

# CHAPTER 22

In the close of the foregoing chapter we had Paul bound, according to Agabus's prophecy of the hard usage he should receive from the Jews at Jerusalem, yet he had his tongue set at liberty, by the permission the chief captain gave him to speak for himself; and so intent he is upon using that liberty of speech which is allowed him, to the honour of Christ and the service of his interest, that he forgets the bonds he is in, makes no mention of them, but speaks of the great things Christ had done for him with as much ease and cheerfulness as if nothing had been done to ruffle him or put him into disorder. We have here,

- I.** His address to the people, and their attention to it (v. 1, 2).
- II.** The account he gives of himself.
  - 1.** What a bigoted Jew he had been in the beginning of his time (v. 3-5).
  - 2.** How he was miraculously converted and brought over to the faith of Christ (v. 6-11).
  - 3.** How he was confirmed and baptized by the ministry of Ananias (v. 12-16).
  - 4.** How he was afterwards called, by an immediate warrant from heaven, to be the apostle of the Gentiles (v. 17-21).
- III.** The interruption given him upon this by the rabble, who could not bear to hear any thing said in favour of the Gentiles, and the violent passion they flew into upon it (v. 22, 23).
- IV.** Paul's second rescue out of the hands of the rabble, and the further course which the chief captain took to find out the true reason of this mighty clamour against Paul (v. 24, 25).
- V.** Paul's pleading his privilege as a Roman citizen, by which he was exempted from this barbarous method of inquisition (v. 26-29).
- VI.** The chief captain's removing the cause into the high priest's court, and Paul's appearing there (v. 30).

## ~~421~~ ACTS 22:1-2

### PAUL'S FIRST DEFENCE

Paul had, in the last verse of the foregoing chapter, gained a great point, by commanding so profound a silence after so loud a clamour. Now here observe,

**I.** With what an admirable composure and presence of mind he addresses himself to speak. Never was poor man set upon in a more tumultuous manner, nor with more rage and fury; and yet, in what he said,

**1.** There appears no fright, but his mind is sedate and composed. Thus he makes his own words good, *None of these things move me*; and David's (~~426~~ Psalm 3:6), *I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about.*

**2.** There appears no passion. Though the suggestions against him were all frivolous and unjust, though it would have vexed any man alive to be charged with profaning the temple just then when he was contriving and designing to show his respect to it, yet he breaks out into no angry expressions, but is *led as a lamb to the slaughter.*

**II.** What respectful titles he gives even to those who thus abused him, and how humbly he craves their attention: "*Men, brethren, and fathers, v. 1. To you, O men, I call*; men, that should hear reason, and be ruled by it; men, from whom one may expect humanity. You, *brethren* of the common people; you, *fathers* of the priests." Thus he lets them know that he was one of them, and had not renounced his relation to the Jewish nation, but still had a kindness and concern for it. Note, Though we must not give flattering titles to any, yet we ought to give titles of due respect to all; and those we would do good to we should endeavour not to provoke. Though he was rescued out of their hands, and was taken under the protection of the chief captain, yet he does not fall foul upon them, with, *Hear now, you rebels*; but compliments them with, *Men, brethren, and fathers.* And observe, he does not exhibit a charge against them, does not recriminate, Hear now what I have to say against you, but, Hear now what I have to say for myself: *Hear you my defence*; a just and reasonable request, for every man that is accused has a right to answer for himself, and has not justice done him if his answer be not patiently and impartially heard.

**III.** The language he spoke in, which recommended what he said to the auditory; *He spoke in the Hebrew tongue*, that is, the vulgar language of the Jews, which, at this time, was not the pure Old-Testament Hebrew, but the Syriac, a dialect of the Hebrew, or rather a corruption of it, as the Italian of the Latin. However,

**1.** It showed his continued respect to his countrymen, the Jews. Though he had conversed so much with the Gentiles, yet he still retained the Jews' language, and could talk it with ease; by this it appears he is a Jew, *for his speech betrayeth him*.

**2.** What he said was the more generally understood, for that was the language every body spoke, and therefore to speak in that language was indeed to appeal to the people, by which he might have somewhat to insinuate into their affections; and therefore, *when they heard that he spoke in the Hebrew tongue, they kept the more silence*. How can it be thought people should give any attention to that which is spoken to them in a language they do not understand? The chief captain was surprised to hear him speak Greek (<sup><421></sup>Acts 21:37), the Jews were surprised to hear him speak Hebrew, and both therefore think the better of him. But how would they have been surprised if they had enquired, as they ought to have done, and found in what variety of tongues *the Spirit gave him utterance!* <sup><448></sup>1 Corinthians 14:18, *I speak with tongues more than you all*. But the truth is, many wise and good men are therefore slighted only because they are not known.

