

Divide and Conquer (Act 23:6-10)

- I. This study should teach us:
 1. to be wise unto the way this world works, but not to be of it.
 2. how to use strategy when dealing with enemies.
 3. how to use our opponents weakness against them.
 4. how to use the mechanisms of this world to save us from the wicked intentions of the men of this world.
- II. As Christians we should be wise unto that which is good, but simple concerning evil (**Rom 16:19**).
 1. This doesn't mean that we should be ignorant of how the world works and should not use wisdom and strategy to get through this world.
 - A. Jesus teaches us to be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (**Mat 10:16**).
 - B. Paul teaches us to use the world, but not abuse it (**1 Co 7:31**).
 - C. Paul teaches us to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise men (**Eph 5:15**).
 - a. Circumspectly - In a circumspect manner, with circumspection; cautiously, warily, carefully.
 - b. We should therefore be paying attention to our surroundings (literally and figuratively) so that we are not taken by surprise.
 - c. "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished." (**Pro 22:3**)
 2. Jesus commended an unjust steward for his craftiness (**Luk 16:1-12**).
 - A. To their credit, Jesus said that the children of this world are wiser than the children of light (**Luk 16:8**).
 - B. Jesus instructed His disciples to make friends of the "mammon of unrighteousness", in other words saying to learn how to use this world, but not abuse it (**Luk 16:9 c/w 1 Co 7:31**).
- III. An overview.
 1. In Acts 23:1-10, the apostle Paul had found himself in front of a Jewish counsel consisting of the high priest and Pharisees and Sadducees.
 - A. In this account, Paul demonstrated for us how to use wit and wisdom to use his persecutors' weakness against them and so to deliver himself from them.
 - B. This is a pattern we should follow (**1 Co 11:1**).
 2. Let's first look at the events that led up to Paul being brought before the council in Acts 23 and how Paul employed different methods to deliver himself from his persecutors.
- IV. Strategy #1: Using diplomacy to reason with your enemies.
 1. The Jews had taken Paul captive when they found him in the temple (**Act 21:26-30**).
 2. Paul was providentially saved from being killed by the Jews by the Roman army (**Act 21:31-36**).
 3. Paul first attempted to reason with the Jews and give his defense (**Act 21:37-22:21**).
 - A. This should always be our first recourse, to settle with our enemies quickly, before the situation escalates (**Mat 5:25-26**).
 - B. If possible, we should live peaceably with all men (**Rom 12:18**).
 4. Having listened up to the point of God telling Paul to go to the Gentiles, the Jews then demanded his death (**Act 22:22-23**).

5. The chief captain then commanded that he should be bound and scourged so that they could find out why the Jews cried against him (**Act 22:24**).
 - A. That was quite the jurisprudence!
 - B. This was not the first time a righteous man was guilty until proven innocent (**Joh 18:29-30**).
 - C. This is about like Jay Carney, President Obama's press secretary, defending the president's kill list.
 - D. It was apparently customary to scourge an innocent man under Roman rule (**Joh 18:38 c/w Joh 19:1**).

V. Strategy #2: Appealing to the law to escape from your enemies.

1. At this point, Paul used his wild card and asked them if it is lawful to scourge a Roman who is uncondemned (**Act 22:25**).
 - A. Paul was appealing to the law of the land which protected him as a Roman citizen (**Act 21:39; Act 22:3**).
 - B. This was not the first time Paul had appealed to his status as a Roman citizen (**Act 16:37-38**).
 - C. Paul had apparently learned his lesson from when he was beaten and put in jail in Philippi (**Act 16:22-24**), and this time used his citizen trump card *before* being beaten and bound.
 - D. This is lesson for us, that at times it may be wise to appeal to our rights as US citizens if we are being prosecuted wrongly.
2. When the centurion found out that Paul was a Roman citizen he stopped binding him and told the chief captain (**Act 22:26-29**).
 - A. The chief captain was afraid when he found out Paul was a citizen because he had bound him (**Act 22:29**).
 - B. It is a good government that fears the law and respects its citizens.
 - C. One of the law's functions is to protect citizens from their government, which is the purpose of the Bill of Rights of the US Constitution.
 - D. "Let no more be said about the confidence of men, but bind them down from mischief with the chains of the Constitution". - Thomas Jefferson
 - E. This wasn't the first time that the Roman magistrates feared when they had trampled on the rights of a citizen (**Act 16:35-39**).
 - a. Paul asserted his rights that time, being so confident that he demanded that the magistrates come and personally release him from prison (**Act 16:37**).
 - b. The magistrates changed their tune slightly when they found out Paul's status (**Act 16:39**).
3. Being humbled, having found out Paul's civil status, the chief captain adopts a new method of investigation, rather than the "beat first, ask questions later" approach (**Act 22:30 c/w Act 22:24**).
 - A. He removed the handcuffs and gave Paul his day in court to face his accusers.
 - B. This was the way Roman law was supposed to be administered (**Act 25:16**).
 - C. This is called the writ of Habeas Corpus.
 - D. Paul's appeal to the civil law had spared him a beating.
 - E. Paul could thank God for delivering him out of all of his persecutions (**2Ti 3:11**).
 - F. The Lord helps those who help themselves.

