



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ◇ DEO ◇ GLORIA

## THE BOOK OF ACTS

### Sermon Notes

#### Paul in Route to Rome, Part 4

#### *Paul Delivers His Defense in Jerusalem, Part 2*

Acts 22:12-29

May 4, 2008

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- In her book *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity*, author Nancy Pearcey chronicles the changes in American evangelicalism since the Second Great Awakening in the nineteenth century.
- [In contrast to the First Great Awakening], Pearcey writes, “As the Second Great Awakening proceeded...preachers began to employ methods calculated to pressure people into making a decision. The most aggressive was Charles Finney, a lawyer-turned-evangelist...Finney insisted that revivals had to be carefully staged. ‘A revival is not a miracle,’ Finney stated flatly; it is merely ‘the result of the right use of the appropriate means.’”
- As a result of the “success” of the Second Great Awakening, pastors began to emerge, not as faithful biblical expositors, but, as Pearcey puts it, “shrewd entrepreneurs and talented entertainers, adept at arousing, or manipulating, people’s emotions. They honed the sermon into an effective ‘recruiting device,’ using language peppered with provincial expressions and colloquialisms. They were also quick to make use of the growing technology of print journalism to publish vast quantities of newspapers, books, and

pamphlets, which resulted in many becoming well-known far beyond any local congregation.”

- ❑ Yet, arguably the greatest effect of the Second Great Awakening was that conversion was no longer viewed as an objective act by a Sovereign God; but, rather, it was viewed as an emotional experience, a “decision” or “choice” on the part of the individual.
- ❑ However, as we examine Paul’s testimony concerning his own conversion, it becomes clear that God saved him through a divine act of conversion.
- ❑ Furthermore, as Paul delivered his defense before the Jews, he did not try to manipulate the crowd, or try to get them to “make a decision”; rather, he simply conveyed the truth of what God did.

## I. Paul Concludes His Defense

### a. Paul Meets Ananias

- ❑ Paul continues his defense by speaking of his encounter with Ananias, saying, in **Verses 12 – 16**, “A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing near said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very time I looked up at him. And he said, ‘The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.’”
  - He was devout...He was not *righteous*. Paul says that Ananias was committed to “the standard of the Law...”
  - He was not committed to the “standard of Jews”; rather, he was committed to the standard of “the Law.” According to Acts 9:10, Ananias was a disciple of the Lord...a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Here, in Paul’s defense, Ananias is portrayed as a devout Jew. Yet, these two truths, as Paul has already made clear, are not in contradiction to one another. Rather, they are perfectly consistent.

### In fact, no one has ever been more Jewish than Jesus Christ!

- Once again, Paul is demonstrating his consistency, not with the traditions of the Jews, but the Law itself.
- In fact, Paul even states that Ananias was “well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there [Damascus]...”
  - Such a statement by the Apostle reveals the truthfulness of his testimony. The man, Ananias, has a public reputation in the city of Damascus, and the

Jews listening to Paul could easily follow-up and confirm that what Paul was conveying was in fact true..

- It is even possible that some of those in the crowd would have known, or at least heard of, Ananias of Damascus.
- Notice, then, how in **Verse 13**, Paul states that “[Ananias] came to me...”
  - On the road to Damascus, Christ revealed Himself to Paul...Paul was not seeking after God. God was the One who actively “pursued” Paul.
  - So it is here. Paul, being blind, in no way had the ability to pursue anyone. Consequently, Ananias [who was certainly being led by Christ] pursued and sought out Paul. This is yet another example of God’s pursuit of His people.
  - As Jesus Christ Himself tells Nicodemus in John 3:3, “No one has the ability to see the Kingdom of God unless He is born again.”
- Then, also in **Verse 13**, Ananias addressed Paul, saying, “Brother Saul, receive your sight!” Paul adds, “And at that very time I looked up at him.”
- After being used as an instrument of grace by God to restore Paul’s sight, Ananias then commissioned Paul, saying, in **Verse 14**, “The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth.”
  - The phrase, “The God of our fathers” is an Old Testament phrase of Jewish roots which is synonymous with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (3:13; 5:30; 7:32; Exodus 3:13, 15-16; Deuteronomy 1:11, 21).
  - In other words, this is not a “new” god commissioning Paul.
    - Novelty...newness in theology is fatal. It is spiritually deadly.

**We worship an historical Jesus who fulfilled the ancient promises of a timeless faith. Our hope is in nothing new, but rather is in the One who Created time and space.**

John Calvin wrote, “Paul confirms...by these words...that he had not made any departure from the God of Abraham, whom the Jews had in times past worshipped, but that he continues in the ancient worship which the fathers did use, which he had learned out of the law...[W]hen the question is about religion, let us learn by the example of Paul, not to imagine any new God (as all heretics do), but let us retain that God who has revealed Himself in times past to the fathers, both by the law, and also by diverse oracles. This is that antiquity wherein we must remain.”

