

CHAPTER 24

We left Paul a prisoner at Caesarea, in Herod's judgment-hall, expecting his trial to come on quickly; for in the beginning of his imprisonment his affairs moved very quickly, but afterwards very slowly. In this chapter we have his arraignment and trial before Felix the governor at Caesarea; here is,

- I.** The appearing of the prosecutors against him, and the setting of the prisoner to the bar (v. 1, 2).
- II.** The opening of the indictment against him by Tertullus, who was of counsel for the prosecutors, and the aggravating of the charge, with abundance of compliments to the judge, and malice to the prisoner (v. 2-8).
- III.** The corroborating of the charge by the testimony of the witnesses, or rather the prosecutors themselves (v. 9).
- IV.** The prisoner's defence, in which, with all due deference to the governor (v. 10), he denies the charge, and challenges them to prove it (v. 11-13), owns the truth, and makes an unexceptionable profession of his faith, which he declares was it that they hated him for (v. 14-16), and gives a more particular account of what had passed from their first seizing him, challenging them to specify any ill they had found in him (v. 17-21).
- V.** The adjourning of the cause, and the continuing of the prisoner in custody (v. 22, 23).
- VI.** The private conversation that was between the prisoner and the judge, by which the prisoner hoped to do good to the judge and the judge thought to get money by the prisoner, but both in vain (v. 24-26).
- VII.** The lengthening out of Paul's imprisonment for two years, till another governor came (v. 27), where he seems as much neglected as there had been ado about him.

~~400~~ ACTS 24:1-9

THE SPEECH OF TERTULLUS

We must suppose *that Lysias, the chief captain*, when he had *sent away Paul to Caesarea*, gave notice to the chief priests, and others that had appeared against Paul, that if they had any thing to accuse him of they must follow him to Caesarea, and there they would find hi, and a judge ready to hear them — thinking, perhaps, they would not have given themselves so much trouble; but what will not malice do?

I. We have here the cause followed against Paul, and it is vigorously carried on.

1. Here is no time lost, for they are ready for a hearing *after five days*; all other business is laid aside immediately, to prosecute Paul; so intent are evil men to do evil! Some reckon *these five days* from Paul's being first seized, and with most probability, for he says here (v. 11) *that it was but twelve days since he came up to Jerusalem*, and he had *spent seven in his purifying the temple*, so that these five must be reckoned from the last of those.

2. Those who had been his judges do themselves appear here as his prosecutors. *Ananias himself the high priest*, who had sat to judge him, now stands to inform against him. One would wonder,

(1.) That he should thus disparage himself, and forget the dignity of his place. *She the high priest* turn informer, and leave all his business in *the temple at Jerusalem*, to go to be called as a prosecutor in *Herod's judgment-hall*? Justly did God make *the priests contemptible and base*, when they made themselves so, ~~300~~ Malachi 2:9.

(2.) That he should thus discover himself and his enmity against Paul!. If men of the first rank have a malice against any, they think it policy to employ others against them, and to play least in sight themselves, because of the odium that commonly attends it; but Ananias is not shamed to own himself a sworn enemy to Paul. *The elders* attended him, to signify their concurrence with him, and to invigorate the prosecution; for they could not find any attorneys or solicitors that would follow it with so much violence as they desired. The pains that evil men take in an evil matter,

their contrivances, their condescensions, and their unwearied industry, should shame us out of our coldness and backwardness, and out indifference in that which is good.

II. We have here the cause pleaded against Paul. The prosecutors brought *with them a certain orator named Tertullus*, a Roman, skilled in the Roman law and language, and therefore fittest to be employed in a cause before *the Roman governor*, and most likely to gain favour. The high priest, and elders, though they had their own hearts spiteful enough, did not think their own tongues sharp enough, and therefore retained Tertullus, who probably was noted for a satirical wit, to be of counsel for them; and, no doubt, they gave him a good fee, probably out of the treasury of the temple, which they had the command of, it being a cause wherein the church was concerned and which therefore must not be starved. Paul is set to the bar before Felix the governor: *He was called forth*, v. 2. Tertullus's business is, on the behalf of the prosecutors, to open the information against him, and he is a man that will say any thing for his fee; mercenary tongues will do so. No cause so unjust but can find advocates to plead it; and yet we hope many advocates are so just as not knowingly to patronise an unrighteous cause, but Tertullus was none of these: his speech (or at least an abstract of it, for it appears, by Tully's orations, that the Roman lawyers, on such occasions, used to make long harangues) is here reported, and it is made up of flattery and falsehood; it calls evil good, and good evil.

1. One of the worst of men is here applauded as one of the best of benefactors, only because he was the judge. Felix is represented by the historians of his own nation, as well as by Josephus the Jew, as a very bad man, who, depending upon his interest in the court, allowed himself in all manner of wickedness, was a great oppressor, very cruel, and very covetous, patronising and protecting assassins. — Joseph. *Antiq.* 20.162-165. And yet Tertullus here, in the name of the high priest and elders, and probably by particular directions from them and according to the instructions of his breviat, compliments him, and extols him to the sky, as if he were so good a magistrate as never was the like: and this comes the worse from the high priest and the elders, because he had given a late instance of his enmity to their order; for Jonathan the high priest, or one of the chief priests, having offended him by too free an invective against the tyranny of his government, he had him murdered by some villains whom he hired for that purpose who afterwards did the like for others, as they

were hired: *Cujus facinoris quia nemo ultor extitit, invitati hac licentia sicarii multos confodiebant, alios propter privatas inimicitias, alios conducti pecunia, etiam in ipso templo* — *No one being found to punish such enormous wickedness, the assassins, encouraged by this impunity, stabbed several persons, some from personal malice, some for hire, and that even in the temple itself.* An yet, to engage him to gratify their malice against Paul, and to return them that kindness for their kindness in overlooking all this, they magnify him as the greatest blessing to their church and nation that ever came among them.

