

The Great Stories of the Early Church

76-Paul at Jerusalem 03

Dealing With Governmental and Religious Authority as a Believer

Acts 22:24-23:11

- 24 The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.
- 25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?
- 26 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman.
- 27 Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.
- 28 And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born.
- 29 Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.
- 30 On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.

Acts 23

- 1 And Paul, earnestly beholding 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 them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.
- 3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?
- 4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?
- 5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.
- 6 But when Paul perceived that the 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: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.
- 7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.
- 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.
- 9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.
- 10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.
- 11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

Introduction:

I hope you recall where we are in this story. Paul had finished his Third Missionary journey by returning all the way to Jerusalem. While there, he had agreed to spend some time in the Temple with some Jewish believers who had taken a vow. Some Jews from Asia had seen him there and had raised a violent mob which caught him with the intention of beating him to death. The Roman authorities had rescued him and as they were carrying him away he had asked for permission to speak to the crowd and had told them a summary of his story and why he had been traveling among the Gentiles. You will recall that we spoke last week on the topic of telling your story. I do hope you have been giving some thought to that project.

Today we come to see how Paul dealt with both of the governing bodies which had authority over him and the principles by which he guided his interactions with them.

Before we begin the message there are a couple of ideas that are here I would like to show you. They are not the message but they are important. You will recall that as Paul told his story, he laid out a case which would seem to make the argument that there was every reason the Jews should listen to him.

Acts 22:19-20

- 19 And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee:
20 And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

It almost seems like he was arguing with God that he should minister to the nation of Israel after the Lord had told him they would not hear him.

Acts 22:18

- 18 And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

The question comes to my mind and maybe to yours (it certainly did to Paul's), "why would the Gentiles hear Paul and the Jews not?"

But, we must ask why any person *ever* hears the gospel? Jesus had explained it in John 6.

John 6:44

- 44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

The only way any person or any group of persons can come to God is through the drawing power that God works on them through His Holy Spirit. The compelling story of the one speaking has nothing to do with the moving of the Spirit.

I say that because Christianity (so-called) in our day is oblivious to this reality. They are sure that if a person has a really profound story of how they came to Christ or how they were healed from some awful illness, or how they were rescued from some dangerous situation, they are sure to be used of God in the telling of the story. Paul's case proves this to be a false assumption.

What was going on with Paul? It was a principle which has operated in every century, in every circumstance. ***God's Purpose for every person is very specific.*** God was going to use Paul and in very powerful ways, but only in the place where He had determined to use him. Paul was not free to choose his own place to minister. Neither is anyone else.

God not only has a general call, He has a Specific Call. The man who was used essentially to convert the entire city of Ephesus and who had a massive impact on Corinth... was not going to be heard at Jerusalem... no matter how well he told his story and no matter how compelling the story was. The Holy Spirit was not going to bless his ministry there though He had already used others and was going to use them in the future.

God is Sovereign... not only over salvation but over the specifics of every person's ministry. Every preacher must not only preach the message that God has given him but ***at the location*** to which God has called him to minister. Many have been tempted to think that there was some human explanation for God's decision to send Paul elsewhere.

The Jews hated Paul too much...

He was a volatile figure...

etc., etc.

The reality is that God was pleased to bring Jews to Himself through the ministries of men far less well trained than Paul, and in that He received all the Honor and all the Glory for their conversions.

God's Sovereignty is always the primary issue.

But, today, we want to observe and consider Paul's interactions with authority structures.

He was, similar to Jesus, caught between two authorities both of which claimed jurisdiction over him, the Jewish Sanhedrin and the Roman government. The Romans had the ultimate authority but they worked closely with the locals everywhere they could and gave them a good deal of leeway.

They did not sanction mob murder so the 'chief captain,' the senior soldier on duty that day, had intervened to save Paul's life. But Paul's welfare was not his primary concern, keeping the order was. His indifference to Paul's situation was demonstrated by the immediate preparations to interrogate him.

24 The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.

To 'examine' a person by scourging was essentially a process of interrogation by torture, assuming that it ensured truthful answers, that the prisoner would lie as a matter of course and

would only be truthful if beaten. This was legal under most circumstances but it was forbidden to do any such thing to a Roman citizen without a proper trial, much as it supposedly is for every American citizen.

But there is a huge question which is often asked by Christians and it is answered both here and in the next event. "How does a believer conduct himself when under arrest for his faith?" We will watch as the answer works itself out.

When Paul revealed himself to be a Roman citizen, the plan to scourge him was immediately canceled.

Then the Roman commander call for the Jewish council to meet so that he could know what the charges were against Paul. Surely they must be severe to induce them to beat him to death in the street.

As Paul began to speak, the High Priest ordered him to be struck in the face, to which Paul reacted vigorously and apparently in anger by pointing out the injustice of the action. Just like Roman Law, Jewish Law forbade a man to be punished unless he had been tried and duly convicted. We see his intense reaction in 23:3.

3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?

When it was pointed out to Paul that the man to whom he was responding was the High Priest he backed away a bit from his statement because of scripture commands.

4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?

5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

Ex 22:28

28 Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people. (*Note: the Hebrew word translated 'gods' can mean people or spiritual entities in high positions.*)

But the action of the man was, nonetheless, illegal and morally wrong.

Then, Paul switched his approach to take advantage of a division he knew that existed on the council. Part were Pharisee and part Sadducee, so he brought up the issue of the Resurrection, knowing that it would create confusion and an argument.

6 But when Paul perceived that the 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: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the

- Pharisees confess both.
- 9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

So, here are the object lessons for Christians from the experience of Paul.

First and always... we are to do what is right before God and for the benefit of those who love Him.

