

# God, Government, and Gospel

## Introduction

If you have your Bibles...

If you have your Bibles, and I hope you do, please turn to Acts 24. Today, we have a divine appointment that reveals God's view of government, the responsibilities of leadership, and the non-negotiable demand of the gospel: repent and believe. In a world where we're tempted to flirt with Jesus as an interesting figure, this passage confronts us with the reality that anything less than full surrender to Christ is prideful rebellion.

## Acts 24

And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul. 2 And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying:

"Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, 3 in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. 4 But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. 5 For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. 6 He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him.[b] 8 By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him."

9 The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so. 10 And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied:

"Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense. 11 You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, 12 and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. 13 Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. 14 But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, 15 having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. 16 So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. 17 Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. 18 While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia— 19 they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. 20 Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, 21 other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: 'It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.'"

22 But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case." 23 Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.

24 After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. 25 And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you." 26 At the same time he hoped

that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him. 27 When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

## Context/Story

- Who was Felix?
  - Of the four most important historians of antiquity—Suetonius, Tacitus, Josephus, and Luke the physician—all four wrote about Felix. We are told that Felix was born into slavery but later was given his freedom, either by the mother of Claudius, according to Tacitus, or by Claudius himself, according to Josephus. Both historians agreed that Felix was born a slave and then elevated to the level of governor. His brother Pallas was also born into slavery. He rose so high in the Roman hierarchy that he became in charge of all the civil servants in Rome, much like holding a cabinet position in the United States government. So both Felix and Pallas were very high up in the Roman hierarchy.
- Felix had three wives. His first wife was the granddaughter of Antony and Cleopatra. His third wife was Drusilla, the daughter of King Herod Agrippa I. At the time of Paul, Felix, who had begun as a slave, was married to royalty, surrounded by royalty, and holding the honorific titles of royalty. We are told by Tacitus, however, that Felix was known for his brutal and ruthless quelling of insurrections in his territory. When the Jews stood against the Romans, Felix wiped them out. Tacitus said that Felix had the power of a king but the mind of a slave, yet the most important thing that ever happened to him was this encounter with Paul the Apostle.

## God Establishes Government to Uphold Justice

- The high priest Ananias, along with elders and a slick lawyer named Tertullus, present their case to Felix, flattering him with words dripping with insincerity.
  - Vs 2b-8 “Through you we enjoy much peace”.
    - This is decidedly not true, everyone knew that Felix was particularly violent and malevolent with the Jewish people, and the Jews despised him. But they clearly despised Paul even more.
      - Tertullus is laying it on thick.
  - They paint Paul as a plague, a disease, he is a pestilence, he is a public nuisance, stirring up riots among Jews worldwide.
    - He calls them a sect, not a religion. Then he calls them Nazarines. Not christians, not followers of the way. As high of an insult as he could give.
- Paul's response
  - I am a Jew, I did not start any riots, I follow the law just like they do. I was in the temple like a good jew, but these guys from Asia seemed to have a problem and it was the guys from asia who started the riot, not Paul. Which is true.
    - I AM INNOCENT! And now it lies at the feet of Governor Felix. Which side will he take? What will he do?
      - Felix took his own side. He kept Paul, didn't charge him with anything, but held him for 2 years. Felix didn't care about the truth.

He didn't care about who was right. There is no doubt that Felix was an absolutely wicked ruler.

- The Bible teaches that government is God's institution, established to maintain order and justice.
  - Romans 13:1-2 - Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.
    - Felix, as governor, held a God-ordained role to administer justice impartially. In Acts 24, he's tasked with judging Paul fairly, yet his actions reveal a failure to fulfill this divine mandate. His knowledge of the Way and his delay in deciding Paul's case show a man swayed by political expediency and personal gain, not justice.
- Prove
  - 1 Peter 2:13-14 - Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14 or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.
    - Felix's failure to release Paul, an innocent man, or to confront the false accusers, violates this calling.
  - Proverbs 29:4 - "By justice a king builds up the land, but he who exacts gifts tears it down."
    - Vs 26 - Governmental leaders and leaders in general bear a God-given responsibility to uphold justice and righteousness. Felix's hope for a bribe exposes his corruption, undermining the very purpose of his authority.
- Apply
  - So what do you do when the government is corrupt? When kings and presidents and senators and governors are covered with guilt? (That doesn't happen here in America of course! But hypothetically...)
    - All joking aside, we know this happens, and it happens all the time. Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.
      - It is a part of human nature to want more power. When you have that kind of authority, that kind of control, you aren't content with just a little, the more you have, the more you want. You want enough that no one can take it from you. No one can stand against you.
  - 4 things we are to do in the face of corrupt government:
    - 1. Recognize God's Sovereignty
      - Human authorities, like Felix, often fail. Our ultimate trust is in God's sovereign rule, not flawed systems. Felix's corruption (his greed, brutality, and refusal to release Paul) didn't thwart God's plan. Paul's imprisonment advanced the gospel
    - 2. Pray for your leaders, even the guilty
      - Paul didn't curse Felix but loved him enough to share Jesus with him. We should Pray for corrupt leaders to repent, for God to restrain their evil, and for wisdom to govern justly.

