

## GOOD EGGS

*Series in Acts: Advancing the Gospel*

**Acts 24:1-27**

Chadron Berean Church

It's plain to see that there is growing antagonism against Christianity in our culture today. Christians are sometimes portrayed as a threat to public welfare. In extreme cases, Christians are viewed as outdated, self-righteous bigots. Biblical truth is labeled as hate speech. Just yesterday I happened to see an article where a preacher, thankfully, had his charges dropped for offending and upsetting the public with biblical truth. How do we respond to the false portrayals and what should we be doing to counter these accusations? How do we live in a culture like this? That's where we're going in the discussion this morning as we pick up our study in Acts 24. We haven't talked about it much yet, but one of the main purposes of the book of Acts in its day was to defend Christianity against the charge that it is a threat to the Roman Empire and social order. That purpose is still relevant today.

I remind us that last time in Acts Paul was arrested on false charges that he had brought a Gentile (non-Jew) into the temple area beyond the sorge, a wall that Gentiles could not cross. Paul's trial last week before the commander, Claudius Lysias, and the Jewish Council resulted in a stalemate and a plot to assassinate Paul. Being a Roman citizen, Claudius then transferred him to Governor Felix in Caesarea. Caesarea is a Roman city on the Mediterranean coast, northwest of Jerusalem.

*24 Now after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges against Paul to the governor. 2 After Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began accusing him, saying to the governor, "Since we have attained great peace through you, and since reforms are being carried out for this nation by your foresight, 3 we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. 4 But, that I may not weary you further, I beg you to grant us a brief hearing, by your kindness. 5 For we have found this man a public menace and one who stirs up dissensions among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. 6 And he even tried to desecrate the temple, so indeed we arrested him. 8 By interrogating him yourself concerning all these matters, you will be able to ascertain the things of which we are accusing him." 9 The Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so.*

### I. PAUL'S ACCUSATION BEFORE FELIX. (VV. 24:1-9)

So while the last trial was very religious in nature, this is a **civil, Roman trial** and thus, the responses are going to be very different. The Jewish leaders, eager to end Paul's life and ministry, appoint **Tertullus** as their attorney. Tertullus appears to be a Hellenistic Jew. He has a Greek name, speaks Greek, but appears to have Jewish background by the way he identifies with

the Council in their arrest of Paul (v. 6, “we seized,” “we arrested”). It is apparent the Council is relying on his knowledge of the complex Roman law and his skillful rhetoric to defend them.

In accordance with standard procedure, the trial begins with a prosecution, including **flattery** followed by **charges**. It’s been said that if you want to know who your worst enemies are, just look for whoever flatters you. Tacitus said, “*Flatterers are the worst of enemies.*” Solomon, in **Proverbs 26:28** said, “*a flattering mouth works ruin.*” Compliments, encouragement, and respect are good, but not flattery. And Paul said in **1 Thessalonians 2:1-6** that he avoided flattering speech in his defense of the gospel. Not Tertullus. Tertullus flatters his Felix by talking about how **peaceful** it is under Felix and how **thankful** they are for him and his **reforms**... when everyone knows the Jews can’t stand this guy. They can’t stand Rome, period. But it’s all part of the political games, isn’t it?

As you read through Tertullus’ accusation, it’s helpful to remember that **rebellion** and organized resistance by Jewish **Zealots**, revolutionaries against Rome, is fomenting in the background. Zealots were no doubt reading the prophet Daniel and understood that Rome was the last Gentile kingdom predicted before Messiah came. So with the Messianic expectation at fever pitch, by their resistance and hopeful overthrow of the Roman regime, I think they were hoping to move the hand of God a bit and usher in the Messianic kingdom. While Felix had put down several threats and revolts like that of the Egyptian false prophet that Claudius presumed Paul to be in 21:38, his rule was not peaceful. Actually, the entire Pax Romana doesn’t seem to be all that peaceful. It was a sword to the throat type of “peace.” History reveals that Felix was a heavy-handed ruler. He was violent, greedy, and over-reactive, causing more tension between the Jews and the Romans than any other governor. This eventually fomented into the **Roman-Jewish Wars/Revolts** (Wars of the Jews) about ten years later (66-73 A.D.) when the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. like Jesus prophesied.

