

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Paul's Trial Before Felix, Part 2: Paul's Defense Begun

Scripture: Acts 24:10-16

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This is part two in the tragedy of postponing, and it comes from Acts 24. It's really the story of Felix; it starts out as the trial of Paul before Felix, and it ends up as the trial of Felix before Paul. In Acts 24, we have a very graphic illustration of the tragedy of postponing a decision about Christ. In Acts 24:24, we read these words, "And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, 'Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.'"

You know, as far as the Bible is concerned, there never was a convenient season. There was a group of people in Acts 17, Athenians. Paul had spoken to them on the Areopagus, Mars Hill. The Bible says, in Acts 17:32, "When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked and others said, 'We will hear thee again concerning this'." As far as we know, there never was an 'again'. The tragedy of hopeless procrastination.

Jesus records for us a most interesting series of comments on discipleship in Luke 9:57. Jesus, in this particular portion, is talking about discipleship. Three would-be disciples appear on the scene, none of whom follow the Lord. All of them wipe out before they ever get started. Verse 57 begins, "It came to pass, as they went on the way, a certain man said to him, 'Lord, I will follow you wherever you go.'" Sounds good. I mean, it couldn't be much better. There aren't even any conditions - I will - from his standpoint. Or circumstances - wherever.

"Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head'." Why did He say that? The implication is because the man came with a materialistic motive. "Lord, I'll go wherever You're going to go. I'll follow You." The man, undoubtedly, realized or at least hoped that Jesus was the King, the Messiah. He had a Judas-problem; he wanted to get in on it from the standpoint of ambition. "I'll stay with You wherever You go," and in the back of his mind he was thinking, "That's the way I'll get to the top." Jesus said, "Let Me just tell you something. You won't be as well off as the foxes or birds if you follow Me. I have nothing of worldly goods." The man never followed. He bombed out on the basis of materialistic motive.

Look at the next man. Here, the man doesn't volunteer to follow, he is invited by the Lord to follow. He says, "Follow Me." It's sort of like the calling of the apostles. But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." You'd say well, "Please, sir, please. For goodness sake, go do that. To have a dead body lying around stinking in the house is ridiculous. Go." Well, the point is, the father wasn't even dead yet. What he was saying was, "Yes, I'll follow You as soon as I get my inheritance." What was the implication? Lack of faith. "I'm not about to start on a vagabond thing, floating around, preaching the kingdom without any money to support myself." Lack of faith.

The first guy had a materialistic motive; the second guy had a materialistic motive of a sort, he didn't believe that God could supply his needs. Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their dead." In other words, let the spiritually dead take care of the physically dead. You go and preach the Kingdom of God, and you know, the promise of the Lord is that if you seek the Kingdom of God, all the things will be added to you. The man had a motive, and it was really materialistic and he had a lack of faith.

Look at the third one. Another said, "Lord, I will follow You." That sounds good. "But let me first," that's it. "Let me first go and bid them farewell who are home at my house. I want to go home and say goodbye to everyone, get everything fixed up and in order." Jesus said, "No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God." That's procrastination. Materialistic motive, lack of faith, and the third guy bombed out because of postponement.

A man who postpones isn't fit, but there are a lot of people who do that. There are a lot of people who say, "Someday I'm going to give my life to Christ. Someday I'm going to serve the Lord. Someday I'm going to receive Christ as my Savior, but not now." That's very, very dangerous. The only people who do that are very, very careless people. They're gambling with their lives.

This week, I was reading an old, old book, almost a classical book, about a man who was going from Europe to America. In order to transport his fortune, he reduced all of his fortune to a huge diamond which he bought from some African mine. It was worth an immense amount of money. He happened to be demonstrating it to someone on the ship when the ship lurched and it dropped into the ocean. Foolish man! Foolish! But no more foolish than the man who postpones the ultimate destiny of his own soul. Postponement.

Careless people postpone for two reasons. They are careless firstly because their constant rejection may harden their hearts. You see, the more you resist Christ, the harder you become and the easier it becomes to resist the next time. We are creatures of habit. That's why Hebrews 3:7 says what it says. I'm not going to go into all the explanation of all the detail, but just to pull off the basic interpretation of the passage so you'll see. Listen to the words of the Holy Spirit. Here again is a great proof of the Old Testament's inspiration, because he's quoting from the Old Testament writer, and yet says the Holy Spirit said it.

