Belief in resurrection was commonly held by the Christians and Pharisees against the Sadducees.

Paul's appeal fanned into flame the smoldering theological tensions between the Sadducees and Pharisees.

Luke notes that as he said this there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For the benefit of his readers who were unaware of the distinctions between the two groups, Luke briefly summarizes them. The Sadducees, he explains, say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

The Sadducees accepted only the Pentateuch as authoritative. They rejected any concept of an afterlife (cf. [Matt. 22:23-33](#)), claiming that it was not found there.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, believed in resurrection and the afterlife. Their beliefs were thus more compatible with Christianity than those of the Sadducees.

F. F. Bruce notes that **"a Sadducee could not become a Christian without abandoning the distinctive theological position of his party; a Pharisee could become a Christian and remain a Pharisee—in the early decades of Christianity, at least"** (*The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 453).

The Scriptures record Pharisees who became Christians, including Nicodemus ([John 3:1](#)) and others ([Acts 15:5](#)), but no Sadducees.

Paul's appeal threw the meeting into confusion. Rising to the defense of a fellow Pharisee, **some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"**

So bitter was the theological dispute between the two parties that the Pharisees were willing to defend Paul against the Sadducees.

Lysias must have watched in growing frustration as the discord grew. Even after bringing Paul before the highest Jewish court, he was no nearer to discovering what crime the apostle had committed.

Finally, as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.

Once again the Romans had to rescue Paul from his own people, who hated him as they had hated Christ.

The Consolation

But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also." ([23:11](#))

For his own safety, the Romans kept Paul confined in the barracks of Fort Antonia. Alone in his cell, the apostle was physically battered, discouraged, and uncertain of his future.

But **on the night immediately following** his abortive hearing before the Sanhedrin, **the Lord stood at his side.**

As He had before in times of need
(cf. [18:9](#); [22:17-21](#)), **the Lord**
appeared in person to His servant.

He began by consoling Paul, exhorting him to **take courage**. God graciously comforts His downcast servants, so much so that **Scripture calls Him "the God of all comfort"** ([2 Cor. 1:3](#)). To the Corinthians Paul wrote:

[God] comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. ([2 Cor. 1:4-5](#))

Later in Second Corinthians, Paul could write that he was filled with comfort ([7:4](#)), because God comforts the depressed ([7:6](#)).

The Lord also commended Paul, reminding him you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem.

Paul had successfully completed the task the Lord had given him in that city.

Finally, the Lord gave Paul hope.

He promised him that his life would not end in Jerusalem, but that he would be granted his desire ([Rom. 1:9-11](#); [15:23](#)) to witness at Rome also.

That gracious promise sustained Paul during the many trials he would endure before he got there.

- MacArthur New Testament Commentary

The Priesthood

In first century Palestine there was no separation between church and state. The priests at the temple in Jerusalem not only officiated over the religious life of the Jews, they were also rulers and judges.

Herod, who was himself a pawn of Rome, had his own pawns installed in the Jewish priesthood. By the first century the election of the High Priest was more political than religious. The Romans wanted the priesthood to support their occupation, and the Herods made sure their desire was carried out. However, it would be unfair to categorize all of the priesthood as sympathetic to Rome. Some did support rebellion against Rome, but those at the highest levels were undoubtedly in Rome's back pocket.

We see evidence of this loyalty to and fear of Rome in the Gospels:

“Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did.

Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, ‘What shall we do? For this Man works many signs.

If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.’”(John 11:45-48)

“But 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!’

Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led Him away.” (John 19:15-16)

Josephus recorded that the priesthood went so far as to authorize a daily sacrifice for Caesar in the temple. This was a source of continual angst for the Jews. In the final Roman/Jewish conflict the cessation of the daily sacrifice for Caesar was considered an act of war that helped lead to the destruction of Jerusalem.

The priesthood lived in luxury well beyond that of the average man. They supported their lavish lifestyles with a temple tax which every Jew was required to pay. Richard Horsley in his book “The Message and the Kingdom” describes what archeologists have discovered about the living conditions of the priesthood.

