

Paul had been attacked while in the temple, rescued by the Roman soldiers, and charged with a crime by the Jewish officials. The Roman commander Lysias learned from Paul's nephew about a plot on Paul's life and so had him escorted by soldiers away from Jerusalem to Caesarea.

¹ And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul. Acts 24:1 After Paul was held in Caesarea for five days, the high priest Ananias came and with him a hired Greek orator to make their accusations before governor Felix. This fits well with the historical information we have on Ananias' cooperation with Rome to advance his own causes. He wants Paul executed.

² And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying: "Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, ³ in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. Acts 24:2-3 Tertullus began with stock phrases of praise. If this was all we read about Felix, we might think it true. However, we have the account of Josephus who tells us that Felix was recalled to Rome to give an account of the brutal way in which he ended a dispute between Syrians and Jews' demand for civil rights in Caesarea. If it wasn't for his brother Pallas intervention before Nero, Felix would have been harshly punished. Some historians believe Felix' governorship was one of the chief factors leading to the first Jewish revolt. Considering this fact, Tertullus' praise on behalf of the high priest Ananias sounds hypocritical. However, it was a common tool to gain the sympathies of a judge to the plaintiff's cause. His words were spoken like a true politician. The Sadducee party did depend on Rome's cooperation and even military intervention against Jewish rebel groups. So in that sense, the praise was sincere.

⁴ But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. Acts 24:4 The presentation would be brief because they didn't have much of a case if any at all. They were relying on the "kindness" of Felix to bend the law to prosecute Paul.

⁵ For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. Acts 24:5 Tertullus' first accusation is that Paul is one who disturbs the peace and starts riots all over the Roman world, like a plague that was spreading (Acts 17:6ⁱ). He has begun by overstating the facts and misrepresenting them. We have seen that during Paul's missionary journeys it was the Jews who didn't accept Jesus as the Messiah who started the riots (Acts 13:50ⁱⁱ; 17:5ⁱⁱⁱ, 13^{iv}). The Way was not an illegal sect of Judaism, but one that the high priest would like to paint in a bad light. Remember that in the past, other governors have accepted it as a protected part of Judaism (Acts 18:14-15^v). Most of the riots were stirred up by the Jews and the rest by intolerant idolaters (Acts 19:24-29^{vi}). It is often the case that the ungodly will accuse others of what they themselves are guilty. Who started the riot in the temple? It was certainly not Paul, but the same men who followed Paul and instigated riots in Asia (Acts 21:27-28^{vii}).

⁶ He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. Acts 25:6 This is the second charge, another bold-faced lie with no evidence whatsoever. The Jews of Asia assumed Paul brought a Gentile into the temple. That was what started this whole series of events. Now they are sticking with this unproven accusation. Tertullus distorted the facts even further when his speech implied the temple police seized Paul to be tried rather than that the people in the temple tried to kill him. Tertullus was trying to claim the jurisdiction belonged to the Sanhedrin and not to Rome. Both of the accusations and the implication he has made were the opposite of the truth. Felix possessed Lysias' report and knew the last claim was untrue (Acts 23:27^{viii}). Lysias soldiers had rescued a Roman citizen from a mob of Jews attempting to murder Paul.

We should note that verse seven is missing from the most reliable and earliest manuscripts. It adds, "we would have judged him according to our law, but the chief captain Lysias came and with great violence took him out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come to you." It appears to be a later addition. It is unlikely that the accusers would have expressed animosity toward captain Lysias as he was serving under Felix. Like most additions, it makes no theological difference if added.

If some of the Jews of Asia had come with the high priest and told how their synagogues were disturbed by Paul, they might have had a legitimate case. But even that claim could be countered by the disputes being merely of interpretation of the law and not one of intentionally disturbing the peace.

⁸ By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him." Acts 24:8 Tertullus implied that if Felix asked the right questions he will come to the same conclusions. The implication is that if he differed in the conclusion he wasn't smart enough to ask the right questions. Felix didn't fall for it.

⁹ The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so. Acts 24:9 The Jewish leadership that was present declared that they agreed with all Tertullus had claimed, making them complicit with his lies (Acts 5:17^{ix}).

¹⁰ And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied: "Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense. Acts 25:10 Paul doesn't resort to praise, just to the truth that Felix had been a governor for a number of years, five to be exact, and was familiar with the differences among Jews, and that Jesus' followers were not instigators of riots. Paul cheerfully makes his defense because he can share his faith. What a difference between Tertullus and Paul! Believers don't have to follow the world's pattern. Remember that Jesus said that when we are on trial the Holy Spirit will give us the words to speak (Matthew 10:19^x).

