

Paul Before Festus, Part 2: The Power of a Dedicated Life

Acts 25:7-12

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How exciting it is to find ourselves in Acts 25 and to see Paul's defense before the governor of Judea, whose name was Festus. We began this study last Lord's Day, and we're going to complete it today, that is, the study of Acts 25:1-12. Those verses record for us Paul's trial before Festus.

The Word of God is such a treasure that it's hard for me to understand why there would be any such thing as a Christian who didn't study the Bible, when you realize what's there, the riches, the treasures that are here, to be discovered, to be mined. I feel like David, who said, "Oh, how I love thy law."

As we look at the book of Acts, as we have found, many of the deepest treasures in the book of Acts are just that: deep, down under the surface. We have to kind of mine them out. In a book like this that is historical narrative, most of the doctrine and spiritual principles are under the surface; that is, they are implied or illustrated. An example of that is the passage with which we're dealing today, where there is no particular statement regarding any doctrine, yet there are at least ten principles that just leap out of this page. Ten tremendous truths that are deep, they're buried, and you have to uproot them. What we want to do is pull up the food that's under the ground and feast on it this morning, and see how God will nourish us with it.

I mentioned to you last time that, as we looked at these verses, we found at least ten principles here, and there are probably more. I'm not sure we could handle ten, because that's a lot. There are ten principles that just kind of come out of the passage without being stated; they are implied or illustrated. They are these, and I'll only remind you of them.

We see in this passage the hatred of religious people toward Christ and Christians. We see also the binding power of sin illustrated. Then we see evidence of the sovereign providence of God; then we find, also, the pattern of the world's persecution, that is, the way in which the world persecutes. We see also the innocence and blamelessness of the life of Paul and the effect that such a blameless life had. We see the exoneration of Christianity in terms of being a political issue or criminal activity. We see the courage of a committed Christian. We see, as well, how a Christian is to behave toward his government, and also his attitude toward persecution. Finally, we see the impact of one totally dedicated life. These are tremendous principles.

I hasten to say this, that none of them are new. All of them we have taught you before, and it's as if the Holy Spirit just puts this narrative here as a reminder. Like Peter said, "I will not cease to put you in remembrance of these things," so the Holy Spirit puts us in remembrance of all these principles which we have already seen in the book of Acts. They seem to be summed up in these 12 verses, as they begin to appear under the surface, as you pull up the roots.

Looking at the passage, I want to divide the 12 verses into four parts. As we go through the four parts, we'll see these 10 principles. The first part, as we told you last time, was the assassination plot in verses 1-5. If you'd like, you may follow along that outline you have, and take some notes. The assassination plotted. The Apostle Paul, as you know, has been accused by the Jews of three things. Sedition, that is, crimes against Rome, being an insurrectionist. Sectarianism, that is, being a heretic; and sacrilege, blaspheming God through the desecration of the temple. These accusations are all false and without evidence, without support, and yet, they are made against him.

As a result of this, Paul finally found himself before Felix, the governor, to be tried. Felix knew Paul was innocent, but he didn't want to upset the Jews who wanted him dead, so Felix kept him in prison for two years. At the end of two years, Felix was taken from his assignment in disgrace and hauled back to Rome. A new man was put in his place by the name of Festus. As chapter 25 opens, Festus arrives in Caesarea to take over his responsibility.

I'll read to you Acts 25:1-5. "Now when Festus was come to the province," that is, the province of Judea, "After three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem." Caesarea, of course, was the head of the Roman government there in Judea, and he did a little bit of business there for three days, then headed for Jerusalem. He knew that it was important for him to establish relationships with the people over whom he would rule. He knew that relationships had been extremely shaky with Felix, and it was important to bind together some sort of working relationship.

He came to Jerusalem, then, and immediately, verse 2, "The high priest and the chief ones of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him and desired a favor against him, that he would send him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him." The first thing they bring up when Festus arrives in Jerusalem is this guy who has been a prisoner for two years. He never really committed any crime, but they hate him with a deep, deep hatred. They want him dead, so they say to Festus, who is totally naive and uninformed, "Could you kindly bring this prisoner to Jerusalem? We'd like to have a little bit of dealings with this particular case, so bring him here." Really, they wanted to ambush Paul on the way, and kill him. Festus didn't know that.

Festus answers in verse 4, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and he himself would depart shortly for there. He says, "I'm not going to bring him here, I'm going to Caesarea myself." Verse 5. "Let them, therefore, who among you are able," or, that is, who are able men, influential men, "Go down with me and accuse the man if there is any wickedness in him." So Festus says, "I'm not going to bring him to Jerusalem. If you have anything to bring against the man, let's do it in Caesarea."

