

# A Practical Study of ACTS:

## Take It To Them!

### “Putting the GO Back in the Gospel”

#### Study Number Nineteen – Acts 23:1-35

John DeLorean made a statement in his book that goes something like this:

(DeLorean by John Z. DeLorean)

Each day it became harder to voice that false optimism. Each morning I looked in the mirror and saw a man hours closer to ruin. My face was tired and drawn. But John Z. DeLorean, CEO of his own company, the man in charge, the celebrity, Mr. Cool, the glamorous husband of the beautiful Cristina, could never let on that he was close to ruin himself—financially, physically, and emotionally.

I was out of control, a situation that, for me, was a sin as great as the “sin” other people credited to me when I left General Motors. If I couldn’t rely on *my* skills, *my* incredible good luck, the special touch that had propelled *me* through General Motors faster than any man in recent corporate history, then where could I turn? I *had* to be in control. I had to be constantly “up” for others so that I could generate enthusiasm in them and, as a result, fresh money I was desperate to have. I...I...I...

Deep inside, I knew I needed something more. My arrogance and pride were killing me.

It was in those desperate hours that I decided I needed a little assistance from a higher power—just until I could get on my feet. I still had to be the one in charge of my life, but I could use a little boost from “the man upstairs.” Just a turbo-charge boost from God so I could continue being in control. And that’s when I turned to Sonja in earnest. [She was a medium, a spiritess.] She suddenly became the only person in the world to whom I could tell the truth about our company’s situation.

(source unknown)

We read something like that and we realize that men, women, boys and girls too, will struggle to find anything whereby they can get something from God. And when we turn to the book of Acts we see a man like the apostle Paul whose life is never the same after meeting Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road.

His only goal and purpose for the rest of his life is well described in:

### Philippians 1:20

According to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

The scene of our study opens with the apostle Paul still

hurting pretty badly. In our two previous episodes, he was warned about going to Jerusalem but he felt that it was God's will for him to go and so he did.

He stirred up a riot in the city. And as a result of that riot, he nearly lost his life. And from that experience, as he's taken by the commander to the barracks, he asks for the privilege of giving a speech to these people who are trying to kill him. And the apostle gives a marvelous speech that we looked at last week from the stairs.

Everybody listened as he spoke in fluent Aramaic, respecting the fact that he was speaking in the mother language. But then he came to one word—he said the word “Gentiles” and they started throwing dirt in the air and saying, “A man like this is not fit to be living on the earth! Away with him!”

Well, commander C.L. is so confused he takes him in the barracks and commands that he be scourged. And we talked about scourging and we talked about the fact that the apostle Paul finds his protection in his Roman citizenship.

And so finally the commander, pressed against the wall, doesn't understand what's going on. Paul is not the Egyptian he thought he was. He's a Jew from Tarsus and he can't understand why these other Jews don't like him.

“And he's a Roman citizen so I can't scourge him. The one thing I'm going to do is I'm going to put him before the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews, and let him see what

he's going to do in that kind of situation.”

In our last study we had him standing on the stairs ready to give his speech. And now we have him standing before the Sanhedrin ready to give it.

So he's before the Sanhedrin. Get in mind the picture of a man who is battered and bloody, he's still bruised and broken from the beating that he got yesterday. He probably has a lot of pain now because it's been long enough and the hurt is really there. He's feeling an intense sense of loneliness. All of his friends have pretty much abandoned him. He's probably scared of the unknown.

And remember how we ended our last study? Probably uppermost in his mind is the other two people who were before the Sanhedrin ahead of him. Neither one of them came out alive.

Stephen was stoned to death and he's the first martyr of the church in Acts 7. And Jesus Christ, twenty-nine years ago was led out to crucifixion. So he has those feelings. He really means that when he says, “I want Christ glorified in my life, whether by life or by death. But that still doesn't mean that you can't, you just can't get discouraged.”

How much can a man take before he breaks? Anyone of us would have broken a long time ago. We couldn't take all of this whipping and beating and railing accusations. We would not be able to stand and to speak to people who hated us like that,

and yet they do.

Maybe inside he's like us. He's saying, "Lord, how long do I have to go before I taste some success? Please, just a ray of light in this darkness! Somehow Lord could we have the road a little level? This uphill into the wind is just really bothering me intensely and I hurt, hurt, deeply.

But now inside there's one other thought this man has. The thought that he has is this is the greatest opportunity that he's ever had in his life. His heart-cry is for his people, that they would come to know the Lord.

And the ruling body of the Jews is the Sanhedrin. Ladies and gentlemen, this is like speaking before the Senate and the House of Representatives. He is speaking before an influential body—great opportunity. Twenty years ago he served on this body. But now after becoming a Christian he's been away for many, many years in his missionary ministry. And so in a way it's like coming home.

And as he stands there in the Sanhedrin—that's where we left him—there are some thoughts going on in his mind. He thinks back that twenty years ago when Stephen stood there and he sat on the Sanhedrin.

Now he's standing where Stephen stood and the Sanhedrin's still meeting and they haven't changed. So he really thinks that maybe this is his final message and he's hoping and praying that he can do as good a job as Stephen did.

The greatest message in the Bible is Acts 7—incredible statement of faith by Stephen. And Paul had to be deeply touched by that message so he's ready now to give his.

