

Acts (Part Twenty-Three)

Acts 22 - 23:10 Paul's Incredible Skill at Extricating Himself from Trouble

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 28-Feb-89; Sermon #BS-AC23

We are going to go into something here at the beginning that, again, at least has a little bit of a play on what we are going through in the book of Acts.

Every single one of us knows that the apostle Paul seemed to be constantly in trouble in regard to crowds of people who did not like what he said. And as a result, some of them pounded on him every once in a while, and he was in a position where he could have struck back very violently maybe in self-defense, and maybe picked up a rock or two or a big club or stick or whatever and wailed away at those people who were trying to beat the tar out of him. And that certainly would be understandable if somebody did that with all the provocation that he received. And you may find yourself someday in that kind of a situation where maybe you are confronted with the necessity of defending yourself and it has not been necessarily because you have provided any kind of a provocation. You just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. At least I hope you are no provocation when this thing occurs.

So just very briefly at the beginning of this, since we find in this chapter that we are going to go into, that in the perils of Paul he is in trouble again. But we are going to look at this principle of defending yourself and see a little bit about what the Bible has to say.

Let us go, first of all, to Matthew the 5th chapter, verse 39. It is one that most of us know, if not by memory, we at least recognize that it is there.

Matthew 5:39 "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also."

Now does this mean that we never defend ourselves? Obviously this is a situation that is going to require a great deal of faith and a great deal of restraint. Because whenever we are attacked, or even if there is the fear of

attack, we either think of running, which might be the wiser course, or we think of fighting, what the psychologists call "fight or flight." And there are those who are aggressive enough or they feel confident enough of their own ability or maybe they just feel the necessity of fighting. Even though there might be a way for them to run away, they just have the background and training that they would rather fight than flight.

We have to begin to build, though, on the wider application from the Bible, and I think that all of us understand that the Bible makes it clear that we have to live by God's law of love in every situation. And it is a high ideal, but that law of love is at work, and God wants us to strive to do what is right in every situation regardless of the provocation.

Now, certainly we should not fight back with the intent of inflicting injury on the other person. If we did that, that certainly would not be love, would it? To pick up a whatever was handy and bash the other person so that they were injured in their body in some way. That would not be right. However it does not appear wrong to the Worldwide Church of God that the using of restraint, or let us say, of enough force to restrain the other person from continuing his attack is not wrong. Now, I hope that none of you ever get into that kind of situation. And the best way to avoid that kind of thing is to do your best to anticipate what might occur and avoid the circumstance in the first place.

There is a proverb that says that (I am paraphrasing it; I am not going to say that this is precisely what is said there), but it says that the fool sees the danger but goes on and is punished. Now, there is a person who apparently receives enough information or enough warning, you might say, that he is aware that what he is doing is treading on dangerous ground, getting into territory where there might be a circumstance where he is attacked, but he goes on heedlessly and he ends up getting hurt. We certainly do not want to do that.

The best thing to do, if it is at all possible, is to avoid a situation where you see that there is potential danger.

Everybody, I think most everybody tries to do this, and you warn your children, do not go into certain areas and you yourself try to avoid those

areas that might carry a high risk of mugging, or you know that there is a potential danger of being held up and robbed and so you avoid those areas. You tend to not to want to travel through certain areas at a certain time, though you may permit yourself to go through that same area at another time, like during the day when there would be crowds of people you might go through an area without any hesitancy at all, but during the night you might go miles out of your way to avoid.

Now that is the kind of thing that we are thinking about. You might also warn your children not to play with certain children, because you know that they are aggressive, bullyish, and are very likely to pick on your child, especially if they learn that your child is not going to be one that is fighting back. Now again, you do pretty much the same thing. You have a tendency to avoid people that you know are going to be unusually assertive and aggressive, and you just skirt around them. Well, that is certainly not wrong. That is a right principle to do.

There are going to be times, though, when perhaps you are confronted, and there is nothing you can do. Well, hopefully when that time arrives, you have taken care to establish good contact with God and that you have been obeying Him right along within the limits of your ability. You do not have to turn to this, but it says in I John 3:22, "And whatever we ask, we receive from Him." You are going to be asking for protection, and if it occurs that you need protection very quickly, then hopefully this has been a part of your preparation, your program for avoiding the circumstances.

"And whatever we ask, we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight." Well, what pleases Him, it tells us in Hebrews 11:6, is to live by faith. So you have been living by faith and you have been praying, you have been studying, you have been avoiding lying, stealing, you see, those kinds of things. You are not being deceitful in your life. You are an open book, childlike attitude, and God is going to respond to that kind of person. You know, He can respond instantaneously and angels can show up or He can change people's minds and make all kinds of strange things occur.