"Wherefore as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation in the day of trial in the wilderness, when your fathers put Me to the test, proved Me, and saw My works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved of that generation, and said, "They do always err in their heart and they have not known My ways." So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter into My rest." God says, "Don't be like Israel, who kept hardening and hardening in the wilderness, until they finally were not allowed to enter the Promised Land. That's what happened, wasn't it? They all died in the wilderness. Why? Because they hardened against God and forfeited rest, the rest of the Promised Land.

I believe the Promised Land represents salvation. They forfeited it. The illustration here is warning, "Don't do what they did." He writes, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Exhort each other while it is today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." The more you reject and the more you put it off, the harder you get, and sin deceives you into rationalizing that postponement.

Verse 15. "While it is called today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." In chapter 6 of Hebrews, he says, "Don't come all the way to faith, tasting the heavenly gift, partaking of the powers of the world to come, all of that, and fall away, or you'll never be able to be renewed again to repentance." Tragic story.

This is what happens when a man rejects and rejects and rejects. Even though he has good intentions of someday, someday, someday. That someday begins to fade. Luke 13:24 is a most interesting passage. It says this. "Strive to enter in at the narrow gate." The narrow gate is the way of salvation, isn't it? "For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able." You know, there are going to be people who seek and will not be able. Few will be saved, verse 23 says. I don't know how people can equate that with the doctrine of universalism.

Verse 25. "When once the master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I know you not from where you are.'" There are an awful lot of people who will say, "I wanted in and I planned to get in, and I wanted to come that way," but it's going to be too late. The door will be shut; they will be like the people who lived in Noah's time. It will be raining and they will be knocking on the ark.

Postponement is a foolish thing, because your own heart can become hard. Secondly, as I've just pointed out, God stops calling after a certain point. Read it. In the pre-Noah time, God said, "My Spirit will not always strive with man." Only a fool postpones when his soul is at stake; he is a bigger fool than a man who throws his fortune up in the air in a diamond and drops it into the ocean.

We meet such a man in Acts 24. His name is Felix. Felix is a fool. He was a procurator of Judea from A.D. 52-59. It fell his lot to deal with Paul, the apostle, even as it had fallen the lot of a previous procurator by the name of Pilate to deal with Jesus Christ. Now in this passage, we find Paul and Felix confronting each other in a hearing, a form of a trial. As we said before, there are three ways you can look at this passage. You can look at it from the viewpoint of Paul, the history of the record of what happens to Paul. You can look at it from the viewpoint of God, how God is working in this situation. You can also look at it from the viewpoint of Felix, the tragedy that occurs in his life. We've been looking at it from Paul's viewpoint and as we conclude our study, we'll look at it from the viewpoint of God and Felix. We'll have to have that conclusion next week.

The Jewish leaders had desired to kill Paul. Paul represented, to them, a very serious threat and the same threat that Jesus represented; that is, he was winning a great following. The Jewish leaders had one great fear, and that was that they would lose their authority, their power, their prestige and position in the eyes of the people. So anyone who came along and won a great following of the people was really a threat. Paul had had tremendous success in winning Jews to Christ, and of course, the leaders began to be fearful, so they set about to get rid of him.

We've just seen in the previous verses that in Jerusalem, they had tried to kill him three times in a riotous situation, and once they had tried to kill him with a plotted ambush. After those four attempts, the Romans had finally decided to get Paul out of town to save his life because Paul, after all, was a Roman citizen and they had to protect him. Secondly, he had committed no crime. So the Romans hustled him down to Caesarea and put him right there in the

praitorion, the seat of the Roman government being in Caesarea, so Paul is there in a sort of protective custody.

The accusers of the Jews are sent to Caesarea to bring the case before Felix there, in order to get a more fair trial than ever would be possible in the city of Jerusalem, if in fact they could even keep him alive in the city of Jerusalem. So the whole thing shifts; the plot to kill Paul moves to Caesarea, and these accusers come down, attempting to get Paul executed for crimes of which they will accuse him.

As the scene opens in chapter 24, the trial takes place. It has three parts like any trial: the prosecution, the defense, and the verdict or judgment. We saw last time the prosecution, and I'll just read through the first few verses to set your mind back in that context. Paul has been in Caesarea for five days, waiting for his accusers to arrive. Finally, his accusers get there.

Verse 1. "And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders [that is, representatives of the Sanhedrin], and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul." This is their hired lawyer, and his job was to inform Felix as to what Paul had

done. He was the accuser, the voice.

"And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying," now he begins his accusation by flattery; he really butters up the situation. He says to Felix, "Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy provision, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness." This was a bunch of balderdash; he didn't believe a word of it. He said, "You've brought great peace and done so many worthy deeds," and I told you last week that we try in vain to find one thing in history that he ever did that amounted to anything. When he says, "We accept it always, in all places, with all thankfulness," that's just a gross over-exaggeration; they hated and despised Felix, and Felix knew it.

