

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

UNDER THE EXALTED CHRIST, THE GOSPEL BEGINS TO SPREAD

THE ACTS

† THE BOOK OF ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRIES, Associated

An overview of the Book of Acts, by Given O. Blakely

ACTS 5:31-32

"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Lesson #93

COMMENTARY ON: 23:1-10

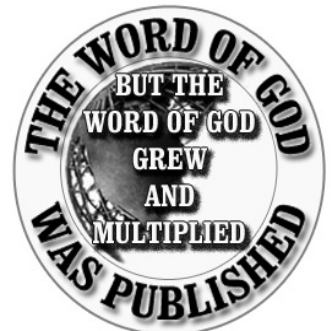
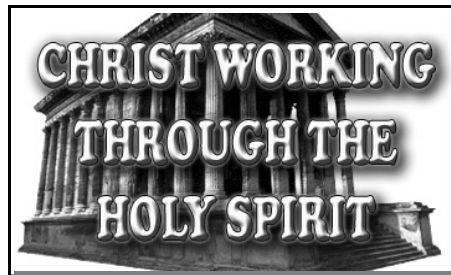
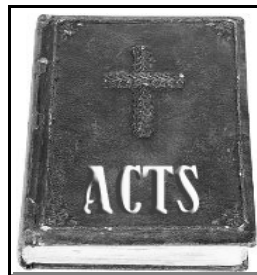
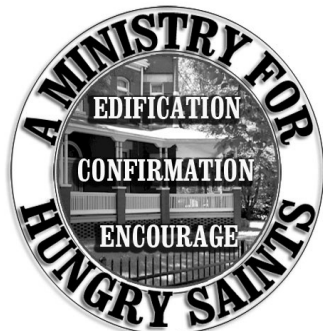
PAUL TURNS PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES AGAINST EACH OTHER

Paul commences a further explanation to "the chief priests and all their council." No sooner had he commenced his defense, and the high priest commanded that he be smitten on the mouth. Paul responded, and a brief dialog followed between Paul and those standing by. He then perceived a mixed company before him, consisting of Pharisees and Sadducees, who by no means were agreed in their view of the things of God. Immediately he spoke in such a manner as to set these theological opponents at a variance with one another, pointing out that he was a Pharisee, and had been called into question "the hope and resurrection of the dead." Because this was an area of controversy for these groups, confusion ensued. Ultimately this resulted in Paul being removed from the unruly crowd, and again taken by force into the "castle," or military barracks, therefore being afforded temporary protection.

ACTS 17:26-27

"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."

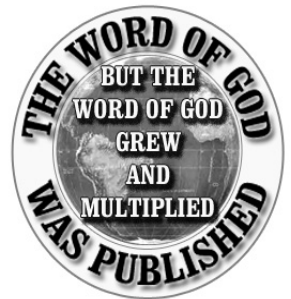
" . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)



Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ

The Book of Acts

Lesson Number 93



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

TRANSLATION LEGEND: ALT=Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED =Amplified Bible (1965), ASV=American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA=Douay-Rheims (1899), ERV =English Revised Version (1885), ESV=English Stand Version (2001), GNB=Good News (1966), GWN=God's Word (1995), IE= International English (1973), ISV=International Standard Version (1967), JPS=Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV=King James Version (1611), L.ITV= Literal Translation of the Bible (1976), LIVING=Living Bible (1971), MESSAGE=The Message (1993), MKJV= Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY=Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD=Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB=New American Bible (2002), NASB=New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU=New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version (1984), NJB=New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV=New King James Version (1979), NLT=New Living Translation (1996), NRSV=New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS=J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT=Bishop's New Testament (1595), RSV=Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK=JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster=The Webster Bible (1833), WEYMOUTH=Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS=William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE=Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE=Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT =Young's Literal Translation (1862).

THE INSPIRED RECORD OF HOW THE ENTHRONED CHRIST, BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKED THROUGH HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND GODLY MEN, TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, AND TO BRING EDIFICATION AND STABILITY TO MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.

Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----
LXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT = Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, LEH = LEH Lexicon, GINGRICH = Gingrich Lexicon

DISCLAIMER: The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

PAUL TURNS THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES AGAINST EACH OTHER

“ 23:1 "And Paul, earnestly beholding 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 them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. 3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? 4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? 5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people. 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. 7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. 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. 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." (Acts 21:1-10)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT
Paul commences a further explanation to "the chief priests and all their council." No sooner had he commenced his defense, and the high priest commanded that he be smitten on the mouth. Paul responded, and a brief dialog followed between him and those standing by. He then perceived a mixed company before him, consisting of Pharisees and Sadducees, who by no means were agreed in their view of the things of God. Immediately he spoke in such a manner as to set these theological opponents at a variance

with one another, pointing out that he was a Pharisee, and had been called into question concerning "the hope and resurrection of the dead." Because this was an area of controversy for these groups, confusion ensued. Ultimately this resulted in Paul being removed from the unruly crowd, and again taken by force into the "castle," or military barracks, therefore being afforded temporary protection.

THE MINISTRY OF TROUBLE
Throughout this entire episode we

are beholding the outworking of spiritual life. Faith, which is the pulse of spiritual life, is able to respond appropriately to trouble as well peace, and to hardship as well as blessing. In fact, it causes the trusting one to go deeper into the well of the water of life, drawing refreshment when all does not appear to be going well. However, none of this is done passively, or without the involvement of the one who has faith.

While we are in this world, from the standpoint of the flesh, trouble is an

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- HE LIVED IN ALL GOOD CONSCIENCE (23:1b)
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inevitability. This is because we are in a cursed world that is in the throes of death, groaning and travailing in anticipation of the manifestation of the sons of God (Rom8:19-21). However, there is more to trouble than this. There is also trouble and tribulation that come to us because we are the sons of God. Consequently, difficulty, inconvenience, pain, and sorrow should not surprise us, much less overwhelm us. **This is often trouble that comes because of our faith, and it is as sure as the trouble that comes because we are in a cursed and temporal environment.**

Jesus said to His apostles, who are the most privileged and significant class in His body (1 Cor 12:28), *“In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). He had earlier explained to them, *“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”* (John 15:19). Make no mistake about this, **those who deliberately hurt and afflict the people of God do so because they hate them.** Therefore believers are told, *“Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you”* (1 John 3:13).

There is a ministry that opposition

and affliction has for the people of God. We are to **know** *“tribulation brings about perseverance”*^{NASB} (Rom 5:3). God works to perfect His people within the context of suffering – suffering that results from their faith. As it is written, *“But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you”* (1 Pet 5:10). Notice that this is accomplished by *“the God of all grace.”* **Trouble, affliction, suffering, etc, prove to be an excellent context in which the grace of God can effectively work.**

Now, it is one thing to have a pedantic acquaintance with these facts. It is quite another thing to perceive them in the Scriptural accounts of various saints. Think of the people who were perfected in the surrounding of trouble and ungodliness. The list is quite impressive, including saints like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and all of the prophets. In the book of Acts we are introduced to others like Peter and John, the apostles, Stephen, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and several others.

Those who have developed and perpetrated a theology that strives for the approval of the world and its citizens have led the people astray. Their approach to theology and the understanding of the Scripture contradicts the very purpose of God, which includes not only the Divine objective, but HOW it is carried out and brought to completion. Any approach to ministering that attempts to make the message palatable to those who are alienated from God, as opposed to those who are seeking Him, is off-center, to say the very least. At the heart of such approaches is the ignoring of the Lord Jesus Himself, who is the sole means of approaching God (John 14:6).

PAUL’S RECORDED TROUBLES In Summation

- ⇨ Beatings, floggings, being stoned, shipwrecks, isolation, frequent journeys, perils, weariness, painfulness,

going without food, cold and exposure (2 Cor 11:24-27).

- ⇨ Trouble on every side, perplexed, persecuted, cast down (2 Cor 4:8-9).
- ⇨ Hungered, thirsted, lacked adequate clothing, was beaten, had no certain dwelling place, was reviled, was persecuted, defamed, and made as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things (1 Cor 4:11-13).
- ⇨ Dishonor, evil reports, seen as deceivers, being unknown, dying, chastened, sorrowful, being poor, and having nothing (2 Cor 6:8-10).

Details

- ⇨ In Jerusalem, the Jews took counsel to kill him (Acts 9:23-24).
- ⇨ Persecuted and expelled from Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:50-51).
- ⇨ Driven from Iconium (Acts 14:1-6).
- ⇨ Stoned at Lystra by the Jews from Antioch and Iconium (Acts 14:19).
- ⇨ Persecuted in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra (2 Tim 3:11).
- ⇨ Beaten and imprisoned at Philippi (Acts 16:19-24).
- ⇨ Treated shamefully at Philippi (1 Thess 2:2).
- ⇨ Opposed in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4).
- ⇨ The Jews from Thessalonica came to Berea and stirred up the people against him (Acts 17:13-15).
- ⇨ Opposed by the Jews in Corinth (Acts 18:12-18).
- ⇨ Beaten in Jerusalem (Acts 21:32).
- ⇨ More than forty Jews agree to fast until they killed Paul (Acts 23:12-15).
- ⇨ Imprisoned in Herod’s judgment hall

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(Acts 23:35).

- ⇒ Left bound in prison for two years by Felix (Acts 24:27).
- ⇒ Shipwrecked on the island of Melita (Acts 27:14-28:1).
- ⇒ Bitten by a poisonous snake (Acts 28:3-6).
- ⇒ Was pressed out of measure, so that he despaired of life (2 Cor 1:8-11).
- ⇒ Had a grievous thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7-8).
- ⇒ Preached to the Galatians during a time when he was sick (Gal 4:13-14).
- ⇒ Made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men (1 Cor 4:9).

These experiences all took place WHILE Paul was engaged in the work of the Lord – doing what Jesus had commissioned him to do. The period during which these things were experienced was approximately twenty-six years.

Several valuable lessons can be learned from these things.

1. THEY TEND TO MINIMIZE OUR SUFFERINGS. For most believers, Paul's

sufferings tend to minimize those through which we are called to pass. In Paul we see an example of how much believers can endure without conducting themselves in an uncomely manner. Job is another example.