## ~~<421>~~ ACTS 22:3-21

### PAUL'S FIRST DEFENCE

Paul here gives such an account of himself as might serve not only to satisfy the chief captain that he was not that Egyptian he took him to be, but the Jews also that he was not that enemy to their church and nation, to their law and temple, they took him to be, and that what he did in preaching Christ, and particularly in preaching him to the Gentiles, he did by a divine commission. He here gives them to understand,

**I.** What his extraction and education were.

**1.** That he was one of their own nation, *of the stock of Israel, of the seed of Abraham, a Hebrew of the Hebrews*, not of any obscure family, or a renegado of some other nation: “No, *I am verily a man who is a Jew, **aner Ioudaios** — a Jewish man*; I am a man, and therefore ought not to be treated as a beast; a man who is a Jew, not a barbarian; I am a sincere friend to your nation, for I am one of it, and should defile my own nest if I should unjustly derogate from the honour of your law and your temple.”

**2.** That he was born in a creditable reputable place, *in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia*, and was by his birth a freeman of that city. He was not born in servitude, as some of the Jews of the dispersion, it is likely, were; but he was a gentleman born, and perhaps could produce his certificate of his freedom in that ancient and honourable city. This was, indeed, but a small matter to make any boast of, and yet it was needful to be mentioned at this time to those who insolently trampled upon him, as if he were to be ranked with the children of fools, yea, the children of base men, ~~808~~ Job 30:8.

**3.** That he had a learned and liberal education. He was not only a Jew, and a gentleman, but a scholar. He *was brought up* in Jerusalem, the principal seat of the Jewish learning, and *at the feet of Gamaliel*, whom they all knew to be an eminent doctor of the Jewish law, of which Paul was designed to be himself a teacher; and therefore he could not be ignorant of their law, nor be thought to slight it because he did not know it. His parents had brought him very young to this city, designing him for a Pharisee; and some think his being brought up at the feet of Gamaliel intimates, not only that he was one of his pupils, but that he was, above any other, diligent and constant in attending his lectures, observant of him, and obsequious to him, in all he said, as *Mary, that sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word*.

**4.** That he was in his early days a very forward and eminent professor of the Jews' religion; his studies and learning were all directed that way. So far was he from being principled in his youth with any disaffection to the religious usages of the Jews that there was not a young man among them who had a greater and more entire veneration for them than he had, was more strict in observing them himself, or more hot in enforcing them upon others.

**(1.)** He was an intelligent professor of their religion, and had a clear head. He minded his business at Gamaliel's feet, and was there *taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers*. What departures he had

made from the law were not owing to any confused or mistaken notions of it, for he understood it to a nicety, *kata akribeian* — according to the most accurate and exact method. He was not trained up in the principles of the latitudinarians, had nothing in him of a Sadducee, but was of that sect that was most studious in the law, kept most close to it, and, to make it more strict than it was, added to it the traditions of the elders, the law of the fathers, the law which was given to them, and which they gave to their children, and so it was handed down to us. Paul had as great a value for antiquity, and tradition, and the authority of the church, as any of them had; and there was never a Jew of them all that understood his religion better than Paul did, or could better give an account of it or a reason for it.

(2.) He was an active professor of their religion, and had a warm heart: *I was zealous towards God, as you all are this day*. Many that are very well skilled in the theory of religion are willing to leave the practice of it to others, but Paul was as much a zealot as a rabbi. He was zealous against every thing that the law prohibited, and for every thing that the law enjoined; and this was zeal towards God, because he thought it was for the honour of God and the service of his interests; and here he compliments his hearers with a candid and charitable opinion of them, *that they all were this day zealous towards God; he bears them record* (<sup>451B</sup>Romans 10:2), *that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*. In hating him, and casting him out, they said, *Let the Lord be glorified* (<sup>236B</sup>Isaiah 66:5), and, though this did by no means justify their rage, yet it enabled those that prayed, *Father, forgive them*, to plead, as Christ did, *For they know not what they do*. And when Paul owns that he had been zealous for God in the law of Moses, *as they were this day*, he intimates his hope that they might be zealous for God, in Christ, as he was this day.

II. What a fiery furious persecutor he had been of the Christian religion in the beginning of his time, v. 4, 5. He mentions this to make it the more plainly and evidently to appear that the change which was wrought upon him, when he was converted to the Christian faith, was purely the effect of a divine power; for he was so far from having any previous inclinations to it, or favourable opinions of it, that immediately before that sudden change was wrought in him he had the utmost antipathy imaginable to Christianity, and was filled with rage against it to the last degree. And perhaps he mentions it to justify God in his present trouble; how unrighteous soever those were that persecuted him, God was righteous, who permitted them to do it, for time was when he was a persecutor; and

he may have a further view in it to invite and encourage those people to repent, for he himself had been *a blasphemer, and a persecutor*, and yet obtained mercy. Let us view Paul's picture of himself when he was a persecutor.