"Notwithstanding," he says, "I don't want to be further tedious unto you by reciting how wonderful you are, so I'll just ask you to give us a few minutes of your precious time to listen to our words."

Now here's their case. "We have found this man a pestilent fellow, a nuisance, a troublesome character." Here are the three accusations, remember them? One, sedition. "A mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world." In other words, he is a terrible threat to the security of Rome because he leads the Jews in insurrection. "He is treasonous," they are really trying to get the charge against him of being a political criminal. Sedition - he leads the Jews to riot against Rome.

The second thing is sectarianism; they accuse him of being a heretic. "And he is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." He is the leader of a well-known heresy. The Nazarenes really were Christians; the name was given as a slur, a mocking name. The reason they called them that was because that's what they had called Jesus, the Nazarene. When they said 'Jesus of Nazareth' it wasn't just a geographical designation, it was a slur, a slam, sarcasm. When they put on the cross 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews' that was a joke, supposed to be funny, not serious. It was the ultimate mockery. "Would you believe? The King of the Jews came from Nazareth? Ha ha! Nothing ever came from that place."

So when they called Christians 'Nazarenes' that was a slur, as if they were demeaned, ignorant, stupid, uneducated, illiterates. The sect of the Nazarenes was identified with Jesus, so he says, "This man is a ringleader of a heresy, a well-known Messianic heresy." This implied, too, that it had certain political overtones, because many of the Messianic offshoots of Judaism were definite problems to Rome, they were militant, some of them. So they accused him of sectarianism.

Thirdly, they accused him of sacrilege. "Who also has gone about to profane the temple." He went to profane, or desecrate, the temple. There were territories in the temple forbidden to Gentiles, and they had accused Paul of bringing a Gentile into the place. He hadn't done it, of course, it was a lie like the rest of them. Then they said, "Whom we took and would have judged according to our law," but of course, that was a lie. They wanted to kill him in a riot.

"Then the chief captain, Lysias, came and with great violence, took him away out of our hands." He didn't take him away because he wanted to do violence to him, he took him away because they were trying to kill him. "And he commanded his accusers to come to you. He sent us all the way down here with our case. So if you'll just examine Lysias," verse 8 says, "He'll tell you that what we say is true." Then they brought their witnesses in verse 9, put them on the stand, and they all said, "That's right, he did that. We all say he did that." So they had a prosecution from their lawyer and witnesses to agree to it. That's the prosecution.

Incidentally, it's all lies, every bit of it. But that's to be expected, isn't it? I told you last week that if you live a godly life in the face of an ungodly world, you're going to suffer. That's part of it. All that live godly in the present age are going to suffer persecution. You know, the marvelous thing is that Paul suffered this, and he could stand up there and say, "Friends, I am blameless." That's what God wants. Mark this, He wants Christians to be called before the tribunal of the world. Yes He does. He wants us to be on trial for our faith and He wants the verdict to be, "Not guilty, they are are blameless," so that they have to persecute you for righteousness' sake. If you're going to get it, get it because you're holy, not because you deserve it. Acts 24:1-9 is the prosecution.

Now let's look at the defense, and watch how Paul defends himself. He does it calmly, courteously, and categorically. One, two, three; against sedition, against sectarianism, and against sacrilege, he defends himself. Verse 10. "Then Paul, after the governor had beckoned to him to speak, answered." Felix said, "Alright, it's your turn, Paul." I want you to notice that Paul doesn't have a lawyer; he didn't have any smooth-tongued, oily character who knew his way in and out of Roman law and Roman courts. You say, "Too bad." No, not too bad. He had someone better than a lawyer, a human lawyer.

When Jesus was leaving the earth and He told His disciples, in the Gospel of John, that He was going to go, He said, "I'm going to go away, but I will send to you another Comforter." The word 'comforter' is from parakletos and it means 'one called alongside', someone called alongside to help, called alongside to assist. It could be translated 'a lawyer for the defense'. He didn't have a human lawyer, but he had the parakletos. He had the divine lawyer for the defense carrying out his case.

I want you to notice something exciting, that every word he said to Felix was the word of the Holy Spirit. It's all recorded here in the Bible; it was inspired. So it was Paul talking, but it was the Holy Spirit moving through him. So the defense for Paul that day was Paul's and the Spirit's as well. He doesn't need a human lawyer; he can handle himself in the energy of the Spirit.

