

## Acts 23

We live in a time where apologetics has become the common method to defend Christian rights. In this chapter, we see that facts and logic have given way to a demonic desire and rage. That divide between *reason and riot* has become more and more common as the USA gets way from our Christian roots. We are talking about *Spiritual Lawfare*.

**Read Acts 23:1-11:** Paul states that his conscience is clear because he has fulfilled his duty to God. His duty to God was pretty clear:

*But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. <sup>17</sup> I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.' (Acts 26)*

*<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." (Acts 9)*

In general, what was the Pharisaical belief their duty to God was? They believed in scrupulous adherence to all 613 commandments. They were keepers and enforcers of the Law and the observances. They also believed that they were required to make their religious performances; such as prayer, fasting, alms, etc..

They believed that this activity was theoretically reflecting on their *personal righteousness*. That was their take; but it was never the intended message from God.

*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. <sup>40</sup> But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. <sup>41</sup> "I do not receive honor from men. <sup>42</sup> But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. <sup>43</sup> I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. <sup>44</sup> How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? <sup>45</sup> Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. <sup>46</sup> For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. <sup>47</sup> But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (John 5)*

The beginning of this chapter reminds me of the interrogation of Jesus. Striking Paul on the mouth is not really about maintaining respect for the office of the interrogator. It is just a guise for more control over the narrative and proceedings. This is what is called a *kangaroo court*, full of manufactured testimonies, contradictory witnesses, crowd manipulation, biased judges, shifting charges, and it all pointed at shaming the witness and framing them.

*<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. <sup>20</sup> "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. <sup>21</sup> Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said." <sup>22</sup> When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded. <sup>23</sup> "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" <sup>24</sup> Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. (John 18)*

Insincere interrogators not seeking truth use a variety of techniques to keep a lid on any unwanted information from being revealed. We see this in our congressional hearings all of the time. Here are the typical ways that the accused is railroaded into a contrived statement:

- Talking over the response
- Reframing the response to mean something else
- Closed yes or no questions, that both seem to convict them
- Leading questions
- Repetition to create small inconsistencies
- Challenging assertions
- False evidence
- Strategic silence
- Rapid fire questioning
- Raised voice inflection to assert urgency
- Tone of skepticism
- Presenting evidence gradually to steer the responses

#### How these appeared in accounts of Paul

- Talking over / interrupting: Paul's speeches are often cut short or reacted to with hostility (Acts 21–22; 26). For example, in Acts 21:30 the crowd interrupts and stirs a riot before he can explain.
- Accusation / misrepresentation: Paul is accused of violating the temple and teaching against the law (Acts 21:28), and his message is reframed as a political or social threat (teaching Greeks and defiling the temple).
- Ambush / surprise arrests: Paul is seized in the temple at Jerusalem in the night (Acts 21:30–33), limiting his ability to prepare a defense.
- Triangulation / multiple interrogators: He's questioned by Jewish leaders, Roman commanders, and governors (Ananias, the Sanhedrin, the Roman tribune, Felix, Festus, Agrippa), each with different pressures and aims (Acts 23–26).
- Staged authority / show trials: Some proceedings (e.g., before the Sanhedrin) include orchestrated attempts to discredit or manipulate testimony (Acts 23:6–10 shows the Sanhedrin divided and factionalized).
- Leading questions / loaded charges: Charges are reframed to attract Roman interest (e.g., claiming insurrection or profaning the temple) so Jewish leaders can transfer Paul to Roman jurisdiction (Acts 21:28–36; 24:5–9).
- Threats / intimidation: Paul faces plots on his life (Acts 23:12–15), imprisonment, and the specter of execution, used to coerce or neutralize him.
- Isolation from fair counsel: Paul is held in custody for long periods with limited opportunity for civil defense; access to impartial adjudication is constrained (Acts 24–26).
- Presenting false witnesses / bribed accusations: Opponents bring charges to Roman authorities based on partial or false testimony (Acts 24:5–8).
- Rapid topic shifting / confusion: Accusers and authorities shift focus between religious violations and political crimes to confuse the case and secure transfer to more favorable judges (Acts 21–25).
- Public spectacle: Episodes like the Caesarean hearings before Festus and Agrippa are public and theatrical, with political considerations shaping outcomes (Acts 25–26).

*<sup>31</sup> To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” <sup>33</sup> They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?” <sup>34</sup> Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup> Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8)*

Paul sensed the insincerity and the bias, and used this interplay for his favor. He framed his accusers as *just attacking the pharisaical belief system*. The Pharisees and Sadducees have a differing belief system; so he pit them against each other.

## Key differences between Pharisees and Sadducees

- **Scripture and authority**
  - Pharisees: Accepted the Written Torah plus the Oral Tradition (oral law/rabbinic interpretations).
  - Sadducees: Accepted only the Written Torah (Pentateuch); rejected oral traditions.
- **Afterlife and resurrection**
  - Pharisees: Believed in resurrection of the dead, angels, and spirits.
  - Sadducees: Denied resurrection, angels, and spirits.
- **Legal interpretation**
  - Pharisees: Flexible, applied interpretations to everyday life; developed detailed halakhah.
  - Sadducees: Literal, strict reading of the Torah; resisted expansions beyond the text.
- **Social base and power**
  - Pharisees: Broad popular support, teachers/scribes, influential in synagogues.
  - Sadducees: Aristocratic, wealthy, associated with priestly families and the Temple elite.
- **Temple and cult**
  - Pharisees: Valued Temple worship but emphasized piety in daily life and synagogues.
  - Sadducees: Centered religious life on Temple rites and sacrificial system.
- **Political posture**
  - Pharisees: More adaptable to popular and communal life; sometimes seen as more independent of Roman rule.
  - Sadducees: Tended to cooperate with ruling authorities to preserve Temple/privileges.

God foresaw all of the public debate and inquisition over Paul. He would purposefully be the defendant for the gospel over and over again. Paul was perfectly trained in courtroom procedures and reviewing evidence.

Did Paul's curse on the High Priest come true? Yes, it did. Ananias the high Priest was murdered in the war against Rome in AD 66.

**Read Acts 23:12-35:** The Chief Priests and over 40 men formed a plot to kill Paul before he could testify in Jerusalem. There was no legitimate trial. The inquiry was an excuse to kill him en route. It was a thoroughly corrupt arrangement, where they could set up a legal inquiry, forcing Paul to have to travel and be exposed to an ambush.

Paul's nephew overheard the plan to murder Paul. He shared it with the Roman Commander. The Commander, Claudius Lysias sent Paul to Governor Felix with a cover letter. Paul was delivered by a small army in the middle of the night. Claudius Lysias wrote a cover letter stating that Paul had done nothing deserving death. The Governor Felix was located in Cesaria. Cesaria had several important things:

- The Roman Praetorium, or the Governor's office was located here where Felix held his court. It was a fort attached to Herod's Palace. This is where Roman petitions were received.
- Herod's Palace was here, with its administrative center
- Roman administrative and military regional headquarters

After receiving this intelligence, the Governor kept Paul at the Praetorium until his accusers came to him.