I will tell you something that happened to my wife and daughter just recently when they were down in Florida because of the death of my mother-in-law. I

was down there too, but I left to come back here for Sabbath services and they remained on. But while I was there the family was discussing the sale of the house. It was to be part of the estate and then the inheritance that would be divided to the children. And partly out of curiosity and to see what kind of work and so forth might be done in the house, I made a tour around it. Well, right next door, very close, is a home with chain link fence in between them, but two large dogs, one of them a Great Dane and the other a Doberman Pinscher. And all the while that I was walking in between the houses, they were growling and menacing threateningly there and I was sure glad there was a big fence because they were pacing up and down nervously, real upset at my being there.

Well, I believe it was a day or two later, I guess it was getting near evening or it was evening, my wife and daughter and her two other sisters were standing out in front of the house and suddenly, without warning, these two dogs burst around the corner—they were free! And they headed right for the group of ladies. They were almost on top of them and suddenly, old Marmaduke, you know, the Great Dane, and the Doberman Pinscher—did you ever see a dog who was running real fast and they just put their legs out in front of them and slide to a stop? Well, that is what they did. They just put their legs out in front of them and slid to a stop in front of the ladies. And then just kind of, I guess, stood there a little bit dazed for just a second. And then the man realized they were out of the yard and he called them and they came back.

It makes you wonder. What made them stop? Did the dogs see something that the people did not? Something that made them put the brakes on? I do not know, you just have to wonder about something like that. Maybe they did see something and they were very suddenly subdued.

Now if you are studying and praying and you are doing your thing and have a good relationship with God, well, He is going to protect.

I will tell you another amazing one. I know a man who was a member of the church down in Long Beach and as far as I know, he is still there. But this man was working in a store and he was held up. And he did what the police said, you know, you get held up and the guy has a gun on you, you just hand the money over, say, "yes sir, yeah, here, here, go ahead and take it." Well,

he gave the man the money out of the register and then the man pointed the gun at him and he was not any more than the distance across the counter away. He pulled the trigger and fired and missed. You know, point blank. How did that happen? And then the man ran out of the shop. And on the way out, he dropped his wallet. Police came, picked up the wallet, and were waiting at the house for him when he got there.

At any rate, certainly nothing wrong, and certainly right, that you prepare in advance and then if something does happen, why, you very quickly ask God to intervene.

Now there are certainly examples from Christ's life. He was the perfect Man and He was no pushover. I am sure that He was strong, virile, aggressive and assertive in the right way and the right circumstance, but in every case He used wisdom in approaching these things. And He somehow or another was able to perceive or discern when the time was right to aggressively push forward and confront issues, as He did, let us say, with the chasing of the money changers out of the Temple. And when the time was to very cautiously withdraw, and when the time was to humbly and meekly submit to whatever occurred, as He did in the beating and the crucifixion. So He was able to somehow avoid confrontation as much as possible, as much as wisdom, despite the general antagonism that people would have for Him, He managed to escape a very large amount of it.

Back in Romans 12, verse 19, another general instruction. I should not say general, it is pretty specific.

Romans 12:19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves [that precludes us taking any vengeance on someone, it precludes fighting with the intent of inflicting some kind of bodily harm on the other person], but rather give place to wrath; for it is written: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

There is His promise. He does not absolutely say that we are going to escape injury at all times. It is very evident that many of His servants in many circumstances could not avoid the situation, and God did not choose to intervene to cause the confrontation to just dissipate away into nothing. But rather He allowed His servant to undergo a beating, but I am sure that He

intervened at least to the extent that He gave him the right attitude in, let us say, taking it, being able to take the injury and not necessarily die from it. Some of them undoubtedly did; died as a martyr. And so then verse 20 takes a more positive approach.

Romans 12:20 Therefore "If your enemy hungers, feed him; and if he thirsts, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

The idea is that as you have opportunity, try to do good and it may not come right at that particular time. The coals of fire indicate a refining process, not an inflicting of injury.

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

I am sure that if we are in a good attitude above all things, we have a good relationship with God, why, He is going to be in almost every case, very willing and quick to come to our aid, as Psalm 91 expresses so beautifully. So we can rest our confidence in that and do what we can to prepare for that kind of a situation by being careful and also at the same time, taking care of our relationship with God.

Let us go back to the book of Acts. Acts 21, where we were the last time, concerned itself with Paul's trip to Jerusalem and how he was warned in many cases, I believe it was three different cases, that if he went there, there was going to be a great deal of trouble for him, but he nonetheless resolutely set his face to go there. He felt that it was necessary that he go there and part of the reason, of course, was to carry the contribution that was made by the Gentiles to the Jerusalem church. That was very important in regards to unifying the church, and so Paul felt that he had to go there and he also looked at it as being a first step toward evangelizing the western areas of the Mediterranean Sea. So it was going to be back to Jerusalem and then from there to Rome and from Rome on to Spain.

