

The Conviction of Governor Felix

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[0 : 0 0] Acts 23.31. We'll continue to read through chapter 24. So the soldiers carrying out their orders took Paul with him during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris.

! The next day they led the cavalry go on with them while they returned to the barracks. When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him.

The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, he said, I will hear your case when your accusers get here. Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace.

Five days later, the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus. And they brought their charges against Paul before the governor.

When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix. We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation.

[1 : 0 6] Everywhere, in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.

We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and even tried to desecrate the temple.

So we seized him. By examining him yourself, you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him. The Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied, I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation, so I gladly make my defense.

You can easily verify that no more than 12 days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city.

[2 : 0 9] And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the way, which they call a sect.

I believe everything that agrees with the law and that is written in the prophets. And I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings.

I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. But there are some Jews from the province of Asia who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me.

Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin. Unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence, it is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.

- [3 : 20] Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the way, adjourned the proceedings. When Lysias, the commander, comes, he said, I will decide your case. He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard, but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.

Several days later, Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, That's enough for now.

You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you. At the same time, he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Portius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

We have broken out of our usual study of Acts for a Christmas message, a New Year's message, and so we're returning to the book of Acts this morning. Three weeks ago, we learned that Paul is going to Rome.

- [4 : 36] It came to him, this knowledge, this assurance that he's going to make it to Rome, came to him at one of the lowest points in his Christian life. He's in Jerusalem.

The whole city seems to want him dead and wanted nothing to do with his Savior and his gospel. The Lord, who knows the hearts of his servants, came to Paul one night, and he came with this encouraging promise.

Take courage. As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, you must also testify about me in Rome.

You're going to Rome, Paul. And the rest of the book of Acts is full of events that seem to mock that promise of the Lord. Things happen that make it look like Paul's never going to make it alive to Rome.

Indeed, the very next morning, over 40 Jews swore an oath that they would never eat or drink again until Paul was dead.

- [5 : 39] And they had a well-thought-out plot to get the job done. But the Lord, whose word controls history, uncovered their plot and revealed it to Paul's nephew and then to the Roman commander, Lysias.

And that commander, who was so confused about who this guy Paul is, saved his life again yet the fourth time.

And the Lord has Paul escorted safely out of Jerusalem by night with 470 Roman soldiers. There's Paul in the middle of this small army.

And God's just showing them, see, I'm leading you. I'm with you. You're safe in my hands. Be encouraged. And so they go out of Jerusalem.

The next day, Paul arrives in Caesarea, 62 miles away, where his case was to be tried by the provincial governor, a man named Felix.

- [6 : 46] So God has spoken. The Lord has spoken. Who are men to stand in his way? Paul's going to Rome. And it's by a rather strange way that the Lord is going to get him there.

But get him there, he will. So he's here in Caesarea to stand trial before the governor, Felix. We don't read about this governor, the things I'm going to tell you, in the scriptures.

But history has recorded that this Felix was immoral in both his private and public life. He was a tyrant. And his vices and violence were well known.

He got his third wife, Drusilla, by deceitfully enticing her away from her lawful husband. He was an unprincipled, bribe-seeking politician.

We see that in the biblical text. But Tacitus, the Roman historian, sums up his whole reign in these words. He exercised the power of a king with the mind of a slave.

[7 : 50] Indeed, he used assassins to bump off people that he wished gone, including the Jewish high priest, Jonathan, right in the sanctuary, right in the temple.

He was hated by the Jews. And he was finally removed from office by none other than the emperor Nero himself, Felix. And one day, into his wicked life, rode a man on a horse named Paul.

In the middle of this 470, there he is. And in trying his case, Felix will come face to face with the gospel of Jesus Christ that could save him from his sin and from eternal punishments.

Chapter 24 naturally divides into three points. We have the accusations of the Jews. We have the defense of Paul. And we have the decision of Felix. And each of these three points brings home to us an important lesson for our lives.

First, the accusations of the Jews. Felix had Paul kept under guard in Herod's palace there in Caesarea, mostly for Paul's own protection as he knew there was a plot on his life.

[9 : 06] And he's being held there until his accusers can arrive from Jerusalem. And five days later, here they come. There's Ananias, the high priest, whom Paul had so fittingly described as a whitewashed wall.

Well, that didn't sit well with Ananias. And he's followed Paul the whole 62 miles to get even with him. And he's brought with him some of the elders that were on the Sanhedrin, this high Jewish court who had already heard Paul.

