

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

A Cheerful Defense

Acts: 24:1-27

Intro: “Law was the most characteristic and lasting expression of the Roman spirit,” (historian Will Durant). “The first person in Roman law was the citizen.” This meant that it was the primary responsibility of the Roman court to protect the citizen from the State. This insistence of Roman law set the precedent for the rule of law that western civilization is known for and has enjoyed for thousands of years. Yet too often, various types of corruption infiltrated and infected the Roman legal system which made it difficult for the common man to obtain justice. The Apostle Paul is about to discover just how corrupt a Roman governor could be.

Paul is in Roman custody after nearly being killed by a Jewish mob who accused him of trying to profane the temple. The Roman commander rescued Paul from certain death but was unable to ascertain why the Jews were trying to execute him. He attempted to discover Paul’s crimes by having him appear before the Sanhedrin but that also descended into a shouting match between the council members and Paul was quickly removed from the scene. The commander, Claudius Lysias, learned nothing from Paul’s appearance before the Sanhedrin but the next day, he did learn that 40 assassins had vowed to kill Paul when he was brought before the Sanhedrin a 2nd time. To keep Paul safe, Lysias had him transferred from Jerusalem to Caesarea under escort of 470 crack Roman soldiers.

In Caesarea, Paul will finally have both the freedom and opportunity to defend himself without any fear of reprisal from a mob of angry Jews. In fact, Paul states that he will cheerfully answer for himself. That may seem a bit odd for someone who is about to go toe-to-toe with Israel’s best and brightest while not only his freedom but his life hangs in the balance. But, it is nevertheless accurate. Paul can cheerfully defend himself before the Roman governor Felix because: 1) he was in the right. The facts, the evidence, the truth was on Paul’s side. 2) He’ll finally be able to fulfill the rest of God’s plan for his life as promised back in **9:15**, “to bear My name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel.” Now, Felix wasn’t a king but he was a ruling Roman official. In total, during Paul’s stay in Caesarea, he will have the opportunity to testify of Jesus Christ before 2 Roman

governors and 1 king and queen.

1-9 – 5 days had passed since Paul had arrived at Caesarea and that had given the Sanhedrin a little time to gather a case together and respond to an invitation to go to Caesarea and press their charges against Paul before Felix. They brought a lawyer with them named Tertullus. All we know about him is that he had a Roman name. Scholars notice certain Latinisms in his speech so it's quite likely that Luke records a Greek translation of a Latin speech. This man was a professional orator who had been hired by the Jews to present their case before the Roman governor. Luke probably gives a condensed form of this speech and if his pared-down version reflects the proportions of what was actually said, we can assume that half of Tertullus' address was taken up with flattery of the governor.

His opening statement (**2**) was utter hypocrisy. Though Felix had the status of a Roman governor, his background was not particularly distinguished. He'd been a slave who became free under Claudius. He pandered to the depravity of the emperor and rose in the court until he was finally awarded the governorship of Judah. He was corrupt in his administration and was hated by the Jews. His time as governor was characterized by graft. His wife was a teenager whom he stole from another king. Eventually, the corruption of his rule became so outrageous that Emperor Nero (no model of morality) recalled him and would've executed him if Felix' brother hadn't come to the rescue. The Sanhedrin hated Felix and he knew it. This flattery only served to pique his interest in what the Jews were trying to do to Paul.

Tertullus' introduction was basically lies presented as flattery. Flattery is really a forgotten sin but the Bible speaks about it more often than you might think. In **Rom 16:17-18**, Paul warns believers to take notice of those who cause division in the church. Their goal is to deceive hearts and they do it by using smooth words and flattering speeches. **Jude** also warns us (**16**) that these people use flattery to gain advantage over believers. Several times in Proverbs, flattery is associated with sexual immorality. Many people have been seduced into immorality and the destruction it brings through simple flattery. 4 other references in Proverbs (**20:19; 24:24; 28:23; 29:5**) warn of the evil of flattery. It's even possible to flatter God (**Ps 78:36**). Israel tried it but God wasn't buying it and they suffered because of it – not because of the flattery but of the condition of their hearts that believed they could get away with it.

How does this apply to us in our day and age? There is quite a bit of flattery of God that goes on in churches all across our country and the world today. Many people are drawn to church because they love the worship time. They love the music, the style of worship, the singing. There is a freedom of expression that some take full advantage of in expressing their love for the Lord. But here's the problem. Too many "believers" participate in corporate worship then walk out the door and live like the world the rest of the week without any concern or conviction. When you give God insincere praise, it's nothing more than flattery and God doesn't want it, He's not impressed and He doesn't accept it as praise. Worse, the heart that is comfortable replacing flattery for praise is in real spiritual danger.