**1.** He hated Christianity with a mortal enmity: *I persecuted this way unto the death*, that is, "Those that walked in this way I aimed, if possible, to be the death of." *He breathed out slaughter against them*, ~~400~~ Acts 9:1. *When they were put to death, he gave his voice against them*, ~~423~~ Acts 26:10. Nay, he persecuted not only those that walked in this way, but the way itself, Christianity, which was branded as a byway, a sect; he aimed to persecute this to the death, to be the ruin of this religion. He *persecuted it to the death*, that is, he could have been willing himself to die in his opposition to Christianity, so some understand it. He would contentedly have lost his life, and would have thought it well laid out, in defence of the laws and traditions of the fathers.

**2.** He did all he could to frighten people from this way, and out of it, by *binding and delivering into prison both men and women*; he filled the jails with Christians. Now that he himself was bound, he lays a particular stress upon this part of his charge against himself, that he had bound the Christians, and carried them to prison; he likewise reflects upon it with a special regret that he had imprisoned not only the men, but the women, the weaker sex, who ought to be treated with particular tenderness and compassion.

**3.** He was employed by the great sanhedrim, the high priest, and all the estate of the elders, as an agent for them, in suppressing this new sect; so much had he already signalized himself for his zeal against it, v. 5. The high priest can witness for him that he was ready to be employed in any service against the Christians. When they heard that many of the Jews at Damascus had embraced the Christian faith, to deter others from doing the like they resolved to proceed against them with the utmost severity, and could not think of a fitter person to be employed in that business, nor one more likely to go through with it, than Paul. They therefore sent him, and letters by him, to the Jews at Damascus, here called *the brethren*, because they all descended from one common stock, and were of one family in religion too, ordering them to be assisting to Paul in seizing those among them that had turned Christians, and bringing them up prisoners to Jerusalem, in order to their being punished as deserters from the faith and

worship of the God of Israel; and so might either be compelled to retract, or be put to death for a terror to others. Thus did Saul make *havoc of the church*, and was in a fair way, if he had gone on awhile, to ruin it, and root it out. "Such a one," says Paul, "I was at first, just such as you now are. I know the heart of a persecutor, and therefore pity you, and pray that you may know the heart of a convert, as God soon made me to do. *And who was I that I could withstand God?*"

**III.** In what manner he was converted and made what he now was. It was not from any natural or external causes; he did not change his religion from an affectation of novelty, for he was then as well affected to antiquity as he used to be; nor did it arise from discontent because he was disappointed in his preferment, for he was now, more than ever, in the way of preferment in the Jewish church; much less could it arise from covetousness, or ambition, or any hope of mending his fortune in the world by turning Christian, for it was to expose himself to all manner of disgrace and trouble; nor had he any conversation with the apostles or any other Christians, by whose subtlety and sophistry he might be thought to have been wheedled into this change. No, it was the Lord's doing, and the circumstances of the doing of it were enough to justify him in the change, to all those who believe there is a supernatural power; and none can condemn him for it, without reflecting upon that divine energy by which he was herein overruled. He relates the story of his conversion here very particularly, as we had it before (Acts 9), aiming to show that it was purely the act of God.

**1.** He was a fully bent upon persecuting the Christians just before Christ arrested him as ever. He *made his journey, and was come nigh to Damascus* (v. 6), and had no other thought than to execute the cruel design he was sent upon; he was not conscious of the least compassionate relentings towards the poor Christians, but still represented them to himself as heretics, schismatics, and dangerous enemies both to church and state.

**2.** It was *a light from heaven* that first startled him, *a great light*, which *shone suddenly round about him*, and the Jews knew that God is light, and his angels angels of light, and that such a light as this shining at noon, and therefore exceeding that of the sun, must be from God. Had it shone in upon him into some private room, there might have been a cheat in it, but it shone upon him in the open road, at high noon, and so strongly *that it*

struck him to the ground (v. 7), and all that were with him, <sup>4034</sup>Acts 26:14. They could not deny but that surely the Lord was in this light.

**3.** It was a voice *from heaven* that first begat in him awful thoughts of Jesus Christ, of whom before he had had nothing but hateful spiteful thoughts. The voice called to him by name, to distinguish him from *those that journeyed with him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* And when he asked, *Who art thou, Lord?* it was answered, *I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest*, v. 8. By which it appeared that this Jesus of Nazareth, whom they also were now persecuting, was one that spoke from heaven, and they knew it was dangerous resisting one that did so, <sup>8025</sup>Hebrews 12:25.

**4.** Lest it should be objected, “How came this light and voice to work such a change upon him, and not upon those that journeyed with him?” (though, it is very probable, it had a good effect upon them, and that they thereupon became Christians), he observes *that his fellow travellers saw indeed the light, and were afraid* they should be consumed with fire from heaven, their own consciences, perhaps, now telling them that the way they were in was not good, but like Balaam's when he was going to curse Israel, and therefore they might expect to meet an angel with a flaming glittering sword; but, though the light made them afraid, they heard not the voice of him that spoke to Paul, that is, they did not distinctly hear the words. Now faith comes by hearing, and therefore that change was now presently wrought upon him that heard the words, and heard them directed to himself, which was not wrought upon those who only saw the light; and yet it might afterwards be wrought upon them too.