2. **SUFFERINGS ARE CONTROLLED BY HEAVEN.** Peter reminds us that our sufferings are under the Sovereign control of God, and are only for a time. *“But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you”* (1 Pet 5:10). Seen correctly, sufferings prepare us for spiritual maturity (perfect), solidity (stablish), spiritual stamina (strengthen), and a life of faithfulness (settle).
3. **KEPT FROM FALLING.** Paul is a sterling example of Jesus keeping His servants from falling, and making them stand. Although the accounts to which I have referred were not intended to be a kind of biography of Paul's troubles, yet they identify the seriousness of his trials, as well as the pain and concerns they generated. No ordinary man could have endured such an extended period of suffering, to say nothing of the severity of the experiences he mentioned. His

stability was an example of being *“kept by the power of God”* (1 Pet 1:5), being kept *“from falling”* (Jude 1:24), and being made *“to stand”* (Rom 14:4).

4. **SPIRITUAL CONSISTENCY AND STEADFASTNESS.** It is also a display of the spiritual consistency that characterizes those who have eternal life, and are clinging to the Lord with purpose of heart. The doctrine affirms that *“tribulation produces perseverance”* (Rom 5:3). Instead of trials and temptations causing Paul to stumble, thereby bringing the need for repentance and recovery, they made him more steadfast. That is the result of responding to the teaching of grace (Tit 1:11-12).
5. **THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE AND VICTORY.** Additionally, we see that the life of ease, and the lack of opposition, are by no means the dominant traits of spiritual life. Being *“more than a conqueror”* does not suggest the absence of battles – even fierce ones. It is still true that the devil, with all of his wiles and subtlety, has no weapon that can effectively offset saying *“NO!”* to his temptations (Tit 2:12). He has no effective weaponry against the individual who resists him (James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:7-8).

PAUL EARNESTLY BEHOLDS THE COUNCIL

“^{23:1a} And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said . . .” Other versions read, *“looking earnestly,”* ^{NKJV} *“looking intently,”* ^{NASB} *“looked strait at,”* ^{NIV} *“looking fixedly,”* ^{BBE} *“fixing his eyes on,”* ^{DARBY} *“stared at,”* ^{GWN} *“looked directly at,”* ^{NET} *“earnestly gazing at,”* ^{AMPLIFIED} and *“surveyed the members of the council with a steady gaze.”* ^{MESSAGE}

This is an example of how a man with a good conscience conducts

himself before his enemies. His conscience does not condemn him; he knows that he is not guilty of the charges brought against him. He also is keenly aware that the Lord is his Helper, and thus does not fear what men shall do unto him (Heb 13:6). He is not intimidated by men – especially those who oppose the Gospel of Christ.

Beholding involves riveting one's attention on something. Discernment and consideration is in the word also. Solemnly

the Psalmist prayed, *“Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in Thy way”* (Psa 119:37). When the enemies of the apostles **beheld** the lame man whom they had healed, *“they could say nothing against it”* (Acts 4:14). **Thus we are reading of a lingering and considerate look.**

THE COUNTENANCE

Paul is beholding the countenance of the people before him – discerning therein something of their persons. By definition the countenance is *“the face as an indication of mood, emotion, or character; bearing or expression that offers approval or sanction: moral support.”* ^{MERRIAM-WEBSTER}

Early in the history of humanity, we read of the countenance. For example, when Cain's offering was rejected, *“his countenance fell”* (Gen 4:5).

This is an example of how a man with a good conscience conducts himself before his enemies. His conscience does not condemn him; he knows that he is not guilty of the charges brought against him.

What is even more, the Lord asked him, “*why is thy countenance fallen?*” (Gen 4:6). Cain’s face reflected disappointment that his offering was not accepted. However, even then the Lord gave an opportunity to present an acceptable offering. “*If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him*” (Gen 4:7). However, because Cain was “*Of that wicked one*” (1 John 3:12), he not only rejected Divine counsel, but murdered his brother Abel. That confirmed Cain “*belonged to the evil one.*”^{NIV}

Other references to the human countenance confirm that it reflects satisfaction or dissatisfaction, favor or hatred, and acceptance or rejection.

⇒ Laban changed his countenance toward Jacob: “*And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before*” (Gen 31:2).

⇒ Jesus said men should not have a sad countenance when they were fastening. They were rather to groom and present themselves as those who were not fasting. “*Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall*

reward thee openly” (Mat 6:16-18).

⇒ The wicked not only refuse to seek God, but betrays his reprobacy in his countenance. “*The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts*” (Psa 10:4).

⇒ The Psalmist spoke of the health of his countenance, tracing it back to God Himself. “*Why art thou cast down, O*

of his friend” (Prov 27:17).

Because the body is an integral part of our persons, something of the individual can be known by its various expressions. The countenance, or visage certainly is not a thorough index to the individual, but enough can be perceived in it to give the one beholding it some valuable information. In the case before us, the countenance of the people will betray their feelings toward Paul – whether they are

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my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God” (Psa 42:11; 43:5).

⇒ Solomon said “*A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken*” (Prov 15:13).

⇒ It is written, “*Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance*

raging with madness, or are open to sound reasoning.

Paul earnestly beholds the Jewish council as he speaks. Extemporaneously, he will frame his words in a manner appropriate for the situation. His is not a prepared speech to be delivered whether or not the people are listening. His words will rather be suited the occasion, being mingled with wisdom and deep spiritual insight. As such, the Lord will be able to work with them to accomplish certain things in Paul’s behalf.

HE LIVED IN ALL GOOD CONSCIENCE

“^{23:1b} . . . **Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.**”

MEN

“ . . . *Men . . .*” Here Paul addresses his audience as fellow members of the race of Adam: “*men.*” The word translated “*men*” (ἄνδρες) also assumes adulthood, when people are capable of reasoning and drawing sound conclusions. **Paul does not insult his audience by speaking to them as though they were children.** He does not lisp to them in baby talk, but rather makes an appeal to mature minds. If their heart is right, the Holy Spirit

will assist them in coming to a sound conclusion. If their heart is not right, Paul’s manner of speaking will cause their corruption to erupt.

To my knowledge, there is not so much as a sentence of Scripture that is addressed to immature and childish minds. I understand that in the instruction of immature children the word of God must be opened and expounded. However, the Scripture itself is never addressed to those whose rational powers have not yet been matured. **Even children are addressed as thinkers** (Ex 20:12; Eph 6:1-2). Yet, the Scripture is thoroughly capable of making

young minds “*wise unto salvation*” (2 Tim 3:15). It is not that the Scripture itself is adapted to the immature mind. It rather is conducive to the development of a mature mind. Working with the Scripture, the Holy Spirit will cause the child’s mind to eventually be elevated spiritually. The marvelous horizon of truth will burst upon the child as he advances in “*wisdom.*”

Notwithstanding, in this text, Paul is not addressing children, but mature “*men.*” He speaks to them in such a manner as to provoke deep and sound reasoning. He knows that their countenance will reflect their manner of reasoning, whether sound or

In a display of spiritual wisdom, Paul turns the Pharisees and Sadducees against each other – by Given O. Blakely

perverse. Without undue elaboration, I have noticed a current tendency in preaching that is most uncomely. **Much of what is being delivered to the people is juvenile. It does not appeal to the reasoning capacity of the people, especially those who are in Christ Jesus.** Shallow preaching will inevitably produce shallow and unthinking people.

It is my opinion that those to speak

men addressed the people as foes. Much of this detection was perceived in the countenance of the people.

When Paul and Silas addressed the heathen in Lystra, they did not call them *"brethren,"* but rather referred to them as *"men,"* or *"sirs"* (Lk 14:15). When Paul spoke at Athens, he did not speak to brethren in any sense, whether as Jews or as followers of Jesus. He addressed them

to be – which was precisely what they were.

⇨ He addressed the scribes and Pharisees as a *"generation of vipers"* (Matt 23:33).

⇨ He spoke to the unbelieving Jews during His ministry as a generation who chided Him for not doing what they wanted. *"But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented"* (Matt 11:16-17).

⇨ To His disciples He said, *"Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations"* (Luke 22:28). When their faith was weak, He addressed them as those who could have maintained faith: *"How is it that YE do not understand . . . How is it that YE have no faith"* (Matt 16:11; Mk 4:40).

One of the great transgressions of the modern church is that some of its preachers and teachers address the people as though they were not the children of God – as though they had not been regenerated, given a new heart, and been made "accepted in the beloved"

to the people of God should remove from their speaking terms like, "I hope you understand what I am saying," or "Are you getting this?" or "I'll explain that later." If a word is being addressed particularly to children, speak **briefly** to them. But the majority of what the man of God says should be addressed to those who have the capacity of understanding. This is precisely how Paul addressed Agrippa when he said, *"Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?"* (Acts 26:8). **The truth of what men are and what they prefer is made known in the arena of thought, cogitation, and mental challenge.**

AND BRETHREN

" . . . and brethren . . ."

Paul also addresses them as the people of promise, the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: *"brethren."* This is how Peter addressed the Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:29). It is how Peter addressed the crowd in the Temple (Acts 3:17). This is how Stephen began his address to the Jewish council (Acts 7:2). It is how Paul addressed the Jews in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:38).

Even though those to whom Peter, Stephen, and Paul spoke may have been bad Jews, they spoke to them as sincere Jews – as the progeny of Abraham. They framed their words as though those before them were familiar with the Scriptures, and were serious about their identity with God. It is only when hostility was detected that holy

according to what they were: *"Ye men of Athens"* (Acts 17:22).

A careful examination of the epistles will confirm that Paul, Peter, and John wrote to the churches according to what they were in Christ: *"called to be saints"* (Rom 1:7), *"sanctified in Christ Jesus"* (1 Cor 1:2), *"the saints"* (2 Cor 1:1), *"faithful brethren"* (Col 1:2), *"in God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Thess 1:1), *"elect"* (1 Pet 1:2), *"them that have obtained like precious faith"* (2 Pet 1:1), *"they that have known the truth"* (2 John 1:1) . . . etc.

