

The Apostle to the Gentiles Defends Himself

Acts 22:1 – 23:11

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Introduction:

Last week, we saw how Paul, wanting to maintain the unity of the church, submitted to the counsel of the elders at Jerusalem.

- The elders were very welcoming of Paul, but they were also very concerned for the Jewish believers in Jerusalem who had recently trusted in Christ.
 - These new believers, seeing what God had done in Christ, were very zealous for God, and their zeal was expressed in a greater devotion to the observation of the law—that is, the ceremonial law of the Old Testament.
 - They had not yet worked out all the implications of the New Covenant pertaining to how they worshipped God,
 - and how with the coming of Christ, the ceremonies were fulfilled and so no longer needed or appropriate.
 - They were still very much attached to *the law of commandments contained in ordinances...*
 - In other words, they were not only still worshipping at the temple and observing the regulations, but were doing this with more zeal than ever because of their love for Christ.
 - Their love for Christ was quite commendable in all this...
 - And the Lord, in His wisdom and consideration of His peoples' weakness, had not commanded the immediate abolition of Old Covenant worship.
 - This would have alienated Christ's disciples even more from their brethren in Israel who had not yet believed...
 - It would have unnecessarily added to the offense of the cross which was already a stumbling-block.
 - So the Lord had allowed that His disciples—and even His apostles—would gradually work out the theology of New Covenant worship.
 - In His tenderness toward them, the final change in worship would not occur until after the Jews had all had a chance to give the gospel a fair hearing...
 - it would not come until destruction of the temple in 70 AD, some forty years after the ascension of Christ.
 - Nevertheless, there had already been a great deal of progress in this direction.
 - It was probably 58 AD when Paul made this trip to Jerusalem that we are reading about now...
 - And there had already been some radical changes in the understanding of the twelve apostles and of the elders at Jerusalem.
 - From the very beginning of Acts, we saw how Christ had told the apostles that they would not only be his witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea, but to the Samaritans and even to the ends of the earth!
 - It was only a few years after Pentecost that they saw how God poured out the Holy Spirit on the Samaritans as soon as they believed.
 - And then there was the radical shift that came in 36 or 37 AD when Peter was commanded to go to the house of a Gentile and even to eat unclean food!
 - Peter had to do some serious explaining of his actions at Jerusalem, but the elders and other apostles had accepted his testimony—for the Gentiles had also received the Holy Spirit without first being circumcised and becoming Jewish proselytes.

- This was a huge change in everyone's thinking and it prepared the way for the acceptance of more changes regarding worship.
- Thirteen or fourteen years later, in 50 AD, there was the official declaration of the Church Council at Jerusalem where the elders from all the churches met with the apostles and decreed that the Gentiles were not obligated to be circumcised or to keep the Law of Moses.
 - This was a huge change and never could have happened if Peter had not had the experience with Cornelius.
 - Nor would it have ever happened if Paul, who was God's special Apostle to the Gentiles, had not been so clear on this issue.
- So in the events we are reading about in Acts 21, when Paul came to Jerusalem in 58 AD, the elders had a pretty good understanding that circumcision and the keeping of the law of Moses was not required...
 - But they inform Paul that many of the members of their congregations at Jerusalem did not have this understanding.
 - They were zealous for the law...
 - And they were concerned about Paul's ministry because they had been informed that Paul was going around and commanding Jews who trusted in Christ to forsake Moses and not to circumcise their children.
 - Paul was not commanding that at all!
 - He well understood that during the time of transition, the Jews were at liberty to continue in their ancestral worship.
 - He constantly defended their liberty in this matter—while staunchly insisting that no Gentile be required to follow Moses.
 - For the sake of the peace of the church, the elders at Jerusalem asked Paul to dispel this rumour by joining in purification rituals at the temple with four disciples who were finishing a Nazirite vow.
 - Paul was glad to do this.
 - And it is very likely that it **did** help many of the disciples of Christ for him to do this...
 - But when the unbelieving Jews from Asia saw Paul worshipping in the temple, they were outraged!
 - Without investigation, they assumed that he was taking Gentiles into the temple...
 - After all, his whole ministry was one in which he was claiming that Gentiles could enter the kingdom of God through faith in Christ—without circumcision!
 - Why would he not also bring them into the temple?
 - The Jews had no problem with Gentiles *becoming* Jews, but they took great offense at the notion that they could enter the kingdom of God without becoming Jews!
 - Their allegation was that Paul had apostatized from their ancestral religion—which they rightly believed to be the only true religion of the true God.
 - And so these unbelieving Jews from Asia, seeing Paul, stirred up a whole mob at the temple and dragged Paul out of the temple even as he was fulfilling his purification rites!
 - They dragged him out and would have killed him if Claudius Lysias, the commander of the Roman cohort at Jerusalem, had not come to break up the commotion.
 - We saw last time that Paul, having already been under attack by the Jews, surprisingly asked the commander if he could address the angry mob—and Claudius Lysias gave him permission...
 - Probably largely because he saw that Paul was a man of high social status—honour was a huge thing with the Romans—and Paul's social status was probably even higher than the commander's!