**5.** He assures them that when he was thus startled he referred himself entirely to a divine guidance; he did not hereupon presently cry out, “Well, I will be a Christian,” but, “*What shall I do, Lord?* Let the same voice from heaven that has stopped me in the wrong way guide me into the right way, v. 10. Lord, tell me what I shall do, and I will do it.” And immediately he had directions to go to Damascus, and there he should hear further from him that now spoke to him: “No more needs to be said from heaven, *there it shall be told thee*, by a man like thyself, in the name of him that now speaks to thee, *all things which are appointed for thee to do.*” The extraordinary ways of divine revelation, by visions, and voices, and the appearance of angels, were designed, both in the Old Testament and in the New, only to introduce and establish the ordinary method by the



scriptures and a standing ministry, and therefore were generally superseded when these were settled. The angel did not preach to Cornelius himself, but bade him send for Peter; so the voice here tells not Paul what he shall do, but bids him go to Damascus, and there it shall be told him.

**6.** As a demonstration of the greatness of that light which fastened upon him, he tells them of the immediate effect it had upon his eye-sight (v. 11): *I could not see for the glory of that light.* It struck him blind for the present. *Nimum sensibile laedit sensum — Its radiance dazzled him.* Condemned sinners are struck blind, as the Sodomites and Egyptians were, by the power of darkness, and it is a lasting blindness, like that of the unbelieving Jews; but convinced sinners are struck blind, as Paul here was, not by darkness, but by light: they are for the present brought to be at a loss within themselves, but it is in order to their being enlightened, as the putting of clay upon the eyes of the blind man was the designed method of his cure. Those that were with Paul had not the light so directly darted into their faces as Paul had unto his, and therefore they were not blinded, as he was; yet, considering the issue, who would not rather have chosen his lot than theirs? They, having their sight, led *Paul by the hand into the city.* Paul, being a Pharisee, was proud of his spiritual eyesight. The Pharisees said, *Are we blind also?* <sup>400</sup>John 9:40. Nay, they were confident *that they themselves were guides to the blind, and lights to those that were in darkness,* <sup>409</sup>Romans 2:19. Now Paul was thus struck with bodily blindness to make him sensible of his spiritual blindness, and his mistake concerning himself, when he was *alive without the law,* <sup>409</sup>Romans 7:9.

**IV.** How he was confirmed in the change he had made, and further directed what he should do, by Ananias who lived at Damascus.

Observe,

**1.** The character here given of Ananias. He was not a man that was any way prejudiced against the Jewish nation or religion, but was himself *a devout man according to the law;* if not a Jew by birth, yet one that had been proselyted to the Jewish religion, and therefore called a devout man, and thence advanced further to the faith of Christ; and he conducted himself so well that he had a *good report of all the Jews that dwelt at Damascus.* This was the first Christian that Paul had any friendly communication with, and it was not likely that he should instil into him

any such notions as they suspected him to espouse, injurious to the law or to this holy place.

**2.** The cure immediately wrought by him upon Paul's eyes, which miracle was to confirm Ananias's mission to Paul, and to ratify all that he should afterwards say to him. He *came to him* (v. 13); and, to assure him that he came to him from Christ (the very same who had torn and would heal him, had smitten, but would bind him up, had taken away his sight, but would restore it again, with advantage), he *stood by him, and said, Brother Saul, receive thy sight*. Power went along with this word, and *the same hour*, immediately, he recovered his sight, and *looked up upon him*, ready to receive from him the instructions sent by him.

**3.** The declaration which Ananias makes to him of the favour, the peculiar favour, which the Lord Jesus designed him above any other.

**(1.)** In the present manifestation of himself to him (v. 14): *The God of our fathers has chosen thee*. This powerful call is the result of a particular choice; his calling God the God of our fathers intimates that Ananias was himself a Jew by birth, that observed the law of the fathers, and lived upon the promise made unto the fathers; and he gives a reason why he said *Brother Saul*, when he speaks of God as the God of our fathers: *This God of our fathers has chosen thee that thou shouldst*,

**[1.]** *Know his will*, the will of his precept that is to be done by thee, the will of his providence that is to be done concerning thee. He hath chosen thee that thou shouldst know it in a more peculiar manner; not of man nor by man, but immediately by *the revelation of Christ*, ~~801~~ Galatians 1:1, 12. Those whom God hath chosen he hath chosen to know his will, and to do it.

**[2.]** *That thou shouldst see that Just One, and shouldst hear the voice of his mouth*, and so shouldst know his will immediately from himself. This was what Paul was, in a particular manner, chosen to above others; it was a distinguishing favour, that he should see Christ here upon earth after his ascension into heaven. Stephen saw him *standing at the right hand of God*, but Paul saw him standing at his right hand. This honour none had but Paul. Stephen saw him, but we do not find that he heard the voice of his mouth, as Paul did, who says, *he was last of all seen of me, as of one born out of due time*, ~~413~~ 1 Corinthians 15:8. Christ is here called *that Just One*; for he is Jesus Christ the righteous, and suffered wrongfully.

