

Acts 24 • Paul's Second Testimony

Introduction

There are two overall themes in this chapter to which we should be sensitive. The first is how we can expect persecution to come about from so-called religious authorities and bodies. If we were to quantify how much persecution of the Church has historically come from 100% non-believers versus those operating in the name of God and/or Christ, it would be eye opening to see how often persecution is initiated by people purported to come from “within” the Church. The second issue raised here is how Christians should act in a political environment and with earthly political figures. In this present age when Christian political action committees are the norm, it is healthy to understand the biblical guidelines for such endeavors. In either case, Paul serves up a personal example of never allowing either one to obscure or marginalize the greater need for the Gospel and to keep all things focused on Christ.

¹After five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul. ²After Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying to the governor, “Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation, ³we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. ⁴But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing. ⁵For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. ⁶And he even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him. [We wanted to judge him according to our own Law. ⁷But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands, ⁸ordering his accusers to come before you.] By examining him yourself concerning all these matters you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him.”

⁹The Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so.

[Read v.1-9]

Q: Is this Paul's first hearing?

A: In the previous chapter Paul was first brought before the Sanhedrin. This resulted in a public tumult so great that the local Roman authorities had to intervene and take Paul into custody. This is Paul's second hearing overall, but the first to take place in Caesarea before the Romans. In essence these are representatives of the Sanhedrin who were unsuccessful making a case in their own court who now attempt to make a case in the ruling government's court.

Q: What might we find curious about the fact that the high priest Ananias and representatives of the Sanhedrin employed Tertullus?

A: His name strongly implies that he is not a Jew but a Roman, someone employed strictly for legal representation. In the context of the times it would suggest that they are incapable of representing themselves willing to work within a system that is at odds with the religious legal system they themselves are supposed to uphold. It shows hypocrisy on a number of levels.

Q: How might we characterize Tertullus' opening remarks?

A: In v.2-4 we have what is probably the typical kind of flattery which legal proceedings of the day regularly employed regardless of whether or not such were actually believed by the speaker and the party he represented.

Q: What is the nature of each of their accusations in v.5?

1. **A Personal Accusation:** “...we have found this man a real pest...”
2. **A Political Accusation:** “...a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews and throughout the world...”
3. **A Religious Accusation:** “...a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”

Notice how it once again replays the same pattern by which they accused Christ and how true believers are described in the character of a cult: annoying, politically disruptive, and religious kooks.

Q: How are each of these accusations actually false?

1. Although they consider Paul a kind of “plague”, being a pest is not an actual crime. (It is worth noting that non-believers often do not realize that their “pesky Christian friends” are really their best friends.)
2. The political accusation was false because Paul never sought to change men's politics. In fact we know from his letters that it was his instruction to support and pray for earthly governments.

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3. They looked on Christians as a sect of Judaism, identifying it with a term of contempt. (Remember Nathanael's opinion of Nazareth? Jn. 1:46) The Greek word here translated "sect" is actually "haireseis" – "heresy". The fact is that the only true Judaism that exists even to this day is the one brought about through Christ when He brought an end to Mosaic Judaism. Christianity is actually the one, true Jewish religion, so to speak, practiced by both regenerate Gentiles and Jews as members of the Body of Christ known as the Church.

Q: What is the nature of the accusation in v.6-8?

1. First is a lie within a lie. Paul never "tried to desecrate the temple", something that was fabricated in order to arrest him, and then the lawyer over-simplifies what followed by stating "then we arrested him", completely omitting the riot that took place. He obviously understood how the truth would implicate the guilt of those he represents instead of the one he is accusing.
2. Second he exaggerated what Lysias did. When he learned of the plot to assassinate Paul, it was not Lysias who used "much violence" but who acted to prevent violence from taking place both in extracting him from before the Sanhedrin and in moving him before the assassination plot could be executed.

The Jewish authorities hated Lysias because of the way he intervened and were slandering him (albeit with subtlety) as much as Paul in order to accuse and convict them.

Application: *Whether it is the law of man or the law of God, false believers are betrayed by the way they twist and misuse it to persecute the true believers.*

"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

— John 8:44

¹⁰When the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded:

"Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense, ¹¹since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹²Neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city itself did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot. ¹³Nor can they prove to you the charges of which they now accuse me. ¹⁴But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; ¹⁵having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶In view of this, I also do my

[Read v.10-16]

Q: It might appear to be a small point, but what is the very significant lesson we might learn from v.10?

A: Paul waited until the governor gave him permission to speak. He provides by personal example his teaching to submit to civil authorities and provide them all due respect. Paul was never a defiant political activist who mocked or demonstrated against their authority. He never engaged in insults but relied wholly on expressing the truth.

Q: How would you compare Paul's opening with that of Tertullus?

A: Paul does not engage in hollow flattery, but focuses the governor on the only function that matters in this situation by highlighting "you have been a judge to this nation" before whom "I cheerfully make my defense". (v.10)

For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness— nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

— 1 Thessalonians 2:5–6

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best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.

Q: How would you compare Paul's presentation of the case with that of Tertullus?

A: Whereas Tertullus is exaggerating some points while omitting others, Paul is content to answer their accusations with facts, especially that twelve days is hardly enough to form a political movement against the government and that they can produce no witnesses to support their allegations.

Point: Whereas false believers use lies to support lies, true believers use truth in the course of establishing truth.