(1.) They are very ready to own it (v. 2): “*By thee we, of the church, enjoy great quietness, and we look upon thee as our patron and protector, and very worthy deeds are done, from time to time, to the whole nation of the Jews, by thy providence* — thy wisdom, and care, and vigilance.” To give him his due, he had been instrumental to suppress the insurrection of that Egyptian of whom the chief captain spoke (⁴⁰¹⁸Acts 21:38); but will the praise of that screen him from the just reproach of his tyranny and oppression afterwards? See here,

[1.] The unhappiness of great men, and a great unhappiness it is, to have their services magnified beyond measure, and never to be faithfully told of their faults; and hereby they are hardened and encouraged in evil.

[2.] The policy of bad men, by flattering princes in what they do amiss to draw them in to do worse. The bishops of Rome got themselves confirmed in their exorbitant church power, and have been assisted in persecuting the servants of Christ, by flattering and caressing usurpers and tyrants, and so making them the tools of their malice, as the high priest, by his compliments, designed to make Felix here.

(2.) They promise to retain a grateful sense of it (v. 3): “*We accept it always, and in all places, every where and at all times we embrace it, we admire it, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.* We will be ready, upon any occasion, to witness for thee, that thou art a wise and good governor, and very serviceable to the country.” And, if it had been true that he was such a governor, it had been just that they should thus accept his good offices with all thankfulness. The benefits which we enjoy by government, especially by the administration of wise and good governors, are what we ought to be thankful for, both to God and man. This is part of the honour due to magistrates, to acknowledge the quietness we enjoy under their protection, and the worthy deeds done by their prudence.

(3.) They therefore expect his favour in this cause, v. 4. They pretend a great care not to intrench upon his time: We will *not be further tedious to thee*; and yet to be very confident of his patience: *I pray thee that thou wouldst hear us of thy clemency a few words*. All this address is only *ad captandam benefolentiam* — to induce him to give countenance to their cause; and they were so conscious to themselves that it would soon appear to have more malice than matter in it that they found it necessary thus to insinuate themselves into his favour. Every body knew that the high priest and the elders were enemies to the Roman government, and were uneasy under all the marks of that yoke, and therefore, in their hearts, hated Felix; and yet, to gain their ends against Paul, they, by their counsel, show him all this respect, as they did to Pilate and Caesar when they were persecuting our Saviour. Princes cannot always judge of the affections of their people by their applauses; flattery is one thing, and true loyalty is another.

2. One of the best of men is here accused as one of the worst of malefactors, only because he was the prisoner. After a flourish of flattery, in which you cannot see matter for words, he comes to his business, and it is to inform his excellency concerning the prisoner at the bar; and this part of his discourse is as nauseous for its raillery as the former part is for its flattery. I pity the man, and believe he has no malice against Paul, nor does he think as he speaks in calumniating him, any more than he did in courting Felix; but, a I cannot but be sorry that a man of wit and sense should have such a saleable tongue (as one calls it), so I cannot but be angry at those dignified men that had such malicious hearts as to put such words into his mouth. Two things Tertullus here complains of to Felix, in the name of the high priest and the elders: —

(1.) That the peace of the nation was disturbed by Paul. They could not have baited Christ's disciples if they had not first dressed them up in the skins of wild beasts, nor have given them as they did the vilest of treatment if they had not first represented them as the vilest of men, though the characters they gave of them were absolutely false and there was not the least colour nor foundation for them. Innocence, may excellence and usefulness, are no fence against calumny, no, nor against the impressions of calumny upon the minds both of magistrates and multitudes to excite their fury and jealousy; for, be the representation ever so unjust, when it is enforced, as here it was, with gravity and pretence of sanctity, and with assurance and noise, something will stick. The old

charge against God's prophets was that they were the troublers of the land, and against God's Jerusalem that it was a rebellious city, hurtful to kings and provinces (¹⁰⁶⁵Ezra 4:15, 19), and against our Lord Jesus that he perverted the nation, and forbade to give tribute to Caesar. It is the very same against Paul here; and, though utterly false, is averred with all the confidence imaginable. They do not say, "We suspect him to be a dangerous man, and have taken him up upon that suspicion;" but, as if the thing were past dispute, "*We have found him* to be so; we have often and long found him so;" as if he were a traitor and rebel already convicted. And yet, after all, there is not a word of truth in this representation; but, if Paul's just character be enquired into, it will be found directly the reverse of this.

[1.] Paul was a useful man, and a great blessing to his country, a man of exemplary candour and goodness, blessing to all, and provoking to none; and yet he is here called *a pestilent fellow* (v. 5): "*We have found him, loimon — pestem — the plague* of the nation, a walking pestilence, which supposes him to be a man of a turbulent spirit, malicious and ill-natured, and one that threw all things in disorder wherever he came." They would have it thought that he had done a more mischief in his time than a plague could do, — that the mischief he did was spreading and infectious, and that he made others as mischievous as himself, — that it was of as fatal consequence as the plague is, killing and destroying, and laying all waste, — that it was as much to be dreaded and guarded against as a plague is. Many a good sermon he had preached, and many a good work he had done, and for these he is called a pestilent fellow.

[2.] Paul was a peace-maker, was a preacher of that gospel which has a direct tendency to *slay all enmities*, and to establish true and lasting peace; he lived peaceably and quietly himself, and taught others to do so too, and yet is here represented as *a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout all the world*. The Jews were disaffected to the Roman government; those of them that were most bigoted were the most so. This Felix knew, and had therefore a watchful eye upon them. Now they would fain make him believe that this Paul was the man that made them so, whereas they themselves were the men that sowed the seeds of faction and sedition among them: and they knew it; and the reason why they hated Christ and his religion was because he did not go about to head them in a opposition to the Romans. The Jews were every where much set against Paul, and stirred up the people to clamour against him; they moved

sedition in all places where he came, and then cast the blame unjustly upon him as if he had been the mover of the sedition; as Nero not long after set Rome on fire, and then said the Christians did it.