And he's also got their big gun, Tertullus. He's a Polish lawyer. And he has experience in the Roman courts. You see, it's one thing to try Paul in their own kangaroo court of the Sanhedrin.

Sanhedrin. It's another thing to get a charge to stick in a Roman court of law. So they're banking on this lawyer, Tertullus, to win their case against Paul, since he knows the ways and the ins and outs and how to get the job done in a Roman court.

So, first thing on the agenda is to butter up Felix. You see that in the text. We've enjoyed a long period of peace under you. And your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation everywhere and in every way.

[10 : 21] Most excellent Felix. We acknowledge this with profound gratitude. Well, he's just lying through his teeth. None of those things were true.

Only a professional could keep a straight face while saying these things about this tyrant. It's nothing but flattery. Kids, flattery is insincere praise.

When you say positive things about someone that you do not feel in your heart about them at all. But it was all part of the fashion of the times.

Part of the price you had to pay to win the judge over to your side if you wanted to get a favorable ruling. So he flatters him. And then he pours it on really thick when he infers that he could go on and on lauding his praises.

But in order not to weary you any further, please be kind enough to hear us shortly. As if any egomaniac would ever grow tired of hearing his praises. And yet, he says, we'll be short and we'll cut to the chase.

[11 : 27] Well, he's got three accusations against Paul. First of all, Paul is a troublemaker. We have found this man to be a troublemaker. Stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world.

And the word here for troublemaker is the same word for pestilence. A plague. A disease. Paul's a pest. He's a plague on the world.

He's stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. Now, that's the very same charge they brought against our Lord Jesus some 30 years earlier. We have found this man subverting our nation.

He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar. He claims to be Christ a king. And he stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. Inciting the people to rebellion.

Now, that was a serious charge to make in the Roman Empire. It threatened the Pax Romana, that famous peace of Rome. That wherever Rome went and conquered, they established a peace.

[12 : 31] And they were proud of that maintenance of peace and order in their empire. So, to hear of someone subverting and stirring up riots in the Roman Empire would be of most serious concern to a Roman ruler.

So, there's the charge against Paul. Now, it's a fact that the Jews were not happy under the Roman heel. They were known to be a troublesome people.

And there often arose Jewish revolutionaries who had gathered together a group of people and tried to throw off the Roman yoke by force and fight against them. Barabbas was one such man.

Remember. He was guilty of murder in the insurrection. He was revolting against Rome and killed. The commander, Lysias, initially thought Paul was such a man.

Remember. Aren't you that Egyptian who started a revolt and led 4,000 terrorists out into the desert? He asked. There were these Messiah, hero figures that rose from time to time.

[13 : 38] And Rome had no patience for them and just crushed them under their heel and shed much blood. Much Jewish blood. In fact, within just 10 years, the famous Jewish-Roman wars, the series of Jewish revolts, would lead to a massacre of many, many thousands of Jews.

Hundreds of thousands. And the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem and her temple, which is gone to this day. That happened in 70 AD, just 10 years later or so.

10, 13 years later. So that's the first accusation against Paul. He's a troublemaker. But I ask you, was he? Was he a troublemaker? Now, we must admit that it's true that many places where Paul went, trouble seemed to show up.

And yes, even riots were stirred up. But the evidence of the book of Acts, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is that the stirring spoon was not in Paul's hands, but was in the hands of the Jews themselves.

They were the ones who stirred up trouble and riots against Paul. That's what we've seen in Pisidian Antioch, in Iconium, in Lystra, in Corinth, Thessalonica, Berea, and Jerusalem.

[14 : 53] We followed the trail. And it was the Jews who were experts at stirring up riots. And they had many different recipes to follow. Sometimes they would travel to other towns and incite the Gentiles there to persecute Paul and his team.

Other times they would round up bad characters in the marketplace and pay them to start a riot. Other times they just shouted lies into a mob, into a crowd that stirred up the whole city of Jerusalem to start killing Paul.

Yes, we've seen trouble. It seemed to find Paul, but it was not of his making, but of the Jews. So there's the charge. Troublemaker. Stirring up riot.

What say you, the jury? True or false? False. False. Exactly. It was false. The second charge.

Paul's a heretic. He's a ringleader of the Nazarene sect. The Nazarene was a despised name given to Jesus.

