

Paul's Trial Before Felix, Part 3: The Tragedy of Postponing Salvation

Scripture: Acts 24:17–27

Code: 1793

REVIEW

Acts 24:1-27 is about the tragedy of a man who had a great opportunity for salvation, but postponed it. His name was Felix, and he was the Roman governor assigned to Judea. The apostle Paul was on trial before him. He had been accused of certain crimes, all of them false. The charges had been drummed up by some antagonistic Jewish leaders who wanted to see Paul dead because he was a threat to their theological security. The case eventually found its way to Felix. As we examine the case, we see not only Paul exhibiting his blameless life, but God working as well. But particularly in this lesson do we see Felix, a tragic man who squandered his opportunity for eternal life.

Felix had to make a judgment in the case of Paul. The problem that began in Jerusalem when the Jewish leaders tried to kill Paul was pushed to a higher court--the court of Felix in Caesarea, the Roman headquarters. Beyond the legal decision that Felix had to make regarding Paul, he had to make a personal decision regarding Jesus Christ. And the record that remains is of a man who forfeited a tremendous opportunity. Few men have had the privilege of having the apostle Paul in their house for two years. Yet despite all that Felix was exposed to, the sad truth is that he rejected salvation.

I. THE PROSECUTION (vv. 1-9)

Christians should expect false charges

Paul expected false charges. I think that Christians who live holy lives in Satan's world will always have to contend with false accusations. To see this perspective, let's look at a prophecy and a statement that Jesus made.

1. Matthew 10:10-36

a) The expectations When Jesus sent out His disciples, He told them to anticipate certain problems and how to react to them. (1) Hostility Matthew 10:16 says, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." The first thing He says indicates that they would face a certain amount of hostility when they began to confront the world with the truth. Then He said, "Be ye, therefore, as wise as serpents" (v. 16). They needed to be shrewd and careful in planning their strategy. They also needed to be as "harmless [innocent] as doves." You should be wise. Paul continually revealed his blamelessness and his cleverness in the way he was able to construct an opportunity to present the gospel in the midst of a hostile audience. (2) Evil men Matthew 10:17 says, "Beware of men." The disciples' biggest problem would be people. He didn't say, "Beware of Satan," because it is assumed that Satan is behind the scene. Jesus continues, "For they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues, and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles" (vv. 17-18). Jesus instructed them not to naively trust others and become suckered into their confidence, fall into their traps, or to do anything that would enable them to bring a valid charge against them. Paul had already experienced being brought into the councils of men. He was on the verge of being scourged in Fort Antonia, saved only by the fact of his Roman citizenship. In Acts 24 Paul was brought before the governor, Felix, and in Acts 26 he was brought before a king, Agrippa. Paul fulfilled Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 10:17, and

it was fulfilled by all the apostles to some extent.(3) Divine inspirationJesus gave some comforting words in the midst of His warnings, "But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaketh in you" (vv. 19- 20). That was a direct promise to the apostles; I don't believe Christians can expect that today. The promise of divine inspiration belonged only to the apostles. In John 14:26 Jesus said, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said unto you." The Holy Spirit would give the gospel writers accurate recall of all that Jesus said. When the apostles opened their mouths, the Spirit would speak through them. The Holy Spirit does lead and guide us, but God doesn't talk through us as He did through the apostles and writers of Scripture. Paul received inspiration in all six phases of his trial. God gave him the words and they are recorded in the Word of God.(4) Family strifeMatthew 10:21 says, "The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death."b) The explanationMatthew 10:22 says, "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." The reason for the hostility is Jesus Christ. First John 5:19 says, "The whole world lieth in [the lap of] wickedness." Since Satan controls the world and hates Christ, the system that persecutes the believer is really persecuting Christ. Christians will suffer for Christ's sake because of who He is and the world's hatred of Him.c) The encouragementMatthew 10:26 says, "Fear them not, therefore; for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; and hidden, that shall not be known." In other words, "Don't be afraid because there will come a time when judgment will be accomplished and proper rewards will be given. The true and the false will be unmasked." Verses 27-28 say, "What I tell you in darkness, that speak in light; and what ye hear in the ear [in secret], that proclaim upon the housetops. And fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Fear God, not men. If you fear men, then you won't give a bold testimony. But fearing God will cause you to open your mouth because you'll want to be obedient to Him.God knows all about you. Jesus said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father [knowing]. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows" (vv. 29-31). We should expect persecution, but God will care for us so we shouldn't be afraid of it.We need to be willing to pay a price. And the price is animosity from the system. In verses 36-39 Jesus said, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me.... And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it." There is a price to be paid: Expect false charges. And you will be accused because the world still hates Christ. Satan hates Christ, and he attacks Him through those who name the name of Christ.