One of the great transgressions of the modern church is that some of its preachers and teachers address the people as though they were not the children of God – as though they had not been regenerated, given a new heart, and been made "accepted in the beloved" (Eph 1:6). Too often their messages are peppered with sayings like, "we are all sinners," "we are just like those Israelites," and "we never really want to do what God requires of us." All of this is supposedly sanctified by statements like, "God accepts us just as we are," "You can't do anything to make God love you less," and "God can handle your weaknesses." **Of course, such speech neutralizes any truth that may be said, disarming the soul, and producing a kind of spiritual laxity that gives Satan the advantage.**

When Jesus spoke to the people, He addressed them for what He perceived them

Thus Paul addresses his audience according to what they really are. As he speaks, he looks steadfastly at them, ready to detect a favorable or unfavorable change in their countenance.

I HAVE LIVED IN ALL GOOD CONSCIENCE

" . . . I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." Other versions read, *"perfectly good conscience,"* ^{NASB} *"a clear conscience,"* ^{NRSV} *"my life has been upright,"* ^{BBE} *"perfectly clear conscience,"* ^{GWN} and *"perfectly good conscience."* ^{AMPLIFIED}

We live in a generation that could not receive this statement. I do not doubt that the accuracy of such an expression would be immediately questioned by most professing Christians. **The reason for this circumstance is that the church of our time has learned to live with willful and persistent sin.** Church staffs and theological schools are maintained with sinners in mind rather than those of good conscience. However, throughout history there have been people who maintained their life with spiritual consistency. This does not mean they never sinned, but sin was not their manner – and Paul is speaking of the manner of his life.

The Scriptures draw attention to several people who were especially noted for the righteous manner of life.

- ⇒ **ABEL.** *“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.”* (Heb 11:4)
- ⇒ **ENOCH.** *“And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.”* (Gen 5:22)
- ⇒ **NOAH.** *“These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.”* (Gen 6:9)
- ⇒ **JOB.** *“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.”* (Job 1:1)
- ⇒ **ASA.** *“But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa’s heart was perfect with the LORD all his days”* (1 Ki 15:14).
- ⇒ **HEZEKIAH.** *“I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore”* (2 Ki 20:3).
- ⇒ **DAVID.** *“I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart”* (Psa 101:2).
- ⇒ **ZACHARIAS AND ELIZABETH.** *“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.”* (Luke 1:6)

There are other noble souls against whom no sin is recorded. It is not that these people never sinned. **Rather, they were noted for their righteousness and integrity.** With them, sin was an exception, not the rule. These include the following, and accounts for their lives prior to the establishment of the new birth and the new covenant.

- ⇒ Abel.
- ⇒ Enoch.
- ⇒ Noah.

- ⇒ Melchizedec.
- ⇒ Joseph.
- ⇒ Samuel.
- ⇒ Daniel.
- ⇒ Shadrach.
- ⇒ Meshach.
- ⇒ Abednego.
- ⇒ John the Baptist.
- ⇒ Nathanael.

Once again, the point being made is not that these persons needed no Savior, or that they were without sin. **The point is that sinning was not their manner.**

Ethiopian eunuch, Saul of Tarsus, and Cornelius. For those in Christ whose conscience requires further training, this word is given: *“Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be **otherwise minded**, God shall reveal even this unto you”* (Phil 3:15). Paul then adds that each believer is responsible for living in strict accord with what they **do** know, thereby maintaining a good conscience: *“Nevertheless, **to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind”*** ^{NKJV} (Phil 3:16). **Each person is**

Each person is responsible for living up to what they do know. While it is true that it appears as though relatively few people actually do this, Paul was one of those noble souls who lived in such a manner.

Their primary characteristic was living with a heart and mind to please the Lord. That is what is involved in living *“in all good conscience.”* Prior to the coming of Christ and regeneration the Psalmist wrote, *“God is in the generation of the righteous”* (Psa 14:5). Zecharias, father of John the Baptist, confessed this to be the manner of the Lord. *“And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation”* (Luke 1:50).

The same is true of Paul prior to his conversion, who confessed he lived in *“all good conscience”* until the very day he was speaking. If it is countered that Paul persecuted the church, and therefore could not have had a good conscience, consider the following. **The conscience is not an infallible guide, although God has made no provision for violating it.** Even when a person may have drawn the wrong conclusions about right and wrong, he cannot go against his conscience, but must do what he does as unto the Lord. That is the whole point of Romans 14. When Paul wrote, *“And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin”* (Rom 14:23), he was addressing the matter of the conscience. It is another way of saying, *“Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind”* (Rom 14:5). **All of this postulates that a person is living to please the Lord.** God will direct such a soul, for his heart is tender and directable. For those outside of Christ we have the examples of the

responsible for living up to what they do know. While it is true that it appears as though relatively few people actually do this, Paul was one of those noble souls who lived in such a manner.

When Paul persecuted believers, he thought he was serving God. He was doing what he perceived the Law of God to have commanded (Deut 13:1-5; 18:20; Zech 13:3). Speaking of that period of his life, he confessed to Agrippa, *“I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth”* (Acts 26:9). His actions were caused by ignorance and unbelief, as he said in First Timothy 1:12-13: *“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that **He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.”** That ignorance and unbelief was not a preferred mode of life for Paul.* It was brought on by a lack of knowledge and understanding. He had not seen the Prophets or Jesus Christ from a proper perspective. However, when Jesus revealed Himself to Paul, then Saul of Tarsus, he immediately believed and willingly yielded, inquiring what the Lord wanted him to do.

While this is something that cannot be codified or comprehended statistically, there is a sense in which Paul’s manner of maintaining a “good

conscience” allowed him to respond more immediately to the truth. A man

who has been conscientiously living for the Lord, though incorrect in his perception, can

be more apt to respond to the truth when it confronts him.

THE HIGH PRIEST COMMANDS PAUL TO BE SMITTEN

“2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.”

THE HIGH PRIEST ANANIAS

This Ananias was doubtless the son of Nebedinus (Josephus, Antiq., book 20, chapter 5, section 3), who was high priest when Quadratus, who preceded Felix, was president of Syria. He was sent bound to Rome by Quadratus, at the same time with Ananias, the prefect of the temple, that they might give an account of their conduct to Claudius Caesar (Josephus, Antiq., book 20, chapter 6, section 2). **Albert Barnes**

While there is some controversy concerning the precise identity of Ananias the high priest, I consent to the record of Josephus, together with several commentators. **To me, the significant thing to note is that at the time of our text, the high priest was appointed by the political dignitary – at this time, Agrippa.** Most historians and commentators concur that this was the custom at the time of our text.

The above being true, we see what a degeneration had taken place in the matter of high priests. According to God’s Law, high priests were to be descendants of Aaron, who was appointed by God as the first high priest (Num 17:2-10; Lev 21:10; 1 Chron 6:49; Heb 5:4; 7:11-14). The responsibilities of the high priest were as follows.

- ⇒ **HAD CHARGE OF THE SANCTUARY AND ALTAR.** (Num 18:2-7)
- ⇒ **OFFERED SACRIFICES.** (Heb 5:1; 8:2).
- ⇒ **DESIGNATED SUBORDINATE PRIESTS.** (Num 4:19)
- ⇒ **OFFICIATED AT THE CONSECRATION OF THE LEVITES.** (Num 8:11-21).
- ⇒ **HAD CHARGE OF THE TREASURY.** (2 Kgs 12:10; 22:4).

- ⇒ **LIGHT THE LAMPS IN THE TABERNACLE.**
- ⇒ **BURN INCENSE.** (Ex 27:20-21).
- ⇒ **PLACE SHOWBREAD ON THE TABLE EVERY SABBATH.** (Ex 30:7-8; 1 Sam 2:28; 1 Chron 23:13).
- ⇒ **OFFER FOR HIS OWN SINS OF IGNORANCE.** (Lev 4:3-12).
- ⇒ **OFFICIATE ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT.** (Ex 30:10; Lev 16:1-34; Heb 9:7).
- ⇒ **JUDICIAL RESPONSIBILITIES.** (Num 5:15; Deut 17:8-13).
- ⇒ **NUMBER THE PEOPLE.** (Num 1:3).
- ⇒ **OFFICIATE AT THE CHOICE OF A RULER.** (Num 27:18-21).
- ⇒ **DISTRIBUTE THE SPOILS OF WAR.** (Num 31:26-29).

All of the duties of the high priest had to do with things pertaining to God. This is stated succinctly in Hebrews. *“For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins”* (Heb 5:1). This same thing is true in the various functions and offices that are found within the church.

Yet, at the time of our text, the office of the high priest was an appointment by civil authorities. **Further, when the civil and the religious stood together, the civil was, according to appearance, in control** (Matt 27:12-13; Acts 22:30; 23:10; 24:20-22; 25:10-12).

This perfectly accords with the depiction of the false church in the book of the Revelation. There, the church thrust into society by the wicked one is set forth as *“a great whore that sitteth upon many waters,”* and *“with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication”* (Rev 17:1-2). Later, the Spirit unravels some of the mystery that surrounded her. She was being carried along by a *“beast,”* which is confirmed to be governments, headed up by *“kings”* that

make war with the Lamb (Rev 17:3-13).

This appears to be one of Satan’s consistent strategies. **It involves the corruption of religion, so that it is closer to the world than it is to God.** Then there is a merger of religion with the world, which results in the inevitable dominance of the world over religion. We see this taking place in a more apparent way in our text, with God-ordained offices being managed by Rome. But this did not occur until Judaism had been so corrupted it bore very little resemblance to the institutions Moses had put in place under the direction of Almighty God.



This is not the place to be diverted to a lengthy discussion on this subject. However, it ought to be apparent that this very same strategy has been employed against the church. **It is, however, totally inexcusable because of the superior knowledge, power, and resources that have been vouchsafed to the church.** However, even though such gracious gifts are thoroughly adequate to protect and empower the church, unused they fall in the street as truth did during the time of Isaiah (Isa

59:14).

