



Potomac Hills Community Church, PCA

GRACE ORIENTED • CHRIST CENTERED

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June 13, 2004

The Acts of the Apostles: The Spirit sends the Church with the Gospel Acts 24.1-25:22 The Gospel is Insistent

INTRODUCTION: “*An Innocent Man falsely accused and judged.*”¹

In the early morning hours of October 4, 1980, a young nursing student was brutally murdered in the Chicago suburb of Oak Park. Following the advice of well-meaning friends, Steve Linscott, a student at Emmaus Bible College, told police about a dream he'd had the night of the crime. Oak Park police later arrested him, interpreting his dream account as the roundabout confession of a psychopathic killer. Later a jury found Linscott guilty, and he was sentenced to forty years in prison. There was just one problem — **Linscott was innocent!** Only after time in prison and numerous legal appeals — a process that lasted **twelve years** — was Linscott free and vindicated!

Those years undoubtedly brought the most difficult challenges Linscott will ever face — separated from his wife and children for three and a half years except for brief visits, wondering if he had somehow brought all this on himself and why God had allowed it to happen, having to survive prison violence. Those were tough years, **and yet** years of growth and a growing awareness of the goodness of God. In Linscott's own words, “I have come to realize that we cannot judge God's purposes, nor where He places us, nor why He chooses one path for our lives as opposed to another.”

The Bible itself is full of accounts of divine action or inaction that doesn't seem fair, that doesn't make sense ... **except** when viewed in light of God's perfect plan. Thousands of Egyptian children were massacred while a baby named Moses was spared. Jacob was a liar and a thief, and yet it was he, not his faithful brother Esau, who received the blessing of their father Isaac and of God. On one level it makes no sense that God would allow His Son to die for the sins of humankind. But God has a plan — a perfect plan.

Though our circumstances may not be as extreme as Steven Linscott's, no

¹ The introduction is adapted from Steven Linscott's book, Maximum Security.

one likes to be falsely accused. To do what is right and be charged with doing wrong, to work hard to maintain a good job record or a good reputation and have someone else smear it — is the kind of injustice that can easily crush the human spirit, even in a follower of Jesus Christ.

We know the truth, we know who we are in Christ, **but slander hurts**.

The Apostle Paul, one of the most devoted servants of Jesus Christ in the history of the Church, was at times hated, persecuted, and falsely charged. Acts 24 & 25 recounts such a time.

Consider what Paul had already endured. He had been arrested in Jerusalem though he had done nothing wrong, had spoken to an angry mob, had addressed the Sanhedrin, had been transferred to Caesarea to avoid assassination, and now was about to appear before Felix, the old governor, and then Festus, the new governor. He had not committed any crime, and yet he was a prisoner of the Roman Empire and on the receiving end of numerous false accusations.

But God wasn't surprised by all of this.

And neither was the Apostle Paul. Because Paul was a man who had a lot of experience when it comes to ...

24:1-23: KNOWING THE CIRCUMSTANCES ²

Acts 24:1-23, *"Five days later Ananias, the high priest, arrived with some of the Jewish leaders and the lawyer Tertullus, to press charges against Paul. [2] When Paul was called in, Tertullus laid charges against Paul in the following address to the governor: "Your Excellency, you have given peace to us Jews and have enacted reforms for us. [3] And for all of this we are very grateful to you. [4] But lest I bore you, kindly give me your attention for only a moment as I briefly outline our case against this man. [5] For we have found him to be a troublemaker, a man who is constantly inciting the Jews throughout the world to riots and rebellions against the Roman government. He is a ringleader of the sect known as the Nazarenes. [6] Moreover he was trying to defile the Temple when we arrested him. [7] [8] You can find out the truth of our accusations by examining him yourself." [9] Then the other Jews chimed in, declaring that everything Tertullus said was true.*

*[10] Now it was Paul's turn. The governor motioned for him to rise and speak. Paul said, "I know, sir, that you have been a judge of Jewish affairs for many years, and this gives me confidence as **I make my defense**. [11] You can quickly*