- But whatever his reasons, he gave Paul permission to address them.

And that is where we stopped last week...

- Right at the point where many see a poor choice for a chapter division as our Bible translators put the division right at the point where Paul was starting his speech...
 - But that is where we are picking up today—at Acts 22:1.
 - In this reading we will be looking at Paul’s defense in which he shows on no uncertain terms that his ministry to the Gentiles is of God!
 - He shows clearly that he is in no way departing from the religion of Israel that was handed down from their fathers...
 - To the contrary!
 - He has been especially called by God to lead the way in the ongoing unfolding of God’s saving work that had been prophesied by Israel’s prophets going back to Abraham and even before.
 - The question of Paul’s fidelity to his ancestral religion was no trivial matter!
 - That is why Luke, and the Holy Spirit who led him in the writing of Acts, makes so much of this matter.
 - The Jews knew and Paul knew that if he was apostatizing from the faith of the fathers in Israel, and forming a new religion,
 - It was a completely worthless religion.
 - Many in our postmodern times don’t really see this point as clearly as Paul’s contemporaries...
 - But if a religion claims to be of God, it cannot begin in Paul’s generation!
 - The Greeks knew this, and that is why Luke traces Christ’s genealogy back to Adam in his gospel—
 - The Romans knew this, and that is why they did not allow new religions to be started in the Roman empire—they called it *superstitio* and *superstitio* was illegal.
 - They were very tolerant of the practice of various ancestral religions and gave them liberty to carry out their rites.
 - They even allowed the Jews to execute Gentiles who dared to enter into the place of worship where only Jews were allowed to go.
 - But they did not tolerate new religions.
 - Modern churches do great harm to themselves if they do not trace their roots back to Abraham and even to Adam.
 - None of the reformers saw themselves as starting a new church but as reforming the church according God’s Word and the testimony of the fathers.
 - None of the twelve apostles saw themselves as starting a new religion,
 - They would have been rightly horrified at the suggestion!
 - And here, as Paul defends himself as God’s apostle to the Gentiles, he recognizes that he is defending the validity of the gospel...
 - That with the coming of the Messiah, both Jews and Gentiles are saved by faith in Jesus Christ.
 - Paul’s defence of this message of his is essential to the very existence of the true church.
 - That is why so much is made of his defence at the end of Acts—
 - If Paul is not a true apostle and if the message that God revealed through him about Christ for Jew and Gentile is false, then we are all cut off from the kingdom of God.

So give attention as I read to you, beginning with Acts 22 where Paul's defense is recorded:

- This is the very word of God.

Acts 22:1 – 23:11: “Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.”² And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said:³ “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women,⁵ as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.⁶ Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me.⁷ And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’⁸ So I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’⁹ And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me.¹⁰ So I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.’¹¹ And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.¹² Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt *there*,¹³ came to me; and he stood and said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him.¹⁴ Then he said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth.¹⁵ For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.¹⁶ And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’¹⁷ Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance¹⁸ and saw Him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.’¹⁹ So I said, ‘Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You.²⁰ And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’²¹ Then He said to me, ‘Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.’”²² 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!”²³ Then, as they cried out and tore off *their* clothes and threw May the Lord bless the reading of His holy Word.

dust into the air,²⁴ 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.²⁵ And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?”²⁶ When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the commander, saying, “Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.”²⁷ Then the commander came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman?” He said, “Yes.”²⁸ The commander answered, “With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.” And Paul said, “But I was born *a citizen*.”²⁹ Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.³⁰ The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from *his* bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.^{23:1} Then Paul, looking earnestly at 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 those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.³ 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?”⁴ And those who stood by said, “Do you revile God’s high priest?”⁵ 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.’”⁶ But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!”⁷ And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.⁸ For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.⁹ Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees’ party arose and protested, saying, “We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.”¹⁰ 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.¹¹ But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.’”

