

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Confrontation and Consolation

Scripture: Acts 23:4-11

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As we come to chapter 23, we who have been studying together for any length of time are aware that in this portion of scripture, the Apostle Paul is facing the second phase of his trial. He has been captured. He is now a prisoner and will remain a prisoner until his death, which is some years hence; but, nevertheless, this is the beginning of his life as a prisoner. It doesn't hinder his ministry. It just gives it a new dimension...but in this particular situation, we find the Apostle Paul, as so often in his life, under stress, but maybe this is most severe or as severe as any other stress he's known.

If I can read a little bit into his thoughts and kind of see between the lines, I think he has the sense that this could be the end. The Holy Spirit had told him that bonds and afflictions awaited him at Jerusalem, that he would be delivered over to the Gentiles...and he made the statement, "I don't really know what this means, but I don't really care, either, because I don't count my life dear to myself. I only wanna finish the ministry the Lord gave me."

But it may well have been, and I'm sure it was, that in his mind, either in the foreground or the background, there was a knowledge of the fact that it was possible that his life was ending. That was hard on him, because life was exciting, even though he said, "For to me to live as Christ and to die is gain," and...and life was always a matter of planning for the future, and he did have some plans to go to Rome. He wanted to go to Rome. He wanted to confirm the Christians there. He had written them a letter and said, "I have oftentimes wanted to be with you, and to impart to you some spiritual gift, and...and to be mutually comforted with you," and he had that goal; but surely in his mind somewhere was the possible thought that this could be the wrap-up on everything. He's just been through a terrible ordeal, a riot in which his life was at stake, rescued by the Romans. He faced being scourged. Rescued from that, he now is brought to face the Jewish tribunal, the high court of Israel, the Sanhedrin.

As I was thinking through this and how we might introduce the...the thoughts that are here in verses 1 to 11, which we have begun to study already, I thought to myself, "Here is a great illustration of how the Lord ministers to one of His children in need." In thinking through, during this week, all of these folks that have been in such need, my thoughts have been in that area. I thought, "Here is the Apostle Paul, not perhaps overly conscious of the needs of others, but conscious of the death and the potential of death in his own life, and aware of the tremendous trial and pain that he was going

through"; and...and in the midst of this, we see a God who comforts him, particularly as we will come to verse 11; and I began to think about what kind of God He is, what kind of Christ we have. I thought about the pagan systems of religion, the religions of the world, for the most part, in fear of their gods; afraid that if they cross their god or violate their god or do not continue to appease their god, their god will swoop down in plague or pestilence or death.

We see it all over the world as people live in fear; and we Christians have a God who is not to be feared in the sense of being afraid of what He will do to us; but, rather, we're comforted in what He will do for us. And my mind was drawn to a text that you don't need to turn to. I'll just read you the little account of it; but it's Mark 4 verse 35. It says, "And the same day, when the evening was come, He said unto them, 'Let us pass over unto the other side. We're gonna get our little boat across the Sea of Galilee.' And when they had sent away the multitude, they took Him even as He was in the boat; and there were also with Him other little boats." So there's a little fleet going across. "And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was now full." The boat is full of water.

"And He was in the stern of the boat asleep on a pillow." They're all in panic, and Jesus is sound asleep. "And they awake Him and say unto Him, 'Master, carest Thou not that we perish?'" Have you ever thought about that question in the face of death or some deep trouble? "Lord, are You there? Are You sleeping? Are You like Baal confronted by Elijah? Where are You? Don't You care that we're in a situation that could end in our death?"...

I suppose in everybody's life, I know it's probably been true in your lives. It's been true in my life. There are times when we wonder where God went. Or at least if we don't wonder, the question enters our mind, "Is He there? Does He care? Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" What kind of a God do we have? I was drawn to Isaiah 49, listen to these words, verses 14 and following. "Zion said...that is the people of Israel said...'The Lord has forsaken us; my Lord has forsaken and forgotten me.'" Here are these Jews saying, "God has forsaken us. God has forgotten us. My God has forgotten me."

Listen to God's answer. "Can a woman forget her nursing child? Her child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Oh, behold...He says...I have engraved thee on the palms of My hands. I see you before Me all the time." God has not forgotten. You say, "But it seems as though there are those periods of time when you wonder." Isaiah 54 answers that in verse 6, "'The Lord has called thee like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou was refused,' saith thy God." In other words, God says, "I, you know, I called you like a forsaken partner in a marriage. I wanted you back. For a small moment have I forgotten you, but with great mercies will I re-gather you." There may be moments, but they're only moments.