² The exposition of the text is adapted from Preaching the Word: Acts by R. Kent Hughes, pages 3101-324; The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Acts 13-28 by John MacArthur, pages 299-329; Acts: An Expository Commentary by James Montgomery Boice, pages 387-402; The Spirit, The Church, and The Word: The Message of Acts by John R. W. Stott, pages 358-368; and The NIV Application Commentary: Acts by Ajith Fernando, pages 578-594.

discover that it was no more than twelve days ago that I arrived in Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. [12] I didn't argue with anyone in the Temple, nor did I incite a riot in any synagogue or on the streets of the city. [13] These men certainly cannot prove the things they accuse me of doing.

[14] "But I admit that I follow the Way, which they call a sect. I worship the God of our ancestors, and I firmly believe the Jewish law and everything written in the books of prophecy. [15] I have hope in God, just as these men do, that he will raise both the righteous and the ungodly. [16] Because of this, I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and everyone else. [17] "After several years away, I returned to Jerusalem with money to aid my people and to offer sacrifices to God. [18] My accusers saw me in the Temple as I was completing a purification ritual. There was no crowd around me and no rioting. [19] But some Jews from the province of Asia were there—and they ought to be here to bring charges if they have anything against me! [20] Ask these men here what wrongdoing the Jewish high council found in me, [21] except for one thing I said when I shouted out, 'I am on trial before you today because I believe in the resurrection of the dead!' " [22] Felix, who was quite familiar with the Way, adjourned the hearing and said, "Wait until Lysias, the garrison commander, arrives. Then I will decide the case." [23] He ordered an officer to keep Paul in custody but to give him some freedom and allow his friends to visit him and take care of his needs."

Jerusalem and Rome were the centers of two enormously strong power blocs. The faith of Jerusalem went back two millennia to Abraham. The rule of Rome extended some three million square miles round the Mediterranean Sea. Jerusalem's strength lay in history and tradition, Rome's in conquest and organization. The combined might of Jerusalem and Rome was overwhelming. If a solitary dissident like Paul were to set himself against them, the outcome would be inevitable. His chances of survival would resemble those of a butterfly before a steamroller. He would be crushed, utterly obliterated from the face of the earth.

Yet such an outcome, we may confidently affirm, never even entered Paul's mind as a possibility. For he saw his situation from an **entirely different perspective**. He was no traitor to either church or state, although this is how his accusers tried to frame him. The enemies of Jesus had followed the same ploy. In their own court they had accused him of threatening to destroy the temple and of blaspheming (Luke 22), while before Pilate they had represented him as guilty of sedition - subverting the nation, opposing taxes to Caesar and claiming to be himself a king (Luke 23). Now Paul's enemies laid similar charges against him, namely that he offended 'against the law of the Jews', 'against the temple' and against 'Caesar'.

But Paul was as innocent in these areas as Jesus had been. He had no quarrel with the God-given status of either Rome or Jerusalem. On the contrary, as he had written to the Roman Christians, he recognized that the authority given to Rome came from God (Romans 13) and that the privileges given to Israel came from God too (Romans 9). The gospel did not undermine the law, whether Jewish or Roman, but rather 'upheld' the law (Romans 3). To be sure, the Romans might misuse their God-given authority and the Jews might misrepresent their law as the means of salvation. In such situations Paul would oppose them. But that was not the issue here. Paul's contention, while on trial, was that in principle the gospel both supports the rule of Caesar and fulfils the hope of Israel. His defense before his judges was to present himself as a loyal citizen of Rome and a loyal son of Israel.

Paul's double denial of treason and insistence on loyalty is the thread which runs through these chapters. So far he has defended himself before a Jewish crown (Acts 21) and the Sanhedrin (Acts 23). Now he will stand trial before the governor Felix (Acts 24), and the governor Festus (Acts 25). And next week we'll see how he defends himself before King Agrippa II.

