

Acts 22:30-23:10 “The Gospel on Trial”

Intro. Jesus constantly confronted the religious establishment: healed on the Sabbath to confront the Pharisees and they wanted to kill him, continued to challenge their misunderstanding of Sabbath observance, the role of fasting, and ceremonial washing. Why do you think He did this? I sometimes wonder where He would confront *me* ... Do *you* ever wonder where Jesus would correct you? ***slackline**. The gospel of grace is like a slackline. The Holy Spirit and the Word are to give us balance to keep from falling towards either liberalism or legalism. Each of us has a tendency to fall toward one side. Which side might you lean towards? **[Thesis]** How can you respectfully protect Christian freedom from liberalism and legalism?

Subject: Paul’s trial before the Jewish council

Object: Respectfully protect Christian freedom from liberalism and legalism

Context [30] The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from *his* bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them. A Roman commander rescued Paul from a violent Jewish mob. He wanted to know what Paul was accused of. So he summons the Jewish chief priest and their Counsel [The Sanhedrin] and sets Paul before them [i.e. on trial]

i. The Sanhedrin was a counsel of 70 elders [*like Congress & Supreme Court in one]

A. The wrong model for addressing conflicts regarding Christian freedom [1-10]

1. A Christian asserts he is not doing wrong [1] Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, “Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day: Paul is not asserting that he was sinless, or that “trying to do the right thing” made him right with God, but that he was not guilty of charges against him

a. Paul was falsely accused of teaching contra the Mosaic law, the temple and the Jews; and for bringing a Gentile into an area restricted to Jews.

i. The gospel is not contrary to the OT but is the transition to the NT (promised in OT)

2. The religious establishment attacks [2] And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth: the high priest orders Paul’s mouth slapped

a. Ananias is offended that Paul asserts he did nothing wrong. First Paul proclaimed the gospel of Christ. Second how could he be a good Jew if he was a Christian?

i. Per the Jewish historian Josephus Ananias was corrupt. He stole from the tithes and was a pro-Roman puppet. Killed by the Jews in 66AD rebellion against Rome.

3. The Christian attacks the religious establishment [3-5] Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, *you* whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?”

a. **Whitewashed wall:** ref. a tomb with decay & death inside painted over to conceal

b. The high priest was to be an example of the law but what he did was contrary to the law since you can’t strike a Jew without a guilty verdict **[Deut.25:1-2]**

i. Paul can clearly see where the religious establishment is wrong

4. There is limited confession of wrong [4-5] And those who stood by said, “Do you revile God’s high priest?” 5Then Paul said, “I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.

a. Paul admits he was wrong for rebuking the high priest [4-5]

i. revile God’s high priest [4] criticize in an abusive or angrily insulting manner.

ii. **Paul says he did not know Ananias was high priest [5]:** Paul had just returned to Jerusalem after being away for years.

iii. Paul admits he was wrong because the Bible prohibits speaking evil of a ruler of God’s people [Ex.22:28] (respect the office if not the person’s behavior)

note: Paul denied guilt re charges of blasphemy & bringing a Gentile into temple area restricted to Jews, but he quickly admitted his wrong re the rebuke of the high priest

note: Paul confesses his wrong, but the high priest doesn’t

5. Escalating hostility between opposing views [6-10] But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!”7And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. 8For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. 9Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees’ party arose and protested, saying, “We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.”10Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring *him* into the barracks.

a. The issue of the resurrection [6] Pharisees support the resurrection & suggest that Paul’s teaching may be of God [9], and the Sadducees disagree [8]

b. Who were the Pharisees? [6-8] Religious legalists, they are fundamental in their theology, believe in angels, and the resurrection. Paul was one like his father [7]

i. Yet as repeatedly noted by Jesus they add burdens beyond God’s commands [Sabbath], and focus on a particular issue to the neglect of greater matters [tithe mint but neglect mercy] [Matt. 23:4,23].

ii. **legalism:** creates burdens beyond those commanded by God by presuming implications [Sabbath prohibits work. Cf. volumes of commentary re what is work].

c Who were the Sadducees? [6-8] Religious liberals: wealthy and materialistic.

Denied the resurrection, and angels (spiritual realm) [8]. Saw only Torah as authority

i. **liberalism:** ignores clear commands to do or not do. Tends to abuse the concept of grace. Tends to rationalize that because we are saved because of what Christ has done we are free to do whatever we want ... perverts the gospel of grace [Rom.6:1-2]

d. The hostility became so great the secular authorities had to intervene [7,10]

- i. **Dissension arose & they were divided [7]; arose great dissension [10]** hostile
- ii. Paul had to be rescued from the mob by the Roman Commander [3rd time] & confined at the fortress [10]
- iii. suffice it to say the Romans were observing the hostilities between God's people and were not impressed or drawn to the True and Living God

B. A proposed model for addressing conflicts regarding Christian freedom:

1. Consider what the Bible actually says about the issue: does the Bible address the issue black & white [a direct command to do or not to do] or is the issue gray Cf. differing but orthodox views: re end times, work of HS, man's choice & sovereignty

2. Consider the Biblical validity of the others' view: Neither the Pharisees or Sadducees consider the validity of one another's argument, nor did either group consider the validity of the gospel [Paul's defense]. Both groups tend to judge the other harshly & presume the other doesn't get it.

a. If the Bible does not prohibit, nor command, there is likely a freedom that can be abused by legalism or liberalism. Your presumed implications of a text may not be the only view. [**** 1Th.5:22 abstain from every form of evil**

3. Don't judge another for the exercise of their liberty [Rom.14]: Just cause you come to a different conclusion doesn't mean they're wrong. *Attending a gay wedding?

4. Avoid making any particular issue and performance the litmus test of spirituality: serving, reading the Bible, sharing faith, generosity, prayer, evangelism, missions, the poor, orphans, etc.

5. Be respectful as you address issues and consider the impact on unbelievers

Conc: Respectfully protect Christian freedom from liberalism and legalism

Discussion Qs

1. Jesus constantly confronted the religious establishment. Why do you think that He did this?

2. Each of us tends to lean towards legalism or liberalism (despite our best efforts to be balanced). Which side do you lean towards?

3. Have you ever judged others, or felt judged, about an issue where liberty likely existed? What happened?

4. Have you ever wanted to engage others about an issue but been reluctant because of the tendency for hostilities to escalate? How could the issues be addressed in a better way?