

Lesson 11 - 7 October 2012

Paul's Trial Before Felix

Lesson Scope: Acts 24-26

Lesson Focus

Paul had been escorted the sixty miles from Jerusalem to Caesarea by four hundred seventy troops to protect him from the murderous Jews. Chapter 24 opens with Paul waiting for trial before Felix, the governor of Judea.

This chapter covers two years, but most of it deals with the first few days of this period. Within a week of Paul's arrival, the elders and Ananias, the high priest, traveled to Caesarea for the trial. They brought Tertullus to serve as prosecuting attorney. No doubt he was familiar with Roman laws and court procedures and was able to present the case in correct legal phrasing. But the lawyer Tertullus, who was more interested in winning the case than in telling the truth, used flattery, exaggeration, and lies against Paul. But Paul calmly presented the truth, and the Lord blessed his ministry. Paul had the opportunity to witness to Felix himself (Acts 24:25).

False accusation can intimidate the believer and hinder his work. Exercising faith and the Christian graces, however, can turn such opposition "unto the furtherance of the gospel."

By nature, we justify behavior in ourselves that we would condemn in others. Thus we can clearly see the mote in another's eye but tend to defend the beam in our own eye.

The first question we should ask when we face false accusation is, "Is it really false?" Often we deserve at least part of the blame. God may be using others to chasten us and help us look past our self-interest to His view of us. Another helpful question is, "How would I judge another in my shoes?"

Lesson Aim: To present principles related to facing false accusation.

Theme Verses: 1 Peter 3:15-16. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and 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: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

Lesson Text:

"Tertullus ... Informed the Governor Against Paul"

Acts 24:1 ¹ And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and *with* a certain orator *named* Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.

Acts 24:5-6 ⁵ For we have found this man *a pestilent fellow*, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: ⁶ Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.

Acts 24:9 ⁹ And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.

"I Do ... Cheerfully Answer for Myself"

Acts 24:10-21 ¹⁰ Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: ¹¹ Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. ¹² And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: ¹³ Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. ¹⁴ But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: ¹⁵ And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. ¹⁶ And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and *toward* men. ¹⁷ Now after many

years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. ¹⁸ Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. ¹⁹ Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. ²⁰ Or else let these same *here* say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, ²¹ Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.

"Felix ... Deferred Them"

[Acts 24:22-27](#) ²² And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of *that* way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. ²³ And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let *him* have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. ²⁷ But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

Questions for Study

"Tertullus ... Informed the Governor Against Paul"

1. What aspects of Tertullus's testimony were false?

"I Do ... Cheerfully Answer for Myself"

2. List some facts that help God's people give a calm answer to their accusers.

3. How did staying calm and cheerful help Paul's defense?

4. Contrast the appeals of Tertullus and Paul to Felix.

5. Why must we strive "to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men"?

"Felix ... Deferred Them"

6. How did God use the injustice of Felix to help Paul's ministry?

7. Why does "a convenient season" for surrender to Christ never seem to come?

8. What are some long-range benefits of choosing not to compromise with evil?

Analyzing the Passage

These Jews were very persistent in opposing the Christian way, just as Paul had been before his conversion. They had failed to assassinate Paul; now they tried to distort justice in a civil court.

Tertullus's opening flattery of Felix ignored the facts; the Jews did not appreciate Roman rule, and Felix was notoriously cruel and corrupt.

Tertullus then accused Paul on four serious counts. He charged him with being a pestilent fellow, a mover of sedition, a ring-leader of a sect, and a profaner of the temple.

Paul skillfully defended himself to Felix in six logical steps. He acknowledged that Felix was able to judge the case (Acts 24:10). He denied the charges and showed that he had not been in Jerusalem long enough to stir up trouble (Acts 24:11,-12). He noted the lack of proof for the charges (Acts 24:13, 19). His religion was in harmony with Judaism (Acts 24:14-15). He wanted to do only what was right (Acts 24:16). He had gone to the temple to bring alms and be purified (Acts 24:17-18).

Drusilla, the third wife of Felix, was a Jewess. Perhaps that is why Felix had "more perfect knowledge of that way."

Principles and Applications

"Tertullus ... Informed the Governor Against Paul"

1. False accusers often exaggerate (Acts 24:5). In a world with no absolutes, exaggeration pays. So false accusers "make a

man an offender for a word, ... and turn aside the just fora thing of nought" (Isaiah 29:21). But their magnifying glass does not change the actual size of an issue.

2. Christians should expect to experience false accusations at times (Acts 24:5-6). Our enemy, the father of lies, will use any deceit to oppose us. We live by eternal values, which seem upside-down to carnal men. Our holy lives provoke fault-finding reactions as men seek to justify themselves before their accusing consciences. Our perfect Lord Jesus faced false accusation, and so will we.

3. A multitude of false accusers cannot change the facts (Acts 24:9). "All truth is God's truth" and no group of men, regardless of its size, can change it. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" With God, one saint is a majority.