[3.] Paul was a man of catholic charity, who did not affect to be singular, but made himself the servant of all for their good; and yet he is here charged as being a *ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes*, a standard-bearer of that sect, so the word signifies. When Cyprian was condemned to die for being a Christian, this was inserted in his sentence, that he was *auctor iniqui nominis et signifer* — *The author and standard-bearer of a wicked cause*. Now it was true that Paul was an active leading man in propagating Christianity. But, *First*, It was utterly false that this was a sect; he did not draw people to a party or private opinion, nor did he make his own opinions their rule. True Christianity establishes that which is of common concern to all mankind, publishes good-will to men, and shows us God in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and therefore cannot be thought to take its rise from such narrow opinions and private interests as sects owe their origin to. True Christianity has a direct tendency to the uniting of the children of men, and the gathering of them together in one; and, as far as it obtains its just power and influence upon the minds of men, will make them meek and quiet, and peaceable and loving, and every way easy, acceptable, and profitable one to another, and therefore is far from being a sect, which is supposed to lead to division and to sow discord. True Christianity aims at no worldly benefit or advantage, and therefore must by no means be called a sect. Those that espouse a sect are governed in it by their secular interest, they aim at wealth and honour; but the professors of Christianity are so far from this that they expose themselves thereby to the loss and ruin of all that is dear to them in this world. *Secondly*, It is invidiously called *the sect of the Nazarenes*, by which Christ was represented as of Nazareth, whence no good thing was expected to arise; whereas he was of Bethlehem, where the Messiah was to be born. Yet he was pleased to call himself, *Jesus of Nazareth*, ⁴⁰¹⁸Acts 22:8. And the scripture has put an honour on the name, ⁴⁰²³Matthew 2:23. And therefore, though intended for a reproach, the Christians had not reason to be ashamed of sharing with their Master in it. *Thirdly*, It was false that Paul was the author or standard-bearer of this sect; for he did not draw people to himself, but to Christ — did not preach himself, but Christ Jesus.

[4.] Paul had a veneration for the temple, as it was the place which God had chosen to put his name there, and had lately himself with reverence attended the temple-service; and yet it is here charged upon him that he went about to *profane the temple*, and that he designedly put contempt upon it, and violated the laws of it, v. 6. Their proof of this failed; for that they alleged as matter of act was utterly false, and they knew it, ~~Acts~~ Acts 21:29.

(2.) That the course of justice against Paul was obstructed by the chief captain.

[1.] They pleaded that they *took him, and would have judged him according to their law*. This was false; they did not go about to judge him according to their law, but, contrary to all law and equity, went about to *beat him to death* or to *pull him to pieces*, without hearing what he had to say for himself — went about, under pretence of having him into their court, to throw him into the hands of ruffians that lay in wait to destroy him. Was this judging him according to their law? It is easy for men, when they know what they should have done, to say, this they would have done, when they meant nothing less.

[2.] They reflected upon the chief captain as having done them an injury in rescuing Paul out of their hands; whereas he therein not only did him justice, but them the greatest kindness that could be, in preventing the guilt they were bringing upon themselves: *The chief captain Lysias came upon us and with great violence* (but really no more than was necessary) *took him out of our hands*, v. 7. See how persecutors are enraged at their disappointments, which they ought to be thankful for. When David in a heat of passion was going upon a bloody enterprise, he thanked Abigail for stopping him, and God for sending her to do it, so soon did he correct and recover himself. But these cruel men justify themselves, and reckon him their enemy who kept them (as David there speaks) from shedding blood with their own hands.

[3.] They referred the matter to Felix and his judgment, yet seeming uneasy that they were under a necessity of doing so, the chief captain having obliged them to it (v. 8): “It was he that forced us to give your excellency this trouble, and ourselves too; for,” *First*, “He *commanded his accusers to come to thee*, that though mightest hear the charge, when it might as well have been ended in the inferior court.” *Secondly*, “He has left it to thee to examine him, and try what thou canst get out of him, and

whether thou canst by his confession come to the knowledge of those things which we lay to his charge.”

III. The assent of the Jews to this charge which Tertullus exhibited (v. 9): *They confirmed it, saying that those things were so.*

1. Some think this expresses the proof of their charge by witnesses upon oath, that were examined as to the particulars of it, and attested them. And no wonder if, when they had found an orator that would say it, they found witnesses that would swear it, for money.

2. It rather seems to intimate the approbation which the high priest and the elders gave to what Tertullus said. Felix asked them, “Is this your sense, and is it all that you have to say?” And they answered, “Yes it is;” and so they made themselves guilty of all the falsehood that was in his speech. Those that have not the wit and parts to do mischief with that some others have, that cannot make speeches and hold disputes against religion, yet make themselves guilty of the mischiefs others do, by assenting to that which others do, and saying, These things are so, repeating and standing by what is said, to *pervert the right ways of the Lord*. Many that have not learning enough to plead for Baal yet have wickedness enough to vote for Baal.

⌄ ACTS 24:10-21

PAUL'S THIRD DEFENCE

We have here Paul's defence of himself, in answer to Tertullus's charge, and there appears in it a great deal of the spirit of wisdom and holiness, and an accomplishment of Christ's promise to his followers that when they were before governors and kings, for his sake, it should be *given them in that same hour what they should speak*. Though Tertullus had said a great many provoking things, yet Paul did not interrupt him, but let him go on to the end of his speech, according to the rules of decency and the method in courts of justice, that the plaintiff be allowed to finish his evidence before the defendant begins his plea. And when he had done, he did not presently fly out into passionate exclamations against the iniquity of the times and the men (*O tempora! O mores! — Oh the degeneracy of the times!*) but he waited for a permission from the judge to speak in his turn, and had it. The

governor beckoned to him to speak, v. 10. And now he also may have leave to speak out, under the protection of the governor, which was more than he could hitherto obtain. And, when he did speak, he made no reflections at all upon Tertullus, who he knew spoke for his fee, and therefore despised what he said, and levelled his defence against those that employed him. And here,

I. He addressed himself very respectfully to the governor, and with a confidence that he would do him justice. Here are not such flattering compliments as Tertullus soothed him up with, but, which was more truly respectful, a profession that he *answered for himself cheerfully*, and with good assurance *before him*, looking upon him, though not as one that was his friend, yet as one that would be fair and impartial. He thus expresses his expectation that he would be so, to engage him to be so. It was likewise the language of one that was conscious to himself of his own integrity, and whose heart did not reproach him, whoever did. He did not stand trembling at the bar; on the contrary, he was very cheerful when he had one to be his judge that was not a party, but an indifferent person. Nay, when he considers who his judge is, he *answers the more cheerfully*; and why so? He does not say, “Because I know thee to be a judge of inflexible justice and integrity, that hatest bribes, and in giving judgment fearest God, and regardest not man;” for he could not justly say this of him, and therefore would not say it, though it were to gain his favour ever so much; but, *I the more cheerfully answer from myself*, because *I know thou hast been many years a judge to this nation*, and this was very true, and being so,

1. He could say of his own knowledge that there had not formerly been any complaints against Paul. Such clamours as they raised are generally against old offenders; but, though he had long say judge there, he never had Paul brought before him till now; and therefore he was not so dangerous a criminal as he was represented to be.