Observe, Those whom God has chosen to know his will must have an eye to Christ, and must see him, and hear the voice of his mouth; for it is by him that God has made known his will, his good-will to us, and he has said, *Hear you him.*

(2.) In the after-manifestation of himself by him to others (v. 15): “*Thou shalt be his witness, not only a monument of his grace, as a pillar may be, but a witness viva voce — by word of mouth; thou shalt publish his gospel, as that which thou hast experienced the power of, and been delivered into, the mould of; thou shalt be his witness unto all men, Gentiles as well as Jews, of what thou hast seen and heard, now at the very first.*” And finding Paul so particularly relating the manner of his conversation in his apologies for himself, here and Acts 26, we have reason to think that he frequently related the same narrative in his preaching for the conversion of others; he told them what God had done for his soul, to encourage them to hope that he would do something for their souls.

4. The counsel and encouragement he gave him to join himself to the Lord Jesus by baptism (v. 16): *Arise, and be baptized,* He had in his circumcision been given up to God, but he must now by baptism be given up to God in Christ — must embrace the Christian religion and the privileges of it, in submission to the precepts of it. This must now be done immediately upon his conversion, and so was added to his circumcision: but to the seed of the faithful it comes in the room of it; for it is, as that was to Abraham and his believing seed, *a seal of the righteousness which is by faith.*

(1.) The great gospel privilege which by baptism we have sealed to us is the remission of sins: *Be baptized and wash away thy sins;* that is, “Receive the comfort of the pardon of thy sins in the through Jesus Christ and lay hold of his righteousness for that purpose, and receive power against sin for the mortifying of thy corruption;” for our being washed includes our being both justified and sanctified, <sup><441></sup>1 Corinthians 6:11. Be baptized, and rest not in the sign, but make sure of the thing signified, the putting away of the filth of sin.

(2.) The great gospel duty which by our baptism we are bound to is *to call on the name of the Lord, the Lord Jesus;* to acknowledge him to be our Lord and our God, and to apply to him accordingly; to give honour to him, to put all our petitions in his hand. *To call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord* (Son of David, have mercy on us) is the periphrasis of a Christian,

~~410~~ 1 Corinthians 1:2. We must *wash away our sins, calling on the name of the Lord*; that is, we must seek for the pardon of our sins in Christ's name, and in dependence on him and his righteousness. In prayer, we must not any longer call God the God of Abraham, but the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him our Father; in every prayer, our eye must be to Christ.

**(3.)** We must do this quickly. *Why tarriest thou?* Our covenanting with God in Christ is needful work, that must not be deferred. The case is so plain that it is needless to deliberate; and the hazard so great that it is folly to delay. Why should not that be done at the present time that must be done some time, or we are undone?

**V.** How he was commissioned to go and preach the gospel to the Gentiles. This was the great thing for which they were so angry at him, and therefore it was requisite he should for this, in a special manner, produce a divine warrant; and here he does it. This commission he did not receive presently upon his conversion, for this was *at Jerusalem*, whither he did not go till *three years after*, or more (~~418~~ Galatians 1:18); and whether it was then, or afterwards, that he had this vision here spoken of, we are not certain. But, to reconcile them, if possible, to his preaching the gospel among the Gentiles, he tells them,

**1.** That he received his orders to do it when he was at prayer, begging of God to appoint him his work and to show him the course he should steer; and (which was a circumstance that would have some weight with those he was now speaking to) he was *at prayer in the temple*, which was to be called *a house of prayer for all people*; not only in which all people should pray, but in which all people should be prayed for. Now as Paul's praying in the temple was an evidence, contrary to their malicious suggestion, that he had a veneration for the temple, though he did not make an idol of it as they did; so God's giving him this commission there in the temple was an evidence that the sending him to the Gentiles would be no prejudice to the temple, unless the Jews by their infidelity made it so. Now it would be a great satisfaction to Paul afterwards, in the execution of this commission, to reflect upon it that he received it when he was at prayer.

**2.** He received it in a vision. He fell *into a trance* (v. 17), his external senses, for the present, locked up; he was in an ecstasy, as when he was *caught up into the third heaven*, and was not at that time sensible whether

he was *in the body or out of the body*. In this trance he saw Jesus Christ, not with the eyes of his body, as at his conversion, but represented to the eye of his mind (v. 18): *I saw him saying unto me*. Our eye must be upon Christ when we are receiving the law from his mouth; and we must not only hear him speak, but see him speaking to us.

**3.** Before Christ gave him a commission to go to the Gentiles, he told him it was to no purpose for him to think of doing any good at Jerusalem; so that they must not blame him, but themselves, if he be sent to the Gentiles. Paul came to Jerusalem full of hopes that, by the grace of God, he might be instrumental to bring those to the faith of Christ who had stood it out against the ministry of the other apostles; and perhaps this was what he was now praying for, that he, having had his education at Jerusalem and being well known there, might be employed in gathering the children of Jerusalem to Christ that were not yet gathered, which he thought he had particular advantages for doing of. But Christ crosses the measures he had laid: "*Make haste,*" says he, "*and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem;*" for, though thou thinkest thyself more likely to work upon them than others, thou wilt find they are more prejudiced against thee than against any other, and therefore "*will not receive thy testimony concerning me.*" As God knows before who will receive the gospel, so he knows who will reject it.

