

The Influence of the Church

Let Us Reason Together, Acts

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Following is a presentation of Grace Covenant Baptist Church, West Monroe, Louisiana.

Well, tonight as we turn our attention back to the book of Acts, I want to do so with this idea. We are in Acts 25, starting at verse 1, and I'm going to go down to about verse 12 or so, and I want to look at this text tonight with this thought. This is going to be weird so just hang on. Hold onto your hats. What happens when people forsake the fellowship of the church? What happens when people forsake the fellowship of the church? Well, what happens to people who would call themselves religious when they are not in and around and amongst God's people, the true church who is worshiping God, loving other people, sharing the Gospel, doing all those things that the Lord Jesus said that as Christians we ought to do, what happens to people, religious people, when they are not in constant contact with God's church? What influence does the church have on people when they are in constant contact with the church?

So it seems like a strange text, I know to discuss that, but I think we're going to see an example of what I'm talking about in this text as Paul is now being called before Festus. You remember Felix was the proconsul of the area. Paul is in Caesarea by the sea. It is Caesarea by the sea, right? Yeah, Caesarea by the sea. Yeah. Paul is in Caesarea. He is in prison. He has been falsely accused by the Jews in Jerusalem. He has appeared before Felix. He has appeared before the proconsul in Jerusalem. He is now appearing before Festus. He is soon to go appear before Agrippa. So Paul is having his case heard again and again and again and nothing has changed. The accusations continue to get ratcheted up. False accusals continue to be increased and yet despite the increased number of accusers, the increased accusations, Paul remains true to his testimony and he is not found guilty and he has not been condemned to die in all of these, all of these appearances, all of these days in court, if you will.

So we have talked about in the past just, you know, we've got the wrong perspective how discouraging that can be, that if we don't have a God perspective and we don't have our eyes on Christ, that we can get discouraged real easy, but seeing the example of Paul who has kept his eyes on Christ, that he continues in the same message, and as we'll see here in just a few minutes, that what has happened in that is that it has prompted those who stand opposed to Paul to try to get rid of Paul, not through the courts, not through the

court hearings, not through the decisions being rendered by government authorities, but to try to kill him underhandedly in between Jerusalem and Caesarea, in this case. You remember a couple sessions, several sessions ago, that the Jews in Jerusalem were going to try to assassinate Paul as he was being carried from Jerusalem to Caesarea, and that plan was thwarted. You'll see it in just a minute as we read this text, that they are going to try to get Festus to move Paul to Jerusalem so that he can stand trial in Jerusalem with the express intent of killing him, killing Paul, not Festus, killing Paul, ambushing him on the way between Caesarea and Jerusalem. You see, they know once they get into the cities that they can't do that, so they've got to do it out in the wilds, presumably to do it underhandedly so nobody would know what was happening. But the point is that we are going to see that in the midst of all of this, God has given us a picture of really the influence of the church; how much the church influences people, the true church, the genuine Church of Jesus Christ, the bride of Christ, how much she influences people.

So I know I have whetted your appetites and y'all are just super excited and, like, sitting on the edge of your seats just going, "Rusty, where did you get this?" Well, thank you for asking. Let's look at it and I'll show it to you. Acts 25, starting in verse 1, reading down to verse 12.

1 Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea.

So presumably he had been in Jerusalem, I mean, excuse me, in Caesarea.

2 And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, 3 asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem--because they were planning an ambush to kill him [that is, kill Paul] on the way. 4 Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. 5 "So," said [Festus], "let the men of authority among you go down with me [that is, go to Caesarea], and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him." 6 After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. 7 When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. 8 Paul argued in his defense, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense." 9 But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Do you wish [or another way of looking at this is, are you willing] to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?" 10 But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. 11 If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I [Paul says] appeal to Caesar." 12

Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go."

So this text is basically broken into two parts. There is verse 1 to verse 5 which describes Festus' attitude or his perspective of Paul prior to spending time in Jerusalem; and then Festus, starting in verse 6 down to verse 12, Festus' attitude toward Paul after he had moved away from Caesarea for a number of days and he had been hanging out with the Jews in Jerusalem. So what I want to show you is in the first five verses, really kind of Paul being the representative of the church, the influence that Paul had on Festus even directly or indirectly while Festus was in Caesarea. Then starting in verse 6, what happened to Festus when he went outside or removed himself away from the fellowship of Paul, or the fellowship with Paul, or in the analogy that we're using, the fellowship of the church. What happens to people when they move outside the fellowship of the church or begin to forsake the fellowship of the church and begin to live more in the world? Those are the two things: the influence of the church, 1 through 5; the influence of the world, verses 6 to 12. Okay?