SMITE HIM ON THE MOUTH

“ . . . the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.” Other versions read, “strike him on the mouth.” ^{NKJV}

And what was it that provoked this command? It was that Paul affirmed, “Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.” ^{NASB}

It is obvious that Ananias the high priest was convinced Paul was taking the name of the Lord in vain. One of the Ten Commandments reads, “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Ex 20:7). Other versions read “misuse the name,” ^{NIV} “use for an evil purpose,” ^{BEB} “use lightly.” ^{CJB} “idly utter,” ^{DARBY} “use . . . carelessly,” ^{GWN} “swear falsely,” ^{TNK} and “lightly or frivolously, in false affirmations or profanely].” ^{AMPLIFIED}

Thus, Paul’s confession of having maintained a good conscience “before God” was viewed as a reckless use of the name of the Lord. The high priest viewed this as an insincere attempt to bring God into the matter at hand. However, Ananias’ was himself insensitive to God, and thus unable to decipher a “good confession” (1 Tim 6:13). His diagnosis of Paul had been sifted through his corrupted view of God and the Scriptures.

When men filter Scripture and events through their religious tradition, they cannot possibly arrive at the truth of a matter. Their conclusions will always be erroneous, because the filter of tradition removes reality and proper perspective from what they are considering. **Their thoughts are actually molded by their religious tradition, and where the truth contradicts their tradition, they have no capacity to detect that variance.**

It also ought to be noted that religious tradition is never willing to take a secondary or subordinate position. Once embraced, it assumes headship over even the truth itself. This is a circumstance from which men must be delivered. Peter alludes to this when he wrote, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers” (1 Pet 1:18).

Although it may be attended by considerable difficulty and challenge, no believer is obligated to maintain allegiance to what is perceived as vain religious tradition. It is quite true that those who conscientiously and energetically maintained erroneous traditions often find them lurking in nearly every corner of their thinking, it is equally true that Christ has freed us from their

darkness rather than light (Joan 3:19).

⇒ That Christ’s Kingdom and those who have been translated into it are not of this world (John 8:23; 18:36; Col 1:13; John 15:19).

⇒ That truth and error cannot be reconciled (2 Thess 2:10; 1 John 2:21; 3:18-19; 4:6; 3 John 1:3).

Although it may be attended by considerable difficulty and challenge, no believer is obligated to maintain allegiance to what is perceived as vain religious tradition.

dominion. Even though a strong a grip of misconception may appear, it can be overcome because it is of the world, and faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4-5).

Another Valuable Lesson

The wicked are often allowed to vent their rage against the people of God with no apparent restraint. Paul himself reported that he was beaten of the Jews “five times” (2 Cor 11:24).

Those in Christ should not be naive about those who persecute them.

Although it may appear as though they are in control, they are not. Persecution and martyrdom suggest that the adversaries of the saints have dominion over them. Thus were the prophets persecuted and martyred (Matt 5:12; 23:31), Stephen was slain (Acts 7:58-60), as well as James (Acts 12:2). Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned at Philippi (Acts 16:37).

When the saints of God are opposed with seeming impunity, or exemption from appropriate punishment, several things are being made known.

⇒ That the world does, in fact, hate both Christ Jesus and those who are joined to Him (John 15:18).

⇒ That the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth (John 14:17).

⇒ The eyes of the ungodly have been blinded by the prince of this world (2 Cor 4:4).

⇒ That those who are of the world love

⇒ That there is a sense in which persecution is in order that the saints might be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God (2 Thess 1:4-5).

⇒ That it may be confirmed that it is a righteous thing for God to judge the wicked for their actions (2 Thess 1:6).

While the welfare of the saints is a matter with which our Lord is identified, it is always within the greater context of the glory and purpose of God, and in view of the end of the world and eternal judgment.

None of God’s dealings with men are independent of these considerations. Those who declare a kind of sympathetic God who earnestly wants to be involved in the intricacies of human life, have seriously misrepresented the case. Actually, the objective of God is to involve us in what He is doing. That is precisely why, in Christ, we are said to be “joined unto the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17). It is why He has created us to do good works that HE has ordained (Eph 2:10). In the last analysis, it is men who are being changed into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18), and being prepared for eternity. It is why the saved are citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20), and live unto the Lord (2 Cor 5:15).

If we do not remember these things, suffering and opposition may confuse us – and confusion is an arena in which Satan can work more freely. It is by far best to culture the proper spiritual understanding, which makes for a more tender and responsive heart. Blessed is the person who understands these things.

THE RESPONSE OF PAUL

“³ Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?”

This text has moved some to speak critically of Paul, reminding us that when Jesus was led like a lamb to the slaughter He did not open His mouth (Isa 53:7; Acts 8:32). However, the circumstances of these two occasions are not the same. First, Jesus was being “delivered up” by God Himself (Rom 8:32). This was done according to God’s own “determinate counsel and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:33). Additionally, the suffering of the Lord was in strict accord with God’s “prophets” (Acts 3:18).

Additionally, Jesus did not maintain total silence during the events leading to His death. When Jesus stood before the high priest prior to being delivered to Pilate, He refused to answer him (Mk 14:60-61). When chided by Pilate for not answering him, Jesus answered, “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin” (John 19:11). During His earthly ministry, Jesus severely upbraided the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23), leaders among the people, as well as the lawyers (Lk 11:46-52). Prophets also were noted for rebuking priests and rulers (Isa 29:10; Jer 5:31; Mal 1:6).

Suffice it to say, sin and wickedness was always rebuked wherever it existed. The ruler of the people was not excluded from a godly denunciation, and the Law was not to be interpreted so as to lead men to that conclusion.

GOD SHALL SMITE THEE!

“Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall . . .” Other versions read, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall,”^{NKJV} “God will give blows to you, you whitewashed wall,”^{BBE} “God will slap you, you corrupt hypocrite!”^{NLT} and “God is about to strike you, you whitewashed wall!”^{AMPLIFIED}

It is not certain that this was a prophecy of a particular Divine judgment. However, as a matter of historical record, Ananias the high priest was slain about five years later.

Ananias perished by the daggers of the Sicarii (Josephus, ‘Bell. Jud.’ 2. 17:9), at the beginning of the Jewish war under the procuratorship of Florus, in the year A.D. 66. He had been previously deposed from the high priesthood by King Agrippa toward the close of the government of Felix (‘Ant. Jud.’ 20. 8:8), about A.D. 59, or early in A.D. 60, less than two years from the present time. JOSEPHUS

“ . . . and if this was Ananias, the son of Nebedaeus, as is generally thought, it is remarkable, that five years after this, in the beginning of the wars of the Jews with the Romans, this Ananias, hiding himself under the ruins of a conduit, was discovered, and taken out, and killed f1144: and no doubt but he very fitly calls him.” JOHN GILL

SITTEST THOU TO JUDGE ME?

“ . . . for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?” Other versions read, “in violation of the Law,”^{NASB} “your yourself violate the Law,”^{NIV} “in defiance of the Law,”^{AMPLIFIED} “breaking the Law,”^{DARBY} and “transgressing the Law.”^{GENEVA}

I understand the law to which Paul

referred – the law Ananias violated – to be found in Leviticus 19:15: **“Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor.”** Nicodemus, a Pharisee, referred to this kind of abuse during the mock-trial of Jesus. *“Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?”* (John 7:51). He doubtless referred to the law specified in Deuteronomy 1:17: **“Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God’s: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it.”** Solomon also wrote, *“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him”* (Prov 18:13).

Thus Ananias commands that Paul be struck on the mouth, interrupting what he was saying, making an unwarranted assumption, and acting rashly before all of the facts and defense had been made. This kind of conduct was even wrong under Roman law (Acts 16:37-39; 22:25-30). **The Mosaic law forbade rash and unrighteous judgment** (Ex 23:2,7; Lev 19:15; Deut 1:17; 16:18,19). The Psalms, Proverbs, and the Prophets also addressed the matter of injustice with remarkable clarity (Psa 82:2; Prov 17:15; Isa 26:10; Jer 22:3-5; Lam 3:34-36; Amos 5:11-12). **The conduct of Ananias was thoroughly unacceptable.**

The point here is that injustice is always wrong, and the fact that those committing it hold a high position does not change that fact. Wrong is never sanctified by a superior religious or political position. **In matters of morality, there can be no respect of persons.** That is how God views the matter, and He responds accordingly.

THE OBSERVATION OF THOSE STANDING BY

“⁴ And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God’s high priest?” Other versions read, “You dare to insult God’s high priest?”^{NIV} “Do you say such words against God’s high priest?”^{BBE} “Doest thou rail against the high priest of God?”^{DARBY} “Doest

thou reproach the priest of God?”^{MRD} *“Do you rail at and insult the high priest of God?”*^{AMPLIFIED} and *“Is that the way to talk to God’s High Priest?”*^{LIVING}

Do not be unduly concerned about

this question, for it is not to be our initial consideration. When those who stood by referred to Ananias as “God’s high priest,” they altered the way we are to consider this matter. They brought God into the matter, and that changed everything.



The office of the high priest was a critical one. In the epistle to the Hebrews, a point is made of the primary function of this office, and the manner in which it was populated.

THE PRIMARY FUNCTION OF THE HIGH PRIEST

First, the high priest focused on things relating to God – i.e. to the people of Israel and their relationship to God. *“For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God”* (Heb 5:1). Another statement relating to his function reads, *“For every high priest*

is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer” (Heb 8:3).

The matter in this text has nothing whatsoever to do with doing *“things pertaining to God.”* The entire council, including the high priest, has been convened upon the demand of a political official, who had *“commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear”* before him (Acts 22:30). The objective was to determine the legitimacy of the charges brought against Paul. Therefore, at this time, they are not meeting as a Jewish council, but as subordinates of the Roman empire. Yet, Ananias conducts himself as though he was in charge of the whole affair. Whether wittingly or unwittingly, he had done what the Roman official had not dared to do – commit an infraction of Roman law by striking a Roman citizen without having established an authentic charge against him.

