

# The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it – but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

*Vance Havner*

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Text

Acts 22:24 – 23:10

Topic

Paul plays his cards right and thereby avoids two hostile interrogations

Title

*Playing the Grace Card*

**Acts 22:24** the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him.

**Acts 22:25** And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?"

**Acts 22:26** When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman."

**Acts 22:27** Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" He said, "Yes."

**Acts 22:28** The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "But I was born *a citizen*."

**Acts 22:29** Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

**Acts 22:30** The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from *his* bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

**Acts 23:1** Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."

**Acts 23:2** And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.

**Acts 23:3** Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, *you* whitewashed wall! For

you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?"

**Acts 23:4** And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"

**Acts 23:5** Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.'"

**Acts 23:6** But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!"

**Acts 23:7** And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.

**Acts 23:8** For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection - and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.

**Acts 23:9** Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God."

**Acts 23:10** Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring *him* into the barracks.

## Introduction

There seems to be a lot of 'card playing' in politics these days. Candidates are described as playing the race card; or playing the gender card; or playing the terror card.

It means that a candidate appeals to one of those issues in order to trump his or her opponent in an area where they hold the advantage.

We see something similar, but far more godly, in our text:

1. When he was about to be interrogated by Roman officials Paul played the good citizenship card.
2. When he was about to be interrogated by Jewish officials he played the good conscience card.

Good citizenship before men and a good conscience before God are the by-product of walking in the grace of God. In each case Paul was playing a **grace** card that was suited to his situation.

So can you and I as we walk in the grace of God. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Keep The Laws Of The Land So You

Are Able To Play The Citizenship Card, and #2 Keep The Law Of The Lord So You Are Able To Play The Conscience Card.

#1 Keep The Laws Of The Land  
So You Are Able To Play The Citizenship Card  
(22:24-29)

We left the apostle Paul at the dramatic but sudden end of his sermon on the stairs. The angry mob that had tried to murder him flared-up again at his mention of salvation being offered to Gentiles. The Roman commander, Claudius Lycius, brought Paul to the barracks and to safety. But Paul's safety was going to be short-lived:

[Acts 22:24](#) the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him.

The [scourging](#) by Roman soldiers often killed you. It was the one done with a whip of several thongs that were embedded with bits of sharp bone and glass and metal. At the very least it could cripple you for life.

Paul played the good citizenship card.

[Acts 22:25](#) And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?"

Paul had played the good citizenship card before – in Philippi after being unlawfully beaten and incarcerated. Here he waited until he had been bound and they were just about to whip him.

The waiting tells us he was being led by the Lord to appeal to his rights as a Roman citizen only when it could help further the ministry of the Gospel. His citizenship was a tool he could use from time to time. Paul wasn't interested in his rights; only in his responsibility as a servant of Jesus.

The mention of his standing as a Roman citizen struck fear into the hearts of the soldiers.

**Acts 22:26** When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman."

They were already in trouble for binding a Roman citizen – let alone attempting to scourge him. The officials could be severely punished.

**Acts 22:27** Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" He said, "Yes."

**Acts 22:28** The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "But I was born *a citizen*."

Why this exchange? Again it shows that Paul only appealed to his citizenship in stages, as directed by the Lord. Earlier, while being carried up the stairs leading to the barracks, he had told the commander that he was from Tarsus but made no mention of his citizenship. He wasn't shouting on the stairs, "I'm a full-fledged born-Roman citizen and I demand my rights!" It wasn't about his rights at all. It was about the Gospel. His rights were a resource.

**Acts 22:29** Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

The citizenship card trumped their attempts to interrogate Paul. He had played it brilliantly and with the Lord's perfect timing to give him an advantage. Though in custody Paul was in control.

- being changed to bring change -

Let's talk about citizenship in a broader context. Remember getting a citizenship grade on your elementary school report card? You were graded as a 'citizen' of your classroom.

You are a citizen of your country, and of your classroom, and of your company, and of any place else you find yourself. As a Christian you are to walk in the grace of God in all those places and in every place. You are to be a good citizen. Keep the laws of the land – which include the rules of the company or classroom. Then, if it ever becomes necessary, you can play the grace card of citizenship and bring glory to the Lord.

