

08.16.17

**Will Bear Witness to the Truth With an
Honorable and Cooperative Spirit
Acts Chapter 23**

The church is a strange phenomenon as you go into the Book of Acts. It is something that was not expected. If you go back through the Old Testament and try to look for the church, you would be hard pressed to find anything that has anything to do with it. It is rarely mentioned in the Old Testament with few exceptions. Let me show you a particular passage and maybe a few. But, on the whole, it was a mystery. This was one of the reasons why Paul says that he would tell us a mystery. The mystery is the church. God had called forth a nation, the nation of Israel. He had called them forth from Abraham. He told Abraham, (Genesis 12:2) “And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;”

Literally, God will hold you up as a country, a nation. Up to this point, the nations had continued to rebel against God. God said, “We will make a nation that will display the

character and nature of God. Therefore, this nation will be holy as under the Lord.” The word holy means separate, distinct, and that which would reflect God. We know that as time went on Israel did everything but that. The fact is that God had called them to be a different nation.

Leviticus is all about how different they were to be. They were to be different in the way they ate. They were to be different in the things that they celebrated. Everything was to be different. Their calendar was to be different. Even so, Israel longed to be like the other nations and tried to become like them. It lost its distinction. We do not see this thing called the church coming, but it was prophesied. Psalm Chapter 22 is a Psalm that, in a way, describes the suffering of Christ on the cross. It is prophetic in that way. In fact, the way that the Psalm starts off is prophetic.

(Psalm 22:1) “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning,”

We know instantly where that takes us. Jesus spoke those words on the cross. Verses 11-18 include a description of Christ dying on the cross.

(Psalm 22:12) “Many bulls have surrounded me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me.”

(Psalm 22:13) “They open wide their mouth at me, As a ravening and a roaring lion.”

Then He describes how He feels. If you ever want to know what and how Christ felt on the cross, it is described there in Verse 14.

(Psalm 22:14) “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me.”

It is a description of life draining out with His blood.

(Psalm 22:15) “My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death.”

(Psalm 22:16) “For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet.”

(Psalm 22:17) “I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me;”

(Psalm 22:18) “They divide my garments among them,
And for my clothing, they cast lots.”

This Psalm was written hundreds of years and maybe a thousand years before Christ even comes on the scene. If you read further, the cry begins to stir up hope.

(Psalm 22:19) “But you, O Lord, be not far off; O You my help, hasten to my assistance.”

And the wonderful text in Verse 22:

(Psalm 22:22) “I will tell of Your name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.”

Do you see the phrase “In the midst of the assembly, I will praise You”? It is the same text that we read in: (Hebrews 2:12) “I will proclaim Your name to my brethren, In the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise.”

The word for assembly, when translated from the Septuagint, or more specifically from Hebrew, into Greek, it is the word “Ekklesia.” It is the word for “church.” In Hebrews, it is literally translated as congregation or

church, depending upon the translation. The passage reads something like this: “I will tell of Your name to my brethren in the midst of the church. I will praise You.”

Psalm Chapter 22 is a prophetic text where we have not only the declaration of the Christ suffering on the cross but a picture of the hope that was to come in this new body of life, the church.

We see the birth of that church in the Book of Acts. As you look at the Book of Acts, the word church is mentioned at least eighteen times. Before that, in the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—the word church is only mentioned twice. These two are found in the Book of Matthew. The reason why they believe that it was written only in the book of Matthew was that Matthew was written to the church. Matthew was written at a later date in time when the church had already been formed. He mentions the word “church” in:

(Matthew 16:13) “Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’”

(Matthew 16:15) “He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’”

(Matthew 16:16) “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”

Then in Matthew Chapter 18, Jesus dealt with the discipline of the church.

(Matthew 18:17) “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

It is an interesting text because at the time that Jesus would have been speaking, the church had not yet been born. It reminds me of God telling Adam and Eve in:

(Genesis 2:24) “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”

I am sure that Adam and Eve were thinking, “What is a mother and father?” Neither of them had been born to a mother or father, nor had they any children yet. It is an interesting scene as Jesus described the church to His disciples before it existed. But Matthew recorded this and wrote His Gospel to the church. In the Book of Acts, we

see the birth of the church. The people did not know what would happen any more than they fathomed the fact that Christ would be resurrected. It starts off with this group of one hundred twenty people.