As he stands there, the scene of the study opens in verse 1.

**v. 1 And Paul, having looked intently at the Sanhedrin, said: “Men, brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.”**

“And Paul, having looked intently at the Sanhedrin, said: ‘Men, brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.’”

Now why does he look at them “intently?” There are two reasons:

1. He's looking to RECOGNIZE but
2. He's also looking to REBUKE.

Know how somebody is fidgeting or doing something and they're acting like they're not paying attention? The trick of a public speaker is to look right at them. It's kind of a rebuke. It's almost like saying, “Would you sit still!”

He's looking at them to rebuke them for why in the world he needs to be here in the first place. They have hatred in their

eyes and they don't like him. And he's rebuking them for that.

But he's also looking at them to recognize them. The apostle has never been able to see well since he saw the light on the Damascus Road. The man says, when he writes the book of Galatians:

### Galatians 6:11

See what large letters I write.

He has a thorn in the flesh that he prayed would be taken away and the Lord said no, "but My grace is sufficient for you." (ref. 2 Corinthians 12:9)

The loved apostle did not experience the healing that he prayed for. And as a result of that, he's never been able to see really well. There's most likely another factor and that is, his eyes are probably still puffed up from the beating yesterday and he lost his contacts in that battle out there outside the temple.

And he flat cannot see very well at all and he's looking, squinting, knowing that twenty years ago he can recognize some of the lines in their faces. And he's thinking, "There's Joe and there's Mack and there's Jack." And he sees these guys and he's looking at them and he starts his message. But look at the statement he makes:

"Men, brethren,"—they are his brethren—"I have lived my life

with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.”

Is that a rebuke? Why in the world does the Sanhedrin need to even meet if that’s true? Because if a man has a perfectly good conscience before God, then they’re out of it in even thinking that something is wrong with him.

Now this is vindicated by the apostle in one other address that we’re to see.

### Acts 24:16

Herein do I exercise myself to always have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men.

“I want to be right with God and I want to be right with my fellow man.”

Can we say that? Do we know in our heart right now that we’re right with God and with our fellow men?

One of the ways we can tell whether we’re not right with God is by our relationship with our fellow men too. When they’re all out of whack, it only tells us we have something wrong on the vertical. And when things are really right on the vertical, we’re exuding the love and the patience and the compassion of Jesus Christ. It’s awfully hard to get angry at somebody like that—walking in the Spirit rather than in the flesh.

Well these guys are going to get upset! So his opening remark

is a stern rebuke to the Sanhedrin. They sure don't feel this way about Paul.

**v. 2 And the high priest Ananias ordered those standing beside him to be striking him on the mouth.**

“And the high priest Ananias ordered those standing beside him to be striking him in the mouth.”

They had an iron-heeled shoe for this purpose. When anybody spoke blasphemy the High Priest could say, “Smack them in the mouth!” They'd take this iron-heeled shoe and just hit them in the mouth.

Now was he hit in the mouth yesterday? Ever been hit somewhere you've been hit once before? And how much more it hurts the second time? Plus the pain to his pride over what has just happened in being struck? He doesn't understand what's going on.

**v. 3 Then Paul said to him, “God is about to be striking you, you white-washed wall! And are you sitting, judging me according to the Law, and violating the Law you are ordering me to be struck?”**

“Then Paul said to him,”

“Well bless you sir. I forgive you for that.” Is that what he says?

Now some people have the idea that when somebody is really spiritual they never lose it. Well here's a spiritual man that just lost it. We cannot get around these words no matter how we look at them. They make us chuckle because he's so human. It's delightful that the Bible paints this, warts and all. Look at that.

“Paul said to him, ‘God is about to be striking you, you white-washed wall! And are you sitting, judging me according to the Law, and violating the Law you are ordering me to be struck?’”

He lost it didn't he? How well he wanted to do before his peers.

It's kind of like the Super Bowl. Those guys have played that game a dozen times but when that kick-off floats down, the guy who has to receive the kick-off has had that in his mind sixteen jillion times. But if he fumbles it, it's probably going to be the outcome of the ballgame. And he knows it! Talk about a pressure situation.

Paul is there. The ball just comes floating down to him and he loses it! He fumbles! The wheels come off and the wagon turns over and he doesn't even get a chance to witness.

Now we can't say that he's not mad because we don't call somebody a name without being mad at them. When we get mad at somebody we also punctuate it with a name. And he calls these guys a “white-washed wall!” Now that's what the

Lord called them too. He said you're "white-washed walls full of dead men's bones," when He spoke to them. (ref. Matthew 23:27)

But how carefully he had planned his testimony. It was probably just like Stephen's. He had all the Old Testament from the Abrahamic covenant clear down to the person of Christ. He had it all proved through David and through everything else. And he was ready to give it and now he lost it. And he dreamed of this powerful presentation, and now it's gone.

What did he do wrong? When he writes the book of Romans, he tells us what he did wrong. Sometimes we read the guy's stuff later on and we discover what he did wrong.

### Romans 12:19

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," says the Lord.

How did the Lord handle it when He got hit in the mouth before the same group? Listen to this back in Matthew:

### Matthew 26:62-67

The high priest stood up and he said to him, "Do You make no answer? What is it these men are testifying against You?" But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure

You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Then the high priest tore his robes, saying, “He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; what do you think?” They answered and said, “He is deserving of death!” Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists, and others slapped Him.

