

## Paul and Felix

- Acts 24:1-27
- Since Barnabas went to find Paul in Tarsus and brought him to Antioch to help in teaching the church, the story of Acts has followed Paul in his journey and we have been introduced to a number of different characters because God put them in Paul's path. Most of them have been men or women who are drawn to Christ through Paul's ministry or are somehow yoked with him in his work. Like Aquila and Priscilla, Lydia, and the Philippian jailer. But now, in the trial stage of Paul's life, many of these characters have been opposed to the Gospel and dead-set on putting this little Jewish man away. They're virtually taking a number to get in line so they can take their best shot at Paul. Let's examine this text today under these three headings: the prosecutor's charges; Paul's confession; Felix's dilemma.
- **The prosecutor's charges**
- The scene is Caesarea, which was the provincial capital of Judea. The governor is Felix, and he will preside over this court proceeding as judge. The prosecutor, who has come up from Jerusalem with Ananias and the elders, is named Tertullus. And you can't help but not like the guy right from the beginning, because of what he says to the judge. He uses a technique which was common then and is common today as well. The Romans called it "captatio benevolentiae," which means, "I'm going to blow as much smoke as I can at you, judge, to win your favor and good will." We all recognize this as parents, when one of our children walks in out of the blue and says, "You know, Dad, I was just thinking about what a great Dad you are. You always do the best thing, and you love your children more than, hey, more than you love yourself! And I have not told you enough how glad I am to be your son, and..." You stop him before he hurts himself, right? And you ask.... ? "What do you want?" And that's just funny, because he is right, you ARE a good Dad and you DO love your children! But Tertullus the lawyer is a liar. It reminded me of the old joke, "How do you know a lawyer is lying?" His lips are moving. "What's the difference between a dead skunk and a dead lawyer on the road?" There's skid-marks in front of the skunk. "What's the difference between a lawyer and a catfish?" One's a bottom-dwelling scum-sucker, and the other is just a fish! OK, enough lawyer jokes. But Tertullus starts spewing flattery with his first phrase: "Since through you we enjoy much peace." The TRUTH is, during Felix's short governorship, he had to put down several bloody insurrections, and he did so with such barbaric brutality, that Stott says "he earned for himself the horror, not the thanks of the Jewish population." Then the lawyer made it even more nauseating when he said that Felix was responsible for national reforms. There is no historical evidence that Felix ever did ONE thing to move the empire forward. He was called back to Rome after short tenure and removed of his responsibilities to govern a province.
- Now at this point, the judge has two choices. An honest judge would stop a lawyer in his tracks and tell him to get on with it and stop wasting the court's time with his nonsense. He could do that because a judge is IN charge of his courtroom. I saw that a few years ago when I was sitting in district court to be moral support for a friend, and before the session even started, the judge had every person wearing shorts removed from the place. Some were defendants, getting ready to have their day in court, and they had shown up wearing shorts and a dirty t-shirt. The judge read them the riot act and sent them packing. That's what honest judges do when they see disrespect for the law and for the court. And he would not put up with more than half a sentence of Tertullus' nonsense. A dishonest judge would enjoy the flattery, maybe even believe it, and let it go on. We can see which category Felix belongs to. He has no more character and integrity than the man who is standing there lying about him.
- We finally get to the charges, and Luke graciously summarizes them for us as he did the opening drivel. The charges are three. First, Tertullus says that Paul is a plague. Some versions say a pest. Not only that, but Paul is stirring up riots among ALL the Jews throughout the WORLD! Whoa, that should give us pause. Second, Paul is a ringleader of a sect called the Nazarenes. The word for sect is the same word used to describe the party of the Pharisees and the party of the

Sadducees, and at this point doesn't refer to a heretical movement. But it's the word "Nazarene" that would have made the judge smile to himself. Nazarene? Nazareth? What could possibly come out of Nazareth that would be of any value whatsoever? Third charge, Paul even tried to profane the temple. This goes back to what started all the ruckus, when the Jews thought Paul had brought a Gentile, Trophimus, into the temple. This may have been the most serious charge, because the Romans had granted the Jews nearly complete power to police their own temple. "We seized him," Tertullus says. That was almost true, wasn't it? They didn't just seize him, they beat him and would have killed him had the tribune not intervened. Convenient omission. Then Tertullus turns to Felix and says he knows the governor will be able to see everything I have just said is true as soon as he examines the prisoner. The Jews are all there adding their consent, nodding and grunting in affirmation. Felix then nods to Paul.