But at any rate, he went and we find then that when he got there, why, he immediately was embroiled in a dispute over what was the alleged taking of a Gentile, Trophimus, into the Temple. We of course know that that was not

true. It was a trumped up charge, but nonetheless, it was a charge that was made against him, and so we find that he was caught in the midst of another riot and rescued from that riot by the commander of the garrison there in Jerusalem.

We had worked our way to the end of chapter 21 when it became 9 o'clock last week. So we will pick up the story then in Acts the 22 chapter and verse 1, where the apostle Paul is going to begin his address to the crowd there, standing just outside the Temple. So he says,

Acts 22:1-2 "Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now." And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said:

Fathers here indicates older people and defense indicates what is going to be his keynote in this address. It does not simply mean a reasoned answer as our English word defense means. Like we go to court and we make a defense where we are giving a reasoned answer to a charge. But the context shows that what Paul intended by that was not only was he going to defend himself in terms of the accusation against him, but also it is very clear that there is going to be the concept of making a witness. In other words, Paul was going to preach too. He took every opportunity. He was not going to let this slip by. And so he then proceeded to do that.

Now you can see as we go through this, that Paul did not make a point by point reply to the charge of taking a Gentile into the Temple, but rather, you are going to see that he took this opportunity to evangelize, to preach some of the gospel of the Kingdom of God, to give a witness of his work for Christ. Now, his defense is what some may consider to be apostasy. The "some" would be the Jews who were listening to him. So what some might consider to be apostasy, Paul is going to claim here was actually a vision and a commission from heaven. That is going to be the basis of his defense. Now we know that that is true. But of course they did not believe that what he was telling them or was going to tell them was was the truth. But they did give him attention because he was going to be speaking to them in Hebrew. I take it when it says Hebrew, it does not mean really what we might consider classical biblical Hebrew, but rather in Aramaic. In other words, the language of the people of the day.

Acts 22:3 "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today."

He actually covers a couple of areas here, actually three of them in this. He covers his "genesis" is what it says in the Greek, his birth or his beginning. Where it says that he was brought up is actually the Greek word nourishment which indicates an early period in his life. And that he was taught. The Greek word there is more akin to our word training. So his genesis was as a Jew. But his nourishment was in the city. Now you see, that is an important point. His nourishment was not in Tarsus, but rather in Jerusalem, which indicates that though he was born in an area outside the city of Jerusalem, his earliest memories and his childhood formative years, where his psyche, you might say, was trained was in the city of Jerusalem.

He was doing this—it was true—but he wanted to make as close of an identification with these people as possible. Very good psychologically. So, it indicates then that Paul was in the city of Jerusalem at the very latest from his early teens on. And it is very likely that he was in Jerusalem earlier than that.

Now his formal training under Gamaliel probably would have begun there in his early teens. Somewhere where we might consider a person going into about the 9th grade. What Paul is doing is he is laying a platform here, a foundation, so that they will understand that his Jewishness cannot be argued against.

Acts 22:4-5 "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the counsel of the elders from whom I received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there in Jerusalem to be punished."

What he is doing is establishing evidence of his zeal.

There is one thing I just happened to think about here and that is the mention of the name Gamaliel. That is the second time in the book that his name has come up. The other time was earlier. Gamaliel was one of the outstanding teachers of his day. He was of the school of Hillel, which was, I would have to say by our definition today, a moderate approach to the law. It was not what we would consider to be ultra orthodox, but neither were they liberal either. Now we are going to get to something probably about the Sadducees and Pharisees that might surprise you a little bit, a little bit later about their different approach to things.

But at any rate Paul was establishing before these people his zeal for what we would call Jewishness. Now what he was establishing here is that he in all likelihood went further in his zeal than anybody in his audience. He persecuted people to the death! And in many cases those people were jailed. What he mentions the high priest here for is so that if anybody cared to verify what Paul was saying, it was on record, that the high priest had a record of it. Because the high priest gave letters of authority for Paul to do what he did.

Acts 22:6 "Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near to Damascus at about noon, and suddenly a great light from heaven shone round about."

Now we are going to get Paul's description of the Damascus Road incident. A couple of things are added here that are not included in the other account in chapter 9. One of them is that it was about noon. That was not included. And that is interesting, you see, because at noon, the sun is high in the sky. It is the brightest part of the day, and yet the light from heaven outshone the sun. So we get a measure of the brightness, something that we can judge it against. Now that has to be pretty bright. If you look at the sun at high noon with your eyes wide open, you are going to regret it. But this light was brighter than that.

Acts 22:7-8 "And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'"

Here is another addition. The name of the town of Jesus is given. That was not given in chapter 9. Now, I am sure that this was given so that the audience would have a more precise identification of the speaker; not Paul, but the One in the vision. It was Jesus of Nazareth. Now there were a lot of Jesuses in that day, Yeshuas, a very common name. But when he identified this Yeshua with Nazareth, it made very clear in the minds of these people because they knew somewhat of the local history, I am sure. They knew what had occurred in 31 AD because it was noised about the community. It had to be noised about. That is why they were persecuting Paul. And so he identified the speaker in the vision as being Jesus of Nazareth.