I think we will excel in our citizenship on earth when we remember we are first and foremost citizens of Heaven. It puts my time on earth

into the proper perspective. I'm not at school or at work just for myself. I'm there for the Lord, as His representative. I'm to walk in His grace so others will see His love for me and for them. My life should be a display of the difference grace makes.

If I'm wronged I may or may not appeal to my rights. They are a resource and not a first resort. **My rights are not as important as Jesus Christ's death for the wrongs of those mistreating me.**

#2 Keep The Law Of The Lord  
So You Are Able To Play The Conscience Card  
(22:30-23:10)

Claudius Lycius was stymied. He still had a volatile situation on his hands. He still needed to get to the bottom of the riot.

**Acts 22:30** The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from *his* bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

This was an unofficial but powerful meeting of the ruling council called the Sanhedrin. Whether all seventy-one members were present or not they had great power over Jewish affairs.

Paul didn't wait to be interrogated. Though he was the one seemingly on trial, he set things in motion by making a powerful opening statement:

**Acts 23:1** Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."

He boldly declared that his actions were approved by God. He had nothing to defend and nothing to fear.

**Acts 23:2** And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.

**Acts 23:3** Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, *you* whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?"

**Acts 23:4** And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"

**Acts 23:5** Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.'"

There is a lot of scholarly debate on exactly what took place in this fiery exchange. Did Paul get angry and act uncharacteristically? Those who say "Yes" look at his further comments as an apology. Those who say "No" look at his supposed outburst as a prophecy and his further comments as confirmation he was led to condemn the high priest.

I think Paul was prophesying. The truth is that **Ananias** was acting unlawfully by ordering Paul struck. Those charged with keeping the **law** of God, those who were judging Paul by the **law** of God, began by breaking it. The exchange was a powerful illustration of their corruption and his good conscience. Thus when Paul said he didn't know Ananias was the high priest he meant that he wasn't acting as a high priest should. Paul's quote from Exodus established that he respected the office of the high priest even though the man occupying it was evil.

Time to play yet another grace card:

**Acts 23:6** But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!"

Paul played the **Pharisee** card. We know from reading the Gospels that the Jews were divided into two very distinct groups – Sadducees and Pharisees. The Sadducees generally were materialistic in their approach to the Scriptures and to life. The Pharisees generally were spiritual, although legalistic, in their approach to the Scriptures and to life.

Paul was a Pharisee according to his Jewish heritage. His appeal would split the council along party affiliations and prevent them from reaching any conclusions about him.

Don't let it bother you that Paul could say **I am a Pharisee**. Not "I was," but "I am." Paul understood that Christianity was the fulfillment,

the completion, of all things Jewish. The Pharisees were right about everything except they externalized rather than internalized God's law and except they rejected God's Savior.

It may strain our thinking but instead of being a Pharisee in our negative sense of the term, be a Pharisee in Paul's positive sense.

**Acts 23:7** And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.

**Acts 23:8** For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection - and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.

**Acts 23:9** Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God."

Why divide the council rather than preach a sermon? We must conclude Paul was being led by the Holy Spirit. And he did preach the Gospel! His mention of the **resurrection of the dead** was rooted in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That the council knew what he meant is evident by their mention that **a spirit or an angel has spoken to him**. They were referring to his testimony of Jesus Christ appearing to him on the road to Damascus. They knew Paul's testimony.

**Acts 23:10** Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring *him* into the barracks.

Too bad the commander wasn't Jewish or he could have said, "Oi vey!" But he couldn't just throw his hands up and walk away so he took Paul back into protective custody.

Walking in the grace of God Paul could declare that his biblically trained conscience was good before God. He wasn't hiding anything; no secret sin was to be found out; there were no skeletons in his closet.

If you've sinned, or are in sin, confess it to the Lord and He is faithful to forgive you your sin. A good conscience is a powerful prerequisite for sharing Jesus with others.

Grace cards abound. You have a deck full of them. God can provide one in any and every situation you find yourself in. We've discussed citizenship and conscience. But we could talk about dozens or hundreds of other things – like mercy and forgiveness and longsuffering and patience and forbearance and kindness and gentleness. These are all trump cards that help God take control of any situation you find yourself in so that He is glorified.

Play your grace cards right!