“...impressive archeological remains of their Jerusalem residences show how elegant their life style had become. In spacious structures unhesitatingly dubbed ‘mansions’ by the archeologists who uncovered them in the 1970’s, we can get a glimpse of a lavish life in mosaic floored reception rooms and dining rooms with elaborate painted and carved stucco wall decorations and with a wealth of fine tableware, glassware, carved stone table tops, and other interior furnishings and elegant peristyles.”

The priests lived lavish lifestyles while the average Jewish peasant struggled to survive. The temple taxes combined with taxes imposed by Herod and Rome were literally threatening the existence of the Jewish people. The people of the land were carrying a burden they could scarcely bear or tolerate. Palestine had become a powder keg waiting to ignite.

The priesthood was undoubtedly jealous of Jesus’ popularity, but their main motivation for seeking to kill Jesus was fear. When a new king came to power, he would set his version of the priesthood in place. All

this talk of Jesus becoming the new king undoubtedly unnerved the priests in Jerusalem. If Jesus came to power, they thought they would be out of a job or killed. And the Romans did not take too kindly to unauthorized kings. In their opinion, Jesus was inviting the wrath of Rome. They did not understand that Jesus' kingdom was not of this world and his priesthood was not according to flesh and blood.

The Pharisees

The Pharisees rose to prominence in what scholars call the second temple period. The Babylonians destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in 587 BC.

The time after the Jew's return from exile is known as the second temple period. It was a time when the gentiles were constantly encroaching upon the Jewish people, their customs, and religion. The Pharisees were a group that set out to preserve the Jews from this perceived threat. The very name "Pharisee" is derived from the Hebrew word that means "to separate."

The Pharisees were very zealous for the Law of Moses, but they also considered themselves the guardians of the oral traditions that scholars developed over generations. The oral traditions interpreted the Law of Moses. For example, the Law said to keep the Sabbath. They were not to work on God's holy day. Yet, what was work and what was not? The oral traditions filled in the details that Moses left out. For instance, how far could a person walk on the Sabbath without it being work? The interpreters decided that the distance was 2000 cubits which is about 2/3 of a mile. This was known as a Sabbath's day journey. Where did they get that number? When the Hebrews carried the Ark of the Covenant in the wilderness, God commanded them to walk 2000 cubits behind the ark. They decided that was God's way of telling them how far one could walk on the Sabbath.

It is interesting that Jesus deliberately broke the Pharisee's oral traditions every chance He got. In John chapter nine Jesus healed a blind man by spitting on the ground, making mud, and then rubbing it in the man's eyes. He then told the fellow to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. According to the Pharisees, Jesus broke the Sabbath not once but three times in healing this man. First, it was considered unlawful to heal on the Sabbath. Jesus broke this tradition often. In fact, if we read the gospels, we will see that His favorite day to heal was the Sabbath. Second, making the little bit of clay that Jesus put in the man's eyes would have been considered work. (No, I am not joking.) Third, making the man walk to the pool of Siloam and back would be considered illegal as well. If we

read John chapter eight, we see that Jesus was probably in the vicinity of the temple when he performed this miracle. A quick look at a map shows that the journey to the pool and back was well over 2000 cubits.

In this we see one of the great ironies of the scriptures. The Pharisees had great zeal for God. The average Pharisee fasted two days a week and paid his tithes to the penny. Yet, their zeal for God did not lead them to God but away from God. They examined the Law to the smallest detail, but they entirely missed what the Law was saying. John tells us that Jesus was God's word made manifest. In other words He was Torah in the flesh. Yet, the Pharisees stood in the presence of the perfect revelation of Torah, and they did not know Him. In fact, they wanted to kill Him. (To be fair, we cannot say this is true of all the Pharisees. In fact, some later became Jesus' followers.)