Q: What does Paul do before he actually addresses the specific accusations?

A: He takes the opportunity to first witness of his faith in Christ.

Q: What is ironic about Paul's dual testimony of his faith and his initial response to their accusations in v.14?

A: They have accused Paul of leading a cult, something by their definition which is completely contrary to the Word of God. Paul's response is that he is rather actually **fulfilling** the whole Word of God, "*believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets*". Paul is more concerned about the accusations regarding the Law of God than the law of man. What they call "a sect" – in Greek "heresy" – is actually the only correct application of God's Word.

Point: True believers must often stand up for service to "the God of our fathers" (v.14) against false believers who attempt to co-opt a religious legacy for themselves in order to make themselves look legitimate and the legitimate to appear false.

Q: What is even more ironic about Paul's response in v.15?

A: Having made a distinction between himself and them, Paul now shows the similarity between many of the very same authorities who were now trying to bring a case against him caused the riot they accuse Paul of initiating over the issue of the resurrection. (Acts. 23:6) It is an elegant way of telling an earthly authority that this is really not a civil dispute but a spiritual issue. It also tells the non-believers in the room that ultimately everyone will stand before God.

Q: What is Paul's point in v.16?

A: It goes back again to the issue of obedience to God's Word and that he is actually putting it into practice – "*I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men*" – rather than setting it aside **EITHER** for the religious authorities **OR** the earthly.

Application: The first order of business in the course of persecution is to retain the primary focus on Christ and the Gospel, making sure that what is really at stake is not obscured or marginalized.

¹⁷“Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings; ¹⁸in which they found me occupied in the temple, having been purified, without any crowd or uproar. But there were some Jews from Asia—¹⁹who ought to have been present before you and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me. ²⁰Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council, ²¹other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, ‘For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.’”

[Read v.17-21]

Point: Paul does not address the specifics of his case until he has first focused everyone on the central issue of the Gospel and Christ.

Q: Why would the fact that Paul “came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings” be a very strong refutation of personal and political accusations?

A: “Alms” is a charitable gift specifically designated to address the needs of the poor and destitute, and “offerings” are designated for the operation of the Temple and priesthood. How could he be guilty of being “a pest” or one who “stirs up dissension” (v.5) when he is bringing what is defined in their own terms as a gift of love to both the religious authorities and the people of Israel?

Point: This is a very important point to note, that Paul was not going to the Temple in order to prove obedience to the letter of the Law, but in order to witness to the greater intent and spirit of the Law to love others.

Q: How does Paul prove the hollowness of their case from an earthly perspective?

A: By the fact that they have not produced witnesses to testify to the validity of their accusations. (v.19-20)

Q: How does Paul provide an explanation of what is really at stake behind the guise of these false accusations?

A: It is the same issue which initiated the riot, the doctrinal issue of “the resurrection of the dead” (v.21) In fact, if they **HAD** produced those witnesses, it would have been revealed that it was they rather than Paul who induced the riot they now accuse Paul of inciting. Each side is revealed by the way they handle both earthly truth and spiritual truth.

Application: Christians have a right to use the legal system to protect themselves and the Gospel, but must understand their need to maintain the whole truth both from an earthly and spiritual perspective.

²²But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.”²³Then he gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody and yet have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him.

²⁴But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁵But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, “Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you.”²⁶At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse

[Read v.22-27]

Q: Of all the ironies we have highlighted in this chapter, why is v.22 probably the most powerful of them all?

A: A non-believer such as Felix had “a more exact knowledge of the Way” than the high priest and the members of the Sanhedrin who were accusing Paul.

Point: Something we need to never forget or underestimate about non-believers is that they very clearly see the difference between religious hypocrites and sincere believers. They may not have all the doctrinal details, but they certainly know the difference between the authentic and the counterfeit.

Q: What are the main points of discussion between Paul and Felix?

1. Righteousness
2. Self-control
3. The Judgment to Come

[Continued on the next page.]

with him. ²⁷But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.

Q: Why would these particular topics be of the utmost importance to Felix from both an earthly and spiritual perspective?

A: History records that Felix enticed Drusilla away from her first husband and that he was a cruel criminal ruler protected from prosecution by his brother, a Roman judge. Can you see how he needed to hear the Gospel in terms of “*righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come*”? (v.25)

Q: How would you characterize the root cause of Felix’s failure to accept the Gospel?

A: He was more concerned for the things of this world than those of the one to come. He was incapable of denying himself as the necessary first step toward taking up the cross. (Mt. 16:24)

Q: How would you characterize Paul’s character in this situation?

A: He took the opportunity of a public event in order to develop a personal relationship that he might win the individual to Christ. He is not merely a representative of Christ in general, but is always responsible for taking it to the individual level.

Application: *Christians have an opportunity, even through the legal system, to not just witness about the Gospel in general, but to tailor the message to the lives of those they encounter in the overall process. We must never lose sight of the individual.*

Overall Application

- *How does the way truth is handled – whether in earthly legal systems or in the structure of God’s Word – reveal the true spiritual character of everyone involved?*
- *How is every situation – especially the bad ones – actually an opportunity to share the Gospel?*
- *How is every situation – especially the bad ones – actually an opportunity to display our personal witness?*
- *Do we recognize we are placed on public display not just to be a general witness but to develop relationships so as to win individuals within that arena?*