- It was this God – the One True and Living God...the God of our fathers, who commissioned Paul, **appointing** him (1.) to know His will; and (2.) to see the Righteous One; and (3.) to hear an utterance from His mouth.
  - In other words, the reason why the exalted Christ had appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus was because God had appointed Paul. Certainly, God had appointed him, chosen him before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).
  - In fact, Paul writes in Galatians 1:15-17: “But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.”
  - But, then, Ananias articulates the three-fold purpose for which Paul was appointed by God.
    - This purpose centers on the identity and work of **the Righteous One**.
      - This was an Old Testament, Messianic term [Exodus 9:27; Isaiah 24:16; 53:11; Acts 3:4; 7:52].
      - The significance of the term; however, is profound.
      - It means that the Righteous One, is perfectly obedient to the Law...He is, indeed, Right, Righteous, or Just.
      - It, of course, in this context, is used of Jesus Christ, the One who perfectly fulfilled and obeyed the Law; yet was declared guilty.
      - This is certainly a vindication of Christ.
      - Interestingly, Ananias may have been devout, but only Christ was Righteous.
    - The other two points that Ananias makes relate to the Righteous One. For, God appointed Paul to also “know His will” and “hear an utterance from His mouth.”
      - The will of God for our lives is simple: love God and obey Him.
      - Yet, both of these are impossible apart from the work of the Righteous One.

- Furthermore, it is only through the work of the Righteous One that we can “hear” and understand the commands of God.
- All of these things point to the one great truth: none of us are righteous, and none of us seek after God and His righteousness. However, through the work of the Righteous One, who was the fulfillment of the Law, God pursues us and changes our nature so that we can see, hear and do the things of God. And finally, He imputes the righteousness of Christ to our account, declaring us righteous because of the Righteous One.
- Then, in **Verse 15**, Ananias tells Saul, For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.”
  - For the astute biblical reader, it is clear, here, that the phrase “all people” refers to both Jews and Gentiles.
  - However, the crowd does not yet know this.
  - These words also echo the words of Christ to his eleven disciples in Acts 1:8.
- Finally, Ananias tells Saul, in **Verse 16**, “Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”
  - Ananias’ point is certainly **not** that the physical act of baptism washes away any sins.
  - Rather, the act of water baptism symbolizes God washing away our sins (Romans 6:3-11; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 3:27).
  - Baptism is, simply put, an outward sign of an inward change.
  - In fact, the idea is that through the calling of the name of the Lord, it would be the Lord Jesus Christ who washes away our sins, casting them “as far as the east is from the west.”
- One of the great examples we see with Ananias is that God was not content to simply “convert” Paul. Rather, it was the Lord’s will to send Ananias to him in order to instruct him “in the doctrine of the gospel.”
  - So God does with us today. He does not intend for us to simply confess Christ; but also to pursue a life of obedience.
  - God does not simply convert us; He also commissions us and calls us to a life of obedience.

## **b. Paul Receives a Vision in the Temple**

- Paul, then, transitions to his vision in the Temple. This is a part of his testimony not included in Acts 9.
- He states, in **Verses 17-21**, “it happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, and I saw Him saying to me, ‘Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.’ And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.’ And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles!’”
  - In accordance with Galatians 1:17-18, this scene would have taken place some three years after Paul’s conversion, following his return from Arabia.
  - Once again, Paul is revealing his Jewish piety, even as a follower of the exalted Christ, for he says that he was in **Jerusalem...praying in the temple**.
  - Then, Christ again revealed Himself to the Apostle Paul.
  - This scene strongly, and likely, intentionally, echoes the vision of Isaiah in Isaiah 6:1-13 as well as Peter’s vision in Acts 10.
  - In this vision, the Apostle Paul falls into a “trance” and saw Jesus Christ [the Lord] who told him to leave Jerusalem, for the Jews would not accept his testimony.
  - Adding to the drama of Paul’s testimony, it is **in the physical Temple** that **Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of the Temple**, appears to him.
  - What is also interesting is that the vision Paul receives is not favorable to the Jews. Yet, in his testimony, Paul still boldly speaks the truth.
  - Paul seems to question the warning of the Lord, commenting that he himself had persecuted the church, even approving of the murdering of Stephen.
  - However, the Lord, **in the Temple**, said to Paul: “Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.”

## **II. The Jewish Crowd Reacts to Paul’s Defense**

- Then, as the crowd was listening to Paul, Luke writes, in **Verses 22-24a**, “They listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!’ And as they were crying out

and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks.”