So having said that, going to the first section looking at the influence of the church, I want us to notice that it says in verse 1, again, Luke is writing this, Luke is very precise in even his historical accounting. Now here Luke is just describing events but he is very detailed in the description of those events. He says, "Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea." As he had come in as the governor, as he was taking over for Felix, there was a period of time which, I'm sure, he was being updated on all of the things that were going on in the area, that Felix was going to bring him up to speed on all the things that have happened. There was going to be a debriefing of Felix by Festus, so there is this transfer of power happening. Now, Luke doesn't say this but we seem to get this sense from what was happening in Festus' initial response about Paul, is that Felix seems to have spent some time talking to Festus about Paul. "There is this Jewish fellow that we have in custody here. The Jews are leveling accusations against him. He has made a defense where we really have found no guilt in him, but you know, you might want to just hang onto him as a political bargaining chip." And I don't know if that was the conversation they had, but it seems reasonable that that might be. So even indirectly, and I would presume in this time that Paul would have had at least some interaction with Festus, but directly or indirectly, look at the influence that Paul had on Festus. Look at the influence that the church has upon those in the world or those that are in close fellowship with the church.

It says, "Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. When he got to Jerusalem, the priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul." So here they come again. They are leveling false accusations at Paul. They are accusing him of breaking the law. They are accusing him of doing all kinds of uncivil and seditious things, and verse 3 says, "asking as a favor against Paul, they wanted Festus to summon Paul to Jerusalem because they were planning to ambush and kill him on the way." Okay? So you're saying, "Well, what's the influence of the church there?" Well, the church is standing, Paul was standing as salt and light as a torch in a very dark place. The religious leadership was so against Paul, so

against Christianity, that they were willing to do whatever it took to eradicate it, and so the church is standing as salt and light there.

Look at what Festus says, verse 4, "Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. So if you want to go and have another trial and accuse Paul of these things, I'm not bringing him to Jerusalem. You can go to Caesarea." So do you see how as Festus has been in and around Paul either directly or indirectly, he is protecting him? He is protecting him. "No, I'm not bringing him to Jerusalem. We are going to keep him in Caesarea. If you want to have anything to do with him, you come down here."

You know, we haven't talked about this, but Caesarea was the seat of political and governmental power for the Romans. Jerusalem wasn't. They had a cohort in Jerusalem. They had a military presence in Jerusalem but Caesarea was really kind of the seat of power. Jerusalem wasn't, so the official courts and the official places where the Romans would have ruled or it would have been a judiciary ruling with Roman approval, would have had to have been Caesarea. So you can see that Festus would say, "Look, it doesn't make any sense to go to Jerusalem. That's not the Roman seat of power. That's not the governmental seat of power. It may be the religious seat of power for you, Jews, but it's not the governmental seat of power for what we're doing. So I'm not taking him down there."

So we see, I would say we see the direct and indirect influence of Paul, the influence of the church, upon the world in these first five verses in that Festus, which really doesn't necessarily have a dog in the hunt, still understands what is true, what is right, what is proper, and makes real decisions based upon the influence of goodness and righteousness and holiness as embodied in Paul. Does that make sense?

I think there is an example here of the church as people are in close fellowship with the worshiping church, then they begin to understand righteousness and holiness and justice similarly, they begin to make decisions based on what is right and what is good and what is holy and what is proper, and there is a sense in which, although just fellowship with the church does not guarantee salvation, it certainly brings what I would say at this point in time is a degree of sanctification. Now I don't mean sanctification in the same way as we would use that term as the Christians being conformed into the image of Christ after regeneration. When I say sanctification at this point, what I mean is a moral purification, moral purifying. When people are in the presence of the church, and I don't mean they just know where the church is located, but they are actually in the fellowship of the church, they are worshiping with the church, they are abiding with the church's people, they are hanging out with church folks, they are going to lunch and dinner with church folks, they are hearing the preaching, they are hearing the teaching, they are singing the songs, just that simple witness changes people. It changes people. That's why a lot of people don't like to hang out in churches, okay? Worldly people don't like to hang out in churches because I believe the Holy Spirit confronts them, convicts them. If the church is being true to its call, witnessing of Christ, worshiping as regenerate believers in Christ,

doing all the things the church is supposed to be doing, there is an influence. The church has an influence over people like that. Paul was having an influence over Festus.

