

**Text: Acts 22.23-30**

Today we bring Acts 22 to a close.

Once again, we come to the subject of Christian interaction with authorities.

Our title:

*Appealing to Authority*

We've completed Paul's defense before the Jewish mob. They react violently, completely losing their composure, throwing dust in the air and removing their coats.

The commentaries don't know what to make of these gestures.

Various explanations offered, but no one really knows what these actions mean, other than that the crowd is extremely angry.

The tribune brings the scene to a close, has Paul brought inside the castle immediately, and decides to gain information by interrogating the prisoner.

That is the scene, and it brings about a remarkable exchange between Paul and the tribune. That exchange forms the text for our message today.

Read Acts 22.23-30

As I said earlier, this exchange brings up again the topic of Christian interaction with authorities. We will take some time to explain the legal situation, the citizenship of both Paul and the Tribune, and then take careful note of what Paul claims, why he claims it, and the approach he takes in making his claims.

All of this (along with other passages), informs us of the Christian approach to authorities. In our day of political anxiety, understanding the Bible on this is critically important.

**Proposition: I'll give you this at the end of the message.**

## I. Understanding the law

A. The position of the tribune in Jerusalem

1. Rank

- a. The Roman army made up of Legions, led by a Legate (General)
- b. Under the Legate were 6 tribunes, with one directly responsible to the Legate (his assistant) and the others spread through the Legion

- c. The Legion broken down into Cohorts and Centuries, each century led by a Centurion, ten Centuries = a Cohort, led by a senior Centurion

## 2. Authority

- a. The governor, called a procurator, in charge of Judaea
- b. His assistant was the Tribune, who acted for him while away (governor lived in Caesarea — by the sea)

This man was a highly placed official, likely with ambitions to reach higher in the city of Rome itself.

## B. The interrogation

- 1. The Tribune didn't understand why the Jews were outraged by Paul; determined to get the truth by "*flagellum*"
  - a. A *flagellum* was a leather whip with a wooden handle
  - b. Bits of bone, stone, or metal would weight the ends of the whip
- 2. According to Roman law, interrogation by torture was permissible
  - a. Of non-citizens
  - b. Or of slaves (testimony of a slave not allowed in court without torture)

"it was legal to scourge slaves or aliens to extort confessions or to determine the truth concerning a situation."<sup>1</sup>

- 3. Since Paul spoke to the crowd in Aramaic, the Tribune likely could make little sense of his defense
  - a. If carried out, Paul would experience the worst beating of his life
  - b. The *flagellum* could kill, and often crippled those who survived

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<sup>1</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Ac 22.24-25.

### C. The laws concerning interrogation

1. As mentioned, slaves and non-citizens were subject to interrogation by flagellum
2. Citizens, during the Republic, were exempt
3. In Imperial times, citizens could receive the beating *after* conviction

### D. The law of citizenship

1. Five ways one could obtain citizenship in Rome<sup>2</sup>
  - a. Born to a Roman father
  - b. A citizen of a Roman colony
  - c. A retired auxiliary soldier
  - d. Part of a municipal aristocracy or other group honored by Rome
  - e. A slave freed by his or her owner
2. Under the emperor Claudius especially, citizenship was for sale
  - a. This was simple corruption: Claudius' wife notorious for selling citizenship
  - b. The "great sum" the Tribune paid was as a bribe to various officials, esp. the emperor himself
  - c. His name, Acts 23.26, is Claudius Lysias

"One generally took the name of the patron through whom citizenship was obtained."<sup>3</sup>

- d. This speaks to his ambition
  - 1) Normally a soldier would get citizenship on retirement
  - 2) Procuring it ahead of time indicates this man wanted to rise in the ranks

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<sup>2</sup> Keener, Ac 22.28.

<sup>3</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 465.