[16 : 02] And they're trying to tie Paul to that subversive man, Jesus, the Nazarene. And by calling Paul a ringleader of the Nazarene sect, they're saying he's a heretic from the true religion of Judaism.

That he's turning people away from the religion of their fathers. And we've already heard that charge before in chapter 21. He teaches all men everywhere against our people, against our law, and against this place.

And Paul has said elsewhere, and he'll say it again in his defense here, that that simply is not true. The second accusation is also false.

And the third accusation is that Paul even tried to desecrate the temple, verse 6. Remember how it happened? Some Jews from Asia had made this charge there at the temple in Jerusalem.

They'd come for the feast of Pentecost, and they saw Paul. And Paul had previously been seen with Trophimus, the Gentile from Ephesus, in the city of Jerusalem.

[17 : 07] And these Jews from Asia just assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area and to bring an uncircumcised Gentile into the temple precincts that were only for the Jews would defile and profane the temple.

And so their false assumption led to a false accusation. This, too, was false. Well, that's no concern of Tertullus, who's hired for a guilty verdict.

And so he closes his argument saying, by examining Paul, you'll discover that all our charges against him are true. And then all the Jews present chime in. Yes, these things are all true.

It's the many against the one. Paul will be the lone voice, portraying a different reality. But could Governor Felix side with one voice against the many respected Jews who have just presented their case?

Well, before we come to Paul's defense, learn this. It's the first lesson. If you're a Christian, expect to be falsely accused by the world. If you are a follower of Jesus, expect to have the world lie about you.

[18 : 28] And when they do, Peter says, don't be surprised as though something strange was happening to you. No, it comes with the territory for the people of God.

Indeed, Jesus said, blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil about you because of me. And remember, that's how they treated the prophets who were before you.

You see, this is a pattern. It's a pattern. So expect to be called a troublemaker. Paul was. Jesus was. Elijah was.

The prophet Elijah. You remember wicked King Ahab and his wife Jezebel had turned Israel away from the worship of God to the worship of Baal. Idol worshippers.

And God sent his prophet Elijah to announce his judgment against the nation for their idolatry. He said there will be no dew or rain for the next few years. And so the ground became parched and a severe famine was throughout the land.

[19 : 33] Three years later, God sends Elijah back to King Ahab. And when Ahab saw Elijah, he said to him, is that you?

You troubler of Israel? Troubler of Israel? Troublemaker? Troublemaker? And Elijah said, I've not made trouble for Israel.

But you and your father's family have made trouble for Israel by abandoning the Lord's commands and following the Baals. Do you see the pattern? The wicked world calls the righteous troublemakers.

A plague on society. Pests. That was the charge that the early Christians faced for a long time under the Roman Empire. Indeed, it's why many of the early church fathers were apologists.

That means that they wrote to the Roman rulers a defense of Christianity. Defending Christianity and its values and its behavior against the many false charges that were circulating against them.

[20 : 41] It was a perpetual problem that Christians were falsely accused. Well, we live in a pluralistic age now where no one religion is any better than any others, we're told.

And if the majority religion, the moral majority, continues to become the moral minority, than we can expect to be called troublemakers more and more.

To be identified as the problem in our country. The pest. The disease which if it was rooted out, our nation would be much better off.

You see, it's the Christian who stands in the way of progress. In the eyes of many today. The Christians stand in the way of progress of letting people die a death of dignity.

To die a death on their own terms. I.e. Suicide. And the Christian says, no. God says, that's murder. You see, it's the Christians that stand in the way and try to withhold the full range of health care to women.

[21 : 53] Which must include abortion. And it's the Christians that say, no. Our God says, that's to take a life. That's murder. And it's the Christian who stands in the way of progress in the sciences.

Still denying evolution. And clinging to an outdated belief in six day creation. I wonder if you saw that. When Governor Pence was selected to be the vice presidential candidate.

He was immediately raked over the coals. For what? For his views on creation. How can he, I mean, how bright can he be to not accept the fact of evolution?

He's going to harm the educational system of our children. Yes, it's the Christians who are the hate mongers. Who make life so difficult for the LGBT community.

And on and on it goes. And when these things happen, brothers and sisters, we must not be surprised. We must expect it.

[23 : 00] And when it happens, we must rejoice. And not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. But answer insult with blessing.