THE MEANS OF SELECTING AND APPOINTING A HIGH PRIEST

By Divine intention, the high priest could not assume his office. Precisely as the first high priest Aaron was called of God, so must every high priest be appointed in strict comportment with the will of God. Thus, it is

written, *“And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron”* (Heb 5:4). This was largely done through following the proper Levitical lineage, particularly through Aaron (Ex 27:21; 28:43; 29:9).

There were additional qualifications that had to be met. For example, they included being without any kind of physical blemish. He could not be blind, lame, or have any physical deformity (Ex 21:17-23). The high priest could not marry a prostitute, widow, or a divorced woman (Lev 21:7-15).

The point here is that simply saying Ananias was the “high priest of God” did not make it so. Those who criticize Paul for the manner in which he spoke have not examined the case carefully enough. He did not break God’s Law unless this was really *“the high priest of God.”* If he did not meet the qualifications, he was nothing more than a hypocrite, like the rest of the Pharisees and Sadducees that were present. **It is always proper to expose works of darkness** (Eph 5:11). This is in the same category as John the Baptist rebuking Herod (Matt 14:3-4; Mk 6:18). No office is exempted from the rebuke of sin.

PAUL AGAIN RESPONDS

“5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.” Other versions read, *“I did not know,”*^{NKJV} *“I was not aware,”*^{NASB} *“I did not realize,”*^{NIV} and *“I was not conscious of.”*^{AMPLIFIED}

Himself a Pharisee (Acts 23:6; 26:5), Paul was very familiar with the requirements of the Law. The text to which Paul refers is Exodus 22:29; *“Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people”* (Ex 22:28). The text postulates a **valid** ruler of the people.

Also, Paul had not reviled or railed on Caiaphas, which presumes false and prejudiced charges. Jesus referred to Herod as a *“fox”* (Lk 13:32). John the Baptist referred to a cluster of Pharisees and Sadducees as a *“generation of vipers”* (Matt 3:7). Jesus did the same (Matt 23:33).

“Soon after the holding of the first council at Jerusalem, Ananias, son of Nebedenus, was deprived of the high priest’s office, for certain acts of violence, and sent to Rome, whence he was after released, and returned to Jerusalem. Between the death of Jonathan, who succeeded him and was murdered by Felix, and the high priesthood of Ishmael, who was invested with that office by Agrippa, an interval elapsed in which this dignity was vacant. This was the precise time Paul was apprehended; and the Sanhedrin being destitute of a president, Ananias undertook to discharge the office. It was probable Paul was ignorant of this circumstance (Acts 24:17).” **NOTE:** Acts 24:17 relates to the continuation of this very event, in which Paul states that he had been away from Jerusalem for “many years.” That is the reason for the last statement in this quotation.
TREASURY OF SCRIPTURAL KNOWLEDGE

It ought to be noted that Paul did not retract his statement, or say that he repented for making it. This

indicates that he did not regard Ananias in the same way as those who were with him. His statement concerning not realizing that Ananias was the high priest is explained in the attending box. However, it seems to me that more is involved here than what appears on the surface.

The fact that Paul brushes the whole matter aside, and proceeds in his assessment of the situation confirms to me that he recognized Ananias was really **not “God’s high priest.”** Instead, he was to genuine high priests what *“false prophets”* (Matt 7:15) were to God-sent prophets, or *“false apostles”* were to genuine apostles (2 Cor 11:13). There is such a thing as religious frauds. **I know of no word from God that says such men are to be honored as though they were sanctified by the office they usurped, and were honored by the Lord as though they were functioning lawfully.** That is precisely why God is said to have no respect of persons (Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; Col 3:25; 1 Pet 1:17).

PAUL CAPITALIZES ON THE MOMENT

“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.”

It is evident from Paul’s conduct that the peace of God was keeping his heart and his mind (Phil 4:7). Even though the circumstances were tumultuous – he had been beaten and jostled about, and the air was charged with dissension and animosity – yet Paul has the presence of mind to survey the situation with the intention of adopting a wise course of action. He has not been unduly distracted by the events of the last two days, but is thinking and acting with godly discretion. That is the effect of letting, or allowing, the peace of God to “rule” in the heart (Col 3:15).

In today’s “Christian” world, there is not much being said concerning the reality and nature of the “peace of God.” **In my judgment, a considerable amount of sin can be traced directly to the absence of the peace that is given to the believer.** Jesus said this peace directly bore on being troubled and afraid (John 14:1,27). The absence of these stabilizing qualities leaves a gapping door through which Satan is sure to enter.

PAUL PERCEIVED THE CIRCUMSTANCE

“But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees.” Other versions read, “knowing that some of them were,”^{NIV} “noticed that some were,”^{NRSV} “saw that half of them were,”^{BBE} “realized that,”^{CSB} and “was well aware.”^{NJB}

The Amplified Bible reads, “When Paul perceived—from the discussion which plainly had by this time arisen between the parties. that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees.” The Pulpit Commentary takes a different view: “Possibly the Pharisees in the Sanhedrim were disgusted at the brutal act of Ananias, and were not sorry to hear him called “a whited wall,” and St. Paul’s quick intelligence saw at a glance that the whole council did not sympathize with their president, and divined the cause.” Adam Clarke is of the opinion that Paul knew some of these men from former associations, even though

he had been absent from them for fourteen years (Gal 2:1).

The point here, however, is not HOW Paul arrived at this proper conclusion, but that he was alert and sensitive to assess the situation. Once again we see the selflessness of this man of God. The fact that he has been beaten, maligned, and is presently being examined by a Roman military man and a group of spiritually deranged Jews had **not** turned his eyes inward. **It ought to be noted here that some people live in such a spiritually sloppy manner that all trouble is thought to be punishment for unacceptable conduct. Note that such a reaction is never credited to Paul.**

With a keen and perceiving eye, Paul assessed the audience before him. He sees what it is most expedient to say – something that will turn the attention from himself, for he was not the transgressor in this matter.

A PHARISEE CALLED INTO QUESTION CONCERNING THE HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION

“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.”

It should not surprise us that some have criticized Paul on this matter, even affirming that he lied. I rather see this as a fulfillment of a certain promise that Jesus delivered to the twelve. *“But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost”* (Mark 13:11).

“Orbio charges this upon Paul as an artful manner of declining persecution, unworthy the character of an upright and honest man. Chubb, a British Deist of the seventeenth century, charges it upon Paul as an act of gross ‘dissimulation, as designed to conceal the true ground of all the troubles that he had brought upon himself, and as designed to deceive and impose upon the Jews.’ He affirms also that ‘Paul probably invented this pretended charge against himself to draw over a party of the unbelieving Jews unto him.’ See Chubb’s Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 238.” ALBERT BARNES

Divine deliverances are not always wrought by straightforward means. For example, when Samuel was sent by God to anoint David king he responded, *“How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me.”* The Lord responded, *“Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto Me him whom I name unto thee”* (1 Sam 16:2-3). A sophist might object, saying that is really not why Samuel was being sent. However, this is like replying against the Almighty. Samuel did, in fact, offer a sacrifice, even though the primary reason for going was to anoint David king over Israel. **However, the Lord does not always divulge the fulness of His cause – particularly to His enemies.** In His works, He has a mind to protect His people.

One might also reason that there was some form of duplicity in the commission given to the prophet Jonah. He was told to go to Nineveh and boldly preach, *“Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown”* (Jonah 3:4). God referred to this message as *“the preaching that I bid thee”* (Jonah 3:2). Again, a sophist might reason that an all-knowing God knew Nineveh was really not going to be destroyed. But all such reasoning is foolish. **This is a Divine manner, and it does not involve misrepresentation or lying.** The fact that it is confusing to the carnal mind is really irrelevant. In the instance concerning the anointing of David, this was God’s way of protecting young David, ensuring the safety of Samuel, and suppressing the animosity of Saul. Only a wise God can accomplish such things with a single saying.

Therefore, in keeping with that Divine manner, Paul also previously appealed to Roman citizenship to avoid further beating. Now he capitalizes on the division among his accusers in order to deal with the dilemma before him.

Things To Consider

Concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead, this was a primary teaching of Paul, and was one of the pillars of his reasoning (Acts 17:18,31-32; 1 Cor 15; Acts 13:34; 26:6,7,23,25). The same was true of the other apostles who were noted for preaching *“through Jesus the resurrection from the dead”* (Acts 4:2). **The fact that all**

of this has a strange sound to many nominal Christians and their teachers is owing to a falling away, and is in no way related to the truth. Take away the fact of the resurrection, and faith and preaching are pointless. Consider the powerful reasoning of Paul on this matter. *“But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable”* (1 Cor 15:13-19). **In light of**

this, Paul’s answer was a most excellent summation of the case.

Notice how Paul so loved the truth, that he would acknowledge it, even if flawed teachers gave assent to it. Himself a Pharisee, he knows very well that they acknowledged the resurrection of the dead, while the Sadducees denied it. Yet, these two parties had overlooked their theological differences in order to oppose Paul – much like Pilate and Herod, formerly enemies, were united in their opposition to Jesus Christ (Lk 23:12). **If dissension could not be avoided, it just as well be between Paul’s enemies.**

It seems to me that it is still in order for the divisions in professing Christendom to be pointed out in a discreet manner. Where division exists, regardless of

the reason or its assumed acceptance, something is seriously wrong, for Christ is not divided (1 Cor 1:13). There is an undeniable unity in the Godhead Itself, and in the truth that issues forth from it. **Division and variance have no place in the heavenly economy.** Wherever division is found, Christ is not the prominent Person, and truth is not given the proper emphasis. That division may very well be the result of Divine judgment, as occurred in *“a plain in the land of Shinar”* (Gen 11:2-9). **Those who pretend to traffic in the truth, yet defer to the traditions of men will not obtain the blessing of God.** They will not experience *“the unity of the Spirit”* or *“the unity of faith”* (Eph 4:3,13). Such was the group before whom Paul is standing. They were a group of fundamentally divided religious people. They could live with this as long as an informed person was absent.

THERE AROSE A DISSENSION

“⁷ And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.”