2. Luke 6:22-23

Jesus said, "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company" (v. 22). Has that ever happened to you? When someone finds out you're a Christian, does he avoid having anything to do with you? That is alienation. Jesus added that people will "reproach you [criticize you], and cast out your name as evil" (v. 22). But when all that happens, you are blessed "for the Son of man's sake" (v. 22). What should be your reaction when they do that? Verse 23 says, "Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven." You need to expect that the world is going to be antagonistic, so you should expect false charges. It sure wasn't a shock to Paul.

II. THE DEFENSE (vv. 10-21)

Having heard the false charges, Paul answers them when asked to do so by Felix in verse 10.

A. Recognizing the Assistance (v. 10)

B. Responding to the Accusations (vv. 11-21)

1. Sedition (vv. 11-13)

The Reversed Perspective

As we consider the Jewish leaders' accusations of Paul, I see an illustration of man's inability to make a sound evaluation. Felix was evil, immoral, materialistic, and oppressive. He ruled with brutality and gained his position by collusion and corruption. The apostle Paul was gentle, godly, Spirit-filled, courageous, selfless, truthful, and hard-working. But what did the Jewish leaders say? "Most noble Felix" (v. 3). The world's perspective is the reverse of the godly one. The contrast between Paul and Felix reminds one of Jesus and Barabbas. The lovely Son of God and a common, ordinary criminal were presented to the people so that one could be set free. The people said, "Not this man, but Barabbas" (John 18:40). One of the sins that destroyed Israel was the exaltation of evil men (Mal. 3:15). Paul was accused. But the ones who should have been accused were Felix and the Jewish leaders for their corruption.

2. Sectarianism (vv. 14-16)

LESSON

3. Sacrilege (vv. 17-21)

The Jewish leaders also accused Paul of attempting to profane the sacred Temple, which was to claim he was blaspheming God.

a) Paul's reason for coming to Jerusalem (v. 17)"After many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings."Paul's motive in going to Jerusalem was not to blaspheme God. After many years (four years since his last visit or even longer since he actually had lived there), he came simply to bring alms to his nation. "Alms" refers to the money he had brought for the needy. He had collected that money from Gentile Christians to offer to the Jewish Christians as a sign of love. Paul also said that he brought offerings in addition to alms. What's the difference between alms and offerings? "Alms" is the definition of what he brought--the gift of money; "offerings" is the bringing of that gift. The alms were a gift to the needy from the Gentiles.Paul said he came to bring alms to his "nation." But he didn't give the alms to the nation; he gave them to the Christian Jews. Remember that the only true Jew is a Christian Jew--one who is a Jew inwardly, not outwardly (Rom. 2:28-29). Paul didn't distinguish the Christian Jew from the nation because in his mind a true Jew was one who believed in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He did in that sense bring alms to his nation.b) Paul's reiteration of his innocence (v. 18)"Whereupon certain Jews from Asia [Asia Minor, a Roman province that included Ephesus, a city where Paul had preached for three years] found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult"Paul was in the temple carrying out the purification rites for a Nazirite vow and worshiping in the customary manner. When the Jews from Asia Minor found him there, no multitude was gathered and no riot was taking place. He was doing nothing illegal. He had not desecrated the Temple, and no multitude had accused him of it while he was there. If Paul had brought a Gentile into the inner part of the Temple, you can be sure a riot would have occurred. But there was no tumult and no crowd. Paul was simply carrying out his vow when the Jews from Asia seized him.The Jews saw an opportunity to get rid of Paul, so they raised up a mob and tried to kill him (Acts 21:27-30). They were angry with him because many Jews had been saved in their own province. That put a dent in their synagogue attendance and undermined their operation. But Paul testified that there wasn't a crowd and that he hadn't violated anything. Rather than desecrating the Temple, he was purifying himself. He had just gone through a time of dedication and commitment that was far from desecration.c) Paul's requests to Felix (vv. 19-20)(1) Present eyewitnesses to the crime (v. 19)"Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had anything against me."Paul is saying that if a riot had occurred, some of the people who were in it should be giving testimony to it. He is asking the Jewish leaders, "Where are your witnesses? You