In each of these five trials, in which the charge was now political (sedition), now religious (sacrilege), the judging audience was part Roman and part Jewish. Thus, when Paul spoke to the Jewish crowd and the Jewish Council, Claudius Lysias, the Roman tribune, was present and listening, while when Paul stood before Felix and Festus, the representatives of Rome, it was the Jews who were prosecuting.

So after leaving Jerusalem under armed guard and being escorted to Caesarea, Paul was arraigned before Antonius Felix, the provincial governor. He then withstood the clever attacks of Tertullus, a lawyer hired by the Sanhedrin.

Paul addressed himself to the charge that he was 'a ringleader of the Nazarene sect'. This led him to affirmation as well as denial. Although he was indeed 'a follower of the Way', this was not a 'sect', as they called it, for he worshipped the God of their fathers and believed the teaching of the Scriptures.

Here was Paul's public confession of faith.

It consisted of four affirmations found in verses 14-16;

1. *I worship the God of our ancestors*
2. *I firmly believe the Jewish law and everything written in the books of prophecy.*
3. *I have hope in God, just as these men do, that he will raise both the righteous and the ungodly.*
4. *I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and everyone else.*

Paul's purpose in this was not just to make a personal declaration of faith, however, but to insist that he shared this faith with the whole people of God. He

worshipped the same God ('the God of our ancestors), believed in the same truths (the Law and the Prophets), shared the same hope (the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked) and cherished the same ambition (to keep a clear conscience). He was not developing a new religion, but loyal to the ancestral faith. Nor was he a heretic, for he stood squarely in mainstream Judaism. His worship, faith, hope and goal were no different from theirs. 'The Way' enjoyed a direct continuity with the Old Testament, for the Scriptures bore witness to Jesus Christ as the one in whom God's promises had been fulfilled.

It's a pretty straightforward and successful defense. But in Acts 24:22-26 Governor Felix, having heard enough, dismissed Paul's accusers while still keeping Paul under a kind of house arrest, a situation that made possible a fateful interview between Paul and Felix and his wife Drusilla. Paul's example shows us how to share the Word, and the example of Felix and Drusilla shows us how **not** to receive the Word.

Background information about Felix and Drusilla helps us catch the importance of this interview. Antonius Felix was the first slave in the history of the Roman Empire to become the governor of a Roman province. That would have been quite a distinction if he had earned it, but that was not the case. As a child, Felix, along with his brother Pallas, had been freed by Antonia, the mother of Prince Claudius, a future Caesar. As they grew up, Pallas became a close friend of Claudius, so much so that when Claudius became emperor, Pallas persuaded him to make Felix a government official in Palestine.

During Felix's governorship, insurrections and anarchy dramatically increased throughout Palestine because of his brutality. The ancient historian Josephus tells us that he repeatedly crucified the leaders of various uprisings. The Roman historian Tacitus described him as "a master of cruelty and lust who exercised the powers of a king with the spirit of a slave." Antonius Felix was an unscrupulous, greedy, brutal, scheming politician.

Drusilla was his third wife, and Felix was her second husband. Drusilla was the youngest daughter of Agrippa I and had originally married the king of a small kingdom in Syria. She did not find that king very exciting and won Felix's affection with the help of a magician, eventually becoming Felix's lover and took the title of "wife," though there is no record of them ever actually getting married. She was barely twenty at the time. Unusually beautiful, her ambition and lust equaled that of her husband. Unlike Felix, who was a pagan, Drusilla had been raised as a Jew, though she no longer had an active faith.

Evidently after Paul's hearing, during his continuing house arrest, Felix and Drusilla sought Paul out. The opening exchange gives us insight in how to proclaim the Word of God. And obviously the Apostle Paul could do this because

he had spent a lot of time ...

24:24-27: KNOWING GOD'S WORD

Paul delivered God's Word with **boldness**, as Acts 24:24-25 make very clear, "*A few days later Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish. Sending for Paul, they listened as he told them about faith in Christ Jesus. [25] As he reasoned with them about righteousness and self-control and the judgment to come, ...*"

This was not the message this illicit couple wanted to hear! They probably thought they would hear some learned dissertation on the future resurrection or some arcane point of rabbinic theology. But Paul quickly left off preaching and went to meddling.

