

Exploring Acts

The Continuing Ministry of Jesus Christ
Through the Holy Spirit

Lesson 19

Day One: Grace Under Fire

In Acts 24–25, we find Paul taking a stand for the third time (previously in Acts 21 facing a crowd of Jews; and Acts 23 before the Sanhedrin). This time however, he will be brought before two governors: Felix and Festus, and then finally before King Agrippa. There are two remarkable assurances to derive from Paul’s example for believers facing stressful circumstances: (1) the power of God to enable us to remain calm; and (2) the confidence our hearts can have when our words are grounded in the truth.

Whenever we read in scripture of people going to Jerusalem, it speaks of them *going up*; but when they go from Jerusalem, they *go down* and away. The plan hatched by the Jewish religious leaders against Paul took them (literally and figuratively) *down and away* from the presence of God and His righteousness. Unknown to them however, was the reality that God was using their evil intentions to further His own plan for good.

Read Acts 24–25.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer. Come to your time of study expectant to receive something from the Lord. Write down your first impressions.

Memory verse: Romans 13:8 Write the verse; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

*Owe to no one anything except to love one another,
for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.*

While the events leading up to Paul's present predicament seem to have taken longer, he had actually been in Jerusalem only a total of twelve days, hardly enough time to organize and lead a rebellion against the ruling Jewish authorities—yet that is what they pretended. Luke tells us here that Paul had been a prisoner for five days, while Felix awaited the arrival of Ananias and some of the elders led by a skilled orator named Tertullus (the equivalent of a prosecution attorney).

1. What did Tertullus do in his opening statement to gain favor with Felix? Vv. 2–4

2. According to the prosecutor, briefly state the charges against Paul in the following:
 - a. v. 5

 - b. v. 6

3. What does Tertullus falsely allege happened that prevented the proper Jewish authorities from dealing with Paul? v. 7

4. What does Tertullus invite Felix to do himself? Vv. 8–9

The reader is not informed as to how many people Ananias brought with him to the hearing but they now joined in as one voice to affirm the charges against Paul.

5. Think about it: If someone were to bring charges against *you* for being a Christian, what evidence would they present? How do you think you would respond publicly to their charges? Please explain.

Day Two: Paul's Defense Before Felix

Read Acts 24:10–27 for review.

In similar manner to that of the prosecuting attorney, Paul opened his remarks on a conciliatory tone, encouraging Felix to do his own fact-checker to ascertain what Paul had been up to since his arrival in Jerusalem. He had gone up to the temple to worship, yet had spent most of his time in Roman custody, not allowing him time or opportunity to form an uprising. Having denied the charges against him, Paul proceeded to make his point that the dispute was a religious, not a political one.

1. While Paul denied the false charges against him, he admitted to what was at the heart of the debate. Briefly restate Paul's points using your own words.
 - a. v. 14
 - b. v. 15
 - c. v. 16
 2. What was the other reason for Paul's appearance in Jerusalem? v. 17
 3. What was the real reason behind the charges brought against Paul? v. 21
 4. Think about it: It's hard to imagine ourselves on trial for being Christian, but it still happens daily in Third World countries. Paul's example models for us what to say about our faith in Christ and how to do it with grace and dignity. What stands out to *you* that you'd like to apply when sharing the gospel with others?
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Deeper Discoveries ~

Luke seems to like to use the term *the Way* in speaking of these early believers (Vv. 14, 22). The common form of it is *hodos*—appearing 102 times in the New Testament. John the Baptist used it to warn people to *prepare the way of the Lord* (Matthew 3:3). The Pharisees told Jesus that He taught *the way of God in truth* (Matt. 22:16). The book of Hebrews talks about the blood of Jesus providing us a *new and living way* to God (10:20). The most obvious connection of the phrase relates back to Jesus' description of Himself in John 14.

- a. What is the lesson Jesus teaches His followers in John 14:1–6?
- b. What did Felix profess to understand about *the Way* in verses 22–25? Did this make a difference in Felix' life?
- c. Personal: Have you perhaps been studying the Bible for a while and made the determination in your heart that you *know about* God, His Word, and Christianity; but you've never fully surrendered your life to Christ? Are you afraid or like Felix, have you been putting it off? Will you pause now and tell Him that you realize HE IS YOUR Savior and you want Him to be Lord of your life? Ask Him to cleanse and forgive you of your sin and fill you with His Holy Spirit. Thank Him for coming inside and that you are born again!