As we saw last time, and went through those verses in detail, there are some tremendous spiritual principles that are implied and applied in this particular illustration. The first thing we see here is the hatred of religious people toward Jesus Christ. The folks who were really antagonistic toward Paul were Jews, religious people. The persecution that comes against true religion most often comes from false religion. It is when false religion rears its head that it begins to abuse the truth. These folks were the religious leaders of their land, of their day.

Satan, who disguises himself as an angel of light and propagates all the systems of false religion, of course sets them in antagonism toward true religion. The most obvious enemy of Christ is true religion. All throughout the book of Acts it is the Jews, the religionists, who persecute Christ, and

when I say Christ, that means both Jesus Christ when He was alive, and those who teach what He taught and believed in Him as their Messiah. They continued the persecution.

I think it's an interesting footnote, and I'll expand it in a minute, that the only times Roman persecution ever broke out was when it was a religious issue. Some might say, "You say it's always the religionists, but what about when the Romans persecuted?" It was a religious issue with them too, and we'll see that in just a minute. Religion is always the persecutor, because, you see, Satan sets up false religion in opposition to true religion. He brings all the unbelievers into the systems of false religion and they are in opposition to the truth. That's why any such thing as an ecumenical movement is absolutely ridiculous.

I was coming here this morning at about 7 o'clock and listening to religious news on the radio station. They were saying that recently, there was a great meeting in some city, I forget which one. It was a meeting of the Muslims, the Christians, and the Jews. The Muslims were represented by some Arab, the Christians were represented by some Coptic priest or bishop from the Coptic church, and Jewish rabbis. They were trying to figure out how they could all get together. The only way they could ever get together is if the Christianity that is represented there is run by Satan, because obviously, he is running the Judaism and Islam, because they're anti-Christ.

It is ludicrous to imagine that Christians and Jews and Muslims, or Christians and anyone else in any other religion, can get together. It's impossible because all other systems of religion are against Christ. When that effort is made, the only thing that ever results is the loss of true Christianity. True Christianity is a rebuke to all other religions in the world. We cannot accommodate them. Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me." If Christianity is Jesus Christ, and anything other than Christianity is in opposition to Him, there can be no communion there. Throughout history, it has been the religionists who have persecuted the truth.

This is stated clearly in II Peter 2:1. Peter says, "There were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you." You go back to the history of Israel, and you'll find out that the biggest problem Israel ever had historically was the problem with the pagan religionists, wasn't it? Drifting into idolatry and Baal worship and being hassled by all the gods of the pagans - that was always the problem. It's no different now, he says. "There shall be false teachers among you, secretly bringing in destructive heresies, denying the Lord that bought them, and bringing on themselves swift destruction." Watch. "Many shall follow their pernicious ways and because of that, the way of truth will be evil spoken of." False teachers will always speak evil of the truth.

The only way that Christianity can ever get together with all kinds of false religions is when they're ready to take the evil that is set against the truth and abandon the truth. We always stand isolated; we have to. That is our identity, because all the systems of religion in the world are against Christ. You say, "They don't seem to be." That's the idea. They secretly bring in destructive heresy. It's not always obvious; it's subtle, very often. Some religions are violently anti-Christ, some religions are subtly anti-Christ by being pro-Jesus ethic and nothing more, certainly not pro-Jesus as God in human flesh, Savior of the world.

So the hatred, historically, that has come against the truth, has come from religious systems. I think it's important for you to realize that. There is no way you're ever going to accommodate people in false religious systems; you must confront them.

Let me give you a second principle that we saw here, and that is the binding power of sin. Here are these religious leaders in Israel. It's been two years since they've had to deal with Paul; for two years, he's been in jail. You'd think that, in two years, they would pretty well have forgotten about the guy. But when two years is up, and Festus, the new governor arrives, the first thing they say to this guy in verse 2 is all about Paul. "We've got to have him dead," they say, "Let's go to Festus and work out a little plot, and we'll ambush him." They're hung up on Paul for two years and they haven't even seen him.

That tells me a little about hate, does it tell you something about hate? It really drives itself deep, then it stays there. That's the way sin is: it's a binding thing. Let me show you the words of Jesus to illustrate this principle. They appear in a passage that perhaps is familiar to you, John 8:30. Jesus was speaking, and it says, "As he spoke, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to the Jews who believed on him, 'If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.'" Jesus says, "I'm glad you believe, but the proof of the true faith is if you continue. And if you continue in my word, you are truly saved, and the truth shall make you free."

By saying that, He implied that they weren't free. They were slaves. Of course, they didn't like that. They said, "We are Abraham's seed." They thought that just because they were Jews, that meant they were absolutely free. They said, "We have never been in bondage to any man." Now, how about the Egyptians, the Babylonians? Have you forgotten the Medo-Persians, the Syrians, the Greeks, and the Romans? You've never been in bondage to any man? "Well, we're talking spiritually." Oh? Fine.