"In a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you, saith the Lord the Redeemer." There are those little moments when we wonder, "Carest Thou

not that we perish?" I can see Paul in this situation when he becomes pensive and thoughtful after this phase of his trial is over, and he's alone in a cell, and he's sitting there, and maybe he's thinking in his mind, "I wonder how I got into this. Does God really know that this could be the end?"

You've thought it. Do you remember what Jesus did in Mark chapter 4? "He arose in the boat and He said to the winds and the waves, 'Peace...Be still.'" And there was a calm like no calm had ever been; and the disciples said, "What manner of man is this that even the winds and the waves obey His will?" Does He care? Yes, He cares. You see Him on John 18 as He rescues the disciples from the possibility of capture by the Romans. Hear Him as He speaks through Peter in 1 Peter 5 and says, "Casting all your care on Him, for He...what?...cares for you." Hear Micah as he says, "Who is a God like Thee who pardons iniquity, passes by the transgression, who gives mercy?"

Yes, our God is caring. He is merciful. He is gracious. He is forgiving. You say, "But, John, is that true at the times of our failures?" Yes, because, you see, grace and mercy and forgiveness can only operate in times of failure. Do you understand that? If there's no failure, there's no grace. If there's no failure, there's no forgiveness. If there's no failure, there's no mercy...

In our account for today, we see Paul, and I think he failed...I think he failed, and I think he erred, and I am excited to see God's response to that error. Now, we saw last week, beginningly, as we looked at the passage, that the Apostle Paul is drawn before the Sanhedrin. They have hastily convened in Fort Antonia, called into session by Claudius Lysias, who is the commander-in-chief of the Roman forces; and they have been called in order to try to ascertain what this man has done. The Romans saw the riot. They saw the crowd trying to murder Paul, and they didn't really know what the accusation was. They've tried several ways to find out without success; and so now Claudius Lysias figures, "If I can get the Sanhedrin together, they can judge the case. They can hear the evidence. They can come up with a crime for which he can be sent to Caesarea and tried." He assumed there must be a crime, or they wouldn't have been trying to kill him in the temple court.

So, as we approach verse 30, the session of the Sanhedrin is called together. As we come to verse 1, we see four major points in this flow of text: the confrontation, the conflict, the conquest, and the consolation.

First of all, reviewing the confrontation in verse 1, "Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, 'Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.'" And we discussed that last time. Paul says, "I don't stand here convicted of anything. In my own conscience, I am pure. I am free from any conviction...I don't know any sin. God is not speaking to me about some sin. I don't feel pangs of guilt over some sin." That's really a very powerful statement; because, in effect, if they're gonna come up with a crime, they're gonna have to come up with a crime that God doesn't even know about...or else God would be convicting him. That's what he's saying.

"I have lived in good conscience. Everything that I've ever done, I've done conscientiously toward God, and that hasn't changed since becoming a Christian. I'm still being obedient to what I believe is the voice of God. I'm still conscientious, and I sense no guilt and no pain for something that I have done out of line."...

That's a tremendous statement; and, for him to stand in front of the Sanhedrin, and, incidentally, the Sanhedrin is convinced that he is guilty of something. I mean the riot sort of murmuring that started the riot was, "He's against the people, against the law, against the temple, and that he's anti-Jewish." He's, if imaginable, he's against everything that he was raised to be for. He's a heretic. He's an apostate.

He stands up and says, "I'm guilty of absolutely nothing. I have done nothing for which my conscience pains me." Well, they couldn't stand that kind...to them, that was horrible egoism; and I think partly due to the fact that no Jew ever had a clear conscience if he was really, totally honest. You say, "Why?" Because the Old Testament system never purged the conscience, right? When you made a sacrifice, that took care of the sins you'd already committed. As soon as you committed another one, you were under the guilt again. That's why the book of Hebrews says in chapter 9 and in chapter 10 that Christ, in His perfect sacrifice, purged the conscience. Something that a Christian has that a Jew does not have, aside from salvation, is the absolute freedom from the guilt of unforgiven sin, because it's all forgiven; and so those Jews didn't understand the statement. They didn't understand how he could say, "I'm conscientious before God," when they thought he was an apostate, and if you wanna push the point, they couldn't understand at all how a guy could say, "I have a good conscience," even in its ultimate sense, because they never knew freedom from an evil conscience to have a clear conscience; and the reason they didn't know a clear conscience was because there was never an ultimate sacrifice for their sin. They were always under the guilt.

