



were looking for to do him in. A riot broke out, and Paul was almost killed. Because of the unrest in the city, the Romans were alerted. They stepped in just as Paul was about to be killed and saved him... by arresting him.

The next day, the Roman officer in charge wants to get to the bottom of the unrest. He doesn't understand what Paul has done wrong. So he calls a meeting of the Jewish ruling body called the Sanhedrin to try to sort everything out. So here is Paul, standing before this large crowd of Jewish leaders, and also a few prominent Romans, and he has the perfect opportunity to witness his faith... to testify about the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's see how things go!

**<sup>1</sup> Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." <sup>2</sup> At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. <sup>3</sup>**

Not a great start, right? Paul just gets out one sentence: he declares his innocence by stating that his conscience was clear. He believed that he had not violated any laws of God in his conduct in the temple. He hasn't even begun his defense! But he's already interrupted. The High Priest tells a temple guard to strike Paul on the mouth.

That the Ananias would order such an unjust punishment before Paul's guilt was determined is not surprising given what we know about the man. A historian from the time says Ananias was a cruel and despised high priest... A man primarily interested in politics, power and prestige. Certainly not a servant of God caring for the people of God.

**Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"**

**<sup>4</sup> Those who were standing near Paul said, "How dare you insult God's high priest!"**

**<sup>5</sup> Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'"**

In response to being struck, Paul responds with righteous anger. The man who ordered that he be struck was a hypocrite. He was accusing Paul of violating God's law while he publicly violated the law of God by having Paul struck when he had not yet been found guilty. While Paul had been struck in the face by man, the one giving such an unlawful order would be struck in the face by God.

Paul made this statement, not realizing he was addressing the High Priest. How could Paul not have known that the person giving the order was the High Priest? There are a number of explanations. The most interesting one suggests that Paul had poor eyesight, so he couldn't clearly see who was giving the order. This fits with Paul's practice of having a scribe transcribe his letters to the congregations. When Paul would write himself, his letters were apparently bigger and more blocky... again, seemingly because of poor eyesight.

In any event, although Paul's statement was true and accurate, those listening didn't feel he gave proper respect to the High Priest. When that fact was pointed out, Paul actually apologized. Paul respected the office of High Priest, even if he didn't respect the person holding the office. While everything Paul said was true and right, Paul himself acknowledged that he didn't give proper respect for the office.

Already, things aren't going great. Let's read on.

**<sup>6</sup> Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees,**

Let me just stop there and explain. Sadducees thought that only the first 5 books of the Bible were the true word of God. They rejected the concept of spirits and angels. They also rejected the teaching of the resurrection of the dead. They thought that when you're dead, your dead. The Pharisees, however, considered all of Old Testament Scriptures to be the word of God and they did believe in an afterlife and the resurrection of the dead.

**called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead." <sup>7</sup> When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.**

We're not sure exactly what Paul was thinking here. Did Paul intend cause a fight and an uproar in order to side track the proceedings? I don't think that was his intent. Was Paul trying to demonstrate to the Romans that he was arrested purely for religious reasons? That seems to make more sense. There is no law against having religious beliefs that are different than others. They would have to let him go. But again, things didn't quite go as planned.

**<sup>9</sup> There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" <sup>10</sup> The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.**

The trial turns into chaos as some side with Paul and others want to kill him. The situation keeps escalating. Emotions are running high. Things are taking a violent turn, so the Romans once again have to step in and forcefully remove Paul from the gathering and put him back in prison where he was safe.

Now, before we read the final verse, let's think about all this. Are you finding this text to be very motivating when it comes to being a bold witness?! If I concluded by saying, "Look at how Paul witnessed today, go and do likewise, and you will have a similar result!" Would you go and be that bold witness?

What I think this text helps us see is that perhaps our expectations about witnessing are not accurate. In fact, I believe there are myths about witnessing that will discourage us if we believe them. What myths does this text bust?

