

“Accusations and Procrastinations”

- Acts 24-25 -

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Acts 24-25 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. 2 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, 3 "we accept [it] always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. 4 "Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us. 5 "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. 6 "He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. 7 "But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took [him] out of our hands, 8 "commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him." 9 And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so. 10 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, 11 "because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. 12 "And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. 13 "Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me. 14 "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. 15 "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. 16 "This [being] so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. 17 "Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, 18 "in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. 19 "They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. 20 "Or else let those who are [here] themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, 21 "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.'" 22 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." 23 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. 24 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. 25 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." 26 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. 27 But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound. Acts 25:1 Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. 2 Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, 3 asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem—while [they] lay in ambush along the road to kill him. 4 But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going [there] shortly. 5 Therefore," he said, "let those who have authority among you go down with [me] and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him." 6 And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought. 7 When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove, 8 while he answered for himself, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all." 9 But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?" 10 So Paul said, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. 11 "For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar." 12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!" 13 And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus. 14 When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying: "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix, 15 "about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed [me], when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him. 16 "To them I answered, 'It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.' 17 "Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in. 18 "When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, 19 "but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. 20 "And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters. 21 "But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar." 22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him." 23 So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in. 24 And Festus said: "King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer. 25 "But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him. 26 "I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write. 27 "For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him."

When humanity is spiritually backed up against the wall, it usually will take up both offensive and defensive positions. Often ...because a true child of God is a walking breathing embassy of kingdom domain, those same reactions can occur merely in response to your physical presence in their world. The apostle Paul is going to experience both in these chapters...the offense of lies and false accusations, and the defense of procrastination of decision and position.

Man feels that they can put off a commitment to God or they can deflect His reality through attacks upon Him and His followers. *Some years ago an article was written concerning American author and journalist Ernest Hemingway. The article made the statement that Hemingway had proven that you could do everything you wanted to do with no consequence. After all, he had won the Nobel Prize in literature! The article stated "the old Victorian ideas of the Bible that the wages of sin is death," and that "what you sow you shall reap" have all been proven to be a lie. For Hemingway has done this and he's done that and he's done the other thing and it talked about his lack of morality and so forth and so on and heaped the praise upon him. Ten years later to the very month that the article was written he put a bullet through his brain and killed himself.* (John McArthur) Then 35 years later his granddaughter Margaux Hemingway killed herself, "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations."

Paul begins the 24th chapter of Acts in a Roman court appearing before just such a man as this, who, for more than one reason, was a rather famous individual himself. The governor there was one Antonius Felix, who actually went from once being a slave to being a governor, and a very powerful one at that. However, such a worldly advance in position and status seemed to bring Felix no peace or satisfaction. The Roman historian Tacitus described Felix as "cruel, licentious, and base."

Those who stood against Paul on this occasion, brought out all the heavy guns, complete with a power attorney by the name of Tertullus, who immediately began to "butter up" the governor. When he finally gets around to the trumped up charges against Paul, Paul is accused of the following specifics: One, he was a "plague." Two, he was a creator of revolt amongst all the Jews. Three, he was the "ringleader" of the sect of the Nazarenes (not a flattering term in that day). And four, he tried to profane the temple.

Certainly these charges would have surprised and perhaps even chagrined this humble servant of Christ, but the world has always made some pretty incredulous accusations against the followers of Christ! Any engaged disciple of God has, or soon will, experience such on the receiving end. Welcome to my world!

We can garner some clarity of the situation at hand when we note the extent of the offensive planning against Paul. Besides their attorney Tertullus, the high priest himself made the journey so as to be present. Everyone on the "attack" side had made the investment and commitment to see a verdict in their favor. Such a venture is even today an amazing thing to see. People will set-up fake email addresses, make fake name reviews, spin lying tales in penned letters to 3rd parties, call your friends and attempt to trap them with a ruse, etc. It all gets very elaborate and quite creative! Apparently these folks have no lives to speak of or are so consumed with their hatred that no measure is too excessive! That's what was going on with these enemies of Paul.

However, all that the enemy will dish out seems to never take into consideration the power and gifting of the Holy Spirit, nor the gift of discernment, which often is manifest in the awareness that something smells rotten in a situation! Paul it seems, made a fair lawyer himself! He herein lays out the information clearly and concisely. Meaning, He simply tells the truth, ...*imagine that!*...and he let the chips fall where they may!

We as Christians can often get all intellectual in discussions that quickly become debates, and eventually degrade into a personal sparring match. Our flesh loves to try to show how smart we are, but God rarely blesses such attempts! (Paul: Eph 6:19, Ph 1:27, 1 Thess 1:5) The fact remains that no one is ever intellectually debated into the Kingdom of God. We don't find such in the Gospels nor in the success of our normal every day witnessing.