Now, we really have to consider the back half of this to see the difference and to accentuate the point I'm making, in that when Festus left the fellowship of Paul for a while, we see a completely different answer. So our second point, second heading, if you will, starting in verse 6, the influence of the world, in verse 6 it says, "After he stayed among them," that is among the Jews in Jerusalem, "not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea." So what has happened here is Festus has left Caesarea, he has gone up to Jerusalem, the Jews have approached him about bringing Paul back to Jerusalem so that they can kill him, he has said, "No, I'm not doing that. If you want to talk to Paul, I'm heading to Caesarea in a couple of days. You can go with me." But then he stayed about a week, a week to 10 days, and after he went back to Caesarea, look at how his perspective has changed.

1. "He took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought." You see, he went from a position of, you might say, apathy toward Paul. In verses 1 through 5, we don't really see any urgency to try to bring him to trial, okay? He is dealing with the priests and the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sanhedrin, who are pushing him to try to bring Paul to Jerusalem so that they can kill him. He doesn't seem to be inclined to do that and his statements of, "If you want to deal with him, you come to Caesarea," just really doesn't seem to have any urgency in it. In verse 6, we see that change. Immediately upon arriving in Caesarea, Luke says, the next day, the next day, he took his seat in the tribunal. So there is an increased urgency to get rid of Paul. There is an urgency to remove this Christian influence.

I also want you to notice, secondly, there is the need to appeal to human authority. Not only did he do it the next day, do it with urgency, he officially went and sat on the seat in the tribunal which was the judgment seat. He went to the place and sat as judge, rendering a decision over Paul. He appealed to his human position and he ordered Paul. He goes from knowing about Paul, perhaps talking to Paul, to ordering that he be brought.

Now, I don't want to make a mountain out of a mole hill here, but it seems to be that while Paul was dealing with Felix, that Felix summoned Paul, he called for Paul to come, but there wasn't that harsh, abrupt order, "I order that Paul be brought here." No, it was, "I'm summoning Paul." Now that might be a fine distinction but the difference is as Felix and Festus, at least initially, interacted with Paul, there was this idea that they were bringing him in and listening to him. They were bringing him in and allowing him to converse with them and they perhaps were asking him questions and he was giving them answers. Well here, as Festus has removed himself from the fellowship of Paul and has put himself in the fellowship of the world, there is now this very stark, harsh ordering that Paul be brought to him. The terminology is almost like a common criminal; somebody who has already been convicted of a crime and now sentence is about to be handed down. So there is a harshness and an abruptness, an urgency to remove the Christian influence whenever people remove themselves from the fellowship of the church and place

themselves in the fellowship of the world. So the influence of the world is one that creates hostility and abruptness in dealing with the things of Christ, with the Gospel.

Verse 7, "When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove." Here is the second thing and third thing, fourth thing, next thing, in this section of the influence of the world, is that a lot of things get done by consensus. A lot of opinions, a lot of theories, a lot of beliefs are the consensus of the group. The Sanhedrin, or the representatives of the Sanhedrin, are in Caesarea again and they are standing around Paul and every time they find themselves on the debate floor with Paul, the number of charges go up, the severity of charges go up, and the number of people screaming that he's guilty goes up. Huh? Yep. It doesn't matter if it's right, just scream it louder. You know, Hitler was known for saying if you tell the people a lie long enough and loud enough, they'll believe it. I mean, that's Hitler. That's what he said. And that's what's happening here, that's the influence of the world. It's consensus belief that is angry, belligerent, and untrue. They couldn't prove it. Luke is very clear to say that the charges they brought against Paul, they could not prove. They had never been able to prove them before and they weren't able to prove them now. No matter how loudly they screamed them, no matter how many accounts or charges they brought, no matter how many false witnesses they brought, the charges just wouldn't stick.

But here's the charge in the middle of all of this, verse 8, "Paul argued in his defense, 'Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.'" You know, it's interesting that the church doesn't need a team of lawyers. The church doesn't need a legal team. The Christian witness doesn't need a team of lawyers. We don't need to lawyer up. We don't need fancy arguments. We don't need strategy sessions to figure out how we are going to present things. We just tell the truth. Paul was arguing in his own defense and he said, "I have not broken any laws of the Jews. I have not broken any laws of the temple. And I have not broken any laws against Caesar. I'm not being seditious. I'm not being a zealot. I am not stirring up anti-government beliefs. We've been down this road before. I've already given my answer and I have only done one thing and that is I spoke about resurrection from the dead and that's what these guys are all upset about."

Then there is Festus' response to that in verse 9, again, his time away from Paul and his time in the world. Verse 9, "But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul," now the text says, "Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem," but a better rendering of that is, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and be tried there by me?" You see, there is deceit. When the world is the influence, when those are in fellowship to the world as opposed to the fellowship with the church, there is deceit. Festus was wishing to do them a favor. There is a political favor. There is a behind-the-scenes handshake or agreement. He's doing it so that he can hold it as a bargaining chip for whatever he wants, and there is something driving the decision beyond simply truth.

