

THE GOVERNOR WHO TREMBLED

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series from
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Let's Begin

Herod's palace was filled with bloody memories. On the very floor upon which Paul stood, Herod uttered death sentences for his own sons. Also, an innumerable number of Jews had horribly suffered right here. Paul was getting the opportunity of a lifetime: he would testify of Christ before Felix the governor. When we are obedient to God, He is faithful to place us in strategic circumstances to further His Kingdom.

As we make our way through this chapter, let's follow the outline below:

- I. The Accusation Paul Endured (vv. 1-9)**
- II. The Explanation Paul Extended (vv. 10-21)**
- III. The Proclamation Paul Expounded (vv. 22-27)**

I. The Accusation Paul Endured (vv. 1-9)

As Paul was kept in a holding tank, Felix entered the judgment hall. His robe of royal purple danced across the floor as he proceeded to the judgment seat. Felix's face was scarred, marked with cruelty, corruption, covetousness, and compromise. Though born a slave, Felix became governor of Judea. Tacitus, the Roman historian, wrote of Felix, "He exercised the authority of a king with the spirit of the slave."

Following slightly behind him was Druscilla, the Jewish daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Her stunning appearance attracted every eye in the room as she seated herself beside Felix. Why they came to hear Paul was a mystery. Perhaps they were bored. Nonetheless, we can be sure God was behind this Divine appointment.

Paul proceeded to the judgment hall with armed guards at his side. The door opened and he entered the room where Felix and Druscilla awaited. People stared as the small framed man walked toward the throne, stepping in front of the judgment seat.

Tertullus began his accusation, "Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness" (vv. 2-3). Note the flattery with which the Jewish lawyer began. Making friends with corrupt courts may propel a person to apparent success in this life. However, no such winsome language will sway the Judge of all the earth who judges with righteous judgment.

After the phony accolades came the perilous accusation, "For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law" (vv. 5-6). Paul was accused of both pestilence and sedition.

"Pestilent fellow" is one word in the Greek and literally means the way it sounds — a pest. The lawyer was calling the greatest preacher since Jesus a bug! Also, Paul was accused of sedition; in fact, a "ringleader" of an entire

Reflection Connection

Reflect upon a time when circumstances came mysteriously together for which no reasonable explanation was available. Did you believe God was behind the circumstances, working out His plan in secret? Be prepared to share with the entire group how God worked His plan out.



Reflection Connection

Have you ever been accused of something you did not do? How did you respond? How should you have responded? Given what you know now, would you respond differently? Why or why not?

Reflection Connection

Paul was brought before the governor based upon false charges. Anger easily could have gotten out of control. Do you think Christians, in general, are easily angered? If so, why? If not, what do you think makes them different from other people? Be specific.

sect of seditionists known as the Nazarenes. “Ringleader” carries the idea of one who stands in first place. In other words, Paul was the president, the man in charge.

II. The Explanation Paul Extended (vv. 10-21)

What a contrast between Paul and Felix the governor. One was a preacher, the other was a judge. Felix was a politician; Paul was a prisoner. Felix was free outwardly; inwardly his soul was chained. Paul dragged his chains to the judgment hall; his heart soared above the city.

Luke gave us Paul’s opening statement, “..Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself...they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me” (vv. 10-13). Instead of flattering the governor, Paul demonstrated his willingness to speak openly about his actions compared to their accusations. In addition, he questioned whether his accusers possessed any demonstrable evidence whatsoever.

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III. The Proclamation Paul Expounded (vv. 22-27)

The final part of the chapter is the heart of our study. In fact, a mere part of one verse sums up his powerful proclamation, “And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come...” (v. 25). Paul expounded three points to his two person congregation.

First, Paul reasoned of a righteousness which they did not possess. Righteousness was one of Paul’s key terms, used at least 60 times in the letters he wrote. When Paul spoke of righteousness, he was first and foremost speaking of the *rightness* of God. The rightness of God pertains to His character; in other words, God is righteous and holy.

The Apostle John wrote, “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5; cp. Ezra 9:15; Psa. 50:6). When John was speaking of God’s light, he was speaking of God’s righteousness. His righteousness and holiness are far beyond anything we can imagine; it is hard to comprehend. A key ingredient for true revival and renewal of God’s people is to once again capture the reality of God’s righteous holiness.

A tendency exists in many circles to have a blasphemous familiarity with God in our day. Have you ever heard someone speak concerning the “Man upstairs?” Or, a more recent chummy name for Jesus is a “dude.” Familiar names like these



Reflection Connection

Describe the normal way you address God in prayer. Do you think the way you address God in prayer is the way most people address Him? Explain. Do you think there is a healthy respect for God's name in public worship? Why or why not?

are attempts to bring God down to our level. It's a way to humanize Deity. In fact, there is very little difference between these names for Almighty God and the concept of god in Greek mythology.

The rightness of God not only pertains to His character but also to His attitude toward sin. God opposes unrighteousness (cp. Rom. 1:18). God hates sin. Nor will He tolerate it. Later the apostle wrote, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 5:7). Even so, God loves the sinner and paid the ultimate price to save the sinner (John 3:16).