Well, the confrontation then led to conflict. Verse 2, "The high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite on the mouth." When Paul said that, I told you last week that the high priest told somebody to hit him in the mouth. The word smite is not a slap. It either means a blow with a club or with a fist. At the least, it was a smash in the mouth with a full fist. Now it is this point that becomes the interesting part of this passage. What is going on after this is the part that we wanna determine.

"Then said Paul unto him...in verse 3...'God shall smite thee, thou whited wall! Sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?'" The high priest had violated the law. Jewish law carefully safeguarded the rights of a man on trial. He hadn't even been accused of a crime, let alone proven to be guilty, and so the high priest was out of order in asking that Paul be punched in the mouth...That was completely out of order; and the Apostle Paul is saying, "God is going to punish you." He was calling on the vengeance of God. "God is going to punish you for sitting at the seat of authority in the law and violating the law. You are a hypocrite. You have

brought me to be tried by the law, and you are in violation of it yourself. You whited wall!" And that's just a term for a hypocrite, hypocrisy. A wall that's all painted up nice, but if you leaned on it, it would fall over.

Now, I told you last week that I felt Paul was somewhat angry. He was indignant, and that I think that this was a mistake that he made. This was a sin. This was a violation. He lost his cool at this point, and I don't have a problem with that, because I think that's what humanity is like, and I think that sooner or later the old nature, the part of man which has its propensity toward sin is gonna surge out, and apparently, to me, does here in Paul's case.

Now, there are other interpretation of this; and I...I'm the first one to admit that. In fact, a friend suggested to me this week that maybe Paul was not volatile. Maybe he was not angry. Maybe he was not reactionary, but he merely saw this as an opportunity to gain a legal advantage. That when this high priest had violated the law...then he took advantage of that to gain a point over them...to sort of be able to put himself in the place of being the one who supported the law as over against them. It seemed to be a very good, legal move. The problem I have with that is, in the first place, he didn't know it was the high priest that said it; and in the second place, it wasn't convened really as a legal court...but lemme just take it further. I really feel comfortable with the fact that Paul was a little angry here, because of the fact that, in a legal situation, you don't have to call somebody a whited wall to make your point. You can just make your point. There would be an objection in court if you said to somebody on the stand, "Such and such and such and such, you whited wall." I mean, normally, that's not how you would handle a legal move, not if you were smart.

It was verbal abuse is unnecessary...even if the high priest was a whited wall, you don't say it. Not in legal protocol or procedure; and another reason that I feel that Paul was angry is the reaction of the crowd supports the idea that Paul's words were not the calculating words of a legal approach, but rather the fiery words of a man who reacted to all that he'd endured. Verse 4, watch. "And they that stood by said, 'Revilest thou God's high priest?'" You say, "In what sense was this guy God's high priest? He was Satan's man." He was God's high priest in the sense that he sat in the seat that God had ordained to be the seat of rule in Israel. His position was a God-ordained position. His person was Satan-oriented and motivated; but the position was the God-ordained position.

And notice what they said. Here's the key word. Whatever Paul's tone of voice, whatever his attitude was toward this person, they interpreted it as reviling, okay? Whatever it was, they called it reviling. Well, the thing we wanna determine then is what is reviling. Loydahrao is an interesting word, and I did a word study on it. This is what I found out. Kiddle, which is a very comprehensive series of volumes dealing with Greek meanings, says the word reviled means to remonstrate in anger... Now that is the compilation of all of its meanings reduced to the simplest term. To revile in anger. It can be translated to abuse, to slander, to insult, to curse, and to blaspheme. It is used four times in the New Testament. Once here, another time in John 9:28, when the Jews insulted and mocked the blind man

who had been made to see by Jesus. It is used in 1 Corinthians 4:12 to mean the opposite of blessing. What is the opposite of blessing? Cursing. It is used in 1 Peter 2:23 to refer to the mocking and spitting abuse that was put against Jesus at the crucifixion. In all four of its verb meanings in the New Testament, it means cursing, mocking, insulting, abusing, including spitting and anything else.