**4.** Paul, notwithstanding this, renewed his petition that he might be employed at Jerusalem, because they knew, better than any did, what he had been before his conversion, and therefore must ascribe so great a change in him to the power of almighty grace, and consequently give the greater regard to his testimony; thus he reasoned, both with himself and with the Lord, and thought he reasoned justly (v. 19, 20): "*Lord,*" says he, "*they know that I was once of their mind, that I was as bitter an enemy as any of them to such as believed on thee, that I irritated the civil power against them, and imprisoned them, and turned the edge of the spiritual power against them too, and beat them in every synagogue.*" And therefore they will not impute my preaching Christ to education nor to any prepossession in his favour (as they do that of other ministers), but will the more readily regard what I say because they know I have myself been one of them: particularly in Stephen's case; they know that when he was stoned I was standing by, I was aiding and abetting and *consenting to his death*, and in token of this *kept the clothes of those that stoned him*. Now "*Lord,*" says he, "if I appear among them, preaching the doctrine that Stephen preached and suffered for, they will no doubt receive my testimony."

“No,” says Christ to him, “they will not; but will be more exasperated against thee as a deserter from, than against others whom they look upon only as strangers to, their constitution.”

**5.** Paul's petition for a warrant to preach the gospel at Jerusalem is overruled, and he has peremptory orders to go among the Gentiles (v. 21): *Depart, for I will send thee far hence, unto the Gentiles.* Note, God often gives gracious answers to the prayers of his people, not in the thing itself that they pray for, but in something better. Abraham prays, *O that Ishmael may live before thee;* and God hears him for Isaac. So Paul here prays that he may be an instrument of converting souls at Jerusalem: “No,” says Christ, “but thou shalt be employed among the Gentiles, and *more shall be the children of the desolate than those of the married wife.*” It is God that appoints his labourers both their day and their place, and it is fit they should acquiesce in his appointment, though it may cross their own inclinations. Paul hankers after Jerusalem: to be a preacher there was the summit of his ambition; but Christ designs him greater preferment. He shall not enter into other men's labours (as the other apostles did, ~~EBB~~ John 4:38), but shall break up new ground, and *preach the gospel where Christ was not named,* ~~ESD~~ Romans 15:20. So often does Providence contrive better for us than we for ourselves; to the guidance of that we must therefore refer ourselves. *He shall choose our inheritance for us.* Observe, Paul shall not go to preach among the Gentiles without a commission: *I will send thee.* And, if Christ send him, his Spirit will go along with him, he will stand by him, will carry him on, and bear him out, and give him to see the fruit of his labours. Let not Paul set his heart upon Jerusalem, for he must be sent far hence; his call must be quite another way, and his work of another kind. And it might be a mitigation of the offence of this to the Jews that he did not set up a Gentile church in the neighbouring nations; others did this in their immediate vicinity; he was sent to places at a distance, a vast way off, where what he did could not be thought an annoyance to them.

Now, if they would lay all this together, surely they would see that they had no reason to be angry with Paul for preaching among the Gentiles, or construe it as an act of ill-will to his own nation, for he was compelled to it, contrary to his own mind, by an overruling command from heaven.

## 422 ACTS 22:22-30

### PAUL'S FIRST DEFENCE

Paul was going on with this account of himself, had shown them his commission to preach among the Gentiles without any peevish reflections upon the Jews, and we may suppose designed next to show how he was afterwards, by a special direction of the Holy Ghost at Antioch, separated to this service, how tender he was of the Jews, how respectful to them, and how careful to give them the precedency in all places whither he came, and to unite Jews and Gentiles in one body; and then to show how wonderfully God had owned him, and what good service had been done to the interest of God's kingdom among men in general, without damage to any of the true interests of the Jewish church in particular. But, whatever he designs to say, they resolve he shall say no more to them: *They gave him audience to this word.* Hitherto they had heard him with patience and some attention. But when he speaks of being sent to the Gentiles, though it was what Christ himself said to him, they cannot bear it, not so much as to hear the Gentiles named, such an enmity had they to them, and such a jealousy of them. Upon the mention of this, they have no manner of patience, but forget all rules of decency and equity; thus were they *provoked to jealousy by those that were no people,* 409 Romans 10:19.

Now here we are told how furious and outrageous the people were against Paul, for mentioning the Gentiles as taken into the cognizance of divine grace, and so justifying his preaching among them.

**I.** They interrupted him, by lifting up their voice, to put him into confusion, and that nobody might hear a word he said. Galled consciences kick at the least touch; and those who are resolved not to be ruled by reason commonly resolve not to hear it if they can help it. And the spirit of enmity against the gospel of Christ commonly shows itself in silencing the ministers of Christ and his gospel, and stopping their mouths, as the Jews did Paul's here. Their fathers had said to the best of seers, *See not,* 230 Isaiah 30:10. And so they to the best of speakers, *Speak not. Forbear, wherefore shouldst thou be smitten?* 426 2 Chronicles 25:16.