Hugh Latimer, the great English Reformer, often preached before King Henry VIII and on one occasion offended the king with his boldness. So he was commanded to preach the following weekend and make an apology. On the next Sunday, after reading the text, he addressed himself as he began to preach, "Hugh Latimer, dost thou know before whom thou art this day to speak? To the high and mighty monarch, the king's most excellent majesty, who can take away thy life if thou offendest; therefore, take heed that thou speakest not a word that may **displease**; but then consider well, Hugh, dost thou not know from whence thou comest; upon whose message thou art sent? Even by the great and mighty God! Who is all-present, and who beholdeth all thy ways, and is able to cast thy soul in hell! Therefore, take care that thou deliverest thy message **faithfully**."

Hugh Latimer then gave Henry VIII **the exact same sermon** he had preached the week before!

The Apostle Paul had **that** kind of boldness.

Felix and Drusilla "*listened as he told them about faith in Christ Jesus*", though basically they had come to be entertained. Paul got their attention with a clear presentation of the gospel, emphasizing that if they would truly put their faith in Christ their lives would change. He understood their vain pursuits, their looking for love in all the wrong places, their sleepless nights, and he was convinced that Christ could make the difference.

The apostle not only presented the theology of personal salvation but discussed personal morality — "**righteousness**," no doubt emphasizing God's holiness and his requirements for the inhabitants of Planet Earth. The conversation probably included thoughts like those expressed in the epistle to the Romans; **Romans 1:18**, "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*" (ESV)

Romans 3:10, "*as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one."*" (ESV)

Paul also told these two who had always followed their passions about “*self-control*.” Perhaps he taught, as he did in Galatians 5, that such self-discipline can only be accomplished by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Finally, he emphasized “*the judgment to come*,” warning them that they would not escape divine accountability. Undoubtedly he pointed out that God would not only judge their outward actions but also their hearts. Wanting to win their souls to the Savior who alone could save them, Paul didn’t soft-pedal the truth. Preaching the gospel must include the lostness of man and God’s moral demands. If we leave this out, we are not preaching the full gospel of Christ.

How did all this affect Felix and Drusilla? Did they respond with contempt — mockery — confusion? In Drusilla’s case, we can’t say. But the text is clear about Felix, verse 25, “*Felix was terrified*.”

Actually, this was the continental divide of Felix’s life. He was being weighed on the scale of God’s holiness. It was time to make a choice — believing repentance or continuing rejection. The scale trembled and hesitated for a moment, and then Felix said, “*Go away for now*,” he replied. “*When it is more convenient, I’ll call for you again*.”

In a very real sense, his soul died at that moment — a tragedy of infinite proportions. Two tragedies are possible for every soul. The first is the tragedy of never trembling — of never coming to face one’s sin before a holy God. The second is the tragedy of disregarding such Spirit-produced trembling. The one whom God has brought to fear for his soul must not turn away.

Felix didn’t say he never wanted to hear Paul and his message again. He just made the potentially fatal error of procrastination. When God’s Word comes to us with conviction, we must never put off our response, for several reasons.

- *We might hear the same truth again, but it might not bring conviction again.*

That was pathetically true of Felix who sent Paul away, saying he would summon him another time. But verse 26 tells us, “*He also hoped that Paul would bribe him, so he sent for him quite often and talked with him. [27] Two years went by in this way; then Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And because Felix wanted to gain favor with the Jewish leaders, he left Paul in prison.*”

He frequently talked with Paul for greed’s sake, but he only trembled once. Repetition dulls the truth. Some who have heard the Gospel for years are now able to greet extraordinary truth with a yawn.

- *Truths not acted upon can harden us so that we cannot understand them.*

Jesus said, **Matthew 13:12-13**, “*To those who are open to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But to those who are not listening, even what they have will be taken away from them. That is why I tell these stories, because people see what I do, but they don’t*

really see. They hear what I say, but they don't really hear, and they don't understand."