He appeals to Paul by saying, "Are you willing to go?" But really if Festus decided he wanted to send Paul to Jerusalem, it didn't matter whether Paul was willing or not. So

there is this feigning, there is this appearance of receptiveness or working with Paul, but it really wasn't there, and I would suppose that if Paul had not appealed to Caesar, then Jerusalem would have been exactly where Paul would have wound up because Festus would have given into the Jews, and he would have sent Paul to Jerusalem. But we see deceit here. We see deception. We see self-preservation. We see selfishness in that people do the things that they want when they are in the fellowship of the world, as opposed to being within the fellowship of the church.

But look at Paul's answer. This is a fascinating answer. If you don't really understand kind of what's going on, you'll miss it. Again, Paul is appealing to truth. Now, this time he's appealing to legal truth, which means at times the church and Christians have every right to appeal to the laws of the land. But look at what Paul says, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death." I want to stop there for a second and just go back. You see, the seat of power where the tribunal would have held court, so to speak, was in Caesarea. It was not in Jerusalem. If Festus was going to hold court in Jerusalem, he would have had to have held court within the Sanhedrin's legal system, for lack of a better term. Festus was not on his home turf in Jerusalem. Festus was on his home turf in Caesarea. So to move the trial back to Jerusalem would have, in essence, been an endorsement of the legal and religious leadership of the Jews. He would have moved the venue to Jerusalem where they were, that was home field advantage for them. They were the political power, the religious power in Jerusalem now. They enjoyed a very tenuous peace, if you will, with Rome. Rome had a military presence in Jerusalem and the governor would have the opportunity to go to Jerusalem any time he wanted to, but he kind of did it at the welcoming or the behest of the Sanhedrin. So for Festus to move the trial back to Jerusalem would have been playing right into the Sanhedrin's hand that would have put them in a position of authority and power that Festus could squash it, if he wanted to, but the Romans normally didn't because they were trying to keep the peace. The Romans didn't want to invest any more blood and treasure in Jerusalem than they had to, so they kind of let the Sanhedrin get away with some things just to kind of keep the peace.

Verse 10 tells us Paul understood that, so Paul simply says, "Why would I be willing to go to Jerusalem?" It's almost like he's saying, "Festus, why would you be willing to go to Jerusalem? This is your home court here. You are the tribunal. You have already sat in the seat of judgment. This is where you hold court. Why would you move it to Jerusalem where you have to borrow a judgment seat there from the Sanhedrin, from the Jews?" So Paul doesn't say, "No, I'm not really going to Jerusalem," he just says, "I am exactly where I need to be." And what Paul is doing is he is appealing to Festus as a Roman citizen. Paul is using his Roman citizenship to ensure that he is tried in a Roman court, and Festus is the Roman representative here.

So Paul is saying, "Look, I'm before Caesar's tribunal. I'm before the one that has been appointed by Caesar to adjudicate these cases and I am in the place where I ought to be tried. Now, if I have done anything to the Jews, if I'm guilty of any wrongdoing to the

Jews which you yourself know I am not, then if I am, if I have done anything wrong, if I have committed any offense that truly deserves death," Paul says, "let me die. I'm not trying to get out of getting killed. I'm not trying to get out of being condemned to death if I have truly done anything wrong, but everyone knows I haven't." And so he says, "If these charges against me no one can prove them if they are not true, then you can't give me up to the Jews. You are legally bound to ensure my case is heard in a Roman court." And here's the appeal, this is what is going on with appeal: a Roman citizen that suspected that a court was corrupt could appeal to Caesar. So in perceiving that Festus was already tainted by the influence of the Sanhedrin, Paul appeals to Caesar, and by Roman law, Festus had to send him to Caesar. He couldn't prevent him from going to Caesar.

Now, if it was just an everyday Roman citizen, that might be a little bit different, but Paul had received hearings from the tribunal, the proconsul in Jerusalem. The military, Roman military leadership in Jerusalem had brought him to Felix. Felix was the appointed governor of the area. He had been heard by Felix and now Festus, who has taken Felix's place, governor over that area. Paul was too much of a high-profile case not to do it and so as he appeals to his right as a Roman citizen to be heard by Caesar, Festus kind of sees him out. "Okay, I don't have to fool with it anymore. I'm going to pass him. I'm going to kick the can down the road," which is a very common phrase today. "I'm going to send him to someone else."

