

## Paul's Third Defense

Acts 24:1–27

Studies in Acts #29

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It seems every time there is a high profile legal case in our country there are threats made of riots if things don't go a certain way for a certain group. In the face of what one group considers an unjust verdict, more injustice is the result. How are we as Christians to respond to injustice? But more particularly, how are we to respond to injustice done *to us*? We can learn how from the apostle Paul's experience in Acts 24.

Here we have Paul's third of five defenses. He's defended himself against the Jewish mob. He's defended himself against the Jewish Sanhedrin. And now he defends himself against the Sanhedrin but in front of Felix, who was the governor of the Roman province of Judea from AD52–60. He was known as being ruthless in quelling Jewish uprisings. The Roman historian Tacitus said, "He exercised the power of a king with the mind of a slave."<sup>1</sup>

We pick up after the military tribune, Claudius Lysias, found out about a plot against Paul's life. His response may seem extreme to us—**two hundred soldiers...seventy horsemen...two hundred spearmen** (23:23), nearly half of the garrison's strength—but Paul was a Roman citizen and if he as Claudius' prisoner died, Claudius would be put to death himself. So Paul was taken out of Jerusalem around 9pm (23:23) with a letter from Claudius to Felix (23:25–30) and came about half way to

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<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *Histories*, 5.9.

Caesarea to the city of **Antipatris** (23:31). The next day Paul and the seventy horsemen made it to Caesarea (23:32–33). Felix read the letter, found out Paul was a Roman citizen from the province of Cilicia, and housed him in **Herod’s praetorium** until his accusers arrived (23:34–35). Then came the trial. I want you to see how Paul faces nothing but one injustice after another but instructively responds in a godly way.

### **The First Injustice: False Accusation (vv. 1–9)**

The first injustice is *false accusation*. And I should add that this is just the first injustice *here*. We’ve already seen Paul accused wrongly in the temple court (ch. 21). We’ve seen him beaten unjustly (ch. 21). We’ve seen him tried before the Sanhedrin unjustly (ch. 23). We’ve seen him hit at the command of the high priest unjustly (ch. 23). We’ve seen a plot against his life unjustly (ch. 23). Paul faces nothing but injustice here.

So on behalf of the Sanhedrin, **five days later the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus** (24:1). I want you to notice this character, **Tertullus**. The Sanhedrin spared no expense in retaining his services. He’s called a **spokesman**, but literally he is a *rhētoros*, a rhetorician. Tertullus was a trained speaker whose job was to persuade people. When the Sanhedrin could not prosecute Paul themselves with the facts, they resorted to verbal tricks! It’s one more injustice.

His first trick is what Roman rhetoricians called *captatio benevolentiae*, that means to “capture the benevolence” of your audience. We would say he’s “buttering up” Felix: **“Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, in every way and**

everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly” (24:2-4).

His second trick is emotional language meant to inflame Felix’s passions against Paul: “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. He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him” (24:5-6).

His third trick was false witnesses, as we read in verse 9: **The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so.** There’s no evidence here, only accusations!

### **The Second Injustice: Inaction (vv. 22-27)**

I want to skip past Paul’s defense for a moment to Felix’s judgment. It’s another injustice as there is nothing but *inaction*. Paul’s accusers have nothing. Paul actually defends himself. Yet we read that Felix defers action until “**Lysias the tribune comes down**” (24:22). Why? Well, we see in verse 23 that he was not harsh to Paul but ordered that he should **have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs** (24:23). Obviously Paul is a Roman citizen, but there’s a more nefarious reason for this leniency and inactivity: Felix wants a bribe. After Paul spoke with Felix and his Jewish wife **Drusilla** (24:24) we read that Felix **hoped that money would be given him by Paul** (24:26). And notice that this just didn’t happen once, but Felix **sent for him often and conversed with him** (24:26) in the hopes of money! He was a crooked judge “on the take,” as we say! And just when we thought

things couldn't get any worse, we read that this went on for **two years!** (24:27) Nowadays when there's even a hint of injustice we get a hashtag trending to rectify it immediately. Yeah, we've got it so bad! At the end we learn that Felix never was out for justice: **And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison** (24:27).

## **Paul's Defense, Our Response (vv. 10–21)**

So how did Paul defend himself? And what can we learn from his response in the face of bald-faced injustice?

1. First, Paul stuck to the truth in the face of false accusations. He even says he **cheerfully** [made his] **defense** (24:10). Tertullus made three accusations and Paul responded in kind:

Tertullus accused Paul of being **“one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world”** (24:5). Paul gave facts: **“You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, 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”** (24:11–12). The world is going to do all it can to silence us. We need to learn the virtue of speaking the truth in love!

Tertullus accused Paul of being **“a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes”** (24:5). Paul gave the facts that we are not “a sect,” but **“I worship the God of our fathers”** (24:14), I **“believ[e] everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets”** (24:14), and I **“hav[e] a hope in God...that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust”** (24:15).

Tertullus accused Paul of **tr[ying] to profane the temple** (24:6). Paul responded with the facts that **“after several years of travel I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings”** (24:17), which the law required, and that **“they found me purified in the temple”** (24:18).

2. The second lesson to learn here is that Paul saw injustice as an opportunity to proclaim the gospel. He sums it all up saying, **“It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day”** (24:21). Without his imprisonment he never would have had an opportunity to witness to the Governor, and as we’ll go on to see, the King or to Caesar’s own household.

3. Paul learned patience in the midst of injustice. As we saw this morning, **“suffering produces endurance”** (Rom. 5:3). Do you run right to Facebook or do you run to the face of the Lord when injustice happens? Know that God uses your struggles to further his plan of sanctification in your life. Amen.