### 3. When the Tribune boasts of the great sum he paid...

- a. He meant to boast about his status [his relationship with Claudius]
- b. He may have looked on the disheveled apostle (after the beating by the crowd) as “not much of a citizen”
- c. By this implying “that the privilege must have become cheap of late if such a sorry-looking figure as Paul could claim it.”<sup>4</sup>
- d. Paul’s simple answer of birth-citizenship made his status superior to the Tribune

“Born citizens enjoyed greater respect than Romans who had bought their citizenship.”<sup>5</sup>

### 4. As to the validity of Paul’s claim

- a. Citizens possessed a wooden object that served as an ID card
- b. These items were valuable, and not always carried on the person
- c. However, it was a serious crime to falsely claim to be a citizen
- d. Consequently, the Tribune would accept the claim on face value

### E. The tribune’s jeopardy

1. Any officer who put a citizen to a flogging would commit a serious crime
2. The centurion in charge immediately reported Paul’s question to the Tribune
3. When Paul verified the claim, the soldiers immediately released him, with much uneasiness (29)
  - a. “immediately let go of him”
  - b. “commander also was afraid”

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<sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 421.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ac 22.26.

If Lysias was ambitious as I suggest, he no doubt saw his career passing before his eyes...

“The tribune shuddered as he realized how near he had come to perpetrating a serious illegality; indeed, he had already begun to perpetrate it by giving the order for Paul to be flogged; but at least the flogging itself had been arrested.”<sup>6</sup>

## II. Comparing circumstances (Philippi and Jerusalem)

- A. Paul also resorted to his citizenship in Philippi, this time after receiving a beating (Ac 16.19-24, 35-39)
1. Here, in a near riot situation, the city officials proceeded with a beating (19-24)
    - a. Note: with rods, not flagellum — less severe, but hard enough
    - b. No trial took place, almost mob rule
    - c. No time to make any appeal
  2. The next day, Paul will make his claim of citizenship in the calm of a release order (35-39)
    - a. Note that the magistrates exhibited great fear when they discovered their error
    - b. Paul’s motive here (I think) is to protect the Christians he leaves behind, and the fledgling church, as he departs town right away
- B. In Jerusalem, Paul is about to receive a beating, when he stops everything with a simple question (22.25)
1. The soldiers lashed his hands by a thong to a stake
  2. They likely had him stripped to the waist as well

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 422.

3. At the right moment, Paul asks the centurion in charge: “Is it lawful...”

“The seemingly innocent question immediately caught the attention of the centurion in charge of the scourging. It definitely was not legal to examine a Roman citizen by scourging. The Valerian and Porcian laws clearly established the illegality of such an act, and any Roman officer who transgressed this exemption would himself be guilty of a serious breach of law.”<sup>7</sup>

### III. Examining the appeal

A. The form of the appeal: a calm question

1. Paul makes no demand
2. Paul makes no accusation

B. Compare 1 Peter

<sup>1 Pt 2.21-24</sup> For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, <sup>22</sup> WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; <sup>23</sup> and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; <sup>24</sup> and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

1. Remember, “example” means “an elementary school lesson”
2. The lines of the lesson that we are to trace out
  - a. Commit no sin when suffering
  - b. Utter no deceit when suffering
  - c. Do not return reviling for reviling
  - d. Utter no threats
  - e. Trust yourself to God
3. And Jesus, in his great example, willingly suffered and died for our sakes

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<sup>7</sup> Polhill, Acts, 464.

C. Here is Paul, then, not insisting on rights, or taking a stand, but asking a question

“The fact that Paul raised a question in his defense rather than demanding his release reflects his self-control in this dangerous situation. He was under the Spirit’s control.”<sup>8</sup>

### Conclusion:

Our instincts run counter to this. We want to demand, not appeal.

In the political turmoil we face these days, I have sympathy with the protests of some of the protestors.

Yet I would counsel them not to break the law in their protests, to keep the peace, and simply make their cases before our officials.

But for us, as Christians, here is the lesson:

**Proposition:** The civil laws are tools Christians can appeal to for self-protection, yet the mission of Christ calls us to depend on Him, not on human laws so we can spread the gospel.

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<sup>8</sup> Constable, *Expository Notes*, Ac 22.25.