Because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

What a blessing to be one of God's people. Doesn't matter who's calling us names and lying about us. Well, that's the lesson that grows out of the accusation of the Jews.

Be expecting to be falsely accused. The second part of this chapter is the defense of Paul. It runs from verse 10 to verse 21. Now, Paul starts out very politeful and respectful in his speech to Felix.

But there's none of the flattery that we found in Tertullus. He appeals to the facts that are easily verifiable. First of all, as to the charge of being a troublemaker and stirring up riots, he says in verses 11 and following that 12 days ago I came to Jerusalem not to stir up trouble, but to worship.

[24 : 10] I came here to worship. And my accusers didn't find me arguing with anybody in the temple or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere in the city. They can't prove to you the charges they're making against me.

As for charge two, being a heretic, leading people away from their Old Testament Jewish religion. He says, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the way, which they call a sect, a heresy.

But far from being a heresy, the way is the true fulfillment of all Old Testament religion. I'm not against the Jewish people.

I'm not against the Jewish law, the Old Testament scriptures. I'm not against the temple. I came to Jerusalem to bring gifts to my people, the Jews, who were in need.

I came to worship. And the God I worship is the God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And all that I believe agrees with the Jewish law and the prophets.

[25 : 17] I am not a Christian because I reject the Old Testament scriptures. I am a Christian, a follower of the way, because I believe the Old Testament scriptures. And I have the same hope in God as these men that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unjust, the wicked.

And Jesus' resurrection proves it. He's the proof of a resurrection. In fact, that's the only crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin, that I said, I believe that there will be a resurrection.

Because Christ arose, all men will rise for the day of judgment. And so, you see, he's emphasizing that the teachings of the way, the teachings of Christianity, are not at odds with Old Testament Judaism.

Rather, they are the fulfillment. They are the flower of all that the Old Testament pointed to. The Old Testament is promise. And the way of Christ is the fulfillment of the promise.

Same God, same fathers, same scriptures, same hope of the resurrection. They call it a sect, a heresy, a departure from the true religion of Judaism.

[26 : 29] But Christianity is all that Old Testament Judaism promised. It's all fulfilled in Messiah Jesus, who is himself the way, the truth, and the life, the only way to God.

Charge two, dismiss. As for the charge, thirdly, of desecrating the temple, he says, I came here to worship and to present offerings. I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this.

There was no defiling of the temple. There was no crowd with me. I hadn't brought Trochimus into the temple. Nor was I involved in any disturbance. I was just minding my own business, is what he's saying.

So he flatly denies all the charges against him. Now, before we come to the decision of Felix, I want you to consider verse 16, where Paul says, he's not preaching to a church choir like I am today.

He's speaking to a Roman court and to these Jewish accusers. And he says, so, verse 16, I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

[27 : 35] You see, more important to Paul than coming away innocent in the courtroom of Felix is to not be condemned in the courtroom of his own heart, his conscience. And that's lesson number two.

Strive always to keep a clear conscience before God and men. Now, that word so, so connects it to what goes before.

And what goes before is the doctrine of the resurrection. And this, for Paul, is the only fitting response to the belief in the resurrection of the dead.

Because death is not the end, but it's followed by a resurrection unto final judgment, I take pains. I strive always to live my life in a way that my conscience will be clear.

It won't be logging its accusations of guilt against me, of sinning against God and men. You see, conscience is God's voice. It's his megaphone in the heart.

[28 : 39] And it's always weighing in on how we're doing in our life. Sometimes accusing us for having sinned, Romans 2, 14 and 15.

But also sometimes excusing us for not having sinned or violated the law in that situation. So conscience is the judge, God's voice in the heart.

And Paul worked hard to maintain a conscience that was clear from accusation. He didn't find it natural. It's something he had to work hard at.

To say no to sinful passions and reactions. It meant mortifying sinful pleasures and desires and carefully watching against temptations.

And when he did sin, it meant, and his conscience says guilty, It meant running quickly to Jesus Christ and his blood that atones for sin and that can cleanse the conscience.

[29 : 35] For the only thing that can properly silence a guilty conscience, the only thing that can cleanse the conscience is the blood of Jesus. Hebrews 9, 14. How do you serve God with a clean conscience?

When you know you've sinned, you come back to the blood. And you trust in the blood of Jesus to have atoned for sin. To have been a fitting payment to God.

A fitting punishment served for that sin. Calvary covers it all. All my past with its sin and shame.

