

## **Act 23:1-11 – Quick Thinking**

### **1. Introduction:**

a. Question: There is an ancient proverb that states “The enemy of my enemy is my friend.” What does this mean? Why do you think this is often the case?

b. Question: Another old adage tells us that, “War makes strong bedfellows.” What does this mean? How could the alliance of England, the United States and Russia be considered as strange bedfellows? What brought them together in WWII?

**2. Read:** Acts 23:1-11, “And looking intently at the council, Paul said, ‘Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.’<sup>2</sup> And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.<sup>3</sup> Then Paul said to him, ‘God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?’<sup>4</sup> Those who stood by said, ‘Would you revile God’s high priest?’<sup>5</sup> And Paul said, ‘I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’<sup>6</sup> Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, ‘Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.’<sup>7</sup> And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.<sup>8</sup> For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.<sup>9</sup> Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees’ party stood up and contended sharply, ‘We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?’<sup>10</sup> And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.<sup>11</sup> The following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.’”

a. Question: What does Paul mean in verse 11 when he says, “I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day?”

b. Question: Why do you suppose the High Priest ordered Paul to be struck “on the mouth?”

c. Question: Paul’s reaction included the phrase “whitewashed wall.” What does whitewashing do?

d. Jesus used the imagery of whitewashing in Matthew 23:25-28 when He said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.<sup>26</sup> You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.<sup>27</sup> “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within

are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. <sup>28</sup> So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

e. Question: Can you think of a modern-day example of a person looking good but in actuality being nothing more than a “whitewashed tomb?”

f. Many explanations have been put forward as to why Paul didn't recognize the Chief Priest including, Paul's absence from Jerusalem for many years or poor eyesight but we simply don't know from the text.

g. In verse 6 we read about how Paul used the sharp differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees to his advantage by saying, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.”

h. Question: What was the primary issue between the Pharisees and the Sadducees?

i. Question: How could the Sadducees limiting the scriptures to the first five books of the Bible while the Pharisees accepting the whole Old Testament have contributed to the division between them?

j. Question: Can you think of any examples today that separate people of faith?

k. 1 Peter 3:13-17 provides sound guidance for addressing differences between people of faith. “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, <sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.”

l. Question: How does Romans 12:14-18 help us when we have disagreements with others? “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. <sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”