say I was desecrating the Temple, but who says so? Where are the eyewitnesses who saw me take a Gentile into the inner court of the Temple?" There weren't any because he hadn't done it. And they may have been afraid to bring in a false witness because they wouldn't want his lie to be exposed.(2) Present a report from the council (v. 20)"Or else let these same here [Ananias and the elders] say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council."Paul was saying, "If there are no eyewitnesses of the supposed desecration of the Temple, why don't you let the Jewish leaders tell you what they determined in their council?" The council did meet, but ended in a riot and they never found out anything (Acts 23:1-10). So the Jewish leaders had nothing to say. There was no accusation from witnesses and none from the Jewish hearing. They could only accuse Paul of one thing, which Paul brings up in verse 21.d) Paul's redirection of the issue (v. 21)"Except it be for this one thing, that I cried standing among them, Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day."The only thing Paul could be accused of is making an issue out of the resurrection. And Paul knew that was not a criminal issue, but a theological one. Theological issues were not decided by courts. Incidentally, Felix also knew it wasn't an issue for the court. In Acts 23:29 he received a letter from Claudius Lysias, the tribune of Jerusalem, who explained, "I perceived [Paul] to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds." Claudius knew that Paul hadn't done anything to break the law, but that the Jewish leaders were upset over a theological issue. Paul ended his testimony by throwing the case into the area of theology. That was a wise move from someone who was as wise as a serpent. Paul knew from experience that a Roman judge could not make a determination in a case regarding Jewish theology. There was no crime with which to try Paul. Felix knew the real issue, and Paul passed to him the responsibility of making the right decision. The key to Paul's testimony is in verse 16, "In this do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men." Paul had a clear conscience--his life was blameless. It is a tremendous thing to be able to stand in front of a court and not only be as wise as a serpent, but also be as blameless and innocent as a dove. And when you rebuke all those who would accuse you by your pure life and words, you put to silence their accusations.

III. THE VERDICT (vv. 22-27)

What is the only appropriate verdict that could be rendered? Innocent. There weren't any witnesses. The preliminary hearing held by the Sanhedrin came up with no conclusion. The only issue that was involved in the case was theological. So what verdict does Felix give in the case? He was a competent man who had judged cases before. He knew that the Jewish leaders perjured themselves throughout the trial. When they first arrived, Tertullus flattered Felix with lies. They lied about what happened when Claudius Lysias rescued Paul. Felix already knew what went on from the letter he received from Claudius. They also lied about the accusations because they had no witnesses to support them. They lied about everything. When Paul finished his defense, they didn't have anything to say. But Felix had a problem. He knew the leaders had lied, but he was afraid. What was he afraid of? For one thing, he was trying a Roman citizen, and a Roman citizen had certain rights. If those rights were not met, Paul could make trouble for Felix. But he had an even worse problem: There were many angry Jews in his court--and angry Jews had been known to start revolutions in the past. A governor who was having trouble with revolutions was in worse trouble with Rome. Pontius Pilate had a similar problem. He ultimately allowed Jesus to be crucified to pacify the Jewish leaders because he was afraid he would lose his job if he didn't rule well. Felix was trapped in the same way. His relationship to Rome and its laws was at stake, but so was his relationship to the Jewish leaders. So he did what many politicians do--nothing. He compromised. I'm not saying all people in public office do that, but I am saying that many do.

