

Here we can go beyond a limited understanding of the facts and consider a limited understanding of the deeper issues. How does Festus understand what's transpired thus far? (**READ Acts 25:19**). If Festus' words weren't so sad, they'd be comical.

It was of such misperceptions (or lack of perception) Paul spoke earlier in 1 Corinthians (**READ 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:14**). Festus doesn't see these things because he can't see.

2. Christ

But this "certain Jesus," the One of whom he spoke, knows not only the facts, the circumstances, but the issues and the hearts of all involved – motives, desires, affections.

B) Limited Willingness to Act

1. Festus

But Festus can't. He is limited in this deeper understanding. And we would have to say even in his willingness to act. True, he does seem to rate higher than his predecessor, Felix. But he is a politician nonetheless. Not a statesman but a politician – looking out not necessarily for the public good but his personal good. Think back to his change of position on a Jerusalem trial. Likely this is partly why Paul is unwilling to go along with it. If Festus could be swayed in his own court, what might he do back there? At least Felix was a seasoned veteran of the ways of Paul's opponents. Festus was not.

2. Christ

Jesus – the One who knows the heart – was the One in whom Paul was entrusting himself. This One who is committed both to His glory and to our good and had demonstrated that repeatedly through Paul's ministry – He is alone worthy of such trust.

Application:

Now how does the danger of entrusting ourselves to fallen individuals apply to us? Our cry for help is good. It shows humility, dependency outside ourselves. But to whom are we crying? We're "looking for love in all the wrong places" – seeking assurance, security, peace in people that are hopelessly incapable of providing such things. There is no one – absolutely no one who is any more secure a hope than we are. Except One. And He has spoken (**READ Exodus 20:2-3**). No God but God.

CONCLUSION:

Let's be clear. Idolatry is more real, dangerous, and insidious than we think it is. Listen to these words from Psalm 115 (**READ Psalm 115:2-8**). That being said, why then do we tend towards such things, such foolishness – worshipping, serving, depending upon another creature rather than the Creator? Why are we prone to such idol worship?

Positively, we can put it this way. We were made to worship. G. K. Chesterton once said that when we (**READ Chesterton quote**) "*cease to worship God, we do not worship nothing, we worship anything.*" We are worshipping creatures. So why the idols? Because they're ours. We choose them. We make them. Idols are easier. God's ways are not our ways – strength in weakness, greatness in service, patience in trials. Idols are easier – at least at first. Until they begin to take more than they could ever give.

Which brings us back to what we were made for. Or, rather, who – no God but God. Or, as we sung earlier from the psalm (**READ "Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah"**):

*Hallelujah, praise Jehovah, O my soul, Jehovah praise;
I will sing the glorious praise of my God through all my days.
Put no confidence in princes, nor for help on man depend;
He shall die, to dust returning, and his purposes shall end.*

No God but God. No God but God.

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Because God alone is our sure help,
(anchor) we must place our trust in Him.

I. TRUSTING NOT IN ONE WHO IS FINITE

Think with me as to the limitations of the state. Paul has no desire to place his trust in those who are finite, in those who are hemmed in by their creaturely limitations.

A) *Limited Ability to Act*

1. Festus

Such limitations affect the ability to act, to take initiative, to make things happen. Think of Festus. We know nothing of his career up to this point and precious little beyond it for he died only two years after these events. Here he could only do so much. Once Paul made his appeal, Festus' hands were tied. He could not convict Paul without running afoul of Rome. Yet he could not release him without running afoul of Jerusalem.

2. Christ

There's only so much he could do. But not so the One on whom Paul was really depending. Remember what we saw a few weeks ago – the promise the Lord Jesus made to Paul not long after all this began (**READ Acts 23:11**). Festus is finite in what he can do. Jesus is not. Paul and every circumstance surrounding him was in the Lord's hands.

B) *Limited Knowledge of the Facts*

1. Festus

Festus suffered from a limited ability to act. And a limited knowledge of the facts as well. Thus, he needed to take advantage of Agrippa's presence. Herod Agrippa II was known as an expert in Jewish customs and conflicts, well versed in the Hebrew Scriptures. That the subject of Paul came up between them was hardly a surprise.

