

## PAUL ON TRIAL (ACTS 25)

How best do you study the Word of God? ... The only way for the Christian is to study it is *as* the Word of God. It is not an ordinary book which you come to analyse in any secular literary sense, - it is God's Word, and therefore, we do not judge *it*, but *it* judges us. It is the authority to which we are wholly subordinate.

The most reliable way to study Scripture is what is known as 'expositional' or 'exegetical'. ... There *is* a difference, but they both work together ... While exegesis is an analysis of the text – studying its language, grammar, historical and cultural background – in order to understand its meaning, Biblical exposition is an opening or unfolding of the text to help the hearers understand both its meaning and its implications.

It begins with the foundation that all God's Word is inspired, inerrant, and infallible, and it is there to teach us sound doctrine, and to reprove and correct us when we need it, and to teach us in righteousness (II Tim. 3:16).

To do these things, the Bible explains itself, without any need for secular influences ... Instead, we read a passage and we carefully extract what it is saying ... and the simpler we try to achieve that aim, the less we confuse ourselves. ... We are not out to impress God by 'our much learning'. Neither do we infuse our own thoughts into the text, - we don't make the Bible conform to what we want it to say, ... but we examine carefully and prayerfully its words, - their meaning and application, - the historical background of the people and the events, and the truth/doctrines which are contained within the light of Scripture, as a whole in order to put it into practice.

The best way is to keep it simple, for it *simply* speaks ... and it reaches the parts of our being into which God requires our attention. ... Using these recommendations, let's turn to a passage and see how the Lord teaches us.

### **The Jews accuse Paul before Festus**

**Acts 25:1** Now when Festus [*Porcius Festus had taken over from Felix as the new procurator of Judea, sometime between 55-60 BC*] was come into the province [*the region where the Roman governor resided; a procurator managed the financial affairs of a province*], after three days he ascended (25:7) from Caesarea [*built by Herod the Great c. 25-13 BC; it was the administrative centre of the province of Judea within the Roman Empire*] to Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought [*summonsed*] him, <sup>3</sup> And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. <sup>4</sup> But Festus

answered, that Paul should be kept [*under guard*] at Caesarea, and that he himself [*Festus*] would depart shortly thither [*i.e. to Jerusalem*].<sup>5</sup> Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able [*competent*], go down with me [*from Jerusalem to Caesarea*], and accuse this man [*press charges*], if there be any wickedness in him [*if he has any case to answer*].<sup>6</sup> And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he *went down* unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat [*βῆμα*] commanded Paul to be brought [*to be lead in before him*].<sup>7</sup> And when he [*Paul*] was come, the Jews which *came down* (25:1) from Jerusalem [*to Caesarea*] stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove. [*cf. 24:5* For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: <sup>6</sup> Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. <sup>7</sup> But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, <sup>8</sup> Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. <sup>9</sup> And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.]

Festus was in a dilemma. The Jews were not easy to deal with, - they were stubborn and arrogant, and for two years they had been pursuing opportunities to silence Paul. On the one hand, Paul was a Jew whose fellow-countrymen wanted to kill him ... but on the other hand, he was a Roman citizen whose government had an obligation to protect. ... If he released Paul, the Jews would be in an uproar, but if he continued to hold him he would be in breach of his own Roman law for imprisoning Paul without any official charges.

So, Festus was getting nowhere, - the Jews said Paul was guilty ... Paul said he wasn't.

### **He answers for himself**

<sup>8</sup> While he [*Paul*] answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews [*Torah*], neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all [*... no charge to answer!*]. ... So Festus, - in an attempt to bolster his own position, - looked for a compromise ... <sup>9</sup> But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou [*would you be willing*] go up to Jerusalem [*i.e. from Caesarea*], and there be judged of these things before me? <sup>10</sup> Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. ... Paul refused to go! ... Instead, he claimed the right of every Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar ...

### **and appeals unto Caesar**

<sup>11</sup> For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver

me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar. ... He had ‘slipped through the net’, for he wasn’t going to be brought to Jerusalem where the opportunity for the Jewish leaders to kill him would have been a strong possibility! <sup>12</sup> Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go. ... And Festus was *forced* to comply with his prisoner!

His problems weren’t over yet though for along came Herod Agrippa and his lover/sister, Bernice. <sup>13</sup> And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus.

Herod Agrippa II was the last of the Herodian kings ... the great-grandson of the Herod who killed the babies in Bethlehem ... and the son of the Herod who killed the Apostle James. (‘Herod’ means ‘heroic’). This incestuous relationship was clearly condemned by Jewish law, (Lev. 18:1-18 and 20:11-21). However, pagan Rome (Emperor Nero) had given King Agrippa legal jurisdiction over the temple in Jerusalem, so it was appropriate he should hear Paul’s case, alongside Festus. ... And also, Agrippa was an expert in Jewish matters [<sup>26:2</sup> I [Paul] think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: <sup>3</sup> Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews]

