

Having given his defense to the Jewish crowd (in the form of a personal testimony), we find in vv22-23 their response, in vv24-30 the reaction of the Romans, and then beginning in 23:1, we have Paul's second defense before the Jews (that is the Council). Thus, our text is actually 22:22—23:10 (which we will consider under three headings: Paul's rejection, Paul's revelation, and Paul's defense before the Council).

- I. His Rejection by the Jewish Mob (21:22-23)
- II. His Revelation of Roman Citizenship (21:24-30)
- III. His Defense Before the Jewish Council (23:1-10)

I. His Rejection by the Jewish Mob (21:22-23)

1. Verses 22-23—"And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!' Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air."
2. The Jews were able to endure Paul's speech up until he repeated the Savior's commission in v21—"Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles."
3. This is what set them off—the fact that Paul was commissioned by Christ to be sent to the nations (Gentiles).
4. Now keep in mind brethren—the fact that God always intended to bless the Gentiles is taught all through the OT.
5. In fact, it's impeded in the very promise made to Abraham, that from him would come blessings to every nation (Gen.12:3).
6. But these unconverted and self-righteous Jews, were so fixated on their ethnicity that they hated non-Jews.
7. And thus, it was the mere mention of the Gentiles that created in these Jews a desire to end Paul's life.
8. V23—"Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air"—these were ways to express great anger and anguish.
9. The notion that God would extend His saving favor to the pagan nations was absolutely repugnant to them (let me briefly suggest two reasons).
10. (1) They viewed themselves as special people—that is, they viewed themselves as the chosen people of God.
11. And in a very true sense they were right—God had selected Abraham and his seed to serve as His people.
12. But here's the problem—they trusted in their religious privileges as that which made them right with God.
13. Yes, they were a privileged people, but God never intended them to trust or rely merely in their privileges.
14. The same is true of children born into a Christian home—privileges along by themselves are not enough (they have to be improved upon).
15. (2) They viewed the Gentiles as unclean dogs—in fact, the Jews were forbidden to eat or speak with Gentiles.
16. And in a very true sense they were right—but here's what they failed to realize—all men, both Jews and Gentiles, are born unclean.

17. Yes, it's true the Gentiles were ceremonially unclean, but morally speaking, all men are born unclean.
18. And it was because of these two reasons, these Jews hated the idea of God bringing the truth to the nations (what we have is a gross example of national pride and a violation of the second table – 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself').

II. His Revelation of Roman Citizenship (21:24-30)

1. Within vv24-30 we have the Romans reaction to the Jews, and Paul's interaction with the Roman soldiers.
2. (1) The reason for his revelation (vv24-25)—simply put, he revealed his Roman citizenship because they were about to scourge him.
3. V24—"the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him."
4. In order to find out why Paul was so hated by the Jews, the commander thought it necessary to whip him.
5. Apparently, we believed the best way to get the truth from somebody was to torture them by way scourging.
6. And so, as they bound him to be scourged, Paul said to the centurion, v25—"Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned."
7. A practice that was evidently against Roman policy—Roman law forbid any citizen from being flogged.
8. Furthermore, every Roman citizen had the right to a speedy trial before its judicial (or justice) system.
9. While the Roman Empire had its problems, it nevertheless had orderly laws that were strictly adhered to.
10. And to violate these laws would lead to serious consequences (even fines, imprisonment, and/or death).
11. (2) Their response to his revelation—from v26 we learn the centurion gave this information to the commander (who then came to Paul to confirm it).
12. V27—"Then the commander came and said to him, 'Tell me, are you a Roman?' He said, 'Yes'" (which led to his response).
13. V28—"The commander answered, 'with a large sum I obtained this citizenship.' And Paul said, 'But I was born a citizen.'"
14. Within the first century you could either purchase your citizenship (with a large sum of money) or else be born with it.
15. In order to be born a Roman citizen you had to be born to parents who were citizens (seemingly, while Paul's parents were Hebrews they had obtained Roman citizenship).
16. Thus, while this Roman commander had paid for his citizenship, Paul had been born natively a citizen.
17. Now, let me remind you, that within the Roman Empire, it's estimated that only 1/4 of the people were citizens.
18. Likely one half were slaves, and the other quarter were non-slaves who were non-citizens (thus citizens were a minority).
19. And so, as we shall see in upcoming chapters, Paul will repeatedly appeal to his rights as a Roman citizen.