He says this, "For as much as I know that thou has been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself." He says, "Felix, I know you've been around long enough to judge fairly in the case, so I'm anxious to answer. Cheerfully do I answer for myself." Is that flattery? No.

Now, people have accused Paul of flattery. They say, "Paul is sort of buttering him up." No, he's not at all. There is no flattery there at all. Paul says this, "Felix, you have been a judge long enough around here to make a fair evaluation, so I am glad to give my case." That's all he said, and it was true. Felix had been governor in that area for five years. Prior to that, he was under Cumanus, who was the governor of Samaria, and he was under him for four years. So for at least nine years, he was acquainted with Jewish affairs.

Now, one very important thing to notice is that in any judgment in regard to Jewish affairs, you would have to know Jewish custom. It is unique, it is so different, that a man would have had to live within the culture to be able to evaluate the actual tensions that were going on. Paul is, in effect, saying, "Felix, I know that you have been around long enough to know that this is a theological problem, and to know the real hassle that is behind this, and I am glad to give my defense, because I know that you know that." There is no flattery here.

Let me hasten to add this. Flattery, for a Christian, is unacceptable at all times. Did you get that? There is no place in a Christian's life for flattery at all, anytime, anyplace. Off the cuff, the simplest definition I could think of is that flattery is when you do or say something to someone that is beyond the truth to elicit something for yourself. It's when you butter them up to get what you want. You don't flatter the people below you, you flatter the people above you - the people who can give you something or spare you some pain.

You know, when you hear Tertullus say, "Oh, most wonderful Felix, oh, most noble, oh," you just say, "Blech!" It's not true; he knew it, everybody knew it, Felix knew it. But flattery is a very common thing; you do that to get what you want. You know something? I'm sad to say that it works. It is absolutely unacceptable to the Christian. Why do I say that? Because Proverbs 26:28 says, "A flattering mouth works ruin," and Psalm 12:3 says, "The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips." Now, if you'd like to hang on to your mouth--

It's that serious. You say, "What's wrong with flattery?" Flattery is not the truth. Flattery is a calculated misrepresentation to gain something for yourself; it is mass self-indulgence and selfishness, it is sin. You know, that's a temptation. People say, "Oh, if you want to get anything in life, you've got to go that route." No.

There are people who would say, "In your church, you find someone who has a lot of money. You need to build that new building? Go to that person who has a lot of money and boy, get close to them, butter them up, and you'll get their money." If you're waiting for me to do that, friends, it isn't going to happen. I don't want your money because I flattered you for it; I want your money not at all, in fact. I'm not interested in it. I'm just interested in being the kind of Christian I ought to be and you being the kind of Christian you ought to be and you doing what God wants you to do with everything else in

your life and your money, and me doing what God wants me to do and we'll see what happens. But I don't do certain things to get certain things from you.

I'm sure some of you have said to yourselves, "The way you preach, always belting us around, it's pretty obvious you don't want anything." Well, I just want you to be conformed to the image of Christ. I try not to belt you around, I try to lovingly admonish you. But there is no place for flattery. That goes on all the time, even in Christian circles, believe me. Believe me. I know. It happens even to me, and I don't believe it when it happens. I know me. And if I start to believe it, my wife helps me out.

So he is not flattering Felix. What he's saying is simply, "Felix, you've been around long enough to make a proper judgment, so I will cheerfully go ahead with my defense." Now, I would say that there is a little reverse psychology in that because now, Felix is really on the spot. Paul has said, "You should be able to make a fair judgment, Felix, you've been around long enough." Did you ever notice how Paul can always somehow get his thumb on top of everybody? Now, Felix is not only pressured by the case, he's pressured by the fact that Paul knows he's been around long enough to make a responsible judgment. Paul has such boldness.

So Paul replies, first of all, to the charge of sedition. He starts and goes categorically through the three. First of all, he replies to the charge of sedition in verses 11-13. Now, this is the charge that he was a political criminal. Notice what he says. "Because thou mayest understand that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship." He says, "Felix, you know that I've only been around here twelve days." Acts 24:1 says that five of those had been spent in Caesarea. So the maximum possible time he had spent in Jerusalem was seven days. Now Paul, in effect, is saying, "I haven't had time to start a riot. I haven't had time to get a revolution off the ground. There is no way." And that's right.

In fact, if you go back to chapter 21, you can find out what he spent those seven days doing. Acts 21:23, he arrived in Jerusalem. James and the other believers who were there, the other Christians, were very concerned about Paul because they had heard word that he had become anti-Semitic. They heard he had become anti-Jewish, that his Christianity had gone amok and he was against all the customs and traditions of the Jews. Paul said, "That's not so."