- VI. Strategy #3: Divide and conquer; using your enemies' weakness against them.
1. Paul was brought before the council and once again tried to reason with them (**Act 23:1**).
 - A. He declared to them that he had lived in good conscience all his life.
 - a. Paul stated this fact more than once in his defense and in his letter to Timothy (**Act 24:16; 2Ti 1:3**).
 - b. Paul also impressed upon Timothy, the young preacher whom he had trained and ordained, the importance of maintaining a good conscience (**1Ti 1:5,19**).
 - c. Even when Paul was persecuting Christians and Jesus Christ Himself, he did it with a good conscience (**Act 26:9 c/w Joh 16:2**).
 2. Paul *earnestly* beheld the council (**Act 23:1**).
 - A. Earnestly - In an earnest manner; in a manner indicating earnestness.
 - B. Earnest - *adj.* - 1. Of persons: Serious, as opposed to trifling; usually in emphatic sense, intensely serious, gravely impassioned, in any purpose, feeling, conviction, or action; sincerely zealous. Of feelings, convictions, etc.: Intense, ardent. Of actions or words: Proceeding from or implying intensity of feeling or conviction.
 3. At that point, it appears that the council were all unified *against* Paul (**Act 22:30 - 23:1**).
 4. Paul *perceived* that the one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees (**Act 23:6**).
 - A. Perceive - *v.* 1. To apprehend with the mind; to become aware or conscious of; to observe, understand.
 - B. Paul was being circumspect (**Eph 5:15**).
 - C. He was foreseeing the evil and hiding himself (**Pro 22:3**).
 5. Paul knew some things about the Pharisees and the Sadducees.
 - A. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection (**Mat 22:23; Act 23:8**).
 - B. They also denied that there are angels or spirits (**Act 23:8**).
 - C. The Pharisees confessed both (**Act 23:8**).
 - D. They also believed in the resurrection (**Act 24:15**).
 - E. The Pharisees and Sadducees were about as different as the liberal Episcopalians and the fundamentalist Baptists.
 6. Paul was a Pharisee (**Act 23:6**).
 - A. Paul was brought up under a reputed Pharisee named Gamaliel (**Act 22:3 c/w Act 5:34**).
 - B. Until his conversion, Paul lived as a Pharisee after the most straitest sect of the Jewish religion (**Act 26:5; Phi 3:5**).
 - C. Paul was even more zealous than the other Pharisees (**Gal 1:14**).
 7. Paul's strategy: divide and conquer.
 - A. Though Paul counted his former life as a Pharisee as dung (**Phi 3:7-8**) and had renounced it (at least the wicked parts of it) (**2Co 4:2**), he could still use it to his advantage since he still believed some of the fundamental doctrine that they did, such as the resurrection.
 - B. "We must never think the worse of any truth of God, nor be more shy of owning it, for its being held by men otherwise corrupt." - Matthew Henry
 - C. Paul then used their weakness against them, which was their lack of unity, and sided with his enemies, the Pharisees, and declared that he was one of them and that he believed in the resurrection (**Act 23:6**).
 - a. Unity causes stability and builds up a group (**Eph 4:13-16**).

- b. Division and strife will cause a group to consume itself (**1Co 3:3 c/w Gal 5:15**).
 - c. Strife causes confusion (**Jam 3:16**).
 - d. If Paul could get the council divided, he could overthrow their purposes.
 - e. This would have been tantamount to crying out, "I am a member of a sovereign grace church and I believe in predestination and election" if you were surrounded by a group of Calvinists and Arminians who were arguing with you.
- D. Paul's strategy was successful and caused a dissension and a division between his enemies (**Act 23:7**).
 - a. Dissension - 1. Disagreement in opinion; esp. such disagreement as produces strife or contention; discord; an instance of this, a violent disagreement or quarrel arising from difference of opinion.
 - b. Because they disagreed on the resurrection, they strove together (**Act 23:8-9**).
 - c. This is how the Lord destroyed Israel's enemy, the Midianites, in the days of Gideon (**Jdg 7:20-22**).
- E. The Pharisees then did a 180 and sided with their enemy, Paul, saying "We find no evil in this man" (**Act 23:9**).
 - a. They used the occasion to not only strive with the Sadducees about the resurrection, but also to get in a jab at them by saying that if a spirit or an angel had spoken to Paul (both of which the Sadducees denied (**Act 23:8**)), then they shouldn't fight against God (**Act 23:9**).
 - b. They had wisely taken the advice of one of their leaders, Gamaliel (**Act 5:38-39**), even if it was not due of the best motives.
 - c. Sometimes people will even set their differences aside and join with an enemy when they have a greater common enemy (**Act 17:18; Luk 23:12**).
- F. The Pharisees and Sadducees went from having a dissension to *a great dissension* (probably in part due to the Pharisees bringing up angels and spirits) (**Act 23:10**).
 - a. Rather than being united *against* Paul, they ended up *fighting over* Paul to the point that it looked like they might pull him in half (**Act 23:10**).
 - b. Paul's ways had pleased the Lord and He made his enemies to be at peace with him (sort of) (**Pro 16:7**).
 - c. God has been known to reward faithfulness in such ways (**2Ch 17:6,10-11**).
- G. The civil authorities ended up coming to Paul's rescue (**Act 23:10**).
 - a. This wasn't the first time this happened (**Act 21:30-35**).
 - b. And it wouldn't be the last time either (**Act 23:12-27**).
 - c. Paul could be confident because of past deliverances that God would deliver him again (**2Co 1:8-10**).