Jesus answered them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever commits sin is the slave of sin." They were slaves. Notice what He says. "Whoever commits a sin is a slave to sin." Sin is a slavery. Sin binds. The word doulos means a bondsman. The only way you could cease being a bondsman was to die. The only way out was death, and our Lord says that sin is bondage, slavery. In Titus 3, sinners are called doulos, bondsmen to lust; in Romans 6:19, a bondsman to uncleanness.

Sin is slavery; sin captures a man, he is not free, he is a slave. The only release from that slavery is death, and isn't it marvelous to realize that it was only as you were crucified with Jesus Christ, as Romans 6 says, only that you died in Him, were freed from death, woke up in the resurrection and became a doulos to a new master, not sin, but Jesus Himself? You're still a bondsman, but a bondsman to Jesus Christ. I'll tell you something. Being a bondsman to Christ is better than being free to sin.

So you see the binding character of sin. How sad it is that these men would allow two years to go by and still be totally destroyed on the inside by this hatred for Paul. Paul had loved them and was an innocent man.

A third principle that we saw in the passage was the providence of God. We saw that, in spite of what seemed to be the normal course of events, God was ordering things. When they said to Festus, "Hey Festus, why don't you take Paul up to Jerusalem? We want to do some business regarding his case," he said, "No." That's very strange. The normal thing would have been to say yes, right? He was trying to win the Jews, he was trying to influence them for his side. He was trying to conciliate

them, make friends, establish a base of operation. But instead of saying yes, he says no, and there isn't any reason to say no, other than the fact that God is in control.

I get excited when I think about the fact that God is in control, don't you? Listen to Lamentations 3:37-38. "Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass unless the Lord has commanded it?" Isn't that terrific? Listen to the next verse. "Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth?" Nothing happens for good or evil unless it is in the framework of God's allowance. That's clear in the Word of God. Festus didn't know it, but he was just moving along on the divine timetable. His own attitudes fitted the consistency of the will of God. God controls the destiny of every man.

The second point we see here, first, the assassination plot, then the accusation presented. Verse 6. "When he had tarried among them no more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea." So we have Festus going down to Caesarea like he said he would. "The next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought. When he was come, the Jews who came down from Jerusalem stood round about and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul."

So eight or ten days later, Festus has made some contacts, perhaps established relationships with the high priests, the Sanhedrin, and whoever else he needed to. Now he hustles back down to Caesarea, and the next day, he brings Paul. The accusers have come from Jerusalem, ready to lay the case. What do we find here? They lay down grievous charges, many of them, and complaints. We find, again, another principle. This is the fourth of the principles that we'll see, and it is this: the typical pattern of the world's persecution. Watch. The world persecutes on two premises. The persecute falsely and for Christ's sake.

Listen to Matthew 5, the words of Jesus. "Blessed are you when men shall persecute you and revile you and accuse you falsely for my sake." There are the two ingredients in the typical pattern of the world's persecution: they accuse you falsely and for Christ's sake. In other words, it isn't you they hate, it's Christ. It isn't you they resent, it's Christianity. Some Christians live such messed-up lives that it may be you they resent, but the point is, if you really receive the true rebuking of the world as Paul received it, it won't be because you fouled up so much that you deserve it, it will be false and for Christ's sake because of the vibrancy of your testimony for Christ.

Our lives should be so lived that the accusations are false. Our lives should be so lived that the only accusation people could make would be that they can't stand our Christianity. They should falsely accuse you. I'll tell you something, when Christians' lives are that way, when Christians' lives are lives that can only be accused falsely, then the world is really going to take notice of us, believe it.

Let me show you the third point, and we'll begin where we wanted to begin today. After we've seen the assassination plotted and presented, we see the absence of proof. It's always interesting, I think, in all the trials so far that we've seen, no one ever had any evidence against Paul. They were all trumped-up, false charges. The end of verse 7. "All these grievous complaints against Paul were laid, which they could not prove." They couldn't prove any of them. No witnesses, no support, no evidence, no case. You say, "Maybe they hadn't really worked on it." Don't believe that. In chapter 23, they tried to get a case against Paul and there weren't any witnesses there, they tried again in chapter 24 and there weren't any witnesses.

I think one of the notes, this is just a little thought I have; it may be true, it may not be. I think the

possibility of verse 6 saying that he had tarried in Jerusalem for eight or ten days, some Bibles only say ten days, the original manuscripts say eight or ten. The reason the Holy Spirit put that there is because that gives the Jews plenty of time to get their case together.