But do you see how, and this is the last thing I would mention here, when people are in the fellowship of the world, they are not really willing to undertake the hard work of confronting what is right and what is wrong. As I have thought about that thought, as I've thought about that idea for a number of years now, I've come to a conclusion that this is rampant within evangelical life today, this thought that I'm about to give to you. Evangelical life is infected with a terminal cancer and that terminal cancer is called nonconfrontation. I'm astounded at the number of Christians, and I believe they are believers in Christ, they are striving to love Christ and do what Christ has commanded them, who of the number, I'm astounded by the number of Christians who simply will not stand up for what is right. They want to soft sell it. They want to let somebody else do it. They say, "It's not my gifting. I don't want to." I've seen Christians avoid conflict at all costs and, sadly, I believe it's because, at least in that area of their thinking, they are in fellowship with the world more than they are in fellowship with Christ, fellowship with the church.

If you notice in this whole discourse, Paul doesn't back up from confronting anything or anyone, including himself. He says, "If I've done wrong, okay, kill me, but you know I haven't." Paul is not trying to get somebody else to fight his battles for him. He is not trying to get somebody else to do the dirty work for him. Paul stands flat-footed, straightforward, right in the middle of a whole host of people that are trying to kill him and confronts them with truth, and we see everybody else in this scenario, this text, Festus, Felix, before him, the Sanhedrin, who the leaders of the Sanhedrin probably weren't there, it says principal men in verse 2, that would probably be the leadership of the Sanhedrin, the chief priests. Luke does say the chief priests were there and the

principal men of the Jews, but I would suspect that mostly it was representatives of those men, that those men didn't even really want to do it themselves. They wanted somebody else to do the dirty work for them. Why did they not just appeal and push to have Paul executed by Festus? Why did they conspire to kill him on the road before he ever got there? Because they didn't want to get their hands dirty. They didn't want to be implicated. They didn't want to be seen as behind that.

You see, at every point what is happening here is that the world does not want to confront anybody with wrongdoing, and if you think about how the world works, the world lives under the Norm mentality, right? You all remember "Cheers," right? Everybody sitting around the bar, Norm walks in, what does everybody say? "Norm!" Now, if you've watched "Cheers," Norm is a lovable guy but he's got problems. Norm is not holy. He is not righteous. But he is accepted because everybody wants to go where people know your name. Sometimes people just want to go where everyone knows your name. It's because the world doesn't confront you with the problems and the sin in your life. The rule of this fallen world has convinced us that nonconfrontation is the Christian thing to do, and I promise you as we've been going through Timothy, Paul's admonitions to Timothy have been anything but nonconfrontation.

So as people are more in the fellowship of the world or more in line with the thinking of the world than they are with the thinking and the fellowship of the church, you see an increased unwillingness to confront sin and wrongdoing. I mean, I think if y'all began to inventory situations in your own life, you would see that that is true. You know, people need to be confronted over the things they say; they need to be confronted over the things that they have done; they need to be confronted over their attitudes and their opinions, their beliefs, all of those things that are out of step with Scripture, and we don't want hurt feelings, we don't want to jeopardize friendships, we don't want to. We just don't want to confront and so we tell people, "You want to do that? Okay, be my guest. Take off." Where as if we were truly living as the church in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, we would confront sin in the lives of those around us. We would stand for truth. We would stand for what is right. We would truly be salt and light every day in the world in which we live. And if we would do that every day in the little things, I don't mean being ugly and I don't mean being obnoxious, but I mean just standing for truth in the little things, and I think that testimony would begin to take hold, take hold, take hold, and we would avoid some of the dramatic and acute things, the drastic situations, just by being salt and light in the little things every day.

You know, as a teacher, it's amazing how frequently I come around the corner and students immediately stop talking, and it's not just because I'm a teacher, although that's part of it, but I'm trying to stand for salt and light. I'm trying to be salt and light. I'm trying to stand for truth. You know, I heard a student this afternoon, if I could have gotten to him and said something to him, I would have but I heard him down the hall go, "Dang it!" And I have witnessed where students have said things like that in front of faculty members and not a word has been said. As a matter of fact, at times faculty members snicker at what's going on where the student would say that. But they don't do that with me because my saying to that is, "Now wait a minute, an expletive by any other name is

still an expletive." "Well, that's not a cuss word, Mr. Grant." Well, yes it is. It might be a socially accepted cuss word but it's still a curse. You're still using an expletive, it's just a cleaned up one that everybody accepts. You see, we need to stand for truth in what we say, what's right.

So students really watch what they say most of the time when they are around me. I even had them ask me, "Well, what words can we say?" Well, there aren't any words that you can say. You just need to take control of your tongue and your heart, not get bent out of shape. Little things like that. Little things about being straightforward with people about what you expect, and then holding them accountable when they don't keep their end of the bargain. I get in trouble a lot over that. I mean, look, this is what I expect and you didn't fulfill your end of the bargain, and so there are consequences. Those are great lessons to teach people, don't you think? Here is the expectation. You have failed to meet the expectation and you haven't held up your end of the bargain, so now there are consequences to that.