- 1 Timothy 2:1–2 - First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way
  - Not only that, but prayer does something for us as well. It aligns your heart with God's will and keeps you from bitterness. Show me someone who is constantly fretting about tomorrow and I will show you someone whose prayer life needs work.
- 3. Obey God Over Man When Necessary
  - Acts 5:29 - We must obey God rather than men
  - If a government commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands, we are to prioritize obedience to God.
  - Examples:
    - Hebrew midwives disobeying Pharaoh
    - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refusing to worship Nebuchadnezzar's statue
    - Daniel's defiance of Darius's edict to pray only to Him.
- 4. Speak Truth with Courage
  - Paul didn't shrink from preaching righteousness, and judgment to Felix, even knowing it might cost him (Acts 24:25). Christians must boldly proclaim truth, calling leaders to repentance and exposing corruption. Paul's preaching alarmed Felix because it meant Felix was not really in control. His power was meaningless in the face of the divine power that Paul represented.

### **Leaders Are Accountable to God's Standard**

- Paul doesn't flatter Felix or shrink back; he preaches righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment. He wants Felix to know that one day he will give an account for his leadership to God. All leaders, regardless of their title or power, are accountable to God
  - God's standard applies to all, and leaders especially will face stricter judgment
  - Felix sensed this accountability but refused to act on it.
    - Psalm 2:10–11 - Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. 11 Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.
      - Felix's two-year delay, leaving Paul in prison to curry favor with the Jews, proves his cowardice and rejection of God's call to repentance.
  - 5. Trust God's Justice
    - Psalm 94:23a - He will bring back on them their iniquity and wipe them out for their wickedness;
      - Leaders who persist in guilt will face God's judgment. Rest in this, but don't gloat
- Apply

- If you're a leader, know that God sees your heart and your actions. Are you leading with integrity, or are you, like Felix, chasing bribes—whether money, approval, or power?
- This corrupt government is not going to be fixed. Why do I say that?
  - Corrupt governments often reflect a corrupt culture. Felix is really a representative of the moral state of all of Rome. Our corrupt government is representative of the moral state of all of America. We are not good people. We take pride in our pride. We dress in ways we should be ashamed of and call it liberating. We are consumed with ourselves and constantly try to one up each other on social media. Our cities are full of crime and looting and violence.
    - The only solution to our government is a new society. The only way to a new society is through heart change. That can only come through Christ.

### **The Gospel Demands Repentance, Not Curiosity**

- Felix's response to Paul's preaching is tragic. He was treating Jesus as an interesting idea, rather than the Lord of all. Jesus demands repentance, and to offer him anything else is prideful rebellion. Felix and Drusilla "heard Paul speak about faith in Christ Jesus, but when convicted, Felix sent Paul away. He toyed with the gospel, he tried to use the gospel for selfish gain, and never surrendered to Christ. This is the essence of pride: hearing the truth but refusing to bow.
- Apply
  - Don't Treat Jesus Like a Buffet
  - Some of you are like Felix, intrigued by Jesus but unwilling to repent. Maybe you enjoy church, admire Christian values, or like debating theology, but you've never surrendered your life to Christ. That's pride, and it's deadly. The gospel isn't a buffet to sample; it's a call to die to self and live for Christ.
  - Don't waste the opportunity God gave you.
    - Are you delaying like Felix, waiting for a "better time"? Today is the day of salvation. Repent of your sin, trust in Christ's finished work on the cross, and follow Him.
      - Acts 17:30–31 - The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

### **Conclusion**

- When it comes to government, you are to submit where you can, resist where you must, vote wisely, engage civically, and support leaders who reflect God's standards, and you are to always proclaim Christ. Above all, live for the King who never fails, trusting Him to work through or despite human corruption. Repent of any pride that keeps you from full surrender to Christ
- Hebrews 3:15 - "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

## **Pray/Invitation**