- One must remember that the primary charge against Paul was that he had brought a Gentile into the sanctuary of the Temple [although the charge was false].
- This was a capital crime, if true. So one can imagine the indignation of the zealous Jewish crowd as they heard Paul claim that the crucified Christ had commissioned him, while in the Temple, to go out and preach the promises of God to the Gentiles!
  - Yet, the irony here is that the Old Testament – the very Scriptures the Jews claim to embrace [over and against Paul] – declares/prophesies that the Gentiles will be brought into Kingdom of God.
  - In fact, as Darrell Bock writes, “If there is a complaint to be made about Gentiles being included in God’s promise and message, Paul is not to blame. God is responsible for these events.”
  - This very truth reveals, then, that the Jews stand primarily against God!
- So angry were they, that that unambiguously shouted, “[This man] should not be allowed to live!”
- Not only this, but in **Verse 23**, “they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air...”
  - This reaction against Paul is quite similar to the reaction against Jesus in Luke 4:24-30.
  - The action of the Jews – throwing off their cloaks – was a common act of public protest, mourning and anger. This was similar to tearing one’s clothing.
  - It is not exactly clear what was meant by the “garment-waving gesture.”
    - They may have taken off their garments in a “mock preparation” for the stoning of Paul – especially since he mentioned “watching the coats” of those who stoned Stephen.
    - It also may mean that they are “shaking the [unclean, pagan] dust off of their coats” in an act of disgust towards Paul. That is, a symbolic act whereby even the dust that comes in contact with an unclean pagan or Gentile must be shaken off of the clothing of a pious Jew.
    - Ultimately, this is an act by the crowd that demonstrates their protest at what they believe to be blasphemous words by Paul.

### III. The Roman Commander React to the Crowd

- Then, in **Verse 24**, Luke writes, "...the commander ordered him [Paul] to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way."
  - In other words, the commander sought to use torture as a means to interrogate Paul as to why the crowd was so angry.
  - Part of the reason for the confusion on the part of the Roman commander would have been that Paul addressed the crowd in the Hebrew dialect, that is Western Aramaic, and Romans would likely not have understood the language.
  - The Roman scourging would have involved stripping Paul and using a *flagella* on his bare, exposed back.
    - The *flagella* was the "cat-of-nine-tails" consisting of a wooden handle with leather straps. At the end of the leather straps were balls of leather with bits of metal and bone.
    - This would have been the same torture device used on Jesus Christ just prior to his crucifixion.
    - So brutal were such scourgings that many people often died from them.
- Then, in **Verse 25**, Luke writes, "But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, 'Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?'"
  - The Romans had likely brought Paul to the Gabbatha, a stone pavement in the Antonia fortress. It was a central courtyard and likely the place where Christ was scourged as well.
  - Yet, as they were preparing to torture Paul, he spoke up, asking, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?"
    - Most certainly the answer to this question was NO!
    - The Valerian and Porcian Laws of the first century Roman Empire prevented Romans from being beaten in this way.
    - In fact, the ancient author Cicero wrote, "To bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him an abomination, to slay him is almost an act of murder."



- Had the commander overseen the flogging of a Roman citizen, he would have lost his job, at a minimum, and possibly faced death himself.
- In **Verses 26-28**, Luke continues, “When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, ‘What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.’ The commander came and said to him, ‘Tell me, are you a Roman?’ And he said, ‘Yes.’ The commander answered, ‘I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.’ And Paul said, ‘But I was actually born a citizen.’”
  - When the Roman commander finds out about Paul’s claim, he asks him, “...are you a Roman?” Paul responds, “Yes.”
  - There would have been some way for Paul to prove his citizenship. He possibly was carrying a *diploma*, which was a wooden “diptych” showing registration as a Roman citizen.
  - To falsely claim Roman citizenship was a capital crime, so few people would dare do so without convincing proof.
  - The commander notes that he actually paid a large amount of money for his citizenship. In fact, it was common during the reign of Emperor Claudius, for people to pay bribes for offers of citizenship.
  - Yet, Paul notes that he received his citizenship at birth.
    - This quite possibly means that Paul’s father was a man of significance in their home of Tarsus.

<b>IV. The Law Vindicates Paul</b>
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- This scene ends, in **Verse 29**, “Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains.”
  - The Law, here, vindicates Paul – not only Roman Law, but Jewish Law as well.
  - In fact, Luke states that the Roman commander was actually “afraid when he found out that he was a Roman...”
  - The reason for this is because not only had they come close to scourging Paul, but they had actually put him, a Roman citizen, in chains – a violation of Roman law.
  - So, the Roman officials kept Paul in custody overnight [possibly for his protection against the angry mob].

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- ❑ In this scene where Paul is speaking before the Jewish crowd, the dangers of “sacred traditions” become quite clear.
- ❑ Certainly there is nothing inherently wrong with traditions.
- ❑ However, often times we, as the Jews had done, elevate our traditions to a “sacred status.”
- ❑ When we do this, we miss the very thing [or One] to which the tradition was intended to point.
- ❑ For the Jews, the ancient traditions were instituted in order to point to the Messiah – the One who was to come. Yet, the Jews so elevated their traditions that when the Messiah did in fact come, they missed Him!...because they were so focused on their traditions.
- ❑ Thus, may we focus on Christ and may the traditions we embrace serve to focus our vision, not blur it.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

Hebrews 1:1-4