

Main Idea: Acts 24 is the record of Paul’s trial before Governor Felix. The story involves three scenes. The story also teaches us much about what to do when you’re on trial for Christ.

- I. We see the prosecution (1-9).
 - A. The world uses flattery (1-4).
 - B. The world uses inflammatory language (5-8).
 - 1. Look out for people who use a lot of words but say nothing.
 - 2. Look out for people who give a lot of heat but little light.
 - C. The world uses intimidation (9).
- II. We see the defense (10-21).
 - A. Paul’s response was respectful (10).
 - B. Paul’s response was factual (11-13).
 - 1. He answered the question, “What?”
 - 2. He gave a defense, but wasn’t defensive.
 - C. Paul’s response was biblical (14-16).
 - 1. He answered the question, “Why?”
 - 2. He put the focus on Christ.
 - D. Paul’s response was evidential (17-21).
 - 1. He put the evidence on the table.
 - 2. He used the occasion to be a witness.
- III. We see the outcome (22-27).
 - A. God protected Paul (22-23).
 - B. God gave Paul more opportunities for witness (24-26).
 - 1. To be saved you must face your sin.
 - 2. To be saved you must believe in the Savior.
 - C. God gave Paul a new kind of ministry (27).

Make It Personal: What am I doing with the pulpit the Lord is giving me right now?

Suppose you had been arrested for a crime you had not committed, then physically molested by your accusers, thrown in jail, and then forced to give a defense before a hostile court without an attorney? How would you feel? If ever the word “victim” would apply to someone, it would surely apply to you in that moment. You’d been mistreated, abused physically and emotionally, and denied the justice that a human being ought to receive. You were a victim.

So how would you respond? The scenario I’ve just described is precisely what Paul himself experienced, as we’re seeing in our series, “*The Gospel on Trial*,” in Acts 21-28. And how Paul responded is what we’re about to see today in Acts 24. To help us make sense of Paul’s response, let’s turn for our Scripture reading to a very personal account written by Paul in 2 Corinthians, for what we’re going to see Paul do in Acts 24 is what he describes in 2 Corinthians 4.

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:1-12

The day marked a turning point in his life. Up until this day his work for Christ hadn’t been easy, for sure. He’d been beaten, stoned, and run out of town after town, but at least he’d been free. Now he was no longer free. And on this day, he’ll find out if he will ever be free again.

It was AD 57, and Paul was on trial for Christ. He’d just finished his third missionary trip. In the previous decade of his life, he’d taken the gospel of Christ to thousands and thousands of people throughout the Roman Empire. But when he brought a benevolent offering to the needy Jews in Jerusalem, he was misrepresented and nearly torn apart by a mob instigated by jealous religious leaders. The Roman tribune, Claudius Lysias,

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Acts series preached at WBC in 2003.

arrested him and later escorted him out of town sixty miles to Caesarea. There he would appear in court before the ruler of the district, Governor Felix.

What would you do if you were arrested and placed on trial for Christ? The reality is, this is happening in our world every day. The world is scrutinizing those of us who claim the name of Jesus, and sometimes it's a hostile jury.

Some of you are experiencing this right now. Like Paul, you are doing life in the presence of angry, at times *hostile*, critics. Every day when you leave your house and head to the office or school, you are on trial for Christ. Indeed, some of you may well be on trial for Christ *within* your house, as you seek to obey the Lord to the chagrin of unregenerate family members.

Be encouraged. When we're on trial for Christ in a hostile world, the Lord is actually giving us a tremendous opportunity.

"To do what?" you ask. To do what Paul did in Acts 24. I've entitled this message, "*On Trial for Christ: The Courtroom Becomes a Pulpit.*"

What's a pulpit? It's a place from which to proclaim a message. This wooden desk is a pulpit. But so is a courtroom, and a cancer diagnosis, and a job loss. These (and there are many others) are God-given opportunities to affirm and proclaim the gospel message to an audience.

Acts 24, which takes us into the courtroom, has much to say to us about what to do when God places a pulpit in our lives. There are three scenes in this account.