You'd better believe that, since they had been shot out of the saddle twice already because of a lack of evidence and witnesses, they used those eight or ten days, or at least a good portion of them, to scurry around and try to find or bribe some witnesses. But God never let it happen - there were no witnesses. Paul had done nothing; no one witnessed what he did because he didn't do anything. Apparently, God didn't even allow them to bribe any witnesses. So they show up without any witnesses. Again, when the thing starts and Paul gives his testimony, then thing that knocks you over is his absolute innocence.

That brings us to principle number five, which follows the one I just gave you: the innocence and blamelessness of Paul and the effect of that innocence. I'm telling you, the effect of an innocent, blameless life on the world is powerful. Let me show you a passage that you're familiar with, but with a different slant. I Peter 3:14. "If you suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are you. Don't be afraid of their terror, don't be troubled." If you suffer for sin, that's a different story, if you've fouled up your life so much that you're getting abuse because you've sinned, that's another thing. But if you're suffering for righteousness' sake, if you're living a godly life and all of a sudden, you're really getting it, happy are you.

Don't be afraid of their terror, don't be troubled, but do three things. Take care of what you are, what you say, and make sure what you think. That's the next verses, watch. "Sanctify the Lord Christ in your heart." What does that mean? It means set apart Christ in your heart. That is simply a statement saying, "Be holy." What's the second thing? "Then be ready to give an answer to every man that asks for a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." Number one, check what you are, make sure you are holy. Number two, check what you say, make sure you speak the truth of God. Number three, check what you think; have a good conscience.

He says, "You'll be persecuted for righteousness' sake; stand on what you are, a holy life. Stand on what you say, the truth. Make sure that, when all is done, your conscience is clear, your thoughts are clear, you know you've not violated God. You know what will happen? Verse 16, "They will speak evil of you as evildoers but that they may be ashamed because they falsely accuse your good manner of life in Christ."

You know how to rebuke people who accuse you? Give them nothing to accuse you of, then they'll have to face the fact that their accusations are unfounded. They'll have to face the fact that the real issue is their hatred of Christianity and they'll be forced to face that. By Paul's innocent life, he made those people, over and over again, face the fact that what was really wrong was that their hearts were not right. They hated Jesus Christ; they resented God's Messiah. He forced them to feel that way, to recognize that, because there was really nothing for which they could blame Him.

Take stock of what you are, set Christ apart in what you say and what you think. Then be bold, and stand up, confronting the world with an innocent life. The power and impact of that kind of life can make the world ashamed. Shame may be a cause of conviction that can bring someone to Christ.

Let me give you principle number six. Another principle we see in this particular situation as Paul is

brought before this governor, but there is no evidence, is the exoneration of Christianity of any crimes. You know, it was a very popular thing for the Jews to try to get rid of Christianity by accusing the Christians of being criminals against the Roman government. Throughout the whole book of Acts and the early history of the church as it grew from Jerusalem to Rome, the Jews had tried over and over again to make the Romans believe that Christianity was revolutionary, that Christianity was sedition and insurrection, that if the Romans tolerated the Christians, they'd overthrow the government.

Of course, the hypocrisy of it is enough to make you sick, because the Jews were busy trying to do the same thing. They had a group called the Zealots, and the Zealots were going around starting riots and insurrections, secretly assassinating people that they wanted to get rid of. In fact, they used to kill the Jewish Uncle Toms. That's today's vernacular, of course, they didn't call them that then. In today's vernacular, a Jewish Uncle Tom would be a Jew who paid tribute to Rome. The Zealots would kill them just as soon as they'd kill a Roman. So there was tremendous insurrection coming out of Judaism. And they're trying to accuse the Christians of doing that, but of course it never stuck.

All through the book of Acts, you repeatedly have different trials of Christians. Every time, the Roman government said they were innocent. The testimony is written down for all time, for all men to know. Christianity is not a revolution, it is not a political threat, it is a personal relationship to a living God, and the world doesn't have to fear Christianity. God has established that in the printed pages of His Word. So every time there is a trial of Christians in the book of Acts, Christians are exonerated.

You say, "Why then did the Romans start persecuting them?" That happened because there was a change in things. Let me tell you what happened. The Roman Empire was vast, from the Euphrates on the east to Britain on the west. From the top of Europe and Germany to north Africa, that entire, huge area was the Roman Empire. The Romans were practically scared to death about the possibility of fragmenting that empire, so they worked long and hard to try and come up with a unifying factor that could tie a thread across the whole situation and pull it together.

