

Acts 24

Truth on Trial: Three chapters, three politicians: Felix, Festus and Agrippa. These are public arguments about faith in Christ. When people discuss the gospel publicly, a lot of opinions get thrown around. Sometimes the discussions are intellectual, sometimes emotional. Some people believe they are above any kind of response. These next chapters give us a grid by which we can analyze various responses to Jesus. The important message of these chapters that we need to understand is this:

Message: The gospel demands a personal response.

- I. Some people respond with attacks. 24:1-9
- II. Some respond with faith and obedience. 24:10-21
- III. Some respond with procrastination. 24:22-27

- I. Some people respond with attacks. 24:1-9

A. 24:1 That's *five days* since Paul arrived in Caesarea.

Background on Felix – governor or “procurator” of Judea from about 52 to 60 AD – whose position was formerly held by Pontius Pilate.

Felix had been a slave of the Emperor Claudius's mother. After receiving his freedom he used his connections to gain positions. His brother Pallas was especially close to Nero, the current emperor. Felix was vicious, corrupt and the Jews all hated him.

“Felix’s cruelty and licentiousness, coupled with his accessibility to bribes, led to a great increase of crime in Judaea. The period of his rule was marked by internal feuds and disturbances, which he put down with severity.” (Wikipedia)

He crucified countless numbers of Jewish Zealots, denouncing them as robbers. On the other hand, he used the more violent Sicarii, for his own purposes, for instance, in the murder of Jonathan the high priest who helped him get his position.

“His term of office was practically a reign of anarchy; for even the high-priestly families were at war with the lower priests (“Ant.” xx. 8, § 8; “Vita,” § 3).” (Jewish Encyclopedia)

Read article: [Link to Wikipedia.com](#)

Read article: [Link to JewishEncyclopedia.com](#)

With all that in mind, we're now ready to hear the accusations of the orator Tertullus. He is the prosecutor. His name is Latin, so he is likely a Roman with no personal interest in the case. He has only been hired by the Jewish Sanhedrin to accuse Paul. The whole speech is a comical combination of flattery and lies.

B. 24:2-4 These are about as empty as compliments can get.

C. 24:5 The word *sect* like “heresy” or “cult”. He is implying that the Christian faith is a oddball fringe group, unrecognized and against Roman law. He's ignoring the fact that many priests have become Christians (Acts 6) and that Paul himself was once a highly respected by this same ruling clique.

- D. 24:6 Paul did not try “to profane the temple”, but when he was falsely accused a riot broke out and the mob was in the process of beating him to death on the spot.
- E. 24:7 As for the “violence”, it did take a measure of force to stop the riot breaking out around Paul.

- At this point the Jewish Council was willing to pay any price to stop the spread of the Christian faith. They first lost their integrity regarding this issue when they sent Jesus to Pilate. Now, years later, they are willing to pay a Roman lawyer to flatter and lie to a corrupt Roman politician who wasn't even especially friendly toward the Jews, in order to stop Paul.
- They are self-destructing ethically. Ten years later they will be destroyed physically.
- **The gospel demands a personal response.** The high priest and elders have decided to respond with attacks. They are attacking Christ's followers and the faith itself – anything to get attention off the fact that by rejecting their own Messiah they are continually condemning themselves.

II. Some respond with faith and obedience. 24:10-21

- A. 24:10 Paul is trying to be honest and yet say something kind. All he can think of is, “You've been here a long time.”
- B. What he now says throughout this section agrees fully with the story as we read it a few chapters back.
- C. 24:18-19 It was originally this group of Jews from Asia that falsely accused Paul of desecrating the temple, which started the riot, which led to Paul's arrest. Now that he's on trial, they don't show up. That should tell us something about the validity of their accusations.
- D. 24:14-17 Here is Paul's response to the gospel.
- 24:14 He continues to worship the God of Israel. The Christian faith is the logical fulfillment of Old Testament Judaism.
 - He believes the entirety of Scripture.
 - The written word is the basis of our faith and the standard of our conduct.
 - This was actually a point of contention between the Pharisees and Sadducees. The high priest Ananias would have been a Sadducee who didn't accept the prophets. By telling the truth Paul makes the discussion awkward for his accusers by exposing a division among them.
 - 24:15 He believes in a future resurrection. - of the just and unjust. This implies a future judgment.