**II.** They clamoured against him as one that was unworthy of life, much more of liberty. Without weighing the arguments he had urged in his own

defence, or offering to make any answer to them, they cried out with a confused noise, "*Away with such a fellow as this from the earth, who pretends to have a commission to preach to the Gentiles; why, it is not fit that he should live.*" Thus the men that have been the greatest blessings of their age have been represented not only as the burdens of the earth, but the plague of their generation. He that was worthy of the greatest honours of life is condemned as not worthy of life itself. See what different sentiments God and men have of good men, and yet they both agree in this that they are not likely to live long in this world. Paul says of the godly Jews that they were men of *whom the world was not worthy*, <sup>8118</sup> Hebrews 11:38. And therefore they must be removed, that the world may be justly punished with the loss of them. The ungodly Jews here say of Paul that it was not fit he should live; and therefore he must be removed, that the world may be eased of the burden of him, as of the two witnesses, <sup>8111</sup> Revelation 11:10.

**III.** They went stark mad against Paul, and against the chief captain for not killing him immediately at their request, or throwing him as a pry into their teeth, that they might devour him (v. 23); as men whose reason was quite lost in passion, they cried out like roaring lions or raging bears, and howled like the evening wolves; they *cast off their clothes* with fury and violence, as much as to say that thus they would tear him if they could but come at him. Or, rather, they thus showed how ready they were to stone him; those that stoned Stephen threw off their clothes, v. 20. Or, they *rent their clothes*, as if he had spoken blasphemy; and *threw dust into the air*, in detestation of it; or signifying how ready they were to throw stones at Paul, if the chief captain would have permitted them. But why should we go about to give a reason for these experiences of fury, which they themselves could not account for? All they intended was to make the chief captain sensible how much they were enraged and exasperated at Paul, so that he could not do any thing to gratify them more than to let them have their will against him.

**IV.** The chief captain took care for his safety, by ordering him to be brought into the castle, v. 24. A prison sometimes has been a protection to good men from popular rage. Paul's hour was not yet come, he had not finished his testimony, and therefore God raised up one that took care of him, when none of his friends durst appear on his behalf. *Grant not, O Lord, the desire of the wicked.*



**V.** He ordered him the torture, to force from him a confession of some flagrant crimes which had provoked the people to such an uncommon violence against him. *He ordered that he should be examined by scourging* (as now in some countries by the rack), that *he might know wherefore they cried so against him*. Herein he did not proceed fairly; he should have singled out some of the clamorous tumultuous complainants, and taken them into the castle as breakers of the peace, and should have examined them, and by scourging too, what they had to lay to the charge of a man that could give so good an account of himself, and did not appear to have done any thing worthy of death or of bonds. It was proper to ask them, but not at all proper to ask Paul, *wherefore they cried so against him*. He could tell that he had given them no just cause to do it; if there were any cause, let them produce it. No man is bound to accuse himself, though he be guilty, much less ought he to be compelled to accuse himself when he is innocent. Surely the chief captain did not know the Jewish nation when he concluded that he must needs have done something very bad whom they cried out against. Had they not just thus cried out against our Lord Jesus, *Crucify him, crucify him*, when they had not one word to say in answer to the judge's question, *Why, what evil has he done?* Is this a fair or just occasion to scourge Paul, that a rude tumultuous mob cry out against him, but cannot tell why or wherefore, and therefore he must be forced to tell?

**VI.** Paul pleaded his privilege as a Roman citizen, by which he was exempted from all trials and punishments of this nature (v. 25): *As they bound him with thongs*, or leathern bands, to the whipping post, as they used to bind the vilest of malefactors in bridewell from whom they would extort a confession, he made no outcry against the injustice of their proceedings against an innocent man, but very mildly let them understand the illegality of their proceedings against him as a citizen of Rome, which he had done once before at Philippi after he had been scourged (~~Act~~ Acts 16:37), but here he makes use of it for prevention. He *said to the centurion that stood by*, “You know the law; pray *is it lawful for you* who are yourselves Romans to *scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?*” The manner of his speaking plainly intimates what a holy security and serenity of mind this good man enjoyed, not disturbed either with anger or fear in the midst of all those indignities that were done him, and the danger he was in. The Romans had a law (it was called *lex Sempronia*), that if any magistrate did chastise or condemn a freeman of

Rome, *indicta causa* — without hearing him speak for himself, and deliberating upon the whole of his case, he should be liable to the sentence of the people, who were very jealous of their liberties. It is indeed the privilege of every man not to have wrong done him, except it be proved he has done wrong; as it is of every Englishman by *Magna Charta* not to be dis-seized of his life or freehold, but by a verdict of twelve men of his peers.