When you understand the tension building in the background, it helps you understand the severity of the **3 charges** Tertullus brings against Paul. The **first charge** is **treason**. Tertullus calls him a **pest** (*loimon*). To us that’s a little strange, but Felix would’ve understood Paul to be a revolutionary pest who infects people with his plague.<sup>1</sup> In other words, Paul is a threat to the Empire and harmful to society. This is a similar charge to that which Paul was accused of in Thessalonica. He was accused of being an **agitator** – a disruptor of civil peace. Similar charges were brought against Jesus (Luke 1-2, 5) and against Christians today. But Tertullus brings this charge because if there was one thing Roman emperors wanted most, and Roman governors must maintain to please the emperors, it was peace. They could not put up with any sort of insurrection, riot, or chaos. Starting a civil disturbance was a capital crime.

The **second charge** is that of **religious heresy**. Tertullus claims he is a **ringleader** of a **sect** (GK, *hairesis*). In referring to Christianity as a sect, he is doing two things that are noteworthy: 1) if Christianity is a new sect/religion, it is illegal because new religions had to be approved by Rome and 2) the concept of a sect just leaves a bad taste in your mouth. Sects, even if faithful to God, are usually viewed as divisive and heretical in nature, thus being disruptive to society. The

poor taste is amplified by Tertullus's use of the terms "**ringleader**" and "**Nazarene**". Ringleader makes you think of a secret mob or group like the Zealots, and Nazarene was used derogatorily because like John 1:46 says, nothing good was said to have come out of Nazareth. Essentially, Tertullus does a good job of making Christianity look like a specific, localized problem that needs to be addressed before it continues to spread. Paul, the ringleader, is a good place to start.

Tertullus' use of labels – **pest, Nazarene, ringleader, sect** – all remind me of persecutions of the past. Whenever a government or people group wants to do away with another people group, they start labeling them in ways that devalue their dignity and make their destruction reasonable to the rest of the public. In WWII they called that Jews, cockroaches. Today they call babies fetuses or parasites. Labels can be powerful weapons and something to watch out for in a culture that views Christians as a threat. What you're going to notice in Paul's defense is that he refuses to do the same. He doesn't return insult for insult (1 Peter 2:15, 20; 3:8-12).

The **third charge** is **desecrating the temple**. Really, this is the original charge blurted out in the temple. This whole thing began with the false claim that Paul desecrated the temple being bringing a Gentile (Trophimus) into the temple beyond the partition. Because it was false and there was no evidence for it, Tertullus would've liked to dismiss this charge altogether, but nevertheless must address it since it's the reason they are there. Notice how he softens the charge. Instead of saying Paul did desecrate the temple, he says, "*he even **tried to desecrate the temple.***" In all, these charges are **painting Paul as a threat to Roman peace and an enemy of the public**.

## II. PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE FELIX. (VV. 10-21)

*10 And when the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded: "Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense, 11 since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. 12 And neither in the temple did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city itself. 13 Nor can they prove to you the things of which they now accuse me. 14 But I confess this to you, that in accordance with the Way, which they call a sect, I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and is written in the Prophets; 15 having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. 16 In view of this I also do my best to maintain a blameless conscience both before God and before other people, always. 17 Now after several years I came to bring charitable gifts to my nation and to present offerings, 18 in which they found me occupied in the temple, having been purified, without any crowd or uproar. But there were some Jews from Asia— 19 who ought to have been present before you and to have been bringing charges, if they should have anything against me. 20 Or else have these men themselves declare what violation they discovered when I stood before the Council, 21 other than in regard to this one declaration which I shouted while standing among them, 'For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today!'"*

So Paul opens with respect and facts, not flattery. He points out that since Felix has been governor for some time now, he has a pretty good grasp on the corruption going on and what's really happening with Christianity. Then he responds to each of the 3 charges. As for the **first charge of treason**, Paul was not in Jerusalem long enough to stir up any sort of insurrection. He was in Jerusalem to **worship**, not cause trouble. Besides that, he was only there for only **12 days**, 5 of which were spent in protective custody. Even if he wanted to, to claim he had organized an insurrection in such short order is ludicrous. Instead of causing trouble, he went out of his *not* to offend anyone or cause a stir. He didn't gather any crowds or even carry on a discussion.