But we don't find anywhere that He said anything.

### Matthew 26:68

and they said, “Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is it that hit You?”

Paul knows all about that. He wasn't scourged in the last chapter because that would be violating human dignity. But he can be slapped by the religious leaders in this chapter and violate human dignity by the Jews.

And so he just lost it:

“God is about to smack you, you big hypocrite full of pomp and circumstance!”

“Are you sitting there, judging me according to the Law, and violating the Law you are ordering me to be struck?”

Why does he talk so directly to him? He knows the guy is a glutton. He knows the guy has taken the tithes from the people and put them in his own pocket. They know that he's a stool-pigeon to the Roman government. So all of these things have repulsed him as a person, but it's not an excuse for losing it at this critical time.

**v. 4 And those standing by said: “Are you reviling God’s high priest?”**

“And those standing by said: ‘Are you reviling God’s high priest?’”

Now obviously his eyesight created a problem. He didn't know that Ananias was the high priest and that he was the one making the order. So Paul is standing there now with egg all over his face.

Have we ever done that in our life? When we didn't have all the facts and we reacted to a situation and we feel horrible? We're standing there in total violation and somebody has just pointed out the error of our ways, how we're going to handle that kind of thing.

Paul has had an early fumble and the intensity is incredible. He's prepared for it perfectly and he gets blown out of the water before he can get it together.

The big problem with those kinds of things is eating crow

afterwards, isn't it? It doesn't taste very good. And we have to do something about it.

We are going to find the kind of person that is involved when we do that. Now we do that with our kids, don't we? We wish so many times that we could respond to them instead of reacting to them. They say something and we think, "Oh man, I hurt in that situation."

Judy Viorst in her book *Necessary Losses* talks about sibling rivalry and how hard it is. And she had this little poem in there:

(Necessary Losses: The Loves, Illusions, Dependencies, and Impossible Expectations That All of Us Have to Give Up in Order to Grow by Judith Viorst)

My [momma] says I'm her sugarplum.  
My [momma] says I'm her lamb.  
My [momma] says I'm completely perfect  
Just the way I am.  
My mom says I'm a super-special  
wonderful terrible little guy.  
My mom just had another baby.  
Why?  
(source unknown)

That's it right there! We can just see it!

Okay, how do we handle it when we're standing there with

egg all over our face? Most of us have to excuse it. We have to figure out some way to excuse it.

And then if we don't excuse it, we have to defend ourselves by putting it off on the other person. The incredible person is the person who can humbly apologize saying, "I am fallible. I've made a mistake. I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?"

Paul immediately knows he's wrong. He lost it in anger, but he rebuked the high priest and that's a violation of the Law. And watch how he does it—verse 5.

**v. 5 And Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was high priest, for it has been written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"**

"And Paul said, 'I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest, for it has been written, "You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

He even quotes the passage of the Law that he's broken. Talk about somebody who can own up to it and get it right, he does it.

But now, because he has been so wrong in the mistake he made, he can't hold it together. So he's going to go to Plan B. When we fail with Plan A, we go to Plan B? Well he's going to go to Plan B. And if we can't witness, we start a war. And he knows these guys.

These are like the Democrats and the Republicans. They don't have the same philosophy at all. These are the Pharisees and the Sadducees sitting in this group and they're divided. And he thinks, "Now I can't get a witness so I'm going to start a war and get out of this situation." And that's exactly what he does.

Actually this mistake is almost as bad as the other one.

**v. 6 Now, Paul having perceived that one party were Sadducees and the other Pharisees was crying out in the Sanhedrin, "Men, brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am being judged for the hope and resurrection of the dead!"**

"Now, Paul having perceived that one party were Sadducees and the other Pharisees was crying out in the Sanhedrin, 'Men, brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am being judged for the hope and resurrection of the dead!'"

Now what's wrong with that? Well the Pharisees believed in the "resurrection of the dead." The Sadducees DIDN'T believe in the "resurrection of the dead."

The Pharisees believed in the resurrection and the Pharisees believed in spirits. And the Sadducees didn't believe in spirits and didn't believe in the resurrection from the dead, and that is why they're "sad, you see?"

**v. 7 And as he was saying this, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.**

“And as he was saying this,”—look what happened—“there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.”

**v. 8 For Sadducees are saying that there is no resurrection, nor an angel nor a spirit; but the Pharisees are acknowledging them all.**

“For Sadducees are saying that there is no resurrection, there are no angels nor a spirit; but the Pharisees are acknowledging them all.”

So that’s what started the big fight!

**v. 9 And there arose a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party having stood up were arguing heatedly, saying: “We are finding nothing wrong with this man; and what if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?”**

“And there arose a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party having stood up were arguing heatedly, saying: ‘We are finding nothing wrong with this man; and what if a spirit or an angel did speak to him?’”

He was a Pharisee. He was a part of the Pharisaic party

before he became a Christian and some of them knew that. And so they're standing up for him now.

**v. 10 And as a great dissension was developing, the commander having become afraid lest Paul would be torn in pieces by them ordered the soldiers, having gone down, to take him by force from their midst, and to be bringing him into the barracks.**

“And as a great dissension was developing, the commander having become afraid lest Paul would be torn in pieces by them ordered the soldiers, having gone down, to take him by force from their midst, and to be bringing him into the barracks.”