What they came up with was Caesar worship. If they could get everyone to worship Caesar, that might be the thing they needed to hang it all together. So they established Caesar as a god and demanded out of everyone emperor worship. Once a year, every inhabitant of the Roman Empire had to take a pinch of incense, burn it to Caesar, and then publicly declare, "Caesar is lord." After he did that, he could go and worship any god he wanted to, but he had to believe in the god Caesar and establish that verbally.

You know as much as I do that no Christian would do that. Salvation is confessing Jesus as Lord. We sang that when we came in here. "He is Lord, He is Lord. He has risen from the dead and He is Lord." That's the testimony of a believer, and no believer is going to stand up and say, "Caesar is lord." The Christians wouldn't do it, and that's when the persecution began. Now remember what I said earlier, the persecution is not political, it's religious. They then persecuted the Christians for religious disloyalty. As I say, it's always false religions that lead persecution against the truth. It was then that martyrdom began.

Incidentally, the first guy to really get it off the ground was named Nero. You'll be interested to note, Nero was the Caesar at this very time that Paul is in Caesarea. You'll find out in just a minute, if you didn't know already, that Nero was a complete maniac. He began to murder Christians. The succeeding Caesars after him continued it, and they murdered Christians because they were

supposedly religiously disloyal, and they dreamed up all kinds of other accusations. But this perverted character Nero began it.

It's funny, because the first five years of his rule weren't anything; he was just an ordinary character. Or as ordinary as a pervert could be, I suppose. He was ordinary historically, nothing really happened. But all of a sudden, after his fifth year, bang! Everything just broke loose, and it was due to the fact that they had established emperor worship. That really keyed persecution, as I said, because it comes from religious antagonism.

The record stands, beloved, it stands in the Word of God. No accusation, no accusation, no accusation ever, ever rendered a guilty verdict against the believers; they were never successfully accused of insurrection. Remember in Acts 16, the Romans took Paul and Silas and threw them in jail? You know what happened. God just had a localized earthquake and opened every door in the place. Of course, everyone was scared about that, and it says in verse 35, "The sergeants and magistrates got together and said, 'Let those guys out. Get them out of there.' The keeper of the prison told the same to Paul. 'The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now, therefore, depart and go in peace.'"

They knew that they had imprisoned them without reason, they were imprisoned and in stocks and they hadn't done one thing. The Romans simply stuck them in there at the whim of some of these Jewish people, and Paul and Silas were upset about being put in there. They were upset in one sense, and yet they accepted it as the will of God. But now the Romans were scared, because they knew they had done this against Roman law and without any real verdict. So they said, "Tell them to go quick! Get them out so no one will know we did this." Watch Paul's reaction.

"Paul said to them, 'They have chosen to beat us openly, uncondemned, being Romans. We're Romans and they beat us uncondemned. They threw us into prison. Now they think they're going to put us out privately?'" Paul says, "Now that they've beat us up publicly, they're going to sneak us out privately?" The sergeant said this to the magistrates and the magistrates panicked. "They heard that they were Romans, and came and besought him, 'Please leave. Please leave.'" Do you see the importance of this passage? The Romans knew that they hadn't done anything and they just wanted to get their own injustice off their backs.

Later on, in chapter 18, the Jews bring Paul to Gallio. Gallio says, "This guy hasn't done one single thing. Get him out of here," and threw the whole case out of court. That's how it goes through the whole book of Acts; never were Christians convicted by the Roman government of insurrection. Listen, a Christian is someone who is a model citizen; a Christian is someone who conforms himself to the government for his own conscience's sake, as well as for the sake of what God would do to him if he didn't. I'll talk about that in a minute.

I Peter 2:12 says, "Have your behavior honest among the heathen that whereas they may speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." Here is a Christian's behavior: "Submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake," whether it is the king, the governor, the police, anyone. "Honor the king," he says. This is part of it as a Christian because it is meaningful in giving a testimony. "When you do this, you, with your good deeds, will silence the ignorance of those who would persecute you." So the Christian is to be the example.

Listen to Paul's denial in Acts 25:8. They have no proof, so Paul answers and says, "Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple," the law of the Jews was the accusation of sectarianism, the temple, the accusation of sacrilege, "Nor yet against Caesar," the accusation of sedition. He hadn't done any of these things. "I have not offended in anything at all." That's the end of the case, folks. You don't bring a case into court and say, "He did this and this and this," and the judge asks for evidence and you say, "There is no evidence. I'm just saying he did it." There is no case.

What should Festus have done? Thrown it out, dismiss it on the spot. But you know what? If Felix was the procrastinator, Festus was the guy who did what was expedient, and maybe that's even worse. Whatever benefited him. He knew that if he just dumped Paul, he'd really be in bad, bad trouble, because the Jews would be against him from the very beginning since they wanted this man dead. He was scared to release Paul even though he knew he was innocent. He wanted to be in with the Jews, he wanted to do what was expedient, so he comes up with a compromise.