20. Every Roman citizen had right to an impartial trial, and if necessary, they could appeal to Ceaser himself (25:10).

III. His Defense Before the Jewish Council (23:1-10)

1. I want to divided Paul's defense before the Jewish Council into three sections: he confronts the high priest, he identifies as a Pharisee, he returns to the barracks.
2. (1) He confronts the high priest (vv1-5), v1—"Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, 'Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.'"
3. The phrase "looking earnestly at the council" meant that Paul "unashamedly locked eyes with them."
4. He then addressed them as "men and brethren"—that is, they were brethren according to the flesh (fellow Hebrews).
5. He then makes a bold statement—"I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day"—that is, he had lived before God with a perfectly good conscience.
6. He doesn't mean this was always true of him, but that it became true when Christ was revealed to him.
7. The implication was—if Paul lived with a good conscience before God, then what about the Council?
8. Furthermore, according to the Jews nobody had the right to claim such intimacy and assurance as this.
9. For the Council, it was the height of impiety to suggest that you are certain you are at peace with God.
10. And so here's Paul, basically saying—"It means little what your court rules, as I am already judged righteous before God."
11. V2—"And the high priest Ananias (different from 22:12) commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth."
12. Thus, Paul's claim was not only personally offensive but highly blasphemous from the perspective of the Jews.
13. V3—"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?'"
14. Paul responds with a stern warning—"God will strike you, you whitewashed wall"—that is, God will repay your evil with judgment.
15. To be a "whitewashed wall" was to be a hypocrite (that is, to have the outside clean while the inside is dirty).
16. Matt.23:27—"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."
17. These men sat as judges of the law and yet they failed to judge righteously according to the law (Deut.25:1-2).
18. V4—"And those who stood by said, 'Do you revile God's high priest?' Then Paul said, I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"
19. Seemingly Paul was unaware who Ananias was, and when he found out, he acknowledged he was wrong.

20. He then appeals to Exodus 22:28, which warned the people of Israel from speaking evil of any ruler over them.
21. The reason being, God is the one who appoints rulers (and thus to speak evil of them was to speak evil of Him).
22. (2) He identifies as a Pharisee (vv6-9)—within vv6-9, we find Paul being "wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove" (Matt.10:16).
23. Having realized the council was comprised of both Sadducees and Pharisees, he aligns himself with the Pharisees.
24. V6b—"Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged."
25. This is the basic message Paul preached—he preached Christ crucified and resurrected as our forerunner.
26. Because Christ was raised from the dead, all of those who believe in Him will be raised from the dead.
27. This resulted in a division among the council, v8—"For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both."
28. Paul knew they were divided among themselves, and so he wisely and shrewdly sided with the Pharisees.
29. If you remember, there had risen a division within the Jewish leadership between two competing groups.
30. The Sadducees were largely the theological liberals who rejected the bodily resurrection and spirit realm.
31. Whereas the Pharisees, took Scripture more seriously and believed in spiritual and supernatural activity.
32. And so, as you can image, the scribes of the Pharisees' party generally sided with Paul, saying, v9b—"We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God."
33. I think these words likely were intended as a further rebuke to the Sadducees (who didn't believe in angels or spirits).
34. (3) He returns to the barracks (v10), v10—"Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks."
35. The commander basically got what he wanted—he learned the issue between Paul and the Jews was theological.
36. This led him to rescue Paul from them and return him to the barracks (where he would be safe from the Jews).
37. Now as we shall see next week, from v11 and following, the Jews would continue their murderous hatred for Paul (in that they would form a plot to kill him).
38. But nevertheless, our passage ends with Paul safely in the barracks of the Roman soldiers free from the Jews.

