

REASONING WITH FELIX

Acts 24:22-27

In our lesson today I want to talk about an occasion when Paul interacts with Felix, then governor of Judea and that region. There are some lessons we can glean from this interaction as we think about our salvation.

I. Background

- a. Contextually - Paul has completed his 3rd journey, been arrested in Jerusalem and because of threats he is transported to Caesarea, where he is placed under the care of Felix. Acts 23:23-35 records his being safely taken there. Acts 24:1-9 records the Jews accuse Paul through their orator, Terullus. Paul defends himself (23:10-23) and establishes that his accusers did not have a valid case. Nevertheless, Felix chooses to keep Paul until Lysias the commander came down to discuss the matter. Paul was kept in custody but given liberty. There is no indication Lysias ever came and Paul was kept there for 2 years (vs. 27) until he was replaced by Porcius Festus.
- b. Some history of Felix. According to historical sources (Tacitus and Josephus), Felix arose from being a slave to procurator of Judea (he ruled AD~52-60) by emperor Claudius. He was a harsh and licentious governor. History records that he had at least 3 wives, with Drusilla of Acts 24:24 being his 3rd. Scripturally, he had no right to be married to her (cf. Matthew 19:4-9). Keep his character in mind as we notice our text.
- c. Paul is given many occasions to speak with Felix. Acts 24:24-25 describes one such occasion, which we want to focus upon.
- d. We note in vs. 24 that taught about "faith in Christ" and reasoned about other matters. Reasoning here is a term that means to engage in a dialogue. Paul always "reasoned from the scriptures" trying to teach others about Christ Jesus. It is the beginning of sharing the gospel with others (cf. Matthew 28:18-19, Acts 17:2 – in Thessalonica he reasoned with them from the scriptures; Acts 17:17, 18:4, 19:8-9, etc.) – he reasoned in the synagogue in Athens and Corinth and Ephesus. Wherever Paul was, when he saw an opportunity to share the gospel and he did, even before Felix and other kings and dignitaries.

We are simply reminded that we too have responsibilities to try and reach others – 1 Peter 3:15.

II. Reasoning with Felix about

- a. **Faith in Christ** – obviously this would reference to how we are saved in Christ. John 3:16, Acts 8:35-38 – Philip "Preached Jesus to him..."; Acts 16:31-33 – "Believe on the Lord..."
- b. **Righteousness** – the idea of righteousness is living a godly life, a life pleasing to God. It is defined as doing or being what is right.
 - i. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. Various examples of the unrighteous are given. 2 Corinthians 6:14 dealing with fellowship warns us to no be unequally yoked together with unrighteousness – no fellowship.
 - ii. True righteousness is based upon our faith – Romans 4:2-4 – Abraham was justified by his faith, not meritorious works. BUT understand that this is not a passive faith, but one that actually responds – see James 2:21-24. 1 John 3:7 – he who practices righteousness...
 - iii. Philippians 3:8-9 – Paul lived his life striving to be righteous by God's standard and not his own (cf. Romans 10:1-3). 2 Timothy 3:16-17 – God's word makes us complete, for instruction in righteousness.
 - iv. Considering Felix's history, this would have been a subject he needed to be challenged about.
 - v. In addressing righteousness, it is also worthy to consider that we are only righteous before God because of His gracious acts – Romans 5:18-19.

- c. **Self-control** – or temperance. This is about me taking control of my life. It is about me doing what I am supposed to do and not doing what I should not be doing. It is about one who masters his desires, passions and even his sensual appetites. The thing about self-control is that it is TOTALLY up to me!
- i. As has been noted, self-control (or the lack thereof) is behind every sin that we commit and how we respond in any situation. It factors into our demeanor, our accomplishments, our successes and failures. It is a factor in how we interact with others and what we do with our relationships both physically and spiritually.
 - ii. Proverbs 29:11, *A fool vents all his feelings, But a wise man holds them back.* Ephesians 4:26, *“Be angry and do not sin...”*
 - iii. Galatians 5:22-23 – it is a fruit of the Spirit and a “stepping stone” in our faith (2 Peter 1:5-7). Titus 2:11-12 – God’s grace has appeared teaching us that we should deny ungodliness and live soberly, righteously and godly...
 - iv. 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 – Paul spoke of bringing his body into subjection lest when had preached to others he would be disqualified.
 - v. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7 – our sanctification is about abstaining from sexual immorality and possessing our own vessel “in sanctification and honor”...
 - vi. Consider Felix – again, based on his history, he had issues with this.
- d. **Judgment to come** –
- i. Clearly the scriptures address the coming judgment. Hebrews 9:27 notes that man will die and then the judgment.
 - ii. Note Acts 24:14-16, as Paul made his defense before Felix and the accusatory Jews, he mentioned, *But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.*
 - iii. Jesus Himself had warned of this in John 5:25-29 noting that *“all who are in the grave will come forth...”*
 - iv. Romans 2:5-11 we find Paul warning man that there will be a day when ALL will be judged. 2 Corinthians 5:10-11 – it was this judgment that prompted Paul to risk life and possessions to win others to Christ.
 - v. This was the backdrop of Paul’s reasoning with Felix and Drusilla about these matters.
- e. Why these three?
- i. The reason for these three specific topics, AND exactly what he said about them, is not recorded. But they are fundamental in helping people understand what they need to do to be saved. Recall that Paul was teaching Felix about “faith in Christ” (vs. 24) and giving him, “a more accurate knowledge of the way.” (vs. 22)
 - ii. **Righteousness** – there MUST be an understanding that to follow God, through Christ, you have to change your life and live by His standards; **Self-control** is the discipline of the heart that we must develop to live that life; **Judgment to come** is a motivation – there may be others, but knowing that one day we WILL stand before God to give an account ought to move us to make whatever changes we need to make NOW, before it is too late.
 - iii. **Repentance** – in essence, these are subjects that call for man to repent so that he can be saved. Recall Paul’s sermon in Athens, Acts 17:30-31. Then recall Peter’s answer on the day of Pentecost when they asked, “What shall we do?” Both involved repentance!