My guilt, my despair. Jesus took on him there. And Calvary covers it all. And if God is satisfied with the blood of Jesus, then my conscience is satisfied.

If God looks on him and pardons me, then he speaks peace. And my conscience no longer accuses. I am at peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

[30 : 49] Blessed is the man whose conscience is not accusing, especially when man is accusing. Do you see the connection here? Man is accusing. You're a troublemaker. You're a heretic.

You desecrated the temple of God. Oh, how blessed when man is accusing to have a conscience before God that is not accusing. It is washed in the blood of Jesus.

Blessed when men cry guilty to have a conscience crying innocent. Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.

And why not? Because it was counted against my substitute, Jesus. And he took all the punishment for me. How many of you believe in the resurrection of the dead?

That when you die, it's not like the dog. That's it. You believe there's going to be a resurrection one day of the righteous and the unrighteous. To stand before God in judgment. I would say probably all of us here this morning would have to say, Yes, I see that in the Bible.

[31 : 54] But have you also learned the practical application of that doctrine? That's what Paul had learned. That if to die is not the end, then being ready for that day of judgment is the most important business of this life.

And therefore, I will strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. You see, no doctrine was mere theory for Paul. Truth changed the way he lived.

And so I ask you, do you have any ongoing controversy with God or man? And conscience is saying, you know, you know, you're wrong. Oh, flee to Christ and have that sin washed away, covered in the blood and righteousness of Jesus.

Well, the accusations of the Jews, the defense of Paul. We come lastly to the decision of Felix. Now, he's heard two conflicting views of reality.

And only one can be right because they oppose each other at the very root. Both claim to be true. And they can't both be true. But could he take Paul's lone voice against all these respectable leaders?

[33 : 06] Well, he postpones his decision. Isn't that good? He puts it off. We're closing up court today. And we'll assemble again later when Lysias, the commander, will arrive.

As if he needed further testimony from Lysias, the commander. But he already had the letter in his hand when Paul was delivered to him. The letter from Lysias said very clearly that he had found no charge.

This is the man who arrested him and put him in prison and sent him to Felix. I found no charge against him deserving of death or imprisonment. But that the accusations had only to do with questions about their law.

It's just a religious infight here. Nothing to be punished. So why does he postpone? Well, Felix was acquainted with the way, well acquainted with the way, we're told.

Perhaps through his wife, who was a Jewess. Drusilla. She's a daughter of King Herod. The one who beheaded the Apostle James and arrested Peter and was planning to do the same to Peter.

[34 : 12] But God opened the prison gates and broke the chains and brought Peter out. It was his will to take James, but not Peter. This is the Herod.

Drusilla's father. Remember the end of Acts 12. He was eaten of worms and died because he did not give glory to God. Well, here she is.

And perhaps over supper, Felix tells his Jewish wife about this guy named Paul. You know, it's really quite a remarkable fellow. And these Jews were bringing up charges against him.

She's a Jew. And so she's curious enough to want to hear this man. The one who had agitated her people, the Jews. So several days later, Felix and his wife, Drusilla, send for Paul to listen to him.

What an opportunity for Paul. And what an opportunity for Felix and Drusilla. Oh, Felix does not seem to realize the amazing privilege brought to him that day.

[35 : 14] To hear the message of one who could save them from eternal torments. But Paul makes the most of the opportunity. He spoke to them about faith in the Messiah, Jesus.

That was his central theme. He preached Christ. And faith is that which is required of the sinner. To trust in this Savior. To save them from their sins.

To, by faith, trust in Jesus and what he had done for sinners. But that's not all he spoke about. Because, you know, if people don't know why they need a Savior, they won't appreciate a Savior.

And so, Paul also spoke to them about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come.

Now, this is the why you need him. Why I need him. Why Drusilla and Felix. Why you need him. Why you need faith in this Jesus. He discoursed on righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come.

[36 : 21] That after the resurrection comes a judgment. And so he tells them about the righteousness of the judge that they're going to meet one day. He's so righteous that he in no way can clear the guilty.

Every sin must be punished. That's the righteousness of this judge. And the righteousness he requires is spelled out in his holy laws, his righteous laws.

That's the standard by which you'll be judged in that day. A righteousness that requires self-control of ungodly passions. Saying no to any desire that wants to break the boundaries of God's laws.

