

Our Contributors.

Paul and Felix.

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ACTS XXIV, 24-7.

We have here set before us three persons—Paul the great Apostle, Felix the Roman governor, and Drusilla, his so-called wife. Paul and Felix all but wholly engage our attention. We are told of Drusilla, only that she was present at the meeting here mentioned, and that she was a Jewess, and the wife of Felix. Let us, therefore, in our further meditations on this passage, direct our attention mainly to Paul and Felix.

First. Let us consider the reason of their meeting. It was the subject of religion. We are told in the 24th verse, that when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Many think that he did so, merely to gratify the curiosity of Drusilla who, as I have already said, was a Jewess. It may be so, but he may have been moved also by his own curiosity, though he was a heathen. We are told that certain Athenian philosophers who were heathens, brought Paul to Mars' hill, saying: 'May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears; we would know therefore what these things mean.' (Acts 17: 19, 20.)

Second. Let us consider the manner of Paul's preaching on this occasion. We are told that he "reasoned." He did not use the Scripture in support of what he said. It would have been altogether unnecessary for him to have done so. Felix was a heathen, as I have already said, and, therefore, did not acknowledge the authority of Scripture in religion. Yea, very probably, he knew nothing about it. Paul, therefore, spoke in a manner which Felix could understand. He spoke, no doubt, of the works of nature. In his Epistle to the Romans, he says: "The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead." Of course, he would address himself to his conscience which, as we shall presently see, was not yet dead. In the same manner, he preached to the heathen Athenians and Lystrans. But when he preached to Jews, he made great use of the Scripture, for example, at Antioch, in Pisidia, and several other places mentioned in the book of Acts.

Let those who preach the Gospel learn from what I have just stated, to adapt their manner of speaking to the capacities of their hearers. It is utterly useless to preach in what is, really, an unknown tongue, like the Latin in the prayers of the Roman Church. It is said that the common people heard Christ gladly. They would not have done so, if He had not spoken plainly.

Judging from the life of Drusilla, she was, though a Jewess, perhaps, about as ignorant of "the faith in Christ" as was Felix, and, therefore, Paul's manner of preaching was as suitable for her, as for Felix. Many professing Christians, at the present day, are extremely ignorant of "the faith in Christ."

Third. Let us now consider the subjects of Paul's preaching, or "reasoning," as it is here expressed. They were "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." Let us take them in their order. The first was

"righteousness," uniformity to the law of uprightness, doing to others, as we would have them do to us. Paul did not, in one sense, preach personally to Felix, that is, he did not directly characterize him as guilty of the opposite sin. He preached the truth clearly, leaving it to Felix to lay to heart what he had said. In another sense, he preached personally. He directly attacked sins of which both he and Drusilla were guilty. Felix was a most unrighteous man. If he only procured power, or money, he was utterly indifferent as to how he did so. Paul was not like some preachers who, in order not to displease their hearers, carefully refrain from attacking sins of which they are known to be guilty, but most vigorously assail sins of those of which there is not one in the place who commits them.

The second subject of which Paul "reasoned," was "temperance," specially, the sin of impurity. It was one equally applicable to Felix and Drusilla. They were living together as husband and wife, but they were not really married. Drusilla was a daughter of the Herod who was eaten of worms, a beautiful woman, but an utter disgrace to her sex. She was married to Azizus the king of the Emesenes, who, for the sake of the alliance, submitted to be circumcised. Felix induced her to leave him and be married to himself, which was contrary to the law of Moses to which she, as a member of the Jewish Church, professed obedience.

The third and last subject of which Paul "reasoned," was "judgment to come." But for that, what he said on the other subjects would, most likely, have had no effect on Felix. He said, in effect, to Felix what he said to the Athenians on Mars' Hill; God hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained. He would show that God is infinitely holy, that he cannot but be so. He would show that the very least sin is hateful to him, that he cannot look on it even with indifference. He would tell him that at the day of judgment, the sentence of God's eternal wrath shall be passed on all the ungodly.

Fourth. Let us now consider the effect of Paul's preaching on Felix. "He trembled." Such preaching was a perfectly new thing to him. Conscience said that not one word of it could successfully be gainsaid, that he was guilty of the sins against which the Apostle had spoken, and, therefore, worthy of the wrath and curse of God for ever. His trembling was, for the present, a good sign. Suppose we saw a person who had fallen into the water, taken out, to all appearance, dead. By and by, he makes motions which are caused by suffering. We would rejoice at it, for it would prove that he was alive. The dead suffer not. So it was then with Felix. His conscience was not dead. Therefore, to human view, his case was not an utterly hopeless one. "While there is life, there is hope."

"While the lamp holds on to burn,
The greatest sinner may return."

Whether his goodness proved as the morning cloud, and as the early dew, we shall presently see.

There is no mention of Drusilla having trembled. It is not likely that she did. She seems to have been, though a Jewess, more hardened than Felix, a heathen, was. What

she heard Paul say, seems, to use a homely expression, to have gone in at one ear, and out at the other.

Fifth. Let us now consider how Felix treated Paul's preaching. He answered: "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." He was like the Athenians who, when they heard Paul preach on Mars' Hill about the resurrection of the dead, answered: "We will hear thee again of this matter." Conscience showed him too much truth in what he had heard the Apostle say, for him to "mock." But he could not bring his mind to give up his unrighteousness, and to part with Drusilla. He knew that he must do both, or perish for ever. So he chose a middle course between accepting Paul's teaching, and openly rejecting it.

Felix promised to send again for Paul, when his official duties would allow him to do so. It is usually quoted as saying: "a more convenient season." But, according to the original, he said simply; "a convenient season," meaning that the present was not a suitable one. Thus, his conscience was dying. He desired to make the Apostle believe that he would send for him to speak with him about the salvation of his soul. But he had no such intention. His trembling amounted to nothing. He kept his promise to send again for Paul. He sent often for him. He was not like the Athenian philosophers of whom I have already spoken, who heard Paul only once. (Acts 17: 33.) But he sent for him only in the hope of being paid by him, or his friends, to set him free. He knew that Paul deserved no punishment, and, therefore, he had no right to keep him in prison. But he cared not, provided he could only make money by him. Had Paul given him for his freedom, the money which he had brought with him for the relief of the saints at Jerusalem, and Felix had known that, he would have found no fault with him. Very probably, he had, for payment, set some vile wretches at liberty. The salvation of his soul was of infinitely greater importance to him than the gold which perishes. He had many "convenient seasons" for speaking with Paul about it. But he had lost all interest in it. How very different was the trembling of Paul and the Philippian jailer, from that of Felix! They accepted Christ as their Saviour, and found "joy and peace in believing."

Felix does not seem to have said one word to Paul about his soul, but to have been wholly concerned about money. Neither does Paul seem to have said one word to him about it. The Lord may have said to him: "He is joined to his idols, let him alone." If Felix did speak about his soul, it was all only a piece of hypocrisy.

It is said that Felix was made governor by the Roman emperor in compliance with a petition of the Jews. However, they, at length, rebelled against his cruelty and injustice. They petitioned for his removal. Accordingly, he was sent to Rome, some say in chains, two years after the event here recorded.

How did he treat the Apostle? He knew that he had done nothing worthy of punishment. He should, therefore, have given him his liberty, even though he saw that he could not get payment for it. But he left him bound. Why? To please the Jews. It was a cheap and easy way, he thought, of getting back, at least, some of his lost popularity. This was an awful proof of the wickedness of his heart. He thus treated one under whose preaching he had trembled. God seems to have said: "My spirit shall no longer strive