The Jews' intentions for Paul soon became clear. They wanted the governor to kill Paul. They had several charges against him, which their lawyer skillfully developed. 1) He's a troublemaker. A literal translation is a "plague." They were saying that Paul was a plague of mammoth proportions; an infectious disease. He spread contagion. Tertullus is suggesting if Paul were released, he'd spread turmoil, disorder, and maybe even rebellion throughout the empire.

Why would the Jews present this charge? They knew that the Romans weren't much interested in religious matters but were highly interested in anything that might stir up trouble. Here, they are accusing Paul of causing turmoil.

2) He's a ringleader of the Nazarene sect. These words are loaded with strong negative connotations. Paul was a follower of Jesus but the Jews were trying to avoid using Jesus' name; He's just the Nazarene. Tertullus didn't just refer to Paul as a follower of the Nazarene but of the Nazarene sect, a word that has overtones of heresy. Tertullus also called Paul a ringleader. He could have just called him a "leader," but he didn't. He said ringleader because the word implies Paul was busy whipping up this troublesome heresy.

3) He tried to desecrate the temple. This charge was patently false; Paul wasn't trying to desecrate the temple. This was just the mob's accusation. Tertullus distorts the truth even further. We seized him, implying they'd arrested Paul for desecrating the temple. But that's not what had happened. The mob attacked Paul and tried to kill him. It was the Romans who had

actually arrested Paul, and they did it to save his life.

Those were the charges. Paul's a troublemaker (we have enough of those). He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect (we all hate heresy). He tried to desecrate the temple (even Rome viewed that as a sacrilege). Maybe Tertullus thought he could score points with the last accusation since Roman law gave special status to the Jewish temple and even prescribed the death penalty for those who violated it. His final suggestion to Felix was to have Paul examined (flogged) in order to ascertain the truth of their accusation. Their hope was that Paul wouldn't survive the beating. It's quite possible that Tertullus and the Jewish leaders were unaware of Paul's Roman citizenship.

Tertullus had made his accusation, which were no more truthful than his flattery, then he sat down. Felix must have nodded to Paul who, according to the strict procedures of Roman law, now had a chance to present his rebuttal.

10-21 – Paul begins his defense politely enough but his words to Felix are restrained. Tertullus had flattered Felix. Paul would do no such thing. Still, he acknowledged that Felix had been a judge over Israel long enough to know something about the kind of nation it was. Because of that, Paul was glad to be able to make his defense before him. Felix would be aware of the kind of charges being brought against him and the fact that they were unsubstantiated.

After a introduction Paul began to answer the charges made against him. He dealt with each one in order.

1) I'm *no* troublemaker. Paul not only denies their 1st charge but he could prove his claim and they couldn't prove theirs. First, it had only been 12 days since he arrived in Jerusalem. Felix knew Paul had in Caesarea for 5 days and he'd been in prison in Jerusalem 1 day. So 6 of the 12 days were already accounted for. At most, Paul had a mere 6 days to stir up all the trouble they're accusing him of. How much trouble can one person stir up in a week? It wasn't Paul who was stirring up trouble but the Asian instigators and the Jerusalem mob. His Jewish accusers had the responsibility to testify to what they could prove Paul had done during the 6 days he was in Jerusalem.

Paul further asserts his innocence by saying that during those 6 days he wasn't debating with the crowds or even lecturing. He had done that in other places; that was his job. But in Jerusalem he wasn't disputing with anybody. There were no crowds around him in the city or in the temple. In fact, the only reason he was at the temple that day was so that he could worship the very God these men also profess to worship, since he also was a Jew.

2. I'm a follower of the Way. Paul admits to the 2nd accusation but phrases it differently. He doesn't call Christianity the sect of the Nazarenes; he calls it the Way. Yet, despite the semantics, Paul agrees with the substance of the accusation. But that wasn't a problem, because the only substantial legal question was if Paul's following the Way was sufficient grounds for punishment, but his accusers hadn't argued that point. Paul could practice his religion because Roman law provided religious freedom. If the Way was a sect of Judaism and Judaism was protected by Roman law, wasn't Paul protected too? If Felix ruled against Paul for following Jesus, couldn't he also now have grounds to move against the very Sanhedrin who were pressing their case against Paul? This was a wise response!

Paul also stressed the similarity between his beliefs and those of his Jewish accusers (14-15). He could've argued that following Jesus wasn't a deviation from Judaism but was true Judaism itself. If anyone had strayed from true Judaism, it was his opponents.

3) I did not desecrate the temple. Paul emphatically denied the 3rd charge. He hadn't come to desecrate the temple. That was the last thing he wanted to do. He only came to Jerusalem on an errand of mercy. He'd been establishing churches in Gentile lands, and these churches had given an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem and Paul came to deliver it to them. Besides, when they found him in the temple, not only was he not causing trouble, he was submitting to the laws of Judaism. This was Paul's defense against Tertullus' formal charges.

