

**# 16 Barrier Breaking Faith:
Legal Process – Friend or Foe**

Acts 23:12-26:32

Confidence vs Arrogance 23:12-35

Having received a second encouraging vision from the Lord (18:9, 23:11), Paul now faces a conspiracy of forty who are out to assassinate him. Braced by the Lord, he confidently negotiated the arrogance of those who took a vow to put themselves under a curse not eat or drink anything until they killed Paul.

The plan of the arrogant 40 was thwarted by God, as Paul's nephew overheard the plot and reported it to Paul and then the centurion in charge of guarding Paul. The centurion did not hesitate to act, but promptly responded, surrounding Paul with 200 infantry and 70 cavalry for relocation to Caesarea. A letter of introduction to the governor accompanied the soldiers, and legal proceedings were arranged along with safeguarding in Herod's palace.

Today, the Southern Baptists find themselves engaged in multiple legal proceedings as a denomination and in our churches. The issues range from abortion, COVID mandates, handling of sexual abuse, to hiring and firing issues around leadership styles or social issues regarding LGBTQ rulings. Paul's teaching about lawsuits among believers in 1 Corinthians 6: 1-11 gives inspired teaching. Some of today's congregational lawsuits should be settled inhouse using mediation services and not in a secular court system.

In Paul's case God guided and safeguarded him through the maze of the Roman legal system. Each proceeding step gave Paul an opportunity to give his testimony. It is obvious that God was with him. In the "lions den" Paul stood in faith with integrity, as had Daniel many generations before. He modeled being light in darkness.

Accusations vs Stays of Protection 24:1-27

Paul was patient as he live under the protection of the Roman laws. He used his time to write to churches and encourage them. We gain understanding of his attitude from reading the "prison epistles" of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon. Each of these epistles could have been written in different locations. Only Philippians was possibly written while Paul was in Caesarea. Philippians 1:12-14 speaks of God using this time to advance the gospel. The time frame was 58-60 AD. Paul had arrived in Jerusalem at Pentecost in the Spring of 58. His attitude has great similarity to the Old Testament Joseph who also spent time in prison. See Genesis 50:20. Both reflect a devout faith in the sovereignty of God.

Defenses are made before two Governors Felix, and Festus. Later he would defend himself to King Agrippa and Bernice. Each listened to his testimony. They played games with him, passing him from one to another. God kept working among "The Way" to get the word out. See 24:14, 22, 24 "Felix... listened to him on the subject of faith in Christ Jesus."

Using Legal Proceedings for Advantage 25:1-27

Innocence is Paul's initial defense in 24:13. It is his continued defense in 25:8-11. Paul was up against political favor. The governor wanted to please the people. Governor Pilate, who judged Jesus gave into the tactic of political favor and crucified Jesus. We still see this going on today. Does political favor influence decisions affecting not only Christians but all citizens? Yes! In many cases it is not about common sense or right and wrong, but about popularity, how to please people to get reelected, or to remain loyal to a party platform.

His appeal to Caesar 25:11 was his right as a Roman citizen. It is an appeal for due process, and to not let a lower court decision stand, especially since he could see where the governor was leaning. Believing the Lord's assurance that he would be going to Rome, Paul endured and soldiered on for the Lord.

Governor Festus states Paul's innocence in 25:25 as will King Agrippa in 26:31. Governor Pilate had said the same about Jesus Jn. 18:38 "I find no grounds for charging him."

Even when processes are not in our favor, and others are doing wrong, we are still called to live righteously, innocent of wrongdoing before the Lord, 1 Peter 2:12, 15.

A Third Opportunity for Testimony 26:1-32

Paul tells his story to a King eager to hear it (25:22) "I would like to hear the man myself." He could have refused to hear Paul, but God was working and King Agrippa was given the grace of hearing a testimony of faith that called for a faith decision, to believe 26:27. The interchange between Paul and the King is interesting. See 26:24-29. Paul gets the last word. The king leaves and no longer responds publicly.

Agrippa plays the blame game and avoids making a legal decision regarding Paul, saying he must go on to Caesar because of his appeal 26:32.

Application:

Trust God even when circumstances do not seem to be going well for you.

Faithfulness is called for when facing legal proceedings.

Hone your testimony and share it when possible. We never know who may be listening, and who may believe in Christ as the fulfillment of God's promises to send a Savior.