Now, it is used in the noun form twice. In its two noun uses, it appears in the two lists in 1 Corinthians 5 and 1 Corinthians 6, lists of vices characteristic of unregenerate men who will not inherit the Kingdom. It then has two adjective meanings. One of those in 1 Timothy 5:14 tells us that Satan does it. The other one is 1 Peter 3:9 says Christians aren't to do it. You take all those eight possible meanings, and they all mean the same thing. The crowd said, "Paul, you have slandered, abused. You have remonstrated in anger. You have blasphemed the high priest. They read Paul's attitude as anger, as mockery, not as just a calculated legal move.

So from the standpoint of that word, I think we're fair in saying that Paul here had failed, and they saw that; and let's face it, if you're on trial in front of a court, and you're gonna be tried by the law, you're pretty dumb to violate the law right in court; but that's what he did. He blew his cork at that point and was in violation of the law; and they said, "Are you reviling God's high priest?" You say, "Was that a big deal?" Yes, it was a big deal. You just didn't do that. When God set up His economy, His theocracy, you can go back to Deuteronomy chapter 17, I'll just read it to you. "God ordained authority in Israel." There has to be authority. You know, that even a bad government is better than no government? The worst government is better than no government.

God has leaders. A bad leader is worse than no leader? No. No leader is worse than a bad leader. God ordains authority and submission, and God knows that there are gonna be bad leaders and bad governments and bad high priests and...and bad judges, and God still said to Israel, "You submit," because submission is the principle that keeps the thing together; and that judge or that priest or that leader will pay for his own failure. He is accountable to God. You're accountable to be submissive to him unless, of course, he makes you do something in direct violation to God.

But here, interesting thing, in Deuteronomy 17:8, God first gave the pattern, "If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, then come to this place which I will choose." Now verse 9. "And come to the priests, the Levites, and the judge who shall be in those days, and inquire; and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment." God set up a court, a law where they could go and...and resolve the problems they couldn't resolve among themselves. "And thou shalt do according the sentence, which they of that place which the Lord shall choose shall show thee; thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee." Obey them.

"According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do. Thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall show thee to the right hand or the left. And the man who will do presumptuously, and not hearken to the

priest who stands to minister there before the Lord thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die; and you shall put that evil away from Israel." You can stone the man if he disobeys the decision of the court. You don't speak a word, and you don't disobey the one God has set up to be judge or priest. Both judge and priest came together in the high priest, who was the ruling man in the Sanhedrin. He was both judge and high priest.

So when Paul spoke that way to the high priest, he did stand in violation. The high priest had no right to inflict punishment on him, but he had no right to react the way he did, because he was taking an action that violated the principle that God had ordained, the principle that goes with that office.

You say, "But the man was a crumb. The guy was no good. He was a terrible person." That's not the point. The office was God-ordained. I think you'd find it interesting sometime if you'll look up Exodus 21:6, Exodus 22:8 and 9, and Psalm 82:1. You'll find that the...the name of God, Elohim, is also the title of the judges in those passages. God actually called certain judges in His land gods, because they stood as His place of authority and representation of the law and, in that sense, represented Him. So a man who held a sacred position was not to be desecrated or slandered or cursed, but a man was to submit to that, because it was a God-ordained place, even though the man was satanic.

Now, of course, he had to pay for his own consequences. Paul was right when he said God was gonna smite you, because he had violated the whole role of the high priest; but look what Paul's attitude was. This is what's so beautiful. Paul, I think, had erred; but what's his attitude? Now, you know, just take it from a human standpoint. What would be my response? I would've said, "God shall smite you, you whited wall!" And in my mind I woulda said, "Boy, that's giving it to him, MacArthur. Shoot, beautiful shot." And then they would've said, "Revilest thou the high priest so," and I woulda said, "You're right, I reviled him...Why, he deserved it. He had no right to say what he said and command to be done what was done. He's a hypocrite, and so are all the rest of ya."...

You say, "Well, I wouldn't have done that." But you'd do something like that, so do I. What happens when somebody comes to you and says, "You did such and such wrong." What's your reaction? "Well, you're not perfect, either...You're not so hot. I've seen you do a lot of things, too." That's defensiveness. That's where you retaliate in defense. You can't just accept the responsibility for your sin and bow under the Word of God. You've gotta say, "Well, yeah, you're not so perfect. What about what you do?"