Hence, when Paul spoke of righteousness, he was also speaking of the *wrongness* of man. In essence, Paul was saying to Felix, You, sir, are a sinner. As a man of God always does, he brought him face to face with the condition of his own heart. A man who preaches the whole counsel of God always brings us face to face with our sin (cp. Rom. 3:10; 23; Isa. 64:6; Gal. 3:22). Question: have you seen yourself as a sinner? If not, you have yet to reach first base in your relationship to God. Any genuine connection with God begins with our confession of sin.

Finally, when Paul spoke of God's righteousness, he was also speaking of Christ's righteousness. God has made a way whereby all sinners can be made right with Him (cp. Rom. 1:16-17; 10:3-4; 2 Cor. 5:21). At the cross the blood of Jesus covers our sins and we are declared righteous before Him! And, there is one single connection through which we may plug in to His righteousness. What is the connection? One word — *faith* (Eph. 2:8-9).

Second, Paul reasoned of a temperance which they did not practice. Neither Felix nor Druscilla practiced self-control. One of the inherent temptations of the rich and powerful is indulgence. Since they

have so much access to so many resources, many times they lose any sense of restriction, abstinence, limitation, or self-control. Recall how many times one hears of the Hollywood-type who possesses dozens of automobiles, several houses in various countries, and pays outrageous prices for shoes, hairdos, and shirts. Temperance was not a strength of the rich and famous then, and it is no better today.

Let's notice the appropriateness of temperance. Felix's name meant "happy." Of course, his name was a lie. The governor was miserable. He had been married three times, stayed in excessive, continual debt and was addicted to wild parties. Druscilla was married to a king at age 14. However, because Felix became enamored with her beauty, he employed a sorcerer to persuade her to forsake her husband and marry him. Felix stole another man's wife!

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Reflection Connection

What is your definition of excess? How do you know when enough is enough? Explain. Do you think there is a problem in the contemporary church with excess? Why or why not?



Thus, when Paul spoke of both the righteousness of God, which they lacked, and the excessive lifestyle they lived, it is easy to see how appropriate was his message. As Paul spoke, the governor recalled the adulterous affairs he had. His wife was reminded of her lost decency, modesty, and purity. Paul exposed their moral bankruptcy in the very judgment hall where plans were made to expose him.

Paul's words to the governor and his wife speak volumes to us today. Sin cannot be taken lightly; yet, it is. We place enriching labels on our sin to make it appear better than it is. We call stealing, embezzlement; we dub lying, a credibility gap. Fornication is called free love, while wicked adultery is seen as a harmless affair. Sadly, many preachers add to the problem by remaining strangely silent in their pulpits.

God is never pleased with profanity, public indecency, pornography, or destructive addictions. Nor is God pleased when Christians attempt to dabble in these destructive behaviors in the name of either "moderation" or "Christian liberty." Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20). Consequently, we are called to possess and practice self-control. Or, in other words, temperance.

By now, Felix's neck veins were about to burst. His wife felt humiliated. Yet, Paul did not stop. Instead his voice became like peels of clapping thunder.

Paul reasoned of a judgment to come for which they were not prepared. God doesn't always punish upon earth. But there will be a future judgment coming concerning which all wrongs will be set right. Jesus spoke of it (Matt. 10:15; 12:36). Paul did too (17:31). Thus, judgment is a fact.

Unlike Felix, the coming Judge can never be bribed, abused, or tricked. The finality of the judgment cannot be overemphasized. Those whose names are not written in the book of life will be assigned to the lake of fire forever and ever (Rev. 20:11-15). Additionally, once one stands before God at the judgment, it will be eternally too late to turn from sin and trust in Christ.

When Paul finished his message, Felix's anger morphed into terror. His body quaked as he trembled before the apostle who faithfully testified of God's judgment to come. Yet even while his whole life flashed before him, he would not turn from his sin. Instead of following the sinful guilt he had experienced to the saving Christ Paul expounded, he apathetically noted he would listen again when a more "convenient season" presented itself. The Spaniards used to say, "The road of by and by leads to the house of never." Neither Felix nor Druscilla ever came to the Lord Jesus to be saved, as far as we know.

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Reflection Connection

Do you think many pulpits preach a soft message toward sin today? Why or why not? Do you think preaching against sin is inherently negative? Explain.



Golden Greek Nugget

The charges brought against Paul included the accusation that he was a ringleader of the “sect” of the Nazarenes (v. 5). The Greek word is “*hairesis*” whose root means “take” or “chosen” and came to be used pertaining to a particular opinion or idea one has chosen to take. Interestingly, we get our English word “heresy” from this word. Thus, the charges brought against the Apostle Paul included the charge of heresy from the Jewish leaders.

Wrap Up

The Word of God is powerful enough to make even the most important people quake before God. A simple message of righteousness, temperance, and judgment was the catalyst God used to expose the sinful lives of political leaders. We should never doubt the effectiveness faithful testimony brings. Furthermore, once we have faithfully delivered God’s message, it is not up to us to determine the outcome. Felix and Druscilla were led right to the door of the Kingdom of God, but refused to cross the threshold.