You see, that kind of falls right in line with God is holy, man is not, our sin has offended a holy God, and apart from the grace covenant that God has given to us in Jesus Christ through the Gospel, all we can expect because of our rebellion is death and hell. There are consequences to us not holding up our end of the bargain. God said, "Be holy as I am holy," which we usually apply that to the church but did you know that God applies that to his entire creation? That he expects his entire creation to be holy? And the ones that are not holy, "It is appointed once for a man to die, then comes the judgment," right? Then the good news is in the Gospel we avoid the pain of feeling the wrath of God on our sin because God has poured his wrath out on his Son and Jesus took God's wrath for us. The consequence is still there, it's just that Christ took it upon himself.

You see, those are great lessons but we don't like to teach those lessons. It comes to us in this terminology, "Well, if you tell people expectations, you know they're going to fail, right? So when you hold them accountable, you just damage their psyche. You are damaging their self-esteem because they feel really bad about themselves that they didn't keep their end of the bargain. So we don't want people to feel bad about themselves and so we're not going to tell them that they didn't hold up their end of the bargain, and if we're not going to tell people that they didn't hold up their end of the bargain, there is really no need to tell them what the expectation is." So we are just nonconfronting all the way around. We don't talk to each other. We don't tell each other what we expect. And we certainly don't tell each other when expectations are not being met. Then we wind up in therapy and everybody says, "Well, we're having communication issues." Yes, we are. We are not communicating. That's the issue.

But we see here in this text, I think, that the influence of the church is anything but nonconfrontation. It's being open. It's being honest. It's being upfront. It's holding people accountable in a restorative way, but yet nonetheless, confronting each of us and in our own hearts too, the failings and the shortcomings and the sin and the breaking of God's law. And we know at the end of all of this that this whole text and others are under God's sovereign control. God is moving Paul to Rome where as he was imprisoned in Rome, he

established the church at Rome, of which he wrote a letter to them later, and then God took the Gospel into the seat of power in the ancient world through one little Jewish man who simply said, "I appeal to Caesar." That's the influence of the church. The influence of the church, the influence of the Gospel does, as you notice I said does, I didn't say can, I said does change the world. So I just pray that we will let God use us in that way too, by understanding what it means to be in fellowship with the church versus the fellowship of the world.

So, thoughts or questions, concerns about our time tonight?

You know, it's kind of interesting to me that confronting one another has become so outside the mainstream of Christian thought these days that we are really, our concern to not offend brothers, fellow brothers, or to avoid conflict with other brothers and sisters, is a very real concern because what ends up happening most times as we are striving to live in light of Scripture and confront the sin we see in each other's lives, is that that usually goes badly. It wasn't always so. Think about the church during this time. Now, we've spent a lot of time talking about Paul and Luke has really focused a lot on Paul's arrest and his appeals to the various leaders, but you know, the church was still going. All the churches that Paul had planted: Philippi, Ephesus, Corinth, Colossae, all through Asia minor, those churches were still going. The church in Jerusalem was still going. You still have Peter, James and John preaching and teaching in Jerusalem. And you know, here at least at this juncture, a lot of fighting and stuff going on within the church, so at least in some measure what that tells me is that people were receiving the correction that they were being given by fellow Christians and by those that they were submitting to as pastors and elders. There wasn't this, "Well, who are you to tell me that that's a problem?" There wasn't any of that. Plus I would also say that that confrontation absolutely was being done in love. Not a, "Well, I think this is a problem in your life," but, "Brother, this is what the Bible says about these issues in our hearts and minds."

So we don't have that within evangelical life today as a rule. I mean, even among fellowships that are closely knit and fellowships that are striving to be God honoring and they are Sola Scriptura churches. You know, when there is a problem and fellow brothers and sisters begin to kind of poke around in that tender spot, people tend to get frustrated, upset, get mad. You know, they tend to remove their fellowship to other places and there are all kinds of things that happen. We know that. We are sensitive to it. So we don't want to break fellowship with the people that we love and that we have been bound together with by common confession, but what I'm saying is even if there is a desire within a church to confront the sin that is resident in all of us, there is a hesitation because we know that it can go badly very quickly because that confrontation a lot of times in our world today, is not received. Man, you want to talk about this group of people they call millennials, don't start trying to tell somebody of that age group that they are doing something wrong. They get upset real quick. They don't see themselves as being insufficient in doing things. So you're right. I'm affirming what you're saying. It's hard because it isn't received very well.