Another thing is, that identifying Jesus with Nazareth also identifies his conversion with his homeland. Even though it took place in Syria, he was on the road there and the Jews might have an inclination to be prejudiced against that, be skeptical of it, even if their mind was open a little bit that, well, maybe Paul did undergo something. If it happened in a Gentile land it was going to be prejudiced against. So you see, by using Nazareth, he puts a bit of his homeland into his conversion, which took place in a foreign land.

Acts 22:9 "And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me."

What he is doing is here is identifying that of the whole group that was with him, and I do not know how many people were there, but of the group that was with him, he only was converted. You cannot be converted unless you hear the Word, and these people did not hear the Word. Faith comes by hearing and they did not hear the word of the Lord, and so what he is saying is that this was something that was directed *entirely* at him. He is focusing the attention right there. So what can we say? We say, then, that only the apostle Paul experienced a divine revelation out of this entire group. Now they saw the light, they heard a sound, but they did not see it as a revelation of Jesus in His glory. All they saw was a light. But to Paul, there was a personification of everything.

Acts 22:10 "So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.'

Now, already Paul had been so impacted by what was occurring that he called the person Lord, which means boss or master. Now it might be understood to be something that would be just natural to say. But I do not think in this context that we would say that it was just natural. All of this was surrounded by the glory and the blindness and so forth, and Paul was impacted in his mind that he was looking at someone now as a new Boss.

Acts 22:11 "And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus."

I am sure that was a humbling experience for the apostle Paul, a man who was assertive, aggressive, a take charge guy, a leader of men, and here suddenly now he is humbled to the place where he cannot even see. And so he has to be led, almost you might say like a little child into Damascus.

Acts 22:12-16 "Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him. Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

One of the interesting things here is how Paul illustrates the role of Ananias. Now undoubtedly, Ananias was already a Christian at the time that Paul came into Damascus. He was not only a Christian, but in all probability, I would say 100% probability, he was a minister. But Paul leaves that out. He does not say that Ananias the Christian came to him. Instead, he calls upon

Ananias' race, his ancestry. He was a Jew, you see, and he was devout in the law. Undoubtedly he was. So Paul is stressing what he could say about the man that would be acceptable to a Jew and he is excluding those things which were also true, but he is excluding those things that would immediately make these people take offense and be prejudiced against Paul.

Acts 22:13 And said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him.

Now, the restoring of his sight. I think that Paul is using this as God's confirmation that he was involved in Paul's life, that he was involved in Paul's conversion. And this is the idea that Paul is attempting to get across to these people. That is, that Paul is in the position that he is in, not by choice, but by *God's* choice. That is not by Paul's choice, but by God's choice, that Paul did not just willy-nilly choose to go this way because he found it attractive, or he found that he could make some money this way, or he found that this was something that he really liked and agreed with. But rather he is trying to get across to these people that here he was going along in his life, minding his own business, so to speak, and God suddenly intervened and just completely made his world topsy-turvy and changed and put him here.

You can see what Paul is trying to avoid is the idea in these people's minds that he is an apostate. So he is then given back his sight as an affirmation from God and also in order that Paul will be able to carry out his commission.

Acts 22:14 "Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One and hear the voice of His mouth.'

See how Paul is putting this. Any of you who have read the autobiography or heard Mr. Herbert Armstrong talk, it sounds so familiar. Mr. Armstrong, "here I was just going along in my life trying to make a million bucks and wham, you know, suddenly God threw me down and took my money away and just completely changed my life." Well, there is a pattern here. God did not strike Mr. Armstrong blind, but he took away his wealth and position of power and authority, and just completely turned his life upside down. Well, that is what Paul is saying here.

Acts 22:15 'For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.'

Do you think that that is hyperbole to say that Paul was witness to all men? Well, one might think it is. But you know, everybody is going to read this book someday, and he is going to be a witness to all men, in that manner anyway. He may not do it verbally, but he is certainly going to do it through the things that he wrote, and he wrote most of the New Testament.

And it is interesting. Here is something else that is added in verse 16. And that is, he shows a bit of Ananias' attitude. "Come on, Paul," you know, kind of reproachful. "What are you standing there with your teeth in your mouth, get baptized." That sort of thing. Almost as if it was kind of like a put down, like Paul was not acting quick enough.

Oh, another thing that I got out of verse 14. Did you notice there what he said, "The God of our fathers"? You see, he connected those people in his present day with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will tell you, this thing is a masterpiece psychologically. I just do not know, except under inspiration, how anybody could just put something together like this right off the top of his head. And it did not work. I mean, at least for that present time, it did not work. But what he was doing is, he was showing these people the continuity between Paul's revelation and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was showing the continuity between the Old Testament and the revelation of Jesus Christ. Just awesome, really something.