That's not what Paul did. He was too mature for that. He was too spiritually-minded to respond like that. You know what he did? He submitted to the Word of God and apologized, and you know something? That was the spiritual thing to do, because he had violated the law. Even though in nine out of ten times you would look at that, and you'd say, "He was right to say what he said." But look at verse 5. "Then said Paul, 'I knew not, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.'" He says, "Hey, I didn't realize I was reviling the high priest,

because the Word of God says," and he quotes Exodus 22:28. He says, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people."

You know what he did? He condemned himself in front of that whole court. He said, "I've sinned. I'm sorry."...You notice he doesn't play ignorant? He doesn't say, "Well, how did I know it was the high priest? I didn't know it was the high priest. I thought it was just any old...I didn't know that. You can't blame me." You know what he said in effect? He said, "I should've found out before I mouthed off. It's my fault."...

Friends, I'm excited about the fact that Paul admitted he did wrong. Boy, that's a hard thing to do, isn't it? Hard thing to do, especially if you have to do it publicly. Here he is in face of all of his enemies, and he confesses to them that he's in violation of God's Word. Talk about a legal blunder, that's one, to be standing before a court of law breaking the law. The old man had just come to the fore, just whooom.

Lemme tell you something. The next best thing to not sinning at all is to confess it immediately when you've done it. Did you get that? The next best thing to not sinning at all is to confess it the moment you've done it and submit to the authority of the Word of God and turn from it. That's what Paul did. You see, his humanity when he burst out. You see his spirituality when immediately he caught himself in the sin and opening, publicly confessed his sin and turned from it. That's spirituality.

Christian, if you would deal with sin in your life that way, you'd save yourself a lot of chastisement. Do you know that? That's what 1 Corinthians 11:31 means when it says, "If we judged ourselves, we would not be...what?...judged." In other words, if we would take care of our own sin, we wouldn't have to be subject to the chastening of God to whip us into shape. Now let's face it. You're gonna sin...and I'm gonna sin, and we're gonna fail, and we're gonna transgress God's law; but the next best thing to not sinning is to immediately deal with that sin and accept the total responsibility for that sin, repent from that sin, submit to the Word of God, and go from there; and if you don't do that, then your sin will continue...

Listen to this. Don't ever think of your sin in relation to how bad other people are. Did you hear that? Do you know why? 'Cause you can always find some worse ones. You can say, "Well, I know I did that, but, boy, look, did you ever hear what she did?" Don't ever think of your sin in relation to how bad others are. Always think of your sin in relation to how holy God is. My sin is only to be compared with the absolute holiness of God, and my submission to His Word is what He asks, not comparing myself with how bad others are. Paul didn't say, "Well, you forced me into it." Paul didn't say, "Well, you deserved it." Paul said, "I'm sorry I sinned. I didn't know he was the high priest. I stand in violation of the Word of God."

Friends, that's a great man. That's a humble man. God help me to be so and you. Now, it's interesting I think to see that Paul said, "I didn't know he was the high priest." You say, "Well, how ignorant can a guy be? What do you mean you don't know it's the high priest?" I told you last week that I thought it was important that they convened the session in the Fort Antonia, and I don't think that Claudius Lysias wanted to turn Paul over to the Jews and have them take him over to where they usually met, because it could start another riot, so he wanted to keep custody. So he brought the Sanhedrin to Fort Antonia. I think it's best to see that's what the text is saying in verse 30 of 22; and so here they wouldn't be in their normal configuration. They wouldn't be seated with the high priest in his special seat. They would just be together in a mass milling around; and since it was an informally called session, the high priest wouldn't have his special robes on. So it is very likely that, because of that, he was unrecognizable and that the voice just came out of the mass of 71 people there. In addition to that, it is very possible that Paul had poor eyesight, isn't it?

You remember in Galatians, he writes about how large a letter I have written unto you, and the Greek is with what large letters? One of the possibilities of that is that it could be...refer to poor eyesight, among others; but he says in Galatians 4:15, he says, "You and I had such a good relationship that you would've plucked out your eyes and given 'em to me." That may be an indication that he had an eye problem, and had there been transplants possible, they would've afforded him the eyes. So it may have been that he had an eye problem. He just couldn't see that well. I think it's probably best to assume that that's possible, but that likely they were mixed together without their formal robes on. He wouldn't have been able to tell who it was.

