



CAPITOL COMMISSION[®]

Rogue Authority Outwitted by Paul

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Acts 23:1-10 *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.” 2) And 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! And 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 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!” 7) And as he said this, there arose 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 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?” 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. (NASB)*

“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). 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.

JOHN MACARTHUR

Why does Paul begin his defense by taking time to stare at his accusers? How does one defend himself in the face of false accusations? Does his first statement summarize all of what he could say in his defense? Are Paul’s accusers already angry before this trial begins? Why the command to strike Paul on the mouth? Was Paul’s response appropriate? Did the command by Ananias prove there would be no justice in this trial? Was Paul emphasizing the Gospel in his final defense?

FOCUS ON FUTURE BIBLE STUDIES:

- MARCH 5: SELECTED SCRIPTURES DR. MICHAEL WILBURN, SENIOR PASTOR AT IMMANUEL
- APRIL 15-17: ACTS 23:11-22 GOD’S LOVE FOR LEADERS AND CAPITALS

This was a rare meeting of the Sanhedrin. They had been summoned by the commander to find out why the Jews in the temple had tried to kill Paul and had demanded so viciously his execution by the Romans. The Sanhedrin expected Paul to be on a stretcher, barely alive after enduring the anticipated Roman scourging. Instead they are incensed to discover that Paul is unharmed and not even chained. The commander probably vented his anger at the Jews for demanding that he execute a Roman Citizen with no charges against him and he demands to be given those specific charges now! The stunned Sanhedrin knows that the lie against Paul about bringing a Gentile into the Jewish area of the temple is false, and

BIBLE STUDIES

THURSDAY @ 6:30AM –PRAYER MEETING – GAB 3RD FLOOR ROOM 300B

THURSDAY @ 7:00AM –BIBLE STUDY – GAB 3RD FLOOR ROOM 300B

Virginia

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that his speech on the steps had overthrown all the other accusations, so they have no legitimate charges against him and the commander is already upset at them. They all know they had better create some charges quickly or it will not go well for them. This commander has set Paul in the midst of them to see their reactions to him while likely he presides and watches them carefully. They are all at a loss in what to do and their silence is deafening!

WHOEVER DIGS A PIT WILL FALL INTO IT, AND HE WHO ROLLS A STONE WILL HAVE IT ROLL BACK ON HIM. A LYING TONGUE HATES THOSE WHO ARE CRUSHED BY IT.
PROVERBS 26:27-28A

I. RESPONSE TO THE GLOWERING ACTS 23:1

Paul extends the screaming silence by walking visually through his audience and looking each one of his leaders in the eye. They are held in rapt attention while hoping one of their comrades will interrupt the silence with some kind of accusation that will seem plausible. The chief priest was probably the most upset by the turn of events because he was responsible for temple and was the top leader of the nation. He may have even commanded the immediate closing of the doors (Acts 21:30) to prevent access to the four Jews with Paul in the temple so the false accusation could not be instantly disproven. Thus he would have been directly responsible for aiding and abetting the riot against Paul. One carefully crafted sentence, revealing his innocence, introduced Paul's defense: "*Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.*" They couldn't say this.

THE WICKED FLEE WHEN NO ONE PURSUES, BUT THE RIGHTEOUS ARE BOLD AS A LION.
PROVERBS 28:1

II. REVENGE WITH UTMOST GALL ACTS 23:2-5

Interrupting Paul after one sentence, Ananias, the high priest, "*commanded*" those standing closest to him to continually (present tense) "*strike him on the mouth.*" This word "*strike*," meaning to "harm or injure," was the same word used for the mob "*beating*" Paul when he was rescued by the Romans (Acts 21:32). It was a vicious attack by punching Paul in the mouth! The word for "*commanded*" means "to appoint over, to put in charge of, order, command," showing that this wicked high priest required those around Paul to take charge of him to attack him, continuing the job of the mob the previous day. Knowing that Paul was a Roman Citizen, this was revenge against him and the Commander who protected 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?*" Bleeding Paul snapped back. With equal gall, those who have just punched Paul fired back, "*Do you revile God's high priest?*" Humble Paul, in obedience to the Law, 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.'*" The same was true in the days of Job (34:18), Solomon (Eccl 10:20) and into the New Testament (Jude 4-8).

SUBMIT YOURSELVES TO EVERY ORDINANCE OF MAN FOR THE LORD'S SAKE, WHETHER TO THE KING... GOVERNORS ... HONOR THE KING. 1 PETER 2:13-17

III. RETURN TO THE GOSPEL ACTS 23:6-10

With no hope for justice, brilliant Paul conceives a way to 1) be a witness for Christ the Messiah, the Hope of Israel; 2) defend the most important doctrine of Christianity-the resurrection; 3) recruit the Sanhedrin's majority to defend him; 4) occupy his enemies; 5) pit them against one another; 6) prove his innocence; 7) reveal who were the real criminals. It sealed their doom!

Questions to Ponder:

- 1) Can you say with Paul that you have lived your life with a good conscience before God?
- 2) How often have you found yourself speaking evil of one of the rulers of your people?
- 3) Do you work to find ways to be a witness for Jesus Christ to those around you?