¹¹ You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, ¹² and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. ¹³ Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. Acts 24:11-13 Paul starts with the second accusation of defiling the temple. He declared it was just twelve days before and he was there to worship, which probably refers to when he began the process of

purification. He wasn't disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd there or in the synagogues. If he was disruptive, it should be easy to prove as it was a recent event. But they haven't brought any proof of either accusation. It's Paul's word against that of his accusers.

14 But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, Acts 24:14 Paul gladly confessed that he is a follower of the Way, which Rome considered as a part of Judaism^{xi}. Paul declared that he is a devout Jew for he worships the God of the Jews and believes all that is in their sacred writings. This would have gone right along with the report sent by Lysias that this was a matter of dispute regarding the interpretation of their Scriptures (Acts 23:29^{xii}).

15 having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. Acts 23:15 Paul went on to say that his hope was in God and the future resurrection of the just and unjust (Romans 14:10-12^{xiii}). He seems to be emphasizing that the Way is indeed part of Judaism and not a new religion to be suppressed. But it is rather strange that he says his accusers agree that there is a resurrection. Most, if not all of them, including the high priest, would have been Sadducees. They don't believe in the resurrection. However, most Jews of that day did agree with Paul that there was a future resurrection (John 11:24^{xiv}). Perhaps Paul believed Felix would have known that, since his wife was a Jew. If the accusers then said they disagreed, it may bring out that this was the real reason behind their accusations, and that they were more out of step with Judaism than Paul was.

16 So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. Acts 24:16 Because he believes in the resurrection when we will all give an account of ourselves to God (2 Corinthians 5:10^{xv}), he always wants to live in such a way as to have a clear conscience. This is a defense against the claim that he is a rabble rouser. **If we truly believe we will have to answer to God for the way we lived, we will want to live with a clear conscience.** Though our sins are removed as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12^{xvi}), we don't want our bothered conscience to interrupt our communion with Jesus.

Paul also wanted a clear conscience toward man. A clear conscience toward God must include a clear conscience toward man, as Jesus insisted that we forgive one another and love our enemies (Matthew 6:14-15^{xvii}; Luke 6:27^{xviii}). That doesn't mean we must continually put ourselves under their abuse, but we must forgive as the Lord has forgiven us. Paul is clearly showing that the issue is differences in interpretation of Jewish Law which means he hadn't violated Roman laws.

17 Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. Acts 24:17 Next Paul addressed the charge of profaning the temple. After years of absence, he came to Jerusalem to worship according to the law and even give alms and offerings. What we do with our money usually declares what we truly believe (Romans 15:25-28^{xix}).

18 While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia—¹⁹ they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. Acts 24:18-19 He was completing his vow of purification according to the Law and causing no trouble when the Asian Jews attacked him and started the riot! Since they started all this they should be the ones bringing the accusation. There was an issue in the political world of that day that would soon be passed into law. If accusers did not show up to make a face to face accusation, they were abandoning the case. The Holy Spirit had inspired Paul with a key issue that was making its way into Roman law at that very time.

20 Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council,²¹ other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: 'It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.'" Acts 24:20-21 The present accusers only know about his defense to the council. Let them bring up what was wrong with his defense. All he was able to declare was that he believed in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6-7^{xx}). Lysias' translator could testify that this was the case regardless of what the Sadducees said. If that was the reason he was there, most of the Jewish nation should be on trial with him, for they too believe in resurrection of the just and unjust.

22 But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case." Acts 24:22 Felix knew what this was all about, which is whether or not Jesus is the Messiah. He was stuck though, trying to please the Jewish leadership and keep the peace. He decided to pass the buck. It was a no-win situation: allow a Roman citizen to be killed or raise the ire of the Jewish leadership. Paul was inspired to make it a Sadducee versus Pharisee conflict, a well known argument that was centuries old, but one essential to faith in Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:13-14^{xxi}). The tribune Lysias could clear up some of the argument by telling what he observed. That would tend to back up Paul's case and show the accusations to be based on several lies.

23 Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs. Acts 24:23 Roman prisoners were not fed. They relied on the generosity of others. While Paul was confined, he could do as he pleased and have guests who met whatever needs he had, which made his confinement more comfortable. He needed quill and parchment and a secretary... and he got it. And the church has benefitted from it ever since!

24 After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. Acts 24:24 There is quite a story behind this one. Drusilla is the sister of King Agrippa II. Felix deceptively precipitated her divorce from her first husband so that he could take her as his wife. Paul was invited by Felix to speak about his faith in Christ Jesus. Oh for such opportunities!

25 And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you." Acts 24:25 Paul pulls no punches to obtain his freedom. He presents the Gospel in its fullness. Righteousness - required by God and only found in Jesus (Romans 3:21^{xxii}); self-control - the fruit of the Spirit in the life of a believer that keeps us from continuing in sin (2 Peter 1:5-6^{xxiii}); and the coming judgment – eternal rewards for those who accept Christ and punishment for those who reject His love and grace. It means torment for those who reject Christ, and reward for those in Christ who yield to the Spirit, but a lack of rewards for Christians who do not exercise self-control and yield to the flesh rather than the Spirit (Acts 10:42^{xxiv}; 1 Corinthians 3:15^{xxv}).