I. We see the prosecution (1-9).

Luke introduces us to the prosecuting team in verse 1, "And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul."

The prosecution consisted of Ananias (who was one of the most corrupt high priests Israel ever had), some elders from the Sanhedrin, and a smooth-talking attorney hired for the occasion by the name of Tertullus.

That's a Roman name, and that's about all we know about him. Scholars who know languages well detect certain Latinisms in his speech. One suggests that in Acts we have a Greek translation of what was a Latin speech. Tertullus was a professional orator, as the lawyers of the first century tended to be. The Jews hired him, not because he was skillful at achieving justice, but because he was a professional, persuasive talker.

As we look at the approach the prosecution takes, we're going to see three tactics that the world uses even today in its attack on Christianity.

A. The world uses flattery (1-4). Verses 2-4, "And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying: 'Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation,³ in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude.⁴ But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly.'"

What's that called? Hot air. Granted, court etiquette then as now requires a degree of formality by those who approach the bench, but Tertullus is merely "buttering up the judge." What's worse, everybody knew it. It's a matter of record that in the first century, the Jews hated the Romans, but this fellow makes it sound like they were best friends.

Pollock suggests that Felix and Tertullus were a match made in heaven.² "Tertullus knew perfectly well that since the appointment of Felix in A.D. 52 Judea had suffered widespread bloodshed from the insurrections he provoked, and from the increase in political murders after he had arranged for the ex-high priest Jonathan to be assassinated in the Temple itself. Felix's greed was notorious."

² In Swindoll, p. 264.

Through you we enjoy much peace! Right. Perhaps for the last ten minutes.

Pollock continues, “Tertullus puffed out his cheeks and hitched his robes in the immemorial manner of advocates with weak cases.”³

This is the way justice works in the world. When someone wants something, something they ought *not* want, they begin to build their case by using flattery.

B. The world uses inflammatory language (5-8). Listen to Tertullus as he presents his case: “For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. ⁶ He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. ⁸ By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.”

Essentially, Tertullus charged Paul with three crimes. One, he accused him of breaking Roman law, saying that he stirred up riots. Two, of breaking Jewish law by being a ringleader of the Nazarene sect. And three, of breaking God’s law by supposedly desecrating the temple.

Please observe that Tertullus gives no objective proof here for his harsh accusations, only pejorative language. He speaks in vague generalities, offering no concrete specifics. He uses highly sensational expressions designed to create a negative opinion.

For instance, in the NIV he uses the word “troublemaker.” It’s literally the word for “pest.” But as James Boice points out, it’s a stronger word than what “pest” means today. “For us ‘pest’ usually means a nuisance. But in earlier days of the English language, ‘pest’ meant ‘plague,’ an idea that we preserve in the stronger but somewhat archaic word ‘pestilence.’”⁴

Hence, the ESV, “We have found this man a plague.” In other words, Tertullus is insinuating that Paul is like an infectious disease, that if he were set free, he would spread turmoil and destruction in the world.

Did he give evidence for this wild charge? None. Just accusations couched in inflammatory language.

Are there people like Tertullus around today? Indeed, there are. Can you imagine what Tertullus would have done if he had had a social media account? I’m sure you can imagine, because the approach of Tertullus is alive and well on social media today.

Brothers and sisters, if we’re serious about living for Christ, we must learn to deal with misrepresentation. It’s been well said, “Our Lord was nailed to a cross; so you can count on being nailed to a wall.”⁵

I see a couple of practical precautions illustrated here.

1. Look out for people who use a lot of words but say nothing. For starters, let’s make sure we are not one of them! Let’s be people who “speak the truth in love,” as Ephesians 4:15 states, literally, “truthing in love.” So when we speak, we say what we mean and mean what we say.

2. Look out for people who give a lot of heat but little light. Tertullus wasn’t interested in getting at the truth. His aim simply was to win the case. Consequently, he chose words intended to turn public opinion against Paul, words that inflamed rather than illuminated. When a person does that, he tends to give off a lot heat, but very little light.

