

“The Unbeliever’s Response to the Gospel”  
(Acts 24:24-27)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation. Last week, we considered the importance of having a clear conscience.

1. It’s something that can be very useful to us in this life.

a. Paul was falsely accused of crimes he didn’t commit:

- (i) The Jews accused him of breaking God’s Law and their own law by desecrating the Temple.
- (ii) They also accused him of stirring up dissention among the Jews throughout the Roman Empire and of being the ringleader of a sect called the Nazarenes, both of which were violations of Roman law.

b. But Paul knew he wasn’t guilty of these charges:

- (i) He hadn’t violated God’s Law or that of the Jews, for he hadn’t brought Greeks into the Temple.
- (ii) Neither had he broken Roman law, for Christianity wasn’t a new religion outside the bounds of Rome’s protection, but the fulfillment of the Old Covenant types, shadows and promises in Christ – it was the fulfillment of the Jewish faith.
- (iii) And because he knew he wasn’t guilty, he was able to stand his ground and speak the truth with boldness, knowing the Lord was with him and that He would not allow Paul’s opponents to put him to shame.
- (iv) When we know that our lives are pleasing to God and that the Lord is with us, it will give us confidence when we need it the most.

2. A clear conscience is also something that will be *very* useful to us on the Day of Judgment.

a. It was with this day in view that Paul lived the life he did – it certainly helps us in this life, but it will help us much more on the day when we must give an account of our lives to God.

b. Paul said this in his defense: “But 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; having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience *both* before God and before men” (Acts 24:14-16).

c. That is the day we must always have in view, if we are to live as we should.

B. Preview.

1. It’s this statement of Paul that sets the tone for our passage this morning:

- a. A few days later, after having given Paul’s testimony some thought, Felix returned with his wife Drusilla, to learn more about faith in Jesus Christ.

- b. When he was asked, Paul didn't just give him the simple facts about Jesus Christ, but also gave him the reason why he needed to pay attention to the Gospel: because of God's perfect standard, because of Felix's apparent lack of self-control and because of the Day of Judgment when all his evil deeds would be brought into the open.
- c. Paul delivered his message with such force that Felix became afraid and sent him away.
- d. But this fear didn't have the saving effect on Felix for which Paul had hoped: it didn't drive him to Christ that he might be ready for the judgment, because he was unwilling to repent of his sins.
- e. This passage stands as a warning to us not to take the same path he did, but to turn from our sins to Christ, to trust Him and walk in His ways, so that we might stand boldly on that great day in Christ, even as Paul knew he would through faith.

- 2. This morning, we'll look at two things:
  - a. First, the Gospel Paul preached to Felix.
  - b. Second, Felix's rejection of the Gospel.

## II. Sermon.

### A. First, let's consider the Gospel Paul preached to Felix.

- 1. Felix left and then returned with his wife, Drusilla (v. 24).
  - a. When he arrived, he sent for Paul to hear him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.
  - b. Why?
    - (i) It might have been that Drusilla wanted to hear Paul for herself.
      - (a) Drusilla was a Jewess, the "third and youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I" the one who killed James, imprisoned Peter and was eaten by worms (Ac 12:1-4, 20-23).
      - (b) She was also an adulteress: Felix had persuaded her to leave her husband, Azizus, the king of Emesa, and become his wife" (Easton).
      - (c) It may have been that she had a troubled conscience, since she had not repented of her adultery and wanted to know what Christianity taught concerning her sin.
      - (d) Maybe she wanted to know more about Christianity in general.
      - (e) There's no indication in the text that she listened. It's interesting that history records that "she and her son perished in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius" in A.D. 79 (Easton). This may have been God's judgment on her for her unrepentant sin, even as the Lord now appears to be judging us for our state's sin of legalizing homosexual marriage through these many fires.
    - (ii) Or perhaps Felix wanted to hear him: Maybe Felix, like Herod who enjoyed listening to John the Baptist, enjoyed listening to the Gospel, though he was not inclined to accept it.
    - (iii) Whatever the case, Felix summoned Paul, and Paul was more than willing to comply.

2. What's important to see next is that Paul, in explaining the Gospel, didn't simply tell him *that* he needed to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ – he told him *why* he needed to do so: the work of the Law is necessary to bring a person to faith in Christ.
  - a. There are still those within the Christian church who say that we shouldn't present sinners with God's requirements – it might scare them away. But if we don't tell them what Christ requires and how far short they fall of that standard, they won't understand – except in a very general and non-threatening way – why they need Christ at all.
  - b. Paul told Felix the whole truth (v. 25).
    - (i) He discussed righteousness:
      - (a) God's holy standard of perfection revealed in the Law – the Ten Commandments – the fact that a man must be blameless and without sin to enter God's eternal kingdom.
      - (b) He probably told him this to drive him out of his own works – which were far from perfect – to Christ's works, which are.
    - (ii) He told Felix about his need of self-control:
      - (a) This is something that Felix lacked – he was in unrepentant adultery.
      - (b) The fact that he couldn't restrain his sin meant he would be destroyed in God's judgment – he needed God's Holy Spirit to make him willing and able to obey.
    - (iii) And he told him about the judgment that was coming:
      - (a) The day when his deeds would be laid open, when his thoughts, words, intentions and actions would be examined.
      - (b) The day when God would bring into judgment everything he had done, and how every single sin would be weighed in the scales against him and would press him down into the eternal fire, if he didn't repent and turn to Christ.
    - (iv) These things were calculated to produce one thing: fear.
      - (a) Fear is not a bad thing: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10).
      - (b) We need to see our danger so that we will run to Christ.
      - (c) This is what Felix and Drusilla needed who were both living in immorality and were unwilling to turn from it.
      - (d) They needed to deny themselves, repent of their sins, turn to Christ, and follow Him.
      - (e) This should encourage us again in the right use of the Law in Gospel preaching: if men don't see their need for a Savior, they won't want one.
    - (v) Notice too that Paul was willing to tell Felix the truth even though as a Roman official, Felix had Paul's life in his hands:
      - (a) Paul was no respecter of persons.

