

Acts 22:27

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.

Analysis

Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman?—The tribune comes personally (προσελθών, proselthōn, 'having come to') to verify the claim. His question Λέγε μοι, σὺ Ρωμαῖος εἶ (Lege moi, sy Rōmaios ei, 'Tell me, you—are you a Roman?') is direct, using the emphatic σύ (sy, 'you'). He must confirm before proceeding, as flogging a citizen would ruin his career. **He said, Yea**—Paul's simple ναί (nai, 'yes') is a legal declaration, subject to penalty if false.

This brief exchange holds enormous legal weight. Paul doesn't claim citizenship lightly—it's verifiable through official registers in Tarsus and Rome. The tribune's willingness to halt proceedings based on Paul's word shows both the honor system underlying Roman citizenship and the severity of punishments for violation. This moment shifts the entire trajectory of Paul's imprisonment, eventually leading to his appeal to Caesar and journey to Rome.

Historical Context

Roman citizenship could be verified through various means: birth certificates (sometimes carried), citizenship tablets, or inquiry to one's home city's records. The tribune would know that Paul's claim was easily checked and that lying was capital offense. The Jerusalem garrison commander was responsible for maintaining order in a volatile city during festival times—any mishandling of a Roman citizen could end his career. The tribune's caution reflects both Roman

legal precision and the privileges citizenship conferred, regardless of ethnicity or religion.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's forthrightness with his citizenship ('Yea') model transparency and integrity in using legal rights?
2. What does this exchange teach about the importance of identity—Paul's primary identity was in Christ, yet he properly used his Roman identity when providentially useful?
3. In what situations should Christians clearly assert their legal rights, and when might it be better to suffer wrongfully?

Interlinear Text

προσελθὼν δὲ ὁ χιλίαρχος εἶπεν αὐτῷ Λέγε μοι
came Then G3588 the chief captain and said unto him Tell me
G4334 G1161 G5506 G2036 G846 G3004 G3427

εἰ σὺ Ῥωμαῖος εἰ ὁ δὲ ἔφη Ναί
G1487 thou a Roman art Then He said Yea
G4771 G4514 G1488 G1161 G5346 G3483