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Paul Appears Before the Council Acts 22:30-23:11

1. The convening of the council (22:30)

The Roman commander used the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, to learn the reason for the accusation against Paul. The Council was the supreme court of Israel with 71 members consisting of various priests, scribes, experts on the Mosaic Law, and members of prominent Jewish families. This was the sixth instance of their meeting in the New Testament and in Acts we see them threatening (4:5-22), beating (5:21-40) and killing (6:12-7:60) believers.

2. The conflict with Paul (23:1-5)

Like in Acts 22:1, Paul identified himself with his audience as one of them. Paul's words in 23:1 should not be understood as a declaration of perfect righteousness but rather as a statement of faithfulness to the God of Israel.

Ananias became the high priest ten years earlier, was pro-Roman and was considered to be so corrupt that the Jews assassinated him nine years later. The condemnation of Ananias as a "whitewashed wall" is based on the prophetic imagery of judgment from Ezekiel 13:10-16. Ananias likewise was a leader who had no spirituality and would not stand. God will judge all religious leaders who misrepresent the Lord. Ananias was also a hypocrite, using the Law to judge Paul while not following it himself. These two evils are commonly together and oppose God.

Paul's statement about his knowledge of the high priest was sarcastic. Paul had been a leading Pharisee and would have been knowledgeable of many of the council members. Paul meant that Ananias was not acting like a high priest. In particular, Ananias' opposition to Jesus meant that he himself was the one guilty of the speaking against the true ruler of the people.

3. The controversy in the council (23:6-10)

Not able to get a fair hearing, Paul raised the issue of the resurrection not simply to divide the council but to demonstrate to the Romans that the problem regarded Jewish beliefs rather than Roman law. This distinguished Ananias, a Sadducee from Paul, who identified himself as a Pharisee. Paul was indeed on trial for the hope of life to come through the resurrection of Christ.

The Sadducees were the larger group within the council and were the priestly aristocracy. The Pharisees were those whose interest was the Scripture. The Sadducees denied the supernatural, accepted only the first five books of the Old Testament, and supported the appeasement of Rome. Luke explained the issue for his Gentile readers in 22:8. Jesus proved to the Sadducees from Exodus 3:6 that there is indeed a resurrection (Matthew 22:31-32).

The Sadducees were similar to today's liberal Christianity that discounts the Scripture and eternity and emphasizes the pragmatic and the earthly. The Pharisees were similar to today's conservative Christianity that discounts the weightier biblical principles and emphasizes their own applications of the Scripture. Ironically, the Pharisees acknowledged the potential that Paul had heard a divine message but few seriously considered the resurrection of Christ (cf. Acts 15:5).

4. The comfort from God (23:11)

The words of the Lord were an encouragement because Paul wrote of his desire to visit Rome (Romans 1:11; 15:23) during his third missionary journey, possible only a few months earlier. At this point, the likelihood of Paul reaching Rome was bleak.

Like Paul, God also has a sovereign plan for us. Sometimes God's will delivers us from difficulty (cf. Acts 16:25-26) and other times it is to deliver us through difficulty. Regardless of the means that God employs to guide us, His will for us is always to testify as a witness of His resurrection to overcome sin and death.