Verse 15 has something there. The purpose of the calling was that Paul would be a witness. And remember what I told you earlier about the word "defense"? That Paul does not give a step-by-step reply of the charges against him, but rather he is indicating here that to him defense means making a witness. And that is exactly what he is doing. Paul sees himself on trial here, not for bringing a Gentile into the Temple, but rather because of his witness for Christ. That is what the real issue was. It was not the bringing of the Gentile into the Temple at all.

Then verse 16 again. What might be contained in Ananias' rather reproachful statement here or question, "Why are you waiting?" is, let us say, part of the intention or purpose or reason for baptism. And that is that baptism is an

expression of faith in the blood of Christ, in God's promise to forgive sins, as well as being an expression of submission to the will of God. So what Ananias was doing here is saying, "Paul, you just experienced one of the most awesome things that any man has ever gone through. Why aren't you running out to get baptized and submit to it?" That sort of thing. Now I am sure Ananias did not say it like I did but at least Luke got across there a measure of urgency that was in Ananias to Paul quickly submitting.

Acts 22:17-18 "Now it happened, when I was returned to Jerusalem and was praying in a temple, that I was in a trance, and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.'

Hold your finger there and let us go back to Acts the 9th chapter and we will place this in its time element, because Paul has suddenly jumped three years in the course of a verse there.

Acts 9:26-30 And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples [Remember he just mentioned back here when I returned to Jerusalem.], but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out, and he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists [remember he said back here that the people are not going to receive your testimony], but they attempted to kill him. When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

Now, let us go back to Galatians 1.

Galatians 1:17-18 Nor did I go to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to

Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

And it was after that three-year period that Acts 22:17-18 fits in.

Why do you think that he would mention something like this in the course of his defense? That he was in the Temple and in a trance, that is, he had a vision. While it was true what had occurred, that it actually had occurred there, but again, it was given in an attempt to show that God was with him. Because the place of revelation, the place of God's revealing Himself to men was considered by the Jews to be the Temple. And so here was a man of God who received a vision in the place where God gives visions. It really did occur, but again we were going to find that they rejected it.

At any rate, God warned him to get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me. And so then Paul went elsewhere.

Acts 22:19-20 So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'

Verses 18 and 19 may not make a great deal of sense to you, but what they are is, in the vision that Paul was having he talked back to Christ. Now when I say talk back, I do not mean that it was smart alecky or anything like that. I am sure it was very respectful. But what Paul was doing is he was giving Christ a case or a reason as to why, rather than fleeing Jerusalem, he ought to stay here. He was saying, in effect, "Look, I am the very person who was involved in all these things and nobody else can make a better witness here than I can." Well, Christ rejected it. So I guess Paul's approach was that surely they will listen to me. Well, here he is finding out that Christ was right. No, they will not listen to him.

Acts 22:21 And then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'"

So Christ's command stood. And that was not only to assure Paul's safety, but also to implement another part of the commission. That is, that he was commissioned to go to the Gentiles.

Acts 22:22 And they listened to him until this word [That nasty G word, Gentile. As long as he had avoided that word, things were going along respectfully.], and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth [Remember what they said to Christ, "Away with Him! Away with Him!" It is the same thing as saying, put him to death.], for he is not fit to live!"

Undoubtedly some of the things that Paul said previously strained their credulity. About the vision on the road, "Come on, Paul. No witnesses to it. Yeah, they saw the light, but they didn't see any man. They didn't hear any voice. See, all they did was hear a thunder-like noise. Where are your witnesses to that, Paul?" And well, they might have listened respectfully because after all, the man was kind of on trial for his life. Now he is telling us that he had a "vision in the Temple" kind of thing, and that surely would have strained their credulity there because they could not imagine anybody who had contact with the Gentiles, as this man did, having a vision in their Temple. Was this not Paul the apostate, and that would have strained their credulity. But when they put two and two together and came up with what Paul was implying here in verse 21, that the direction of the revelation was that he should go to the Gentiles, that was the last straw.

In effect, what Paul was saying was that by God's revelation, the Gentiles can be approached directly with God's message of salvation without having to come in contact with the nation of Israel with their customs and institutions. And what it does is it very effectively puts Jew and Gentile on exactly the same level before God. Well, they did not want to admit to that at all, and to them, that was blasphemy, that was apostasy. I mean, here was the man right in front of them admitting to it. And to them that was reason for death.

Acts 22:23 Then, as they cried out, tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air, . . .

I will tell you, these people had strong feelings. I mean, we live in Southern California where anybody can do his own thing and everybody is just so tolerant of whatever goes on, and to see a flasher or something, nobody does any more than blink or smile. Now these people got upset. We do not seem to have strong feelings like that these days.

