

PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY EIGHTEEN

Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12

You know what the problem is for the Jewish officials? It's old wounds. It's the bleeding of bitterness coming out from the past. Paul used to be one of these men, and now he is a turncoat in their eyes, following this Jesus and "Telling us He has been raised from the dead." So Paul goes on defense.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

CRITICS are a lot like yellowjackets.

Yellowjackets—those annoying, sometimes dangerous pests that sting, inflict great pain, and then fly off. Worse yet, when a yellowjacket stings, it releases an alarm pheromone that stirs nearby yellowjackets to follow suit and relentlessly sting their unsuspecting and throbbing victim. They swarm and are nearly impossible to get rid of. Something like a mob mentality.

Critics can inflict great pain as well. They tend to be the wrong people, who show up at the wrong time, with the wrong information, who unload in the wrong tone. A casual friend may offer “constructive criticism” after we’ve made an innocent mistake, but it doesn’t help. It just stings.

Sometimes, criticisms are levied anonymously, cowardly, from those hiding behind a keyboard. In a world of critics, our challenge—in life and in ministry—is to build up a tough hide that can shield against their stingers while keeping a tender heart that still exudes the love of Christ.

The apostle Paul was no stranger to criticism. Everywhere he traveled proclaiming and teaching the gospel, he ran into hives of yellowjackets, enemies who accused and criticized him relentlessly.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we consider a long line of constant critics who hounded and hated Paul, seeking any way possible to defame and destroy him. We’ll zero in on how Paul calmly defused his critics, defended his innocence, and declared the Messiah.



Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Amid lies and hateful criticism, Paul stood firmly on the promises of God. Meditate on [Psalm 119:49–56](#) in *The Message*, and as you open the Word, write your own prayer of trust in God's promises.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

At the close of his third missionary journey, Paul returned to Jerusalem. He had been mistreated, maligned, and misrepresented throughout his travels. Paul praised God for his successes, “for a wide door for effective service has opened to me,” while admitting the struggles, “there are many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:9 NASB).

His persecution wouldn't cease. Adversaries from Asia trailed him all the way to Jerusalem. According to Acts 21–23, they stirred up crowds and stirred up trouble. Paul was beaten, falsely accused, and arrested. In five venues, he would defend himself and the gospel he proclaimed. His first defense was before the temple mob, and the second was before the Jewish Sanhedrin. Take a moment to review these defenses in [Acts 22:1–21; 23:1–10](#), which we examined in the previous study.

Then, the Jews conspired to kill him. But, the Lord told Paul that he would “preach the Good News in Rome” (Acts 23:11)—placing His sovereign hand of protection on Paul's life for future ministry. Hurried to safety in Caesarea, Paul would stand trial three more times, facing sham charges in a series of kangaroo courts. We'll cover two of these trials in this study—one before governor Felix and, two years later, the other before governor Festus.





Observation and Interpretation: Paul . . . Handling Criticism Well



Let's join Paul as he makes his defense in each situation and models *seven right responses* to criticism that we can use when critics lob accusations at us. Use your observation and interpretation skills in the charts below.¹ For interpretation, use your Bible-study resources like [Constable's Notes](#) (netbible.org), the [IVP New Testament Commentary on Acts](#) (biblegateway.com), [Bible maps](#) (insight.org/maps) and the [Holman Bible Dictionary](#) (studylight.org). Also, in case you don't have a copy in your library, be sure to grab Pastor Chuck's commentary [Insights on Acts](#) at [insight.org/store](#).

Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12

| Number One: Paul Refused to Be Caught up in the Emotion of the Charges <i>Acts 24:1–10</i> | |
|--|--|
|  Observation |  Interpretation |
| Read Acts 24:1–10 . Summarize Tertullus' presentation of the charges against Paul. | How did Paul demonstrate avoidance of emotional engagement in the charges directed at him? How can believers today model his response? |



Chances are good when we are criticized, we pick up the emotion of the one criticizing us. And we become sometimes angrier than the one who's criticized us. At that point, straight thinking goes out the window, and we begin to get lost in the morass of defending ourselves and closing our minds to a wise approach to what might be used or said. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

| Number Two: Paul Stayed with the Facts <i>Acts 24:11–12</i> | |
|--|--|
|  Observation |  Interpretation |
| Read Acts 24:11–12 . What was Paul's focus when addressing the governor? | Record a principle or two from Paul's response that is instructive for Christians in similar situations. |