### **Afterwards Festus opens his matter to king Agrippa**

<sup>14</sup> And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul’s cause unto the king [*he explained to the king why Paul was in court*], saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix [... *so it’s not my fault this case is ongoing, - Felix failed to deal with it properly*]: <sup>15</sup> About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him [*they wanted me to do their bidding concerning Paul ... but I didn’t have the power to do what they were asking ... Festus was ‘ducking and diving’ – he didn’t want to make a decision for fear it would implicate him, and he would lose his position ... so he looked for ways to ‘pass the buck’ to someone else*]. <sup>16</sup> To whom I [*he put it across that he was acting authoritatively*] answered [*“My answer to him was ...”*], It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. [... *mmh, Festus ... was that not what Pontius Pilate did to accommodate the accusers of Jesus?! ... Pilate delivered the Saviour to the Jews for execution, even though there was no case against Him! ... Festus was bluffing!*] <sup>17</sup> Therefore, when they were come hither [*when they came to me, - (I didn’t go to them)*], without any delay on the morrow [*I acted immediately, - I’m that type of governor ... nothing gets past me!*] I sat on the judgment seat, and [*I*] commanded the man [*he didn’t give his name!*] to be brought forth [... *he is putting it across he acted decisively ... but he is*

really looking for a way out to hand the problem over to Agrippa. ... It indicates how rotten the whole system was towards Christianity, for the opponents of Christianity were not united in anything else, other than their opposition to Christ and His followers.]. **18** Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed [instead of charging him with some serious crime such as I had expected ... he is putting it across that the Jewish leaders were amateurs, compared to him]: **19** But had certain questions against him of their own superstition [... I was 'wise' to them, King Agrippa ... they were rambling on about issues to do with their own religion ... a religion which is not mine!], and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive [... that is nothing to do with me ... for I'm not interested in their religion! ... Jesus and Paul are of no consequence to me ... And by saying such things, he was 'playing along' with King Agrippa, whose family, - from the beginning, - were ardently against Christ, and those who followed Him]. **20** And because I doubted of such manner of questions [it was so ridiculous, I was at a loss to know what to do ... so], I asked him [Paul] whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of [held accountable for] these matters [Paul didn't want to go though! And because he is a Roman citizen, I couldn't make him!]. **21** But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing [to be kept in custody and have his case heard by no less than the Emperor] of Augustus [this was Nero, the 'august one'; here, Augustus is a title, rather than a proper name, also v.25], I commanded [ordered] him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar [... "Aren't I doing a good job ... I'm in control!"]. And, at that point, Festus was relieved because he now saw the opportunity to manipulate the conversation and pass the dilemma over to someone else, to King Agrippa, **22** Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him. ... And Festus was relieved, for it was now someone else's problem

### **and he is brought forth**

**23** And on the morrow [the next day], when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp [and pageantry], and was entered into the place of hearing [the audience room, ἀκροατήριον, - a special place set aside for hearing and deciding cases], with the chief captains, and principal men of the city [the military commanders and the prominent men of the city], at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth [in chains, and flanked by Roman soldiers]. ... All this pomp and ceremony for one little Jewish man who preached the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ! ... So much effort to confront him, and stop him from spreading the message! But remember how the Lord had already told him, **9:15** But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. ... And the Lord also told him, **23:11** And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. ... So, Paul knew he *would* not end his days in Jerusalem for it was the Lord's will he should go to Rome! In other words, his enemies, - no matter how hard they tried, - would not be successful,

for his life was not in their hands ... but in the hands of God. ... Jerusalem was not going to be a pleasant experience ... for him, as the prophet Agabus confirmed, **21:11** And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles ... and the people who companied Paul tried to get him to change his mind, **12** And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. **13** Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. **14** And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

Despite everything that was around him, Paul believed God was still in control, and that nothing outside the will of God would come his way. ... And so Festus stood up in all his finery ... in front of the influential and powerful men in all their finery ... and 'in the dock' was Paul in chains, - a prisoner, faithful to the claims of Christ upon his life. ... **25:24** And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews [that's an exaggeration! ... In fact, it's lies because, **21:17** And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. **18** And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. **19** And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. **20** And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe] **25:24** have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. ... Truth is always expendable when it comes to denying the work of God!

But when analysed 'in the clear light of day', the truth has to overcome, as Festus was forced to comply, **25** But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus [*i.e. the Emperor Nero*], I have determined to send him [*... there was nothing else he could do, since Paul had produced his Roman citizenship ... Festus, you had no option but to acquiesce ... You were 'forced into a corner' by the sovereign determinate will of God, for He is in charge!*]. **26** Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. [*Festus, you are waffling for the truth is Paul's God brought Paul in before you, and Paul's God also brought Paul before Agrippa ... and not only was he waffling, he was also bluffing ...*] **27** For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.

The world reckons it has harnessed the power of God, and God is subservient to its whims. How foolish! The evidence demonstrates how these individuals did not have clear agenda to deal with the problem of Paul and his Christian faith. These disparate groups, - from diverse and discordant factions ... each normally at variance with each other, - were muddling their way along through a pathetic path of opposition to the truth ... They hadn't a clue to the truth Paul has been preaching, as is evidenced in how he preached Christ in the next chapter ... but they were opposed to him nonetheless.

We cannot expect the world to readily accept the Gospel for it is utterly at variance with every decree of truth that comes from God's Word. It might *seem* as if there are times when they agree with what God declares, but as we see in our own society, it is not the case for the old values based upon the Bible are so easily overturned and new laws in total contradiction are readily accepted, even by those who would claim allegiance to Christ.

But throughout it all, Paul stood firm. He did not set aside or accommodate the opposition. He did not readjust the truth and conform. ... He couldn't, for when the truth has you firmly in its grip, you *cannot* deny it. It does not matter what the world says, - it is God's Word that must determine the Christian's principles, path, and profession. ... As Paul gave to Timothy instruction which continues to be essential for us today, **1 Tim. 6:1** *If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; <sup>4</sup> He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, <sup>5</sup> Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.* ... May God keep us focussed on, and faithful to, His Truth! Amen.