As for the **second charge of sectarianism**, or heresy, Paul explains that while he is a leader of **The Way** (a more favorable, self-designated label for Christianity; contra Nazarene), it is not a cult or sect. Paul explains that it is simply the fulfillment of the Jewish promises going back to Abraham. Rather than a new sect, it is within the already established fold of Judaism as an extension or fulfillment of the Jewish beliefs in the Law and Prophets. Therefore, Paul can say, "*If there's one thing I am **guilty of (confess, admit)**, it's being a faithful Jew to the God of their fathers.*" And like an athlete working to get better and better and push himself, Paul **strives (does his best)** to keep a **clear conscience before God and men**.

In response to the **third charge of temple desecration**, in verses 17-21 he explains that he did just the opposite. Rather than *profaning* the temple, he *purified* himself so as not to cause any offense, bringing **offerings** as part of his vow. Rather than increasing the tension between Jew and Gentile, he brought a financial **gift (alms)** from the Gentiles for Jewish people in need, thus supporting the nation of Israel. He bent over backwards in his pursuit to live at peace with all men and foster peace. Surely a Roman governor couldn't ask for a better citizen than this!<sup>2</sup>

In closing, he stiffens his defense by noting the **absence of his accusers**. Remember the Jews from Ephesus who claimed he brought a Gentile into the temple? Where are they? It was serious business under Roman law to not only make a false charge, but also to fail to testify. The implication is their charge was false and they know it. That's why they aren't here! They are in the wrong, not Paul. In verse 21 Paul also makes it clear that the accusations against him are not politically, but **theologically driven**. He is on trial for doctrinal matters, something the governor could care less about. This is a non-issue for Felix. In short, Paul has defended not only himself, but Christianity. It is not a mystery religion or a dangerous, anti-government sect (Rom. 13). If Rome wasn't rejecting the Jews, they shouldn't reject Christianity. Christianity produces good and productive citizens. Next, we see Felix's response... or lack of.

### III. PAUL'S PROLONGED WITNESS BEFORE FELIX. (VV. 22-27)

*22 But Felix, having quite accurate knowledge about the Way, adjourned them, saying, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case." 23 He gave orders to the centurion for Paul to be kept in custody and yet have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from providing for his needs. 24 Now some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla his wife, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. 25 But as he*

*was discussing righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and responded, "Go away for now, and when I have an opportunity, I will summon you." 26 At the same time he was also hoping that money would be given to him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and talk with him. 27 But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul imprisoned.*

So Felix, habitual procrastinator that he is, puts off making a decision for political expediency, saying that he will wait for Lysias to come and talk to him in person. We have no record of him coming. Whether Felix ever asked Lysias to come or not is questionable based on his character and motives to please the Jews. He needs the Jews to maintain order and they need him to maintain their positions of power. He is happy to leave Paul in prison until the Jews forget about the whole situation and he can sneak Paul away in the night.

But even while Paul appears to be a political pawn, Luke is showing us that in the sovereign hands of God, Paul is being given the **opportunity to present the gospel to the highest social levels, defend the reasonableness of Christianity, and that he does so boldly.** It's a fulfillment of Jesus' words that His disciples would stand before kings and governors for His name's sake (Luke 21:12-15). It also shows us that while a Christian can be chained, the gospel can never be (2 Tim. 2:9). It only made the gospel advance in different ways. Paul's imprisonment was not the end of his missionary work, nor the suspension of it, but continuation of it in different ways. Paul had a very effective jail ministry!

After some time, Paul stands before **Felix** and his curious wife **Drusilla**. Drusilla is described by Luke as a **Jewess**. Her history is really fascinating. As a member of the Herod dynasty, her Jewishness is nominal. Her grandfather was **Herod the Great** who tried to kill baby Jesus. His son, **Herod Antipas** killed John the Baptist and was there for Jesus' trial. He was replaced by his brother and Drusilla's father, **Herod Agrippa I**, who arrested Peter and killed James and was eventually eaten by worms in Caesarea for not giving God due glory. So, she has quite a unique history with Judaism and Christianity. It's no wonder she's curious and Felix seeks her expertise.

