

Derek French:

Five days have passed since the plot to murder Paul in Jerusalem had been foiled, and he'd been brought safely to Caesarea. He's been awaiting his trial before the Roman governor Felix, and today we discover how things unravelled.

We've the help of Gerard and Phillippa Chrispin again, and Phillippa will begin by reading Acts 24 verses 1 to 27 and Gerard will bring out the teaching of this bible passage for us.

Phillippa Chrispin:

*'Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator named Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul.'*

*'And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: "Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us. For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him." And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.'*

*'Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: "Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me. But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.'*

*'"Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.'"*

*'But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case." So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.'*

*'And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him.'*

*'But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favour, left Paul bound.'*

Gerard Chrispin:

Five days pass by. Paul now appears before Felix, opposed by the formidable Jerusalem team of Ananias the high priest, Tertullus the legal professional and courtroom orator, and the elders of the Jewish council.

Tertullus begins the accusers' case against Paul. He starts with flattering comments to and about Felix. He volunteers not to be 'tedious' to Felix any further. He begs the governor to hear a few words. He claims that Paul is like a plague which has created world-wide dissension among the Jews, as well as being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. This last comment is false and tactically unwise since Felix has learned what Christianity is. Tertullus shows his contempt for Paul by branding him a trouble making, heretical, sectarian leader who disturbs the nation's accepted religion and threatens its peace that Rome seeks to maintain.

Tertullus' brief presentation is far stronger in oratory than in truth, but as expected, the Jews endorse Tertullus' comments. But they present no real evidence. Factual evidence would impress Felix more than biased endorsement. Paul is literally 'given the nod' to speak by Felix. Paul shows his awareness that Felix has judged for many years and knows much about the Jewish nation. He tells the governor that he will cheerfully answer for himself. Cheerfulness is rarely encountered in contentious court life.

Paul then lays out the simple facts of the case. Unlike Tertullus, he insults no one opposing him. He covers two things. First, he presents factual evidence, and second, he challenges the Jews to present contrary evidence from credible eye witnesses. Paul then demonstrates that he is not a sectarian heretic. On the contrary, he worships the God of his Jewish forefathers and believes the whole of the Old Testament, here referred to as 'the Law and the Prophets'.

The apostle proclaims his belief, both as a traditional Pharisee and now as a born-again Christian, in the resurrection. Paul also confirms his earlier comments that he seeks to live with a good conscience toward God and men. Paul explains that he was simply completing Jewish purification rites in the temple. He disputed with no one and incited no crowd. He did not behave badly in front of the Jewish council; he simply insisted he was being judged because he believed in the resurrection.

Paul believes in the Old Testament revelation of God as the living God of resurrection. He also believes in the risen Lord Jesus Christ who died on the cross for his sins and rose again on the third day. Like Luke, Paul believes that many infallible proofs demonstrate clearly that Jesus rose again, but he also believes in the risen Lord because he has met the resurrected Jesus personally.

Paul will soon speak in detail of his own faith in the risen Christ to Felix. He will challenge the governor's heart. But Felix has heard enough for now.

Felix's more accurate knowledge of 'the Way' seems to be a reason why he adjourns the proceedings. He will know that the many orthodox Jewish converts to Jesus Christ on the day of Pentecost believed all the Old Testament scriptures. They were not heretics, led by Paul. He was not even a Christian then.

Judge Felix will know the facts about Jesus. It is common knowledge that three hours' darkness coincided with his being crucified, and that the temple veil was torn then from top to bottom. Felix knows how to evaluate properly the evidence for Jesus' resurrection. All these considerations work against the suggestion that Paul is a heretical sectarian.

But Felix adjourns the hearing also, because Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander, is not at the hearing. He is a neutral. He is neither Jew nor Christian. Felix has read the commander's letter stating that Paul had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. But Felix needs to hear that evidence put by Lysias in his court. Felix implies he will make a final judgement when the commander comes to court in Caesarea. In fact we never hear of any further judicial proceedings before Felix involving the current opposing parties with Claudius Lysias as a witness.

Meanwhile, Felix commands a centurion to look after Paul and treat him as a free man. Paul's friends in Caesarea are free to bring him supplies or to visit him. The Lord will keep Paul safe en route to Rome under the protective care of the Roman military. God is good to his servant.

The reportedly glamorous, Jewish twenty year old Drusilla is Felix's third wife. He lured her away from her marriage to Aziz, king of Emesa in Syria. Now Felix and Drusilla visit Paul and ask him to speak about faith in Christ. Paul willingly responds to the request to discuss faith in his saviour with this lost governor and the beautiful woman he has stolen. Paul does not soft pedal the costly and demanding implications of responding in personal faith to Christ. He talks immediately about righteousness and the need for self-control. The bible teaches God is righteous and holy. We offend him by our unrighteousness. Sin is coming short of his standard, be it by neglect or deliberate choice. After death, God will judge such sin eternally.

Paul's input makes immoral Felix extremely uncomfortable. As Paul reasons with them about God's judgement on sin, he knows that a sinner must sense his guilt for having offended God's perfect holiness before he will fear eternal punishment from the almighty. Only then will he seek God, turn from his sin wholeheartedly and put his faith in Jesus, who died as a sinner substitute and rose again to be his living saviour.

Felix rightly fears eternal judgement deeply, but sadly he does not come to Christ at this time. Instead he sends Paul away. He says he will call for Paul when he finds it convenient. Although he does often send for Paul for discussions over the next two years, he hopes that Paul will bribe him to gain his liberty, albeit illegally.

Felix is a very sad case. He has missed the God-given opportunity to turn from sin in his life and trust Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life. Please do not copy him! Never postpone from repenting wrongdoing and receiving Christ. Tomorrow may not be yours. Now is the time.

Felix leaves Paul bound in an effort to please the Jews, but God is at work in and for his faithful servant. He always helps those who trust and follow him.

Derek French:

One cannot help but be challenged, both by Paul's graciousness in the way he defended himself in that Roman court, and also his courage as he privately reasoned with the governor Felix about righteousness, self-control and judgement to come. How we should seek to serve Christ and his people with a similar graciousness and courage!