So the elders of the church in Jerusalem said, "You'd better prove that. Here are four guys who are going to take a Nazarite vow." A Nazarite vow was simply an outward form expressing consecration in the heart. It happened to be a Jewish form; it wasn't evil, it was just there, just a custom. Paul said, "Fine. I'll go along and do the same thing they're doing in form, and then everyone will see that I'm not against these customs." So that's what happens in verses 23-27. Verse 26 says, "Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself with them, entered the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification." So they went into the temple for this period of purification.

Verse 27. "And when the seven days were almost ended," imagine! Most of those seven days he was there, he was in the temple. So he spent seven days in there, carrying out a vow, five days in Caesarea; they're accusing him of starting a riot. He says, "Felix, you must understand that I went to Jerusalem to worship, and it's only been 12 days, and there has been no time for any kind of rebellion." That's a pretty good argument, wouldn't you say?

He purposely says this at the end of verse 11, "I went up to Jerusalem to worship, not to desecrate. Not to start a riot, not to start a revolution, not to profane the temple, just to worship." He was carrying out the worship act of the Nazarite vow, which signified consecration to the Jew. That's what he was doing the whole time; he hadn't done anything wrong.

Verse 12. "And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people," which literally means, in the Greek, 'collecting a crowd' for any purpose - either to preach to them or to riot. "Not in the synagogue, not in the temple, not in any place in the whole city. I haven't done anything! There is nothing with which they can accuse me."

In Acts 25:8, he has to give another defense before Festus, and we'll get to that in a few weeks. He says to Festus, "Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar have I offended in anything at all. I haven't done anything, nothing!"

In Acts 28:17, he gives another defense of himself. "It came to pass, after three days, Paul called the chief of the Jews together at Rome, and when they were come together, he said to them, 'Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner.'" He continues clear out to the end of the book, saying, "I've never done anything wrong!" You say, "That's easy for him to say. He's just trying to get out of it." No, because he also says repeatedly, "I stand before God with a clear conscience." No, he didn't do anything.

What is it that he denies? He says, "I haven't been in the temple disputing." This is the word for reasoning or arguing, the word that appears so many times elsewhere in the New Testament, in the book of Acts. Do you know that almost everywhere he went, he disputed, except Jerusalem? So the Lord protected him. He didn't dispute. He says, "I have not had public dialog in the temple, I did not have any argument in the temple." He had done it everywhere else, but he didn't do it there.

You say, "Why didn't he do it there?" Man, he was sensitive to the situation. I mean, he knew that it was a powder keg. Not only that, did you know that he had been relieved of the responsibility of evangelism to the city of Jerusalem? He felt no great burden to evangelize there. I think in his heart he did, but not in terms of actually doing it. I'm sure he cared for the people, his heart was broken over Israel, but he felt that he did not have the personal responsibility of ministry there.

Look what he said. "Neither did I raise up the people or collect a crowd." That's something else he had done in every other city he had been in. Everywhere he went, it says he reasoned, doesn't it? In Acts it says, "He reasoned out of the Scriptures." Or the people gathered and he preached. That happened everywhere but Jerusalem. When he got to Jerusalem, it was time for him to conciliate the Jewish Christians, time for him to cease confrontation. You ask, "Why would he feel that way? Why would he not feel responsible? Why would he sense the volatility of it and explosiveness of it and then back off? Was he afraid?" No, fear was never his motive. Why would he hesitate and stand back?

Listen to Acts 22:17. "It came to pass that when I was come again to Jerusalem," this is referring to an earlier time in his life, "While I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance." He went to another level of consciousness where God communicated. "I saw Him saying unto me, 'Make haste and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me.'" The Lord Jesus told Paul that Jerusalem was not going to receive his testimony, that he had not the responsibility of ministry there.

"And I said, 'Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue those that believed on Thee, and when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I was standing by, consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.'" In other words, wouldn't this be a great place for me to do it, Lord? They would see the transformation. "And He said unto me, 'Get out of here, depart. For I will send thee far from here, unto the Gentiles.'" You know, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, by direct revelation to Paul, said he was not responsible for the ministry in Jerusalem.

So you see, when he comes to Jerusalem, his only goal is to fellowship with the Christians. He goes to the temple to carry out the vow so that the Jewish Christians who are still carrying out Jewish custom will not think that he's anti-Semitic. He has no goal in mind of the propagation of the Gospel to win everyone to Christ.

