

SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 6



PAUL'S REFUGE BEFORE THE COUNCIL

Scripture Text: Acts 23:1-11

At the close of our last lesson we read that the chief captain brought Paul, a prisoner, before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council or court. Now we follow the happenings there before the council.

Surrounded by enemies and threats, Paul had yet one refuge where all was clear and bright. It was his conscience. It felt no guilt. If we can keep our consciences clear, we need fear nothing. That is where God looks. Educate your conscience by learning God's will as given in the Bible. The Bible and the Holy Spirit always agree. Train your conscience to sensitive response by always obeying God's leading. Then never disobey or override your conscience.

MEMORY VERSE: *Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people.*

—*Psalm 96:3*

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—**1 Peter 2:11-25** The Christian and the state.

Tue.—**Daniel 2:20-30** God's authority over kings' laws.

Wed.—**Luke 10:17-24** Evil spirits subject to God's power.

Thu. **1 Corinthians 15:20-28** Even Christ is subject to God.

Fri.—**Ephesians 5:21-33** Authority in family as in church.

Devotional Reading: Romans 13:1-10 Conduct related to God.

Paul Before the Council

Acts 23:1-5 As Paul stood a prisoner before the court, he knew himself to be innocent. He made his plea of NOT GUILTY of any crime. The greatest Judge of all witnessed to his innocence. **I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day**—my experience is up to date to this moment.

Ananias was prejudiced, that is, he had judged before knowing. Paul's plea of innocence made him angry. He ordered that Paul be slapped on the mouth. Paul's sense of justice leaped up in a quick, sharp answer. **God shall smite thee**—Paul left the punishment in God's hands—**thou whited wall**—one pretending to be better than he was, a hypocrite. He accused Ananias of inconsistency in breaking the law he was to administer. Paul was not yet found guilty, so any punishment was illegal. Some rebuked Paul, reminding him this was the high priest. Paul had not known this and apologized immediately, quoting God's Law (**Exodus 22:28**).

Respect for Authority

Ananias was unjust and inconsistent in commanding Paul to be smitten. He showed himself unworthy to be high priest. Yet he was, and Paul respected the office, as he should and as God commands. Respect for authority is greatly needed in our day. Children must be taught to respect the authority of parents, pupils of teachers, citizens of laws, and all of us of God and the Bible. We need more genuine fear of God. **Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account (Hebrews 13:17; Romans 13:5-7)** Dishonor of small authority leads to dishonor of greater authority. God commands us to obey the law unless it requires disobedience of God's Laws. Then the highest authority is to be obeyed.

SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 6

Paul's Clever Strategy

Acts 23:6-9 Seeing both Pharisees and Sadducees in the council, Paul saw the opportunity of using a clever strategy to turn contention away from himself. He would use an advantage to set them against each other. He cried out that he was a Pharisee, that he was called in question for his teaching of the Resurrection of the dead. This was true. He taught that Jesus rose from the dead and that we all will be raised. Jesus' Resurrection proved Him to be the Son of God. The Jews objected to this teaching concerning Jesus. Sadducees were unbelievers, materialists, the modernists of those days. They did not believe in a Resurrection, angel, or spirit. Pharisees did believe in these and quickly took Paul's side in the issue. There was **a great cry** and contention. The Pharisees were ready to free Paul, agreeing that an angel or spirit may have spoken to him. (They would not say Jesus had spoken to him, as Paul had told the day before.) **Let us not fight against God.** Even these people who did not believe in Paul's Jesus realized how dangerous and fruitless it was to fight against God. Oh, if only we could get people who say they know Jesus to realize that to fight against God can bring only negative results, and that is to be tragically lost forever! A good conscience is the best assurance.

The Chief Captain Rescues Paul

Acts 23:10 The tumult and fighting rose to the point where Paul was in danger of being **pulled in pieces**—the Pharisees pulled one way to free him, the Sadducees pulled the other way to kill him. The chief captain sent soldiers to forcibly rescue Paul and take him into the castle. Hatred arising from religious matters is a most heated sort. Pray that you as an individual are never taken under its power.

The Lord Visits Paul

Acts 23:11 The next night in the prison Paul had a Visitor. **The Lord stood by him**—Jesus—and **said, Be of good cheer.** How often Jesus speaks to us in this way! He means for us always to have joy and peace, to be anxious for nothing but to trust Him. By this He brought encouragement to Paul. Discouragements surrounded Paul in the prison that night. The future was unknown and threatening. The only bright spot was his innocence, his clear conscience. He greatly needed the cheer and encouragement Jesus brought. Jesus told Paul he had done His will in Jerusalem, he had **testified** of Jesus there. Now he wanted him to bear witness also at Rome. Paul could now go through whatever lay ahead of him feeling the strength of Christ within him. God has tender care for the needs of His people. He could go knowing he would reach Rome and serve God there. He had hoped to go (**Acts 19:21**), but not as a prisoner. While Jesus took on Himself a human body for an extended time only once, He has visited the earth briefly various times.

JUST A THOUGHT

Be careful which way you look. Remember Lot's wife.

This lesson is adapted from a lesson by Mary Lehmann.
It is revised and posted here with written permission from
(c) Bible Paths Publications, PO Box 299, Keithville, LA 71047