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## An Honest Defense

**Acts 21:27-22:22**

**Intro:** **Ch21** is a great illustration of the frustration that results from being misunderstood. We saw how Paul's mission was misunderstood by his friends in the faith and co-workers in the ministry. They heard the Spirit's warning to Paul about what was waiting for him in Jerusalem and responded rationally and emphatically to the news as any friend would but they didn't understand the deep concern Paul had for bringing his countrymen to salvation in Jesus Christ. We saw how the church in Jerusalem misunderstood Paul's message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. A rumor had been circulated that Paul was teaching that Jewish believers shouldn't hold to the traditions, which wasn't the case. Finally, Paul's ministry to the Gentile world was deliberately misunderstood by the Jews for a very selfish reason and, as we will see, this selfish reason persists in the world even to this day.

**27-30** – In the temple complex, there was a wall that stood to separate the court of the Gentiles from all the other courts laid out around the temple. No Gentile was permitted to go beyond that wall. In fact, there was an inscription on the wall that stated: "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught so doing will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." The Roman officials had actually granted the Jewish religious leaders authority to deal with anyone who broke this law, up to and including execution. This law plays an important part in what happens to Paul in our text today.

Remember, Paul had agreed to sponsor 4 men from the Jerusalem church in taking a vow of purification. The process would take 7 days and each day would be spent in the temple. As the period was coming to an end, a group of Jews recognized Paul and made some egregious assumptions. Who were these men? Luke doesn't explicitly say they were from Ephesus but he does say they were from Asia (Roman province, not continent) of which Ephesus was the capitol. The real clue is that they recognized Trophimus walking around town with Paul and he was from Ephesus. Paul had spent quite a bit of time in Ephesus and these men had undoubtedly been exposed to Paul's teaching and knew where he stood on Gentile

observance of the Jewish laws.

Now, just like the rumor that was floating around the church about Paul's teaching; the accusation made against Paul in the temple was also blatantly false. They were completely wrong about Trophimus – just because they had seen him with Paul in the city and now they see Paul in the temple doesn't automatically mean that Paul brought him into the temple. Luke makes clear that this was not the case nor would Paul have ever done it. He was trying to show concern for the ceremonial laws of Judaism. He would never violate the temple precincts by bringing in a Gentile.

When the Jews accused Paul, they gave it their own special twist, saying that Paul was teaching "all men everywhere against the people, the law and this place" (28). Paul had not been doing that either. He had great respect for the law of Israel. He simply rejected the idea of trusting in any of these as a basis for righteousness before God, because that only comes through Jesus Christ. Still, it was true that he was teaching that Gentiles could be saved apart from keeping the Law. But, the accusation was so egregious to the Jews that they would rather judge the severity of it before determining the accuracy of it. Their emotions were running at full speed and their brains were in neutral. The temple crowd was in a complete uproar but at the same time, they were completely ignorant of what was going on!

**31-40** – At about this point I'll bet Paul was thinking, "Here we go again!" He had once been stoned by an angry mob of Gentiles and survived. He knew he wouldn't likely survive an angry mob of Jews but the truth is – he still loved them. The mob dragged him out into the courtyard of the Gentiles, where they had him down for the count. They'd have killed him soon enough if it weren't for the Roman garrison stationed next to the temple. As soon as the riot started, it was reported to the commander who sent a group of soldiers (200) into the courtyard to rescue Paul.

The commander handled the situation well. When he took Paul into custody, preventing his being murdered, he tried to find out from the crowd what Paul had done. But, they were all shouting one thing or another. So, since he couldn't get a straight answer, he decided the best thing to do was take Paul inside and interrogate him. As he started to carry Paul away the mob followed, shouting, "Away with him! Away with him!" These were the exact words they shouted at Jesus before His crucifixion. They didn't mean, "Take

him away from the temple area.” They meant, “Remove him from the earth.” They wanted him dead. Their misguided hatred of Paul was so fierce that the soldiers had to protect him forcibly as they extracted themselves out of the crowd and back into the fortress.

In ch23 we learn that the commander’s name was Claudius Lysias. Claudius is a Latin name but Lysias is Greek. This indicates that this Roman commander actually had a Greek background. Lysias was his family name, but he had added the Latin Claudius to it (to honor Caesar?). This means Greek was most likely his mother tongue. As the soldiers were leading Paul to the barracks, he spoke to the commander in educated Greek. The language of Judah was Aramaic, so Paul’s language skills surprised the commander who immediately asked, “Can you speak Greek?” He didn’t just mean, “Do you know Greek?” Many people spoke Greek. But, because he was Greek, he meant, “You speak Greek well. Are you Greek? Since Paul had been raised in Tarsus and spoke educated Greek the commander assumed he was dealing with a Greek of good education and bearing.