You'll notice that in his defenses, he never gets into the details of the Gospel. In the earlier defense before the mob, although he certainly implied all the truth that was there, he did not specifically preach the Gospel, nor did he specifically preach the Gospel in the Sanhedrin. The Lord did not have that particular ministry for him. In addition to that, there were already tens of thousands of Jewish Christians there and evangelism, for the most part, in the city of Jerusalem, was a one-to-one thing. They were winning others. So Paul did not sense this tremendous drive for confrontation that he sensed in other places, so he had done none of these things. He hadn't raised up a crowd anywhere: not in the temple, not in the synagogue, not in the city.

In verse 13, he pulls the props out from under their argument altogether. "Neither can they prove the things of which they now accuse me." Now, if you don't have any proof, you don't have a case. That is it. That's out of court, right? Just throw it out. They can't prove anything. So he denies the charges

and makes clear the fact that they can't prove them. That takes care of sedition. He has done nothing treasonous.

The second thing they accused him of was sectarianism; they said he was a heretic. This is fantastic. Here, he has to defend himself against being a heretic. He can't deny his Christianity, but he also wants to make sure he denies their charge. So what he does here is says, "I am not a heretic," while at the same time saying, "I am a Christian." There is only one way to do that: he makes all of his accusers heretics. He says, "I am the only real one here. They're all the false ones." You can imagine how that went over.

Look at verses 14-16. "This I confess. I have to admit this, Felix. That after the Way," that is a proper name. The Way is the title of Christianity. The unsaved people used to slur the Christians by calling them 'Nazarenes' or slur them by calling them 'Christians' which meant 'little Christs.' But Christians called themselves members of The Way. You say, "Where did they get that name?" It's pretty obvious, there is no other way. Jesus said, "I am the way." Peter preached, "There is no other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Peter even uses it in II Peter 2:2. He says, "False teachers, by their pernicious ways, cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of." So this was a title for Christianity used by Christians: the Way.

He says, "I confess to you that after the Way which they call heresy, so worshiped I the God of my fathers, believing all things written in the Law and in the Prophets and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust." You can see the High Priest saying, "Yuck! Here we go again on the resurrection." Because the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, right? That's what started the fight in the Sanhedrin.

So you know what Paul says? "I would just like to say that it is true that I am a believer in the Way and consequently, I truly worship my God; I believe all of His revelation, including the part about resurrection." As if to say, "Take that!" Who are the real heretics? The high priests, who have ceased worshiping God, because there is only one way to God. Jesus said, "No man comes to the Father but by Me."

"Who have ceased believing all the Law and the Prophets," because if you believe all the Law and the Prophets, you have to believe in Christ, because all the Law and the Prophets talked about was Christ. "And who have ceased believing in the great hope of Israel, the hope of a resurrection." They're the heretics! It is a pretty strong argument.

They had charged Paul with being a religious heretic, they had charged him with belonging to a subversive, extreme offshoot of Judaism. Paul denies it, while at the same time he affirms that he is a Christian. He says that Christianity is true Judaism, and Judaism without Christianity is as pagan as worship of a totem pole. That's true. Those are the heretics. They're heretics because they don't

worship the true God, because you can't worship Him except through His Messiah. They don't believe the Scriptures, because if they believed the Scriptures, they'd worship the Messiah. Add to that they don't even believe in the hope of Israel, which is the resurrection. That's the implication. He doesn't bother to explain it any more than that, because Felix knows. Felix knows Christianity and he knows the dialogue between Christians and Jews; he understands the conflict.

How do we know that? Verse 22. "Felix, having a more perfect knowledge of that way." He knew more than Paul said. Paul knew that he did; he'd been around nine years. Christians were everywhere. In fact, the city of Caesarea was loaded with them, and one of the most vocal of them was Philip the Evangelist who lived there. He knew. So Paul says, "I'm a Christian and I'm the only true worshiper of God standing here. These are the heretics."

He says, "So worship I the God of my fathers." That was the historic title for the God of Israel. What is God called? "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." The God of my fathers. He says, "I still worship the God of Israel, I still worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I have not forsaken God." Friends, that is a great truth for a Jewish Christian to make known, that you haven't forsaken the worship of God. You are the only true worshiper when you come to Him through Messiah; there is no other way.

I think that many people think that when a Jew becomes a Christian, all of a sudden they have ceased worshiping God. No! The God of Israel is only knowable through His Son. So you might remind your family and friends that you worship the God of their fathers, of your fathers if you're Jewish. Becoming a Christian is not forsaking the God of Israel, it's coming to Him the only way: through Christ. Paul was a completed Jew. That's not a very popular term today, but it's a good one, because a Jew can only become all that a Jew is to be when he is complete in Christ.