In a single discerning saying, Paul has transferred the attention from himself to the sectarian bodies before him. **If confusion is found, it ought to be among those who oppose the truth, not those who claim allegiance to it.** This circumstance will also bear a powerful witness to the Roman captain. Now he will see the real troublemakers were the ones raising the allegations against Paul.

THERE AROSE A DISSENSION

“And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. . . .” Other versions read, *“a dispute broke out,”*^{NIV} *“There was an argument,”*^{BBE} *“there was a tumult,”*^{DARBY} *“a quarrel,”*^{GWN} *“fell upon one another,”*^{MRD} *“there arose a debate,”*^{PNT} *“there was a discord,”*^{LITV} *“going at each other in heated argument,”*^{MESSAGE} and *“an angry dispute.”*^{WEYMOUTH}

This tactic of Paul would be considered rude and unwise by many clerics of the day. The general view of things is that we should avoid matters that are

controversial, and just speak of things on which we are all agreed. There is an element of truth to that view, but it is actually very small proportionately. **Being of “one mind” is not achieved by ignoring doctrinal differences** (Rom 15:6; 1 Cor 13:11; Phil 1:27; 2:2; 1 Pet 3:8). It rather involves seeing the truth for what it is, embracing it, and then propagating it.

THE SADDUCEES SAY

“For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit. . . .”

The Sadducees were a Jewish sect that came into being over one hundred years before Jesus was born. It is a sect that was founded on an interpretation of Moses’ writing, rather than on the Word of God itself. History tells us that the Sadducees called themselves “the righteous” (Epiphanius, *Adversus Hoereses*, 1, 4). They viewed themselves as “the straightforward, open, honest, and righteous.”^{McCLINTOK & STRONG’S CYCLOPEDIA} In other

words, they had a high estimation of themselves and their views – they, like the Pharisees, did not derive their origin from the ordination of God – unlike the priests, high priests, prophets, etc. As such, they bear a remarkable resemblance to several Christian sects of our day.

The Sadducees are mentioned fourteen times from Matthew through Acts. No other section of Scripture refers to them. They are referred to nine times in the Gospels (Matt 3:7; 16:1,6,11,12; 22:23-24; Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27). They are mentioned five times in the book of Acts. Although they were not as prevalent as the Pharisees, they exercised considerable influence among the Jews. Even though they were fundamentally disagreed with the Pharisees, they were often found together (Matt 3:7; 16:1,6,11,12; 22:34; Acts 23:6,7,8). The context of their mention is consistently not good.

⇨ They came with the Pharisees to the

In other words, they had a high estimation of themselves and their views – they, like the Pharisees, did not derive their origin from the ordination of God – unlike the priests, high priests, prophets, etc. As such, they bear a remarkable resemblance to several Christian sects of our day.

baptism of John, only to be rebuked by him when he referred to them as a *“generation of vipers”* (Matt 3:7).

- ⇒ They joined with the Pharisees in tempting Jesus to show them *“a sign from heaven”* (Matt 16:1-4).
- ⇒ Jesus warned His disciples, *“Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees”* (Matt 16:6-12).
- ⇒ They came to Jesus and tempted Him, presenting a theoretic scenario of a woman who had seven husbands, asking Him who would have her as his wife *“in the resurrection,”* but Jesus put them *“to silence”* (Matt 22:23-34).
- ⇒ They also surface in our text, again joining with the Pharisees, and seeking to raise a punishable charge against Paul (Acts 23:6-8). In introducing this text, it is stated, *“the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection”* (Matt 22:23).

There is nothing good said about the Sadducees, although I do not doubt that they had some evidences of sincerity. The fact that they emphasized righteousness is certainly a favorable point, even though they did not practice righteousness, as this very text confirms.

Yet, in spite of their identity with the Scriptures, they categorically denied the reality of the resurrection, angels, and spirits. They represent one of Satan’s initiatives. He moves people to claim an interest in the Word of God and the people of God, yet, who cannot receive what appears to be very plain declarations.

WHAT THEY SAID

“ . . . that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit.” That is a remarkable summary of willing ignorance. This was a religious body of people. In fact, there is not a single reference to them that is not within the context of the Scriptures and those who declared them. This included John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostle Paul. Yet, in spite of their identity with the Scriptures, they categorically denied the reality of the resurrection, angels, and spirits. **They represent one of Satan’s initiatives.** He moves people to claim an interest in the

Word of God and the people of God, yet, who cannot receive what appears to be very plain declarations. For example, consider the three things they are here said to deny.

- ⇒ **THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.** Moses and the Prophets contain at least 33 references to the resurrection of the dead. Early in human history, Abraham reasoned what God would raise Isaac from the dead if he was slain on the altar of sacrifice (Heb 11:19). Job, living around the time of Abraham, reasoned concerning the resurrection of the dead (Job 14:12-15; 19:25-27). David spoke of the resurrection of the dead (Psa 16:16:9-10; 17:15; 30:3; 49:15; 71:20; 86:13). The Prophets wrote extensively about the resurrection (Isa 25:8-9; 26:19; 37:1-14; Dan 12:2-3,13; Hos 6:2; 13:14). There were three specific resurrections record in the Scriptures with which the Sadducees were familiar: The son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:17-23), The Shunnamite’s son (2 Kgs 4:32-37), and a corpse that was cast into the open grave of Elisha (2 Kgs 13:21).
- ⇒ **ANGELS.** *“Angels”* are mention 100 times in Moses and the Prophets. Moses mentioned them 32 times (Gen-Deut).
- ⇒ **SPIRIT.** *“Spirit”* or *“spirits”* are mentioned 235 times in Moses and the

Prophets, with Moses mentioning the terms 27 times. The Holy Spirit is mentioned 14 times from Genesis through Ezekiel (Gen 1:2; 41:38; 2 Chron 15:1; 18:23; 20:14; 24:20; Isa 40:13,16; 59:19; 48:16; 59:19; 63:10,11,14; Ezek 11:5,24). He is referred to as *“the Spirit of God,” “the Spirit of the Lord,” “His Spirit,”* and *“the Holy Spirit.”* The word *“spirit”* is used 230 times from Genesis through Malachi, and *“spirits”* is used 14 times – sometimes of an *“familiar spirit”* or *“familiar spirits”* (15 times). Angels are called *“spirits”* in Psalm 104:4.

There are five revealed categories of spirits – i.e. spirits with personalities, wills and influence.

- ⇒ The God and Father, who is identified as *“a Spirit”* (John 4:24).
- ⇒ The Holy Spirit
- ⇒ Holy angels
- ⇒ Evil spirits
- ⇒ Human spirits. These spirits are located in at least three realms. The earth, a place of torment, and a place pf blessing. The latter two are the spirits of those who have passed from this life.

These occupy an unseen world of teeming activity. No spirit occupies a dormant and inactive realm. So far as revelation is concerned, all spirits are conscious and engaged in some kind of expression. Yet, the Sadducees denied the existence of four of them, evidently not perceiving that the God they professed to serve is a Spirit.

BUT THE PHARISEES CONFESS BOTH

“ . . . but the Pharisees confess both.” Other versions read, *“acknowledge them all,”*^{NKJV} *“acknowledge all three,”*^{NRSV} *“have belief in all these,”*^{BBE} *“affirm them all,”*^{CSB} *“believe in all these things,”*^{GWN} *“accept all three,”*^{NJB} *“grant both,”*^{TNT} *“acknowledge the existence of both,”*^{WEYMOUTH} and *“acknowledging [their belief in] them both.”*^{AMPLIFIED}

The different versions represent the following: *“both,” “all three,”* and *“all these.”* The Greek word from which the expression is translated has the following lexical meaning: *“both of two, both the one and the other.”*^{THAYER} There is no disparity here. It is true, there were three things mentioned in defining the Sadducees: (1) no resurrection, (2) nor angel, and (3) no spirit (verse 8). However, only two categories were included, the resurrection and spirits, for angels are categorically said to be *“spirits”* (Psa 104:4; Heb 1:7). Of course, the resurrection of the dead postulates the existence of spirits, for in the resurrection, the spirit reenters the body. In resurrections accomplished prior to the end of the world, the spirit is said to have reentered into the body (1 Kgs 12:22). Jesus referred to this circumstance when He said, *“But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the*

dead, but of the living” (Matt 22:31-32). At the time, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were in the category of “spirits,” – absent from the body. But, in the resurrection, they would be united with their immortal bodies when all of the dead are raised.

Thus, the Pharisees are declared to have acknowledged the reality of the resurrection, and the existence of spirits.

Whatever bad things that were found in this body of people, their acknowledgment of the resurrection of the dead and the existence of spirits was a comely quality.

The irony here is that two bodies of people, so far apart theologically, would work together in sectarian interests (Matt 3:7; 16:1,6,11-12; 22:34; Acts 23:6-8). **That is**

one of the fundamental weaknesses of sectarianism, or denominationalism. The interests of the institution reduce the necessity of having one mind in matters that have been revealed by God. There are some people who endeavor to get those of divers theological views to unite together, shelving their differences in the interest of perceived unity. It is questionable that this is noble.

THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES RESPOND

“*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.*”

Paul’s words have instantly changed the climate of the assembly. Suddenly, a significant number of those who were solidly against him are speaking in favor of Paul. Strictly speaking, this is not because of Paul’s words. **Rather, he spoke words through which God could work.** He made no reference to the persuasions of either Pharisees or the Sadducees. He only referred to “*the hope and resurrection of the dead*” (verse 6). **Yet, these were words that summoned Divine power into the situation – so much so, that a number of men were turned to favor Paul, forgetting the grievance that had been raised against him.** It is written, “*The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD*” (Prov 16:1). THE Lord can also put things into the heart of a person (Ezra 7:27; Rev 17:17). God is noted for putting wisdom into the hearts of men (Ex 31:6), as well as His law (Jer 31:33), and His fear (Jer 32:40). Within the framework of religious argumentation, such things may not sound good. However, in the context of trouble and opposition, the knowledge of this Divine aptitude is most comforting.