That's what happened to the Pharisees. Whenever we come under conviction while hearing the truth, we must take action or suffer spiritual loss. If the Spirit is prompting us to teach, we must quickly take first steps to do so. If he is moving us to give, we must do it. If he is prompting some ethical action or social involvement, we must respond. One of the reasons some churches have such a weak witness is that they have ignored God's voice so long that they can no longer hear it! If God is speaking, we have to respond!

If God is speaking to us, we must not put off our obedience. It is always the right time to do the right thing! Paul said it perfectly in **2 Corinthians 6:2**, "*We urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*" (NIV)

We must each respond to God's Word as it comes to us.

And Felix doesn't do this. But once again, Paul's circumstances are changed. And a new governor arrives on the scene. Festus was a welcomed successor to the miserable Felix. Only days after his arrival in Caesarea, he traveled to meet with Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. The Jews attempted to persuade him to deliver Paul to Jerusalem for another trial before the Sanhedrin. Their plan was to either murder him en route or to sentence him to death for profaning the temple.

But they didn't fully account for Paul's ability in ...

25:1-8: KNOWING TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD

Acts 25:1-8, "*Three days after Festus arrived in Caesarea to take over his new responsibilities, he left for Jerusalem, [2] where the leading priests and other Jewish leaders met with him and made their accusations against Paul. [3] They asked Festus as a favor to transfer Paul to Jerusalem. (Their plan was to waylay and kill him.) [4] But Festus replied that Paul was at Caesarea and he himself would be returning there soon. [5] So he said, "Those of you in authority can return with me. If Paul has done anything wrong, you can make your accusations." [6] Eight or ten days later he returned to Caesarea, and on the following day Paul's trial began. [7] On Paul's arrival in court, the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem gathered around and made many serious accusations they couldn't prove. [8] Paul denied the charges. "I am not guilty," he said. "I have committed no crime against the Jewish laws or the Temple or the Roman government."*"

Festus, like most new rulers, was probably anxious to please his new subjects. He knew they'd brought charges against Paul, though obviously they didn't have much of a case since the apostle had been sitting in a cell for the last

two years. He may also have known that his predecessor, Felix, had kept Paul under arrest because he was hoping for a bribe.

Festus refused to bring Paul up to Jerusalem but kept the legal situation intact, inviting the Jews to send spokesmen to Caesarea to testify against the apostle. Did Festus know about the Jews' plot to murder Paul along the way, or did he have some other reason for his decision? We don't know. We do know, however, that God was in control and was continuing to protect his servant. No matter how devious men may be, the Lord of Heaven and Earth is not fooled.

The Apostle Paul was not the first of God's workers to be falsely accused. Joseph, one of very few Bible characters about whom the Bible has nothing negative to say, knew what it is to be betrayed, hated, and slandered. Sold into slavery by jealous brothers, accused of a crime he didn't commit, imprisoned and then forgotten by a fellow prisoner he had helped, Joseph could have become bitter toward man and God. Instead, he kept his focus on God. **Genesis 50:20**, "*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good...*"

You ever wonder if Joseph counted the passing days with slash marks on his prison walls? You think he gave up worrying about how long he had been there? You think he gave up hoping the cupbearer would keep his promise? Joseph knew that every day the cupbearer stood in a position of power and influence. Maybe one day that man would remember his promise to help free Joseph. But then again, maybe not. How long can a person cling to a dusty promise?

As long as he hangs on to Jesus Christ for dear life, that's how long.

The false accusations of men and women, though they may hurt us and alienate us from those we love, can do us no ultimate harm. We require only God's approval and acceptance, and if Jesus Christ is our Savior, we have it. As Paul writes in Romans 8:33-34, 38-39, "*Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. . . . For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (NIV)

Slandered by his own people, Paul knew the security of "*the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

When the chosen Jewish spokesmen came to Caesarea to testify against the Apostle Paul, they apparently didn't have much to say. About all they could do was throw their charges at Paul, verse 7, "*they made many serious accusations they couldn't prove.*" Paul had been confined in a jail cell for two years and his accusers still had no case!