"I Do ... Cheerfully Answer for Myself"

4. We must use self-restraint when we are slandered or when the facts are distorted (Acts 24:10). Paul waited until "the governor had beckoned unto him to speak" (Acts 24:10). Jesus spoke very little before His accusers. Both Paul and Jesus knew there was no need to panic, because God was fully aware of the truth and in full control of events. They were more concerned about doing God's will than about defending themselves. No accusation can influence God against His children.

5. We should answer our accusers in a respectful and cheerful manner (Acts 24:10-11). "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). As God's representatives, we must not stoop to fighting evil with evil but be an example of courtesy.

6. Our defense of truth should point men to God (Acts 24:15-16, 24). The trials of Jesus, Paul, and Stephen gave them opportunity to witness for truth. Each of them pointed beyond themselves to God, even though it endangered their own safety. They all loved God's truth more than their own lives.

7. It is right to request a fair trial when under legal scrutiny (24:18-20). Paul used the rights of his Roman citizenship. He knew that God has ordained each earthly authority as a "minis-

ter of God to thee for good" (Romans 13:4). God may use the laws of the land to protect us and to extend His kingdom.

"Felix ... Deferred Them"

8. God is in control of earthly judges (Acts 24:22). "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD ... ; he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Proverbs 21:1). Behind the injustices of men stands the great Judge, making sure that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28).

9. We should never compromise truth for personal benefit (Acts 24:26). Since truth is eternal, the consequences of compromise last far longer than its benefits. If we follow truth regardless of the personal cost, we may suffer temporary pain but will enjoy the rewards of truth forever.

As we face pressures for insurance, government aid, or technology, we must ask ourselves, "What decision will take us where we want to be in one hundred years?"

Important Teachings

1. False accusers often exaggerate (Acts 24:5).
2. Christians should expect to experience false accusations at times (Acts 24:5-6).
3. A multitude of false accusers cannot change the facts (24:9).
4. We must use self-restraint when we are slandered or when the facts are distorted (Acts 24:10).
5. We should answer our accusers in a respectful and cheerful manner (Acts 24:10-11).
6. Our defense of truth should point men to God (Acts 24:15-16, 24).
7. It is right to request a fair trial when under legal scrutiny (Acts 24:18-20).
8. God is in control of earthly judges (Acts 24:22).
9. We should never compromise truth for personal benefit (Acts 24:26).
10. It is right to honestly present the facts when falsely accused (Acts 24:11,21).
11. False accusations may provide opportunities to make others

aware of spiritual needs in their lives (Acts 24:25).

Answers to Questions

1. What aspects of Tertullus's testimony were false?

Basically his entire testimony was false. Felix was not a good ruler (Acts 24:2), and the Jews did not appreciate him (Acts 24:3). Paul was not a mover of sedition among all the Jews, and the Nazarenes were not a sect (Acts 24:5). Paul had not profaned the temple, and the attacking mob was not planning to judge him according to the Law (Acts 24:6).

2. List some facts that help God's people give a calm answer to their accusers.

God is fully aware of the truth, and nothing men can say will change His view of His people. God is in control and will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to bear it. He has promised that all things will work together for our good if we love Him. Someday the great Judge will set the record straight.

3. How did staying calm and cheerful help Paul's defense?

Paul did not sound like a dangerous and pestilent mover of sedition. Staying calm allowed him to make an impressively thorough defense. His cheerfulness added weight to his words of testimony and likely led to his ongoing contacts with Felix.

4. Contrast the appeals of Tertullus and Paul to Felix.

Tertullus used flattery and smooth words to sway the judge. Then he exaggerated his baseless claims.

Paul replied respectfully but without flattery. He stuck to the facts and made no personal attacks against his accusers.

5. Why must we strive "to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men"?

If our accusers can point to sin and carnality, it brings reproach to the Gospel of Christ. "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God" (1 Peter 2:20).

6. How did God use the injustice of Felix to help Paul's ministry?

Because Felix refused to give a timely judgment, Paul was able to witness to him. Also Paul spent two years in a loose form of house arrest, protected from his radical enemies but able to write and minister to visitors.

7. Why does "a convenient season" for surrender to Christ never seem to come?

Surrender to Christ means suffering now for future glory. We can easily see the benefits of surrender to Christ and know we should give in someday. But the flesh cringes from crucifixion and struggles to live one more day. Unless we take our faith firmly in hand and seize this day of opportunity, a convenient season will never come.

8. What are some long-range benefits of choosing not to compromise with evil?

We will enjoy the private peace of "a conscience void of offence." We will bring glory to God and gain the respect of our thoughtful neighbors. We will avoid the inevitable reaping for evil in this life. By siding with eternal truth, we will gain eternal life.

Summarizing the Lesson

"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (I Peter 2:11, 12).

Research Guide

1. Study the responses of Jesus (Matthew 27; Mark 14, 15) and Stephen (Acts 7), and compare them to Paul's defense.
2. In *Doctrines of the Bible*, read "The Power of Peace" and "Why Advocate and Practice Non-resistance" on pages 510-512.