Listen to Tertullus as he speaks today. His rhetoric goes something like this: “The problem in our society is the presence of those right-wing, redneck evangelicals with their bigoted notions!” Ponder each of those terms carefully and you’ll discover a lot of heat but very little light.

³ In Swindoll, p. 264.

⁴ James Boice, p. 388.

⁵ Swindoll, *Paul*, p. 260.

Keep in mind that one of Luke's reasons for including this trial (and others in the book of Acts) is *apologetic*. As directed by God the Holy Spirit, Luke is giving a written defense for Christianity by demonstrating that though critic after critic tried to discredit Christianity, the criticisms never stuck. They were fabricated and false. In fact, by the time the book of Acts ends, Christianity has survived trial after trial and made it all the way to Caesar himself in Rome.

We're talking about the tactics the world uses. It starts with flattery. Then comes inflammatory language.

C. The world uses intimidation (9). "The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so." If one person shares an opinion, it's still an opinion. But what if fifty people say the same thing? That makes it fact, right? Not necessarily, especially not if those fifty people have an agenda and a bias that prevent them from being objective.

Be assured that the Jews who agreed with Tertullus and asserted that his words were "true" had an agenda. Remember, less than a week earlier more than forty of their friends took a vow not to eat or drink anything until they killed Paul (23:12). These so called "witnesses" aren't interested in justice, for sure, and neither is this prosecution team that's willing to do whatever it can to "prove" Paul's guilt, including trying to intimidate Felix with numbers.

Flattery. Inflammatory language. Intimidation. These are tactics of people who really aren't interested in the truth. So ends scene #1, the prosecution.

II. We see the defense (10-21).

How did Paul defend himself? Here's a word that does *not* apply to his defense. Victim. He does not play the victim card. Oh, he will set the record straight concerning the injustices, but he doesn't come across as a victim. Instead, he exhibits something you seldom see in a courtroom.

Love. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, said Jesus, if you love. Now, when I say *love*, I'm not talking about some sentimental feeling. I mean what Jesus meant by the term, as Paul himself defined the term in 1 Corinthians 13. Love suffers long and is kind. It is not arrogant, or resentful, but bears all things. Can you do that in a courtroom. Yes, just as you can with difficult people in your family, and at school and work. To love means you do what is right towards them, what you would want them to do to you, if the tables were turned. You do what Jesus Himself would do.

I see four evidences that Paul gave a loving response in the courtroom, and there's much we can learn from him when we too have been mistreated or misrepresented.

A. Paul's response was respectful (10). "And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied: 'Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.'"

Notice the difference between the beginning of Paul's speech and that of Tertullus. Tertullus tried to flatter the judge. "O most excellent Felix! Through you we enjoy much peace!" Not Paul. Paul showed the governor respect, but he didn't utter non-truths or false pleasantries. "You've been a judge for many years." That's true. "And so I now cheerfully make my defense before you."

Interesting choice of words. *Cheerfully* make my defense (NIV 'gladly'). Is that hyperbole? I don't think so. I think Paul meant what he said. How could he make a *cheerful* defense? He'd been slandered, beaten half to death, put in chains, unjustly incarcerated, and shouldn't even be in this courtroom. This is a violation of justice, isn't it? Yes, it is. But it's also a God-moment, that is, it's a moment orchestrated by God Himself whereby His servant, Paul, now has the opportunity to do what he most loves doing. Making known the truth about God and His glorious gospel.

Friends, don't miss this. There's a difference between going into a courtroom and making a defense, and *cheerfully* making a defense. The Stoic makes a defense. Even the guilty criminal makes a defense. But only the person who believes that God is sovereign, wise, and good, can make a *cheerful* defense, for that sees what others in the room can't see, all by the grace of God, of course.

That person knows that no temptation has taken you except that which is common to man, that God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear; but will make a way of escape, so that you can stand up under it (1 Corinthians 10:13). He also knows that all things work together for good for those who love God (Romans 8:28), and that we will reap a harvest if we do not grow weary (Galatians 6:9).