You could really blow a hole in all the ethnic things that are happening. People are going around talking about their Jewishness, but they ought to hear Paul preach in Romans 2:28. "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly; he is a Jew who is one inwardly. His circumcision is not of the flesh but it is of the heart." The only true Jews in the world are Christian ones, did you know that? The only true Jews in the world are Christian Jews. The rest are apostate. The true Jew is the one who continues to worship and obey the true God. The only way to the true God is through Messiah.

In fact, Paul said this in I Corinthians 16:22. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." That's the only way. In Romans 9, Paul says, in effect, the same thing. "All Israel is not Israel." Paul is saying, "I'm the only true Jew here! I'm the only one who has come to the Messiah." In addition, he says, "I believe all things that are written in the law and the prophets."

Do you want to know what his view of Old Testament inspiration was? There it is. You think he believed the Old Testament was inspired? He believed every bit of it. You know what he's implying?

That they don't. He was right. You know why? If you believe the Old Testament law and the prophets, you have to believe in Christ.

You know what has happened today with most Jews? They rejected Christ, so you know what they have to do to reject Christ and be comfortable? They have to also reject the Old Testament. That's why today, most Jews don't believe in the literal truth of the Old Testament. They've explained it all away. The only thing they hang on to is the Judaistic ethic. But you cannot study the Old Testament very long and really believe it and not come to Jesus Christ. That's where it all leads.

Unless you are like the super-orthodox, who are all cranked up about the letters and don't even hear what the sentences say. They're just worried about the letters, the little, tiny things, the minutiae. But for the most part, take the temple down the street, they don't believe in the literal interpretation of the Old Testament; they can't. You know why? Because they can't live with it. In fact, most Jews don't even believe in a Messiah anymore, they believe in a Messianic era. It's sort of a 'happy days are here again' feeling that's going to show up sometime, that's it.

Paul says, "I not only worship the true God, I believe everything He ever wrote is true." Boy, that's a zapper on those people standing there. He says, "I believe in the Way," and that's all he had to say; Felix knew everything about it. He knew it meant Jesus Christ. "And I continue to worship my true God, and I trust totally in all Old Testament Scriptures." You see, to deny Jesus as the Messiah is to deny the Old Testament.

Jesus said in John 5:39, "You study the Scriptures, you search the Scriptures, because in them you think you have eternal life? They are they which speak of Me." On the road to Emmaus, He opened up the Old Testament, gave them the laws, the prophets, the hagiographa, the writings. He said to them, "All of the things concerning Himself." Yes, you can't study the Old Testament and not come to Christ. You're going to have to get rid of the Old Testament. That's what most Judaism has done today. To deny Jesus, a Jew must deny his Scriptures. To come to Jesus is to become completed in all that Judaism is.

Paul says, "I'm no heretic, folks, I've just come the route the whole way. I've finished it up. I have consummated my faith in my Messiah." It's a tragic thing to find the Jews all over the world who reject Christ as Messiah.

You see, if you reject Christ as the Messiah, pretty soon you'll give up the whole idea of a Messiah, because there is nothing else that fits it. There is nothing on the scene that even remotely looks like a possibility. It just can't happen anymore, so you just can't and say it's an era, not a person. Or you just deny it altogether. There are a few, scattered Orthodox, standing there, bobbing up and down, saying their prayers, cranking out the letter of the law, never getting behind it to even worry about what it means. In their blindness, they adhere to the Old Testament, but very few. Very few.

You know, in a sense, we Gentiles are better off than the Jewish unbelievers. I mean, I would love to have been born in a Jewish family. I think there are so many fantastic things about it. But I'm glad I am what I am, because that's what God wanted. Because I'm what I am, I'm where I am, and I like that.

Even though I have not been born into the stock of Israel, and even though I have not known the blessings that come because of that, I am better off and so are you, as a Gentile Christian, than an unbelieving Jew. Because the Bible says that the saddest person has got to be an unbelieving Jew who forfeits and apostatizes from the truth that he has. How much sorer punishment. I mean, to whom much is given, much is required. As a Christian who has accepted the truth, I worship the God of Israel. I believe all that the God of Israel ever said, and I believe in the Messiah of Israel for my salvation. I am every whit a Jew, in terms of all that I believe, if not in my nationality.

I thank God that Romans 11 says that God, in His wonderful grace, chose to graft us in, don't you? The unbelieving branch was cut off because of unbelief, and God grafted us in. But don't get smug and don't get self-satisfied, don't get high-brow about it, because the Bible says there is coming a time when Israel is going to be grafted back in. In fact, he says there is going to be a time when all Israel shall be saved. So Paul says, "I'm the only true Jew standing; you're apostates. These are the heretics, not me."

