

## When You're Under Fire – Acts 22:22-23:35

Acts 22:22. The Apostle Paul has just given his testimony to the crowd in Jerusalem, as a defense for why he preaches the Gospel. The first of 5 trials in chapters 22-26.

The result of which, is that he's thrown out of the frying pan and into the fire. Coming *under* fire from the Jewish leaders.

And his response helps us navigate attacks in *our* life. When *we're* under fire. **(Outline)**

➤ [22] *Up to this word* [up until Paul recounted the command of Jesus to go to the Gentiles; which was outrageous to them] *they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth [a common nobody]! For he should not be allowed to live."* [23] *And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air* [signs of anger and disgust], [24] *the tribune* [the chief military officer] *ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this.*

[25] *But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned [untried, unsentenced]?"* [26] *When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen."*

[27] *So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes."* [28] *The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum."* [In other words, you don't have that kind of money.] *Paul said, "But I am a citizen by birth."* [Way more prestigious in those days.] [29] *So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him [unlawfully].*

Paul was under fire; falsely accused and wrongfully treated. But it didn't keep him from claiming his rights. Implying that it's not wrong for *us* to do so.

When you're under fire . . .

### **It's not wrong to claim your rights. (22:22-29)**

In Paul's case, it was his right as a Roman citizen to avoid flogging until he received a fair trial. To be heard in a formal hearing, and defend himself. It was his right.

And it wasn't wrong for him to claim it; to assert it.

Same goes for us. When you're falsely accused or unjustly attacked, whether formally in a court of law or informally in the court of public opinion . . .

Officially at work or unofficially by your neighbor – it's not wrong to stand on your rights. You need not lay down and get run over.

You say, "Okay, okay. But what about turning the other cheek?"

Jesus said in **Mt 5:39** – "*Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.*"

Shouldn't we let people do whatever they want to us? Isn't that the way of Jesus?

No. The context of his comments are retaliation and vengeance. *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth* (Mt 5:38; Ex 21:24). Don't do *that*, he's saying.

Don't *compound* the offense against you, by responding *likewise*.

Rather, absorb it if you can; absorb the wrong. And let it go. That's the idea.\*\*\*\*\*

But if you can't, or the attack is so unjust and so damaging, like flogging would have been for Paul, it's not wrong to claim your rights in order to defend yourself.

That's the *first* principle. **(Summary)**

➤ The second, starts in v30. *But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he [the Roman tribune] unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet [the Jewish leaders], and he brought Paul down and set him before them. [1] And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day." [2] And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. [He hated the fact that Paul thought he was doing God's work.]*

[3] *Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall [you sinful fake; all clean on the outside but filthy on the in]! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?" [4] Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest [insult him]?" [5] And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"*

Now, some people say that Paul made a mistake here, and that he really *didn't* know who the high priest was, and shouldn't have called him a whitewashed wall.

Making v5 an apology of sorts. Even though that's not what he says.

And even though Paul would have been well *familiar* with the high priest; from his distinctive robes to his infamy.

The other way to look at it, and I think the better way, is to see this as an indictment of a wicked high priest, who was well known in that day for his violence and corruption.

So when Paul says in v5 that he didn't know Ananias was the high priest, he's saying that he doesn't *recognize* him as such.

(A) Because he's not a legitimate *ruler*. And (B) because *Jesus* is our high priest.

He's illegitimate because he's rotten and deserves God's judgment; just like he said in v3 – *God is going to strike you*. And he's been displaced; by Jesus himself.

So far from an apology, Paul's words are a condemnation.

Leading us to the *second* principle when we're under fire:

### **It's not wrong to speak the truth. (22:30-23:5)**

Now, that doesn't mean you *have* to speak it; you *have* to say everything there is to say.

Certainly Jesus didn't when *he* was under fire. (1 Pet 2:23)

It just means it's not *wrong* to do so. It's not *wrong* to say it like it is when you're falsely accused. In fact, sometimes there's a need for it.

Like when the issue is bigger than yourself. Like some of the religious liberty lawsuits being filed these days by Christians.

But you better make sure you're speaking the truth in love – for the *right* reasons instead of the wrong ones.

Like Paul, who wanted justice to be served.

Or Martin Luther in the early 1500's, when he railed against the sinful *Popes* of his day.

Or William Wilberforce in the early 1800's, when he was attacked for his stand against slavery, and *hammered* his fellow members of Parliament for their support of it.

When you're under fire, it's not *wrong* to speak the truth.

It's not *wrong* to say it like it is. It's not even wrong to speak *strongly*.

Unless you're doing so for the *wrong* reasons instead of the right ones; out of hate instead of love; a desire to tear down instead of protect or build up. **(Summary)**

It's not wrong to speak the truth, just make sure you're doing so rightly.

➤ [6] *Now when Paul perceived that one part [of the council; those sitting in judgment of him] were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. [True. He was brought up in that tradition, and lived accordingly before Christ. It was a part of him.] It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial."* [The resurrection of Jesus, and the resurrection of the saints as a result.]

[7] *And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.* [8] *For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.* [Something Paul would have known from his childhood. Implying that what he did was intentional.]

[9] *Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?"* [10] *And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.*

The third and most difficult principle to discern here, is that . . .

### **It's not wrong to divide your enemies (23:6-11)**

You might even insert the word "necessarily." It's not *necessarily* wrong to divide your enemies. It *might* be; and often *is*; but not always. It doesn't have to be.

Which not only makes this the most difficult principle to discern, but the most dangerous to apply. Because our flesh is *always* looking for a way . . .

To justify our sinful actions; especially toward our enemies. So we have to be careful.