- a) This topic also divided his accusers. Paul uses it to end his defense in v.21. If the high priest tries argue the resurrection with Paul, he's going to be picking a fight with some of the Jewish elders who are presently on his side.
- iv. 24:16 Paul tried to live with a clear conscience toward God and men.
 - a) If we believe in a future judgment as the Bible teaches, then we will want our conscience to be clear.

1 Corinthians 4:5 (NKJV) Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

Hebrews 4:13 (NKJV) And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

- v. Far from inciting riots, Paul was in Jerusalem giving *alms and offerings*. The gospel encourages our generosity. Paul was living out his faith.

- **The gospel demands a personal response.** Paul responded to Jesus with faith and obedience. This is exactly what we also need to do.

III. Some respond with procrastination. 24:22-27

- A. 24:22 Felix was familiar with Christianity, but had not believed it. It was a large movement within his territory. He puts off any decision on Paul until the commander comes. He may never have come, because no decision is ever made.

- **The gospel demands a personal response.** Felix is trying to avoid that, but his procrastination is itself a response to the gospel.

- B. 24:24 Regarding Felix's marriage to Drusilla Upon taking his office in Judea, he began having an affair with this Drusilla, sister of Herod Agrippa II, who was married to a Syrian king. They both divorced their spouses to marry each other. By this time she was all of 19 or 20 years old – while he was at least in his 40s.

C. With all that in mind let's see what Paul talks to them about.

- i. Faith in Christ (v.24)
- ii. 24:25 **righteousness** – which they didn't have.
- iii. **self-control** – which they never displayed
- iv. **the judgment to come** – which they, like all of us, will one day have to face.

- **Righteousness** *dikaionē* Thayer Definition: 1) in a broad sense: state of him who is as he ought to be ... the condition acceptable to God ... 1b) integrity, virtue, purity of life, rightness, correctness of thinking feeling, and acting

- This does not describe Felix and Drusilla.

- **Self-control** *egkrateia* Thayer Definition: the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites.
- This does not describe Felix and Drusilla.
- **Judgment to come** Let's hear what Jesus said about this.

John 5:24-29 (NKJV) "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

- Felix became afraid when Paul talked to him. We know nothing about Drusilla's response. **The gospel demands a personal response.** Felix thinks there will be a more convenient time than the present to respond. He waited two years.

"A fierce contest arose at that time between the Jewish and Syrian citizens of Cæsarea, and as Felix acted unjustly toward the Jews, he was recalled by Nero about 60 C. E. ("Ant." xx. 8, §§ 7-9; "B. J." ii. 12, § 7). At the intercession of Pallas [his brother] he escaped punishment." ("Ant." I.c.). (Jewish Encyclopedia)

Porcius ("Swinish" – Thayer) Festus, governor or "procurator of Judea about 58 to 62 AD.

Felix doesn't seem to have made a decision about Christ. He put it off, put it off and then it probably just got easier to put it off again, which amounts to rejecting Christ altogether.

Matthew 12:30 (NKJV) He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

Conclusions: Take some time to examine your own response to the gospel.

- Are you like Felix – procrastinating rather than making a decision about Jesus.
 - Are you comfortable with the topics of righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come? Or does it make you afraid to think about them too much?
 - Could that be the Holy Spirit prompting you in one or more areas of your life?
- Are you like the high priest and elders of the Jews – attacking Jesus or his followers, rather than submitting to Jesus as Lord?
- Or can you agree with Paul as he responded to his accusers? **Read 24:14-16.**

Message: The gospel demands a personal response. Also note that Paul's response is present tense. It's possible that you once responded positively to Christ, but are not doing so presently – not continuously as Paul did

- "believing all things, I have hope in God, I always strive"