B. Paul's response was factual (11-13). "You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem,¹² and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city.¹³ Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me."

This is the second evidence that Paul's response was loving. He was respectful and factual. There's a stark contrast between the generalities presented by Tertullus and the specifics given by Paul. The apostle gave concrete information that served two purposes.

1. *He answered the question, "What?"* As in, what actually happened? Paul presented the facts in a very straightforward manner, and in so doing refuted the charges one by one:

Fact: Twelve days ago I went to Jerusalem.

Fact: I went there to worship.

Fact: I didn't argue with anyone in the temple, nor stir up a crowd in any synagogue or anywhere else in the city. That's what happened, your honor. Those are the facts.

Notice also that when Paul gave the facts...

2. *He gave a defense, but wasn't defensive.* Paul just let the facts speak for themselves. Even if he had been inclined to stir up a rebellion, he hadn't had time. He'd already been in Caesarea five of the twelve days, and a big chunk of the other seven was used in his purification rite. "You can easily verify that," Paul told Felix plainly.

So we need a firm commitment to the sovereignty of God, yes. But we also need a determination to present the facts. Jesus told His followers to be His *witnesses*. That's what a witness does. He presents the facts. That's also the *loving* thing to do.

C. Paul's response was biblical (14-16). Take note of how Paul used the Scriptures in the next phase of his defense: "But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets,¹⁵ having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.¹⁶ So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man."

Here's the most loving thing we can do when giving a defense. Be biblical. What does that mean? Notice what Paul did in this part of his defense. Two things.

1. *He answered the question, "Why?"* He tells Felix *why* he did what he did. Here's why I came to Jerusalem, your honor. Indeed, here's the real reason why my opponents are angry with me.

Fact: I worship God.

Fact: I am a follower of the Way, Jesus.

Fact: I believe in the Hebrew Scriptures, *all* of them.

Fact: I have the same hope these men do, that there will be a resurrection.

Fact: I do what I do in life because I want to keep my conscience clear.

What's Paul doing? He's being biblical. He didn't hide the fact that he was a Christian, but he did deny that Christianity was anti-Jewish and heretical. That's an unbiblical conclusion to draw. Paul makes it clear that he was a complete Jew for he

believed everything written in the Law and the prophets about the Messiah, which his critics didn't. Far from being a heretic, he says he is more orthodox than his accusers.⁶

But he didn't stop there. In his defense, Paul took his biblical approach a step further.

2. *He put the focus on Christ.* Notice again the confession he makes in verse 14, "According to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers." I am "a follower of the Way," says the NIV. This is the subject that made Paul tick. This is the crux of the matter for him, and he's convinced, for everyone.

The Way. This is how Christianity is often referred to in the book of Acts. For instance, we're told in Acts 9:2, that Saul of Tarsus asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, "so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

This is our identity, brothers and sisters. It's how we should think of ourselves.

Listen to Paul. I am a follower of the Way. I believe in the One who claimed to be the way, the truth, and the life. I believe He is the only Way. I identify with Him and with His people who likewise are on the Way to heaven. This is why I'm on trial. I am a follower of the Way.

This is one of the things that stands out about Paul. You are not with him very long before he turns the conversation to the precious truths of the Bible, even in a courtroom, and particularly, to this subject. Let's talk about the Way.

I'm concerned about people who call themselves "Christian," but seldom talk about *Christ*. Even in church, when the final song is over, they talk about the ballgame, the weather, their favorite restaurant, their new outfit, but the name of Christ seldom falls from their lips in conversation. This is not right. Paul loved Christ, and people too, even his hostile critics, and he showed this love by talking about Christ whenever he could. Even in a courtroom.

There's one more evidence of love. Respectful. Factual. Biblical. And...

D. Paul's response was evidential (17-21). "Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings.¹⁸ While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia—¹⁹ they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me.²⁰ Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council,²¹ other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: 'It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.'"

Here's what I mean by evidential. Paul just did two very loving things.