What did he do? That's the second time he's saved his life. The first time was when he was getting torn apart outside the temple after that riot in study #1. And now he comes again!

What would have happened if he hadn't come down there? The same thing that happened to Stephen. They'd take him to the rock pile and they'd have finished him in a hurry. They were gnashing on Stephen and angry at him and just grabbed him as a mob, took him down there and stoned him to death!

So C.L. comes to the rescue again. He can't figure out what in the world is going on, he's tried to be peace-loving, he has tried to work it out. He thought he was an Egyptian. He thought he was Jew. He thought he was going to get it right and he's getting it wrong every time. Poor C.L.

What happens to Paul when he's taken out of there and he's brought back into the barracks? Paul's probably sitting on his bunk and he's dejected, he's humiliated, he's whipped, he's disenchanted, and all of his dreams have been his witness for God have all of a sudden just folded up! And as the cameras zoom in on the apostle, we see him with his head in his hands and tears are running out from his fingers and down and dripping off his elbows.

This man is crushed. He's a tender man and he really wanted to do good before his own people and now there's just no hope.

And like Juanita Ryan in the little book *Standing By* says:

(Standing By: Being there for a Friend in Crisis by Juanita R. Ryan)

O God!  
No! This cannot be happening.  
It is not right.  
I protest this pain.  
I will not accept this quietly!  
It is not fair.

O God!  
Did you allow this evil?  
I have a right to be angry.  
I am hurt, I can't stop my tears.  
Why? God, Why?

I am angry that you let this happen.  
I am angry at those who caused this to happen.  
(source unknown)

And then in another prayer she says:

(Standing By: Being there for a Friend in Crisis by Juanita R. Ryan)

O God,  
Be merciful to me!

I have sinned  
and I am crushed with the weight of my guilt.  
Every day when I awake, it confronts me again.  
Every night I struggle with the agony of it.  
(source unknown)

And Paul is sitting there a real failure.

Isn't God good though? God knows just how long to let us have our little pity party. For Paul it's 24 hours. And then the Lord will come along and He'll have an answer!

We say, "Well He never answers me." Have we ever been still and know that He's God? Have we ever given Him time to talk to us through the Word?

Isaiah 30:21

Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, “This is the way walk ye in it. When you turn to the right hand, and then to the left.”

And look at verse 11. Isn't that great?

Enter the Lord into the situation 24 hours later!

**v. 11 And on the next night the Lord, having taken His stand at his side, said, “Take courage; for as you witnessed with reference to the things concerning me in Jerusalem, so you must witness in Rome also.”**

“And on the next night the Lord, having taken His stand at his side, said,”

“Paul, why'd you blow it?”—is that what He said?

“Take courage; for as you witnessed with reference to the things concerning me in Jerusalem, so you must witness in Rome also.”

Now say the man's not in the will of God! That he has not scrutinized the fact that the Lord wanted him in Jerusalem as a witness! And the one big thing he still wants to do with his life is to go to Rome! Oh how neat the Lord is!

Psalm 37:4

Delight yourself in the Lord and He'll give you the desires of your heart.

The Lord is just the greatest coach in the whole world! He lets him stew over it for 24 hours and then He comes in and He says, "Buck up man. The opera ain't over until the fat lady sings." That's a little different terminology but He doesn't speak of the failure. Notice that? He never does.

With the Prodigal Son, God is pictured as an old man running to get his arms around that kid and he says, "This, my son, was dead, is alive again. Let us rejoice and be merry!" (see Luke 15:21-24)

To the woman in John 8, caught in the act of adultery, He does not go into the gory details. He says:

### John 8:11

Neither do I condemn you; go and no longer be sinning.

God deals with the problem in a very precious and personal way. And He affirms, He encourages and He points to the future.

As he's laid this big egg and he's sitting there in self-pity hoping it'll hatch, the Lord comes along and says, "That's alright! We lose some and we win some! You won one here and you lost one. You're one and one. Now we're going to Rome.

You're still my quarterback. Everything's going to be alright. You just come and rest in Me and let things work out. My plan is for you to go on to Rome."

The problem with most of us, when we have that kind of thing, we extend the pity party into the pit of depression. And then we have a horrible problem. We have a person who is just so down and defeated he's not good for himself nor anybody else. Living in that pit of depression, we have to go seek help and see if we can find somebody to get out of that so we can get on with it.

The Lord says, "Now don't do that! You've got a big ballgame just ahead in Rome! It's going to be alright. I've got your life planned. Everything's going to work out alright. Just don't sit here and worry about what happened before the Sanhedrin. Forget that!"

That's what he meant in Philippians when he says:

### Philippians 3:13

I forget those things which are behind and I press toward those things which are in front.

When the PAST quarrels with the PRESENT, there's going to be no FUTURE. Right? And he's freed from that. He's ready to get on with it.

Now look at verse 12.

**v. 12 And when it was day, the Jews, having formed a conspiracy, bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they killed Paul.**

“And when it was day, the Jews, having formed a conspiracy, bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they killed Paul.”

That’s always the way it is. We feel like we’ve really got a handle on what the Lord’s trying to say to us and we wake up the next morning and everything’s contrary to what we just heard.