Let me add this: he didn't gloat on this. There is no gloating in his mind. I imagine, even as he thought about it and said it, his heart was in pain. You see, because he loved those people. You know, that's something that I don't think people can understand, because the world interprets love in such a narrow way. They don't understand what it is to love and really love.

So Paul says in Romans 9, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not. Please believe me, I know it's hard, but try. My conscience bears witness in the Holy Spirit." He knows his readers aren't going to believe him, but he says, "I have continual heaviness and sorrow in my heart. I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen, according to the flesh. I could almost wish myself to Hell if they could get to Heaven." He cared. In Romans 10:1, he says, "My zeal is for Israel, that they may be saved." He didn't gloat over it, he pained. It hurt him, anguish was caused in his heart.

So Paul simply says, "I'm the true Jew." In fact, he says in verse 15, just to really set the record straight, "I have hope toward God, the hope of the resurrection." The traditional hope of the Jew was the resurrection. You say, "Did the Old Testament teach a resurrection?" Of course it did! Isaiah 26:19, Job 19:26, Daniel 12:2, and elsewhere. The Old Testament taught a resurrection.

I believe in my heart that Abraham believed in a resurrection, that's why he was willing to sacrifice Isaac. I think that was ultimate faith. But you know, the Sadducees standing there didn't believe in a

resurrection. You say, "How did they get around it if it's in Isaiah, Job, Daniel, etc.?" They got around it because they said this. "The only binding truth in the Old Testament is what Moses said out of the first five books. That's it." That's why, when Jesus was having an argument about resurrection, He quoted Exodus 3, because He knew that was the only thing that they would adhere to. He used it by implication, the name of God being the implication of resurrection.

The Sadducees were not traditional; they were heretics. They denied that which the Old Testament taught. They were modernists. They were the aristocratic family and they were the modernists theologically. They were not traditional Jews, and I'm sure the accusers here were mostly Sadducees. The high priest was a Sadducee, and most likely, the other elders were as well. So Paul says, "I'm the guy who believes in the truth, the resurrection of the dead for the just and the unjust." Yes, there will be a resurrection for both. Unsaved people? They will be resurrected physically, in some form. We'll talk about that next time.

Paul says, after saying that, "In this do I exercise myself. To have a conscience always devoid of offense toward God and men. As a true Jew, as one who believes in God and His word, and in the hope of the resurrection, that causes me to want to live a pure life. I don't want to offend God, I don't want to offend man."

Folks, that's the ultimate end of the testimony of any man, to be able to stand up and say, "My desire in life is never to offend God and never to offend man." Friends, that is the epitome. "To have my conscience never accuse me, so I live my life in accord with the standards of my God, what His Word reveals, and I have a clear conscience."

Oh, tremendous. He believed in those great truths. Look at verses 14-15. He believed in them and he built his life on them. Do you know that you really believe only what you act on? If you don't build your life on principles, then you don't really believe them. Paul believed them, stood by them, and stood blameless.

My mom used to always tell a story about a man named Blonden. Blonden was a tight-wire walker, and he decided to walk across Niagara Falls. They set up the wire, and I understand that even now, in the modern day, there is someone who is going to attempt it. Blonden strung the wire, got the whole thing set up, and got up to go across. He said to an acquaintance standing by, "Do you believe I can go across there?" And the man said, "Yes." He said, "Will you climb on my back and go with me?" And he declined. He said to another friend, his closest companion, "Do you believe I can walk across?" He said, "Yes." He said, "Will you climb on my back and go with me?" He said, "Yes." He did, and they went across together.

Which man believed him? The second one. You don't believe what you don't live by. That's right. I don't care what the principle is, biblically. If you really believe it, it's a part of your life, not just a part of

what you say. You can carry that into any principle that we've ever taught. What you really believe, you act on. Paul said, "I believe all that is written in the Law and the Prophets, therefore I exercise myself to live a life consistent with what I believe."

Christian, you ought to live a life that fits the Word of God. You will, if you really believe it. Paul stood up and said, "I'm innocent. Check my life." Can you do that? Can you stand before the world blameless, void of offense? That's the epitome of testimony. So Paul defends himself and sets the stage for the verdict, which we'll see next time. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we thank You for the testimony of the man, Paul, how he stood for what he believed and was willing to live or die for it because he believed it. Thank You for his blameless life. Help us to learn the lessons that the Lord has given us in the pages of His Word, and that the Spirit continues to teach to us by application in our hearts. We give You the praise, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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