

Ouachita Baptist University

Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

Vaught Sermon Notes: A Study of the Book of Acts

W.O. Vaught Archive

12-1-1983

How Paul Explained his Innocence to Felix

W. O. Vaught

Ouachita Baptist University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/vn_acts



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Vaught, W. O., "How Paul Explained his Innocence to Felix" (1983). *Vaught Sermon Notes: A Study of the Book of Acts*. 114.

https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/vn_acts/114

This Sermon Notes is brought to you for free and open access by the W.O. Vaught Archive at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Vaught Sermon Notes: A Study of the Book of Acts by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact mortensona@obu.edu.

HOW PAUL EXPLAINED HIS INNOCENCE TO FELIX

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 121
ACTS 24:17-22

Dr. W. O. Vaught, Jr.
Immanuel Baptist Church
Little Rock, Arkansas

ACTS 24:17-22 "Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day. And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter."

Prior to this study we have seen how Paul answered the three charges that had been made against him. He had been charged with disturbing the peace, instigating a revolution, and profaning the temple. Paul had answered all three of these charges. Tertullus had made these accusations but he produced no evidence or witnesses. In a Roman law court evidence had to be produced and witnesses were necessary. Tertullus had produced neither. In Roman law a man was innocent until proven guilty. Until evidence was produced and witnesses gave sworn statements, the one on trial was considered innocent. Now this concept is basic for law and justice. This idea is based on the doctrine of a man's privacy. No laws should ever be made that violate the basic privacy of an individual. Laws should never make it impossible for a man to live in his own privacy.

By the time of this study we are now making, the Jews had become legalistic and many of their religious laws cut deep into individual freedom. On the other hand, Roman law stood for the worth of the individual. Now Paul here told Felix that Tertullus had not presented any evidence concerning the three charges he had made against him. Paul, therefore, was given an opportunity to defend himself.

ACTS 24:17 "Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings." We will now get the facts in the case. Please notice that in making his defense Paul gave no evidence of a guilt complex. He simply stated the facts as they were. Paul is completely objective. Paul had spirituality plus the knowledge of doctrine plus the knowledge of Roman law. Paul presented the facts so completely and thoroughly that never again will Felix consider the idea of Paul's guilt. From henceforth about all Felix will do will be to try to discover how to dispose of Paul or how to get a bribe from him.

This part of the Book of the Acts is actually unique for it presents a tremendous amount of doctrine blended with history not found anywhere else in the Word of God.

Now here in verse 17 Paul reminded Felix that he had been absent from Jerusalem for many years. He couldn't have had any part in a revolution in Jerusalem for he hadn't been there long enough to organize anything like that. Also Paul pointed out to Felix that instead of defaming the temple, he had demonstrated a certain patriotism. Paul showed Felix that instead of trying to destroy the Jewish nation, he had been helping them all he could. Paul reminded Felix that he took a large offering to help feed the poor Jews there. (Evidently Felix opened his ears wide when Paul mentioned the large offering, for Felix wanted to get his hands on some of Paul's money.)

Acts 24:26 brings out this point. ACTS 24:26 "He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener and communed with him."

ACTS 24:18 "Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult." The "Certain Jews from Asia" brought out the fact that the accusation against Paul had been brought by these foreign Jews. They were from the province of Asia, which is now Western Turkey, called "Antola." Paul related to Felix how he had taken a vow of purification in the temple. Paul did this to show Felix that he couldn't have done this and have profaned the temple, as Tertullus had accused him. The word purified is "Anizo" and is in the perfect tense and means he took the vow in the past with the idea that he would go through with it. This verb is in the passive voice and it means Paul allowed people in the temple to minister to him. Paul knew this was contrary to grace, but he made this blunder, but had now rebounded from his mistake and was back in fellowship with God again.

In passing, please notice the objectivity of Paul at this point. He didn't fall apart, he didn't beat his breast, he didn't cry over spilt milk. Neither did he have an inferiority complex or a guilt complex over his mistake. Paul knew he had done a great and good thing by bringing the offering to Jerusalem for the poor saints, and he also knew he had made a great spiritual blunder by taking the legalistic vow in the temple. But what did he do--cry and fall apart? Did he allow the hatred of the Jews in Jerusalem to upset him? Did he let his own spiritual blunder defeat him for all future time? Certainly not! He took things as they came, turned his case over into the hands of God, and moved on.