Felix had lusted after Drusilla while she was still the young bride of Azizus, the king of Emesa, therefore the warning of future judgment upon un-repentant sins terrified Felix. He promptly dismissed Paul. Felix' fear was from conviction of being accountable for his sins to a holy God. But it appears he did nothing about it. This may have been the turning point when Felix chose to reject the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

26 At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him. Acts 24:26 He knew Paul had influence over many people and could raise money like the alms he brought to Jerusalem and the sacrifice he financed. Typical of tyrants, if they are going to pay a political price they want to be rewarded financially. But often speaking with Paul means often hearing the truth and the Holy Spirit can use that for salvation or judgment.

27 When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison. Acts 24:27 Christians had no political clout, but the Jewish leadership did. With no bribes to be had, Felix did what benefitted him most, even after hearing the Gospel and eternal consequences. He didn't want the Jews attacking him in Rome when giving an account for the harsh ways he dealt with uprisings, so he left Paul imprisoned for two years. Porcius Festus was a much more gracious ruler. He came to the office in the summer of A.D. 59. The fate of Felix is unknown but it appears his eternal fate was made clear by his rejection of the Gospel.

The narrative today presents us with three types of character. The high priest and his team were willing to lie to have their way and maintain religious power. They tried to eliminate what they thought was their opposition. Their hearts were ruthlessly hard. The second is Felix, the secular power, who tried to appease everyone and in the end, could please no one. He rejected the conviction that came upon his heart and lived for this world. And finally, there is Paul. He seems like the victim, the one we should feel sorry for, and yet he is a servant of the living God, living with a clear conscience in communion with His Creator, laying up his treasures in heaven, and fulfilling the call of God upon his life. The only joy seen in this whole passage is that of Paul giving his defense, for it is his opportunity to testify to the grace of God upon his life.

It wasn't long before all of them passed from earthly life. Paul declared he lived his life in good conscience for that day. By the grace of God may we all do the same. We will

stand before God's throne and give an account. Did we accept God's forgiveness and grace found in Jesus? And then, what did we do with the gift of the Holy Spirit? Will we be able to say that we let Him guide us so that we bore much fruit (John 15:8^{xxvi})? Or will we be saved, yet so as by fire, our works on earth burned up like so much hay and stubble? God is working in us to will and do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12^{xxvii}).

Questions

- 1 Which of Tertullus' techniques do you recognize?
- 2 What are the charges?
- 3 What was the high priest hoping?
- 4 What is Paul's defense against the first?
- 5 What is Paul's defense against the second?
- 6 Who gave the best case and why?
- 7 What legal issue was brewing in Rome?
- 8 How was Paul cared for while incarcerated?
- 9 What was Paul's message/warning to Felix? Why?
- 10 What three characters are presented?

ⁱ **Acts 17:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also,

ⁱⁱ **Acts 13:50 (ESV)**

⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Acts 17:5 (ESV)**

⁵ But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.

^{iv} **Acts 17:13 (ESV)**

¹³ But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

^v **Acts 18:14-15 (ESV)**

¹⁴ But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. ¹⁵ But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things."

^{vi} **Acts 19:24-29 (ESV)**

²⁴ For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. ²⁵ These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. ²⁶ And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. ²⁷ And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship."

²⁸ When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

²⁹ So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel.

^{vii} **Acts 21:27-28 (ESV)**

²⁷ When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, ²⁸ crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."

viii **Acts 23:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen.

ix **Acts 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy

x **Matthew 10:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour.

^{xi} It is interesting that the Qumran community referred to itself as "the Way," which may refer to Isaiah 40:3, "prepare the way of the LORD."

xii **Acts 23:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment.

xiii **Romans 14:10-12 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹ for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

¹² So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

xiv **John 11:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

xv **2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

xvi **Psalms 103:12 (ESV)**

¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

xvii **Matthew 6:14-15 (ESV)**

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,

¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

xviii **Luke 6:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,

xix **Romans 15:25-28 (ESV)**

²⁵ At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. ²⁷ For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. ²⁸ When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you.

xx **Acts 23:6-7 (ESV)**

⁶ Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial." ⁷ And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

xxi **1 Corinthians 15:13-14 (ESV)**

¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

xxii **Romans 3:21 (ESV)**

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—

xxiii **2 Peter 1:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness,

xxiv **Acts 10:42 (ESV)**

⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.

^{xxv} **1 Corinthians 3:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

^{xxvi} **John 15:8 (ESV)**

⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

^{xxvii} **Philippians 2:13 (ESV)**

¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.