It is sad to see how evil is so entrenched in our world. Why do pro-abortion politicians get reelected more easily than pro-life candidates? Why does a drunk driver walk away from a wreck while a two-year-old is killed? Why do the media so effectively portray Christian activists as meddlesome, Constitution-stomping kooks but God-denying radicals as heroes — and why do people believe them? Why did innocent Steven Linscott go to prison but some serial murderers are never caught?

Like us, the psalmist Asaph lamented the apparent immunity of the wicked in **Psalm 73:6, 8, 10**, *“They wear pride like a jeweled necklace, and their clothing is woven of cruelty. ... They scoff and speak only evil; in their pride they seek to crush others. ... And so the people are dismayed and confused, drinking in all their words.”*

It is easy to mourn this injustice, to forget that God is still Judge and that he will make all things right in their time, as **Psalm 73:17** concludes, *“Then one day I went into your sanctuary, O God, and I thought about the destiny of the wicked.”*

When we are wrongly accused, slandered, or treated harshly, we must remember that God, the Judge of Heaven, will hold men accountable. Rather than becoming bitter or giving up hope, we must recognize the futility of our opponents’ efforts against us. In the words of C. H. Spurgeon, “We ought never to fear those who are defending the wrong side, for since God is not with them their wisdom is folly, their strength is weakness, and their glory is their shame.”

Furthermore, times of malicious accusation and mistreatment are opportunities for prayer and trust in God. Again quoting Spurgeon, “Often the less we say to our foes, and the more we say to our best Friend, the better it will fare with us.” When faced with groundless accusations, Paul did not go on a rampage but clearly and calmly stated the facts of his innocence.

We also have to have an honest view of ourselves. Even when the charges leveled against us are unfounded — whether in a legal proceeding or in a passing conversation or in misguided media slamming believers — there is an element of truth. None of us is perfect. We all have areas in which we need to grow spiritually.

Why do wicked people — those who reject Christ and shut him out of their hearts and lives — love to slander good people — those who believe in Christ and seek to serve him? And how should Christian believers respond to their accusers? The ungodly would like to do away with any convincing argument for the truth of Christ’s gospel, the existence of a God who holds men accountable to him, the reality of moral absolutes in our world, so they can live as they wish, without fear of divine penalty. Sadly, they are walking blindly toward judgment and eternal darkness.

The supreme example of godly behavior toward one's evil accusers is Jesus Christ himself. **1 Peter 2:21-23**, *"This suffering is all part of what God has called you to. Christ, who suffered for you, is your example. Follow in His steps. He never sinned, and He never deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when He was insulted. When He suffered, He did not threaten to get even. He left His case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly."*

And Paul was able to follow Christ in this way, because he was also well practiced at ...

25:9-22: KNOWING THE SOVEREIGN

Acts 25:9-22, *"Then Festus, wanting to please the Jews, asked him, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there?" [10] But Paul replied, "No! This is the official Roman court, so I ought to be tried right here. You know very well I am not guilty. [11] If I have done something worthy of death, I don't refuse to die. But if I am innocent, neither you nor anyone else has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me. **I appeal to Caesar!"** [12] Festus conferred with his advisers and then replied, **"Very well! You have appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar you shall go!"** [13] A few days later King Agrippa arrived with his sister, Bernice, to pay their respects to Festus. [14] During their stay of several days, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. "There is a prisoner here," he told him, "whose case was left for me by Felix. [15] When I was in Jerusalem, the leading priests and other Jewish leaders pressed charges against him and asked me to sentence him. [16] Of course, I quickly pointed out to them that Roman law does not convict people without a trial. They are given an opportunity to defend themselves face to face with their accusers. [17] "When they came here for the trial, I called the case the very next day and ordered Paul brought in. [18] But the accusations made against him weren't at all what I expected. [19] **It was something about their religion and about someone called Jesus who died, but whom Paul insists is alive.** [20] I was perplexed as to how to conduct an investigation of this kind, and I asked him whether he would be willing to stand trial on these charges in Jerusalem. [21] But Paul appealed to the emperor. So I ordered him back to jail until I could arrange to send him to Caesar." [22] "I'd like to hear the man myself," Agrippa said. And Festus replied, "You shall—tomorrow!""*

Apparently at this point Festus wanted to try one more time to use the situation for his own advantage — “to do the Jews a favor” and help himself in the process. Why was Festus suddenly willing to do what he had refused to do earlier (namely, to transfer his famous prisoner to Jerusalem for trial there)? We are not sure, but to Festus' credit, he gave Paul a choice and did not force the situation to go his way.