Note that the Book of Acts does not call it the church. Look in Acts Chapter One:

(Acts 1:15) “At this time, Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred twenty persons was there together), and said,”

It was a gathering of about 120 people. Out of this gathering, the apostles chose another apostle to lay the foundation for the church. I am not certain they completely fathomed what was going on. They did know that they were supposed to wait for an empowering because that is what Jesus had told them to do as He was taken up into heaven. What were they to do? Wait. Wait until God told them otherwise. What we see in the early stages is that church is a gathering of people. Those gathering were only Jews at this initial point. The church gathered in Jerusalem at their place of worship, the temple.

In Chapter 3, Peter saw this beggar at the temple. Why was Peter at the temple? That was where they worshipped. The church body was still worshiping at the temple. In fact, one of the texts placed them at the Portico of Solomon. There were these big colonnades where they would gather together and probably discuss things. You have this large open area in which they were probably talking about what was happening with the resurrected Christ. This grand body of people was meeting outside the temple. I would think they probably continued meeting there until around Stephen's time which is in Acts Chapter 7. By Acts Chapter 2 and then into Chapter 3, it started to be named a church. At the end of Acts Chapter 7, Stephen was killed. In Acts Chapter 8, the church was dispersed and scattered. By the time you get to Acts Chapter 12, they were no longer meeting in the temple. They were meeting in a house and probably the house where the upper room was. That was John Mark's mother's house or perhaps John Mark's house. That was where they were meeting. You see this birth come about and what made it happen. We know from Acts Chapter 2 that the birth was when the Spirit of God breathed into them. This body began to proclaim a different message than that of the Jews. It was not the Law. Rather than

declare that they served the God of Moses, they talked about the God who saved them and Who was resurrected from the dead. Their message was greater than coming out of Egypt. It was a message of eternal life. They began to proclaim this message. Here you have the church. The word church simply means the “called out” ones. *Ekklesia* is the word that is used all the way through which was different from the word synagogue which means an assembling. From *ecclesia*, we get the word ecclesiastical which makes reference to the fact that we are called out once again to be different, to be separate, for a particular work and for a particular message. Ultimately, this thing called the church will be called the bride of Christ. Stranger than all these things combined is that the church will have the highest position in all of the heavens. What a strange phenomenon that is because you did not see that coming. I think that was one of the reasons why Paul said repeatedly that this was a mystery. Almost all the other epistles—from Romans, First and Second Corinthians Thessalonians, Galatians, Ephesians—all those epistles are letters of instruction to the church. These are important letters, but you have to understand that they are all written to the church. There is no other institution that God elevates, lifts up, or builds. There is no other

institution, if I could use that word institution, that is an organism that God has ordained. There is no other institution that God ordained for the work of the service. It does not get any more complicated than that. When you look at the other books, like James and First and Second Peter, what are those books? James, the pastor of the Church of Jerusalem, wrote to his congregation who were scattered abroad because of what Saul had done. It starts off,

(James 1:1) “I, James, a bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.”

That is how he starts off. First and Second Peter will emphasize the fact that the church has been scattered, and Peter was writing to them to comfort them and to strengthen them in this difficult time. What you begin to see then is that most of the epistles are focused on the churches in Macedonia, the churches in Asia Minor, or the churches in Greece. Asia Minor is the area of present-day Turkey. The churches in Asia Minor are the ones that were fairly close to each other; specifically, it is a letter to the church at Ephesus. That would be Asia Minor. Right?

Galatia would be to the north in that same vicinity, but further to the north. Colossae is going to be in the Asia Minor area. When you look at Greece, you are looking at a place like Philippi. Corinth is in the lower part of that area. Thessalonica is in the Grecian area. Rome, of course, is in Italy. These different letters then are written to these different churches. The Book of Acts is the accounting of Paul's visits to these areas in which these churches are established. Acts is the book that points to these churches. All of those letters are directive letters to the churches telling some of them that they were doing well, but others that they were not doing well. He begins to direct and correct the things that they were doing as do the other epistles. First and Second Timothy as well as Titus and Philemon are what are called pastoral epistles. That is to say that they were written to the pastors. In First Timothy, Paul wrote to Timothy who was the pastor of the church at Ephesus. He told him how he ought to conduct himself in the household of God. When he wrote to Titus, he said, "This is how you put things in order at Crete." But he was writing to pastors. Though these letters give strong doctrine to all of us, they were more specifically addressed to the pastors of the respective churches. Almost from the Book of Acts, all the remaining letters

were focused on the churches. That is why the Book of Acts is so important.