THERE AROSE A GREAT CRY

“*And there arose a great cry . . .*” Other versions read, “*a great uproar,*”^{NKJV} “*a loud outcry,*”^{NASB} “*a great clamor,*”^{NRSV} “*the shouting grew loud,*”^{CSB} “*a great commotion,*”^{NET} “*began shouting louder and louder,*”^{IE} and “*vociferous [boistrous] yelling.*”^{WILLIAMS}

Here was a body of religious

people that were anything but casual about their persuasions. It was a people that had been cultured by God through the means of the Law of Moses, sundry blessings, and various curses. Some of their conclusions were wrong, and they often found themselves in outright opposition to the Lord. They had a zeal, to be sure, but, as Paul stated it, it was “*not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God*” (Rom 10:2-3). These were among those who “*followed after the law of righteousness,*” yet had “*not attained unto the law of righteousness*” (Rom 9:32). This was because, as it is written, “*they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law*” (Rom 9:33).

The point here is that this kind of zeal is not common among many professing Christians. Perhaps that is why those so characterized remain in a state of spiritual ignorance. The landscape of contemporary religion is not at all conducive to aggressive preaching and teaching. A lot of such religion is characterized by a state of lukewarmness, much like that of Laodicea, whom Jesus said were “*neither cold nor hot*” (Rev 3:15a). The gravity of that circumstance is seen in the further word of Jesus: “*I would that you were cold not*” (Rev 3:15b). Other churches were characterized by this trait. The church at Pegamos was indifferent toward some in their number who held to the libertine doctrine of the Nicolaitines (Rev 2:14-15). The church at Thyatira was upbraided for allowing a false prophetess to flourish in their presence (Rev 2:20-24). Sardis is said to have had a name that it was alive, when it was really dead (Rev 3:1-3).

Such a description certainly did not apply to the crowd standing before Paul.

They were anything but indifferent about the things they had formally embraced.

THE SCRIBES THAT WERE OF THE PHARISEES

“*. . . and the scribes that were of the Pharisees’ part arose, and strove . . .*” Other versions read, “*some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party,*”^{NKJV} “*some of the teachers of the Law who were Pharisees,*”^{NIV} “*certain scribes of the Pharisees’ group.*”^{NRSV}

INFORMATION ABOUT SCRIBES

These persons (called in Heb. סֹפְרֵי סוֹפְרִים, *sopherim*; Gr. γραμματεῖς) were originally merely writers or copyists of the law, who followed this business as a mode of livelihood; but eventually they rose to the rank of a learned profession – becoming the doctors of the law and interpreters of the Scriptures . . . The period of the Sopherim begins with the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, and ends with the death of Simon the Just (B.C. cir. 458-300), embracing nearly a hundred and sixty years.

..... McCLINTOK & STRONG

Originally, scribes copied the Scripture, and, in the process, became unusual in their acquaintance with the text of Scripture. Because of this, many of them became teachers. Of old time, a king had a scribe who inscribed things related to his reign (2 Kgs 12:10; 22:9,10; 25:19; 2 Chron 24:11).

Ezra the Scribe

Ezra was one of the better known scribes, and is described as “*a ready scribe in the Law of Moses*” (Ezra 7:6), and “*Ezra the priest, scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of His statutes to Israel*” (Ezra 7:11; Neh 12:26,36). Again, he is referred to as “*Ezra the priest, a*

scribe of the law of the God of heaven” (Ezra 7:12;21). During the time of Nehemiah, Ezra read the Law to the people (Neh 8:1-4). He was a specialist in Scripture.

Example of the Teaching of the Scribes

After beholding Elijah appearing “in glory” with Jesus, and when coming down the mount of transfiguration, the disciples referred to something taught by the scribes. “*And His disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?*” (Matt 17:10; Mal 4:5). Jesus declared that the teaching was correct, and that Elijah would come and restore all things. He then added that John the Baptist was a precursor to that event, with one exception. John the Baptist did not restore all things or turn the hearts of the fathers. Instead, the people “*knew him not,*” and “*did to him whatever they wished*” (Matt 17:10; Mk 9:13).

When Herod learned of the birth of a Babe who was born “*King of the Jews,*” he sought counsel concerning “*where Christ should be born.*” That group included scribes: “*And when he had gathered all the*

elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matt 16:21; 20:18). Our Lord’s scathing denunciation of the “*scribes and Pharisees*” is one of the premier examples of Divine rebuke (Matt 23:2-34).

In most of the references to the scribes and Pharisees, the scribes are mentioned first (Matt 5:20; 12:38; 15:1; 23:2, 13,14,15,23,25,27,29; Lk 5:21,30; 6:7; 11:44, 53; John 8:3; 23:9). Exceptions are Mk 7:1,5; Lk 14:2). **My only point here is that the Jews, as a rule, held a higher regard for experts in Scripture, and that this was the result of the culture developed among those who took the Word of God seriously.**

A Good Standard

Although the scribes were not the paragons of virtue, the idea set forth by noteworthy scribes represents a kind of Kingdom standard. **It is those who have a grasp of the Word of God, and spend time in it, that are “worthy of double honor”** (1 Tim 5:17). The idea of a spiritual leader preacher, or teacher that lacks a holy

the people, and defiling the Temple by bringing a Gentile into it. Now they conclude, “*We find no evil in this man!*” Other versions read, “*We find nothing wrong with this man,*” ^{NASB/NIV} and “*We find nothing evil or wrong in this man.*” ^{AMPLIFIED}

In the thinking of these scribes, Paul’s agreement with a basic tenet of Scripture trumped the charges they had initially brought against him. Doubtless, God was at work in this matter, yet we have here the advantage of embracing the truth of Scripture. God can use such people in purposes that lie beyond the narrow perimeter of their sect.

IF A SPIRIT OR AN ANGEL

“*... but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him . . .*” Other versions read, “*suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him,*” ^{NKJV} “*What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him,*” ^{NIV} “*what if he has had a revelation from an angel or a spirit?*” ^{BBE} “*Maybe a spirit or an angel actually spoke to him!*” ^{GWN} “*a spirit or an angel hath appeared to him,*” ^{TNT} “*if a spirit spake to him, or a messenger,*” ^{YLT} and “*But if a spirit or an angel [really] spoke to him—?*” ^{AMPLIFIED}

These men were probably referring to Paul’s testimony as recorded in Acts 22:17-18: “*And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me*” (Acts 22:17-18). They could also have been referring to Paul’s initial testimony about the glorified Christ appearing to Him (Acts 22:6-11).

During Christ’s ministry, He once came to His disciples walking on the stormy waters in which they were attempting to sail. Upon seeing the Lord is it written, “*they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear*” (Mat 14:26; Mk 6:49). Again, following His resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples, who were assembled with many others. Upon seeing Him, “*they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit*” (Luke 24:37). Additionally, the Jews had Scriptures that gave accounts of people seeing angels (Numbers 22:31; Judges 6:11,22; 13:6,16,21; 2 Sam 24:17; 1 Chron 21:16; 1 Kgs 13:13,18; 19:5; 1 Chron 21:15-16,20). **The Jews were a body of people that were cultured to be cognizant of the existence of angels and spirits – ordinarily unseen to the human eye.**

In the thinking of these scribes, Paul’s agreement with a basic tenet of Scripture trumped the charges they had initially brought against him. Doubtless, God was at work in this matter, yet we have here the advantage of embracing the truth of Scripture.

chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born” (Matt 2:4).

While Jesus did not criticize the scribes for their knowledge of Scripture, He did point out their lack of righteousness: “*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt 5:20). When comparing the teaching of the scribes with that of Jesus, the people observed that Jesus “*taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes*” (Matt 7:29). When speaking of His suffering and death, Jesus told His disciples the “*scribes*” would play prominent role in it all: “*From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the*

familiarity with the Word of God, is flawed to the core.

WE FIND NO EVIL IN THIS MAN

“*... saying, We find no evil in this man . . .*” Having heard Paul mention “*the hope of the resurrection,*” these scribes immediately made an association with the Scriptures. They knew that holy men like Job and David anticipated the resurrection of the dead (Job 14:12-15; 19:25-27; Psa 17:15; 49:15). Isaiah prophesied of the resurrection (Isa 25:8; 26:19). Daniel prophesied of the resurrection (Dan 12:2,3), and was told to live out the rest of his life in such a hope (Dan 12:13). Hosea also spoke of the dead being raised (Hos 13:14).

Suddenly, these men forget about the charges that had been leveled against Paul, of being a rabble-rouser, trying to change the customs of

This is not a persuasion that was learned from the Babylonians, Greeks or the Romans.

As a general rule, there is presently a near-total absence of the awareness of a spiritual world that is occupied by both congenial and hostile spirits. There is also too much speculative thinking about the Holy Spirit, and not enough sharing in the life and endowments that He gives. These conditions reflect the effects of the preaching and teaching of our time. It is too earth-centric, and does not move people to contend for some aspect of the truth as the scribes of our text did. They deferred to the Word of God, and as they did, they saw the injustice of what was happening – something in which they themselves had participated.

LET US NOT FIGHT AGAINST GOD

“ . . . let us not fight against God.”

Other versions read, *“found fighting against God,”* ^{NKJV} *“opposing God,”* ^{RSV} *“Let us not fight against God,”* ^{GENEVA} *“Let us not strive against God,”* ^{PNT} *“we may not fight against God,”* ^{YLT} and *“What if it turns out we’re fighting against God?”* ^{MESSAGE} Most modern translations omit this expression.

This is precisely the same observation made by Gamaliel when the Jewish council were opposing the apostles: *“But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God”* (Acts 5:39). Another similar expression is *“withstand God”* (Acts 11:17). One additional reflection addressed to those who stand against the Lord in their conduct is, *“Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are*

we stronger than He?” (1 Cor 10:22).

During times when religious people are heaping to themselves teachers after their own lusts (2 Tim 4:3), the awareness of fighting against, withstanding, or provoking the God of heaven is a foreign thought. Those who are not committed to the Lord simply do not think in this manner. **Notice, with both Gamaliel and the scribes, fighting against God had to do with rejecting what was being preached in Jesus’ name.** In both cases, the opponents thought they were resisting men. However, this was not the case. They were actually engaged in warfare against the God of heaven! I understand that Luke’s inclusion of these words without an explanation amounts to an affirmation that what they said was true. If this is not the case, he would have included a disclaimer.

