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PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 114
ACTS 23:6-10

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ACTS 23:6-10 "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. And when he had so said there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. 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. 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."

God takes Care of His Own -

We are here in the midst of a mob. For the present time the power and authority of the Roman garrison had rescued Paul from the hands of the mob and they made it possible for him to have a hearing. The only proper place for an adequate hearing in the Jewish nation was the Jewish Sanhedrin. At this juncture in Jewish history religion had infiltrated the Jewish nation and the Sanhedrin was controlled by prejudice. The apostle Paul had probably been a member of the Sanhedrin quite a number of years prior to this time, and he was a Pharisee. As a Pharisee, he knew how the law should function. He knew enough about Jewish law to realize in this particular case the Jewish law was not functioning as it should. Therefore Paul, using all the ability and ingenuity God had given him, turned to a neat little trick. Paul was able to arouse dissension in the court in order to get his acquittal. Since he knew the court was prejudiced, and since he knew he could not get a fair trial there from them, he turned to some manipulation which proved to be quite beneficial.

No Christian Should Ever Be Discouraged

ACTS 23:6 "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." Paul was able both from their speech and their dress to perceive which ones were Pharisees and which ones were Sadducees. The Sadducees were the aristocrats, the wealthy, and were rationalistic in their approach. The Sadducees did not accept the Old Testament Scriptures except those parts that dealt with the Mosaic Law. They accepted the part of the Mosaic Law where justice was involved. The Sadducees were only interested in maintaining their political power. They didn't believe in angels or the resurrection of Christ. On the other hand, the Pharisees were the theologians of their day. Most of the Scribes came from the Pharisees and most of the Chief Priests came from the Sadducees. Hellenistic culture had infiltrated the priesthood and this is how the Sadducees were able to elect most of the Chief Priests. The Pharisees were not saved, they were not believers, but they were extremely religious. The Pharisees were called Scribes and this means they had graduated from one of the theological schools. The Sanhedrin usually had a few super politicians and they were called Herodians, but their influence had rapidly declined and they had little power at the time of our study here in Acts 23.

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Please keep this point in mind; at the point of our study here, Roman law was fair and just. Because of this fact Paul's life was saved and he was preserved so he could finish the work God had called him to do. A few years later than this time, even Roman law will be distorted and they will begin to persecute Christianity and Christians, and later on Paul will fall victim to their persecution. But here in our lesson before us, Paul faced a Sanhedrin that was shot through and through with prejudice and partiality. Therefore, it was absolutely impossible for Paul to get a fair trial from them. Here in this verse we are able to conclude that Paul perceived this distortion of law and he realized he was being treated illegally. He knew he was in the hands of men whose minds had been distorted. Paul was a genius and he quickly realized how he had an opportunity to divide the members of the Sanhedrin. So here Paul started an internal struggle which took the pressure off him. Paul knew what truth was and he was able to act quickly and decisively. Paul knew maximum Bible doctrine and he made use of his vast knowledge of truth he had stored in his mind. Please notice--HE WAS THINKING UNDER PRESSURE. Many people can't think under pressure, for they don't think when there is no pressure. Think for a moment how many factors enter your decisions to keep you from really thinking. In today's world we too often let others do our thinking for us. But here in verse six we have a picture of Paul's mind. We can almost retrace his thought patterns.

The words translated here "He cried out" really should be translated "He shouted". It is the imperfect tense and it means he just kept on shouting. He shouted "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee." From this Scripture we learn that not only was Paul a Pharisee but his father before him had been a Pharisee. The word for "I am called in question" is a present, passive, indicative of "Krino" and means to be called into judgment.

ACTS 23:7 "And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided." The word for "said" is "Laleo" and means to communicate. Paul's words drew sharp controversy very quickly between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. There came to pass "Stasis" and this means discord, dispute. The word for divided is "Schozo" and is an aorist, passive, indicative and means this division came to each one in a moment of time. This is the word from which we get "schizophrenic". "Phreno" means to think and "Schizo" means divided, so this word means "a divided mind."

ACTS 23:8 "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both." The Sadducees say there is no resurrection. This is parenthetical, and is thrown in to explain the theological reason for Paul's emphasis on the resurrection. Paul had said back in verse 6 that the reason he was called in question was the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, neither did they believe in angels or the Holy Spirit. This means that the Sadducees denied that there was anything such as the angelic conflict. We still have people living today who deny any such thing as the angelic conflict.

The Scripture has much to say about the angelic conflict and man is on the scene today to resolve this conflict. The Biblical record reveals that long before man existed, angels existed. The angels rebelled against God and did everything they could to destroy God's universe. Then after man was created they did everything they could to destroy the human race, as accounted in Genesis 6.

So verse 8 gives a very accurate picture of the theological differences of the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Here we are told that the Pharisees did believe in the resurrection, in angels, and in the Holy Spirit. The word for "confess" here is the same word we find in 1 John 1:9 and is "Homologeō". It means to acknowledge, to agree with, to site. So the Pharisees acknowledged these things. Please note in passing here that "Homologeō" does not mean "To feel sorry for" or to say "I'll never do it again" or to say "I'm going to do better next time." Those are emotional concepts and this word "Homologeō" does not involve the emotions but rather involves admission, confession, and agreeing with God concerning the sin. Confession does not involve the idea that you must confess and feel sorry for something, that you must confess and be emotional, that you must confess and say, "I'll never do it again." These things are man's activity and man is not forgiven by what he does or thinks, but rather is forgiven because of the justice and faithfulness of God.