And then Paul reminds his own judge, Felix, that he has a judge to face one day. And he speaks of the coming judgment. Now, could he, Felix, and his wife face this God with a righteousness that he requires?

Do they measure up? Remember what we knew about Felix? Even then, they were living in an adulterous marriage. Breaking God's seventh commandment.

[37 : 25] Felix was guilty of blood of those he had assassinated. Breaking the sixth commandment. His heart was filled with covetousness. Even while he's talking to Paul, hoping that Paul will give him a bribe.

Breaking the tenth commandment. Showing in all of this that he had another God in his heart. Other than the one true and living God. Breaking the first commandment. Indeed, every commandment. No, he couldn't stand before this God.

And all of this showed that he needed to have faith in Christ. But notice Paul didn't spare his hearers from uncomfortable truths.

See, just because they were such important people. And Felix had the power of death over Paul. No, it was his love for them and their eternal souls. And his love for Christ's honor that moved him to hold back nothing that would be profitable.

And so he confronts them with their sin. The righteousness of the one who would judge them. I just can assume that Felix and Drusilla had no idea that morning when they got up what they were going to hear.

[38 : 31] They thought they'd hear some abstract recital of the things that the Christians believe. Near their bullet point. We believe this, this, this, and this.

Some detached presentation of the tenets of Christianity. But Paul didn't know how to handle truth in that way. Some detached way. Some out there abstract way. Truth is God's truth.

And is always meant to be handled close up and personal. And Paul was not aiming merely at informing his hearers, but at converting them. And his arrow of truth hit home.

For as he discoursed on righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix trembled. He was afraid. And well he should be. For he had not measured up to the righteousness that's required by the judge.

He had no self-control like God demanded. He was in no way prepared to face this God in the coming judgment. He was guilty, condemned before God, convicted of his sin.

[39 : 34] And fear is the only proper response to those who are condemned before the God of heaven. Paul's on trial, remember?

But it's Governor Felix who is convicted. And the important thing in this third point is to... The important thing to notice about the decision of Felix is not so much what he did with Paul as what he did with Paul's gospel.

What he did with Paul's savior. And it's at this point that Felix made a fatal decision. He stifled conviction. He silenced his conscience.

He removed the preacher from his presence. And the truth from his thoughts. That's enough for now. You may leave when I find it convenient. I'll send for you. He took a shortcut to relieve his guilty fears.

Rather than repent of his sins and come to Christ and trust in Christ for mercy. He removes the one reminding him of his sins. He tries to forget the day of judgment.

- [40 : 36] The demands of righteousness. Rather than to prepare to meet the judge. He says, I'll consider these things when it's convenient with me. But you know, it's never convenient. Never convenient for the sinner to think about his sin and his guilt before the final judge. Never convenient for the sinner to repent and surrender in humble faith to Jesus Christ. And the next time Felix calls for Paul, his former convictions were gone. His concern is not to find peace with God in Jesus Christ from his guilty fears. But rather to find out if Paul is willing to offer him a bribe if he would set him free. The tragedy of it all. Paul has eternal life to offer Felix. And all he can think about is a few more shackles to spend in this world before meeting the king unprepared. But is that not our world?
- [41 : 46] Is that not the most of men? More concerned with earth than with the final judgment. Two whole years passed in this way without a decision to free Paul. Only frequent talks seeking a bribe until finally Felix is removed from his office. And so Felix walks off the pages of scripture just as quickly as he appeared. But he leaves behind this important lesson for us. It is dangerous. It is a dangerous and damning thing to stifle convictions. Conviction of sin is a good thing. It is a gift of God to be made aware that I am a sinner and I need Jesus. If I am not convicted of my need of Jesus, will I ever seek this Jesus? Will I ever want him? No. So conviction is God's gift to say, John, you need this savior. You must stand before this God and you have sinned against him. There is nothing you can do to undo your sins.
- [42 : 48] But there is a mediator who suffered and died. And if you trust in him, he will bring you to God as a righteous, redeemed son of God. Conviction. It's meant to move you to Christ. That's what it's meant for. That conviction, that fear in the heart. I'm standing before God and I'm not ready. It's meant to chase you to Jesus, to trust in him. It is grace that taught my heart to fear. It was a grace to be made afraid, Newton is saying. But grace then that relieved my fears in the gospel. There's a whole lot of people whose convictions never bring them savingly to Jesus Christ. So I want to close with just three warnings about conviction of sin. Three wrong ways to handle conviction. First of all, don't trust in your convictions of sin. Many mistake conviction for conversion. They think that they're feeling guilty for sin is proof that they're saved.
- [43 : 53] But all people have moments when their conscience accuses them of having done something wrong. Of guilt. That doesn't mean they're saved. Conviction is not conversion to Christ. Remember, godless Felix trembled under conviction of sin. But he's in hell today because though he was frightened, it did not chase him to faith in this Jesus. But rather caused him to silence the man who was preaching Christ to him. So don't trust in convictions. They're no savior. They're meant to chase you to the only savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. Whose blood can atone for your sin. Secondly, don't try to satisfy convictions by doing better. It's the natural response. It's kind of the knee-jerk reaction of the flesh. That when I first learn and it first dawns on my soul. I may have heard it for 20, 30, 40, 50 years that I'm a sinner. All have sinned and come short. But when God, by grace, opened my eyes, I saw it for the first time that I'm the sinner the Bible's talking about.