2. Christ

Why? Again, there were gaps in what Festus knew, gaps that had to be filled. And those gaps limited the help he could be to Paul. But again, not so the One on whom Paul was really depending. The Lord Jesus, the Son of God, the Exalted One, risen, ruling, and reigning over all things knows all the facts. Nothing is hidden from Him.

He and He alone is worthy of our trust. He and He alone. Think with me. Even if Festus had been a Christian, Paul would have been wrong to have depended upon him.

Application:

Which brings us back to the question of trust. Look, we rightfully remember and honor the early Christians who refused to bow to Caesar and faced the lions. But then we do the same thing they refused to do. "How?" you ask. We look to Washington, Nashville, or city hall for the solutions. Not that government has no role but we need to be clear on what it should be. We must never give the state the place due to God alone.

But it doesn't stop with the state. This crippling dependence flows into other relationships too. We would tell one another never to worship another person no matter how great they were. But then we do that very thing. "How?" you ask. By allowing our security to be based on the opinions of others and fulfilling their expectations. By making decisions based on what others will think. We think of idols as being limited to money, possessions, sex, and fame. But they can be friends and family too. And the true and living God says (**READ Exodus 20:2-3**). No God but God. No God but God.

II. TRUSTING NOT IN ONE WHO IS FALLEN

And so Paul has no desire to place his trust in one who is finite. Or one who is fallen, those hemmed in not only by their creaturely but by their sinful limitations.

A) *Limited Understanding of the Issues*

1. Festus

April 10, 2005

“No God But God”
Acts 25:1-22

FCF: Trusting too much in others to help

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Because God alone is our sure help,
(anchor) we must place our trust in Him.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

There are few phone numbers everyone should know – the emergency “911,” for example. Of course, just because you know it doesn’t mean you should call it. I remember hearing a few years ago of Chicago residents using it so frequently (and so frivolously) that the city had to add a second number. You just shouldn’t call 911 for the cat in the tree, directions to the new mall, the weather forecast, or the sports scores.

That would constitute going to the wrong place for the help we need. They might be able to help but there’s someone better suited for the job. And that happens. But so too does this – going to a place for the help we need that really can’t help us at all.

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 25:1-22

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Americans are frustrated with their government. Many say they have “*little confidence in Washington*” to solve the nation’s problems. Few say they “*trust Congress to do what is right*” most of the time. Others – often described as “libertarians” – then go so far to say government in and of itself is actually a bad thing. Now that’s a dangerous position. For the Scriptures teach that government was ordained by God Himself. Thus it would seem we should have a rather high and not a low esteem of such an institution.

But the opposing view can be equally as dangerous – what could be called the “statist” position. Here many believe the role of the state is to provide for its people, that the individual must surrender certain rights, privileges, and responsibilities to the state in exchange for certain guarantees. But here too, there is a problem with such a position. For while the Scriptures make clear God purposely ordained the civil authorities – specifically to promote justice and restrain evil – theirs is to be but a limited power.

Clearly a balance is in order, a balance we see reflected in Acts 25. Let’s review where we are. At the end of Paul’s third missionary journey, he returns to Jerusalem. Events take him to the Temple where he is accosted by the Jews and arrested by the Romans. From there he is taken to Caesarea where he is tried before the governor, Felix. Felix delays a decision and Paul remains in prison for two years – at the end of which Felix is relieved and Festus takes his place. Festus, wanting to make contact with the local officials, visits the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. Though refusing their request to bring Paul down for another trial, he agrees to hear them in Caesarea. There the charges are repeated and Paul’s defense remains firm. Festus then, wanting to get in good with the Jews, suggests that this now be taken up in Jerusalem. Paul, recognizing the danger of this, invokes his rights as a Roman citizen and appeals his case to Rome. Festus, no doubt, is glad to be rid of the case. But he still had to prepare a report and for this he needed some help which came in the form of Agrippa, the king of northern Palestine.

The lessons of all this can be summed up succinctly. In regards to the state (again, it being God’s institution), one’s citizenship brings with it certain rights. Having said that, we have no assurances. For this God-ordained institution is run by fallen men and women. Which brings me to this. The state may be a help. But God alone is our sure help. And because of that, we must place the weight of our trust in Him.