Paul set him straight, telling him that he was a Jew from Tarsus. But, since he was apparently in the officer’s good graces, he asked permission to address the crowd, the mob trying to kill him just 2 minutes before. Under other circumstances this Roman commander probably would have said no. But Paul seems to have impressed him as a reasonable, cultured man, and so he said yes. He thought that there must have been some mistake, and he wanted to solve the problem. If Paul’s speaking to them could clear it up, he was willing to have him go ahead. We should understand that the Romans weren’t sympathizing with Paul; they were merely interested in keeping public order. So, they arrested Paul both for his own protection and to remove the cause of the uproar.

All of this speaks to Paul’s heart for Israel. At this moment, when his life was in imminent danger from an enraged mob and he was suspected of being a dangerous criminal by the officials who held him, Paul only had 1 thing on his mind, “Let me preach the gospel!” It’s amazing that Paul could think and speak so clearly after just being severely beaten by the mob but this just points to the power of the Holy Spirit in Paul’s life and his great passion for the Jews.

Now, if CO Lysias hoped to get information about the commotion from

Paul's speech, imagine his disappointment when Paul began speaking to the mob in Aramaic. But what a dramatic moment! Paul, standing on stairs overlooking the massive open courtyard of the temple filled with his own countrymen. With a wave of his hand, the angry mob goes silent and gives him their undivided attention. This was the opportunity Paul had waited a lifetime for. Paul addresses the crowd in Aramaic in order to identify himself with his Jewish audience, not his Roman captors.

**22:1-5** – Paul gives a magnificent defense and actually uses the word defense (1). It's the Greek word apologia, (apology) and it refers to a formal defense of one's past life or actions. Paul's defense has three parts: his past life in Judaism (1-5), his conversion (6-16) and a testimony of what God said to him (17-21).

Paul had been a leading rabbi in his day so he was certainly known to some of the people in that crowd. Notice how he piles up his Jewish credentials: he was a Jew, a native of Tarsus but raised in Jerusalem, taught by the honorable Gamaliel himself, follower of the Law, zealous persecutor of the Church and a respected member of the Sanhedrin. How could his countrymen not respectfully listen to a man with that kind of record! Paul was speaking as a Jew to Jews. He was carefully laying out the extensive common ground that existed between them.

It's interesting that whenever Paul speaks of his past life, apart from the fact that he persecuted Christians, he never thought of his background as something to be ashamed of. In fact, he always speaks of it favorably (**Rom 9:4-5**). In Philippians he speaks more personally (**Phil 3:4-6**). Paul uses some of the wording from Philippians in his defense which means this was the way he usually talked about his conversion. He was a pure-blooded Jew, zealous for the traditions of Israel. He wasn't ashamed of his Jewish heritage, because God had chosen the Jews. Every spiritual advantage in history before the coming of Jesus Christ was with Judaism and Paul wasn't afraid to acknowledge it.

Still, in spite of the fact that Paul possessed this great spiritual heritage, in spite of the fact that he'd been trained in the law—the law God gave for our benefit to restrain evil and direct us to the Messiah—Paul had been woefully off base in his previous life. He'd been trying to do as a Jew the same thing the Gentiles had been trying to do with their non-biblical religions. He'd been

trying to establish a righteousness of his own. But, because he was a sinner, his righteousness wasn't a true righteousness. He had been rejecting the very salvation that God had provided. In his former life as a zealous Jew, Paul's confidence was placed firmly and tragically in his own flesh.

**6-16** – The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing Paul mentions is his conversion, when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Paul was consumed by zeal for his religion. It blinded him to what he was really doing. But when Jesus appeared to him, he suddenly understood. God had stopped him short. Before this point, he thought he was doing God's work. But when Jesus appeared to him, he realized that in persecuting Christians he'd been persecuting the very Son of God. He had actually been opposing what God was doing in the world!

From a human perspective, it's amazing that Paul was converted at all. Here's a man who was thoroughly trained in, stubbornly adhering to and zealously persecuting any who deviated from his accepted interpretation of the OT – what he honestly and accurately believed to be the very oracles of God. So how was Paul ever converted? What explains it? The only possible answer is this: Paul was converted because the Lord Jesus Christ, the living Lord of glory, appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Not some myth created by the early Christians or a hallucination; neither would have convinced one as gung-ho for Judaism as Paul was. It could only be the risen Lord Himself!