The Lord tests us to see if we really do believe Him. And can the Lord handle a conspiracy of 40 men who aren’t going to eat or drink until they kill Paul? Can he hang onto those words now that he has done it in Jerusalem? He’s going to do it in Rome!

Or are these boys going to be able to fool God and kill the apostle all of a sudden? God does that. He comes along with a wonderful promise to us and He tells us and we’re at peace. And then the first contrary wind that blows the next day, low and behold, here we are right back in the big middle of it.

**v. 13 And there were more than forty who formed this plot.**

“And there were more than forty who formed this plot.”

**v. 14 And they having come to the chief priests and the elders, said: “We bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we killed Paul.**

“And they having come to the chief priests and the elders, said: ‘We bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we killed Paul.’”

If the Lord really means what He said, these guys are going to get awful hungry. They’re not going to get him!

**v. 15 Now, therefore, you with the Sanhedrin notify the commander so that he might bring him down to you, as though you were about to be judging the things concerning him more accurately. And as for us before he comes near, we are ready to slay him.**

“Now, therefore, you with the Sanhedrin notify the commander so that he might bring him down to you, as though you were about to be judging the things concerning him more accurately. And as for us before he comes near, we are ready to slay him.”

Their plan is, “Y’all reconvene the Sanhedrin and then tell old C.L. that you need Paul down here because you want to listen to him one more time and decide on his case. And then on the way down, 40 of us are going to strap it on him. We’re going to get him before he gets to the Sanhedrin.” That’s their plan.

How does the Lord handle a crisis like that? A great big emergency like this? How's God going to handle it?

Isn't God good? He just punches that big computer in the sky and out comes a nephew. This is the only verse in the Bible that tells anything about Paul's family. He does have a sister who's living in Jerusalem.

**v. 16 But the son of Paul's sister, having heard of their ambush, having come and having entered the barracks, told Paul.**

“But the son of Paul's sister, having heard of their ambush, having come and having entered the barracks, told Paul.”

Now who would have ever thought that'd happen? Paul's nephew hired on with one of the local delivery companies there and he was with Federal Express in the Jerusalem office. And he bought himself a Moped in view of the fact that he was going to be getting a salary. And he has his first delivery and low and behold it's the synagogue office building that he's going to.

And he just hops on and he has this Federal Express package and he rolls up and puts it in the handicapped parking place at the front and runs inside and he's going to make his delivery. And as he's walking down the hall to the secretary, he hears some guys talking in here and he hears uncle Paul's name mentioned.

And when he hears uncle Paul's name, he just freezes right by the door and he listens to the whole thing. And after he hears it, he makes his delivery and runs down and jumps on the Moped and he goes all the way to the Army base. Now we don't know how in the world he got in there but he's going in there to tell Paul.

Notice what happens. Just as soon as he gets there, he rushes in.

**v. 17 And Paul having called one of the centurions to him was saying: “Be taking this young man to the commander, for he is having something to report to him.”**

“And Paul”—as soon as he hears it—“having called one of the centurions to him was saying: ‘Be taking this young man to the commander,’”

C.L. is going to say, “Oh no, not again. I can't believe this guy!”

“for he is having something to report to him.”

It's highly classified information. “Take him immediately to him.”

Now, is Paul trusting God when he tells him to do that? You bet he is! He's not disbelieving God. The information's given to him so he acts on it. He says, “take him to the commander so

he hears the information and he does something about it.”

**v. 18 So, having taken him, he brought him to the commander and he is saying: “The prisoner Paul having called me to him asked me to bring this young man to you, since he is having something to say to you.”**

“So, having taken him, he brought him to the commander and he is saying: “The prisoner Paul having called me to him asked me to bring this young man to you, since he is having something to say.””

And old C.L. is saying, “Now what have I done?” What is it with this guy?

**v. 19 Then the commander having taken him by his hand and having stepped aside, he was inquiring of him privately, “What is it that you are having to report to me?”**

“Then the commander having taken him by his hand and having stepped aside,”

He is not going to let anything go by because he has had enough problems as it is in this deal.

“he was inquiring of him privately, ‘What is it that you are having to report to me?’”

“Listen, lay it on me. I’m all ears.” We can just hear him.  
“Nothing will surprise me. I’ve heard it all already about this guy.”

**v. 20 And he said, “The Jews agreed among themselves to ask you to bring Paul down to the Sanhedrin tomorrow, as though about to be inquiring more accurately concerning him.**

“And he said, “The Jews agreed among themselves to ask you to bring Paul down to the Sanhedrin tomorrow, as though about to be inquiring more accurately concerning him.”

**v. 21 As for you, therefore, do not permit yourself to be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in wait for him who bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you.”**

“As for you, therefore, do not permit yourself to be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in wait for him who bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready, and they are waiting for a promise from you.”

**v. 22 Therefore the commander let the young man go, having instructed him: “Tell no one that you notified me of these things.”**

“Therefore the commander let the young man go, having instructed him: ‘Tell no one that you notified me of these things.’”

He says to the young man, “Don’t even tell your mother. No leaks—just you and me. Not a word! This is serious!”

**v. 23 And after he called to him two of the centurions, he said: “Make ready two hundred soldiers by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, and seventy horsemen and two hundred bowmen.”**

“And after he called to him two centurions, he said: ‘Make ready two hundred soldiers by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, and seventy horsemen and two hundred bowmen.’”

