

## ***Courageous Conviction (Part 3): Relating to Leaders & Authority - Acts 25:1-27*** **Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading**

### **Notes from the Sermon**

One of the most tricky and difficult spaces for us to navigate as followers of Jesus is our relationship to the government, to leaders, rulers, and those in authority. This is not a new phenomenon, throughout Christian history there has a pendulum often set by the posture of rulers toward the church. In some eras the government has taken a favorable posture, even having representation from believers in Jesus in the government. Generally these seasons have resulted in times of peace and a level of cultural leadership that has allowed the church the freedom to fulfill its mission without fear. Of course, this is a good thing. Yet, the outcome so often has been that the church became too comfortable with its place at the table, and has sought and fought for power in the places of authority, at times at the expense of its Gospel witness. On the other hand, there are eras and places where the government's posture toward Christ and His followers has been that of opposition and persecution. This runs from using legal means in attempt to silence and marginalize the church to the use of government sanctioned violence to persecute and martyr believers.

The Bible gives us two images of the governments of the world that should help us understand how to relate to those in authority. Yet, these images seem somewhat contradictory. In Romans 13:1-7, the Apostle Paul tells us that governments are ordained by God, "the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer." Paul commands followers of Jesus to submit to their governmental authorities, to pray for them, and to believe they are in place because of the sovereign will of God. This passage is echoed throughout the Old Testament as we are reminded that God is sovereign over the nations and rulers of the earth, and at the end of the day they are accomplishing His purpose on earth. Yet, the other image is found in Revelation 13, as we see the government pictured as a horrible freak show beast who makes war on the church, martyring believers, and exalting itself. The beast gets its authority from a horrible dragon, whom the text identifies with Satan himself, and the beast also joins forces with another beast that pictures false religion in the world. It's a scary scene, and while some will believe that this is a reference to a specific government and leader at the end of time, the text seems to also hold the idea that the beast is represented in all governments at all times. There is something beastly and evil entrenched in every government. This too is a theme echoed in the prophets of the Old Testament. So, is the government God's servant, under His rule, or Satan's minion under his evil scheme. The answer is "yes". For us as believers we must never forget this tension.

This is where the 4th-5th century theologian Augustine and his book *The City of God* helps us. Augustine wrote of two cities, the earthly and heavenly cities. Believers in Jesus are actually citizens of both, yet as citizens of the heavenly Kingdom, they are to live as faithful representatives of their True King and Kingdom no matter the posture of the government toward them. But they cannot forget that the earthly kingdom is driven by love for self and the desire to fulfill its own desires, and therefore, its always shaped by the sinfulness of the Fall.

Our text this week has Paul in front of the two most powerful governmental leaders in the Middle East in the middle First Century. Felix had been replaced by Festus as the governor in Judea. He was a Roman sent to rule a volatile region for Rome. The text shows Festus to be a shrewd politician, which is generally supported by extra-biblical sources. He is politically stuck. He rules the Jews and his job is to keep them from forming an uprising. They want Paul handed to them so they can finish the job they started in the Temple two years earlier. Yet, and the text makes this clear, Festus knows Paul is not guilty of anything in Roman law, and really isn't guilty of anything against the Law of God. So, this means that he is holding an innocent man in prison, which is unjust in any culture. In the context of this

dilemma we have the entrance of Herod Agrippa II and his sister Bernice. They are Middle Eastern rulers who also get their authority from Rome, and they carry a lot of clout in Israel. So the moment pictured in v.23 is surreal. The pomp and circumstance of people who perceive themselves important and who think they have the authority to stand over this Jewish Christian. And then, on command, Paul is brought into the hall, wearing prison clothes, shackled, and seemingly weak and helpless. Yet we know that it is Paul who is truly in power here, and anything that happens in this meeting will accomplish the purpose of God. Paul is a good citizen of both Jerusalem and Rome, submitting himself to their authority. Yet, he never forgets that there is something beastly in these rulers, and therefore is careful to maintain his allegiance to King Jesus and his witness to them.

**Bible Reading for the Week**

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Daniel 5	Daniel 6	Daniel 7	Daniel 8	Daniel 9	Daniel 10	Daniel 11

Reading from this past week: Acts 25:1-27

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Acts 26:1-32

**Family Worship**

Song - *Known and Loved*

<https://youtu.be/cAyqqTuQ4CU>

Gospel Project

Unit: The People Prepare

Story: Ezra Read the Law

Big Picture Question: How should we feel when we sin?

Answer: When we sin, we should feel sorry that we have disobeyed God and want to turn from our sin because we love Him.

Scripture: Ezra 7-10

New City Catechism

Question #7: What does the Law require?

Answer: That we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love our neighbor as ourselves.

Verse: Matthew 22:37-40

Scripture

Acts 25:1-27

- What is the central issue in this text for the Governor, Felix? What is the right thing for him to do? What is the best decision politically?
- How does Felix's actions in the story represent the problem for all governments as they relate to the church and Christians?
- What are some things Paul does in the story that models positive posture and witness before the government?
- Why is it important for us to see ourselves as citizens of two kingdoms while knowing which King has our true allegiance?

Prayer

\*Pray for your governmental leaders, and pray that we would have a Kingdom witness when we engage the government.

\*Pray for the Men's Fishing Trip this weekend.