- Paul is God’s chosen instrument, uniquely prepared to bridge the gap between the Jews and the Gentiles,
- showing how Jew and Gentile are united upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, Israel’s Messiah;
 - leading both Jews and Gentiles to find eternal life through faith in Him.
 - Both have access to God by this great Saviour who was the subject of all of Israel’s prophets and of all the rituals that God had given them.
- And that is the first thing that I want you to see...

I. In his defense here in our text, Paul shows that his ministry among the Gentiles was straight from God.

- He is no rejecter of his ancestral religion or of the God of Israel.
- He is a true prophet of the living God...
 - an official apostle—sent by the Lord Himself—the one true God who had revealed Himself to the people of Israel.
- A. He begins (as recorded in chapter 22:1) by showing them that he has been a faithful Jew from birth.
 - A.1.** He does two things from the outset to show that he is truly a fellow Israelite...
 - A.1.a.** He addresses them as “Brethren and fathers.”
 - He does not see himself as severed from them as his people—he is still a Jew.
 - A.1.b.** And he speaks to them in the Hebrew tongue, as verse 2 says...
 - They pay closer attention because of this—it gave proof that he was one of them because he knew their language and knew it well!
 - A.2.** And then (in verse 3) he recounts to them how, though a native of Tarsus, he was sent to Jerusalem to study under the most celebrated Rabbi of the day—Gamaliel!
 - A.2.a.** He is not some ill-informed upstart who does not understand the ancestral religion—
 - He has more training in the law than almost any of his detractors.
 - A.2.b.** And far from rejecting what he had been taught, he was very zealous toward God...
 - so much so that he went to extreme lengths to persecute those who followed Jesus of Nazareth which he refers to as the way...
 - In verse 4 & 5, he says:
 - **“I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders [you can imagine some glancing around at each other to see if this is so], from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.”**
- TRANS> Clearly, both in his upbringing and in his zeal, he truly outdid them all.
- And many of those who were present could affirm all this to be true.
 - *There* (in the crowd) was one who helped prepare a letter for his expeditions,
 - *There* is a fellow student of Gamaliel,
 - *Over there* is the high priest who was so pleased to have Paul to do his dirty work upon the Christians when he feared the people...

B. Next, Paul shows that his conversion to Christ and call to ministry were totally of God.

- B.1.** Even as he was about the very business of persecuting the believers at Damascus, the Lord suddenly interrupted him...
 - protesting against him for persecuting Him by persecuting His people...
- B.2.** The circumstances made it very clear that this was a divine encounter...

- It was noon in the desert, and yet a light that overpowered the desert sun came around him from heaven...
- It was so overwhelming that he fell to the ground...
- Then a voice came from heaven saying:
 - **v. 7: ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’**
 - And then identifying Himself as (v. 8): **“Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.”**

B.3. And then there is yet more evidence that this was no mirage...

- Paul’s companions saw the light too...
 - But more than that, the light actually blinded him so that he could not see at all and had to be led by the hand for several days...
- He also received instructions to go to Damascus where he would be told what to do...
 - But who would tell him?
 - Again the divine hand is seen in sending a devout man—also a faithful Jew who kept God’s law and had a good reputation...
 - And this man goes to him, calls him *brother*, restores his vision, and tells him that God has chosen him to be an official witness of Him to all men!
 - Look at verse 14-15:
 - **Acts 22:14-15: ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.’**
 - Notice the Jewishness of the language—again showing that all of this is rooted in Israel’s God...
 - Ananias speaks of “the God of our fathers.”
 - And he calls Christ “the Just One.”
 - But most of all,
 - This is a marvellous corroborating testimony where Ananias is given independent revelation of Paul’s call to be God’s prophet and apostle.
 - Immediately, Paul is baptized and becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ, looking to Him for his salvation.
- TRANS> In all this, Paul shows that his calling was directly from the Lord.
- He did not take the office of apostle upon himself, but was called directly by God with a calling that was confirmed by another.
 - And now Paul gets to the offensive part of his story...

C. He shows that the LORD of their fathers expressly sent him to the Gentiles.

C.1. In verse 17, Paul explains that he first went to Jerusalem, but was specifically directed by the voice to the Lord to get out of Jerusalem and go to the Gentiles.

- Now you know that the Gentiles were those who were not Jews.
 - They had been cut off from God upon until this time.
 - But now that Jesus had come and had been crucified and raised again, the time had come for the Gentiles to be called into God’s kingdom
 - The calling of the Gentiles had been prophesied in the Old Testament and now Paul is the man to orchestrate that great work.
 - To establish the Gentile church upon the foundation of Jesus Christ.