Speaking of strong feelings, the latest elections in Israel recorded substantial gains by the Likud and also by the Orthodox parties, which indicates another step to the right rising nationalism in Israel, which very likely is going to set the stage for more violent confrontations. Because those people tend to have stronger, more rigid feelings about things, tend to be less tolerant of the Arabs or, let us say, coexistence than the more liberal parties would be. So very interesting. I did not hear of anybody, though, tearing off their clothes and shaking dust into the air over this election.

But they did that. It is probably indicative of their displeasure and non-responsibility for what occurs to that person, spiritually anyway, in the future. Paul did something very similar, I believe, back in chapter 18 when he had some trouble with the people in Corinth, that he took off his mantle or whatever it was, and he shook the dust out of it, which was, "Well, I'm free of any responsibility toward toward you." And that is kind of what these people were doing here. So a riot was brewing once again.

Acts 22:24 . . . the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted against him.

I get the indication that the commander here could not speak Aramaic. Now he may have been able to, but it does not seem as though he did. The only reason I can think that maybe he did understand Aramaic, but it is not indicated here, and that is that there was such a tumult that he could not make head-nor-hair out of what anybody was saying. It was just a bunch of confused gibberish to him. But I would say it would be more likely that he did not understand Aramaic. Latin, yes, Greek, yes, but Aramaic probably not. So he was going to get the truth by scourging Paul.

What this meant was Paul undergoing basically the same thing that Christ underwent. Now whether they would have ever gone to that extent nobody knows, but he was going to be beaten with a flagellant, which was that whip that had the bits and pieces of metal, glass, sharp pieces of broken bone, or whatever, that was far worse than being beaten with rods. Now Paul said he was beaten five times with rods, the 39 stripes, but this would have been far worse than any of those, or maybe cumulatively worse than all five of them.

Acts 22:25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?"

Well, that stopped things quickly when he uttered those words, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?" Now the Romans were kind of noted for their government, their organization of things, and they had a series of well-defined steps that had to be taken before a person could be put under this kind of punishment.

First of all, there had to be a formulation of charges and against Paul there was no formulation of charges. There were only wild accusations, which the commander could not determine even what the accusation was. That is what he was trying to get. So first of all there had to be a formulation of charges. Then he had to be arraigned and a formal accusation made against him. None of these steps had been taken yet. Then there would be a hearing before a Roman magistrate and usually also several other high ranking citizens who would act as a council for the magistrate. And then if there was, there would be a verdict by the magistrate and the carrying out of any sentence if one was due. Well, they were going directly to the punishment without any of the other steps. That was highly illegal. So you can see that that this whole process is being shown by Luke to be very similar to what happened to Christ.

Acts 22:26-28 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care of what you do, for this man is a Roman." Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are

you a Roman?" And he said, "Yes." The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "But I was born a citizen."

A Roman citizenship apparently was something that was pretty highly prized. It was conferred only on people of high social or governmental status. Of course you could be born a citizen of Rome if you were born in the right place, and but if it was something that was going to be conferred on, let us say, a conquered nation, or a citizen of a conquered nation, it was usually only conferred on some of high social status or of a pretty high government standing. It was also conferred upon someone who had performed some sort of exceptional service for the empire, for the government in some way, and it could also be bought by means of bribe.

That is what the commander was saying here. That he had to pay a large sum of money, he had to bribe people in order to become a citizen of Rome. Now normally when that was done, the people you bribed were members of the emperor's family. And when you did that, you normally took as your first name the name of the emperor, out of respect for the bribe I guess you had to pay in order to get your citizenship. So later on we are going to find out what the commander's name is, and when we do, we find out then when it was that he bought his citizenship.

See, he has admitted that he had to pay a large sum of money. Now Paul apparently had a measure of pride for having been born a citizen, which meant that his parents were citizens before him. In other words, his citizenship may have gone back a number of generations and would put him in a class that was, in a sense, far above this man who had to buy his citizenship. Paul did not have to go through that kind of an illegal means that everybody just turned their eyes aside from to get his.

Acts 22:29 Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

Well, that very quickly put an end to the examination. And it produced a measure of fear in the commander because he had come so close to doing something that he would have paid dearly for. I think I told you what the

penalty was before. If you made a mistake like that, you paid the same penalty that you put on the person that you unjustly punished, which meant that our commander here would have gone through the flagellation himself. So I am sure that he was very happy when he found out that he did not make that mistake.

Acts 22:30 The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from his bonds [that is, the commander did], and commanded the chief priests and all the council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

According to the commentaries that I read, the commander of a garrison like this one that we are talking about here in Jerusalem did have a measure of authority, and on rare or unusual cases he could call for a meeting of the Sanhedrin, which was the ruling body of the Jewish people in Jerusalem. And they had a lot of local authority but in one sense they only answered to the procurator. Now the procurator here at this time was a man named Felix. But Felix was up in Caesarea. And so a certain measure of authority was given to the commander of the garrison that if he felt it necessary, he could on his own without going through the procurator command the Sanhedrin to meet.