What else? Yes, ma'am. I see it, it's burning. It's going to burn a hole in your pocket. Okay.

Yeah. We are inconsistent, is what I would say. Yeah, we don't mind striking out against our little pet peeves. We don't have any problem doing that. We don't, however, like to strike out against those things that, okay, whether we've made peace with or are resident in our own lives or in our own families. Of course, you know, this type of confrontation begins at home. We've got to remove the speck out of our own eye before we attempt to get the log out of our brother's eye, or is it the other way around? Get the log out of our own eye before trying to get the speck out of our brother's eye. But you get the point. You know, we've got to start with our own house. That's why Peter says that God is going to begin with the house of God, or judgment begins with the house of God. It begins with God's people. And so, yeah, I agree with you. I see a lot of that in other circles that, you know, things that I don't like or things that I clearly don't have a problem with, those things tend to be forced and confronted on other people pretty loudly, but don't dare come and talk, don't come and talk to me, and we're not even going to mention those things that we see in the lives of other people that I have a problem with. Does that make sense?

Well, I think that's wrong for the church, that we don't, although we may be conservative, that we may have traditional family values, those are just expressions of really what is the driving force in our lives, which is the Scriptures. We have scriptural values. We are subscribing to scriptural mandates. If we would do that, you know, before I say this, I believe that there is a sense in which we have to draw a line in the sand and say, "Okay, if you have come before this line that we are drawing in the sand, it's going to be a lot harder for you to implement biblical values, scriptural values, in your family because your kids are grown and out of the house, they are young adults, they are making decisions on their own." We are going to draw this line in the sand and say we've got to start somewhere. We've got to start teaching scriptural values in our homes. We've got to start making sure that when our grandkids come to our house, that they are hearing things of the Bible.

For those who still have small children at home, you know, we've got to start making sure that our children are hearing the mandates of the Bible, of the Scriptures, and here is why: if I'm a parent and I am in that role, that spot that you just described, where I am espousing conservative values politically, even family values, but I'm having to deal with a child that is engaged in a homosexual lifestyle, it's too late. It's too late. Now, if I have a young child that is seeming to be moving in a homosexual direction, then that's another issue. There is an influence somewhere that is moving them in that direction. But when you said what you're saying, I'm hearing conservative leaders who have been silenced because they have family members that have been highlighted in the public square as living a contradiction to those conservative values, and so those were adult children, for the most part, and if I have an adult child that is engaged in some sort of unbiblical immorality, then it's too late. I mean, I've lost the opportunity. I am to be salt and light to my adult children who are doing it, but they are no longer under my headship. I mean, they've moved out into their own life. They are making their own decisions. They are not in my house anymore. So it's a faulty premise. It's a straw man that gets raised up so that

the opponents can't knock it down real easy to say, "Okay, somebody who espouses conservative values has a child who is living anything but conservative values," when they don't acknowledge that child as an entity unto themselves making their own decisions.

Now, I would say this: to have an adult child found in that sort of lifestyle, we trace that back to how that child was raised. There was something in the raising of that child that has given rise to that, and it may be not confronting sin in the life of the child, or the parents not confronting sin in their own hearts, and then therefore not confronting the sin in their child's heart. So all of that is remedied, at least in some measure, to instead of conservative values or family values, biblical principle. We live by biblical principle. We live by what the Bible says. Now, the reason why I say that remedies the problem is because if we are truly living by Bible principles, biblical principles, then the confrontation of sin begins in our own hearts and minds and lives, and so even within our own house, we are cleaning out our backyard before we begin to try to clean out the lives or help ensure that our children never get their backyards junked up to begin with, or dealing with sin and rebellion within our own homes because we are dealing with sin and rebellion in our own hearts. God is convicting us first and cleaning us in preparation that we might thereby help our families be clean in Christ as well but that only comes when we are subscribing to biblical principles.

That's not just semantics. Conservative principles, it's just a code of behavior, and if you subscribe to my conservative values, good. If you don't, well, okay. I don't like you but you're still a human being, right? You see, there is no lost and saved in conservative values. There is no lost and saved in family, traditional family values. There is lost and saved in biblical values because the Bible makes that distinction. So the point is that if you don't subscribe to biblical values as the Bible presents them, then we need to talk about your salvation. There is an eternal problem here that we need to deal with. So it's not just about viewpoints, it's about eternity, and those are two vastly different things, I think you can see. Does that make sense, what I'm saying?

What do you mean by permissive parenting? Yeah, kind of like what Dr. B.? Helicopter moms says, as I understand them, are just overwhelming and overbearing and won't let their children do anything. Yeah. Yeah, but that's not permissive parenting, is it? Okay.