C.2. Please turn to Ephesians 3:1 and you can see how Paul describes his unique calling in this regard...to the Ephesians he says:

- **Eph 3:1-7: For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.**
- It was his job to be God’s instrument to establish the church among the Gentiles and to show that they have access to Israel’s God, the true God, through Jesus Christ alone.
 - This is so important for us!
 - If this was not of God, then we Gentiles are not saved!
- Paul goes on in verse 8-9—Ephesians 3:8-9:
 - **Ephesians 3:8-9: To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;**
- TRANS> Clearly, Paul did not call himself into this ministry!
- He was sent by the Lord Himself.
 - Brothers and sisters, God makes sure to confirm Paul’s ministry so that we, as Gentiles, might know that God has indeed accepted us into His kingdom of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ.
- But going back to Acts 22...you can see that...

II. Paul’s claim that God sent him to minister to the Gentiles is the point of great offense to the Jews!

- This is the point about which his ministry is challenged as being not of God.
- A. The opposing Jews cannot bear the claim that the God of their fathers would be behind the work that Paul has been doing among the Gentiles!
 - A.1. As soon as he makes the claim that God sent him there, they do not even let him continue his defense...
 - Look at verse 22.
 - **Acts 22:22: And they listened to him until this word [that the Lord told him to go to the Gentiles], 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...**
 - You can be sure that if they had stones they would have thrown them instead of dust!
 - They count it as blasphemy for Paul to claim that what he has been doing among the Gentiles was commanded by God!
 - A.2. What was the great offense?
 - A.2.a. It was the offense of suggesting that Gentiles could be brought into the kingdom of God without first being proselytes of Judaism!
 - That Paul was declaring to *Gentiles* that they were on equal terms as heirs of Jehovah’s kingdom with Israel!
 - That he was telling them that they could enter the kingdom without being circumcised and without the ceremonies and without any requirement to observe the food laws or go up to Jerusalem to worship...

A.2.b. To them, this was a greater offense than it was for a Jew to follow Jesus...

- It was not such a big deal if a fellow Jew thought that Jesus was the Messiah so long as, like the believing Jews at Jerusalem, they kept the law of Moses!
- It was a bit silly to have a Messiah that was cursed of God and hung on a cross, and one that did not deliver Israel from Rome...
- But as long as they kept the law and worshipped according to the ancestral religion, it was not so bad...

A.2.c. But for Paul to receive foreigners into God's kingdom on condition of nothing more than moral repentance and faith in Jesus was an outrage!

- They saw—and rightly so—that if this were kept up, the ancestral practises that God had appointed for Israel would fall into disuse!
- No, this was not the religion of Abraham and Moses and David!
- Paul was clearly a false prophet who was undermining the faith of Israel!

A.3. And indeed, in a certain way they were also right about this...

- He was undermining the ancestral religion as they falsely understood it!
- If the ancestral religion of Israel was nothing more than the external rituals and ceremonies,
 - then what Paul was preaching was indeed new religion!
- But if it was about God's grace reaching into the world to save sinners—which it was for Abraham and Moses and David!!!
 - *Then* what Paul was preaching was not a departure from the ancient religion, but the very fulfillment of it!
 - Those who truly followed God in the Old Testament were looking for God's promised salvation as they performed the rituals.
 - Their faith was not in the rituals, but in the promises that the rituals represented...
- Beware of that kind of deception today brethren...
 - Your salvation is not going to church and keeping the Lord's Day and partaking of sacraments and reading the bible...
 - Your salvation is in the promises of God in Christ that are revealed in all of these New Testament ordinances.
- TRANS> So the Jews are once again agitated with Paul now that they have heard him say that God sent him to the Gentiles...

B. Once again, the Lord reaches out to protect Paul...from both the Jews and the Romans.

B.1. First, He uses the Romans to rescue him from the Jews by again snatching him away from the raging Jews...

- Paul is God's chosen vessel and the Lord still has much work for him to do...
- So he preserves him...so he is preserved from the Jews by the Romans...

B.2. But then the Lord also has to preserve him from the Romans...

B.2.a. The commander does not understand what all the commotion is about...

- perhaps because he could not understand Hebrew very well—or perhaps because he did not understand the Jews...
- Many of the Romans didn't at this time—even the governors—
 - There was a growing nationalism in Israel because they felt that their religion and their way of life was being threatened...

- And Paul was adding to that threat by watering down the way of access to God (as they saw it).