Now the commander here felt that such a thing was necessary because of the riot. And if there had not been a riot, then probably he would not have convened an assembly of the Sanhedrin. But because of the riot and because he was going to have to report that to the procurator, he wanted to understand a little bit more about why these people were so upset about this man. He could not get any answers, so he decided, "Well, I'll have him stand before these people and maybe they can clarify the issue," because he was still confused about what the issue was. So the commander now has called the council and Paul is now standing the next day before these people.

Chapter 23. The first few verses of this chapter might be considered the comic relief in the book of Acts if it was not so serious. That is, if there was not such serious business involved in this occurrence. But it becomes clearer in this section that the issue is not that Paul defiled the Temple by bringing a Gentile in there. But the real issue was whether the Jews were going to

tolerate Christianity. And of course we know the end of the story here, that they would not do it because they had an irrational hatred toward it. Maybe it was fear that drove them to hatred. I do not know what it was, but at any rate, they had such a competitive attitude toward it and looked at it in such hatred that there was not going to be any measure of toleration.

Acts 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."

Now you wonder how someone who has participated in the stoning of somebody can say that he stands before them in all good conscience. Well, let us not take this too far. What he means is in regard to this charge that is against me. He is saying here, "I am innocent of the charge that is against me." He is not saying that he never did anything evil in his life.

Acts 23:2 And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.

Here comes the comic relief. What a bizarre interruption. Now why the high priest of all people, who certainly one would think would be dignified and rational in his thinking and calm, cool, and collected, a man of responsibility and purpose in regard to following procedures that were set up in the law of God, regarding the trying of a person, you would think that something like this would be the last thing that would come out of that person's mouth. Well, he ordered these people to punch Paul in the mouth.

We can find out though about Ananias from Josephus because he wrote about the man. Now Ananias is not to be confused with the Annas that appears earlier in the book of Acts. Ananias was appointed high priest somewhere around 47 or 48 AD. I believe that Annas' term ended about 36 or 37 AD. But Ananias then was high priest up until somewhere around 58 or 59. Now according to Josephus, he was a brutal, violent, and scheming man who was hated by most of the Jews, and especially those of a more zealous approach to life, because of his pro-Roman leanings and policies. Now, Ananias lost his position around 58 or 59, but he continued to live in Jerusalem. And he was real palsy-walsy with the Romans.

So when war began to break out in 66 AD, one of the first people that the Jewish zealots went after was not the Romans. They went after Ananias, and they burned his house down, and he fled to the palace that had been built by Herod the Great, which was in the northern part of the city. Now Herod the Great was dead a long time ago, but his palace that he built was still there, and he escaped into the palace and kind of barricaded himself in there. But they broke in and Ananias ran hither yon trying to hide himself. He finally got into an aqueduct that ran through the place, and there they found him, and there they did him in. And that was the end of Ananias, loved by no one.

But at any rate, once you know a little bit about his background, you can begin to understand why he did such a thing. It is very likely that the man had no rational answer for Paul, and the only thing that he could do was strike out at him.

Acts 23:3 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?"

Well, Paul was indignant, and he lashed out at this man and accused him of breaking the law, that is, accused Ananias of breaking the law, which he was supposed to enforce by safeguarding the regulations that were in that law that protected even the guilty until they were proven innocent. Now to compound things, Paul had not even yet been charged with a crime. This was just a hearing to find out what the crime and what the charge was. You can see things were in a bad state.

Now Paul, looking at the actions of this man, just made a very quick judgment that anyone acting this way, being a member of the Sanhedrin and acting contrary to the law was going to come under God's judgment. So that quick, he made a judgment that, "Man, because of the way you are acting, you are going to come under the judgment of God. And you, man, are a hypocrite. Here you are supposed to be defending the law and you're doing something that's contrary to the law." And so he made a prophecy that he would come under the judgment of God. It seems as though that prophecy was fulfilled, though it was about 8 or 10 years later that it actually came to pass.

I have to interject something here. We might want to defend Paul and say that what he displayed here was righteous indignation. But that might just be a euphemism for he lost his temper, he lost his cool. And Paul was a man, he was not sinless like Christ, and he should not have done what he did, should not have said what he did.

Acts 23:4-5 And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?" Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of the ruler of your people.'"

Well, the members of the council were astounded because they, of course, considered the high priest to be appointed by God. And so Paul then quoted Exodus 22:28. Now why did Paul not know that it was the high priest? Now some will argue that Paul had poor eyesight and he just could not see that far. I guess that is a possibility. But many modern commentators reject the idea that Paul's eyesight was all that bad. They do not feel that there was enough evidence given in the Bible to really conclusively say that that was so.

