

March 13, 2005

“Being Too Easily Pleased” Acts 24:1-27

FCF: Temptation to put Christ off (and danger)

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because what we seek is found in Christ alone,
(magnet) we must embrace the Gospel message – and not put it off.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

For anyone familiar with Civil War history, the name “George McClellan,” brings to mind a man with great abilities in organization but with great tendencies towards hesitation as well. His reluctance to attack, his unwillingness to seize opportunities have become the stuff of legend. Abraham Lincoln once described him as a man who suffered from “the slows” and once, in response to a request for horses to replace his mounts now too fatigued, Lincoln then asked just what it was they could possibly be so fatigued from.

Let me throw a question your way. Is it possible that such hesitation can take place not just on the battlefield but in the most significant and vital areas of life?

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 24:1-27

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Quite a few of you are familiar not only with C.S. Lewis but also of my fondness of his writings – the fantasy world of Narnia, the letters of Screwtape to Wormwood, the reflections on pain and grief, his essays probing some of our greatest questions and then poking holes in some of our more foolish answers. One often quoted passage comes from a sermon, “The Weight of Glory” ([READ Lewis quote, The Weight of Glory](#)):

We are halfhearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

It’s quite an image, isn’t it? Glorious creatures made in the image of God with potential and promises held out to us such that if we would but hear them they would take our breath away. Yet somehow we are willing to settle for so much less, so much less.

“*We are far too easily pleased.*” Which is exactly what we see in our text. There’s something for everyone here. Think with me. Paul is on trial before Felix, the Roman governor of Judea. The Jews present their case and say that Paul is guilty of agitating the populace, leading a sect, and desecrating their holy Temple – each one a serious charge. Paul then responds to each charge and sets the record straight. But when the time comes for a ruling to be made, Felix isn’t ready ([READ Acts 24:22-23](#)). It would seem Felix wants to please everyone. And, apparently, to hear more of Paul’s message as well. In his own way, he’s intrigued ([READ Acts 24:24-26](#)). He puts off the case. He’s not ready to deal with it. He doesn’t want to deal with it. But that is a reflection of something far greater for he puts off Christ as well. Felix has heard Paul speak of “faith in Christ Jesus” (verse 24) and all that it involves. And he puts it off.

Like Lewis’ words in “The Weight of Glory,” Felix is too easily satisfied. “Putting off Christ” was the last thing he should have done. The last thing we should do as well. Paul’s message to Felix is broken in three parts – righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment. Let’s look at each one and think through this “putting off” we see.

I. NOT PUTTING OFF RIGHTEOUSNESS

A) What It Is

First, what is the righteousness Paul is speaking of here? Is it a reference to ours or to God’s? In a way, it’s both – His in place of ours. Let me explain. It is a reference

to the past – to something that has already happened, something accomplished by Jesus on the cross once for all, of the way God has made it possible for us to stand in His presence and to know His pleasure. It involves what we might refer to as rags and robes.

1. Felix's rags

The rags were Felix's. As a former slave, in his public governance, he was known for his greed and his cruelty. One ancient historian noted that under his rule the people's unrest increased and ([READ Tacitus quote](#)) "*with savagery and lust he exercised the powers of a king with the disposition of a slave.*" Which makes Tertullus' flattery all the more interesting, if not manipulative. Then there was his personal life. Drusilla was his third wife, a young ravishing beauty he had seduced away from her husband for himself.

2. Christ's robes

And to this man, wearing nothing but rags when it came to righteousness, Paul speaks of another's righteousness that could be his instead – Christ's robes for his rags, Felix's sins placed on Christ, Christ's record transferred to him. This was the core of Paul's message. Listen to these words from a sermon some years before ([READ Acts 13:38-39](#)).

B) *Why It Is Put Off*

This was good news. This is what Felix needed. Why then did he put it off?

1. Felix didn't see his rags

He didn't see his rags for what they were. He didn't see a problem with his public governance or his private life. And even if he did, it was too humbling to admit.

2. Felix didn't want Jesus' robes

Felix doesn't see a problem. And so he doesn't see a need for a solution.

Illustration:

Pride gets in the way. Think of the tsunami relief efforts – India in particular. 8,000 people killed, thousands more injured and displaced, \$1.8 billion in damages. And yet, despite the devastation, despite the outcry of the populace, all foreign aid is refused. The Prime Minister has said they are accepting only "*global sympathy.*" And why? Some speculate it is the image they are trying to project so as to gain a seat on the UN Security Council. Translation – pride. Pride is standing in the way of the assistance they need. They don't see just how real the need is. They are too easily pleased.

Application:

So too was Felix. So too are we. We are too easily pleased, too quick to settle for so little. Think with me as to how willing we are to live out a Christianity that allows us to forgive only those we deem worthy of our forgiveness, to assist only those we deem worthy of our assistance. Who then will we forgive? Who will we assist?

We don't appreciate how ragged our rags are, of how deeply in need of His grace and His mercy we are every moment of every day. We have a just little bitty Savior. A little bitty Savior because we think we have just a little bit of sin and so we have just a little bit of love for others. Ah – we are too easily pleased, too quick to settle for so little.

II. NOT PUTTING OFF SELF-CONTROL

But Paul speaks of "self-control" as well. Righteousness refers to the past. Self-control refers to the present, something Jesus is doing in us even now.

A) *What It Is*

Listen. The wonder of the gospel is that God takes us as we are. As we are. But then He doesn't leave us as He found us. He died, yes, so that we might be forgiven for our sins. And He lives that we might be freed from our sins as well. It's both.