III. Felix’s response

- a. The account is not concluded, for we still have the reaction of Felix.
- b. **Felix trembled** – (vs. 25) – the NKJV says he was afraid. As Paul preached, he convicted Felix in some way.

- i. That is what the gospel does – Acts 2:37 – they were cut to the heart; Hebrews 4:12-13 notes that the word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword. So does Romans 1:16 speak of the power of the gospel. Acts 7:54 records the reaction to Stephen’s message to the Jewish council. It resulted in him being stoned to death.
 - ii. The point – the gospel provokes reactions. It did so with Felix – he WAS moved by the teachings of Paul. This showed a realization of need. But is that realization enough to cause one to change? Sadly not always. Realize that we cannot force one into obedience. All we can do is plant and water – 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 and let God give the increase. Sadly, far too often, Satan snatches away the word before it can have impact (cf. Luke 8:11-12 – the “wayside” is those who HEAR the word, but Satan comes and takes it away lest they believe.
- c. **He procrastinated** –
- i. Felix put Paul off to a more “convenient time” (Acts 24:25).
 - ii. Far too often, people are convicted of sin, or realize they need to make themselves right with God, but they put off making changes. They believe they have plenty of time. Maybe they do, but there are NO guarantees in this life.
 - iii. James 4:14 notes that our life is a vapor. We know that life is uncertain. Furthermore, when one puts off obeying this time (whether becoming a Christian or coming back), it becomes more difficult to do what is right the next time. It is easier to keep putting it off. And for many, even when they are convicted, they KEEP finding excuses to wait a little longer.
 - iv. No where do we read of Felix eventually responding. What we do read is that in vs. 26, he often sent for Paul and conversed with him. But we do not read of obeying the gospel.
- d. **A heart unprepared**
- i. We have to address the heart of Felix based on what the text says about him. He clearly had heart issues. Romans 10:9-10 tells us that it is with the heart that one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses unto salvation.
 - ii. **He did not do what was right** – he kept Paul in prison for 2 years with no resolution. We know that this was God’s will, BUT it still was NOT right which tells us about Felix character.
 - iii. **He sought money** – this shows his heart was not honest. And not just money, but it seems like a bribe – which is a form of “dishonest gain” (cf. 1 Timothy 3:3, 8, Titus 1:11, 1 Peter 5:2). How often do people let mammon get in their way of responding correctly to the gospel? How often do people let corrupt and questionable practices get in their way of obeying God? The rich, young ruler loved his money – Matthew 19:21-23, 1 Timothy 6:9-10 warns that the love of money is the root of all (kinds) of evil. Again, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (& Colossians 3:5) speak of the covetous not entering heaven.
 - iv. **He wanted to do the Jews a favor** – he considered political ramifications (impact on his life) in his response. Throughout Acts, and prevalent throughout history, often ungodly leaders will mistreat the godly to do the wicked of society “favors”. Remember, it was “a favor” that caused Jesus to be crucified – Pilate knew better, but cowered and cave to wicked leaders.
 - v. **If our heart is not right it will not take much to keep us from doing what is right** – Acts 8:21-22, when Peter rebuked Simon the sorcerer, he said, “Your heart is not right...” and called for him to repent and pray. Hearts will keep many from obeying God or returning to Him. That was the premise of the parable of the Sower (Luke 8:4-15). Remember Matthew 5:8 – it is the pure in heart that will see God.

Felix was given plenty of opportunity to obey the gospel. He heard the truth and was WARNED. He put it off and there is no indication he responded. What about you? You have heard the truth – how have you responded? NOW is the time of salvation – 2 Corinthians 6:2. Deal with whatever is standing in your way of making yourself right with God, whether in becoming a Christian or AS a Christian. If we can help, we are ready. Think about it!