A. Postponing the case (v. 22-23)

1. Felix's incredible cowardice (v. 22)

a) His information (v. 22a)"And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way" What was "that way"? Christianity. Felix had more perfect knowledge of Christianity than Paul's Jewish accusers did. He was an informed man. Now why did the Holy Spirit include that in verse 22? It gives us some added insight into how responsible Felix was to make a right judgment. He knew enough about Christianity to do what was right. He also knew that the case was based on a theological debate between Judaism and Christianity. Luke (the writer of the book of Acts) is telling us that Felix knew what he should have done. b) His indecision (v. 22b)"He deferred them, and said, When Lysias, the chief captain, shall come down, I will determine your case." There is no record that he ever called Claudius Lysias, or that he ever came. Felix postponed the case permanently. That was the act of a coward. You might be wondering how Felix had a knowledge of Christianity. He lived in Caesarea. Philip the evangelist lived there, as did many Christians. Felix also spent nine years in Judea, and tens of thousands of Christians lived throughout Judea. So he knew enough to make the right evaluation that this case was theological in nature, not criminal. He knew enough about Christianity to be responsible. But he was like Pilate--convinced of the testimony of the accused but afraid of the Jewish leaders. So he postponed the decision until Claudius Lysias could add some information, but Felix never called him. It was a convenient non-decision.

2. Paul's partial confinement (v. 23)

"He commanded a centurion [a soldier who commanded one hundred men] to keep Paul, and let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintances to minister or come unto him." Felix decided to put Paul into a partial confinement to pacify his conscience. Paul was under the care of a centurion, but he had liberty and his friends and acquaintances could visit him at will. At this point the story of Paul's trial before Felix ends. What I see in those 23 verses is the innocence of Paul. His character was blameless. Acts 24:1-23 is the record of an innocent man brought before a pagan judge by Jewish accusers. Paul's case was like that of Christ: If there had been any true accusation, it would have been made. If there were any bona fide witnesses who saw the crime, they would have testified at the trial. But there were no true accusations and no bona fide witnesses. If there had been one small blemish in Paul's life, his accusers would have had a witness ready to accuse him of it. But the Jewish leaders had no such witness and therefore had nothing to say. Paul was as wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove. He was innocent. If you live your life for Jesus Christ and are accused of something, you should be able to stand against those accusations with a conscience like Paul's--innocent, blameless, and holy. This trial gives us a beautiful picture of a holy man who could stand before a group of people who searched for any conceivable accusation, yet could find nothing. It should be the same in your life.

Why did God allow Paul to remain a prisoner?

How do we see God in Acts 24? Is God active at all? Verse 27 says that Paul remained imprisoned for two years. Was God's plan overruled? Did God have to wait to act while Paul sat in jail? Was the plan of God interrupted? No. Was Paul's imprisonment in the sovereign will of God? If it was, why did He allow it? Some people think Paul needed the time to plan his strategy for Rome, but I'm not sure that's true. After all, he remained a prisoner in Rome, and there isn't much strategy involved in that. Other people say he needed to become accustomed to the Roman style of living. But Paul was already accustomed to that. He had travelled in Roman countries for years. If those reasons aren't true, then why did the Lord want Paul to remain a prisoner in Caesarea for two years?