Before we begin Chapter 23, I want to open up and talk about the church's role and how we see that role in the world that we live in as well as what the church should look like and what it should be doing. What is Scripture telling us? I think one of the reasons why I picked this particular book is that I think it is important that we ask ourselves what we are supposed to look like. What should we be doing? What does the church do? How is it built? How do you move from beginning to end within the church? Let me throw out some questions to encourage you to participate with me in this. Let me ask this fundamental question. How political is the church? First, please answer this question. You do not have to have chapter and verse. According to what Scripture says in the Book of Acts, how political should the church be? Are we supposed to be involved in the government's dealings? If we are, how? If we are not, why not? Pretty much zero. Yes. The Book of Acts does not show us having or taking part in the political system, but I believe our influence will be evident. Okay. Can you give me an example in Acts on how involved we should be? Paul's testimony before King Agrippa might indicate the church's involvement. Let me

put it another way. How patriotic is the church? Our allegiance is to the Lord first. We are in America. You are an American Christian. Right? No. I am a Christian American. I am a Christian first. We are supposed to point to Christ. It does not seem to get any more complicated than that. We see the church scattered into Syria. It goes into Antioch, Macedonia, Asia Minor, and into Italy. However, you do not see any transformation of politics in those areas. The emphasis remains the same. It is the same focus. It is all about proclaiming Christ. We see Priscilla and Aquila moved out of Rome by the government, but we do not see them complaining about it. How regimental would you say the church is? What sort of things should we be doing when we come together? How should we conduct our service? That is not set in stone. The Book of Acts does not say anything. No. All that we read in Acts is that they were devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, *koinonia*, the breaking of bread and prayer. That is it. Right? In what order do you want to put that? It does not say that there is a particular order, does it? Why do you think that is true? Maybe because the people are too diverse? You do not want to squelch the Spirit by enforcing your particular bent on the anything. The key is that the birth of the

church is born out of the Spirit, right? It was not born out of a law or a regiment or anything else. Right. You do not see that sense of, “Well, we have to do this, and we have to do that, and this is the way that it has to be done. You have to sing so many hymns. What has to be done within the church is to proclaim the Word of God. We have to preach the Word of God. The apostles devoted themselves to the Word of God and prayer. That is what they devoted themselves to doing. So where is the focus of the church? When Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, he said,

(Ephesians 4:11) “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,”

(Ephesians 4:12) “for the equipping of the saints for the work of the service, to the building up of the body of Christ;”

The emphasis is always, “Let's follow Christ. Let's do what Christ does. Let's learn about Christ. Let's be learners of Christ.” Matthew tells us where to go in order make disciples or learners of Christ. The church should be making disciples. I mean, that should be a vital part of the

church. How many programs do you see in the Book of Acts? How many social activities do you see aimed at those outside the church? I am not talking about caring about those outside the church because that is the Gospel. But you do not see the church raising money, for instance, to help the poor in the world. They did raise money to help the poor in Jerusalem in the church. But you will not see them raise money to help the poor in the world. The Gospel is what we proclaim to the ungodly and believe that if they receive the Gospel, then God will not leave them begging for bread. We believe in the Gospel solution. That is not to say that we would say, "Be warm, be filled, be clothed" if we knew that they did not have any food at that moment. But we do not perceive ourselves as fixing their lives. We perceive the Gospel as fixing their life. When they come into the church, we begin to minister to them. The church is not the answer to the world's problems in the sense of having a program or a feeding station or whatever. The church is the answer to the world's problems because we know the One who truly is their answer. The answer is Christ. It is all about Christ and nothing else. It is all about Christ. What role does money play in the church according to the Book of Acts? It supports the needs of the church. Does money make