Paul adds one other thing. He said that the trouble only occurred because of charges raised by certain Jews from Asia. Since this was a court of law, it was the Jews from Asia, not the Sanhedrin, who should have been present to testify against him. The Sanhedrin hadn't been there when it happened. They were not eyewitnesses. If anyone was to testify, it needed to be those who had been present. The Jews from Asia were good at inciting riots but

not good at producing facts.

22-27 – Felix heard the arguments and knew Paul was innocent. Stuck between what he knew was right and pressured by people demanding he do wrong, Felix refused to make a decision. He adjourns the legal proceedings until Commander Lysias could appear and provide an account of what he knew had happened. This in itself wasn't so bad. Felix had the right to hear the commander's side. The problem wasn't that Felix was postponing a decision until the case was presented to him in full, hoping to make a judgment at the earliest possible moment. No; delay and compromise were bad characteristic of his. He habitually postponed what he knew he needed to do. The real tragedy of his life was not that he postponed making a judgment about Paul, but that he postponed the far more serious matter of making a decision concerning Jesus Christ.

Luke describes how Felix even brought his wife Drusilla to hear Paul. It could be that her own curiosity prompted this audience. After all, her family had been involved with the Way on several occasions. Her Great-grandfather tried to kill Jesus in Bethlehem (**Mt 2**); her Great-uncle executed John the Baptist and mocked Jesus (**Lk 23**) and her father had executed the Apostle James (**Acts 12**). Apparently, messing with the Way had become the family business. But, Paul was no respecter of persons and he delivered a message that went straight to the heart of their problems. Luke says Paul delivered a lovely 3 point sermon about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come. Of course, this was probably the last thing they wanted to hear but it was the one thing they needed to hear.

1st, Paul's sermon on righteousness meant they had to do something about yesterday's sin. Felix and his wife, just like everyone else, were guilty of much past sin. But God is holy and a holy God demands righteousness; that's the bad news. The good news is this same holy God provides His own righteousness to those who trust in Jesus Christ. No one can ever be saved by their own good works (righteousness). Salvation, receiving the righteousness of Jesus Christ, is only made available by His finished work of sacrifice on the cross.

2nd, Paul's point on self-control meant they had to do something about today's temptations. Man can control almost everything but himself. Felix and Drusilla were prime example of the lack of self-control. She left her first

husband to become Felix' 3rd wife. Although she was a Jew, she lived as though the 10 Commandments had never been given at Sinai. Felix was an unscrupulous official who didn't hesitate to lie or murder to be rid of his enemies or promote himself. Self-control was something neither of them was familiar with.

Paul's last point on judgment meant they had to do something about tomorrow's reckoning. Maybe Paul told them that God had appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness as he told the Greek philosophers in Athens (17:31). Jesus Christ will either be your Savior or He will be your Judge. God has given us the assurance of this truth by raising Jesus from the dead. He will judge the world as surely as He is alive today!

What was Felix' response to Paul's sermon? Felix became terrified! Roman officials prided themselves in their ability to restrain their emotions but a conviction from God gripped Felix' heart and he couldn't hide it! Paul had accurately diagnosed the case and had expertly prescribed a remedy but it was up to Felix to receive it. What did Felix do? He procrastinated! It's been said that procrastination is the thief of time but it is also the thief of souls. Felix was moved by Paul's testimony but he didn't believe. He wanted to wait for a more convenient time but that time never came.

Felix had a lot going for him. Luke says he had more accurate knowledge of the Way, meaning he already knew something about Christianity. He also knew Paul was innocent. Most important, he knew he was a sinner. Yet in spite of all that was going for him Felix postponed his decision. It never was convenient to send for Paul. And with these words, Felix passes from the pages of Acts, from history, and from life.

Think about the foolish attitudes Felix had towards God's Word, thinking he could take it or leave it. But God commands all men everywhere to repent. When God speaks, we must listen and obey. Felix had a foolish attitude towards his own sin. He knew he was a sinner yet he refused to turn from his sin and obey the Lord. He had a foolish attitude towards God's grace. The Lord had been long-suffering to Felix yet he refused to surrender. He wasn't sure of another day of life yet he foolishly procrastinated on making a decision for Jesus. Instead of listening to Paul, he tried to use him as a political pawn. When Felix was replaced, he left Paul a prisoner but it was Felix who was really the prisoner – to his own fleshly appetites, corruption

and foolish attitudes! Felix' mind was enlightened, his emotions were stirred but his will would not yield. He tried to gain the world but as far as we know, he lost his own soul. He procrastinated himself straight into hell. **II Cor 6:2** 😊