IV. Observations

1. Here I want to simply underscore three of the many lessons we learn from this very instructive passage.

2. (1) A lesson on dual citizenship—by dual citizenship I refers to the fact that Paul was a citizen of two nations.
3. He was a citizen of the Roman nation and he was citizen of a heavenly nation (both at the same time).
4. Thus, he could say in 22:25 he was a Roman citizen and yet affirm in Phil.3:20—"our citizenship is in heaven."
5. This means, he was a citizen of two nations—the first was an earthly one and the second a heavenly one (thus, I want to say a few things about dual citizenship).
6. (a) Every Christian has both—that is, every Christian has citizenship in an earthly and heavenly kingdom.
7. And not only that, but God is the one who determines who belongs to earthly kingdoms and His heavenly kingdom.
8. This to say, it's God who determines what earthly nation we are born into and He also determines who will be reborn into His heavenly nation.
9. It was God's eternal purpose that Paul would be born of a Hebrew father who was also a Roman citizen.
10. Now, while the relationship between these two nations is close, they simply say they need to be distinguished.
11. This is to say, the church will always remain a nation that's scattered throughout all the nations of the world.
12. Put another way, there will always be the world and the church, or earthly kingdoms and a heavenly kingdom.
13. Yes this doesn't deny these kingdoms are related in that, Christ (as the glorified Godman) rules over both.
14. But dear brethren, He doesn't rule over them both in the exact same way—He rules over the nations with a rod of iron whereas He rules over the church with a rod of love.
15. (b) Every Christian has privileges from both—this means, there are specific benefits from both citizenships.
16. The Roman Empire, with all of its many problems, was still the best earthly government in existence.
17. And so, Paul was not ashamed to stand upon his rights as a Roman citizen—he was a citizen and had rights.
18. Now obviously brethren, depending on what nation you are apart of it, you may have very little rights.
19. But here's my point—it's not wrong or unchristian to stand upon our national rights as citizens (as did Paul).
20. (c) Every Christian has responsibilities to both—we have specific obligations to each of these nations.
21. And we have to remember, it's Christ who commands us to render proper allegiance and honor to both.
22. For example, we are told to pray for our government leaders, obey them, pay taxes, and give them proper respect.
23. And the same is true of the church—we are to pray for our leaders, submit to them, support them, and honor them.

24. (2) A description of a good conscience—what Paul confesses of himself is true or should be true of every Christian.
25. Every true Christian should be able to say what Paul said—"I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."
26. (a) How is a good conscience obtained? In answering this first question, I need to start by defining the word conscience.
27. The word basically means "a common knowledge" and refers to the soul's ability to know right and wrong.
28. The conscience is the soul's reflection upon itself, either accusing or excusing—condemning or acquitting.
29. The conscience is basically a little courtroom erected in man's soul whereby he is condemned or acquitted.
30. Thus, a good conscience is one that's been radically renovated so as to function as God has intended it (it has the law rewritten on the heart and has Christ Himself as our Mediator).
31. (b) How is a good conscience maintained? Paul didn't merely have a good conscience but "lived in it before God."
32. This means, he lived his life with a perfectly good conscience before God (or in the presence of God).
33. Thus, let me ask you this question—how can a person, who stumbles daily, live with a good conscience before God?
34. (i) It needs to be washed—by this I mean, we need to daily rewash our conscience with the blood of Christ (Heb.10:22 – 'let us draw near to God with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience') (we have to hear afresh the verdict of heaven).
35. (ii) It needs to be taught—by this I mean, because our conscience can err, we need to train it according to the truth.
36. (iii) It needs to be heard—by this I mean, we need to labor to keep it void of offense toward God and men (Acts 24:16).
37. This again doesn't mean sinless perfection, but it simply refers to an honest assessment of ourselves before God.
38. Are there any glaring violations of the first table (are there any known duties that I'm ignoring or disregarding)?
39. Are there any glaring violations of the second table (are there any known controversies with any person)?
40. (3) A warning about theological liberalism—this of course is taken from the Sadducees who no longer believed in the supernatural.
41. And dear brethren, this is almost always where it begins—people reject all that runs contrary to their perception.
42. Because they've never seen someone raised from the dead, they are not able or willing to believe in the resurrection.
43. Matt.22:29—"You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God"—the Scriptures foretell the resurrection (and even more than this they describe a number of them most importantly our Savior's).
44. Furthermore, they failed to understand the power of God (who not only rose Christ from the dead but will raise us too).