

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-40 Paul's Trials Before Felix and Festus

Have you ever been insulted or falsely accused? If you have, you should rejoice, for Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven" (Matt 5:11-12). He further said, "Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:28). In today's story from the Book of Acts, we see Paul putting these words of Jesus into action.

When Commander Claudius Lysias found out about the Jews' plot to assassinate Paul, he sent a contingent of soldiers to escort him to Caesarea. There, they handed Paul over to Felix, the Roman governor. Felix then ordered that Paul be kept under guard in the palace of Herod.

When Ananias the high priest heard about this, he followed Paul to Caesarea. With him were some Jewish elders and a lawyer named Tertullus. There, they met with Felix who then summoned Paul to appear before them. The Jews laid out their bogus charges; calling Paul "a ringleader of the Nazarene sect" (Acts 24:5). They further accused him of being a troublemaker and of trying to desecrate the temple.

When Paul was finally allowed to speak, he denied all the charges leveled against him. He did, however, profess his faith in Christ. He said, "I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect." He further stated, "I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked" (Acts 24:14-15). After listening to both sides, Felix decided not to rule on the case until he had heard from Lysias. He then ordered that Paul be kept under guard.

Several days later, in a second meeting with Felix, Paul spoke to him about righteousness, judgment, and faith in Christ. As Felix listened, he grew more and more anxious. "That's enough for now!" he shouted. "I will send for you when I can find a more convenient time" (Acts 24:25). He then ordered that Paul be put in jail wanting to gain favor with the Jewish leaders. As the days passed, he often sent for Paul and talked with him, hoping to receive a bribe from him.

This went on for two years until Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus. Sensing an opportunity, the Jews went to Festus and asked that Paul be brought back to Jerusalem. They wanted to ambush Paul and kill him along the way. Festus, however, denied their request, saying, "You can come to Caesarea and press charges against him there."

Soon Festus convened a hearing in Caesarea. There, the Jews restated their false charges against Paul. Paul then made his defense. "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar," he said. When Festus asked Paul if he was willing to return to Jerusalem and stand trial there, Paul refused. "I am guilty of nothing deserving death," Paul said. "I am not afraid to die; however, I am innocent of all these trumped up charges. I will

not go to Jerusalem. I appeal to Caesar!" Hearing that, Festus retorted, "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!" (Acts 25:1-12).

Before we look at some lessons we can learn from this story, let's look at a couple of insights. The first insight has to do with a reference Paul made to the Christian faith. In making his defense before Felix and Festus, Paul said that he was a follower of 'the Way.' We do not often use the phrase today. However, in the Book of Acts, Luke uses it five times to describe Christianity. The phrase reminds us of Jesus' words, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). It also suggests that being a Christian involves more than just accepting Christ as one's Savior. It is a way we must live, a path we must walk. In the Gospels, Jesus often commanded his disciples, "Follow me." He calls us to do the same today.

The second insight has to do with Paul's appeal to Caesar. When Festus asked him if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem to stand trial, Paul replied, "I appeal to Caesar!" We must not think of this appeal as an attempt by Paul to evade the charges against him. It was rather a Spirit-led move to ensure that he traveled to Rome. In a night vision Jesus had said Paul must testify in Rome (Acts 23:11). The Spirit had compelled Paul to go to Jerusalem. Now, he was compelling him to appeal to Caesar.

In today's story, when Paul spoke to Felix about faith in Christ, the governor was deeply moved and became fearful. Earlier in Acts, when Peter was preaching on the Day of Pentecost, his listeners were "cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37). From these two incidents, we can learn three important lessons about how we can persuade people to follow Christ.

First we persuade people to follow Christ by sharing the gospel with them. In our story, when Paul spoke to Felix about righteousness, judgment, and faith in Christ, the governor's heart was stirred. The gospel is more than words. Jesus once compared it to a seed. It takes root and creates new life in the hearts of those who hear it. Paul wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16). The gospel has power to produce faith in the heart of the hearer. We must faithfully tell people about Christ, knowing that the gospel will produce fruit in their lives.

Second, we learn that we persuade people to follow Christ by being filled with the Spirit. Not only was Felix moved by Paul's words, he was moved by the Holy Spirit who empowered his words. Jesus said that, when the Holy Spirit comes, "he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). When Spirit-filled believers speak the word of the Lord, the Spirit empowers their words. He also works in the heart of the hearers convicting them of sin and drawing them to Christ. We are to be filled with the Spirit and faithfully share the gospel with the lost. The Spirit will anoint our words and will work in their hearts, convicting them of sin and drawing them to Christ.

Finally, we persuade people to follow Christ by living Christlike lives. Felix was stirred, not only by the gospel, and by the Holy Spirit, but by Paul himself. He was moved by Paul's life and character. Paul's accusers were liars; he was truthful. They were devious; he was plainspoken. Their hearts were filled with bitterness; his was full of love. Paul's Christlike

attitude deeply affected Felix. If we want to influence people to Christ, we too must seek to live Christlike lives.

This lesson is **important** because in it we learn how we can persuade people to follow Christ.

The **main truths** we learn from this lesson is that we persuade people to follow Christ by sharing the gospel, being filled with the Spirit, and living Christlike lives.

Let's **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. Name two Roman governors who Paul stood trial before in Caesarea.
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that Paul stood trial before Felix and Festus, you answered correctly.
2. What are the implications of calling Christianity 'the Way' in the book of Acts?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "Christianity is called 'the Way' because being a Christian is more than a single decision we make, it is also a way that we must live and a path that we must walk," you are right.
3. List three ways we can persuade people to follow Christ.
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that we can persuade people to follow Christ by sharing the gospel with them, by being filled with the Spirit, and by living Christlike lives, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it two or three more times or until you can tell others the story of Paul's trials before Felix and Festus. Also, you should gather a group of believers together and discuss the three ways we can persuade people to follow Christ.