B.2.b. The commander does not understand what Paul has done and decides to resort to scourging to see if he can get Paul to tell him.

- Paul had been beaten with rods before, and he had been under the Jewish scourge...
 - But the Roman scourge was the most brutal form of torture of all!
 - Our Lord Jesus had to undergo this torture.
 - They would use these terrible instruments—often a cat of nine tails—
 - sometimes with lead balls tied on the end of each tail—
 - sometimes with bits of bone and metal tied into each tail—
 - sometimes with metal tails that were barbed on the ends.
 - Often those who went under scourge died, and if not, were permanently maimed...
 - The dreadful tails would literally tear the skin off, sometimes leaving bones and organs exposed—and sometimes tearing into the organs as well.

B.2.c. But the Lord had so ordered it in His providence that Paul should be delivered from this dreadful torture...

- He had arranged it from long before that Paul should be a Roman citizen—
 - And Roman citizens were not allowed to be tortured unless they were proven guilty in which case their citizenship was stripped from them and then they were tortured—and that only in extreme cases.
 - The punishment for a scourging a Roman citizen was death!
- The account shows how as soon as they found out that Paul was a Roman citizen, they all withdraw!
 - In verse 27 and 28 there is that wonderful account where the commander admits that he obtained his citizenship by bribery—which was illegal, but common...
 - He is sort of comparing notes with Paul, supposing that Paul must have gotten his citizenship in a similar way.
 - But Paul responds that he has the honour of having been born a Roman citizen!
 - Honour was a huge thing with the Romans,
 - and Paul by his education and citizenship has a higher status than the commander himself!
 - But understand that the Lord is the One who had prepared all of this to come about—
 - all in order that Paul might be able to speak for Him before both Jews and Romans!
 - all that he might testify to God’s salvation for both the Jew and the Gentile through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God that was slain to take away the sin of the world!
 - Now that Jesus had come, the Jewish rituals were passé.
 - Salvation was not in them—they were only provisional until Jesus came and provided the real atonement for sin.
 - Paul is God’s apostle to bring Jew and Gentile together in Christ and the Lord will not let him die until his work is done!
- TRANS> And so it is that instead of being either tortured or shut up in prison, Paul is once again brought forward to speak!
- God saw to it!

- although at this juncture, he still does not get to proclaim the full gospel...
- He will do that later when he is brought before Roman governors...
 - and when he does, he will appeal to them to believe...
- But at this juncture, in this second speech...
 - Paul is able to show clearly that he is not an apostate—

III. Paul is able to show who the real apostates are.

- It is not Paul who has departed from the religion of the fathers, but some of his detractors...
- A. He begins his speech by declaring again that he, Paul, is still serving the God of his fathers, just as he always did.
- A.1. Look at his opening statement in Acts 23:1...
- He looks at the council with the burning penetrating gaze that we have seen before and he declares with all sincerity...
 - **Acts 23:1: “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”**
 - But just a minute!
 - How can Paul say that when he had spent all of those days persecuting the disciples church of Christ?
 - He could say it because he did it with a good conscience, believing that he was truly serving God.
 - Not that a good conscience excuses him—only the blood of Christ can bring pardon for his atrocities...
 - But Paul’s point is that throughout his whole life he has earnestly sought to serve God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 - At no point has he deliberately turned away from or forsaken the religion of the fathers.
 - He is no apostate!
- A.2. But the high priest Ananias does not agree!
- A.2.a. This is the despicable man who collaborated with the Romans and was executed by the Jews in 66 AD...
- He had even had his servants steal tithes from the priests, and had used bribery and was known to be a great hoarder of money.
- A.2.b. And this wicked priest orders Paul to be struck in the mouth for claiming that he is a sincere Jew!
- It was not lawful, according to God’s law, to strike a man who had not been found guilty...
 - He was acting more like a Roman or a Greek than a Jew!
 - They used torture to get people to speak the truth, so Ananias is acting more like a Roman than a high priest of Israel!
- A.2.c. And so Paul calls him on it...
- Look at verse 3—Acts 23:3—and follow along...
 - **Acts 23:3: Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?”**
 - A whitewashed wall was a wall that was crumbling within, but that had been given a coat of paint to make it look sound...
 - It is a charge of hypocrisy,
 - verified by the fact that Ananias, as one who was supposed to uphold the law, had commanded a man to be struck before his guilt has been established!