The Law was meant to lead people to love God and their neighbor. Most of all it was meant to lead to Jesus. It is ironic that because the Pharisees came to none of these things, they were the most impure of all. Jesus said that if the people's righteousness did not exceed that of the Pharisees, they could not enter the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' relationship with the Pharisees should be a lesson to us all. If our zeal for God has led us to contempt for our brother, we aren't following God at all.

The Sadducees

The Sadducees were of the wealthy ruling class in Jesus' day. Many of them comprised the priesthood that controlled the temple in Jerusalem and the Jewish legal council called the Sanhedrin. They were in some ways more conservative than the Pharisees. They only recognized the Torah as the inspired word of God. They acknowledged neither the prophets nor the oral traditions that came after the first five books of the Bible. Consequently, they did not believe in the resurrection or any life after death. They were often at odds with the Pharisees over this matter. People had different ways of reacting to Roman occupation. The Sadducees thought it was best to try to get along with Rome. Why not? They were well off, and as long as they kept on Rome's good side, they could live comfortable lives. The Sadducees opposed Jesus because they feared the people, and they feared Rome. The vast majority of the Jews did not share the Sadducees acceptance of Roman rule. They believed the Messiah would come, sword in hand, and drive the gentiles out of the Promised Land. Even though Jesus never spoke against Rome or advocated rebellion, the Sadducees shared the popular view of what the

Messiah would be. Thus, in their minds, any messiah figure was a threat to their power.

In the second half of the first century rebellion against Rome led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. During the final siege against Jerusalem the rebels killed many of the Sadducees. In an effort to save their lives some of the Sadducees came over to the rebel's side only to die at the hands of the Romans. This was the end of the Sadducees power. However, the Pharisees continued to shape Judaism in a post temple world.

The Essenes

In Jesus' day some people wanted to fight Rome. Others wanted to live with Rome. The Essenes chose isolation as their response to the crazy first century world. They formed a community on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. There the Essenes thought they could live as the true people of God. They rejected the Herods, the temple, and even the Pharisees as corrupt. In their mind, only they were true Israel. They would create a pure community from which the Messiah would come forth to redeem Israel (They actually believed God would send two messiahs, one a priest and the other a king). They, the sons of light, would be the ones he would use to reestablish Israel. The impure Jews as well as the gentiles were bound for destruction.

The gospels do not mention the Essenes. The Romans destroyed the Essene community before converging on Jerusalem. Many scholars believe the Essenes were the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

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AMBASSADOR

Representative of one royal court to another.

According to the KJV, NAS, and NIV reading of [Joshua 9:4](#), the Gibeonites pretended to be official ambassadors from a foreign government as they approached Joshua. Compare NRSV. The king of Babylon sent official ambassadors to learn of Hezekiah's power ([2 Chron. 32:31](#)). Pharaoh Necho sent ambassadors to prevent King Josiah of Judah (640-609) from joining in the battle at Megiddo, but Josiah persisted and died ([2 Chron. 35:21](#)).

**Faithful ambassadors
bring health to a nation**
([Prov. 13:17](#)).

*Paul saw himself even in prison
as an ambassador sent by the
divine King to proclaim salvation
through Christ to the world
([Eph. 6:20](#); compare [2 Cor. 5:20](#)).*

- Holman Bible Dictionary.

Time Magazine 6-14-14

"You Won't Believe How Little Americans Read"

- "A paltry 19 minutes a day." (Per US Bureau of Labor Statistics' "American's Time Use Survey)

- 20-24 ave. 10 min/day reading

- 24-35 ave. 8 min/day reading

- 19-24 Ave. 4 min/day reading

- little over 30 preparing something to eat

- 11 min on lawn & garden care

- Ave. American's day (in hours)

8.75 sleeping

5.25 leisure/recreation/sports

- TV = 2.75 hours (166 min.)

