

## What does it take to testify of Jesus in the face of opposition (conscience, centrality and courage)

>>Living in clear **conscience** before God our judge (23:1-5)

>>Jesus's resurrection is a **central** to Paul's preaching and defence (23:6-10)

>>Take **courage** and press on knowing God is in sovereignly in control (23:11)

### Immediate context

In Jerusalem, Paul was **falsely** accused, both of bringing a Gentile into the temple and of teaching Jews they didn't need to circumcise their sons. He was dragged from the temple by a mob and beaten ([Acts 21:20–21, 28–32](#)).

Paul never taught this; he told the *Gentile* believers they didn't need to follow the Mosaic law, not the Jews—in fact, he circumcised Timothy whose mother was Jewish ([Acts 15:1–5; 16:1–3](#)).

The Roman tribune saved him by arresting him but needs to know what happened and why.

The commander has been unable to get any sense from the crowd (21:34); he has abandoned the idea of flogging Paul on discovering that he was a Roman citizen; and so he now orders a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

Acts 23 opens with Paul again defending himself, this time before an informal gathering of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish religious and civil court).

**23** Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, “My brothers, **I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.**” <sup>2</sup> At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. <sup>3</sup> Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!”

**Acts 23** opens with Paul declaring that he had a clear conscience before God. He had done nothing wrong and his arrest was wrongful.

What Paul is saying is **“I am not guilty & your charges are baseless.”**

This is best understood in the context of his speech to the crowd that ended in 22:21 explaining that God had sent him to the Gentiles.

This Jewish mob earlier was outraged at the thought that God’s salvation could be given freely to believing Gentiles, implying that Jews and Gentiles were equal, having to come to God on the same terms.

ref 20:21 “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.”

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Deuteronomy 25:1-2 says only a man found guilty can be beaten, and Paul had not yet been found guilty of anything.

<p><b>wall!</b> You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself <b>violate the law</b> by commanding that I be struck!"</p>	<p>Paul is calling him a hypocrite because the high priest's prematured judgment is clearly against the law.</p> <p><i>Ironically, Paul's words were prophetic. Historically it is recorded less than ten years later, Ananias came to a tragic end at the hand of Jewish freedom fighters.</i></p>
<p><sup>5</sup> Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; <b>for it is written</b>: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'<sup>[a]</sup>"</p>	<p>When Paul realised he had done wrong in cursing the high priest, he admitted his wrong, displaying a consistent good conscience before God. Contrast that with the high priest</p>
<p><sup>6</sup> Then Paul, knowing that <b>some</b> of them were Sadducees and the <b>others</b> Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the <b>hope of the resurrection</b> of the dead." <sup>7</sup> When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. <sup>8</sup> (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)</p>	<p><b>What do you think is Paul's intention from v6-8?</b></p> <p>Paul finds himself in an argument with the corrupt high priest (<u>Acts 23:1-5</u>). Paul realizes he's not going to get a fair trial though he claims to be right before God. Some Christians understood it as Paul changes tactics with a witty ploy to get himself out of the tense situation by dividing the group.</p> <p>By finding common ground he immediately gained the Pharisees as an ally, and he let <i>them</i> argue it out with the Sadducees.</p>

	<p>However, it is better to understand Paul's unrelenting conviction that the resurrection is the <b>central theme</b> of his gospel message and finds its fulfilment in 26:23.</p> <p>Paul made the claim that he was "on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead". His adamant preaching on this central fact of the gospel had led to his arrest as he had made a massive influence on both Jewish and Gentiles converts.</p>
<p><sup>9</sup>There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"</p>	<p>Even so, Paul's strategy does give both the Pharisees something <b>legitimate</b> to think about.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <b>Sadducees</b> were the theological liberals of their day, and denied the reality of life after death and the concept of resurrection.</li> <li>ii. <b>Whereas the Pharisees were the conservatives.</b> They took the Bible seriously, even though they did make grave mistakes by <i>adding</i> the traditions of men to what they received in the Bible.</li> </ul>

	<p>Paul remains <b>responsibly faithful</b> in testifying the <b>centrality</b> of the Christian gospel; so much so that a real Pharisee should actually become a Christian since they could identify with the hope of resurrection through Christ. Jesus' resurrection and glorification shows us what His followers can expect after death.</p>
<p><sup>10</sup> The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.</p> <p><sup>11</sup> The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, <b>“Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”</b></p>	<p>Paul's clever ploy rescued him from the council, but he could not have been happy with the result.</p> <p>Earlier he had the opportunity to preach to a huge crowd of attentive Jews on the temple mount and it ended in failure. Then he had the opportunity to preach to the influential Jewish council, and it also ended in a brawl.</p> <p>This must have been a difficult night for Paul as his heart longed for the salvation of his fellow Jews (<u>Romans 9:1-4</u>)</p> <p>i. Paul could have been discouraged about the lack of results from the sermon in Jerusalem. But the results</p>

**“Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”**

were not his responsibility. God asserted Paul's responsibility was to preach the Word of God and to testify of Jesus; the results were God's responsibility. **“You have testified about Me in Jerusalem”** means that Jesus complimented Paul on a job well done.

**“So you must also bear witness at Rome:”**

Paul really *wanted* to go on to Rome ([Acts 19:21](#) and [Romans 1:9-12](#)). It seems unlikely that he will ever reach Rome alive as plots against him arise.

In all this turmoil, reassurance comes (23:11). The Lord appears to Paul and tells him to take courage.

The next passage continues with understanding God [intervenes](#) to ensure Paul's safety until he fulfilled his mission in Rome. We will read of a conspiracy with over 40 Jews and the chief priests and elders to plotting to kill Paul. On the pretext of wanting to engage in further questioning of Paul before the Sanhedrin, they planned to ambush him and kill him on his return

	<p>to the hearing. With all involved in the plot, Paul seems in extreme danger.</p> <p>What is intended for harm against Paul is used by God to move Paul courageously, at the very least nearer to Rome</p>
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Application:

Acts 23 teaches that **God guides and protects His servants as they obediently testify of Him.**

1. Paul claimed his good conscience before God and demonstrated it in the book of acts. How should that influence our lives as evangelist?
2. When God assures Paul to take courage, God also demonstrate control over what's ahead. How should this influence our thoughts and feelings in the face of uncertainty?