This is Operation Paul to Caesarea—O.P.C. for short. And there are going to be 470 men involved in this operation. At 21:00 hours, at 9:00 p.m., as soon as all the stores close in the mall and the streets clear, they are leaving for Caesarea about 50 or 60 miles to the northwest where his boss resides and where he’ll have a chance to have a fair trial.

Does God know how to work the deals out? God really does it up choice. Doesn’t He?

When we trust Him and He does it, He fulfills His promise to the obedient heart! God does that! It’s wonderful to claim the promise. Some are sitting here in our skepticism and saying,

“Oh I’ve been claiming the promise and He hasn’t done anything.”

Listen, that’s not a problem with God. That’s a problem with us. If it’s short circuiting and we aren’t getting any action, we should look at ourselves not at God.

The disobedient heart will never claim anything from God. But when we deal with the problem and clear it up, God will be faithful in His promises of the word to us as an individual, as we delight ourselves in Him.

Now notice what He does. He does one thing more—verse 24. The Lord always does it this way. Kind of exceedingly abundant.

**v. 24 And furnish them beasts of burden, in order that having mounted Paul upon one they might bring him safely through to Felix the governor.**

“And furnish them beasts of burden, in order that having mounted Paul upon one they might bring him safely through to Felix the governor.”

He doesn’t even have to walk. He’s going to get a free ride all the way to Caesarea.

Now C.L. has to do one more thing. He’s going to write a letter to Felix the governor. And we’re going to meet old Felix in our next study.

**v. 25 And he wrote a letter having this form:**

“And he wrote a letter having this form:”

**v. 26 Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent Governor Felix, greetings.**

“Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent Governor Felix, greetings.”

This is the way they always did it. They always put their name first and then they give their greetings and to whom the letter was written.

**v. 27 When this man had been arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, having come upon them with the troops, I rescued, having learned that he was a Roman.**

“When this man had been arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, having come upon them with the troops, I rescued, having learned that he was a Roman.”

What is so great about that verse? Is that human nature or is that human nature?

What do we do when we write our resume? We don't ever say a thing about when we were fired, do we? We have a way of leaving that off the resume, don't we? Or anything that would

look negative to a prospective employer—we leave off. We just kind of get a blank space at that point.

C.L. is that way! What does he leave out of this thing? He's writing to his boss so what does he leave out? Well the fact that he arrested him and put him in chains and he was about to scourge him. Those were the three things—the no-no's that you don't do to a Roman citizen. And he did it! He's guilty!

But he doesn't say that! He just says, "having learned that he was a Roman."

We leave all the failures out.

**v. 28 And desiring to know fully the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Sanhedrin;**

"And desiring to know fully the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Sanhedrin;"

**v. 29 whom I found to be accused concerning questions of their Law, but having no accusation worthy of death or of bonds.**

"whom I found to be accused concerning questions of their Law, but having no accusation worthy of death or of bonds."

**v. 30 And when it was pointed out to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you**

**immediately, having given orders also to his accusers to be telling before you what they have against him.**

“And when it was pointed out to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you immediately, having given orders also to his accusers to be telling before you what they have against him.”

Sincerely,  
C.L., Commander of the Felix Force in Jerusalem

That’s his letter. That’s the document that’s now being sent with the apostle to Felix in Caesarea.

**v. 31 So then the soldiers, according to the orders given them, having taken Paul, brought him by night to Antipatris.**

“So then the soldiers, according to the orders given them, having taken Paul, brought him by night to Antipatris.”

They leave at 9:00 right on schedule. Antipatris is about 30 miles northwest of Jerusalem, about half way to Caesarea. It’s a military outpost. And so that’s how far they’re going to get.

How is Paul feeling? He’s riding along on his beast of burden and there’s a guy playing the guitar and he’s singing, “By the time I get to Phoenix the Sanhedrin will be ringing my phone off the wall! I’m getting out of it! All 40 of these guys are not

going to be able to touch me!”

And what else is he saying?

“To God be the glory, great things He hath done. I’m on my way to Rome.”

He’s at perfect peace! God knew that this man was going to face a horrendous price to go into that city of Jerusalem and he was willing to do it. And he did it! And God vindicated His servant, even though everybody else said don’t go because it’s not God’s will to go. God vindicates him and takes him out of the city royally after he gives his witness from the top of the stairs and before the Sanhedrin. That’s the last time the Jews are going to get a chance. They’ve rejected the Messiah for the last time and Paul is taken from that city.

God always has a way of working it out if we’ll just be patient and let God work it. And it’ll be so great when we see it.

**v. 32 And on the next day, having left the horsemen to be going on with him, they returned to the barracks.**

“And on the next day, having left the horsemen to be going on with him, they returned to the barracks.”

Well, 400 of them went back to Jerusalem. The 70 in the cavalry took him on to Caesarea because he’s out of danger now.

**v. 33** And when these came to Caesarea and having delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him.

“And when these came to Caesarea and having delivered the letter to the governor,”—to Felix—“they also presented Paul to him.”

**v. 34** And when he read it, he also asked from what province he was; and when he learned that he was from Cilicia,

“And when he read it, he asked from what province he was; and when he learned that he was from Cilicia,”

**v. 35** he was saying: ‘I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also,’ having given orders for him to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium.

