

Acts 22:22-29

Prejudice, partisanship and partiality can make reasoned discussion and civil debate very difficult, if not impossible. When Paul reached Jerusalem in the late AD50s, anti-Gentile sentiment was on the increase in Judea. This may explain why the temple crowd flew into such a rage when Paul mentioned that Jesus had sent him to the Gentiles (**Acts 22:21**). Whatever goodwill Paul had seemingly gained by recounting his credentials of Jewish loyalty was lost when he clarified that the far-away ones, to whom Jesus had sent him, were Gentiles.

Summary

In Acts 22:22-29, Paul is brought back into the Roman barracks partly for his own safety from the Jewish mob and partly to be interrogated further, at which time he exercises his rights as a Roman citizen when he was about to be examined by flogging.

1. Irate Mob vv. 22-24

When Paul reported that the Lord Jesus had sent him to the Gentiles, the Jewish crowd resumed its vocal opposition (**Acts 22:22**). In their indignation they cast off their cloaks so that they could throw whatever they could find at this supposed blasphemer. In addition, they tossed dust into the air to vent their rage at Paul.

The Roman tribe had allowed this Jew to address the crowd, but the result was even more disturbance and he was still no closer to understanding cause of the uproar. He commanded a centurion to interrogate Paul with the scourge or flagellum.

2. Assertive Citizen vv. 25-29

As Paul was tied to receive the Roman lash, he asked the supervising centurion, 'Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?' (**Acts 22:25**) The centurion recognized the implied claim to Roman citizenship in Paul's question and immediately reported it to the tribune to whom Paul affirmed that he was a Roman citizen (**Acts 22:26-28**).

Roman citizens were entitled to protection from the accusations of non-citizens and from the more extreme forms of punishment. Imperial law from the time of Caesar Augustus banned the flogging of Roman citizens prior to a formal trial and sentencing. A Roman citizen could insist on a trial in Italy rather than the provinces and was not subjected to more extreme forms of execution (such as crucifixion). Technically, Roman citizenship could not be bought. It was a privilege inherited by birth or conferred in recognition for faithful service to Rome or to a Roman citizen.

Paul was such a citizen by birth. During the reign of Emperor Claudius, however, citizenship was virtually for sale to anyone who could pay the going rate. A strategic bribe had brought citizen status to one like this tribune, Lysias, opening the way for his promotion from centurion to tribune.

Understandably, the soldiers who had been ready to flog answers out of their prisoner suddenly drew back, as their commander himself was gripped with alarm. If a Roman citizen, particularly a citizen by birth, had received the brutal treatment that Lysias had ordered it would have had dire consequences for the tribune's career and person. In his subsequent report to the governor, he would put a positive spin on his role in the events (**Acts 23:27**)

3. Willing Sufferer

First, Paul did not refuse flogging because of cowardice.

Following Jesus Christ involved being willing to lay down his life for the gospel. Nevertheless, seeing the opportunity to avoid unnecessary suffering, he took it by appealing to his Roman citizenship.

Christians, Churches and other Christian organizations are at liberty to use all the legal means at their disposal when dealing with the civil authorities, including appealing decisions via the judicial process, where necessary.

Secondly, Paul exhorted Christians to submit to human governments. These authorities are from God and resisting them unlawfully is tantamount to resisting God himself (**Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-16**).

Paul also expected government officials to live up to their high calling. Although willing to suffer submissively for Jesus' sake, when necessary, Paul did not hesitate to challenge those in power to wield that power justly.

What the Roman commander in Jerusalem was going to do with Paul was unlawful (though he was unaware of it), and Paul's challenge in no way undermined his call for obedience to lawful powers. Challenging civil power, however, should always be done respectfully and with a view to honoring Christ.

Thirdly , we need to take note of what Paul was doing here.

Paul's own word to describe what he had undertaken here was a "defense" (apologia) (**Acts 22:1**). Every opportunity to witness to the gospel should be taken, and this is particularly important when we find ourselves under attack.

It is this Christ-centered and gospel-focused resolve that should strike us most of all. Even when life itself is threatened, it is the glory of Jesus Christ that should be our chief goal. In the worst circumstances imaginable, the apostle focuses on the gospel. So should we.