

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 69

I. The Roman Commander commands the Sanhedrin to give Paul a Hearing – 22:30.

A. When the Roman commander found out that Paul was a Roman citizen, he commands the chief priests and the council to gather and give Paul a hearing. This Jewish council was called the “**Sanhedrin**” which was a council of 70 priests plus the high priest. It was the “**Supreme Court**” of the Jews.

II. Exposition of Chapter Twenty Three.

A. Verses 1-10 – Paul’s Defense before the Sanhedrin.

1. Verse 1 – “**Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, ‘Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.’**” – Paul begins by basically declaring that his conscience is clear pertaining to any wrongdoing he was accused of. He was certainly not attempting to say that he had never done anything wrong for we know in **I Timothy 1:13-16**, Paul recounts his life as a persecutor and refers to himself as a “**chief**” amongst sinners.

a. The word “**conscience**” literally means; “**co-knowledge**” or “**joint-knowledge**”¹. Dr. Robert Utley explains its meaning well:

“**Paul uses the term ‘conscience’ often in the Corinthian letters (cf. 4:4; 8:7, 10, 12; 10:25, 27, 28, 29; 2 Cor. 1:12; 4:2; 5:11). It refers to that moral inner sense of what is appropriate or inappropriate (cf. Acts 23:1). The conscience can be affected by our past lives, our poor choices, or by the Spirit of God. It is not a flawless guide, but it does determine the boundaries of individual faith. Therefore, to violate our conscience, even if it is in error or weak, is a major faith problem. The believer’s conscience needs to be more and more formed by the Word of God and the Spirit of God (cf. 1 Tim. 3:9).**”²

b. There are two locations of knowledge within man. The soul (mind, will and emotions) and the spirit, which is that part of us that is now recreated when we receive Christ (born again).

c. The “**spirit**” part of our conscience has been cleansed from “**dead works**” to serve the Living God – **Hebrews 9:9, 14; 10:22**.

d. The “**soul**” part of our conscience, constantly needs to be renewed (**Romans 12:1-2**) and sometimes can be “**weak**” (**I Corinthians 8:7-12**).

2. Verses 2-3 – “**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?’**”

a. “**...the high priest Ananias...**” – This, of course, is not the same Ananias that ministered to Paul after his conversion (**9:10-19**).

b. Commanding Paul to be struck on the mouth was against the law (**Deuteronomy 25:1-2**).

F.F. Bruce states:

“**Such improper behavior from a member of the supreme court stung Paul into an indignant retort. The rights of defendants were carefully safeguarded by Jewish law, and they were presumed innocent until proved guilty. Paul had not yet been properly charged, let alone tried and convicted. The high priest, who was there to administer the law, had broken the law by ordering Paul to be struck.**”³

c. “**...God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!...**” – It could be that Paul was actually prophesying by the Holy Spirit when we consider Ananias was assassinated only nine years later. The term “**whitewashed wall**” is a metaphor for a person who was a hypocrite. Similar to when Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and called them “**whitewashed tomb’s**” (**Matthew 23:27**). Warren Weirsbe asserts:

“**Whited wall’ (v. 3) may refer to Ezek. 13:10ff, where the hypocritical rulers of the land are compared to walls painted over with whitewash but unable to stand up.**”⁴

3. Verses 4-5 – Other members of the Sanhedrin rebuke Paul for insulting the high priest. Paul concedes, not knowing it was the high priest who spoke, and then he quotes **Exodus 22:28** which states; “**You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.**” Some suggest that Paul is being sarcastic in that Ananias wasn’t acting like a high priest should act. If Paul just spoke out without thinking, it

¹A.T. Robertson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. III, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 397.

²Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 254.

³F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Acts*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 488.

⁴Warren W. Weirsbe, *Weirsbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 342.

further suggests that it might have been words given by the Holy Spirit.

4. Verse 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!’”** Basically, the sect of the Pharisees believed in the supernatural such as angels, the spirit and soul of man and the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees, however, didn’t believe in these things. Dr. Robert Utley writes:

“I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead’ Paul threw out a theological issue that the Sadducees and Pharisees disagreed about. The Sadducees denied the afterlife, while the Pharisees affirmed it (cf. Job 14:14; 19:23–27; Dan. 12:2). This set the two factions of the council against each other (cf. vv. 7–10).”⁵

“Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” - Luke 12:11-12

5. **“...the hope of the resurrection of the dead...”** – This is one of the **“elementary principles of Christ” (Hebrews 6:1-2)**. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead brought victory over death to us! His resurrection is called the **“firstfruits”** in that He is the first with all believers in Christ to follow. Paul said in **I Corinthians 15:16-19**:

“For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”

6. Verses 7-8 – **The Sanhedrin begin to argue amongst themselves.**

7. Verse 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.’”**

a. **“...the scribes of the Pharisee’s party...”** – The scribes were considered experts of the law.

Grant Osborne adds:

“Now the meeting descends completely into chaos, and a ‘great uproar’ ensues as the two sides begin shouting at each other (23:9). The staid Sanhedrin becomes just another mob. After a while some scribes in the group gain the floor. Most scribes are Pharisees, but Luke tells the reader anyway in case some don’t know that. These scribes ‘contended’ or ‘argued vigorously’ (NIV: *diemachonto*) for their position, meaning they defended the pro-afterlife position strongly, making a surprise statement about Paul: ‘We find nothing wrong with this man.’ Paul had chosen his argument well.”⁶

8. Verse 10 – **“...there arose a great dissension...”** – This verse suggests that the Sanhedrin were starting to get violent!! The Roman commander was concerned enough that he thought they could up killing Paul if he were to be **“...pulled into pieces...”** Paul was safer with the Romans than he was with his fellow Jews! The Amplified Bible renders this verse:

“And when the strife became more and more tense *and* violent, the commandant, fearing that Paul would be torn in pieces by them, ordered the troops to go down and take him forcibly from among them and conduct him back into the barracks.”

- B. Verse 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.’”** Notice the words, **“Be of good cheer”**. In the Greek this means; **“to have confidence and firmness of purpose in the face of danger or testing—‘to be courageous, to have courage, to be bold.’”⁷** It’s probable that after all the things Paul had gone through, he was discouraged. But the Lord, who is aware of all our struggles and disappointments, is ever present to, not only minister encouragement and comfort to Paul, but also to all of His children.

⁵Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, 255.

⁶Grant R. Osborne, *Acts: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 408–409.

⁷Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 305.