“he was saying: “I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also,” having given orders for him to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium.”

Herod’s Hilton—The “Praetorium” is a fabulous place to stay while you’re being detained.

God not only gives him a royal trip up in a ride, but He gives him a great place to stay for the five days while we’re going to wait for the accusers to come up and to present their trial and

their case.

It's going to be so fun to see the apostle Paul stand before Felix and be charged and watch him handle it.

Listen, you're going to love every one of these studies. They just build one upon the other in beauty as we watch a man who loves Jesus Christ and has nothing in mind except to glorify Christ, to glorify Him in a beautiful way in the way he conducts his affairs.

Now we have some great lessons out of it. Let's just go over them as we get ready to close.

Lesson #1: It is possible to have a good conscience before God and before men.

Don't be excusing disobedience and sin in your life and going around saying that everything's alright between you and God. Well listen, if it's sin and it's wrong, we don't have a good relationship with God, something's wrong. It's possible to have that. Ask God to search your heart and try your thoughts to be sure that we're right before Him.

Lesson #2: REACTION instead of a RESPONSE ruined Paul's opportunity for witness.

He got mad. He lost it. And he lost his witness.

How many times have we done that? We had a chance to be a

real good witness and we lost it?

Lesson #3: The character of a man is revealed by how he handles a mistake.

Does he excuse, defend, or apologize?

Paul apologizes. “I didn’t know he was the high priest but this is what the Law says and I just broke it. I’m really sorry.” He takes a place of weakness before his peers in the Sanhedrin.

Lesson #4: The Lord often comes to us on the field of our defeat with words of affirmation and encouragement.

He doesn’t come with this critical, condemning, assassinating attitude to cut us to pieces. Watch how He handles Peter after he blows it: “Do you love Me? Then feed My sheep. Do you really love Me? Then feed My lambs.”

Every time we see the Lord handling a situation when someone has failed, we see how loving and kind and gracious He is.

The Lord often comes to us on the field of our defeat with words of affirmation and encouragement. “Paul, that’s alright. You did it in Jerusalem, we’re going to do it in Rome. We’ve got someplace to go yet.”

Lesson #5: God is faithful to His promise of protection for Paul to see that he gets to Rome.

Guess what? He gets to Rome before we're through. God is faithful.

Lesson #6: God uses a nephew and a Roman commander to accomplish His purposes.

Everyone's known to Him! He can order events and circumstances to make it happen around us just like He did for Paul.

Lesson #7: God often gives us a real opportunity to trust Him following the promise.

The promise was, "you're going to Rome." And the next morning he hears there are 40 people who are going to kill him! And they're not going to eat until they do. And God many times will give us an opportunity to trust Him after the promise has been made.

And then Paul once again has discovered that great truth in:

### 2 Corinthians 12:9

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

The apostle is a beautiful demonstration of a person who has

one supreme goal and desire. And that's to please Jesus Christ.

Do we know Him?

We who know Him will be caught up in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, into His presence.

And perhaps some might say, "Yes, I know Him but I'm living in disobedience. And I know now that the reason I'm suffering so much and I'm hurting so bad is because of that disobedience. Can I clear that up?"

Yes!

Isaiah 1:18

"Come now and let us reason together," saith the Lord.  
"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.  
Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

And maybe some are saying, "As far as I know, I've got a conscience right with God and right with my fellow man, but I am really hurting."

Then God is working in our life to produce Christlikeness. He has no other way to build Christian character than for us to suffer. We hurt for each other. Just as God let the hedge down so Job suffered, he became a better man through that. God used it.

Christine Wyrzten has a recording called “For Those Who Hurt.” She concludes it with a little song:

Those of us who are God’s children  
Need not wander aimlessly when suffering comes.  
We’ve been given a pattern:  
Christ who suffered for us is our example.

This musical collection is given to you in love.  
It is offered as an encouragement,  
For hope is born when we follow Christ,  
And will be culminated on the glorious  
Day when we shall, for the first time,  
See Him.

Lie down, find your rest in the loving arms  
Of Jesus come build your happiness  
And the world can’t harm you anymore.  
You’re protected by the blood of Christ our Lord.

We know that we sin,  
But if you ask God’s forgiveness,  
There’s perfect peace in Him.  
And the world can’t harm you anymore,  
You’re protected by the blood of Christ our Lord.

And when a soul is born to Him,  
The angels start to sing,  
Alleluia, alleluia, give glory to the King.