2. He was well acquainted with the Jewish nation, and with their temper and spirit. He knew how bigoted they were to their own way, what furious zealots they were against all that did not comply with them, how peevish and perverse they generally were, and therefore would make allowances for that in their accusation of him, and not regard that which he had reason to think came so much from part-malice. Though he did not know him, he

knew his prosecutors, and by this might guess what manner of man he was.

II. He denies the facts that he was charged with, upon which their character of him was grounded. *Moving sedition*, and *profaning the temple*, were the crimes for which he stood indicted, crimes which they knew the Roman governors were not accustomed to enquire into, and therefore they hoped that the governor would return him back to them to be judged by their law, and this was all they wished for. But Paul desires that though he would not enquire into the crimes he would protect one that was unjustly charged with them from those whom he knew to be spiteful and ill-natured enough. Now he would have him to understand (and what he said he was ready, if required, to make out by witnesses),

- 1.** That he came up to Jerusalem on purpose to worship God in peace and holiness, so far was he from any design to move sedition among the people or to profane the temple. He came to keep up his communion with the Jews, not to put any affront upon them.
- 2.** That it was but twelve days since he came up to Jerusalem, and he came up to Jerusalem, and he had been six days a prisoner; he was alone, and it could not be supposed that in so short a time he could do the mischief they charged upon him. And, as for what he had done in other countries, they knew nothing of it but by uncertain report, by which the matter was very unfairly represented.
- 3.** That he had demeaned himself at Jerusalem very quietly and peaceably, and had made no manner of stir. If it had been true (as they alleged) that he was a *mover of sedition among all the Jews*, surely he would have been industrious to make a party at Jerusalem: but he did not do so. He was in the temple, attending the public service there. He was in the synagogues where the law was read and opened. He went about in the city among his relations and friends, and conversed freely in the places of concourse; and he was a man of a great genius and an active spirit, and yet they could not charge him with offering any thing either against the faith or against the peace of the Jewish church.

(1.) He had nothing in him of a contradicting spirit, as the movers of sedition have; he had no disposition to quarrel or oppose. They never found him *disputing with any man*, either affronting the learned with captious cavils or perplexing the weak and simple with curious subtleties.

He was ready, if asked, to give a reason of his own hope, and to give instruction to others; but he never picked a quarrel with any man about his religion, nor made that the subject of debate, and controversy, and perverse dispute, which ought always to be treated of with humility and reverence, with meekness and love.

(2.) He had nothing in him of a turbulent spirit: “They never found me *raising up the people*, by incensing them against their governors in church or state or suggesting to them fears and jealousies concerning public affairs, nor by setting them at variance one with another or sowing discord among them.” He behaved as became a Christian and minister, with love and quietness, and due subjection to lawful authority. The weapons of his warfare were not carnal, not did he ever mention or think of such a thing as taking up arms for the propagating of the gospel or the defence of the preachers of it; though he could have made, perhaps, as strong a party among the common people as his adversaries, yet he never attempted it.

4. That as to what they had charged him with, of moving sedition in other countries, he was wholly innocent, and they could not make good the charge (v. 13): *Neither can the prove the things whereof the now accuse me*. Hereby,

(1.) He maintains his own innocency; for when he says, They cannot prove it, he means, The matter is not so. He was no enemy to the public peace; he had done no real prejudice, but a great deal of real service, and would gladly have done more, to the nation of the Jews. He was so far from having any antipathy to them that he had the strongest affection imaginable for them, and a most passionate desire for their welfare, ~~and~~ Romans 9:1-3.

(2.) He bemoans his own calamity, that he was accused of those things which could not be proved against him. And it has often been the lot of very worthy good men to be thus injured, to have things laid to their charge which they are the greatest distance from and abhor the thought of. But, while they are lamenting this calamity, this may be their rejoicing, even the *testimony of their consciences* concerning their integrity.

(3.) He shows the iniquity of his prosecutors, who said that which they knew they could not prove, and thereby did him wrong in his name, liberty, and life, and did the judge wrong too, in imposing upon him, and doing what in them lay to pervert his judgment.

(4.) He appeals to the equity of his judge, and awakens him to look about him, that he might not be drawn into a snare by the violence of the prosecution. The judge must give sentence *secundum allegata et probata* — according to that which is not only alleged but proved, and therefore must enquire, and search, and ask diligently, whether the thing be true and certain (⁶¹³⁴Deuteronomy 13:14); he cannot otherwise give a right judgment.

III. He gives a fair and just account of himself, which does at once both clear him from crime and likewise intimate what was the true reason of their violence in prosecuting him.

1. He acknowledges himself to be one whom they looked upon as a heretic, and that was the reason of their spleen against him. The chief captain had observed, and the governor now cannot but observe, an uncommon violence and fury in his prosecutors, which they know not what to make of, but, guessing at the crime by the cry, conclude he must needs have been a very bad man only for that reason. Now Paul here unriddles the matter: I confess that *in the way which they call heresy* — or a sect, so worship I the God of my fathers. The controversy is in a matter of religion, and such controversies are commonly managed with most fury and violence. Note, It is no new thing for the right way of worshipping God to be called heresy; and for the best of God's servants to be stigmatized and run down as sectaries. The reformed churches are called heretical ones by those who themselves hate to be reformed, and are themselves heretics. Let us therefore never be driven off from any good way by its being put into an ill name; for true and pure Christianity is never the worse, nor to be the worse thought of, for its being called heresy; no, not though it be called so by the high priest and the elders.