History tells us she was a power-hungry individual. First, she married a Syrian king named Azizus. But then historian Josephus says that Felix wooed her into marrying him, thus becoming his 3<sup>rd</sup> wife and causing her to "*transgress the law of her forefathers' through adultery.*" I guess we could say that **righteousness, self-control, and future judgement to come** are subjects that Felix and Drusilla needed to hear about. Paul's gospel presentation seems to be treading on thin ice when he speaks of these 3 aspects of **faith in Christ**. By speaking of **righteousness**, no doubt he spoke of God's perfect righteousness and our need of it for justification - made possible by faith in Jesus Christ. **Self-control** has to do with living out salvation in righteousness. And the **judgment to come** is why it matters - rewards for believers or consequences in hell for non-believers. All men, great and small - even the Felix's of the world - are going to stand before God's throne and give an account. This truth leaves Felix trembling, but rather than respond to the gospel in faith, he procrastinates again by dismissing Paul.

Felix delayed, and while he visited Paul for 2 years, hoping for a **bribe**, there is no evidence he responded in faith to the gospel, and many will end up just like him. They heard about sin and trembled but never came to Christ. He is a good picture of what not to do. Don't procrastinate. If the Spirit is convicting you of your sin and need of a Savior, go to Him in prayer and confess your sin and ask Him to save you and give you new life in Christ. That's why the Bible says, *"Today is the day of salvation."* And, *"Today if you hear His voice, don't harden your hearts."* Receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior today. If you say, *"No, I'll wait. I want to keep living my life without Him,"* remember your heart will only get harder, and you aren't promised tomorrow.

But in our closing thoughts this morning, I want us to concentrate on how Paul's defense provides us with an excellent example of how as Christians we should live in a culture viewing Christianity as a threat. While they called Paul a pest, Paul let his life do the talking. He wasn't a pest. He was a **good, productive citizen**. He was a blessing to society. Rather than a pest, Felix has to be thinking, *"This is just the kind of citizen we're looking for. He's a good egg!"* He is generous. He has integrity. He's moral. He's sensitive to cultural differences. He strives (does his best) to live with a clear conscience before God and men. That means he keeps short accounts. He's a productive member of society. He's just a good citizen. He's a good egg. I heard that phrase "they're a good egg" earlier this week and thought it was memorable. You can't force the culture to change but you can be a good egg and demonstrate why it needs too by your biblical living.

### **Be a good egg.**

When you think of the word good, you hardly think of anything. It's a broadly used, over-used term. But it comes into greater focus when you say that God is good. You have to define good. Good and **goodness**, as a fruit of the Spirit, can be defined as a **God-honoring benevolent character the is what it is and does what it does for the benefit of others**. Goodness is a life-giving sweetener that makes things better and manifests itself in what it is and what it does. And I think that if we want to continue to disprove the "threat" of Christianity, we have to do three things related to goodness. This is what it looks like to be a good egg:

1. **Be good.** Morally speaking, be a good person. Be upright and righteous (humbly). Have integrity. Tell the truth. Don't lie. Don't steal. Love your wife. Love your children. Work hard and don't cut corners in your work. War against sin in your life. Walk with God. You know, people need to see genuine Christians walk with God and Titus 2 says we adorn the gospel and beautify the Word of God when we live it out. Kind of like how we're going to adorn our church – decorate and beautify our church with Christmas decorations after the service – so we adorn/beautify/make attractive the truth by living it out. There is a **direct link between immorality and misery or morality and human welfare/flourishing**.<sup>3</sup> See, we aren't just good for goodness's sake (like the Christmas song says). We want to support what is good and do good to make our community a better place to live. That means by being good, being moral, that whoever we are, wherever we are, we can make things better by being different. We can sweeten up whatever environment we are in. We want to strive to be better fathers, mothers, children, employees, bosses, students, teachers, etc. And when you do

that, it doesn't matter what people say about us. Our walk and our talk defend us and we silence the slanderers. But we also create an environment where people are more open to the gospel. Darrell Bock writes, *"In today's world, where the moral compass has lost its magnetism, such a life stands in contrast to that of may. This contrast, if lived out in an effective, engaging manner, can be attractive when people sense the chaos of the alternative lifestyle that a lack of morals produces. No state should fear this."*