But the principle remains. Paul perceived that the council included Pharisees, v6, so he picked a side, and enlisted their support.

He appealed to their common belief in the resurrection, and their common background.

And in the process, *divided* the council, v7; *divided* his enemies. Because of their differences. Leading us to the conclusion that it's not wrong.

But it does come perilously close to violating the ethic of *Jesus* once again.

Who said in **Luke 6:27** – *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*

If dividing your enemies doesn't come close to crossing that line, I don't know what does. But based on Paul's example here, it seems there's room.

Otherwise you have to conclude that *Paul* was wrong; that Paul was *sinning*. And there's no indication of that whatsoever.

So how do we know we're *crossing* the line? When our *motive* is out of line. \*\*\*\*\*

If your motive in dividing your enemies is one of defense, *defending* yourself under fire, great. But if you're motivated by hate, or the desire to *oppress* your enemy . . .

Or take *vengeance* on them; not great. That crosses the line.

So while it's not *wrong* to divide your enemies, you better make sure your *motive* is right.

And while you're at it, look for confirmation. Affirmation from the *Lord*. Like Paul got. **V11** – *The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."*

He affirmed him. He affirmed his *presence* with Paul, and his *purpose* for Paul.

Look for confirmation. From the Lord, the Spirit, his Word, and his people. **(Summary)** Because it's a fine line to divide your enemies, but it's not necessarily wrong.

➤ [12] *When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.* [13] *There were more than forty who made this conspiracy.* [14] *They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul.* [15] *Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near."* [They were consumed with hate and blinded by bitterness. Something every single one of us is susceptible to if we're not careful.]

[16] *Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush [evidently Paul had a sister; and nephew], so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.* [17] *Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him."* [18] *So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, "Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you."*

[19] *The tribune took him by the hand [probably indicating his young age], and going aside asked him privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?"* [20] *And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him.* [21] *But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent."* [22] *So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, "Tell no one that you have informed me of these things."*

The 4<sup>th</sup> principle we find here for when we're under fire, is that . . .

### **It's not wrong to seek relief (23:12-22)**

Unfortunately, some people, at least some Christians, have the mistaken notion that it's wrong to do so. That they should just grin and bear it.

And others, who *don't* think that way, still feel *guilty* about seeking relief; sheepish.

And it need not be. There's nothing wrong with seeking relief when you're under fire from those who seek your demise.

Did you hear about the court ruling recently in the case between Intervarsity and the University of Iowa?

Intervarsity is a Christian group that ministers on 772 college campuses nationwide, and requires their student leaders to agree to their statement of faith. Just the leaders.

Seems normal. Legitimate. Because how can you be effective as an organization if your leaders don't agree with your core principles? Even secular organizations require it.

But in June of 2018, the University of Iowa claimed that was discriminatory. You can't require your leaders they said, to affirm your organization's beliefs.

Not only that, but they said other organizations, like fraternities, could.

So they "limited InterVarsity's access to campus, froze its bank account, shut down its website, and advertised that it was "defunct" for lack of student interest." (Becket)

So Intervarsity sought *relief*; in the courts; with the aid of Becket, a non-profit legal organization specializing in freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

And just over a week ago, a federal judge ruled, that the University had violated the law, and infringed on the student's constitutional rights.

Calling the University's actions "ludicrous" and "incredibly baffling." Praise the Lord.

The point is this: you don't have to roll over and take it when you're under fire.

You *might*; as the Lord leads; but you don't have to. It's not wrong to seek relief.

In fact, sometimes, it's not only right, it's best. Like when the issues extend far beyond yourself, and impact people *other* than yourself. (Summary)

➤ It's not wrong to seek relief, and last, it's not wrong to *accept* it.

[23] Then he [the Roman tribune] called two of the centurions and said, "Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night [9pm; under the cover of darkness]. [24] Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor." [Felix was the appointed ruler over Judea.]

[25] And he [the tribune] wrote a letter to this effect: [26] "Claudius Lysias [that was the tribune's name], to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings. [27] This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. [28] And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. [29] I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. [30] And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him." [That was the letter.]

[31] So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. [Map, ESV Study Bible, 2135]

Antipatris is about halfway between Jerusalem and Caesarea. 62 miles in all.\*\*\*\*\*

[32] And on the next day they returned to the barracks [the soldiers and spearmen], letting the horsemen go on with him. [33] When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him. [34] On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from. And when he learned that he was from Cilicia [part of his governorship], [35] he said, "I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive." And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod's praetorium [one of his palaces].

When you're under fire . . .

**It's not wrong to accept help (23:23-35)**

Even from those who in *other* circumstances are your enemies. Like the Romans were to the Jews. No matter, Paul was *glad* to accept their help.

Unfortunately, some people have a hard time accepting help from *anyone*; under *any* circumstances. And then either lament their feelings of abandonment . . .

Or take pride in their rugged individualism. Not good. And not necessary.

As long as the help doesn't come with strings attached, it's not wrong to accept it.

Like churches in Houston who accepted help from FEMA back in 2017, in the wake of Hurricane Harvey (2017). It was right and good.

And may very well be for you as well. From whatever the source. (Summary)

When you're under fire, it's not wrong to *seek* relief, and it's not wrong to *accept* it.

Just like it's not necessarily wrong to *divide* your enemies, or speak *truth* to them.

And it's certainly not wrong to claim your rights.

We don't *have* to, on *any* of these points, but it's not wrong if we do.

Prayer – Lord, thank you for the assurance of your Word and the example of justice.

Protect us we pray, but when attacks *do* come, when we *are* under fire, give us wisdom to know and do what's best. Give us freedom to do what's allowed. And purify our motives so we never cross the line.