- (b) He aimed right at his conscience – not merely at his intellect – something that isn't altogether safe to do – humanly speaking.
- (c) Even though this man had the power to crucify him or release him, and even though there was little possibility – again, humanly speaking – that Felix and Drusilla would ever listen, Paul preached the whole counsel of God to them.
- (d) This should encourage us to tell the Gospel to everyone we can in the most pointed way we can, without fearing their persons.

B. Second, let's consider the Gospel rejected by Felix.

1. Paul preached the law and judgment to Felix, aiming at his conscience, hoping to awaken him to his danger, and it worked.
  - a. He became frightened.
    - (i) It registered in his mind and heart at least at some level.
    - (iii) He became aware of his danger.
  - b. But was fear alone enough? No. He needed to do something with that fear; he needed to let it drive him to Christ.
    - (i) But unlike the Philippian jailer, he didn't take advantage of his fear.
    - (ii) Not all fear is gracious fear, the result of the saving work of the Spirit.
    - (iii) Many times it's only the common work of the Spirit on the conscience.
2. Instead of responding to his fear in a godly way, he sent Paul away.
  - a. He wanted to move the light out of range. It was too uncomfortable.
    - (i) Unbelievers generally don't mind discussing the Gospel as long as they can hold it at arm's length, as long as it is dealt with more abstractly.
    - (ii) But when it becomes personal, when it is applied to the heart and conscience, they don't want to hear it.
    - (iii) Jesus said those in darkness won't come to the light because it exposes their sins (John 3:20).
    - (iv) Felix's sins were exposed, which is why he wanted Paul to leave for the present to call him again when it was more convenient for him.
  - b. This wasn't something that he could afford to put off until later, but something he should have dealt with then.
    - (i) The Bible tells us that today is the day of salvation: "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts (Heb. 3:15).
    - (ii) If the Spirit of God is showing you your need of the Savior, you must receive Him now.
    - (iii) Felix sent Paul away, and it cost him his soul.
    - (iv) This is the unbelieving response to the Gospel – to drive away those who bear witness to it, to put it off until later. *Don't let this happen to you.*
3. Now Felix did call him back and talked to him further about these things (v. 26).
  - a. But why?
    - (i) It wasn't that he was interested in learning more about Christianity.

- (ii) It wasn't that he was afraid of Paul as Herod was of John the Baptist, because he was a holy and righteous man that he couldn't afford to ignore.
  - (iii) It was for a much lower reason.
- b. Apparently, Felix was hoping Paul would try and bribe him, that his friends would raise money to release him.
- (i) Maybe he was hoping the Jews would try to bribe him as well to hand Paul over to them. That, however, would get him into greater trouble, since Paul hadn't broken the law.
  - (ii) Henry notes that Paul's friends should have tried to raise money to gain Paul's release if possible: it's certainly wrong to bribe someone to do something wicked, but it's not wrong as an incentive to do something right.
  - (iii) Felix didn't want to know the truth, he wanted money.
  - (iv) This is another unbelieving response to the Gospel – to try and gain worldly things from it, rather than spiritual.
  - (v) The church is full of people like this today – *don't pursue Christianity for worldly riches, but for the eternal riches.*
4. Finally, we see some concluding evidence that Felix's heart remained unmoved.
- a. After two years, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus.
- (i) His final act as governor was to do the Jews a favor by leaving Paul in prison.
  - (ii) Henry notes that Felix did this for his own welfare.
    - (a) History tells us that the Jews accused Felix to the emperor of misconduct and cruelty.
    - (b) Festus, it is believed, delivered him bound to Rome.
    - (c) However, Josephus tells us that Felix's brother Pallas was able to influence Nero to drop the charges (Easton).
    - (d) Felix wasn't concerned about justice, but his own skin – he was self-centered, not self-controlled, and therefore fell short of the kingdom of heaven. This is the response of unbelief: *an unrepentant, unchanged life.*
- b. In closing, let's ask ourselves these questions:
- (i) Do we let the light of God's Word expose our sins, or do we keep our distance from it and from those who try to tell us about it?
  - (ii) Do we let the fear of judgment drive us to Christ, or away from Him?
  - (iii) Have we dealt with the matters of eternity, or are we putting off our decision to a more convenient time?
  - (iv) Are we following Christ because we hope to gain more of this world or of the world to come?
  - (v) And are we willing to do what's right in God's eyes, even if it doesn't work to our advantage?
  - (vi) The answers to these questions tell us a great deal about our spiritual condition.
  - (vii) Make sure that you have embraced Christ as your Lord and Savior, that you are ready for eternity now. Don't put it off another day. Amen.