1. *He put the evidence on the table.* My critics say I came to Jerusalem to cause trouble. Wrong. The evidence says I brought a benevolent offering to help the poor. They say I desecrated the temple. Wrong. The evidence says I was ceremonially clean. They say I'm a ringleader. Wrong. The evidence says there was no crowd with me.

That's how to deal with a critic. Don't argue. Don't be defensive. Just give him the evidence. It's the loving thing to do. It's what a person needs to know if he is ever going to change. The truth. Which brings us to another way Paul expressed love.

2. *He used the occasion to be a witness.* In his final words Paul did as he had done a few days earlier when on trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin. He took advantage of the pulpit the Lord had given him and put a spiritual subject on the table, even though it was in a very secular environment.

"It's concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial (NIV)!"

That is love. If you get the sense that Paul's number one concern in this trial wasn't securing his own release from prison, you're right. His number one concern was to

⁶ MacArthur, p. 307.

please Christ (as he says in 2 Corinthians 5:9), and his number two concern was to help other people come to know Christ. That's why he uses the climax of his courtroom defense to help everyone in the room think about the subject we all need to think about. Death is not the end, not for you, not for me. You can kill me, but there's coming a resurrection day. And we will all live forever somewhere.

With that, Paul finished. This brings us to scene #3. The prosecution. The defense.

III. We see the outcome (22-27).

The outcome, of course, is always in God's hands. Paul knew that. We can be assured of that too. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God (Psalm 20:7)."

As a result of Paul's defense, God produced three outcomes.

A. God protected Paul (22-23). "But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, 'When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.'²³ Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs."

This is so real to life. What's Felix doing? He's playing the politics game. He knows the charges against Paul are bogus, and that Paul deserves freedom. But he also knows that an innocent verdict would infuriate a whole bunch of his Jewish constituents and lead possibly to further unrest and violence.

MacArthur is right when he observes, "Like many politicians before and since who have been trapped between justice and popularity, Felix decided his wisest course was to avoid making a decision."⁷

You may be thinking, "I thought you said that God protected Paul." He did. He used a self-seeking ruler to provide a safe haven for His servant, even if that safe haven happened to be undeserved jail time.

But why, you ask. Why would the Lord want Paul to remain in jail? He had a good ministry going, didn't he? Yes, he did have a good ministry going. He'd just finished his third missionary journey, and was already making plans for a fourth.

Friends, this is a reality that we need to face. The Lord is *the Lord*. He is in charge, and I mean, in charge. At times He works in ways we can't understand, but why should that surprise us? He is the Sovereign One who created the heavens and earth, and He does all kinds of other things that are, as we say, beyond our pay grade.

The Lord, who is sovereign, wise, and good, is always up to something good for His children, even if it seems otherwise.

You say, "What good could come out of abuse and an unjust stay in prison?"

Here's something. It's the second outcome.

B. God gave Paul more opportunities for witness (24-26). "After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.²⁵ And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, 'Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.'²⁶ At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him."

If Paul had seen himself as a victim, he would missed this opportunity God placed in his life. The victim always misses out.

We need to talk about this reality, friends. We are living in a world that is filled with abuse and mistreatment and injustice, and it affects all of us. We've all been hurt by others, some grievously. And this is why we need to look at accounts like Acts 24.

⁷ MacArthur, p. 309.

Look at Paul. Look carefully. Look at the injustice he has experienced. He's incarcerated because this wicked government official didn't have the backbone to do the right thing. Paul truly is a victim.

But Paul doesn't act like a victim. He acts like his Savior, doesn't he? When this wicked government official calls for him, he speaks. About what? About the injustice of it all? No. He begins to talk to this man who had caused him great pain *about faith in Christ Jesus*.

So Paul turned his courtroom into a pulpit, and now he's turning his prison into a pulpit too. He's choosing to love this wicked man by sharing with him the most precious thing he possesses.

But love isn't wimpy, brothers and sisters. Love takes risks for the good of the other person. And that's exactly what Paul did here. Look carefully at the topics he raised in his conversation with Governor Felix and his wife.