Paul then describes his entrance into Damascus as a blind man and his eventual meeting with Ananias, a man with the credentials of a good Jew who received him into the Christian family. As Paul tells it, both he and Ananias were simply behaving like good Jews. They were neither resisting the God of Israel nor denying their Jewish heritage. Paul took great pains to let them know he still served the God of his fathers. He had not rejected Judaism. The truth of the matter was that many in Judaism (most) had rejected their God as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

**17-22** – Paul begins to share what God had chosen and called him to do. He knew immediately after his conversion that God had called him to carry the gospel to the Gentiles but he didn't mention this in that section of his defense. He knew this fact would be difficult for his audience to accept. He

reminds them yet again that he was guilty of persecuting the church and even consented to the death of Stephen. Eventually, he must come to the point of his commissioning by God and tells them that God had sent him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

This is where Paul's speech ends but not because he was finished. It stops because when Paul mentioned Gentiles, the quietly listening crowd goes wild! They begin screaming, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!" (22). The noise was so loud it was impossible of carrying on any further so the commander ordered the soldiers to bring Paul inside and prepare for an interrogation. The commander didn't know what was happening, but he must've been impressed when Paul, who had just spoken to him in fluent Greek, suddenly addressed the crowd in Aramaic. And, he did so with such skill that he immediately quieted the mob down. Imagine the commander's shock when, just as he thought things were under control, suddenly everybody burst out screaming. What did this man say? What has he done?

The only thing Paul did was say: Gentiles. Why should that upset them? He had been doing everything possible to stress how Jewish he was. Paul didn't even mention the name Jesus. He had done everything he could to bridge the gap; but as soon as he uttered the word "Gentiles," the mob reacted violently and would've killed him if it could have.

Why did they object to that word? They weren't objecting to the idea that Gentiles could become Jews; that was quite an acceptable concept to them. What they were objecting to Paul's insistence that Gentiles could be saved by the God of Israel without adhering to the law of Moses, without becoming Jews. But God saves people His way, and His way is through Jesus Christ. If you're a Gentile, you can come as a Gentile. But it must be through Jesus alone. If you're a Jew, you can come as a Jew. But you must come through Christ alone. If you're Cajun, Indian, Japanese, Norwegian; you can come as you are but you can only come to God through Jesus Christ alone.

Why must we come to God in this way and not in some other way? Why can't we invent our own way? It's because God sent Jesus to be the Savior. This is how God has done it. So when we talk about the gospel today, we're not talking about a religious opinion, though the world would like to think of it as just that. We're talking about a reality, about an undeniable truth. People may respond to our message of the gospel by saying, "That's just your

opinion.” They will be exactly right – it is my opinion; but that’s not the point. Whether it’s my opinion or not doesn’t matter. What matters is – is it true!

Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus and that meeting turned his life around. God sent Jesus Christ to be your Savior. If you rebel against that fact, then you’re doing exactly what the Jews did. You’re not saying you have to become a Jew first but you are making 2 very false claims: you’re saying that you have to do something first before you can be saved (confidence in the flesh) and you want others to do it your way. If you’re thinking this way, it is not wrong to say you despise and even hate a gospel as humbling as the gospel of Jesus Christ is.

That’s the dichotomy of the gospel: it’s equally encouraging and humbling. It’s encouraging in that it declares that salvation can be acquired; it can be attained by anyone and everyone at no cost to themselves! How wonderful is that! But, in the same breath it’s humbling because it doesn’t just declare that salvation can be attained, it emphatically declares that it must be attained because no one can earn it or deserve it. It also declares that it must be attained only in the manner which God has provided. The gospel may be simple and it may be humbling, but it’s still the gospel, and it’s still the only way to be saved. May God give you grace to embrace it wholeheartedly.

Paul was misunderstood in almost every area of his Christian walk by almost everyone around him but the lesson to be gleaned from this is that all this misunderstanding, as frustrating as it must have been, didn’t in any way divert him from the ministry God had called him to.

Are we as stubborn in our resolve to answer the call of God on our lives or are we easily and consistently swayed from following it? The Bible challenges us as God’s children to be daring but before we can successfully be daring, we must first learn to be consistent: in our devotion, in our testimony, in our walk. If you desire to be used by God, that’s what it’s going to require. Let’s pray and asked the Lord to fill us with His Spirit to allow us and empower us to do just that! 😊