

COURAGE IN THE FACE OF CRITICISM - ACTS 22

Icebreaker: Please share a time when you found the courage to do something extraordinary.

Criticisms Levied Against Paul Read Acts 21:21 and 28

21*They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to (1) turn away from Moses, (2) telling them not to circumcise their children or (3) live according to our customs."*

27*When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, **28**shouting, "Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place."*

1. As Paul was returning to Jerusalem, what were the three areas the messianic Jews criticized Paul for? (Acts 21:21) What did the non-Christian Jews from Asia at the Temple accuse Paul of? (Acts 21:28) What did the Jews from Asia at the Temple accuse Paul of?

Paul's Response to Criticism Read Acts 22:1-21

1*"Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."* **2***When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Then Paul said: **3**"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. **4**I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, **5**as the high priest and all the Council can*

themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. **6**“About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. **7**I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’

8“ **‘Who are you, Lord?’** I asked.

“‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. **9**My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

10“ **‘What shall I do, Lord?’** I asked.

“‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ **11**My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. **12**“A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. **13**He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him. **14**“Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. **15**You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. **16**And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’ **17**“When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance **18**and saw the Lord speaking to me. ‘Quick!’ he said. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.’ **19**“‘Lord,’ I replied, ‘these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. **20**And when the blood of your martyr **a** Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’ **21**“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’

2. How did Paul get the people’s attention to start his defense against the criticism? How did he show courage?

3. What are the three parts to Paul’s testimony? (Acts 22:1-5, 22:6-10, 22:11-21)

4. What were the two life-changing questions Paul asked? What was the significance of the word “Lord” after each of these questions?
5. How did the 3-part testimony deflect criticism levied against Paul or did it?
6. What are some highlights of your personal testimony?
7. Why does sharing your testimony require courage? Where does the courage come from? (Reference Luke 12:11-12)

Crowd’s Reaction Read Acts 22:22-31

22*The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!”* **23***As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air,* **24***the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this.*

8. Who were “they” referred to in verse 22?
9. What were their reactions to Paul’s being sent to the Gentiles according to 22:21?
10. What did their shouting provoke?
11. How have people reacted to your testimony or witness?

12. How have you reacted to people who responded negatively to your testimony or witness?

Paul's Nuclear Option Read Acts 22:25

25As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" **26**The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them. **27**When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, **28**shouting, "Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place." **29**Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains. **30**The commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.

13. What legal rights did Paul exert to counter the criticism against him?

14. What legal actions do Christians have today in light of mounting hostility toward Christianity? How do we choose to exercise these actions or not?

15. How did the legal authority react to Paul's declaration? What was accomplished in God's sovereign will?

16. How should we Christians today exercise our religious rights afforded by the constitution while still exercising love and acceptance for those who are critical of us?