- All Paul said was that he had lived with a good conscience before God.
- But then Paul himself is rebuked...
 - **Acts 23:4-5: 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.’”**
 - There is more than one way to understand this...
 - It is difficult to say for sure, but Augustine of the fathers, Calvin of the reformation, and Witherington, an excellent contemporary scholar, all believe that Paul is being sarcastic...
 - “I did not know, brethren, that *he* was the high priest.”
 - It is hard to see how Paul would not know, so it seems to be that Paul is pointing out that *this man* is certainly not behaving like a high priest...
 - This would be especially striking to Paul who knew that Jesus had become the high priest!
 - In quoting the scripture, Paul affirms that the law forbids speaking evil of the ruler of your people...
 - but this man has been replaced by another priest who is worthy of the office!
- TRANS> If this is the correct interpretation, then already Paul is showing that it is not he, Paul, who is the apostate,
- but those like Ananias who accuse those who have been sent by God before they have even been tried.
 - But even if that is not what Paul is doing here...

B. He clearly goes on to expose the true apostates who are at this inquiry—the Sadducees!

B.1. Look at what Paul does in verse 6-7

- **Acts 23:6-7: But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!” And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.**
- Paul sees himself as still a Pharisee, just as much as ever—even more so.
 - because the Pharisees held to the hope of the resurrection!
 - They believed in the saving grace of God that bestows eternal life on those who believe and continue in his covenant!
 - The Sadducees, as Luke tells us in verse 8, do not believe in the resurrection or in angels and spirits...
 - probably by **angels** referring to men in the intermediate state—before the resurrection—as when the church thought the man at the door was Peter’s angel when God had brought him out of prison...
 - and by **spirits** referring to the fact that men have spirits that live forever.
- You see the point here...
 - There is an inquiry to see if Paul is an apostate, but the men who are leading the inquiry are themselves apostates!
 - Paul is claiming to be a disciple of Jesus who rose from the dead and appeared to him to make him an apostle...
 - but these Sadducees who are leading the inquiry do not even believe in the resurrection!
 - So how can they conduct this inquiry?
 - Who is it that has departed from the true religion of Israel!

B.2. Paul's words strike a chord with the Pharisees!

B.2.a. They too were not apostates...in the same way that Paul was not an apostate before his conversion...

- He was an unbeliever, but he had not rejected the God of his fathers.
- He was, as far as he knew, serving Him.
- He was just wrong (very wrong) about how to go about doing that because his eyes had not been opened to see that Jesus is the Messiah.
- In the room were many Pharisees who did believe in eternal life by the grace of God—they only needed to see that Jesus was the way to obtain that life!

B.2.b. You see that the scribes of the Pharisees get the point...

- They realize that Paul has not rejected the religion of the fathers, but that it is the Sadducees who have done so...
 - Look at verse 9:
 - **Acts 23:9: Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God."**
 - They suppose that the spirit or angel of Jesus may have indeed spoken to Paul—as he claims...
 - They declare that they find no evil in him!
 - This is a verdict that will be repeated again and again as Paul is brought before inquiries and trials.
- Paul has proven that he is not the founder of a new religion, but one who is devoted to the God of Israel.

C. Now what about you my brothers and sisters?

C.1. Are you truly devoted to the way that God has revealed in His word?

- There are many over the years in the church's history who continue in the outward traditions of the church...
 - but who are strangers to the real grace of God.
- They latch on to some cause or some political agenda...
 - but like the Sadducees, they have no place for the salvation that Jesus brought into the world...
 - They reinterpret it—
 - that now the cause is giving women liberty to abort their babies...
 - or the cause is setting saving the world from greenhouse gasses...
 - or the cause is gay rights or animal rights or who knows what else!
- But these deny that there is a literal hell and literal resurrection and Saviour who was crucified to atone for our sins.
 - They claim to be following the traditions of the ancient church, but they have completely departed from the faith of the fathers!

C.2. They have no use for Paul's message either...

- that Jesus has come to justify both Jew and Gentile by His death on the cross and His righteous life.
 - That this is the only way of salvation for both Jew and Gentile.
 - That no one can come to God but through faith in Him!

C.3. Brothers and sisters...

- Do you see—God has made it clear for us in His Word that He is the One who sent Paul...
 - that as Jews or Gentiles, we can fully trust in the way of salvation that Paul has proclaimed.
 - Paul did not make this up...
 - Once understood, it is clear that his message is the same that was foretold by the prophets.
 - God has sent this man and all the other apostles and the prophets who have given us the scripture...
 - And it is for us to receive their message with all confidence and assurance as from God.