Paul's response at this point is amazing, *"No! This is the official Roman court, so I ought to be tried right here. You know very well I am not guilty. [11] If I have done something worthy of death, I don't refuse to die. But if I am innocent, neither you nor anyone else has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me. I appeal to Caesar!"*

As Paul again declared his innocence, he was simply, and truthfully, saying that he hadn't committed any crime — that his arrest and imprisonment were unjustified. He also stated publicly that Festus **knew** he was innocent, and for him to go along with the situation was to participate in a charade — a tragic state of affairs for a man God has chosen for political authority. Paul added that if in fact he was guilty of any violation against the law, he was willing to suffer the appropriate penalty, even death. Only a man with spiritual conviction and a clean conscience could say that.

Paul then took a bold step, for his own safety and for the proclamation of Christ — "I appeal to Caesar!" Realizing he would **not** receive justice from Festus or from the Jews, he submitted his case to the authority of the emperor himself. This was a right possessed by every Roman citizen. Paul didn't do this because Caesar was a Christian or a just leader — he was neither, but to make this appeal because God had told him he would minister in Rome.

Festus then conferred with a council of leading citizens, as the Roman governors did in those days. Perhaps he tried to convince them to send Paul to Jerusalem, perhaps not. But they had no choice. Paul, a Roman citizen, had appealed to Caesar, and that is where he had to go. Thus Festus was now obligated to send Paul to Caesar even though there were no solid charges against him.

APPLICATION: Positive Testimony in Negative Circumstances³

This must have been an exhilarating time for the Apostle Paul. Granted, he was again faced with serious charges of which he was totally innocent. Certainly these accusations hurt. Not even the great apostle was immune to emotional wounds when injustice was heaped on his shoulders.

But Paul also had the satisfaction of knowing that even though men maligned him, his Lord loved him and continued to be with him. The spite of mere humans doesn't matter when the God of Heaven says, "You are my child and will be forever — I am with you — I love you"? Combined with this was the excitement Paul felt because he was going to Rome and was sure God would use him mightily in that great city, just as He had promised!

To the unbelieving world the message of Christianity must always appear as

³ The very end of this message is adapted from "The Threat of Christianity" by T. M. Moore, in his daily devotional found at www.breakpoint.com, July 27, 2002.

a threat to their settled beliefs, established traditions, long-standing ways, and comfortable values. The Gospel proclaims a new King, a new reality, and a new future. It calls all people to forsake their former ways and begin to cling to Jesus and submit to His rule. It is a summons to self-denial, self-sacrifice, and self-giving—a summons altogether strange and frightening to many postmodern men and women. We may be ever so careful not to offend—as Paul was in Jerusalem—as we proclaim this glorious message, but it may stir up opposition and heated response nonetheless.

But this much is certain: If we are neither proclaiming nor living the message of the Gospel, then the people of our day will be unchallenged by its demands and unstartled by its promises and hope. They will continue to be bored with the diversions of mundane living, constantly wondering if they're having fun yet. Paul was faithful to declare the Gospel, even at the risk of its being a threat to his people, his neighbors, and even his church.

All we have to offer others is Jesus. The Apostle Paul thought that was enough. And so, in the providence of God, Paul is arrested. And eventually, as he tells his story, he will arrive, for the first time, in Rome, and the Gospel will be heard in Caesar's courts.

He was willing to risk everything ... to give everything.

Because he felt that offering others Jesus was worth the risk.

And all who agree said, "Amen."