2. **Do good.** Ethically speaking. Do good to others. Serve others. Titus says it several times that we should be zealous for good deeds. Helping others. **Proverbs 11:10** says, *"When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices."* You know, we never want to be this church that lives under a rock. We want to be involved in our community in various ways. We want our mayor and city council and neighbors to say, *"Chadron and the surrounding villages are a much better place to live because of Chadron Berean Church."* That means we have to look for or ask about ways we can serve our community – kind of like making 400 sandwiches for firefighters last year or service projects through our Care Ministry.
3. **Support what is good.** Unabashedly. Without shame. With reason. With composure. With compassion. You know, what made our country great in the past was our good, Judeo-Christian values. The implication is that we have left those values and suffered for it and need to get back to it. I've had a lot of difficulty expressing my thought on this issue because I don't want to come across as legalistic, but ever since the spring of 2020 I've had it in my mind that as Christians we need to learn to **champion morality** both by creatively **educating/helping people understand why biblical morality is a good thing** and not a threat to their personal well-being. That when God says, *"be holy, for I am holy,"* He's not commanding this to make life boring and steal our fun. He is good and wants what's best for us. He want to see us flourish and really live. In seeing the goodness of God's ways, they might be drawn to the gospel.

You know, we've never been in a position like we're in today with such rampant immorality and alternative lifestyles. And a lot of people, believers and nonbeliever, are waking up to the harmful effects it's having on society. For example, many people today look at marriage as shackling their freedom. They are fighting today against traditional, biblical marriage and roles. However, abandonment of biblical marriage is probably the number one reason for so much poverty and social disorder. In his book *We Will Not Be Silenced*, Erwin Lutzer points to Dr. Dalrymple's work in India. He says that *"People from the Indian subcontinent... get married, stay together, get an education, and work hard so most are not part of the underclass."* He continues, *"The connection between this loosening [of morals] and the misery of my patients is so obvious that it requires considerable intellectual sophistication (and dishonesty) to be able to deny it. The climate of moral, cultural, and intellectual relativism [the idea that there is no morals and anything goes] – a relativism that began as a mere fashionable plaything for intellectuals – has been successfully communicated to those least able to resist its devastating practical effects."*<sup>4</sup>

Now, I'm a middle-of-nowhere pastor with little influence and still thinking through this concept, but I would challenge the global church to find creative ways to promote/champion morality in a positive tone and with clear thinking and facts. Here are two examples I've come across: 1) the **National Fatherhood Initiative**, dedicated to helping people understand the unfortunate affects that a fatherless home has on society, and 2) an organization called **Fight the New Drug**, dedicated to helping people understand the harmful affects of pornography on men and women and how to win over it.<sup>5</sup> While evil has its slogans, "*My body, my choice.*" Fight the New Durg has a slogan, "*Porn Kills Love.*"<sup>6</sup> I think it's genius.

My point is this: the fruit of the spirit is goodness. That means being good and doing good, supporting what is good with a kind, honest, benevolent heart towards others. In so doing, we create an inviting and attractive environment to engage people with the gospel and advance the gospel. Whoever we are and wherever we go, we want to create an environment where people wonder, "*I don't much about those Bereans, but they are strange in a good way. They're good eggs. I want to know what makes them so different.*"

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<sup>1</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 690.

<sup>2</sup> Bryan Clark, *Daring to Be the Church Series: Defensible Behavior*, [http://s3.amazonaws.com/LBC-Sermons/2022-02-13\\_Transcript\\_DaringToBeTheChurch\\_DefensibleBehavior.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/LBC-Sermons/2022-02-13_Transcript_DaringToBeTheChurch_DefensibleBehavior.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Erwin Lutzer, *We Will Not Be Silenced* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.fatherhood.org/father-absence-statistic>

<sup>6</sup> <https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-can-negatively-impact-love-and-intimacy/>