During the Second Century of the Christian Era, there were heretics who taught people that it was all right to deny Christ or do sacrifice to pagan gods to avoid persecution, but faithful people have always believed that they should do right regardless of the circumstances and such was the example of Paul.

Paul's decision to go to Jerusalem in the face of actual and true prophecies that he would be in danger was based on his commitment to complete with integrity the transmission of the financial aid which had been entrusted to him for the Jewish believers. Though many questioned his wisdom, this was the right thing to do even though it brought him trouble just as the Holy Spirit had said. What he did was noble, brave, and godly.

He should have done this and he did. **It is always right to do right.**

His decision to go into the temple with the four men who had taken a vow was a noble and godly thing to do. He was communicating to Jewish believers that he had not become an enemy of the True Religion of the Jews but rather supported them in it. There are many who have second-guessed him over time and have struggled to understand his motives but it was a good thing to do.

The fact that an uproar was caused by people telling lies about Paul was in no way a fault of his. Those who lied and those who reacted by attempting to kill him bear all of the responsibility.

I want to stop here because our culture has been sold some really bad values by people who desire to manipulate others. The fact that someone gets upset because I do or say something that is true does not mean that I have done wrong. If I affirm a principle or refuse to do something because of a principle and other people start a riot because they do not like what I have done or said or refused to do or say, the responsibility is theirs and not mine.

I see it over and over again, even within churches, someone will do or say something that is right and truthful. They will say it in a respectful way. But others will get upset and then attempt to place the blame back on the one who did right. This is bizarre and twisted. God's people are to do what is right, affirm what is true, and do it in a godly way. Those who react to it bear the responsibility for their actions.

When you do right with pure motives and others get upset, you are not to blame. Remember, Jesus continually made people upset while doing and saying only that which was

right. So will you on occasion.

We notice also that Paul availed himself of all legal means available to him to secure his safety.

He had rights as a Roman citizen and he used them to avoid a beating.

He had rights as a Jewish citizen and he used those as well.

The mere fact that an authority structure has problems with us does not mean that we must go passive and offer no resistance.

Christians should be willing to suffer and even die for Christ but that does not mean that we have taken some kind of suicide oath or made a suicide pact with each other or even with God. Jesus urged His people to see to their survival when they could.

Matt 24:15-16

15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)

16 Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains:

We are not to sell out our convictions to save our lives but we are to preserve our lives when we have opportunity. This is what Paul was doing. We should not be volunteering to martyrdom if there is a way to escape.

Daniel and the 3 Hebrews had no legal ground to argue against the verdicts against them so they went to what was assumed to be their executions without resistance.

Jesus held silent at His trials to record for all time the illegality of His conviction and execution.

But Paul had legal recourse and he used it. This is an example which we should remember.

There was one error that Paul made inadvertently and he quickly corrected it, the way that he spoke to the High Priest, not recognizing that he was the High Priest. He was completely correct in his assessment that the actions of the man were wrong and his words were only wrong in that the man was occupying an office protected by the commands of God. We are to remember to be respectful when we deal with those in authority, even when they are doing wrong. This, too, is a character trait which has been lost in our time.

At the same time, we are not forbidden to point out injustice when it occurs or speak against it when we experience it. Paul had no intention of insulting the High priest but he also had not intention of allowing injustice against himself to go unnoticed. It is not disrespectful to point out wrong doing.

(Except in the imagination of the doers of wrong.)

Finally, we observe that Paul used a strategy to disrupt the meeting.

Now, there are many who might be tempted to find fault with Paul here. He knew that he was facing a divided body... and he knew the trigger issues that would expose the division... so, he used one of them, The Resurrection of the Dead.

I don't know if you remember but when we studied the Jewish trial of Jesus, I told you that the Sanhedrin, in order to find a man worthy of death, had to be unanimous in its decision. Paul's strategy undermined their ability to do that, confounded their capacity to come to a consensus.

Some might wonder if this was proper... it was.

So, the principle is that if one can confound an unjust operation by strategy without doing anything ungodly, deceitful or immoral... he is free to do so.

The meeting ended with such confusion that the Romans had to rescue Paul again.

10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

Then, the Lord appeared to him, letting him know that this had all been orchestrated and supervised by Him to ultimately carry Paul to Rome to bear witness to Him there.

11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

Realize and understand that bearing witness to the truth will sometimes cause problems.

Think through it. Accept it. Embrace it. Give yourself to the Lord for whatever He may allow into your life through obeying and giving witness to truth.

When you find yourself in trouble for doing or saying what is right and true, seek the Lord's help for He has promised to give you assistance.

Jesus said something to His disciples once which I think is a universal principle.

Matt 10:17-22

17 But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues;

18 And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

19 But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.

20 For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

21 And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.

22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

Real Christianity is an unpopular thing. It stands for things that the natural man dislikes and it stands against things the natural man desires.

It affirms the Will of God as superior to the will of man and it also affirms the wickedness of man, calling for him to repent.

It stands against all of the religions which tell men that they can by their own works earn their way into heaven and it declares that there is a place of torment for all of those who will not submit themselves to the Will of God.

It refuses to compromise, to pretend that the religions conjured up by men are as valid as that One True Religion that has been graciously revealed to men by God.

It affirms that there is only One Way to be right with the Living God, repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It reminds men that there is a Day of Reckoning coming, a Great Day of Judgment in which every man will give account of himself to God and be judged by an absolute standard of Justice concerning the way that he has lived his life.

These are not popular ideas and the further our culture runs from God the more it will violently hate those who are faithful to Truth.

I affirm to you that persecution is coming unless God sends an Awakening... and maybe even if He does. Prepare yourself now. It was not raining when Noah started building the ark.