During those two years we have no record of any sermon Paul preached or of anything he wrote. Can you imagine the apostle Paul not preaching or writing for two years? He may have preached or wrote something, but we don't have any record of it. I think those two years may have been a furlough--he needed a rest. He had accomplished much in a few years. He had journeyed all over the Roman world. Those travels climaxed with his arrival in Jerusalem. First, he was nearly beaten to death. Next he was thrown into custody and hustled to Caesarea by four hundred and seventy

Roman soldiers. Then he had to endure a joke of a trial. I think he finally reached a place in his service of the Lord where he had to stop for awhile.

One key thought from Acts 24:23 leads me to think that Paul needed rest: "He commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintances to minister." The implication is that Paul needed to be ministered to. I believe that Luke and Aristarchus were with Paul. Philip probably came around quite often. There probably were many believers in the area of Caesarea who spent some time with him during those two years. I'm sure he disciplined some people. I also think that we will find some of Felix's soldiers when we get to heaven. Perhaps the centurion of verse 23 is there. So I think the two-year imprisonment was a time when God let Paul rest from what he had endured and to be rested in preparation for the worst still to come, which finally ended in his execution. We can be sure of one thing: God knows all. God knew that Paul needed two years in Caesarea. And whatever God accomplished, He accomplished within His purpose--not outside of it.

B. Postponing Salvation (vv. 24-27)

Felix is a sad character. His past was bad, his present was filled with compromise and indecision, and his future became tragic.

1. The request (v. 24a)

"After certain days, when Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, who was a Jewess, he sent for Paul" Felix may have had his exposure to Christianity from Drusilla. She was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I, the Herod named in Acts 12, who would have been very familiar with the beginnings of Christianity. She may have been inquisitive about all the facts of Christianity, as was Felix. Incidentally, Felix first saw her when she was married to the king of Emesa, which was part of Syria, when she was around fifteen. According to the historians, she was supposed to be a raving beauty. Felix eventually seduced her and stole her from her husband. Their relationship was immoral from the beginning.

2. The revelation (vv. 24b-25a)

a) The content of the gospel (v. 24b)"[Felix] heard him concerning the faith in Christ."The verse says, "concerning the faith," not just "faith" (emphasis added). Paul didn't speak concerning putting one's faith in Christ, but concerning the faith in Christ. Faith in Christ is subjective; the faith is objective. Paul gave them the content of the gospel. He told Felix that Jesus is God. He told him that Jesus was born of a virgin and lived a miraculous life. He told him that Jesus died on the cross for the deliverance of sin and rose the third day from the dead. Paul told him all the facts of the gospel. That's what Jude was referring to when he said, "Contend for the faith" (Jude 3). The content of the gospel is the embodiment of truth. Paul talked about who Christ was, why He came, and what He accomplished while Felix and Drusilla listened.b) The character of the gospel (v. 25a)"And as he reasoned of righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come, Felix trembled"(1) Conviction presentedImportant parts of the Christian faith are righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come. Those three areas must be included in the presentation of the gospel.a) Righteousness--This is God's divine ideal--His absolute standard. What does God demand? Absolute righteousness. Jesus said, "Be ye, therefore, perfect, even as your Father, who is in heaven, is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). God's absolute demand is righteousness.b) Self-control--This is man's required response. God has an absolute ideal, and you have to control yourself to conform to that standard. Paul presented Felix with God's standard and showed him that God demands conformity to it.c) Judgment--When man doesn't conform to God's standard, judgment will come. Man must conform to God's absolute ideal or be judged.After Paul presented the ideal of righteousness, he exposed Felix's lack of self-control. Sitting next to him was the woman he had stolen and seduced. Paul talked to Felix about his sin and that he had not lived up to God's standard of absolute righteousness. Felix lived far below that standard. His ultimate end was judgment.