Verse 9. "But Festus, willing to do the Jews a favor," where is justice, friends? What is this favor routine? He answers Paul and says, "Will you go up to Jerusalem and there be judged of these things before me? I've got an idea, Paul. We'll compromise. You will go to Jerusalem, but I'll be the judge." That sounds like a compromise. They wanted to have Paul go to Jerusalem and they as the Sanhedrin would judge him. No, we'll go to Jerusalem because they want that, but I'll compromise and I'll be the judge.

The issue wasn't even an issue, and there was no trial because no case. They had just proven that again, for about the fourth time. By this time, Paul is a little bit upset. He shows it in verse 10 in a very potent response. "Then said Paul, 'I stand at Caesar's judgment seat where I ought to be judged. To the Jews have I done no wrong as you very well know.'" That's pretty strong language, talking to a big wheel like that, the judge.

Notice what he says, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat." Any province with a governor who sat on the seat of judgment was Caesar's representative, and here, he was standing before the representative of Caesar. So he says, "I'm standing here before Caesar's judgment seat. If you've got a crime to deal with, deal with it. I've never done anything wrong to the Jews and you know I haven't."

Now Festus did know he hadn't. Down in verse 18, when Festus later on talked to Agrippa, he said to Agrippa, "Against whom, when the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation of such things as I supposed. I thought they really had a case; they never had any case." Then why didn't you let him go? "Well, it's a political thing."

So here Paul is a pingpong ball between the Roman governor and the Jewish leaders. They're playing this little game of how to get along and he is the victim, getting batted around, and he's getting tired of this. He's a little bit upset at seeing the absolute naivety of Festus, who would believe that they were just going to deal so nicely with him in Jerusalem. He knew in his mind that they probably had a plot to kill him. He's a little uptight because Felix was a procrastinator and materialist, and to add to that, here is the expediency of Festus doing what is going to benefit him. So he's trapped in a snake pit of intrigue, victimized by these two groups with their interplay.

So he stands up for his rights as a Roman citizen. He says, "I am a Roman citizen. I stand before Caesar's judgment seat; if you have a case, prosecute the case. If you don't have a case, forget it. I've done nothing against the Jews. And you know it, Festus." Well, man, if you stick your finger in the nose of a governor like that and say that you're could be in hot water. But I like his courage, don't you? I mean, when the man believed in a principle, he stood up for his principle. He was no compromiser. It is amazing when you see how a man stands for absolutes and you compare him to compromisers. What a difference.

Verse 11. "For if I am an offender," that is, if I have committed a crime, "And have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die. I'm not trying to escape death," he says. That is not the issue. And you can believe it's true, can't you? Paul doesn't care about dying one bit; dying was just promotion for him. For him, to die was gain. He says, "It isn't death that I'm avoiding; it's justice that I'm after. If I'm an offender and have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die. But if there be none of these things of which these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I know Roman law, and if I haven't done anything, there is no reason to deliver me to them."

That's strong stuff, Paul. And it was courageous. If you think that is courageous, look what he does now at the end of verse 11. "I appeal unto Caesar." Now, when he said that, it was not just an offhand comment; that was an official appeal. This brings us to our fourth point, the appeal proposed. A lower court judgment could be appealed to Caesar. In fact, the appeal could be given before or after the verdict of the lower court. All the Apostle Paul had to do, if he was was Latin, was to say, "AdCaesaremprovoco," or "Caesaremappello," and that amounted to an appeal to Caesar. The case ended on the spot and was transferred to Rome. This was one of the rights of a Roman citizen, and that's what Paul does.

He says, "I'm taking this thing to Rome." He knew he was getting nowhere in Caesarea, he was mired down in the stupidity of this little political battle that was going on and he was the victim of the whole thing. He says, "I appeal to Rome," and the very moment that he said that, the thing shifted out of the hands of Festus into the hands of Caesar in Rome.

I can imagine that, in a sense, Paul got kind of excited on the inside when he said that. He knew that back in Acts 23:11, when he was sleeping that night in the cell, the Lord came to him and said, "Hey, don't be too discouraged. You've been faithful preaching the Word here, and the next stop is Rome." So he knew God was getting him there, and when he was able to say, "I appeal to Caesar," he must have been somewhat exhilarated realizing that was the ticket to Rome.

You know, there's another thought that I had, and that is that appealing to Caesar wasn't really that great when you consider who Caesar was. If he had thought about it long enough, he probably would have said, "I'm probably better off with an expedient character like Festus than I am with a complete maniac like Nero." I mean, going to be judged by Nero wasn't exactly the epitome of the anticipation of absolute justice. Just to give you a little insight to him, and I can't go into all the things he did. He was the most immoral that a man could ever be, absolutely inconceivable, just beyond belief.