decisions? No. Where does money come from? God is the Provider and the Giver. It was used to support Paul many times. Paul mentioned that he was being supported by the church at Philippi in Macedonia. Money was given to the church in Jerusalem because of the famine. Paul stopped making tents when he was supported, but he made tents until he was supported. The money goes to the elders who then disperse it. When we give outside of the church, we do not know where the money goes or who is making the decisions. We trust our elders. The churches collected it, and then the elders distributed it. There would have to be a level of trust. I have often told people, "If you do not trust your elders, then you need to find another church. What the elders should do is make their decisions based on the Spirit of God. Often you can look at something logistically and say, "Well, I think that person needs something," but you could make the wrong decision. The Spirit of God will direct you and say, "This is where the money needs to go." When the Spirit leads, many times it would almost seem like, pragmatically speaking, that you made a bad decision. The wisdom would be found in the unity of the Spirit by the elders. What is interesting in the Book of Acts is the fact that Paul, as an apostle who is laying the foundation,

established overseers and leaders in each church. Did you notice that? Can you give me an example of that happening? In Chapter 14:

(Acts 14:21) “After they had preached the Gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,”

(Acts 14:22) “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.’”

How complicated is the structure of the church? It is not complicated. You are looking for men of God. What do they look like? Go back to Acts Chapter 6. It is almost like he has given us a blueprint of what a church should be.

(Acts 76:2) “So, the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.’”

This is something that I had to come to terms with. I remember talking with a godly man. As we sat down and talked, he said, ‘Let me tell you something. There are a lot

of things that you can do as a pastor, and people will be impressed if you do them. You can mow the lawn. You could clean the toilets. You could do other things. Believe me, I've done all of these things. However, you need to be careful because you want to send a message to people that your main responsibility is to preach the Word of God and prayer. If you acquiesce and do what people want you to do, they will applaud you for doing this. But in the end, what you have done is to diminish the office. You cannot diminish the office.” I have often been reminded of that. The purpose of the pastor is to elevate the Word of God above everything else. This is what the disciples said in Verse 2 to the congregation of disciples.

(Acts 6:13) “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”

I think one of the good things about this text is that it is telling us that, even though a person is serving tables, his character should not be substandard. It is not saying, “Well, they were ‘just’ taking care of widows.” Yeah. But they need to be honest men taking care of widows.” They needed to be men who were caring for the widows and

thinking Spiritually rather than thinking logistically. Paul continues by talking about the ones who were approved. The value of the church in comparison to, say, a parachurch organization is that in a church, these people “see” you. When we recommend somebody before the church, we say, “All right. This is a person whom we perceive as one who is following the Lord.” But maybe the body says, “Well, no. He is a bad businessman. He cheated this person. He cheated that person.” That is why we have the church body. If you tell me that this man is not of godly character, then we will not put him in office. This is the value of the church and how God uses the church. Even though in many respects the general populace of the church may not be as holy as this individual, they can tell you if his character is good or not. One of the things that we also do is to go out into their workplace and ask their fellow workers, “How are their work habits? Are they men of integrity or not? We are looking for people who are more givers than takers. We are looking for people who are more caring about those they work with than themselves. It is an interesting passage because it talks about the fact that the congregation will recognize this.

(Acts 6:6) “And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.”

The disciples (congregation) in the early church and the apostles worked together to find and approve men of good character. There was unity in the Spirit. This is what is now called ordination, and this is where we get the procedure for the ordination of the leaders in the church. It is not a complicated process. It is a recognition of godly character. The value of the pastoral epistles is that they go into more detail. Look at First Timothy Chapter 3 where it gives the requirements for being an overseer. You have to be above reproach, the husband of one wife, and it goes down the list. Titus does the same thing in Titus Chapter 1. These are the character traits that you want to see, and it goes into more detail of what these are. If you narrow it down, choose men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom; that pretty well covers all of the criteria that are listed. It becomes an uncomplicated family. The way things are done naturally is not necessarily the way things should be done. I had someone come up to me earlier tonight who said, “This is the way that people say I should do something.” I said, “Would you take a moment and think outside the box? Do what the Lord is telling you

to do. Quit listening to the world and quit letting the world delegate what is right and what is wrong. Do not let them put you in this little box. Listen to what the Spirit of God is telling you, then go do it. Do what He tells you to do.” One of my main concerns is the habit of a lot of these smaller churches. They look for young graduates out of Bible schools or seminaries because they can manipulate them. They are not looking for experienced pastors. They are looking for somebody that they can tell what to do who will be a figurehead for them. Then they can run the church any way they want. Many of these churches are run by families. I remember sitting my son-in-law down. I said, “You will have a hard time if you do this thing Biblically. If you are the shepherd of the flock, let me tell you the way it will go. The honeymoon will last for about a year. After about a year, everybody will start showing who they really are. You can almost mark the date on your calendar.” That is exactly what happened at the next three churches where he worked. Finally, I think he came to the realization that it could not be done right unless he planted a church. I think it is unfortunate that this is true on the whole. The church itself is not complicated, but you have to get good men in the leadership. If you walk into a church and the deacon board does not have good