Day Three: The Apostle Paul's Appeal

Read Acts 25:1–27 for review.

Jewish politics could be difficult to navigate, particularly for a new governor coming into office. Porcius Festus succeeded Felix, attempting to do a better job, but what would he do with a leftover Paul who was in prison but not formally charged? And given that he was a Roman citizen, Festus had to act expeditiously to prevent a bad problem becoming worse. While the Jewish leaders plotted to kill Paul, Festus decided to hear the matter. Paul had refuted the charges against him: offending the law, defiling the temple, and inciting treason against Rome. Now Paul would add to the list that he had not offended Caesar (v. 8).

1. Things were escalating, growing more intense. What do you discern as being most important to Festus at this point in time? Vv. 9–12
 - a. As Paul verbalizes his denials he seems defiant in his defense. What does he insist he is entitled to?
 - b. Do *you* think Paul was wrong in aggressively asserting his civil rights given how Jesus answered His enemies? Please explain.

Once Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar, Festus had no choice but to send him—and consequently the gospel—to Rome! But about this same time, Festus received a state visit from King Agrippa, the ruler who had jurisdiction over the temple in Jerusalem. It would make sense to share Paul's case with him even though these two rulers had no authority to make a decision. So in an elaborate display of pomp—*fantasia*—and circumstance, Paul the Apostle was brought in to them. He would once again be questioned and his hearers would once again be responsible for hearing the gospel message.

2. In an exaggerated attempt to embellish the charges, what did Festus say to King Agrippa? Vv. 24–27
 - a. Under what pretense did he arrange the meeting?
 - b. What was Festus' final assessment of Paul? v. 25

Agrippa's initial reaction to Paul, an innocent man, must have been one of great perplexity but, as we will see, he too will have his moment—his opportunity to respond to the message of truth.

Day Four:

Felix has His Moment of Truth

In a look back at Acts 24, we see that Felix was an informed man, aware of the testimonies of transformation that were circulating throughout Caesarea. Curious to know more, when Felix could not substantiate the accusations against Paul according to Roman law, he charged a centurion to keep Paul under house arrest but to allow him liberty and visits from his friends. Also aware of the monetary offering Paul had brought to the people of the area, Felix hoped to play his hand in a way that he could personally profit from Paul's imprisonment.

Paul always zeroed in on salvation through Jesus Christ and the hope of the resurrection when he preached. Interestingly, Paul reasoned with Felix about *righteousness, self-control, and the judgement to come* (Acts 24:25). Let's look at each of these independently to see how they fit into a Christian testimony.

1. Using Paul's own words, how is it possible to become righteous? Philippians 3:9
 - a. How do 1 John 2:29 and 1 John 3:1–3 add to your understanding?

When Paul spoke of personal righteousness as the divine ideal, it was impossible for Felix not to feel the pain of conviction. Paul went on to speak of self-control—or temperance—which involves acceptance of personal responsibility as it pertains to the use of one's body.

2. What do we learn about self-control in Proverbs 16:32?
 - a. Why is it so important that the believer have self-control? See 1 Corinthians 9:27.
 - b. Felix was not a free man because he was enslaved to his own sinfulness. As believers, what are we called to do? See Romans 6:16–19.

As he did earlier on his missionary journeys, Paul also spoke to Felix about judgment: *He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained* (Acts 17:31).

3. What do the following verses reveal to you about the coming judgment? Hebrews 9:27
 - a. Revelation 20:12 and 15 (The Great White Throne Judgment)
 - b. 1 Corinthians 3:11–15 (The Day of the believer's judgment)

Now as he [Paul] reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid (Acts 24:25). Literally, he became *terrified*, a conviction from God gripped his heart and he could not deny it. But he made his choice . . . he put it off for another day. What about *you*—have you made *your* choice? Don't put it off—you may not have another opportunity.

Day Five: Selah . . . Pause and Ponder the Week in Review

This section of the lesson is intended to be an at-a-glance, user-friendly recap of what you've learned this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark what stands out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share in your discussion group.

1. What is your take-away-truth? How are you working to make it a part of your daily walk?

2. Write out this week's verse from memory.

3. What does this week's verse reveal to you?

4. Personal: Compose a prayer thanking God that He has shown you the Way to life.

Prayer Time: Write down the people in your group to keep in prayer this next week.