He's just spelling out the facts—one, two, three. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12

| Number Three: Paul Told the Truth with a Clear Conscience <i>Acts 24:13–16</i> | |
|---|--|
|  Observation |  Interpretation |
| Read Acts 24:13–16 . Summarize Paul’s rejoinder to the charges levied against him. What did he affirm and what did he deny? | Record two timeless principles about faithfulness in truth-telling. |



Don’t get anywhere near a falsehood. As soon as you step into a lie, you weaken your case, and you will never be free. It’s “the truth that sets us free.”
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

| Number Four: Paul Identified the Original Source of the Criticism <i>Acts 24:17–19</i> | |
|---|--|
|  Observation |  Interpretation |
| Read Acts 24:17–19 . How did Paul identify his original critics—the ones at the temple who falsely accused him? | How did Paul’s action build accountability into the trial? Record a principle about the impact of hearsay within the body of Christ. |



It only complicates when you bring others into the setting and then shape their opinions based on what you have to say about this situation.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12

| Number Five: Paul Would Not Surrender and Quit <i>Acts 24:19–21</i> | |
|--|--|
|  Observation |  Interpretation |
| Read Acts 24:19–21 . Describe Paul’s method and tone when addressing the governor. | For believers, record a principle about tenacity when defending and/or advancing truth. |



He had been beaten, but he got right back up. He had been accused, but he stood firm in the truth. He had been followed, but he didn’t run from them. He had been knocked down, but the man would not give up. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

| Number Six: Paul Did Not Become Impatient or Bitter <i>Acts 24:22–25:10</i> | |
|---|---|
|  Observation |  Interpretation |
| Read Acts 24:22–25:10 . Summarize Paul’s circumstances and experiences following his trial. | How was Paul able to maintain patience and clear thinking despite his circumstances? Record one principle for Christians today. |

Paul was left in confinement for two years! Paul could be out, but he was left waiting. Two years! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12

| Number Seven: Paul Stood on the Promise of God <i>Acts 25:11–12</i> | |
|--|--|
|  Observation |  Interpretation |
| Read Acts 25:11–12 . What was Paul's challenge and appeal before Festus? | How was the exchange between Paul and Festus a fulfillment of Acts 23:11 ? Record one timeless principle about God's sovereignty and faithfulness. |

*God, who is in heaven, is the sovereign of this earth and the heavens above us.
When He told Paul, "You will go to Rome," Paul went to Rome.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Correlation: Fear Not . . . Be Strong

Scripture is full of God's promises for His children, and some specific promises are more than sufficient for believers to ably manage life's inevitable critics.

[Isaiah 41:10](#) contains both commands and promises. Record the commands and promises.

According to [Ephesians 6:10–12](#), what are Christians commanded to do? If we are obedient, who provides our strength? Who is our ultimate enemy energizing critics and their criticism?

Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12

Paul issued similar commands in [1 Corinthians 16:13](#). What four commands do you observe?

Go back to the Book. Start with the Psalms. Look for the promises. Live in them. Walk with them. Let them be your guide and comfort. You'll not only be ready to live—you'll be ready to die. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Developing a Tough Hide

Are you facing unfounded accusations? Is someone after you—trying to prove things you know are untrue? Is someone attempting to imprison you with wounding words? If so, practice Paul's plan:

1. Avoid the emotion of the charge.
2. Stick with the facts.
3. Tell the truth with a clear conscience.
4. Identify the source of the accusation.
5. Don't surrender or quit.
6. Don't become impatient or bitter.
7. Stand firm on God's promises.

If someone has wounded you with unfounded criticism, what parts of Paul's response can you follow?

Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12

The seventh principle is perhaps the most important. To follow this step, first, record a brief prayer to the Lord—unburdening your pain and seeking Him for wisdom and direction about resolution.

Then, ask the Holy Spirit to help you find a promise in Scripture to claim.

Paul clung to God’s promise that he would preach the gospel in Rome. God’s promise to you may not be so specific; nevertheless, it can be your lifeline when critics try to sink your boat. Hang on to God’s love for you and plan for your future, and you’ll find your way through the storm!

You rest your case with the Lord Jesus Christ. You take up your battles with Him. You, with clear conscience and commitment to the truth, lay out your case before Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Lord God, how thankful I am for Your Book, Your Word that lives and abides forever. Thank You for coming to my rescue again and again by Your grace. When I am afraid, bring a sense of peace and refreshment as I turn to the promises of Your Word and find in them hope to go on. Through Christ the Lord, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)”

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 2001, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

insight.org

Insight for Living
Study 18 • Page 8