men in it, you are in trouble. I know it sounds simple, but that is a huge problem. You have one or two choices. You can either split the church because there will be a split if you say something about it. Or you can wait for everybody to die off because a lot of those people are not going off that board till they die. It is a difficult situation. The foundation of the church is not complicated. You see Paul looking for those men in Lystra and Iconium and those places. Paul and those with him were already much attuned to the fact that they might die for what they were doing. Men of high quality are men who are willing to die for what they believe. If you look at the church, it is not a complicated thing.

If you only have the Book of Acts, what is the purpose of the church? What would you say it is? It is a witness to Christ and the Holy Spirit. Nothing more complicated than that. Jesus said, "You shall be My witnesses." That is what He said in Acts Chapter 1. All the way through the Book of Acts, the apostles are laying the foundation of witnessing to the resurrection of Christ. They were witnessing to the power of Christ. They were witnessing to the heart of Christ. To the world they were proclaiming Christ. Paul said to the church at Corinth when he wrote to them:

(I Corinthians 1:17) “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.”

That is what the church does. The whole purpose is:

(Matthew 16:18) “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

This is what the church is about. It is not any more complicated than that. Once a church becomes a social institution, it falls away from what it was called to do. You never see the church in the Scriptures getting more complicated in that realm. What does the church do? Let me put it this way. What is the church supposed to do when it gathers together? Encourage. Okay. You see a lot of that in Paul's writings. You come to church today, and I go, “That arm will feel better tomorrow. The sun will come out tomorrow.” Is that encouragement or what? We are to encourage one another in our faith. I am trying to strengthen you in your faith. That is why you come. When you go out in the world, someone might encourage you to hit the ball harder, but the world is not going to encourage

you to love God more. People are not going to encourage you to grow in your faith. This is the only place in the world where you will get that. See what I am saying? You come together with the church for that encouragement, for that strengthening, for that building up. You are to build one another up because the world is knocking you down. It is talking a lot of trash to you and drawing you away from God.

As we come to Acts Chapter 23, it is an interesting passage because of the way that it demonstrates a dynamic of Paul as a representative of laying the foundation. Every time you see the apostles, their purpose was to lay the foundation of the church. Paul laid the foundation of the church. He demonstrated to us how we interact in the realm of the government. Without reading this whole chapter, I want to throw out a few things that jumped off the pages to me in this chapter before we delve into the text itself.

In Chapter 23, Paul was brought before the Council and more specifically, the Sanhedrin, who were not only Jewish leaders, but the Supreme Court Justices of Jerusalem. These were men of high reputation. They did not represent at this juncture the government of Israel because Rome was over the governing authorities of the

country. That is why they had Governor Pilate over Jerusalem. They would fight for governing decisions if it helped them, but they would relinquish their authority if it made them look bad. They were trying to play both ends against the middle. What we have is this Council which was representative of man's religion. What had happened at this juncture was that Judaism had become more a man's religion based on their traditions as Christ would call it.

(Matthew 15:3) “And He answered and said to them, ‘Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?’”

Much of the writings in the Talmud are the traditions of the Jews. That is one of the reasons why Paul said to Timothy, “Do not pay attention to wives’ tales.” He was quoting from the fairy tales that are written in the Talmud. They would discuss and debate all sorts of things. They would legalize things that were never part of the law. That is what man does. He will add to anything and distort everything. What you find within the passage is that Paul is controversial to the point of being adversarial toward

the religious institutions of the day. As he stood up and began to defend himself, the high priest:

(Acts 23:2) “The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.”

The high priest said that. Paul then responds:

(Acts 23:3) “Then Paul said to him, ‘God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?’”

Calling the high priest a whitewashed wall was not a nice thing to say. Essentially, Paul called him a hypocrite. “You look clean, but you are not,” Paul said to him. “God will strike you.” You know?