- MYTH1: When you speak, you can expect a favorable reaction.  
Have you ever thought that if you just clearly and boldly witnessed your faith, there would necessarily be a favorable reaction from those who heard? If you believe that myth, then any time you witnessed and didn't have a favorable reaction, you would conclude your witnessing was a failure. This is a lie. Paul did not get a favorable reaction from witnessing. God doesn't promise we will. If the response is negative, don't conclude your witnessing was a failure.
- MYTH 2: When you speak, people will listen, *especially* if you find common ground with them.  
Ever thought that if you speak God's truth, at the very least people will listen... especially if you find a connection with them... something you have in common? It's a myth. Sometimes

you speak God's truth and it's not heard, or the person simply doesn't pay attention. Were you a failure as a witness? Only if you're prepared to call Paul a failure.

- **MYTH 3: When you speak, you'll always say the "right thing."**  
When Paul found out the man he was rebuking was the High Priest, he clearly felt bad and apologized. He felt his comment was out of line. So if you think, "A good witness about Christ would never look back and wish he had said things differently." That's wrong! It's a myth. You were not a failure as a witness even if you wished you had said things differently. At the same time, remember that whenever you speak the truth of God, the Holy Spirit is helping you. Maybe *you* thought you said the wrong thing, but the Holy Spirit knows they were the right words at the needed time.
- **MYTH 4: When you speak, conversions will happen.**  
"I can think of a few times when I witnessed, but no one ever came to faith... no one ever started going to church. So I'm a failure at witnessing." Wrong! Paul didn't have any "success" here, but he was a faithful witness. Sometimes witnessing Christ polarizes people in their hatred of Christ. Your witnessing did something... just not what *you* wanted. God doesn't call us to convert people. He calls us to be proclaimers... heralds of his truth. The results are in his hands.
- **MYTH 5: When you speak, people will always respect you for your convictions and your sincerity.**  
Mmm, no. You may *not* gain the respect of others. You might be ridiculed for being stubborn and narrow minded. Don't expect respect for taking a stand for God's Word.
- **MYTH 6: When you speak, you can expect that you will always have opportunity to get to the "good news of Jesus" part.**  
This myth is big, because we assume that if we don't talk about Christ, we failed to witness. In this reading, Paul doesn't get the opportunity to talk about Christ. He mentions the resurrection, but not how Jesus is the one who gives eternal life. He never shared the gospel. Yet he had confronted a man (the High Priest) with his sin. Sometimes we may only be able to call sin a sin. Sometimes we broach the subject of religion and there is immediate hostility. We prodded a complacent conscience, so our "witness" was not a failure. Surely we will pray for opportunities to say more, but need not feel a failure for saying what was said.

Paul must not have felt good about that particular opportunity to witness the faith. He also must have begun to doubt whether he would have more opportunities to witness... or if he might be put to death soon. The text ends with this:

**<sup>11</sup> The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."**

The Lord stood near Paul and encouraged him. He wasn't a failure. And his life was not about to end. He was to continue to testify about the Lord.

Friends, look back at the opportunities you have had to witness. Did some opportunities pass you by? Let's stand together before the Lord and confess that sin. And let's hear together as the Lord announces his full forgiveness through his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. And let's look for those opportunities and be bold!

Did you ever take the opportunity, and consider it a failure? I pray that today's study will help you redefine that experience. Was it really a failure, or did it simply not turn out as you

expected? Paul's witness to the Sanhedrin didn't go like he wanted. But he was a faithful witness. Share your faith at every opportunity, and leave the results in God's hands. A "success" or a "win" in witnessing is simply this: Did you boldly and faithfully proclaim the truth of God? Or at least a small part of the truth of God? Good! Then you were a faithful witness for God. It's that simple.

Know this: The Lord stands near now, and the Lord stands near every time you witness. God tells you and me, "You must continue to testify"... the love of Christ compels us. God WILL continue to send opportunities your way. Get rid of all of your expectations regarding how it's going to go, and what the results will be. Both are completely unpredictable. Instead, go with resolve and determination to simply witness... no matter how it goes or how it turns out. Take courage, for the Lord is near. Be bold and glorify God by witnessing his truth! Amen.