- [45 : 00] This is the God I'm going to stand before in just a few years hence. When my eyes were first opened. I'm a guilty sinner. I've done things that are wrong against this God.
- It's like the knee-jerk reaction. I'm going to stop doing these bad things. I'm going to start doing the right things. And what is that? That's making a savior out of myself.
- And I'm no savior. And just as convictions are no savior. But are meant to drive you to Christ. So I'm no savior. I'm to get to Jesus who perfectly obeyed God's law.
- As the only one who has a righteousness to give me. He's the only one who took the punishment that my sins deserve. And satisfied the judge. And so my first response must be get to Jesus.
- Get to Jesus. Trust in him. Don't trust in your convictions. Don't try to satisfy your convictions by doing better. Keeping the law.
- [45 : 59] Only Jesus' blood can atone for your sins. And thirdly, don't stifle convictions. Don't stuff them down with you. Don't suppress them.
- That's Romans 1.18. There's this knowledge coming to all men. And what do men do? They stifle what they don't like. What they don't like to hear. They just change the channel.
- They tune it out. They flip the switch. They no longer come back. One way or another, they're getting their minds off of these convictions. That's enough for now. I'll deal with this later.
- When it's convenient. But convenient never seems to happen. No, if you see your need of Christ. You feel your need of Christ. Now get to him. He's ready to receive you.
- You may never again feel your need for Jesus Christ. Don't delay. Turn to him. The world's full of band-aids to take your mind off of your fears. And to heal your wounds slightly.
- [46 : 54] And to make you feel a little better about yourself. But anything that turns your attention away from Jesus. It's just a damning delusion.
- There's only one way to be healed. And that's by the wounds of our Savior. Who even now is saying, come to me.
- All you who are weary and heavy laden. And I will give you rest. Felix is running from what? Not an appointment at the dentist.
- What is he stifling? What's he pushing away from? He's pushing away everlasting life. The goodness of God forever. Isn't that a testament to the sin that is in man's heart?
- That we even push away the very best thing as it's offered to us in Jesus Christ. No, rather come to him. He's ready to forgive. He's ready to receive.
- [47 : 56] He's ready to save all who come unto God through him. Cry out to him. There in your seat. Even as we sing together. Number 431. Let's sing it.
- This is the way we first came to Christ, Christian. And it's the same way we continually come to Christ. As we have a conscience that needs to be washed again.
- We come just as we are. Pleading only, no goodness of our own. But pleading only that Jesus' blood was shed for sinners.
- Let's stand as we sing. 431. Let's pray. We thank you, Father, for this chapter in the Bible.
- We see ourselves in Felix. Unclean. Unfit for God. Unfit for the judgment. Stifling conscience. Stuffing conviction.
- [48 : 56] And still you came. Still you offered. And still you promised. And said that whoever comes to me, I will no eyes cast out. We found that all of our needs were met in you, Lord Jesus.
- We found that our need for forgiveness. For an atonement for sin was found in your death. We found that our need for new life was found in your resurrection.

And regeneration. A new birth. We found that our need for purpose in life. To live for this God who made us.

We found a new love for you and for our neighbors. We found why it is that you made us. And why we're here. Where we're going.

All this. Because of your overflowing love and mercy to us. So receive our thanks. It's not much that we can offer. But we would offer our thanks and our love and ourselves.

[49 : 56] And ask that we might make this Savior known to others. Thank you then. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.