(Acts 23:4) “But the bystanders said, Paul, ‘Do you revile God’s high priest?’”

(Acts 23:5) “And Paul said, ‘I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’”

Probably one of the reasons why he did not know who the high priest was is because they would switch the high priesthood within the family. Also, he had not been around for a while, so he did not know that a change had been made. What he demonstrated was that he would take a strong stand, but he would do it in an honorable way. If he knew that he did something in a dishonorable way, he would apologize for it. Let me put it this way. There is a certain way that you can talk to certain people. Parents should correct their kids. You should be corrective. There might even be times when it would be good to shake your finger. But you do not want to do that to someone in authority. There is a place and a time for everything. What I have down here as the title of Chapter 23 is that the church is to bear witness to the truth with an honorable and cooperative Spirit. What I mean by cooperative Spirit is not cooperating with falsehood but cooperating with God because God is working His work and His will. I think the church has to weigh in with its mind and heart, asking itself if this is the purpose of God, and how do I do this? As you look at this chapter, what you are going to see is Paul dealing with the religious institution. You will see Paul dealing with the government. You will see Paul dealing with what seems to be family

being involved in helping him escape. In each case that you see within the text, God is using all of the things around him. You will see Paul in this adversarial situation. He was standing before the Council. They were ready to accuse him. Already the high priest has basically said what he thinks about him. Paul admits in Verse 5, “I should not have addressed you that way. I did not know you were the high priest. Then he says:

(Acts 23:6) “But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, ‘Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!’”

The Pharisees believed that there was to be a resurrection. They believed in spirits or angels. On the other hand, the Sadducees did not believe in angels nor did they believe in life after death, which is interesting. Why would you even have a religion if you did not believe that there was an afterlife? But the Sadducees did not believe that there was an afterlife. Knowing that, Paul essentially started a fight between the two groups. You can almost see a picture of Paul crawling out. We would

perceive this as a strategy. I do not know if I would necessarily nail it in that regard, but what I would say is that God gives the church and individuals wisdom. There are certain things that He wants you to use. For instance, He wants you to use your brain. He does not tell you to put your brain on hold when you are walking in the Spirit. There are certain things that He gives you to say, just as Paul said, "This is where I was born," which was a plus. God will use those things that are honorable. I think what is interesting in the passage is that Paul did not come in criticizing the Pharisees. Nor did he, for instance, turn to the Sadducees and say, "What are you morons thinking? You do not believe in a resurrection? You do not believe in angels? What is that about?" He did not do that. What did he say? He said that he believed. This is one of the things that differentiates the church. I want you to understand this because churches are often not following this. We are called to proclaim what we do believe. We are not called to tear down others. God is the Judge of the world; but believe me, God will stir things up when you proclaim what you believe. All you have to do is say, "I believe in the resurrection of the dead." Watch. There will be movement. Things will begin to pop when you proclaim what you believe. We proclaim the Gospel. We proclaim

the Good News. What is the Good News? The Good News is that you can live forever. The resurrection of the dead is good news. We proclaim that good news. You will not see in any of the texts Paul criticizing the forces that are against him. What you will see is that the greatest force against the church is going to be organized religion. That is a strange phenomenon, isn't it? What you are also going to see in the Book of Acts as it establishes the foundation is that God has ordained the government to protect the church or to move the church in the way He so ordains. It is erroneous and improper and wrong for the church to criticize the government. This is wrong because God is using the government to do his will in the church. God used the government with Nero as Caesar to chop off Paul's head. Paul knew that the time of his departure would come and that the Lord would bring him safely home. It was the government that God had ordained to crucify Jesus in order that salvation might come to you. You never see Christ or Paul or the apostles in any way tearing down the government. Even though the government is often doing horrific and terrible things against the church, the church knows that God is using that government to fulfill His will. Within this passage, it was the government that came to Paul's rescue. It was the

government that pulled him out of the situation with the Jews and locked him in prison. You go, “Well, yeah, but they were locking him in prison.” Yes. Prison was the only place that was safe for Paul at that time. There was a conspiracy in play. There was a great dissension:

(Acts 23:10) “And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.”

The government intervened on Paul’s behalf.

(Acts 23:11) “But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, ‘Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.’”