Here in this trial we had a weak and immoral judge named Felix, but Felix was operating in the realm of Roman law. Roman law was on Paul's side and this was his hope for a fair trial. So here is another illustration of how the divine institution named the nation put a check on religion and provided a citizen a fair hearing.

(In our modern day many laws have been so manipulated that the criminal is no longer regarded as a criminal, but he is regarded as a psychological case, the victim of environment and the product of a depraved society.) This always happens when a nation becomes subjective, and a nation becomes subjective when Bible doctrine is ignored, (This points up the great importance of a church giving out Bible doctrine. As goes the church, eventually so goes the nation. If the church refuses to give doctrinal truth, eventually the nation will decline and fall.)

An illustration of this principle was the trial of Martin Luther at Worms, and when you read that trial you see total subjectivity. Martin Luther wanted to stay in the church and change the church, but in that unjust trial he was forced out and when you read the proceedings of that trial you are shocked and astounded. Let each of us determine that we will not lose our objectivity, but will live by the truth of Bible doctrine. When we have darkened souls that are clogged with scar tissue and we cannot breathe in Bible doctrine, we lose our objectivity and become subjective. This always leads to false spirituality.

In verse 18 Paul stated the case, but there was no breast beating, no pangs of regret, no tears. He knew he had made a blunder by taking that vow, but that mistake was behind him and he was facing the future with confidence. As much as any verse in the New Testament this verse lets us see the inner life of Paul, and helps us realize how he lived relaxed in his mental attitude as he lived daily in fellowship with his Lord.

This verse shows us that Paul was a well-adjusted individual. The issue before Roman law was not the fact that Paul made a spiritual blunder by taking a legalistic vow. Rome didn't care anything about that. Paul had entered the temple in Jerusalem quietly had taken that vow, didn't violate any law and didn't cause a riot. Now this is what Paul stated in verse 18. Paul didn't rush into the temple and start preaching the grace of God. He didn't attempt to overthrow Judaism. Paul claimed that he had not disturbed the peace in the temple. He had not participated in a revolution. He was not involved in mob action and was not guilty of civil disobedience. Paul stuck with the facts in the case, and in this way he wiped out all the criticism brought against him. Objective Roman law saw the facts and cleared Paul.

ACTS 24:19 "Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me." "Who" referred to those Asian Jews who accused Paul of starting a riot. If they really wanted to prove that Paul started a riot they should have been present to witness to this fact. Paul said, "It keeps on being necessary for them to have been here." So a corrected translation here is--"Who from among the Asian Jews, it keeps on being necessary for them to have been here and to witness against me if they have any facts against me." Roman law required witnesses and Paul reminded them that they had produced no witnesses against him. The "if" here is a fourth class condition and means "They wish they did have something against me so they could accuse me, but they don't." Paul, in other words, was saying this--
 "Roman law demands witnesses. These Asian Jews have accused me, but they are not here as witnesses. I stand here and witness to the truth that their accusation against me is not based on truth."

Keep in mind that Tertullus, in his accusation against Paul, never mentioned what happened when Paul was tried by the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. In that Jewish trial you remember they broke out into a heated controversy over the resurrection of Christ and Paul's case was covered up in the hassle. The Sanhedrin had actually broken up in a riot and Paul was rescued by the Roman officer or they would have killed him. But they never mentioned any of this to Felix.

ACTS 24:21 "Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day." When Paul made this brilliant defense, Tertullus must have stood there amazed at the fact that Paul knew how to defend himself so well. Paul had presented an airtight case and Tertullus knew that he had. Now when Paul mentioned the word "Except" evidently there was a gleam in the eye of Tertullus, for he thought there might be one gleam of hope that some factual evidence might be gleaned against Paul.

But his hope did not last long. Paul brought up the matter of the resurrection of the dead and reminded Felix that this was the real reason for the hatred to the Jews for him. When Paul mentioned the resurrection of the dead at once Felix realized this was a matter of their religion and not a matter of Roman law. The resurrection was something for the Jews to worry about and had nothing to do with Roman justice.

ACTS 24:22 "And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter." The word "deferred them" really means that Felix adjourned the meeting. Lysias never did come down to bring any accusation against Paul, in fact, no one ever expected him to do so.

Therefore, as far as Tertullus was concerned and the other Jewish accusers were concerned, the trial was over. But Felix continued to hold Paul in jail, expecting a bribe from him.