One may feel that Paul's approach was "old-school" and too simplistic for our day. But the Scriptures clearly show the power of such a message, and how the gospel truth can either be the "rock of offense" or the "power of life transformation." But rarely if ever is its affect one of benign apathy. Simple words of gospel or biblical correction can start a fire that will smolder for years and fuel a cancer of bitterness and resentment that can apparently consume an individual.

Paul herein denied many of the accusations against him, and clarified others. He told them that he had come to Jerusalem not to raise an army and conduct an insurrection, but to bring money to help the poor! Oh yes...He was guilty alright! Guilty of compassion and preaching the resurrection of Christ! The fact that his accusers, the supposed "eye-witnesses to his crimes," were not there to testify concerning his nefarious acts, was a very real point of contention. Where were those who had the issues with him? Anonymous social media reviews are one thing, but a face-to-face? Well, that is something else! Paul was certainly courteous, but he was far from "rolling over." His attitude toward his accusers was one of "prove it!"

With all that the Spirit presents and the activity herein, we must not miss verse 16. Paul says that he "strives" or "exercises" himself to "*have a conscious without offense toward God or men.*" What does this mean? It means that Paul understood a crucial element of the dynamic believer's life. If he or she is going to be greatly used by God, then he or she is going to have to "break a sweat." Such a diligent life as Paul's... one of consistent and faithful service, does not just "happen."

The Holy Spirit is forever faithful, **but are we?** The word "strive" or "exercise" in the Old King James, means "*to labor, to take pains.*" So many of us speak of a desire to be used by God, but not enough to put forth the cost and effort that is required in order to see such actually come to pass. We usually just want God to do it all. He *can*, but He *won't*. He *requires* our participation. Paul understood, and he was thus used by God accordingly.

Eph 6:19 "*...and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel...*"

Ph 1:27 "*Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel...*"

1Th 1:5 "*For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.*"

Now an interesting thing appears here in the text of 24:22-24. Verse 22 tells us that Felix, the one who sat as judge in these proceedings had "*an accurate knowledge of the Way*" of Christianity. Just *how much*, we do not know, but evidently he understood more than he was given credit for, and no doubt more than anyone understood at that point.

Therefore *he did indeed understand* at least on some level, and yet he failed to act accordingly. It was, no doubt, the turning point in this man's life. We all will have such a moment. The "cross-roads" of one's destiny! Felix lacked the personal and moral strength to do the right thing. To move in favor of Christianity would have no doubt had severe political ramifications for him! In fact, *as it is for all of us*, it would have no doubt been the end of life as he knew it.

One thing we all can confirm about a decision to affirm Christ is that it dramatically changes a person's world and his perspective. Felix does what thousands upon thousands of people do every day. He **procrastinates** ...he postpones a decision that should have been made and finalized at that moment. But Felix rolled the dice...pulled the trigger in another round of Russian roulette. "*click...*" He was still alive. *For the moment...*

Once again, Felix knew the truth...the facts...at least on some level. But he wanted to feed his flesh. He wanted the **world**. He wanted to line his pockets and to have the esteem of the world. He hoped for a bribe from Paul, but at the same time he was apparently and inexplicably drawn to Paul and the things he spoke of. A couple of days later he

would call for Paul to appear once again before him. Curiosity was going to “kill the cat” one way or another! He postponed a move he seemed to innately know he had to make. He would *procrastinate*.

Matt 6:24 NLT *"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."*

Matt 16:24 *"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

Felix went on to have Paul brought before him many times over the next two years. Like many today, there apparently was some inexplicable draw upon the soul of Felix to know this Jesus that Paul spoke of and of course the illusive peace that comes through Him. That's the mystery that ties these two issues of 'accusations' and 'procrastinations'... those who seemingly will not hear your words or receive your message, **but they also won't go away**. Then accusations keep coming. They remain engaged and in the picture in one way or another. But as Shakespeare said *"though doth protest too much me thinks..."* Meaning the reason they can't move on is because in the depth of their soul they know you are right. That what you say concerning them is correct, though hell will freeze over before they will admit it!

The text tells us that Felix “trembled.” (KJV) The things that Paul spoke to him about made him afraid. Like many of us, he kept coming back for more but apparently failed to ever make that crucial decision to give his life over to Christ. For him, the draw to the Word of God was inexplicable. Something inside of him, *the same that affects us today*, kept him “returning to the table” for more. But without that decision, we, *and Felix*, will **“never see the Kingdom of God.”** (Jn 3:3)

Ultimately, Felix was removed from his position because of some bad political moves. Those moves came to pass through his efforts to maintain his position and to protect his power base. In hindsight, one could easily see that perhaps Felix's time was up. He simply sat back on the pew too long and finally God “pulled the rug out” from under him. You see, his lack of decision *was* a decision, whether he totally understood that or not. It is for all of us.