A Pattern for Evangelism

The gospel must be presented so that it convicts those who hear it. Verses 24-25 give us a pattern for evangelism. There are two sides: one, the problem of sin, righteousness, self-control, and judgment; and two, the faith in Christ--who He was and what He did to overcome man's inability to meet God's standard. The gospel is simply this: Tell a man what God's standard is, show him that he is not living up to it, and tell him that he will be judged if he doesn't live up to it. Then tell him that since he can't live up to it, Jesus Christ took his sin, paid his penalty of judgment, and offers him His righteousness by faith.

John 16:8 says that the Holy Spirit has come to convict men of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Righteousness is God's absolute ideal, sin is man's inability to live up to it, and judgment is the result if he doesn't. If you present righteousness, sin, and judgment, you are following the path of the Spirit. You have to present the gospel by covering those three truths because the Spirit wants to convict men of them.

(2) Conviction perceived Felix was convicted. Acts 24:25 says that he trembled. The Greek word indicates that he shuddered. When the apostle Paul presented the facts of the gospel, the Holy Spirit used them to convict Felix, so much so that he began to shake and tremble.

3. The resistance (vv. 25b-27)

a) The decision of a fool (v. 25b) "And [Felix] answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." As long as Felix was shaking from conviction, he still was open to the gospel. But it wasn't long before he stopped trembling, and when he heard Paul, it didn't mean a thing to him. A habit that starts out as a little thread that a child can break soon becomes a cord that a giant can't sever. When someone continues to resist, it becomes harder and harder to break it. That's why Paul told the Corinthians, "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). W. Clarkson said, "If vice has slain its thousands, and pride its thousands, surely procrastination has slain its tens of thousands. The man who is consciously refusing to serve God knows where he stands and what he is; he knows that he is a rebel against God, standing on perilous ground. But, he who thinks he is about to enter the kingdom, shelters himself under the cover of his imaginary submission and goes on and on until sinful habit has him in its iron chain, or until pale faced Death knocks at his door, and he is found unready." (NOTE: John was unable to document this for us.) He's right. It is better for a man to be hostile against the gospel than it is for a man to hang on the edge of salvation but never come. The deceitfulness of sin fools him into thinking he will eventually do what he won't do. Now is the time of salvation, but the foolish man procrastinates. Archias, a supreme magistrate of Thebes, was celebrating at a feast when a courier ran in great haste to present him with important letters. Archias said, "Tomorrow," and he laughed and stuffed the letter under his couch. That same night conspirators attacked and slaughtered everyone in the palace. As long as Felix continued to tremble there was hope, but when he quit trembling he was in trouble. b) The desire of a fool (v. 26a) "He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him" Felix wanted a bribe out of Paul. He was so materialistic that he would do for money what he wouldn't do for justice. He would allow himself to be put in jeopardy for money but nothing else. He wasn't about to let Paul go because the Jewish leaders might give him trouble. But he might have let Paul go if he got money, and then he wouldn't care if they troubled him. Paul told Timothy, "The love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). And Felix loved it. What would make Felix think Paul had money? He probably figured that since Paul brought a lot of money to Jerusalem, and since he was the leader of the Nazarenes, he might have some money on hand. Or he might have thought the Christians could have pooled their money and bought him off. c) The delay of fool (v. 26b) "Wherefore, he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him." Felix sent for Paul again and again. What do you think Paul talked about? The gospel, of course. But the sad part is, Scripture doesn't record that Felix was ever

