

PROCRASTINATING WITH ETERNITY

Several years ago, there was a popular book on the best seller list titled, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. As we follow the events in Paul's life as he went to Jerusalem, was arrested and his life threatened, we might think that some really bad things were happening to a good person. You may know people in just such a situation. You may have personally encountered some pretty bad situations in your life. You could be going through something right now! Do you ever think, "Well, I guess that this is just one of those unlucky times in life" or perhaps think, "I figure this is just my lot or destiny in life" ? Do you think Paul thought that his situation was a result of "bad luck?" Remember, this is the same person who wrote, "For I know that all things work together for good, to them who love the Lord; to them who are called according to His purpose."

Paul had encountered many trials, and would encounter more trials. There would be false accusations, crooked officials, people with agendas of material greed, and people with false beliefs based on ancient prejudices. We may not run into exactly they same challenges that Paul did, but we will encounter people who seem to be operating from some other agenda that what is good and right and beneficial. We need to see such situations as an opportunity to share the truth of the gospel and to stand for what is right. We can see that Paul did just that.

{24:1} Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. {2} When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: "We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. {3} Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. {4} But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly. {5} "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect {6} and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him. {7} {8} By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him." {9} The Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

What were some of the charges the Jewish leaders brought against Paul?

Trouble maker, Stirs up riots among Jews, Ring leader of a sect, Desecrated Temple

Which of these charges were true? (Did they overstate the charges?)

Were the Jews sincere in what they believed about these charges? (What was the basis of their belief? [Hear say] What is the lesson for us today regarding the bases of what we believe?)

What are some things the secular world and (even some liberal churches) accuse conservative Christians of doing or being?

Against Personal Freedom, Homophobic, Prudish, Ignorant (creation vs. evolution), Anti-science, narrow-minded, Intolerant, etc.

The enemies of the Cross and God's plan of salvation are willing to speak against what God is doing through His people. They are not ruffians nor are they uncultured people, but are well educated and have material resources. Yet they have rebellious hearts that stand against God. In their own pride they think they are right. Just as Tertullus did, they present their charges against the church using inflammatory words so as to prejudice those who hear them against what God is doing.

Why should we refute what the elitist secular humanist are saying?

Many people are not aware of the spiritual battles that are being waged, and if they hear only one side of the argument, then it seem that these elitist are right. Therefore, we have a responsibility to present the truth of the matter. Proverbs 18:17 says "Any story sounds true until someone tells the other side and sets the record straight."

{10} When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: "I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense. {11} You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. {12} My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. {13} And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me.

Paul defense was equally well stated as that of the lawyer Tertullus. Paul was a learned man and did not apologize for his learning. Too many Christians today seem to take pride in their lack of learning. This manifest ignorance is a deterrent to the Kingdom of God. God is not a God of lack of excellence but He “doeth all things well.”

Paul did not hesitate to use logic and the tenets of the Roman system of law to refute the arguments of his accusers. His accusers had no basis for their accusations but were operating only on hear say information. Those who accused him could not define the crime he had committed.

{14} However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, {15} and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. {16} So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. {17} "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. {18} I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. {19} But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. {20} Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin-- {21} unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: 'It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.'"

Paul managed to plead guilty of being a Christian and of believing and stating the truth of the resurrection of the dead. All of us should be accused of this.

{22} Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. "When Lysias the commander comes," he said, "I will decide your case." {23} He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.

What can we say regarding the kind of person Felix was? How would you characterize him?

Felix had “head knowledge” but not “heart knowledge.” As so many are today, he knew what Christianity is about. Many will mentally accept the facts of the matter but it makes no difference in the way they live. Knowledge will not save us. It is said that many in our churches will miss heaven by 12 inches – that’s the distance between the head and the heart.

Indecision: Felix was also as many are today in that he would not make a decision if there was another alternative he could take to delay it. Some will enter into eternity without having made a decision to follow Jesus as Lord of their life.

{24} Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. {25} As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you."

What was Felix’s motive for having Paul speak before him again?

Apparently, Paul had some **entertainment value or curiosity** for Felix. He wanted his wife to hear what Paul testified about his life.

What actually happened in this encounter?

God used that opportunity to bring **conviction (fear)** to the Roman leader. Felix successfully resisted the conviction and ended the meeting with Paul. Encounters with Christians should bring conviction to the lost. If that is not happening, then we as Christians, are missing opportunities God has arranged for us.

What happens when a person rejects and resists conviction or Godly fear?

{26} At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. {27} When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

As we share our faith with others and nothing happens, it is easy to become discouraged. We may think we have failed in our approach. Many times (if not all the time) the problem is with the hearer. Felix had an alternative agenda in listening to Paul. He was listening for a bribe and not for a means of salvation for his soul. The sequence of events for a person to come to salvation is conviction from the Spirit of God, repentance on the part of the lost person, and belief unto salvation. Without repentance, then there can be no belief unto salvation.