2. He vindicates himself from this imputation. They call Paul a heretic, but he is not so; for,

(1.) He *worships the God of his fathers*, and therefore is right in the object of his worship. He does not say, *Let us go after other gods, which we have not known, and let us serve them*, as the false prophet is supposed to do, ⁶¹³⁵Deuteronomy 13:2. If so, they might justly call his way heresy, a drawing of them aside into a by-path, and a dangerous one; but he worships the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not only the God whom they worshipped, but the God who took them into covenant with himself,

and was and would be called their God. Paul adheres to that covenant, and sets up no other in opposition to it. The *promise made unto the fathers* Paul preached as *fulfilled to the children* (~~443~~Acts 13:32, 33), and so directed both his own devotions and those of others to God, as the *God of their fathers*. He also refers to the practice of all his pious ancestors: *I worship the same God that all my fathers worshipped*. His religion was so far from being chargeable with novelty that it gloried in its antiquity, and in an uninterrupted succession of its professors. Note, It is very comfortable in our worshipping God to have an eye to him as the God of our fathers. Our fathers trusted in him, and were owned by him, and he engaged to be their God, and the God of their seed. He approved himself theirs, and therefore, if we serve him as they did, he will be ours; what an emphasis is laid upon this, *He is my father's God, and I will exalt him!* ~~443~~Exodus 15:2.

(2.) He *believes all things which are written in the law and the prophets*, and therefore is right in the rule of his worship. His religion is grounded upon, and governed by, the holy scriptures; they are his oracle and touchstone, and he speaks and acts according to them. He receives the scriptures entire, and believes all things that are there written; and he receives them pure, for he says no other things than what are contained in them, as he explains himself, ~~443~~Acts 26:22. He sets not up any other rule of faith, or practice but the scriptures — not tradition, nor the authority of the church, nor the infallibility of any man or company of men on earth, nor the light within, nor human reason; but divine revelation, as it is in the scripture, is that which he resolves to live and die by, and therefore he is not a heretic.

(3.) He has his eye upon a future state, and is a believing expectant of that, and therefore is right in the end of his worship. Those that turn aside to heresy have a regard to this world, and some secular interest, but Paul aims to make heaven of his religion, and neither more nor less (v. 15): *“I have hope towards God, all my expectation is from him, and therefore all my desire is towards him and all my dependence upon him; my hope is towards God and not towards the world, towards another world and not towards this. I depend upon God and upon his power, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead at the end of time, of all, both the just and unjust; and the great thing I aim at in my religion is to obtain a joyful and happy resurrection, a share in the resurrection of the just.”* Observe here,

[1.] That there shall be a resurrection of the dead, the dead bodies of men, of all men from the beginning to the end of time. It is certain, not only that the soul does not die with the body, but that the body itself shall live again; we have not only another life to live when our present life is at an end, but there is to be another world, which shall commence when this world is at an end, into which all the children of men must enter at once by a resurrection from the dead, as they entered into this, one after another, by their birth.

[2.] It shall be a resurrection *both of the just and of the unjust*, the sanctified and the unsanctified, of those that did well, and to them our Saviour has told us that it will be a *resurrection of life*; and of those that did evil, and to them that it will be a resurrection of condemnation, ^{<B5>}John 5:29. See ^{<711>}Daniel 12:2. This implies that it will be a resurrection to a final judgment, by which all the children of men will be determined to everlasting happiness or misery in a world of retribution, according to what they were and what they did in this state of probation and preparation. The just shall rise by virtue of their union with Christ as their head; the unjust shall rise by virtue of Christ's dominion over them as their Judge.

[3.] God is to be depended upon for the resurrection of the dead: I have *hope towards God*, and in God, that there shall be a resurrection; it shall be effected by the almighty power of God, in performance of the word which God hath spoken; so that those who doubt of it betray their ignorance both of the scriptures and of the power of God, ^{<172>}Matthew 22:29.

[4.] The resurrection of the dead is a fundamental article of our creed, as it was also of that of the Jewish church. It is what *they themselves also allow*; nay, it was the expectation of the ancient patriarchs, witness Job's confession of his faith; but it is more clearly revealed and more fully confirmed by the gospel, and therefore those who believed it should have been thankful to the preachers of the gospel for their explications and proofs of it, instead of opposing them.

[5.] In all our religion we ought to have an eye to the other world, and to serve God in all instances with a confidence in him *that there will be a resurrection of the dead*, doing all in preparation for that, and expecting our recompence in that.

(4.) His conversation is of a piece with his devotion (v. 16): *And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men.* Prophets and their doctrine were to be tried by their fruits. Paul was far from having made shipwreck of a good conscience, and therefore it is not likely he has made shipwreck of the faith, the mystery of which is best held in a pure conscience. This protestation of Paul's is to the same purport with that which he made before the high priest (⁴²¹Acts 23:1): *I have lived in all good conscience;* and this was his rejoicing. Observe,

[1.] What was Paul's aim and desire: *To have a conscience void of offence.* Either, *First*, "A conscience not offending; not informing me wrong, nor flattering me, nor dealing deceitfully with me, nor in any thing misleading me." Or, *Secondly*, A conscience not offended; it is like Job's resolution, "*My heart shall not reproach me*, that is, I will never give it any occasion to do so. This is what I am ambitious of, to keep upon good terms with my own conscience, that it may have no cause either to question the goodness of my spiritual state or to quarrel with me for any particular action. I am as careful not to offend my conscience as I am not to offend a friend with whom I daily converse; nay, as I am not to offend a magistrate whose authority I am under, and to whom I am accountable; for conscience is God's deputy in my soul."

[2.] What was his care and endeavour, in pursuance of this: "*I exercise myself* — *asko*. I make it my constant business, and govern myself by this intention; I discipline myself, and live by rule" (those that did so were called *ascetics*, from the word here used), "abstain from many a thing which my inclination leads me to, and abound in all the exercises of religion that are most spiritual, with this in my eye, that I may keep peace with my own conscience."