Verse 25 says he talked about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment. If there were three subjects that Felix and Drusilla needed to hear about, it was these three subjects. Drusilla was a Jewess, the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I. As a small girl she was betrothed to marry the prince of Commagene, in eastern Asia Minor. The marriage, however, didn't take place because the prospective bridegroom refused to embrace Judaism. Then her brother, Agrippa II, gave her in marriage to the king of Emesa (in Syria). But when she was still only sixteen years old, Felix entered the picture. Captivated by her beauty, Felix lured her away from her husband with the help of a Cypriot magician, and persuaded her to marry him. She did so and became Felix's third wife. At the time of Paul's trial, she was but twenty years old.

You have to admire Paul. He was willing to talk straight with the man who controlled his freedom. He told him about *righteousness*, that is, that there is a righteous God who has established a righteous standard that He expects His creatures to follow.

He told him about *self-control*, that is, the response God demands of man in light of this righteous standard. In other words, the standard says, amongst other things, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." It takes self-control to be faithful to your sacred wedding vow. And what happens if you are not?

Paul told him about that too, *the judgment to come*. The inevitable result of failing to demonstrate self-control in response to God's standard is *God's judgment*.

How did Felix respond to Paul? Luke says he was "alarmed." The KJV says he "trembled." It's no wonder he trembled, for he lacked righteousness and self-control, and as an adulterer, he knew it. What he didn't know, or hadn't been thinking about, was that divine judgment was waiting for him. But now he was thinking about it, because Paul made him think about it.

You say, "Wow, that took a lot of guts for Paul to say that." You're right. So why did he take that risk? Because that's what love does. When we love people, we treat them the way we would want to be treated.

This is what evangelism is all about. Speaking the truth in love to sinners about their sin, and about the Savior who came to rescue them from their sin. These are the two subjects that everyone needs to know about.

1. *To be saved you must face your sin*. And it's not just the "big" sins, either. You may not be living in blatant adultery, but if you are in *any* violation of God's righteous standard—and we all are—if you lack self-control to say no to sin—and we all do, then you are heading for divine judgment. The wages of sin is *death*.

Does your friend want to hear that message? Probably not, any more than you wanted to hear it. But someone loved you enough to tell you. Aren't you thankful now?

This is what love says to a friend, what Paul was willing to say to his enemy, frankly. Not you're okay, God understands. But, if you want to be saved you must *face your sin*.

2. *To be saved you must believe in the Savior.* Paul didn't just talk about righteousness, self-control, and judgment. What else did he address during his time with Felix and Drusilla? Verse 24 says he spoke about "faith in Christ Jesus."

There's actually a definite article in the Greek text. He spoke about *the faith*, that is, he presented the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. He told him how that in His grace God took the initiative to meet our need for righteousness and self-control. God sent His own Son into the world, and on the basis of His Son's righteous life, vicarious death, and victorious resurrection, God will save sinners. But to be saved, in addition to facing your sin, you must *believe in the Savior*.

This too Paul shared with the powerful man who would determine whether Paul lived or died. And how did Felix respond? He said in verse 25 (NIV), "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you." And verse 26 indicates he did just that, sent for him, frequently.

But what initially was a fearful heart in time became a greedy heart. What he really wanted out of his time with Paul wasn't salvation for his soul, but a bribe.

What was the outcome of this personal ministry of the Word? Notice verse 27, "When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison."

You say, "Two years in prison. That's bad."

Yes, on many levels. The fact that Felix put off making a judgment about Paul is bad. It was bad for Paul. It was bad for justice. But it was also bad for Felix.

Wiersbe shares the following story about a meeting in hell. Satan called his four leading demons together and commanded them to think up a new lie that would trap more souls.

"I have it!" one demon said. "I'll go to earth and tell people there is no God."

"It will never work," said Satan. "People can look around them and see that there is a God."

"I'll go and tell them there is no heaven!" suggested a second demon, but Satan rejected that idea. "Everybody knows there is a life after death and they want to go to heaven."