PAUL IS REMOVED FROM THE TUMULT

“ 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.”

THERE AROSE A GREAT DISSENSION

“And when there arose a great dissension . . .” Other versions read, *“the dispute became so violent,”* ^{NIV} *“the argument became very violent,”* ^{BBE} *“a great tumult having arisen,”* ^{DARBY} *“the quarrel was becoming violent,”* ^{GWN} *“there was a great commotion among them,”* ^{MRD} *“Feeling was running high,”* ^{NJB} *“the conflict grew more violent,”* ^{NLT} *“there arose a great debate,”* ^{PNT} *“when the strife became more and more tense and violent,”* ^{AMPLIFIED} and *“That was fuel on the fire. The quarrel flamed up and became so violent.”* ^{MESSAGE}

A tremendous outbreak of controversy occurred when the scribes made their recommendation. The very notion of angels and spirits existing was more than the Sadducees could handle. Their respect was for their tradition, not for the Word of God. **Even though the Scriptures they professed to have embraced contradicted what they had espoused, they could not see it.** There is a reason for this. The god of this world had blinded their minds so the truth could not be seen on these

matters (2 Cor 4:4).

The Holy Spirit works within the perimeter of truth. Satan works within the boundary of the lie, for he is the *“father”* of the lie (John 8:44). **Because of what the Sadducees had chosen to accept concerning the resurrection, angels, and spirits, they were now bondslaves of the wicked one, and there was not a thing they themselves could do about their situation.** Of course, many of the Pharisees had their areas of falsity also – such as that Jesus is the Christ. However, on

It ought to be noted that just as the Holy Spirit surely works with the truth, so Satan always works through the lie and misrepresentation. **This is why false doctrine is such a dangerous thing.** Not only is there such a thing as *“doctrines of demons”* (1Tim 4:1), such doctrines are like a portal through which Satan gains dominance over the people.

I do not doubt that much of the increase of immorality in the professing church is directly owing to the false doctrine

While the Sadducees and scribes were concerned about which position was superior, the captain was thinking of Paul’s rights as a Roman citizen, and of his own responsibility to maintain order and protect him. God had appointed this considerate leader to care of Paul. Therefore, he remained fully alert to the circumstance, and ready to take immediate action when it was required.

these two matters – the resurrection of the dead and the existence of spirits – their view was correct. It was practical also, for they conceded the possibility that an angel or a spirit had spoken to Paul. Until now, they entertained no such consideration.

that is being taught concern the nature of salvation, how to obtain salvation, the nature of spiritual life, the prominence of life in this present evil world, etc. **If what is declared is, in fact, a lie, it provides an opportunity for the devil to enter, and he will not pass by such a chance.**

Even in the gathering of our text, although one part of the crowd held a proper view of the subjects being disputed, yet the Sadducees provided a gapping hole through which Satan could enter, causing confusion and danger to the apostle Paul.

FEARING

“ . . . the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them . . . ” Other versions read, “was afraid Paul would be torn in pieces,”^{NKJV} “fearing Paul would be pulled in two by them,”^{BBE} and “the captain was afraid they would tear Paul apart, limb from limb.”^{MESSSENGER}

While the Sadducees and scribes were concerned about which position was superior, the captain was thinking of Paul’s rights as a Roman citizen, and of his own responsibility to maintain order and protect him. God had appointed this considerate leader to care of Paul. Therefore, he remained fully alert to

the circumstance, and ready to take immediate action when it was required. We should not doubt that the same care is focused upon us as we are engaged in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom 12:1-2).

PAUL IS FORCEFULLY REMOVED

“ . . . commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.” Other versions read, “take him away by force,”^{NKJV} “rescue him from them,”^{CSB} “take him from among them,”^{GENEVA} “drag Paul back,”^{GWN} “take him forcibly from among them,”^{AMPLIFIED} “snatch him out of their midst,”^{LITV} and “get him out of there.”^{MESSAGE}

To take someone by force is to master the situation, rescuing the potential victim without regard for those who would do him harm. These soldiers were prepared to fight if necessary. They took charge of the situation, bursting

through the tumultuous crowd and whisking Paul away to safety. In this case, and at the command of the captain, the soldiers forced their wills upon the crowd, refusing to give place to the will of the people. Paul is now removed to the barracks where he would be safe and under the continual protection of the military.

Behold how God can work among men for the good of His people.

It is no wonder that it is written, “My times are in Thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me” (Psa 31:15). Each believer, particularly those who are on the front lines of spiritual battle, do well to remember that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:39) – i.e. no adversarial influence. It is in this sense that we are “more than conquerors” (Rom 8:37). That is view of life from two vantage points: (1) The purpose of God. (2) The ultimate outcome.

CONCLUSION

This passage has confirmed the manner in which God protects His servants. His protection does not mean a lack of inconvenience, or even pain and serious threats. However, the Lord can marshal all the forces on earth and in heaven as well to guarantee that His servants will complete the work to which they have been called. Protection and guidance are not ends of themselves. That is, the comfort and convenience of His children are not what

realized. No person who names the name of Christ should expect to sail through life comfortably and in ease for his sake alone.

The standard for God’s involvement with His children is set forth in the Lord Jesus Christ. While His youth was characterized by growing in wisdom, and stature, and favor with God and man, there

was sword out of its scabbard on the banks of the Jordan River, His life was marked by doing the will of God. For example, **Jesus said of His words,** “For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak” (John 12:49). And again, “the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works” (John 14:10). **He said of His works,** “the works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me” (John 5:36). And again, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4).

Christ’s total life was wrapped up in His Father’s will. This was essential, because the chief work He was going to do involved laying down His life, and taking it up again (John 10:17-18). In order to do this, He had to focus the entirety of His life upon maintaining His association with the Father, speaking the words He was given to say, and doing the works assigned to Him.

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determine His gracious direction and ultimate protection. **It is as the believer is fulfilling the role to which he has been appointed that these benefits are**

is a sense in which it was incidental and preparatory. That is why so little is known of the first thirty years of His life. But when He commenced His ministry, and drew the

death, even the death of the cross" (Phil 2:5-8).

Paul later confessed in the same epistle that this is the way he lived, seeking to know and appropriate as much of Christ Jesus as possible. "But whatever former things I had that might have been gains to me, I have come to consider as [one combined] loss for Christ's sake. Yes, furthermore, I count everything as loss compared to the possession of the priceless privilege (the overwhelming preciousness, the surpassing worth, and supreme advantage) of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord and of progressively becoming more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him [of perceiving and recognizing and understanding Him more fully and clearly]. For His sake I have lost everything and consider it all to be mere rubbish (refuse, dregs), in order that I may win (gain) Christ (the Anointed One), And that I may [actually] be found and known as in Him, not having any [self-achieved] righteousness that can be called my own, based on my obedience to the Law's demands (ritualistic uprightness

and supposed right standing with God thus acquired), but possessing that [genuine righteousness] which comes through faith in Christ (the Anointed One), the [truly] right standing with God, which comes from God by [saving] faith. [For my determined purpose is] that I may know Him [that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly], and that I may in that same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection [which it exerts over believers], and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed [in spirit into His likeness even] to His death, [in the hope], That if possible I may attain to the [spiritual and moral] resurrection [that lifts me] out from among the dead [even while in the body]. Not that I have now attained [this ideal], or have already been made perfect, but I press on to lay hold of (grasp) and make my own, that for which Christ Jesus (the Messiah) has laid hold of me and made me His own. I do not consider,

brethren, that I have captured and made it my own [yet]; but one thing I do [it is my one aspiration]: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the [supreme and heavenly] prize to which God in Christ Jesus is calling us upward. So let those [of us] who are spiritually mature and full-grown have this mind and hold these convictions; and if in any respect you have a different attitude of mind, God will make that clear to you also. Only let us hold true to what we have already attained and walk and order our lives by that. Brethren, together follow my example and observe those who live after the pattern we have set for you." ^{AMPLIFIED} (Phil 3:7-17).

My point is that life lived in this manner gets the attention of heaven. **There are Divine commitments that cannot be fulfilled unless a person grows up into Christ and lives in this way.** As long as this type of life is not lived, the person is out of harmony with Jesus. I do not know how it is possible to justify any other conclusion.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 5/7/10. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The ninety-fourth lesson will cover verses 11 through 35 of the twenty-third chapter: "A PLEA TO THE GOVERNOR" The Lord appears to Paul, telling him to be of good cheer, that he will testify in Rome. A conspiracy to kill Paul becomes the occasion through which he will be brought to Caesar – God orchestrating the whole affair. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.



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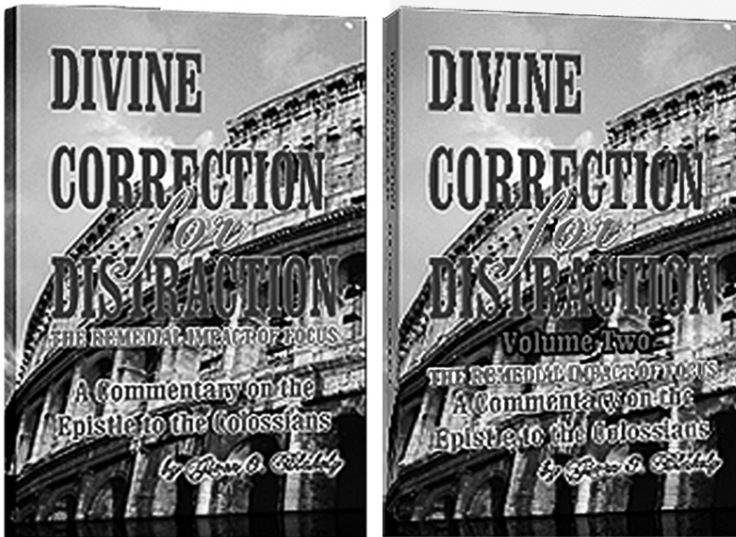
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