- Socializing/Communicating 45

- Gaming (screens or boards) 25

- **Reading 19**

15-19 = 4 min

20-24 = 10 min

25-34 = 8 min

35-44 = 11 min

45-54 = 15 min

55-64 = 26 min

65-74 = 44 min

75+ = 62

- Sports/Exercise/Recreation 18

- Relaxing/Thinking 18

- Arts & Entertainment 5

Average American's Daily Usage of Time (in hours)

3.5 working

- 1.75 household duties
- 1.25 eating/dining
- 0.75 personal care
- 0.75 caring for others/children
- 0.75 buying things
- 0.5 educational activities

0.33 religious / civic activities

- 0.33 "other"
- 0.15 phone/mail/email

Article in "Digital Trends" entitled:

"Americans Spend An Alarming Amount of Time Checking Social Media On Their Phones"

- Informate Mobile Intelligence" reports:
- As of early 2015 average American checks their various outlets of SM **17 times a day...**
- That equates to **over once per every waking hour**
- At least 6 other countries are > 40X/day

*****25-54 use more than 19-24*****

KEY: If not for social media (or not willing to admit it), and if not leading the world in SM dependence, Americans ARE by far the #1 consumers when it comes to Internet & data usage... with the average American now using (aka **"disappearing into") their smart phones for**

4.7 hours a day!

***** Over 280 minutes per DAY!

***** Approx 1/3 of our waking hours!!!

- Quote: (last words of the article) - "So do yourself a favor and TRY to unplug from that tiny little screen for s while. You mane surprised by how much more you can accomplish with an extra few, I distracted hours in your day." (Amen!)

"Temporary investments, by definition, cannot & will not produce eternal dividends." -JDP

[Read verses from Revelation 2-3 for perspective:](#)

A. Ephesus = 2:5 & 7

B. Smyrna = 9-11 (10b-11 key)

C. Pergamum = 16-17

D. Thyatira = 22-23 (23b) & 26-29

E. Sardis = 3-6

F. Philadelphia = 8-13 (8&12 key)

G. Laodicia = 15-17 & 18-20 & 21,22

Cheyenne Dog Soldiers

Cheyenne "Dog Soldiers" called "the Spartans of the plains." They were 1 of 6 warrior societies... Each wore a "dog rope" sash, which was a rope with a "picket pin" (a pointed stake of some sort) that could be driven into the ground and, when connected to the horse, would allow it to graze without wondering away... However, when the picket pin was put in the ground and attached to the warrior, it was a mark of resolve in battle... No turning back, no matter what! - from illustration exchange.com (Joshua 1:6)

"Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them." – Joshua 1:6

Gideon and God's 300...

Gideon began with 32,000... The LORD said "you have too many" because they will take credit for the victory, assuming their own strength & might secure the battle... So any & all who "fearful & trembling" were told they could go home... 22,000 cowards left, they cut-and-run & went home.

10,000 soldiers remained... The LORD SAID: "still too many"
"take them down to the water and I WILL TEST THEM
there... "and whoever I SAY should go, will go, and whoever I
say should not go, will not go with you..."

Notice: God chose... BUT He used Gideon as His instrument of
selection, after having explained His methodology & value
system (shrewdness is priceless in battle)...

So in the end, the LORD chose an army of 300 over 32,000
(with over 2/3 cowards), and even over a force of 10,000
fierce fighting men... NOT because of the 300 men (although
their battle-ready shrewdness was what differentiated
them). No. The point the LORD was making was that HE
controls the battle & ALL the credit for our victories!)

- 300 vs countless Mideonites!

- 300 = < 1% of 32,000

- 300 = only 3% of the 10,000

How virtue becomes virtue:

Quote: (from)

"The Unquiet Grave"

*"Courage is not simply one of many virtues, but rather, courage is the form of every virtue at its teasing stage."
...The soul is refined when convictions are proved through testing. When what we believe survives the threat (and application) of persecution & trial, the courage involved is transformational. That's how character is formed. Put simply, a virtue is a belief that has proved itself.*

(Read Proverbs 17:3)

*The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold,
But the LORD tests hearts.*