God told Paul, “Do not worry, Paul. I know everything looks like it is in confusion, but let Me tell you where we are heading.” God literally turned to Paul and said, “We are heading to Rome. You have to get there through Caesarea” which was the port city. “From there you will go

to Rome.” Caesarea was a Roman port city where he boarded a ship that took him to the place God wanted him to go. Paul began to cooperate with that plan because he knew that God had called him to obey by going to Rome. Paul was dealing with the government which was in charge, Roman soldiers; and he called upon them. Do you remember the message Paul received? His sister's son had somehow been at the right place at the right time and heard this plot to kill Paul. He brings the message to Paul who goes, “You have to tell the guards this. The nephew then tells the centurion. He said, “Look, these people have signed a decree. About 40 men have signed a decree that they were not to eat until Paul is dead. You might want to do something about that.” The centurion wasted no time in moving Paul to Caesarea. Guess who was in Caesarea? Felix. Felix and, more specifically, Cornelius. If you remember, the first Christian Gentile was Cornelius, who was a centurion. He already has Roman soldiers. In fact, there was a church in Caesarea, and that church had already encouraged Paul. Caesarea was fine with him; and God protected him. From Verses 18-23, through the commander and the centurions, all the way through, God was protecting him. The commander instructed:

(Acts 23:23) “And, he called to him two of the centurions and said, ‘Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen.’”

I mean, this guy has an entourage. Paul has an entourage accompanying him. Plus, Paul was put on a horse to ride. Did you ever picture Paul riding on a horse? Paul rode on a horse with 200 soldiers and 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen who ran alongside. All of this so that they might bring him safely to the governor. What was God doing? He was using the government. To do what? To take Paul where he needed to go. Where did he need to go? To Caesarea so he can go to Rome. Now whose idea was that? Look at Verse 11. It was God's idea. Who was He using? This is the point. He was using the government. As you read Verses 26-30, the Roman centurion in Jerusalem wrote a letter that was written on behalf of Paul. Paul did not even have to write his own letters. He had an advocate in the government who wrote for him, explaining what had happened. In the letter, he wrote that “You need to take care of this guy. You want to make sure he does not get hurt. We need to protect him until he gets

there.” Paul stayed two years in Caesarea under the protection of the guards. From what we understand, it was a Praetorian, which seemed to be a nice place. He stayed there under the protection of the guard until everything calmed down. The guys who said that they would not eat or drink anything until he was dead would, after two years, be dead. Or else they did not follow through on their vows. All through this, Acts is establishing how a church is to respond. I want you to go with me to Romans Chapter 13. I want to read this one more time to solidify this fundamental truth. Paul wrote this. I want to remind you. Paul wrote the letter to the Romans when Nero was in charge. Nero was in charge.

(Romans 13:1) “Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”

(Romans 13:2) “Therefore, whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.”

There are many times when people will oppose the government. Neither am I talking about a time when the government might tell you not to preach the Gospel.

Preach the Gospel and then say, “I know you are doing your job. Lock me up.” Then do not look for a lawyer. However, what we are talking about is that the church is often vocal against the government. I see no Scripture that emphasizes this; in fact, I see the opposite.

(Romans (13:3) “For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;”

(Romans 13:4) “for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.”

Actually, the word angel is there. Did you ever think of the government as being an angel? Right?

(Romans 13:5) “Therefore, it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.”

(Romans 13:6) “For because of this, you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.”

Pay taxes. Right. Why? Because we believe that the government is an agent of God and that God is using the government. Now He is not using organized religion because organized religion is going against Him. See? He is not using the humanism of man and the philosophies of man. They go against Him. But He is using governing authorities. Therefore, the church should always be respectful of governing authorities. It does not mean you agree with them. Paul was not agreeing with the government authorities. Even so, you submit to that governing authority, and you do not criticize them. Acts is establishing how a church is to behave in these different scenarios and under these conditions. This is one of the reasons why Paul takes us to these different places.

Prayer

Father, we want to give You thanks for Your word and how clear You are to us as You begin to point us in the direction of being a church. Lord, may we abide by what You say and what You have established in the ground rules that You have ordained. Let us not go by the fads or by what is

accepted, but by truth. And, Lord, help us to be a light that shines. Lord, we give You thanks that You are sovereign and in control of all authority. We submit. We believe. We walk by faith, not by sight. May the church ever be the proclaimer of good and never be a reviler. We ask these things in Your name. Amen.