1. What it involves

What Paul is speaking of here has to do with a restraint on our impulses – upon our speech, our actions, even our thoughts. And it is an inner restraint, coming from within.

2. Who it requires

Which clearly though requires some outside help. Self-control does not come naturally to us. It is described as being one of the “fruits of the Spirit” – requiring the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and His continual, ongoing renewing work in our lives.

B) Why It Is Put Off

This is what is being held out to Felix – freedom from the tyranny of his impulses. Remember this is a man whose impulses had led him to the cruelest treatment of his subjects and a lust to conspire to steal another man’s wife. He needs to hear this.

1. The assessment of the problem

But he puts it off. Why would an offer of such “self-control” be put off? For the same reasons “righteousness” is put off. *“I haven’t really got a problem. And if I do, it’s not that bad. I’ve got a handle on it.”* You do? Ask Drusilla’s ex-husband. Ask the families – the widows and orphans – of the people who you ordered to be cut down like animals. He was intrigued enough to listen to Paul. But not enough to go any further.

2. The attractiveness of sin

For those impulses are so strong, so appealing. Listen. The Bible is honest. “The pleasures of sin” are spoken of. They aren’t denied. But they are said to be fleeting, but for a season. That’s the other part of the honesty. Which the impulse won’t admit.

Application:

Again, Felix is far too easily pleased. He is far too ready to settle for so little. And, again, so are we. We hear this offer in the gospel of self-control, of how this too is part of the message of “faith in Christ Jesus” and we dismiss it. We excuse ourselves, settling for thorns instead of fruit. We are content in the wrong things.

Contentment is good. In fact, it’s commanded – to be at rest in our circumstances. But not in our sin. In that there is such a thing as a holy discontentedness – a desire not to settle for things as they are in our hearts, a conviction that God does indeed intend something more for us and it doesn’t involve being tyrannized by our impulses. It involves being freed from them. But we are too easily pleased, too willing to settle.

III. NOT PUTTING OFF THE COMING JUDGMENT

But Felix put this off – righteousness, self-control. And a third thing, the coming judgment, as well. Obviously, this isn’t referring to something taking place in the past or the present but the future – what is yet to happen, what Jesus has yet to do.

A) What It Is

What is Paul speaking of here?

1. Real and personal

Something that is real and personal. It is not vague or nebulous.

Illustration:

Think of the historical origins of the Passover. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt. Moses had told Pharaoh to let God’s people go. Pharaoh did not want to let them go. And so plagues were sent, the last of which would be the Angel of Death striking down the firstborn male in each household. A horrendous thing. But Moses was told to have the Israelites put the blood of a lamb over the doorposts of their homes. And if they did so, the angel would “pass over” them and they would be spared. Hence, “Passover.”

The judgment to come will be something like that. The only ones who will be spared will be those with the blood of the Lamb upon them – those who have transferred hope in their own efforts to His, to Christ's. This is what "faith in Christ Jesus" involves.

2. Eventual and sure

And this judgment is sure. It is a "coming judgment." The timing is unknown. But its coming is certain. Listen to how Paul put this while in Athens (**READ Acts 17:29-31**).

B) *Why It Is Put Off*

But again, we have to ask, "Why would Felix have put this off?"

1. Because of presumption

Likely, because of presumption. An over-inflated view of his importance ("Don't you know who I am?"). An over-inflated of himself ("Surely this doesn't apply to me").

2. Because of delusion

Likely because of presumption. And delusion as well. The idea that the state of things in this world – people living, dying, suffering, sorrowing – is normal. It's what we're used to. But that doesn't make it normal. It's not how things are supposed to be. Nor is it how things will continue to be. It isn't normal. Why else do we feel such a tearing at the death of a loved one? That feeling is right and should clue us in that something is torn.

Application:

But Felix put all this off. He was too easily pleased, too easily satisfied with so little. And so are we. Think of what the coming judgment tells us. Of God's grace and love for us – that Christ would endure the cross that we might be spared. Of the physical suffering. Of the relational abandonment – the Son cut off from the Father. Look at the cross and see how He loves you! Look at how He took on this judgment for you.

And more – look at the cross and see how He values you. Think with me. A wrathless God cannot be a loving God. A father who loves his son hates the lying, the drunkenness, the foolishness he sees in his son. The opposite of love is not hate. It is indifference, apathy. And God is anything but indifferent to us. Our worth to Him, the value we have in His sight is such that He cannot but be moved with passion by us. There is a judgment coming. And Christ, the Passover Lamb, will be the Judge.

CONCLUSION:

Yet Felix requests to see Paul, the gospel is clearly revealed, and he responds by putting it off (**READ Acts 24:25b**). He's saying, "*There would be plenty of time later.*" Really? Felix, haven't you frittered enough of your life away? Can you really have enough time to live a life for God? Why wait any longer? And how do you know that the time is not now? Will you feel this tug again? For that matter, will you live long enough to consider this again? "*There will be plenty of time later.*" How do you know?

I said earlier there's something here for everyone. For the most part, the focus has been on those who've "settled" things with Christ and yet have settled for too little. But some here may not have settled things with Him at all. You know where Felix is. Please hear me. There comes a point when knowledge demands action, when the decision should be put off no more. There comes a point when the doctor's knowledge of a vaccine needs to be acted on – when the disease has struck his family. There comes a point when the counselor's knowledge of relational dynamics needs to be practiced – when his own marriage is on the rocks. Are you with me? There comes a point when it just doesn't make sense to "put Jesus off" anymore. And the point for some is now.

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(magnet) we must embrace the Gospel message – and not put it off.