[3.] The extent of this care: *First*, To all times: *To have always a conscience void of offence*, always void of gross offence; for though Paul was conscious to himself that he *had not yet attained perfection*, and the evil that he would not do yet he did, yet he was *innocent from the great transgression*. Sins of infirmity are uneasy to conscience, but they do not wound it, and waste it, as presumptuous sins do; and, though offence may be given to conscience, yet care must be taken that it be not an abiding offence, but that by the renewed acts of faith and repentance the matter may be taken up again quickly. This however we must always exercise

ourselves in, and, though we come short, we must follow after. *Secondly*, To all things: *Both towards God, and towards man*. His conscientious care extended itself to the whole of his duty, and he was afraid of breaking the law of love either to God or his neighbour. Conscience, like the magistrate, is *custos utriusque tabulae* — *the guardian of each table*. We must be very cautious that we do not think, or speak, or do any thing amiss, either against God or man, ^{<4021>}2 Corinthians 8:21.

[4.] The inducement to it: *Herein, en touto, for this cause*; so it may be read. “Because I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, therefore I thus exercise myself.” The consideration of the future state should engage us to be universally conscientious in our present state.

IV. Having made confession of his faith, he gives a plain and faithful account of his case, and of the wrong done him by his persecutors. Twice he had been rescued by the chief captain out of the hands of the Jews, when they were ready to pull him to pieces, and he challenges them to prove him guilty of any crime either time.

1. In the temple. Here they fell furiously upon him as an enemy to their nation and the temple, ^{<4028>}Acts 21:28. But was there any colour for the charge? No, but evidence sufficient against it,

(1.) It was very hard to accuse him as an *enemy to their nation*, when after long absence from Jerusalem he came to *bring alms to his nation*, money which (though he had need enough himself of it) he had collected among his friends, for the relief of the poor at Jerusalem. He not only had no malice to that people, but he had a very charitable concern for them, and was ready to do them all good offices; and were they his adversaries for his love? ^{<4004>}Psalms 109:4.

(2.) It was very hard to accuse him of having profaned the temple when he brought offerings to the temple, and was himself at charges therein (^{<4024>}Acts 21:24), and was found *purifying himself in the temple*, according to the law (v. 18), and that in a very quiet decent manner, *neither with multitude nor with tumult*. Though he was a man so much talked of, he was far from coveting to show himself when he came to Jerusalem, or to be crowded after, but went to the temple, as much as was possible, *incognito*. They were Jews from Asia, his enemies, that caused him to be taken notice of; they had not pretence to make a tumult and raise a

multitude against him, for he had neither multitude nor tumult for him. And as to what was perhaps suggested to Felix that he had brought Greeks into the temple, contrary to their law, and the governor ought to reckon with him for that, the Romans having stipulated with the nations that submitted to them to preserve them in their religion, he challenges them to prove it (v. 19): “Those Jews of Asia ought to have been *here before thee*, that they might have been examined, whether *they had aught against me*, that they would stand by and swear to;” for some that will not scruple to tell a lie have such heavings of conscience that they scruple confirming it with an oath.

2. In the council: “Since the Jews of Asia are not here to prove any thing upon me done amiss in the temple, let *these same* that are *here*, the high priest and the elders, say whether they have *found any evil doing in me*, or whether I was guilty of any misdemeanor *when I stood before the council*, when also they were ready to pull me in pieces, v. 20. When I was there, they could not take offence at any thing I said; for all I said was, *Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day* (v. 21), which gave no offence to any one but the Sadducees. This I hope was no crime, that I stuck to that which is the faith of the whole Jewish church, excepting those whom they themselves call heretics.”

⏪ ACTS 24:22-27

PAUL'S TRIAL ADJOURNED

We have here the result of Paul's trial before Felix, and what was the consequence of it.

I. Felix adjourned the cause, and took further time to consider of it (v. 22): He *had a more perfect knowledge of that way* which the Jews called heresy than the high priest and the elders thought he had. He understood something of the Christian religion; for, living at Caesarea, where Cornelius, a Roman centurion, was, who was a Christian, from him and others he had got a notion of Christianity, that it was not such an evil thing as it was represented. He himself knew some of that way to be honest good men, and very conscientious, and therefore he put off the prosecutors with an excuse: “*When the chief captain shall come down hither, I will know the uttermost of your matter*, or I shall know the truth, whether this

Paul did go about to raise sedition or no; you are parties, he is an indifferent person. Either Paul deserves to be punished for raising the tumult, or you do for doing it yourselves and then charging it upon him; and I will hear what he says, and determine accordingly between you.” Now,

1. It was a disappointment to the high priest and the elders that Paul was not condemned, or remitted to their judgment, which they wished for and expected. But thus sometimes God restrains the wrath of his people's enemies by the agency, not of their friends, but of such as are strangers to them. And though they be so, if they have but some *knowledge of their way*, they cannot but appear for their protection.

2. It was an injury to Paul that he was not released. Felix ought to have *avenged him of his adversaries*, when he so plainly saw there was nothing but malice in the prosecution, and to have delivered *him out of the hand of the wicked*, according to the duty of a judge, ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 82:4. But he was a judge that neither feared God nor regarded man, and what good could be expected from him? It is a wrong not only to deny justice, but to delay it.

II. He detained the prisoner in custody, and would not take bail for him; else here at Caesarea Paul had friends enough that would gladly have been his security. Felix thought a man of such a public character as Paul was had many friends, as well as many enemies, and he might have an opportunity of obliging them, or making a hand of them, if he did not presently release him, and yet did show him countenance; and therefore,

1. He continued him a prisoner, commanded a centurion or captain to keep him, v. 23. He did not commit him to the common jail, but, being first made an army-prisoner, he shall still be so.

2. Yet he took care he should be *a prisoner at large — in libera custodia*; his keeper must let him have liberty, not bind him nor lock him up, but make his confinement as easy to him as possible; let him have the liberty of the castle, and, perhaps, he means liberty to take the air, or go abroad upon his parole: and Paul was such an honest man that they might take his word for his return. The high priest and the elders grudged him his life, but Felix generously allows him a sort of liberty; for he had not those prejudices against him and his way that they had. He also gave orders that none of his friends should be hindered from coming to him; the centurion must not forbid any of his acquaintances from ministering to him; and a

man's prison is as it were his own house if he has but his friends about him.