Just to give you a little idea of the things that he did in terms of murder, he killed Britannicus, who did not write an encyclopedia, incidentally. He killed Brittanicus, the son and heir of the emperor Claudius, and, of course, moved in on his territory. He killed his mother, Agrippina, to please his

lover, Poppaea, who was the wife of someone else. Then he burned Rome and got mad at Poppaea and killed her by kicking her in the stomach when she was pregnant. He wanted to marry his adoptive sister Antonius, and she wasn't really excited about the deal so he killed her. He married Messalina after he assassinated her husband, and he spent his career busily assassinating all the best citizens of Rome because he couldn't stand good people. Finally, he did the smartest thing and killed himself, which delivered everyone.

In this principle number seven, I see the courage of a committed Christian. The Apostle Paul stands up and does two things that I would say are courageous. Number one, he rebukes, face to face, the governor of Judea, Festus. Number two, he puts himself in the hands of a maniac. It took courage. Courage is born of confidence in God, isn't it? I know that he realized that God could overrule Festus and God could overrule Nero, and on that basis, he was courageous.

Courage is not an intangible; courage is born of faith. Courage is an absolute that is born out of confidence in God, and he believed that God was running his life, so nothing bothered him. He was like Joshua and Caleb; 12 spies went into the land, 10 came back with a grasshopper complex, remember? "Oh, they're giants and we're like grasshoppers!" Two came back and said, "Let's go and take it." Courage.

With all the hassling going on about, "How are we going to defeat Sisera's army," in Judges 4. "How are we going to do it?" A lady named Deborah walks up and says, "Come on, I'll lead you to victory." All the men blinked and followed. Or maybe in I Samuel, you read about David and his tremendous courage, when he walks out with a handful of rocks to fight a giant. It wasn't just that he believed he was a good shot; it was that he believed that God would deliver him. Courage is born of confidence, and confidence is born of faith in God. Paul had that faith.

All the way to Jerusalem, they kept saying, "The Holy Spirit witnesses in every city that bonds and afflictions await you," he says, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself that I might finish the ministry the Lord has to given me with joy." Courage. There is something about courage that is just irreplaceable. There is something about the Christian who is willing to stand up and say what is true.

I shared this in the early hour. We were talking about this and a man came to me afterwards and said he had to give a speech to a group of people. It was a secular group of people and he was giving a supposedly secular speech, and he decided, since a third of them were Jewish, that he'd give a talk on the proof that Jesus was the Messiah. It was a speech to be critiqued by a group of people, and he got up and gave it, and he said, "Your sermon this morning, that's exactly what happened to me this week. I never understood what God was doing. Once I got into the speech, I was afraid. I gave it and after it was over, I got blasted and bombarded and criticized. When I saw what I saw in the Word of God this morning, I want you to know how my heart is rejoicing." He was willing to do that; he had courage to do it, and believe me, God will honor that.

That's the courage to stand and say what needs to be said wherever you need to say it and know that God is going to take care of what happens. Courage is a virtue that belongs to a committed Christian. Look at verse 12. "Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, 'Have you appealed to Caesar? Unto Caesar shall you go.'" He had to check with his council to find out if Paul had Roman citizenship, and it was legitimate to make the appeal, so he says, "You're going to Caesar."

You can just imagine Paul's heart going thump, thump, thump. Rome, at last! He had written the book of Romans and said, "I want to come! I want to come! I want to minister to you and impart some spiritual gift to you. I want to establish a base to go from there to Spain." Boy, he had Rome on his mind, didn't he? Now, all of a sudden, his heart must have been thumping, "I'm going to Rome! I'm going to Rome!" You say, "He could have done this earlier; two years earlier, he could have appealed." You're right. I'll show you in a minute why he didn't.

Let me give you the eighth principle that I see here. That is the believer's behavior before government. It's interesting, I think, that Paul said, "I appeal to Caesar." He had put himself in the hands of the government, and quite a government, right? Paul has laid out for us here a pattern, an example, that believers should follow. We are to put ourselves in the hands of government. How can we do that? Because government is an institution of God.

For just a moment, I want to call your attention to Romans 13 and mention a couple of thoughts that I think are very important. They help us get a perspective on the believer's attitude toward government. Romans 13:1-6 or so really does give us a pattern. "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers, for there is no power but of God." The powers that be are ordained of God. That doesn't mean that every ruler and every official in the world is God's man, it just means that government, as such, is of God. The institution and the format are of God.