**VII.** The chief captain was surprised at this, and put into a fright. He had taken Paul to be a vagabond Egyptian, and wondered he could speak Greek (~~Acts~~ Acts 21:37), but is much more surprised now he finds that he is as good a gentleman as himself. How many men of great worth and merit are despised because they are not known, are looked upon and treated as the offscouring of all things, when those that count them so, if they knew their true character, would own them to be of the excellent ones of the earth! The chief captain had centurions, under-officers, attending him, ~~Acts~~ Acts 21:32. One of these reports this matter to the chief captain (v. 26): *Take heed what thou doest, for this man is a Roman*, and what indignity is done to him will be construed an offence against the majesty of the Roman people, as they loved to speak. They all knew what a value was put upon this privilege of the Roman citizens. Tully extols it in one of his orations against Verres, *O nomen dulce libertatis, O jus eximium nostrae civitatis! O lex Porcia! O leges Semproniae; facinus est vincere Romanum civem, scelus verberare — O Liberty! I love thy charming name; and these our Porcian and Sempronian laws, how admirable! It is a crime to bind a Roman citizen, but an unpardonable one to beat him.* “Therefore” (says the centurion) “let us look to ourselves; if this man be a Roman, and we do him any indignity, we shall be in danger to lose our commissions at least.” Now,

**1.** The chief captain would be satisfied of the truth of this from his own mouth (v. 27): “*Tell me, art thou a Roman? Art thou entitled to the privileges of a Roman citizen?*” “Yes,” says Paul, “*I am;*” and perhaps produced some ticket or instrument which proved it; for otherwise they would scarcely have taken his word.

**2.** The chief captain very freely compares notes with him upon this matter, and it appears that the privilege Paul had as a Roman citizen was of the two more honourable than the colonel's; for the colonel owns that his was purchased: “*I am a freeman of Rome; but with a great sum obtained I this*

*freedom*, it cost me dear, how came you by it?" "Why truly," says Paul, "I was *free-born*." Some think he became entitled to this freedom by the place of his birth, as a native of Tarsus, a city privileged by the emperor with the same privileges that Rome itself enjoyed; others rather think it was by his father or grandfather having served in the war between Caesar and Antony, or some other of the civil wars of Rome, and being for some signal piece of service rewarded with a freedom of the city, and so Paul came to be free-born; and here he pleads it for his own preservation, for which end not only we may but we ought to use all lawful means.

**3.** This put an immediate stop to Paul's trouble. Those that were appointed to examine him by scourging quitted the spot; they *departed from him* (v. 29), lest they should run themselves into a snare. Nay, and the colonel himself, though we may suppose him to have a considerable interest, was afraid when he heard he was a Roman, because, though he had not beaten him, yet he had bound him in order to his being beaten. Thus many are restrained from evil practices by the fear of man who would not be restrained from them by the fear of God. See here the benefit of human laws and magistracy, and what reason we have to be thankful to God for them; for even when they have given no countenance nor special protection to God's people and ministers, yet, by the general support of equity and fair dealing between man and man, they have served to check the rage of wicked and unreasonable illegal men, who otherwise would know no bounds, and to say, *Hitherto it shall come, but no further; here shall its proud waves be stayed*. And therefore this service we owe to all in authority, to pray for them, because this benefit we have reason to expect from them, whether we have it or no, as long as we are quiet and peaceable — to live *quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty*, <sup><481></sup>1 Timothy 2:1, 2.

**4.** The governor, the next day, brought Paul before the sanhedrim, v. 30. He first *loosed him from his bands*, that those might not prejudge his cause, and that he might not be charged with having pinioned a Roman citizen, and then summoned the chief priests and all their council to come together to take cognizance of Paul's case, for he found it to be a matter of religion, and therefore looked upon them to be the most proper judges of it. Gallio in this case discharged Paul; finding it to be a matter of their law, he drove the prosecutors from the judgement-seat (<sup><483></sup>Acts 18:16), and would not concern himself at all in it; but this Roman, who was a military

man, kept Paul in custody, and appealed from the rabble to the general assembly. Now,

(1.) We may hope that hereby he intended Paul's safety, as thinking, if he were an innocent and inoffensive man, though the multitude might be incensed against him, yet the chief priests and elders would do him justice, and clear him; for they were, or should be, men of learning and consideration, and their court governed by rules of equity. When the prophet could find no good among the poorer sort of people, he concluded that it was because they *knew not the way of the Lord, nor the judgments of their God*, and promised himself that he should speed better among the great men, as the chief captain here did, but soon found himself disappointed there: these have *altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds*, ~~2000~~ Jeremiah 5:4, 5. But,

(2.) That which he is here said to aim at is the gratifying of his own curiosity: He *would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews*. Had he sent for Paul to his own chamber, and talked freely with him, he might soon have learned from him that which would have done more than satisfy his enquiry, and which might have persuaded him to be a Christian. But it is too common for great men to affect to set that at a distance from them which might awaken their consciences, and to desire to have no more of the knowledge of God's ways than may serve them to talk of.