III. He had frequent conversation with him afterwards in private, once particularly, not long after his public trial, v. 24, 25. Observe,

1. With what design *Felix sent for Paul*. He had a mind to have some talk with him *concerning the faith in Christ*, the Christian religion; he had some knowledge of that way, but he desired to have an account of it from Paul, who was so celebrated a preacher of that faith, above the rest. Those that would enlarge their knowledge must discourse with men of their own profession, and those that would be acquainted with any profession should consult those that excel in the knowledge of it; and therefore Felix had a mind to talk with Paul more freely than he could in open court, where he observed Paul upon his guard, *concerning the faith of Christ*; and this only to satisfy his curiosity, or rather the curiosity of *his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess*, daughter of Herod Agrippa, that was eaten of worms. Being educated in the Jewish religion, she was more inquisitive concerning the Christian religion, which pretended to be the perfection of that, and desired to hear Paul discourse of it. But it was no great matter what religion she was of; for, whatever it was, she was a reproach and scandal to it — a Jewess, but an adulteress; she was another man's wife when Felix took her to be his wife, and she lived with him in whoredom and was noted for an impudent woman, yet she desires to hear *concerning the faith of Christ*. Many are fond of new notions and speculations in religion, and can hear and speak of them with pleasure, who yet hate to come under the power and influence of religion, can be content to have their judgments informed but not their lives reformed.

2. What the account was which Paul gave him of the Christian religion; by the idea he had of it, he expected to be amused with a mystical divinity, but, as Paul represents it to him, he is alarmed with a practical divinity. Paul, being asked *concerning the faith in Christ, reasoned* (for Paul was always a rational preacher) concerning *righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*. It is probable that he mentioned the peculiar doctrines of Christianity concerning the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and his being *the Mediator between God and man*; but he hastened to his application, in which he designed to come home to the consciences of his hearers.

(1.) He discoursed with clearness and warmth of *righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*; and here he showed,

[1.] That the faith in Christ is designed to enforce upon the children of men the great laws of justice and temperance. *The grace of God teacheth us to live soberly and righteously*, ^{<302>}Titus 2:12. Justice and temperance were celebrated virtues among the heathen moralists; if the doctrine Paul preaches, which Felix has heard of as proclaiming liberty, will but free him from an obligation to these, he will readily embrace it: “No,” says Paul, “it is so far from doing so that it strengthens the obligations of those sacred laws; it binds all under the highest penalties to be *honest in all their dealings, and to render to all their due; to deny themselves, and to keep under the body, and bring it into subjection.*” The world and the flesh being in our baptism renounced, all our pursuits of the world and all our gratifications of the desires of the body are to be under the regulations of religion. *Paul reasoned of righteousness and temperance*, to convince Felix of his unrighteousness and intemperance, of which he had been notoriously guilty, that, seeing the odiousness of them, and his obnoxiousness to the wrath of God for them (^{<4016>}Ephesians 5:6), he might enquire concerning the faith of Christ, with a resolution to embrace it.

[2.] That by the doctrine of Christ is discovered to us the judgment to come, by the sentence of which the everlasting state of all the children of men will be finally and irreversibly determined. Men have their day now, Felix hath his; but God's day is coming, *when everyone shall give account of himself to God, the Judge of all*. Paul reasoned concerning this; that is, he showed what reason we have to believe *that there is a judgment to come*, and what reason we have, in consideration thereof, to be religious.

(2.) From this account of the heads of Paul's discourse we may gather,

[1.] That Paul in his preaching had no respect to persons, for the word of God, which he preached, has not: he urged the same convictions and instructions upon the Roman governor that he did upon other people.

[2.] That Paul in his preaching aimed at the consciences of men, and came close to them, sought not to please their fancy nor to gratify their curiosity, but led them to a sight of their sins and a sense of their duty and interest.

[3.] That Paul preferred the serving of Christ, and the saving of souls, before his own safety. He lay at the mercy of Felix, who had power (as

Pilate said) *to crucify him* (or, which was as bad, to deliver him back to the Jews), *and he had power to release him*. Now when Paul had his ear, and had him in a good humour, he had a fair opportunity of ingratiating himself with him, and obtaining a release, nay, and of incensing him against his prosecutors: and, on the contrary, if he disoblighd him, and put him out of humour, he might do himself a great diskindness by it; but he is wholly negligent of these considerations, and is intent upon doing good, at least discharging his duty.

[4.] That Paul was willing to take pains, and run hazards, in his work, even where there was little probability of doing good. Felix and Drusilla were such hardened sinners that it was not at all likely they should be brought to repentance by Paul's preaching, especially under such disadvantages; and yet Paul deals with them as one that did not despair of them. Let the watchman give fair warning, and then they have delivered their own souls, though they should not prevail to deliver the souls they watch for.

3. What impressions Paul's discourse made upon this great but wicked man: *Felix trembled*, *emphobos genomenos* — *being put into a fright*, or *made a terror to himself*, *a magor-missabib*, as Pashur, ^{<200>}Jeremiah 20:3, 4. Paul never trembled before him, but he was made to tremble before Paul. "If this be so, as Paul says, what will become of me in another world? If the unrighteous and intemperate will be condemned in the judgment to come, I am undone, for ever undone, unless I lead a new course of life." We do not find that Drusilla trembled, though she was equally guilty, for she was a Jewess, and depended upon the ceremonial law, which she adhered to the observance of, to justify her; but Felix for the present could fasten upon nothing to pacify his conscience, and therefore trembled. See here,

(1.) The power of the word of God, when it comes with commission; it is searching, it is startling, it can strike a terror into the heart of the most proud and daring sinner, by *setting his sins in order before him*, and showing him *the terrors of the Lord*.

(2.) The workings of natural conscience; when it is startled and awakened, it fills the soul with horror and amazement at its own deformity and danger. Those that are themselves *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living* have hereby been made a terror to themselves. A prospect of the judgment to come is enough to make the stoutest heart to tremble, as when

it comes indeed it will make *the mighty men and the chief captains* to call in vain *to rocks and mountains to shelter them*.

4. How Felix struggled to get clear of these impressions, and to shake off the terror of his convictions; he did by them as he did by Paul's prosecutors (v. 25), *he deferred them*; he said, *Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee*.