Porcius Festus followed Felix as procurator of Judea from about AD 59 to 62. Now while Felix was evil and immoral, Festus was a different type of person. He was an intellectual and was likely to be found off studying philosophy. When “Festus” comes on board, he was instantly thrust to the front of the battle. After all this time, at least two years, the Jewish leaders are still living off their hatred of Paul. Ungodly bitterness has no expiration date!

Once again, this is truly a testimony of the desperate and naturally wicked state of mankind. Fueled by nothing more than sheer hatred, the enemies of Paul were unrelenting. They had nothing they could legitimately accuse him of, so they resorted to underhanded name calling and imaginary crimes. A pastor I know once said that “bitterness has the shelf life of a Twinkie...*you can unwrap that puppy 20 years later and it is still as sweet!*

I'm sure that these religious leaders at one time in their lives and ministries couldn't have even *imagined* being a part of murder! But unchecked animosity has no limit as to where it will take you. Many a man has found themselves in some crazy surprising situations that was fueled by deep hatred and bitterness.

Festus, however, was a shrewd politician. He didn't turn Paul over to the Jews, but he knew how to properly “schmooze” with the “powers-that-be.” One cannot help but remember the famous line from the Godfather movie... *“Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer.”* Festus was acting out of self-preservation. He was “working the system” in an effort to please the Jewish leaders. If he brought Paul back to Jerusalem, back to his home turf, he could move to ultimately place him into the hands of the Jews. John 12:43 speaks of such a heart saying *“...they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”*

No doubt under the leading of the Holy Spirit, Paul counters this move by “appealing to Caesar.” It was the right of any Roman citizen to appeal his case before Caesar if the charge involved a capital offense. And once the appeal was made, nothing could stop it. Nero was Caesar at this point in history, (approx. 61AD) and was actually a well-respected leader early in his rule. It would be a few years yet before Nero begins to “unravel” and administer his rule with famous cruelty and erratic behavior. (approx. 64AD)

Some have rightfully wondered if Paul ultimately played a part in Nero’s famous “breakdown.” The timing was certainly consistent with Paul’s visit to Him. Perhaps Paul’s preaching drove him to madness or satanic possession in his rejection of Jesus Christ! We will never know for sure in this life. But he wasn’t the first to fall to such, and he certainly wasn’t the last.

Paul’s appeal to Caesar was the “out” that Festus was looking for. After all, he was in a bit of a fix. He had nothing for which to charge Paul or to keep him locked up, but he didn’t want to release him for the sake of the Jewish powerbrokers. But this request by Paul released Festus of any responsibility he held.

Verse 13 of chapter 25 says that one King Agrippa and sister Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus. Now this was truly a crazy group! Agrippa was the son of Herod Agrippa I, who murdered James and imprisoned Peter in Acts 12. This Herod’s uncle was the Herod who was responsible for the beheading of John the Baptist, and Grandfather Herod had all of the young Jewish boys murdered in his attempt to root out this newborn “king,” Jesus Christ. Yes, it seems that the whole Herod family was “certifiable!”

Bernice, Herod Agrippa’s sister, has been remembered throughout history as a striking beauty. She had previously been married to her uncle until his death, and was now living with her brother in a relationship widely rumored to be incestuous. She later left *him* for another pagan king, then deserted him and ultimately became the mistress of both the Roman emperor Vespasian and his son Titus, who later destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70. All in all, a real nice lady!

In verse 19 we read that Festus, while speaking concerning Paul, says that the whole matter revolved around “*a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.*” This was a point that Paul must have “drove home” with Festus, because this was what Festus later remembered. No doubt such information was the “stumbling stone” on which Festus stumbled! This fact still has a similar effect upon mankind today. Such a reality is either the “good news” of salvation for a man, or a ludicrous assertion for which no credence is given! And of course, sometimes they are even “fighting words.” But no one, even today, stands without opinion on such a pivotal claim!

Paul would go on next week, having one of those ‘historical moments’ in his witness before this famous and infamous bunch. But one cannot miss the fact that despite the accusations...even the attempts at his life, Paul was still “on the field.” History has never learned that you can’t stop God and His plans. You can point your finger and make all the accusations you want, but when God has his hand on a man or woman, or even a ministry endeavor, they cannot be stopped. Even death cannot stop it. Jesus proved that.

And every man and woman that has ever lived will eventually have their own day in court. Hebrews 9:27 reminds us that “...*each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment.*” Martin Luther once said “*How soon ‘not now’ becomes ‘never’...*” Procrastination is the arrogant assumption that God owes you another chance to do tomorrow what he gave you the chance to do today. **William Branham** once remarked “*Christianity is not nothing you pretend; you’ve got to have it. You’ve got to have it. The devil knows whether you’ve got it or not. He knows all about it. No matter how much you can put on a great psychological effect on the outside, the devil knows just how deep that is, and he stands and laughs at you.*”