- **Paul's confession**

- Notice that Paul also started with a much milder "captatio benevolentiae," which doesn't smack of flattery at all, merely respect for the office and the court. Then he answers the charges one by one. This is an important point. When a follower of Jesus is charged with something, the best thing that person can do is answer the charges.
- First, he commends the judge's power to confirm easily that Paul was not a plague, that he had not gone into Jerusalem to do anything other than worship. And that his accusers could not produce a shred of evidence that he even had TIME to create an insurrection.
- Second, Paul confesses. Verse 14. This must have been a surprise to everyone in the courtroom and had them rubbing their hands together with delight. We've GOT him! Paul says the words that every prosecutor lives to hear: "But this I confess to you." What does Paul confess? He confesses that he is a part of the Way, which they call a sect. We know about the Way, right? This is what the followers of Jesus were called. Paul when he was Saul got papers from the high priest so he could go to Damascus looking for followers of the Way, and bring them bound to Jerusalem. That's how chapter nine opens up, and we know what happened on his way to Damascus to persecute the Way. Paul became a follower of the Way. Where did this name come from? I suspect that the Christians were fond of quoting Jesus to their lost friends, saying, this is the One who said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6) No one can know God unless he or she comes to God through Jesus Christ. This categorically denies the claim of anyone then and anyone today who says, "Every person who worship anything or anyone worships the one God. Call him Allah or Jesus, call her Shiva or Vishnu, it doesn't matter. And those who claim exclusivity for one of the pantheon of 'gods' should be seen as dangerous, maybe even deranged." Well, then you would have to count Jesus in that list of dangerous and deranged. Look at the four ways that Paul both affirms and denies the charge that he was a Nazarene and it was a sect.
- 1- I worship the God of our fathers. (vs 14) He has not abandoned the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- 2- I believe everything that was written in the law and the prophets. Their claim was that they believed the law and the prophets, but this "sect" consisted of people who rejected the law and the prophets. That the two are mutually exclusive. Paul says, not at all, in fact just the opposite. Paul's ministry to the Jews had been one of convincing those who had ears to hear that there was a continuity from the Old Testament to Jesus. That the laws and the prophets bore witness to Him! Remember the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after Jesus crucifixion, and Jesus shows up and they don't recognize him and they say that the hope of redemption was now dead? (Acts 24) And Jesus said to them that they were slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken! And beginning with Moses (the law) and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." (24:27)
- 3- I have the same hope in God as these men. (vs. 15) Who are "these men?" The Pharisees! They believed in the resurrection, and Paul says I too believe in the resurrection. "I believe that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust." I would love to know where Paul's eyes

were at that point. Did he look down as he spoke this last sentence? Or did he fix his eyes on his accusers, and even on Felix as he spoke of the resurrection? Then he says,