But, friends, he doesn't claim ignorance. He doesn't say, "Well, I didn't know it was the high priest, so I am not to blame." He says, "I didn't know it was the high priest, and I'm still to blame for my ignorance. I should've found out." God is so honored, and you will find yourself spiritually minded and growing when you are willing to take that approach to your sin. The prodigal son came home, and he says to his father, "I have sinned against God, against you, against heaven, and you, Father, period." He didn't say, "Dad, you drove me out. Gave everything to my crummy brother, and I know I made some mistakes, but, man, you made it tough." No, he didn't mess around with all that. He just said, "I did it, and that's it."

Thief on the cross looked over, and he said, "We, indeed, suffer justly." Period, paragraph, and that's the one that went to be with Jesus. God is honored when we acknowledge sin and turn from it. Your sin is only to be seen in the light of a comparison of the holiness of God.

All right, from confrontation to conflict. Now we come to conquest. Verses 6 to 10. this is amazing. The conflict turns into a victory. You say, "How in the world did he ever get a victory outta that?" Paul has just not only been brought before a group that hates him to begin with, his confrontation was so bold that it made them furious, and now he's violated the law, and they're yelling at him about reviling the high priest. He is really in over his head.

Watch what he does. The Spirit of God has given this man such wisdom. It staggers you. He's there in verse 6. Paul looks at the crowd, and he says to himself, "Humph, there are Sadducees here and Pharisees here." Now, the Sanhedrin was divided into these two groups. The Sanhedrin was composed of priests, Sadducees, scribes, elders. For the most part, the priestly families, the high priestly families were Sadducees. In Jewish theology, there were basically three sects: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. Essenes were kinda the far out people. They...they were the ones that lived down in the...near the Dead Sea in Qumran, the bookworm types, the esthetics, the...the monastics; but the Pharisees and the Sadducees were in the middle of the maelstrom of life. The Pharisees were the super-legalists. They were the supernaturalists. They believed in miracles, and they believed in the literal interpretation of Scripture. The Sadducees were the rationalists. They threw out the miracles. They were the liberals of the day. The Pharisees were like ultraconservative, super-duper fundamentalists.

You know the definition of a fundamentalist like that. No fun, too much dam, and not enough mental. I mean they were just...they were condemning, see. They were on the extreme end of the legalist, literalist end. On the other end of the thing were the Sadducees. They were the far outs. They were the liberals. They were the...the watered-down, anti-supernaturalists. But those were the two factions that dominated.

The Pharisees were the majority. The Sadducees, the minority; but as the minority, they had the control, because they were the priestly family. So Paul looks at the Sanhedrin, a group he knows well, because he was a member; and he perceives again, that the groups are there. Pharisees and Sadducees. Now, these people got along only when they met together in the Sanhedrin. The rest of the time, they fought like cats and dogs.

Most of the time, the Pharisees kind've can overrule, because they had more people; and they would win the vote; but there was a terrible friction between the Pharisees and Sadducees. The only two things they ever agreed on that I could find in the New Testament was get rid of Jesus and get rid of Paul. Apart from that, they disagreed on everything; and so Paul looks 'em over, and he knows there's not a chance for a fair trial, and watch what he does. He says, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee," and immediately alienates the whole Sadducee group, just like that. But the reaction of the Pharisees is, "You hear that? This guy can't be too bad. He's a traditional Pharisee. His father was a Pharisee."

"And I am one who believes in the hope and resurrection from the dead. And that's why I've been called here into question!" Now, that is interesting, because immediately, verse 7, "When he had said that, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the multitude was divided." A fight started. You say, "What are they fighting about?"

"The Sadducees say there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit; but the Pharisees confessed both - both resurrection and angels and spirits." So you know what Paul did? He just turned the whole Sanhedrin on itself. Revolution. Civil war. He's just calmly stood there while they started the fight. You see, the real issue at stake was Paul had given his testimony; and Paul declared in his testimony that he was going down the Damascus Road and who spoke to him? Jesus of Nazareth. Well, if Jesus of Nazareth spoke to him, that meant Jesus of Nazareth was alive, right? So what was that saying? Resurrection.