convicted again. There never was a convenient season. He just wanted money. Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37). What price would Felix pay for his soul?d) The defeat of a fool (v. 27)"But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix's place; and Felix, willing to show the Jews a favor, left Paul bound."Felix was removed from his governorship when there was a big riot in Caesarea. He put it down with such violence that the Jews were outraged and managed to obtain his recall from Rome. But he still was afraid that the Jews would pursue him even when he was out of office. He had already lost his job and he was afraid he might lose his life. So he attempted to pacify the Jewish leaders by leaving Paul a prisoner. For two years Paul had to remain a prisoner. The case was never closed and a final testimony was never given.Felix was a man who preserved his position--a man who wanted money--but who forfeited what mattered. He becomes a classic illustration of one who has all the necessary information. Hebrews 10:26-27 says of such a man, "If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment." Shakespeare put it this way in his play Julius Caesar (IV.iii.209):There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea we are now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose.Shakespeare was right. Felix lost. I'm sure that some of you have thought about receiving Jesus Christ, but you've never done it. You've said to yourself, "Someday I'm going to receive Him--someday when there is a convenient season." There has never been a convenient season. You are being deceived by sin to think that there ever will be. I say to you today, don't harden your heart. Come while you still have the opportunity to receive Christ.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What should Christians expect when they live holy lives in Satan's world?
2. Why did Jesus tell the disciples that they needed to beware of men (Matt. 10:17)?
3. Explain how Paul fulfilled Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 10:17?
4. Why are Christians hated by the world (Matt. 10:22)?
5. What happens when believers fear men? What happens when they fear God?
6. How should believers react when they are alienated for being Christians (Luke 6:23)?
7. What was Paul's motive for going to Jerusalem (Acts 24:17)?
8. Why did the Jews from Asia Minor want to kill Paul?
9. According to Acts 24:19-20, what did Paul ask Felix to present?
10. What was the only accusation that the Jewish leaders could raise against Paul? Why did Paul report that to Felix?
11. What was the only appropriate verdict for a case like Paul's? Why?
12. What was the major problem Felix faced in pronouncing the verdict in Paul's case?
13. Why did Felix have the insight to make a right decision in Paul's case? What decision did he make (Acts 24:22)?
14. Describe Paul's confinement in Caesarea (Acts 24:23).
15. Give some possible reasons for God allowing Paul to remain in confinement for two years.
16. What is the faith in Christ that Paul shared with Felix?
17. What were the three things Paul talked about that caused Felix to tremble? Explain each one. Why did Felix tremble (Acts 24:25)?
18. What pattern does Acts 24:24-25 provide for believers? Explain.
19. What was Felix willing to do for money that he wouldn't do for justice (Acts 24:26)?

20. Why did Felix leave Paul in confinement when he was removed from his post as governor (Acts 24:27)?

Pondering the Principles

1. In Matthew 10:16 Jesus instructed the disciples to be as wise as serpents. That instruction needs to be heeded by all believers today--especially by those who confront unbelievers with God's truth. One of the best ways Christians can begin to learn practical wisdom is to read the book of Proverbs. If you commit yourself to read one chapter a day, you will finish the book in a month. Then read it again the next month, and the next one. The majority of the Proverbs were written by Solomon, who prayed for wisdom and was made the wisest man on earth by God (1 Kings 3:11-12). But Jesus also told the disciples to be as innocent as doves. Wisdom must be balanced with a blameless life. Despite all his wisdom, Solomon turned from God and worshipped the idols of his many wives. As you read Proverbs and follow the Lord's instruction, ask God to continually remind you of the importance of living a blameless life.
2. Whom do you fear most: God or men? Why? Be honest in your answer. Most of us, at one time or another, have feared men more than we feared God. How was your witness for Christ affected by that fear? If you presently fear God more than men, does your witness for Christ to the unsaved reflect that fear? If it doesn't, you may need to more honestly evaluate your fear of God. Ask God to search your heart and reveal your attitude toward Him. Confess to Him any sin that has put men and the things of this world before Him. Ask God to instill in you a reverence for Him and the proper perspective of man's relationship to Him.
3. Acts 24:24-25 gives us a good pattern to follow when we share the gospel with people. What was the content of the gospel Paul shared with Felix? What are the three key elements about sin that Paul shared with Felix, and that we need to share as well? Write those things on a piece of paper and keep it in your Bible. As you study God's Word, add verses to that list that can help in you in your presentation of the gospel. For example, Matthew 5:48 is a good verse to share with people about God's standard of righteousness. Remember, you need to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15).

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