Confess Sins - We Are Not Forgiven For what we DO But on the Basis of who God IS. Agree with God that your Sin is Wrong
 ACTS 23:9 "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." This word for "arose" is "dia machomai" and means "to fight through something." It means to go at something with all the conviction of the soul. So the Pharisees fought here to save one of their very own. We see them here defending their doctrine. So all of a sudden the emphasis shifts. No longer is Paul on trial but the Pharisees and their beliefs are on trial and they were aroused to rise up and defend their theological position.

Immediately arguments sprang up all over the courtroom. One Pharisee would get a Sadducee collared and would would say to him, "There is so a resurrection, and there is a Holy Spirit, and there are angels." Arguments broke out all over the place. So no longer was Paul on trial, but the whole system of the Pharisees was being questioned. This is what the word "Strove" meant. And as a result of this confrontation the Pharisees were quickly driven over to Paul's side, and instead of condemning him they found themselves defending him.

"We find no evil in this man" was simply a way of saying, "Not guilty." Earlier you recall Paul had contended that he was not guilty, and here the Pharisees are solidly on his side. The word for "find" is "Eurisko" and means to discover. It simply meant that in this courtroom investigation they had discovered certain facts and had arrived at certain conclusions. So it means "We detect, we ascertain, we discover." The Pharisees were in the majority and they quickly found Paul "Not guilty."

So look how quickly the situation had changed. A few moments prior to this they were ready to condemn Paul, but they had completely reversed themselves and they say, "Not guilty."

This next clause begins with "If" and is a first class condition and means this is a fact. It could read, "Since an angel or the Holy Spirit has spoken to him, let us not fight against God."

Now the truth is that the Lord had spoken to Paul. Paul had been taught by the Holy Spirit and by angels. We know some angels are teachers and we learn this in Galatians. The concept of angels serving as teachers is an Old Testament conception. In the Book of Zechariah the interpreting angel is presented as a teaching angel. If you go back to Exodus

in the giving of the law, you will discover that angels taught the law. So the Pharisees got this concept from Old Testament Scriptures, even though most of them were not believers. So the majority of the Sanhedrin, the Pharisees, concluded that Paul had received information from God and they were not willing to dispute him or fight against him.

ACTS 23:10 "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." Here is a picture of courtroom confusion which almost broke out into violence. But please notice the presence of Roman authority and Roman fairness and Roman justice. Rome was on the spot to preserve order. As Rome rose in power, crime subsided. Here is a picture of Roman law and order at its best.

Immediately the Roman Chiliarch realized that he needed to get Paul out of that courtroom as quickly as he could. So Roman authority rushed in and used force to rescue Paul physically. Law is to be enforced, and unless law is enforced the very foundation of the nation is in jeopardy. From Genesis 9:6 right on down to Romans 13, capital punishment is the ultimate in the enforcing of law. Our crime in America has come because of our laxness in enforcing the law.

So the scene is this--an innocent man was about to be ambushed in the highest Jewish court in the world. Roman authority stepped in and saved Paul's life. Paul was a Roman citizen and Roman force saved him. The law must protect the person and property of the citizen, and the way to do it is by force.

Please notice this point quite carefully. A policeman is the extension of the law. We have had a series of films in America that downgrade the policeman and call them "Cops" and run them down and try to downgrade their work. Please remember, they are there to guarantee that you will get justice and fairness. They rescued Paul by force and took him into the Roman Fort Mark Anthony.

ACTS 23:11 "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." Reading between the lines here we see that Paul at this point had become discouraged. Paul needed some encouragement, and God gave it to him quickly. Paul was under maximum pressure and the Lord came to him and visited him and gave him assurance of His presence and protection. You recall our detailed study of how Paul got out of the geographical will of God by coming to Jerusalem and how he committed a legalistic act in the temple. Paul had allowed his emotional attachment to those Jerusalem Jews to temporarily get him out of the will of God. So here we find that Paul was having somewhat of a spiritual hangover. Evidently Paul was blaming himself for allowing this situation to develop so we read here, "The Lord stood by me." Paul felt he had made a bad mistake, and it was right in that moment that the Lord stood by him.

Our translation says here, "Be of good cheer" but the words literally mean "Keep on being confident." The Lord literally said to Paul-- "Paul, I command you to be confident." The Lord reminded Paul that he had no time to feel sorry for himself and to have remorse over past mistakes. Paul was to rebound, pick himself up and move on.

The Lord reminded him that he not only had testified in Jerusalem but he would bear witness also in Rome.

As we close let us notice the different words used for "Testify in Jerusalem" and "bear witness in Rome."

The word for "testify" is "dia marturomai" and this refers to a protest type of ministry. But the word for "bear witness" is "dia martureo" and this means to give a faithful witness to the truth of the gospel. His witness in Jerusalem was simply a protest but in Rome his witness would have worldwide results.