So let the angels sing once more,  
Will you acknowledge Jesus as your one and only Lord,  
And the world can't harm you anymore,  
You're protected by the blood of Christ our Lord.  
(source unknown)

Father, we really sense Your presence. We've hurt with Paul when he lost his chance to witness to the people who he really loved the most and wanted to share with. We can identify with the pain of his failure as he sat there in that cell and cried. But thank You that 24 hours later You came and brought healing with a promise for the future. Lord, there are some who need a special touch from You to bring healing so they can go on with their lives. Please free them to come to You, to make those things right. That their conscience may be void of offense toward You and toward their fellow men. And they put themselves in a position of Your blessing. Thank You for being so patient with us and so kind. Please enable us somehow to repay You by being faithful and obedient as You teach us Your Word, to be quick to obey it and to live in it and rejoice in it. And really be sensitive to times when we get a chance to witness and not react but respond to the stresses of life so that people can really see Christ living in us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

# A Practical Study of ACTS:

## Take It To Them!

### “Putting the GO Back in the Gospel”

#### STUDY NUMBER NINETEEN – ACTS 23:1-35

#### NOTES

v. 1 And Paul, having looked intently at the Sanhedrin, said: “Men, brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.”

v. 2 And the high priest Ananias ordered those standing beside him to be striking him on the mouth.

v. 3 Then Paul said to him, “God is about to be striking you, you white-washed wall! And are you sitting, judging me according to the Law, and violating the Law you are ordering me to be struck?”

v. 4 And those standing by said: “Are you reviling God’s high priest?”

v. 5 And Paul said, “I did not know, brethren, that he was high priest, for it has been written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’”

v. 6 Now, Paul having perceived that one party were Sadducees and the other Pharisees was crying out in the Sanhedrin, “Men, brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am being judged for the hope and resurrection of the dead!”

v. 7 And as he was saying this, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.

v. 8 For Sadducees are saying that there is no resurrection, nor an angel nor a spirit; but the Pharisees are acknowledging them all.

v. 9 And there arose a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party having stood up were arguing heatedly, saying: “We are finding nothing wrong with this man; and what if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?”

v. 10 And as a great dissension was developing, the commander having become afraid lest Paul would be torn in pieces by them ordered the soldiers, having gone down, to take him by force from their midst, and to be bringing him into the barracks.

## NOTES

v. 11 And on the next night the Lord, having taken His stand at his side, said, “Take courage; for as you witnessed with reference to the things concerning me in Jerusalem, so you must witness in Rome also.”

v. 12 And when it was day, the Jews, having formed a conspiracy, bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they killed Paul.

v. 13 And there were more than forty who formed this plot.

v. 14 And they having come to the chief priests and the elders, said: “We bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we killed Paul.

v. 15 Now, therefore, you with the Sanhedrin notify the commander so that he might bring him down to you, as though you were about to be judging the things concerning him more accurately. And as for us before he comes near, we are ready to slay him.

v. 16 But the son of Paul’s sister, having heard of their ambush, having come and having entered the barracks, told Paul.

v. 17 And Paul having called one of the centurions to him was saying: “Be taking this young man to the commander, for he is having something to report to him.”

v. 18 So, having taken him, he brought him to the commander and he is saying: “The prisoner Paul having called me to him asked me to bring this young man to you, since he is having something to say to you.”

v. 19 Then the commander having taken him by his hand and having stepped aside, he was inquiring of him privately, “What is it that you are having to report to me?”

v. 20 And he said, “The Jews agreed among themselves to ask you to bring Paul down to the Sanhedrin tomorrow, as though about to be inquiring more accurately concerning him.

v. 21 As for you, therefore, do not permit yourself to be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in wait for him who bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you.”

v. 22 Therefore the commander let the young man go, having instructed him: “Tell no one that you notified me of these things.”

v. 23 And after he called to him two of the centurions, he said: “Make ready two hundred soldiers by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, and seventy horsemen and two hundred bowmen.”

## NOTES

v. 24 And furnish them beasts of burden, in order that having mounted Paul upon one they might bring him safely through to Felix the governor.

v. 25 And he wrote a letter having this form:

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v. 27 When this man had been arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, having come upon them with the troops, I rescued, having learned that he was a Roman.

v. 28 And desiring to know fully the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Sanhedrin;

v. 29 whom I found to be accused concerning questions of their Law, but having no accusation worthy of death or of bonds.

v. 30 And when it was pointed out to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you immediately, having given orders also to his accusers to be telling before you what they have against him.

v. 31 So then the soldiers, according to the orders given them, having taken Paul, brought him by night to Antipatris.

v. 32 And on the next day, having left the horsemen to be going on with him, they returned to the barracks.

v. 33 And when these came to Caesarea and having delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him.

v. 34 And when he read it, he also asked from what province he was; and when he learned that he was from Cilicia,

v. 35 he was saying: 'I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also,' having given orders for him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

## QUESTIONS:

1. Read Acts 23:1-35 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

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2. How does Paul characterize himself before the Sanhedrin in verse 1?

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3. How does the high priest respond to this claim, according to verse 2?

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4. How does Paul bring about a division in the Sanhedrin, according to verses 6-9?

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5. What instructions does Paul receive from the Lord in verse 11?

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6. Who keeps Paul from being ambushed and slain, according to verse 16?

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7. How does the commander thwart the Jewish conspiracy, according to verse 23?

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8. To whom is Paul taken, according to verse 24?

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9. What verse in the study has meant the most to you?

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10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

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## LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: It is possible to have a good conscience before God and before men.

LESSON #2: Reaction instead of a response ruined Paul's opportunity for witness.

LESSON #3: The character of a man is revealed by how he handles a mistake. Does he excuse, defend, or apologize?

LESSON #4: The Lord often comes to us on the field of our defeat with words of affirmation and encouragement.

LESSON #5: God is faithful to His promise of protection for Paul to see that he gets to Rome.

LESSON #6: God uses a nephew and a Roman commander to accomplish His purposes.

LESSON #7: God often gives us a real opportunity to trust Him following the promise.