

Acts Week 49

Paul faces the council Chapter 23

1 Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." 2 And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. 3 Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?"

4 And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"

5 Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.' "

6 But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!"

Paul once again chooses his words very carefully; conscience comes first; he says he has lived in all good conscience until this day (syneidēsis, G4893, a conscience reconciled to God, 1 Peter 3:21; free from guilt, the *consciousness of rectitude, of right conduct*. Now look at his use of the whitewashed wall or whited wall in numerous versions). "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!" The implication would be of a hypocrite, kon-ee-ah'-o G 2867, *is applied to a hypocrite who conceals his malice under an outward assumption of piety, Acts 23:3. See Mark 23:27*

It became obvious that Ananias was upset when Paul spoke against him. We can see this for two very different reasons: First, Paul stops Ananias when he realizes Ananias is judging him, and Paul's inclination is correct. What he ordered was not legal for him to do. Ananias had to deal with the truth: who is this Jew who knows the law? Paul's condemnation of Ananias was also correct. Paul then, after reciting Exodus, took the next step in bringing out the rest of the law, Deuteronomy 25:1-3. Paul's judgment of Ananias proved to be factual in the very next sentence. "for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" Paul knew and understood the game going on here. He cited the law from Exodus 22:28. Ananias became angry and threatened; the truth often offends those who take the supposed high ground and see themselves as more than they truly are.

When Paul was told Ananias was the high priest, he immediately said I did not know he was the high priest but did not back down either by citing the law, demonstrating his wisdom and knowledge, and laying low any further challenges. Ananias, there are three men with this same name but not the same man. Ananias who conspired with his wife Sapphira to deceive the brethren about how much they contributed. Ananias who removed the scales from Paul's eyes, and Ananias the high priest.

Moody writes, "Paul was more concerned about how God would judge him than the Sanhedrin. Though he was a Jew who followed Jesus, he had done nothing to dishonor God."

I know some of you have probably been challenged at some point in your walk and confession of Jesus. I know that in certain circles, it is hard to stand against others, and cutting off the debate seems much simpler than speaking the truth. Paul again sets the example that Moody writes about. It brings to mind what Jesus said when He stood before the disciples, "Mark: 8:38 - **“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”** Are you prepared to give a reason for the hope that you have? Are you ready to face the giants who prompt fear and retreat because you may not be ready for this? Paul is now before the very people who want him dead, and yet he will, as did Job, not deny his God.

Matthew Henry adds; 23:1-5 "See here the character of an honest man. He sets God before him, and lives as in his sight. He makes conscience of what he says and does, and, according to the best of his knowledge, he keeps from whatever is evil, and cleaves to what is good. He is conscientious in all his words and conduct. Those who thus live before God, may, like Paul, have confidence both toward God and man. Though the answer of Paul contained a just rebuke and prediction, he seems to have been too angry at the treatment he received in uttering them. Great men may be told of their faults, and public complaints may be made in a proper manner, but the law of God requires respect for those in authority."¹

This is the same character all Christians are to live out. We will be careful not to respond in an inflammatory manner. If you need to practice this, I recommend that you do so with your own adult children. Why? Because they sometimes come to see us as not really with it, that the old way was alright, but this new way of accepting others faults seems more Godly. But always be ready to back away, a little light through a closed door strikes more interest.²

In verse 6, we see the contention brewing between the Sadducees and the Pharisees; remember that the Sanhedrin was composed of both parties.

Paul cries out, **“Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!”** Here is the

¹ <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/acts/23-5.htm>

² With my four adult children, I have found myself in those tough emotional places, watching my kids navigate iffy dating relationships, discouraging job hunts, health problems, and many other challenges. There have been many times in which trusting God hasn't been easy, times when I'm sure His handiwork is unraveling. God, I know You've said that we can be confident that You'll complete the good work You've started, but sometimes it's so hard to see how that could happen.

<https://www.focjusunonthefamily.com/parenting/how-to-trust-god-with-your-adult-children/>

vast divide between the two parties; what is strange is that the Pharisees seem to have not pushed back against any of this. These are prideful men not ready for any other to take the stage, but pride in this is the devil's handiwork, and these shall pay later for the sins of today. James Montgomery Boice believes Paul intentionally spoke of being a Pharisee and of the resurrection to put the Sadducees and Pharisees at odds. We can see that his plan worked as we move forward, but if the Pharisees found no fault in Paul worthy of punishment and especially death, how strong is the conviction? As Roman men oversee the council to get to the deeper truth, how can they move forward seeing this division and that the Pharisees find no evil in Paul?

Verses 7-10; 7 And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. 8 For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. 9 Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God."

10 Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks.

Luke now tells us of the infighting that takes place. How can there ever be unity between the two sects when one party's disbelief is such an egregious offense to the other party?

11 But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."

12 And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. 14 They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. 15 Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

16 So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. 17 Then Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, "Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him." 18 So he took him and brought him to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner

called me to him and asked me to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you.”

The plot against Paul is exposed here in verses 17-18. As we look at this, we can only think of the despise that fills the hearts of these men. How does it happen that we can become so hostile toward those we disagree with that some will go as far as to seek murder?

Hate is like a cancer or an infection in our bodies, seeking to poison our bodies; it wants to be felled, satisfy its hunger, and if left unaddressed, it will destroy the entire body. We can see this happening with those who have taken the oath not to eat again until they have killed Paul. If this were a real pledge, obviously, these men would have died of starvation in a short time. But today, in our politics, we find the same as we witness our nation rapidly falling apart. When debate is censored and blocked from taking place, anger begins to fester, and some lose control of containing the fire that burns inside them. Retaliation becomes the focus, whether from insult or injury, both being wrong; it festers until it is addressed.

Censorship is dangerous, especially when it comes from opposition; here, we find the Sadducees at odds with the Pharisees, the Democrats at odds with the Republicans, and a nation pays for it all in many ways. **Rom 12:18: If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.**

19 Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside, and asked privately, “What is it that you have to tell me?”

20 And he said, “The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him. 21 But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you.”

22 So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded him, “Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me.”

As I read this, I was somewhat concerned that the commander may have kept the news to himself and allowed the plot to take place. But he knew what the plot would cause and it would not have been good for anyone.

23 And he called for two centurions, saying, “Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night; 24 and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring him safely to Felix the governor.” 25 He wrote a letter in the following manner:

26 Claudius Lysias,

To the most excellent governor Felix:

Greetings.

27 This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. 28 And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. 29 I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. 30 And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him.

Farewell.

31 Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. 32 The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks. 33 When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. 34 And when the governor had read it, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that he was from Cilicia, 35 he said, "I will hear you when your accusers also have come." And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

What was the Praetorium?

the palace in which the governor or procurator of a province resided, to which use the Romans were accustomed to appropriate the palaces already existing, and formerly dwelt in by kings or princes; at Jerusalem it was a magnificent palace which Herod the Great had built for himself, and which the Roman procurators seemed to have occupied whenever they came from Caesarea to Jerusalem to transact public business.

Interestingly, where Paul was from helped make the governor's mind up about hearing the case. Paul's Roman citizenship has now twice saved him. In Acts 18:15, Paul went before Gallio and Gallio said this is about your own law, figure it out for yourself. We can only imagine that here it was because knowing of Paul's Roman citizenship.