Later on he said in the temple when he was giving his testimony in chapter 22, "In the temple, the Lord came to me, too." So he had said, "Twice the resurrected Christ and I have been together." And, you know, that was the part of his message that infuriated the mob. Remember? He said, "Jesus came to me and told me to go to the Gentiles," and they just blew their cork; and he comes in; and, of course, there were some other questions; but he goes right to the issue. He says, "The real issue here, folks, is I happen to believe in resurrection..."

Well, of course, now he's won the Pharisees over by being a Pharisee. Now he's got 'em really on his side, because he believes in the resurrection. It's a funny thing. All these years, 30 years in between, they had denied the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and here was the greatest preacher who ever lived on the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and they're on his team now, because he happened to ring their chimes on that particular chord.

And, you know, they were much more concerned about the ultimate theological debate going on, and they debated about a lotta things. The Pharisees were Calvinists. They believe in absolute sovereignty. The Sadducees were Armenians. They didn't know it yet, because those guys hadn't come along. But the Sadducees believed in free will, and so they used to always argue about predestination and free will. They were at the opposite ends constantly; and so Paul just turned 'em into each other, and they were having this big fight. The whole issue, really, was the resurrection. Paul preached the resurrection. That's what people got upset about. He preached that Jesus was alive, that Jesus had talked with him twice, and this is what infuriated everybody. It becomes the issue later on, incidentally, too.

Over in chapter 24, he's talking there to Felix, and he brings up the same thing in verse 21. He said, "Except it be for this one thing, I cried standing among them: 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am called in question.'" So, again, this whole idea of preaching the resurrection, announcing Christ was alive. It just infuriated the people, and that's one of the reasons they wanted to get Paul; and so he just doesn't mention the resurrection of Jesus. That wouldn't work out real well at this point. That might turn them against him, so he just says, 'I believe in the hope and resurrection of the dead, and that's why I've been called in question.'" And the reaction of a Pharisee would be, "Well, nothing wrong with believing that. That's solid doctrine."...

The Sadducees say there is no resurrection nor angels nor spirit. The Sadducees denied all angels. They denied spirit in the sense that they denied the spiritual part of a man. They denied that the soul lived after the body. They said, "The body dies. The soul dies. It's all over with. There's no heaven. There's no hell. There's no nothing." Sadducees started as a reaction to Phariseeism. They reacted to the Pharisees' concept of rewards for service, and that reaction which started as a reaction against rewards for service, became, went all the way to the extreme of denying any kind of rewards; and the next thing they had no afterlife, and then they denied the miracles; then they denied the supernatural and the whole works. So they're at each others' throat.

Paul calmly stands there. Watch what happens. Verse 9, "And there arose a great cry, and the scribes who were of the Pharisees' party arose and contended sharply." Here they're arguing now. Do you know that those debates were so hot that it was a great day when one of those groups won a theological debate over the other one, and they used to hold a feast when they won it...and here they are going at it like crazy, and the scribes started contending sharply, and they said, "We find no evil in this man." Believe that? And Paul's just standing there, you know.

You see, they were willing to let Paul off the hook in order to make their theological point against the Sadducees. That give you an idea of the antagonism. "And what if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him?" Ah, that's interesting. The last phrase doesn't appear in the best manuscripts. It stops right there. Do you know notice that Paul had said that it wasn't a spirit or an angel that had spoken to him. It was who? Jesus Christ. But they wouldn't accept that; but what did they think? Maybe it was an angel or a spirit. You see how they changed the testimony to fit their theology? But they wanted to drag that part of their theology in, too, 'cause that's against the Sadducees. So they said, "What if an angel or a spirit spoke unto him?" And the Sadducees woulda said, "There aren't any angels or spirits. How many times do we have to go over this?" And away they would go.

So he kept pounding right on the issues of their theology. What happened? Verse 10, "And there arose such a great dissension," the word is clamor. They were really going at it, full bore, discord, a hassle, a melee, shouting out loud, violence. "And there rose a great dissension, the chief captain," poor guy. By this time, he musta been fit to be tied. He couldn't get any kind of answer out of anything. Every time he tried to get an accusation against Paul, he couldn't get it. Now the whole Jewish court's fighting each other, and Paul's still standing there with no accusation.

