

## 79. Paul Spoke to the Sanhedrin

In our last topic, we saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children how to speak with boldness about the death and resurrection of Christ. We also saw that Paul asked the Roman soldiers if they were allowed to give a Roman citizen a scourging when that person had not been condemned. The soldiers immediately told the Roman commander that Paul was a Roman citizen. Today, we will see that Paul was brought to speak to the Sanhedrin so the commander could see why the Jews were so eager to have Paul put to death. The Roman commander wanted to know what Paul had done.

Acts 23:1-3 says, “Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, ‘Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.’ And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. 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?’” Here, we see that Paul fixed his eyes on the Sanhedrin as he spoke to them. He also called them brethren which pointed out the fact that he was also a Jew.

Paul began his words after his greeting by saying, “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” A good conscience is a conscience that is clear before God and feels no guilt. Paul repeats this same thought in Acts 24:16, where he says, “This *being* so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.” Paul wanted to know that his conscience was clear before God. This is also an attitude we want to have in our own lives, because then we know we are doing the things that are pleasing to God.

However, the high priest, Ananias, was very upset at this statement of Paul. As a result, he immediately ordered one of the men standing close to Paul to strike him on the mouth. This high priest was one of the most corrupt high priests in the history of Israel. He was also known as a very cruel man. In fact, he was so cruel that he was murdered by the Jews when they rebelled against the Roman government about five years later. The word translated “strike” means *to strike with the fist or with a whip*. It is used in Luke 22:64, where we read, “And having blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face and asked Him, saying, ‘Prophecy! Who is the one who struck You?’” In this verse, the word was used of the men who struck Christ across the face as he was blindfolded. Here, we see that the Jewish high priest ordered Paul to be struck in the mouth with a fist.

The Jewish law said that it was illegal to strike a man that had not been condemned. However, Ananias had no regard for the law. Paul then spoke to him and made a very important statement. Paul said, “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?” Here, we see that Paul called the high priest a “whitewashed wall”. That same word is used in Matthew 23:27 where Christ said, “‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men’s* bones and all uncleanness.’” Although Ananias may have appeared beautiful in his priestly robes, on the inside he was also full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.

Paul told the high priest that he was supposed to be judging Paul by the Jewish law and he had just commanded Paul to be hit in the mouth, which was against the law. Paul told the high priest that God would judge him for his sin. As we saw above, that was exactly what God did when God allowed the people to murder the high priest five years later. Here, we see that a Jewish religious leader had no respect for the Jewish law and God chose to use Paul to explain the fact that God would judge him.

Acts 23:4-5 says, “And those who stood by said, ‘Do you revile God's high priest?’ 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.”’” Here, we see that some of the other men who were standing there immediately told Paul that Ananias was the high priest. Then Paul apologized and quoted Exodus 22:28 which says, ““You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.”” Here, we see that Paul apologized to the high priest, because he recognized his position even though he could not respect the individual who was holding that position. Paul showed by his example that he respected the Jewish law even when the high priest failed to respect that law.

Acts 23:6-9 says, “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!’ And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection--and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. 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.’” Paul recognized that part of the Sanhedrin were Sadducees and part were Pharisees.

As a result, Paul reminded the men of the Sanhedrin that he was a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. They did not believe in angels. In contrast, the Pharisees had a strong belief in the resurrection as well as a belief in angels. Paul said he was being judged because of his belief and hope in the resurrection. Throughout the Gospels, it was the Pharisees who spent the most time rejecting Christ, because they focused on keeping the law and did not believe that Christ was keeping their laws. In contrast, in the book of Acts, the greatest opposition to the early church came from the Sadducees because of their rejection of the resurrection.

Although Paul was no longer trying to earn his salvation by keeping the Jewish law, he was eagerly looking forward to the resurrection. He certainly still held to that key belief of the Pharisees. Suddenly, the Sanhedrin was totally divided. Immediately, there was a great conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. By what they said, it showed that some of the Pharisees still remembered one of the statements made by Gamaliel many years earlier. Gamaliel had said in Acts 5:38-39, ““And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it--lest you even be found to fight against God.”” Gamaliel had warned that if the apostles were telling the truth when they said that Jesus had risen from the dead, they would be fighting against God.

As a result, the Pharisees immediately began to defend Paul. They said that they did not find any evil in Paul. They said that they thought that it was possible that a spirit or an angel might have spoken to Paul. The belief in the resurrection was one of their key disagreements with the Sadducees. They had remembered the words of Gamaliel. That was why God caused the Pharisees to defend Paul and turn against the Sadducees. The scribes who were Pharisees defended Paul and said that they did not find any evil in Paul.

In fact, some of the Pharisees had even placed their faith in Jesus. Acts 15:5 says, “But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.’” By the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council, those Pharisees were in total agreement with the rest of the Christians. Acts 15:22 says, “Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.” The whole church, including the Pharisees that had believed, had reached an agreement that the Gentiles were not under the law.

The Roman commander had been watching what was happening as Paul spoke to the Sanhedrin. Acts 23:10-11 says, “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. 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.’” The Roman commander realized that there was a great conflict going on among the men of the Sanhedrin. He saw that some were for Paul and others were against Paul. He was afraid that Paul might be pulled in pieces by the two groups. The commander quickly sent soldiers down to rescue Paul and to bring him back into the barracks.

The following night, the Lord came to Paul in the barracks and stood by him. Then, the Lord spoke to Paul to encourage him. The word translated “be of good cheer” means to *be filled with courage or to be comforted*. The Lord told Paul that he had been faithful in speaking for the Lord in the city of Jerusalem. The Lord knew that Jerusalem would be destroyed in just a few years and wanted the leaders to have one more opportunity to choose to either accept or reject Jesus. The Lord also told Paul that he would have the opportunity to give this same witness in the city of Rome.

In the same way, we want to encourage our physical and spiritual children to be faithful in speaking for the Lord. As they are faithful, the Lord will also open up additional opportunities for them to share the Word of God in other places. The Lord is looking for people who will be faithful and He will greatly use such individuals. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children the importance of being faithful to the Lord.