

Courageous Conviction (Part 2): Rights and Argument - Acts 22:22-23:10 **Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading**

Notes from the Sermon

In many places around the world, the hostility toward Christians starts with the governing authorities over them. While God instituted government as a part of the social order in a fallen world, the Bible also shows us that governments are led by humans who are sinful, self-absorbed, and idolatrous. As a result, governments generally overstep their bounds and use power and coercion as a means of demanding allegiance. For believers, though, the basic premise of our faith is that we now follow a different King, and are subjects of a different Kingdom. This often does not sit well with those who want to control people, maintain peace, and protect their power. So, how are we to interact with governmental leaders as followers of Jesus.

The story in Acts this week puts Paul in front of two governmental authorities. The first is a Roman Tribune, a man who named Cladius Lysias, who is the highest ranking official in Jerusalem at the moment. He represents Rome, the great empire who conquered with power and forced the world into peace. Rome's highest goal was to preserve this peace and order, so any form of rioting and mob violence brought the threat of an attempted insurrection, and therefore was serious business. Paul then ended up in front of the Sanhedrin, which is basically the Jewish ruling council and Supreme Court. They were a religious body representing Judaism, and they believed that the way to blessing would come when the masses in Israel obeyed the Laws of God and followed the Jewish religious system and leaders. Yet, this led this council in a place of power, which they fought to protect, even using means that violated God's Law, and they were willing to kill any person who was a threat to this. Exhibit A for how the Sanhedrin dealt with threats to their power is Jesus, and Exhibit B is Stephen. Now they have Paul in their sights, wanting the Romans to hand him over so that they can finish what was started the day before in the Temple.

Paul's posture and defense in front of both of these authorities does provide a model that can help us. Our time is not really different from other eras or the plight of our brothers and sisters around the world. Governments will always protect power, seek to force compliance, and try to marginalize and even persecute people deemed a threat. Yet, our nation was founded on a few basic ideas meant to protect rights, and the first of those was the right of religious liberty. The Constitutional door of religious liberty was intentionally designed to swing two ways. First, it restricted the creation of a state endorsed church or set of religious beliefs. In other words, the Constitution forbids our government becoming Jerusalem, forcing, or at least strongly encouraging an official set of beliefs that will be acceptable in the culture. On this level, the state is to stay out of the church business and is to stay out of church business. The second way the door swings is that the constitution guarantees the freedom for individuals to believe as they see fit, and allows the gathering of people around any set of beliefs. This means that the holding and expression of a person's beliefs cannot be restricted, even in the public square. For several hundred years now, the strongest proponents of religious liberty have been believers in Jesus (and specifically, often Protestants who have identified as Baptist) who have led the charge in the creation and then protection of religious liberty for all.

While Rome did not have an official doctrine of religious liberty, it did afford a myriad of key rights for those who were citizens of Rome. To be a citizen of Rome was a huge deal. Free people from Rome were always citizens. In some cases, Rome granted citizenship to a city or province in the Empire when it aligned with Rome. Others could gain citizenship by fighting for the military, while others gained this right by paying huge bribes to Roman officials. In a place like Jerusalem, very few people would have been

Roman citizens. But for those who were it meant that the government had to treat them with the respect and due process that all people actually deserve. So, when Paul is about to be whipped, he gently reminds the Centurion of his citizenship, which puts the soldiers and the Tribune in an awkward position, since they bound him and all but whipped him without due process. The key for us is to see Paul asserting his rights. Yet his motivation was not primarily for self-protection. Sure, Paul was thankful that he didn't get whipped. But his main purpose is the continued proclamation of Jesus, and his citizenship cleared the path for his ministry to continue.

So we do see that there are times to fight for and assert rights. But not for the reasons Christians in our culture normally do this. It is not for self-protection, rather for the freedom to proclaim Jesus, and for love of neighbor.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Proverbs 15	Proverbs 16	Proverbs 17	Proverbs 18	Proverbs 19	Proverbs 20	Proverbs 21

Reading from this past week: Acts 22:22-23:10

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Acts 23:11-35

Family Worship

Song - *Lovingkindness*

<https://youtu.be/xV-fNmt6ZAo>

Gospel Project

Unit: The People Return

Story: God can always be trusted.

Big Picture Question: Can God be trusted?

Answer: Yes, God cannot lie or ever be wrong, so we can trust whatever He has said.

Scripture: Jeremiah 31

New City Catechism

Question #4: How and why did God create us?

Answer: God created us male and female in his own image to glorify him.

Verse: Genesis 1:27

Scripture

Acts 22:22-23:10

- What are the two basic governmental authorities in the story whom Paul interacts? What can we learn from Paul about how we can address the authorities over us?
- From our text today, what do we learn about being a Roman citizen? Why does Paul assert his rights before he is whipped?
- What are some of the rights we have in our country that are important? Where in that list do you put the right of religious liberty? Why?
- Why might it be important for us to stand for the religious liberty for all persons, in all places?

Prayer

*Pray for the issue of life, from womb to tomb.

*Pray that we God would provide religious liberty here and around the world.