Notice verse 2. "Whosoever therefore resists the power resists the ordinance of God." If you fight against the government, you are resisting God, "And they that resist shall receive to themselves judgment." You ought to be a model citizen, not only for the sake of your testimony, but for the sake of the judgment that comes from God in chastisement if you don't. Listen, Christians are not to be revolutionaries, they are not to rebel. There are times when, if in a society, a government forbids you to love the Lord Jesus Christ or to worship Him, that's a different thing. But within the framework of those laws which exist in a government, we are to be submissive and obedient.

"For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil." I don't care if you're talking about China or Russia or the worst of those countries that we could bring up, those countries still protect people who do good deeds and still punish criminals. We may not agree with the philosophy, and the religious persecution is another factor, but basically, they protect good deeds. Not necessarily good people, because evil people can do good deeds in confirmation to a government. But as long as we obey the government, the government is there to take care of us.

Of course, for the sake of religious persecution, there may be a variable there. But generally speaking, "Do that which is good, and you will have the praise of the same." If you'll behave yourself, don't break the law, you'll get along fine. If you're going to drive 120 in a 40-mph zone, don't feel you're being persecuted for righteousness' sake.

"For he is the minister of God to you for good." It's amazing to realize that these people who are over us in government are ministers of God; not that they know it, but that God uses them to effect His will. If you do that which is evil, you'd better be afraid. If you violate the government, if you disobey the government, you have good right to be afraid, "For they are not bearing the sword in vain," God gave them that sword, and God gave them the prerogative to do with that sword as justice demands.

"You must needs be subject not just for wrath," that is, not only because you could be punished, but

for conscience. So you'll have a clear conscience. "So pay your taxes," verse 6 says, because the people collecting it are God's ministers. "Attending continually upon this very thing, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor." The Christian, then, is to subject himself to his government. We're not to be like the Zealots, who used violence, who plundered, who murdered, who killed even the Jews who were obeying the Romans.

Watch this. Paul, by his attitude, disconnects Christianity from Judaism in another way. The Jews had fanatically been anti-Roman; he makes it clear that Christianity and a condescension to government and authority go together. Civil government, in whosoever's hands it may be, is no less a divine institution and is to be obeyed; even if Nero is on the throne, and that's who was on the throne when Paul said this.

You say, "Certainly it doesn't apply if you have a crummy ruler." Yes it does. His letter, in fact, was written to the Romans. Here it is. The Roman government was ordained of God, that's what he says. So he appeals to a divine institution. You say, "But what if the divine institution doesn't do what it ought to do?" That's for God to decide. The standard is still there.

One other principle along this line. I think this passage also teaches us the believer's attitude toward martyrdom. In the early church, there were people with a martyr complex. They tried hard to die as martyrs because they believed there were two levels of future life: one for the normal people and one for the martyrs. That isn't taught in the Scriptures, but everyone wanted to be a martyr. There is something interesting, just to remind you of. The man who seeks martyrdom isn't a martyr. The only person who is a martyr is one who has fought for every possible escape and found no way out.

Did you notice something interesting about Paul? He used every single resource to avoid death. He never even appealed to Caesar, because he knew what that might involve, until the last possible hope was gone of any other solution. Paul was not some kind of spiritual masochist. There are Christians like that, who think the only time they're godly is when they're in pain; the sicker they are, the more holy. That's not so. If God brings you joy, if He brings marvelous health, peace and safety, just thank and praise Him. If He brings you pain, as there is no other alternative, thank Him for that as well.

You see some great principles here, don't you? Kind of a review this morning. Let me close with one thought. The thing that I think overrides everything else and the one dramatic principle that sticks in my mind and dominates my thoughts is this: the impact of one totally dedicated life. Only eternity will be able to measure the impact of that one man, Paul. He made a staggering impact on his entire world.

I thought to myself, even as I was thinking about that, I know I could never have the impact that he had, but I pray to God that I would maximize whatever impact that I could have on this world. That I would order my priorities, that I would maximize my time, and that doesn't mean that I run around like a chicken with my head cut off; it means I find out the priorities and function within them. Maybe the best way for you to maximize your one life would be to pour it into three other people who will be able to multiply it, I don't know. What I do know is that, as Christians, we ought to realize that one man can affect a whole world if that man is right before God. That ought to be a challenge to every one of us. Let's pray.

Father, we're thankful this morning for the joy that has been ours in just seeing again the pages of the Word of God and having revealed to us the truth of God. Thank You for the principles we've seen and learned this morning hour. We realize, Father, that it is the one, totally dedicated life that You multiply and use to Your glory, and we desire above all that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, might be those kinds of lives that touch other lives and affect our world. That we might influence our world for Christ, no matter the price that we must pay. We thank You for that privilege. We await the day when we will be with You and hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant." We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

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