The second reason that they give might have been that because of the hasty summoning of this ad-hoc council, you might say that the high priest did not have on his high priestly vestments. And that Paul did not know who the high priest was, except he may have known by name, but he may not have known the man because he had never seen him. Remember, Paul was out of Jerusalem for quite a number of years. And so he simply did not recognize the man as being high priest.

But there is a third reason that I think might just be closer to the truth. And that is that what Paul was stating here was nothing more than a bitter comment. Meaning, "I didn't think that a man who would give such an order could be the high priest." I think that there just might be something to that. Because it would be a statement by Paul, let us say, a comeback that indicated that he knew now, absolutely for sure that he was not going to get a fair trial.

Acts 23:6-8 But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and other Pharisees, he cried out in their council, "Men and

brethren, I am a Pharisee [Here comes some more comic relief here.], the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" And when he said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.

And so there was a loud outburst, and now the Sanhedrin is fighting against one another instead of Paul. Now what he said there, of course, just caused a real sharp turn in the action. Paul knew his audience and he knew what they believed.

Now here comes something that is, I believe, to most of us rather surprising. We use terms today liberal and conservative. And to us, a liberal is somebody who has a more moderate approach to law, a greater degree of toleration and acceptance of other people, their beliefs, practices, and things of that nature. They are a people who are given to change. We would call them progressive. On the other hand, a conservative is a person who wants to maintain the status quo. They want things to remain as they are. They want to have a stricter approach to law, stricter interpretation.

Now of these two groups, which was the more conservative? Most of us would almost always say the Pharisees because that is the connotation in our mind. A Pharisee is somebody who is strict. No. The records show that the Sadducees were the more conservative of the two. The epithet today is if you are kind of unbending and unwilling to change theologically, you are a Pharisee. No, that is not the way it was. It was the Sadducees who were conservative in theology. They wanted a real strict letter of the law interpretation. They were the ones who were the sympathizers with Rome and they wanted to maintain a political status quo. They tended to be wealthier. They were of the priestly families.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, were the silent religious protesters against Rome. They wanted an upheaval, if at all possible. It could be bloodless and quiet, but they were the ones that wanted to change. They were the progressives in the country. They wanted to modernize the law through more

liberal interpretations. And in regard to the possibility of a resurrection, their mind was open. They read the law and they could see possibilities of a resurrection there. The Sadducees read the law and said, no way.

Now Paul knew the beliefs of these people, and so he enabled them to pick a fight with one another.

Why did Paul use the resurrection? There might have been some other doctrine that he might have been able to use. Well, again, Paul is ever looking for a chance to witness some of the truth of the gospel. Time and again, earlier in this book, we read that when the men preached, they preached the resurrection from the dead, and the central figure in a resurrection was the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which proved, which established, the Forerunner that makes it possible for us to be resurrected. Now Paul is attempting, he is hoping here that he can turn the subject to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not just the resurrection in general, but the resurrection by which then he can make a witness of the good news that *all of us* can be resurrected into the Family of God.

Now what Paul is saying here is that a person could be a Christian while generally accepting a Pharisaic view of things. Now I do not know whether you have noticed in the past in the book of Acts, that it is always the Pharisees that are associated with Christianity. I do not know that you ever find, except maybe in one or two places, where it mentions priests who converted. It almost always seems to be the Pharisees who converted over to Christianity, which shows that they were closer than the Sadducees were.

So what Paul was saying here in bringing this subject up, is that one could be a Christian even while generally accepting a Pharisaic point of view. Because Pharisaic Judaism found its fulfillment in Christianity. That is, what the Pharisees hoped that Pharisaism would be, Christianity was. That is what Paul is saying here and that is why he brought the subject up. And the difference is that the Sadducees needed a far more deeper fundamental change in their outlook than the Pharisee did. That is why he jumped on that point, in the hope that it would be able to turn things where he could make a witness and maybe even some of these Pharisees on the Sanhedrin would be converted. I am sure that Paul was ever-hopeful that something like that would occur.

Acts 23:9-10 Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man [Boy, he seemed to have won over some of them.]; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God." [at least Paul made his point with those people] 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 them into the barracks.

You see, the commander, though he could call the assembly together, he could not participate in what was going on. That would have been repulsive to the Jews, he could not preside in any way. And so what he had to do was stand off to the side. And indeed, there must have been some kind of even special dispensation given because of the Jews fear of ritual contamination by having a Gentile even in their presence in their chambers there. What kind of an arrangement was made, I do not know, but there was an arrangement made so that Lysias (that was his name) could be off to the side and maybe watch what was going on without the Jews being afraid of contamination. And then when this riot broke out, he was there so that he could intervene.

Now one thing about the scribes here is that though they find Paul not guilty, they certainly did not represent a majority opinion, actually probably a very small minority, and all they did was exacerbate the situation. So much so that that the commander had to intervene. So next time, starting in verse 11, we will pick up the continuing saga.