(1.) He trembled and that was all. Paul's trembling (Acts 9:6), and the jailer's (~~4163~~ Acts 16:29), ended in their conversion, but this of Felix did not. Many are startled by the word of God who are not effectually changed by it. Many are in fear of the consequences of sin, and yet continue in love and league with sin.

(2.) He did not fight against his convictions, nor fly in the face of the word or of the preacher of it, to be revenged on them for making his conscience fly in his face; he did not say to Paul, as Amaziah to the prophet, *Forbear, why shouldst thou be smitten?* He did not threaten him with a closer confinement, or with death, for touching him (as John Baptist did Herod) in the sore place. But,

(3.) He artfully shifted off his convictions by putting off the prosecution of them to another time. He has nothing to object against what Paul has said; it is weighty and worth considering. But, like a sorry debtor, he begs a day; Paul has spent himself, and has tired him and his lady, and therefore, "*Go thy way for this time — break off here, business calls me away; but when I have a convenient season, and have nothing else to do, I will call for thee, and hear what thou hast further to say.*" Note,

[1.] Many lose all the benefit of their convictions for want of striking while the iron is hot. If Felix, now that he trembled, had but asked, as Paul and the jailer did when they trembled, *What shall I do?* he might have been brought to the faith of Christ, and have been a *Felix* indeed, *happy* for ever; but, by dropping his convictions now, he lost them for ever, and himself with them.

[2.] In the affairs of our souls, delays are dangerous; nothing is of more fatal consequence than men's putting off their conversion from time to time. They will repent, and turn to God, but not yet; the matter is adjourned to some more convenient season, when such a business or affair is compassed, when they are so much older; and then convictions cool and

wear off, good purposes prove to no purpose, and they are more hardened than ever in their evil way. Felix put off this matter to a more convenient season, but we do not find that this more convenient season ever came; for the devil cozens us of all our time by cozening us of the present time. The present season is, without doubt, the most convenient season. *Behold, now is the accepted time. To-day if you will hear his voice.*

IV. After all, he detained him a prisoner, and left him so, when two years after he was removed from the government, v. 26, 27. He was convinced in his conscience that Paul had done *nothing worthy of death or of bonds*, and yet had not the honesty to release him. To little purpose had Paul reasoned with him about righteousness, though he then trembled at the thought of his own iniquity, who could thus persist in such a palpable piece of injustice. But here we are told what principles he was governed by herein; and they were such as make the matter yet much worse.

1. The love of money. He would not release Paul because he hoped to make his market of him, and that at length his friends would make a purse to purchase his liberty, and then he would satisfy his conscience by releasing him when he could withal satisfy his covetousness by it; but he cannot find in his heart to do his duty as a judge, unless he can get money by it: *He hoped that money would have been given him of Paul*, or somebody for him, and then he would have loosed him, and set him at liberty. In hopes of this, he detains him a prisoner, and *sends for him the oftener, and communes with him*; not any more about the faith of Christ (he had had enough of that, and of the judgment to come; Paul must not return to those subjects, nor go on with them), but about his discharge, or ransom rather, out of his present captivity. He cannot for shame ask Paul what he will give him to release him, but he sends for him to feel his pulse, and gives him an opportunity to ask why he would take to release him. And now we see what became of his promise both to Paul and to himself, that he would hear more of Christ at some other convenient season. Here were many seasons convenient enough to have talked that matter through, but nothing is done in it; all his business now is to get money by Paul, not to get the knowledge of Christ by him. Note, It is just with God to say concerning those who trifle with their convictions, and think they can have the grace of God at command when they please, *My Spirit shall no more strive with them*. When men will not hear God's voice *to-day, while it is called to-day*, the heart is commonly *hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*. Paul was but a poor man himself, *silver and gold he*

had none to give, to purchase his liberty; but Felix knew there were those who wished well to him who were able to assist him. He having lately collected a great deal of money for the poor saints to relieve them, it might also be expected that the rich saints should contribute some to release him, and I wonder it was not done. Though Paul is to be commended that he would not offer money to Felix, nor beg money of the churches (his great and generous soul disdained both), yet I know not whether his friends are to be commended, nay, whether they can be justified, in not doing it for him. They ought to have solicited the governor as pressingly for him as his enemies did against him: and if a *gift was necessary to make room for them* (as Solomon speaks) and to bring them before great men, they might lawfully have done it. I ought not to bribe a man to do an unjust thing, but, if he will not do me justice without a fee, it is but doing myself justice to give it to him; and, if they might do it, it was a shame they did not do it. I blush for them, that they would let such an eminent and useful man as Paul lie in the jail, when a little money would have fetched him out, and restored him to his usefulness again. The Christians here at Caesarea, where he now was, had parted with their tears to prevent his going to the prison (~~4213~~ Acts 21:13), and could they not find in their hearts to part with their money to help him out? Yet there might be a providence of God in it; Paul's bonds must be for the furtherance of the gospel of Christ, and therefore he must continue in bonds. However, this will not excuse Felix, who ought to have released an innocent man, without demanding or accepting any thing for it: the judge that will not do right without a bribe will no doubt do wrong for a bribe.

2. Men-pleasing. Felix was recalled from his government about *two years after this*, and Porcius Festus was put in his place, and one should have expected he would have at least concluded his government with this act of justice, the release of Paul, but he did not; he *left Paul bound*, and the reason here given is because he was *willing to do the Jews a pleasure*. Though he would not deliver him *to death, to please them*, yet he would continue him a prisoner rather than offend them; and he did it in hope hereby to atone for the many offences he had done against them. He did not think Paul had either interest or inclination to complain of him at court, for detaining him so long in custody, against all law and equity; but he was jealous of the high priest and elders, that they would be his accusers to the emperor for the wrongs he had done them, and therefore hopes by gratifying them in this matter to stop their mouths. Thus those

who do some base things are tempted to do more to screen themselves and bear them out. If Felix had not injured the Jews, he needed not to have done this to please them; but, when he had done it, it seems he did not gain his point. The Jews, notwithstanding this, accused him to the emperor, and some historians say he was sent bound to Rome by Festus; and, if so, surely his remembering how light he had made of Paul's bonds would help to make his own chain heavy. Those that aim to please God by doing good will have what they aim at; but so will not those that seek to please men by doing evil.