Well, "He was afraid lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces by them." Probably, they closed in around him, and the Sadducees were yanking one way, and the Pharisees were yanking the other way. He's all right. No, he's not, and away they were going, see. "He commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them." They had to rescue Paul again. Romans to the rescue. The second time in two chapters. Amazing, God has superintended them. The whole of the nation of Israel's thrown into confusion, and he's got the whole Roman army on the side of Paul.

You know, you start reading Romans 8 with this in mind, and you'll know what it means when it says, "It's very difficult to lay any charge to God's elect." I mean when God has justified somebody, you just try and trump up a charge. It's pretty tough, and here the scribes say, "We find nothing wrong with the man." Amazing. Amazing turn of events. So Claudius Lysias is still scratching his head, saying, "I still don't know what this guy's done. I can't find out." So "They brought him by force and brought him into the barracks."

And conquest. We see Paul leaving majestically the victor, and they're still there fighting over their theology...What happens? Paul is put in the barracks for the night. We come to the consolation, verse 11, watch this. "The night following, the Lord stood by him." Isn't that good? Five times in Paul's life the Lord Jesus came to him Himself. This is one of those five. Always at times of crisis, the Lord stood by him. He was alone in the cell. Maybe he was saying, "Carest Thou not that I perish?" maybe he was saying, "Lord, seems as though You've been all gone a while. Lord, have You forgotten me?"

You know, you can have those kind of moods when you've been through something like that easy. It wasn't enough for the Lord to just remind him of a few principles. Jesus came to him. Jesus came and stood by him and He...He gave him three little words. "Consolation, commendation, and confidence." Watch. Consolation. "The Lord stood by him and said, 'Cheer up, Paul.'" Can't you imagine you're sitting there and, all of a sudden, you hear Jesus say, "Cheer up, Paul." You know, you would, wouldn't ya?

Do you believe the Lord is that close to us? The Bible says the Holy Spirit dwells where? In us. Jesus said, "I may be going away from earth, but I'll never leave you forsaken. Lo, I'm with you always." The Lord stood by him, consolation. God is a God of comfort. Boy, one of the things you see in Paul is he knew this. That man went from one trial to the next, but he knew the comfort of God. Listen to what he wrote to the Corinthians. This is in the midst of pain and being run from one place to the other by people who hated him. "Blessed be God...2 Corinthians 1:3...even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort...listen...who comforteth us in all our tribulation." He says, "I never go through anything that God doesn't comfort me."

"And He does it that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted of God." God comforts me, so that I can teach you about God's comfort. "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your comfort. Whether we be comforted, it is for your comfort." He says, "God keeps comforting me in every trial in order that I might teach you about His comfort."

In 2 Corinthians 7 verse 4, "I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation...verse 5...When we were in Macedonia, our flesh had no rest. We were troubled on every side: without fightings, within fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts those that are cast down, comforted us." God

always comforts His own. "Carest Thou not?" "Yes, I care."

And He came into that little cell that night and stilled the waves, calmed the sea. "Cheer up, Paul." Not a lotta theology in that, is there? Didn't give him a great doctrinal lecture. He just said, "Cheer up. I'm here. I'm here." Do you know what Paul said in Philippians? He said this. "Be anxious for nothing." Why? "The Lord is at hand." Isn't that good? "I'm here, cheer up." Consolation.

Second thing was commendation. I love this. He said, "Paul, for as you have testified of Me in Jerusalem." You know, the word testify means giving full witness. He said, "Paul, you did the job. Cheer up. You finished your work here. You testified of Me in Jerusalem. You did what I wanted." The word means full testimony. "You gave the complete testimony."...His thoughts could've been at that split second, "Does that mean it's over?" Then He gives him confidence. "And so must you also bear witness...where?...at Rome." I imagine he just came right up off the floor. "I'm gonna get to go to Rome." That's confidence. The Lord just gave him that promise.

Do you think God cares for you? God came to Paul, and He gave him thanks for the past, comfort for the present, assurance for the future. He's the God all comfort. I've seen Him comfort many people. I've seen Him comfort in my own life, give consolation. I know you have. In the midst of any trial, He cares. Cast your care on Him. Let's pray.

Thank You, Lord, for teaching us again this hour of Your comfort. Thank You for what we've learned and seen in this man, how You work. We praise You for just the joy that is ours, as we see You standing by thanking us for what we've done, giving us confidence for the future service that awaits us. As we close with the singing of a hymn, may it express that which is in our hearts. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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