"Let's tell them there is no hell!" said a third demon.

"No, conscience tells them their sins will be judged," said the devil. "We need a better lie than that."

Quietly, the fourth demon spoke. "I think I've solved your problem," he said. "I'll go to earth and tell everybody *there is no hurry*."⁸

Felix had so much going for him. Not only was he well acquainted with the Way, but he had the privilege to sit under the personal Bible teaching of the apostle Paul himself, and that for two years! And he did more than sit. He listened. He wanted more. He even acknowledged that he was a sinner, so much so that he trembled in fear. Yet in spite of all this, he postponed his decision. "When it is *convenient*," he said.

Felix reminds me of so many people today, some that come to our church. They've been taught the truth about Jesus Christ. Perhaps they had parents that opened the Scriptures to them. Some have family members and friends praying for them. They may even come to church regularly because they like to learn new things. They may not be Bible scholars, but they know enough about Jesus to be saved.

And like Felix, they have no reason to doubt what they've learned. They agree it makes sense. They know that God deserves to be first in their lives. They know they're sinners. They know that Christ came to save sinners. They've seen Him save and change

⁸ Wiersbe, p. 502.

other people. Why, they might even say to those others, “I’m so glad for you that you have made peace with God.”

Furthermore, like Felix, they may even think about spiritual matters. They think about God. They think about their sinfulness. They think about what Jesus did. They think about the coming judgment—and it frightens them.

But they’re still lost. And when someone lovingly urges them to repent and trust Christ, they foolishly say, “Not now. It’s not time yet. I need to think about it.”

Dear friend, “Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation (2 Cor 6:2).”

Felix put it off and as far as we know he died in his sins. If that’s the case he is in hell’s torment this very moment. He had the opportunities, but he wasted them.

Don’t be like Felix. Come to Jesus while there is still time, and then invest your life in helping others do the same.⁹

There’s a third outcome that God produced in Acts 24.

C. God gave Paul a new kind of ministry (27). Verse 27 says (NIV), “When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus.” Though Luke doesn’t tell us, the reason Felix was replaced by Festus was because of a foolish blunder he made in AD 59. Felix responded to severe strife between Jews and Gentiles in Caesarea by sending in soldiers and brutally killing the Jewish leaders. Rome found out about it and removed him from office.

This is why we must resist a victim mentality. The Felix’s of this world aren’t getting away with anything, not ultimately. God will have the final say.

The Lord actually used Felix to open up a new ministry for Paul, a prison ministry. In some ways the results of Paul’s work in prison were more far-reaching than those prior to his arrest. During his years as a prisoner, Paul will take the gospel to the highest government officials in the Roman world, as well as write the New Testament books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 2 Timothy.

Most of this didn’t happen during his first two-years of incarceration, but later when in Rome. This new prison ministry started with a time of waiting, and Luke gives us no information concerning what Paul did for these two years. Was he discouraged? Was he sick? We don’t know. We do know he was learning to be *content*.

Make It Personal: What am I doing with the pulpit the Lord is giving me right now?

For Paul, the pulpit was a courtroom. Your pulpit may be a set of bleachers, or a doctor’s office. Our pulpit is whatever He sends into our life. Let’s use it for His glory.

Closing Song: #478 “*Soldiers of Christ, Arise*” (all three verses)

Community Group Discussion:

1. In this morning’s message, “*On Trial for Christ: The Courtroom Becomes a Pulpit*”, we looked at Acts 24. Take time to read again the account of Paul’s trial before Governor Felix.

2. What stands out to you from the approach the prosecution takes in verses 1-9?

3. What approach does Paul take in his defense in verses 10-21? What does it mean to say that he turned his courtroom into a pulpit?

4. How did Paul interact with Governor Felix and his wife Drusilla in verses 24-27? What do we learn about personal evangelism from this scene?

5. What do we learn about God in Acts 24 that can help us respond rightly to the difficult situations we are facing in our own lives?

⁹ I’m indebted to James Boice for his thought-provoking challenge concerning this on pages 392-3.