- 4- I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. He says the same thing to Felix that he said to the Sanhedrin just a few days before. A clear conscience! Tertullus had just spun a web of lies before God and man. He was affirmed in those lies by the Jews who had come down with him from Jerusalem. Felix was on his third marriage to Drusilla, who history tells us was a ravishing beauty. Felix wanted her for himself and secured the aid of a Cypriot magician, history says his name was Simon! who somehow seduced her away from her rightful husband and into Felix's arms. Here she is at 22 years of age. A clear conscience? Maybe if there was still a shred of conscience in Felix, his head was pounding about now from guilt. If your head spins when you hear that, and you desire to have a clear conscience, let me remind you where it comes from. Paul had a clear conscience not because of what HE had done, but because of what had been done for him. Our conscience, like our heart, can be wiped clean in an instant by faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. He died for all of our stained consciences, and receives all who come to Him by faith. He will instantly save all who believe and then He will lead you through the sanctification process, where He teaches you how to live, how to forgive, how to make things right with those whom you have offended, and how to live a life of freedom in Christ! I wrote this in my column yesterday: A university professor was asked to speak at a military base one December, and a soldier named Ralph was sent to pick him up at the airport. After they had introduced themselves, they headed toward the baggage claim. As they walked down the concourse, Ralph kept disappearing. Once he stopped to help an older woman whose suitcase had fallen open. Then he stopped to lift two toddlers up to where they could see Santa Claus. He paused again to give directions to someone who was lost. Each time he came back with a big smile on his face. "Where did you learn to do that?" the professor asked. "Do what?" Ralph said. "Where did you learn to live like that? You have stopped to help three people with their problems, and to be honest, I didn't even SEE them!" "Oh," Ralph said, "I learned that during the war, I guess." Then he told the professor about his tour of duty in Vietnam, about how he served with a mine detection unit whose job it was to clear territory of mines left by the Viet Cong. He spoke of how he had witnessed some of his buddies blown apart or maimed for life. "I learned to live between the steps," he said. "I never knew whether the next one would be my last, so I learned to get everything I could out of the moment between when I picked up my foot and when I put it back down again. Every step I took was a whole new world, and I guess I've just been that way ever since." There's only ONE who is the WWY and teaches us to live between...
- Third charge, that Paul had profaned the temple. Paul refutes that as well, explaining that his purpose in coming to the temple was just the opposite. He came bringing alms and offerings, and he was ceremonially pure. But it was Jews from Asia-- . Paul stops in mid-sentence and says, "Where are my accusers? They should be here." When the eyewitness fails to show up in court, there is no case. It should have been thrown out right there, and if Paul had pressed the matter, it might have been. Why didn't he? Remember when Jesus told His disciples that when they were dragged into the courtroom for His names' sake, not to worry about what to say? It will be given to you in that hour, Jesus said. I believe Paul was allowing the Lord to lead him here, and speaking what was given to him by the Spirit. I also believe he was holding onto the promise Jesus had spoken just a few days earlier: as you have testified to the facts about Me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.
- **Felix's dilemma**
- Felix adjourned the proceedings and told the centurion to allow Paul to have some freedom in custody, mainly that his friends could visit. He faced a dilemma, Felix. He could not convict Paul because there was not enough evidence, and the eye witnesses did not appear in court. Lysias had sent Paul to Felix, remember, and the Roman tribune had found no fault in him. Tertullus had made none of the charges stick, despite his nauseating flattery and bold-faced lies. On the other hand, Felix did not want to release Paul. Why? (vs 26). He's hoping for a bribe! And he wants to please the Jews. His character is on display once again. A greedy people-pleaser.

- After a few days, Paul was summoned by Felix. Apparently the Roman governor wants his Jewish wife to hear Paul make his case for Christ. Interesting. What did Paul talk about? “faith in Christ Jesus.” (vs. 24). THAT’S our message! But notice that Paul did not preach about faith in a vacuum, as we don’t either. He spoke with the audience in mind, as we must do as well. So his three main points of his sermon that day were “righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment.” Righteousness. It could be translated “right usefulness.” This is an excellent clicker, most of the time. It would make a lousy hammer. It was not created for that, and to use it to drive nails would be unrighteous. You were made for God, to know Him and love Him and walk in His ways. To live your life for yourself is unrighteousness. Not only that, but righteousness will result in self-control. God teaches all who come to Him how to walk in obedience, to overcome selfish lusts, to make their aim to be well-pleasing to God. And the end result will be that you escape the terrible final judgment of God. Paul may have said something like, Felix, you have tried me and not been able to decide whether I am guilty or not. But make no mistake. God knows everything about you, and you too, Drusilla, and the evidence is overwhelming. There is no question about one shred of it. The eyewitness to every deed and to every word and even every thought is God Himself, and HE DOES show up for court, every time, and you WILL stand before Him one day. Why don’t you come to Him before it’s too late. Felix was alarmed, and said, “Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.” And in the two years that followed, Felix summoned Paul many times and conversed with him. But there is no certain biblical record and no historical record that Felix or Drusilla ever TOOK the opportunity and came to Christ. History records that when she was only 41, in AD 79, Drusilla was in Pompeii with her son when Mt. Vesuvius erupted. The party was going and the pomp and circumstance was on full display and Drusilla was still relatively young and probably still beautiful, and then the whole place was shaken by a rumbling like they had never heard. And it was too late. Drusilla was swallowed up by the molten lava, and was ushered into eternity without Christ.