Well, I was thinking when you said that, permissive parenting, I was thinking about Dr. B's example. I think it was Dr. B., or was it Dr. Malone this past weekend? One of the speakers said that he had talked to a man, I think it was Dr. B., because the guy was going to jail for dealing drugs and he came to Dr. B. and said, "Please tell your youth group, you know, that if you truly love somebody, that you'll set boundaries for them," because he was saying his dad never did that. His dad said, "I love you so much, I'm going to let you do whatever." Yeah, that is what I was thinking about when you said permissive parenting. That is what I was thinking about, just let them do whatever.

Well, yeah, I think there is a lot of parenting that is not willing to confront the sin in their children. Yeah. Okay. I guess I'm just not following what that extension is. What do you

mean by that? It's sin. Okay, all right, I'm with you now. Yeah. Yeah. Those are the ones that read all the parenting books and then don't do anything. They don't do anything. Yeah, as if reading the book is going to magically enact it in the life of their children. Yeah. Yeah, I mean, what I want us to see here is that unbiblical behavior is everywhere and we have allowed it into the camp, and it's even in churches. I mean, again, evangelical life today is rife with this kind of thinking where the preaching doesn't confront sin and the church ministries don't confront sin.

Well, yeah. That's what I was saying a minute ago, that idea of nonconfrontation has so invaded faith life that to confront sin as the Bible describes, seems aberrant. We've departed so far from the truth that when we go back to the truth, it's so foreign to us, and most people are running away from it as being some sort of heresy when in fact what they are running away from his biblical truth. You know, the whole discussion about Calvinism versus traditional Baptist thought here in Louisiana, where I think Lamar or somebody was telling me that there was a leader in the Baptist Convention in this last year who said they were going to eradicate Calvinism out of Louisiana. They were going to remove the entire heresy of Calvinism out of Louisiana. Maybe it was Barry who was telling me that. Somebody was telling me that.

Yeah, and my point is that, you know, I might use the term Calvinism because that's a term that the opponents use, but biblical understanding, biblical theology as presented within the Scriptures, unfiltered through any denominational lens but just straight from the Bible, is so outside of mainstream faith life today that it is seen as being aberrant and it is called heresy. We have people who are trying to eradicate it from the face of the planet. I mean, we are right back to what we've seen here in Acts where the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin who had so departed from biblical truth that when they saw it in Christ, when they saw it in Paul, when they saw it in Stephen, when they saw it in the early church, they saw it as being aberrant and they tried to eradicate it off the face of the planet just because they had departed so far from biblical truth.

So we face the same thing today. I agree with all y'all. We face the same thing today because it's just become, the enemy has just let it slip right in there. It came in unnoticed and unrecognized and people still are not recognizing the danger, the damage, that this failure to confront is doing within the church. That's why the church is ineffective in its witness. It's why millennialists don't want to have anything to do with church because they don't see the church as being real. You say, "Well, what does that mean, the church being real? What do you mean when you say that?" Well, the church is not being authentic. "What does that mean?" Well, the church is not, I don't know, I don't know what the church, what it means to be real and authentic. Well, how about we confront sin because that's what the Bible says we are supposed to be doing? That's real and authentic, right?

Yeah, not have any discussion at all, right.

When we allow the world to influence us more than we allow the church to influence us.

Yeah, we don't matter.

Yeah, they just have a label. They have put a label on themselves. Yep, and that's the point. That's really what we've been saying in this whole time is that there is a difference in the church where the bride of Christ is different. Those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ are different. Those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit are different and they are everyday different. Just everyday different.

Yeah, there was a lot of that. The Sanhedrin was pretty brutal at times but they kept up the appearances, and I think that's why they received at least in some measure the respect of the Romans because the Romans saw what they were capable of doing and they kept those fronts and those appearances out there while all the time behind-the-scenes they were anything and everything but what their public appearance made them look like. That's another hallmark of religion that has kind of been in a lot of the discussions we've had over these months together, but haven't highlighted necessarily, is that religion presents itself as one thing but what it really is behind-the-scenes is anything but what it presents itself to be. So it's anything but holy. It's anything but righteousness. It's anything but concerned about other people. It's anything about honoring God, glorifying Christ. Anything about those.

I mean, they present those things all the time and that's what really troubles me. One of the things that really troubles me about modern-day Christianity and the modern-day church, institutional church, is it espouses all kinds of things to the unaware observer and they go, "Oh, yeah. Yeah, the Bible says that. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah." But when you get into the staff meetings and how they actually deal with people and what their motivations are, I mean, things like motivations are why churches and pastors do the things that they do. Very seldom will they see the light of day. But you're not going to have a pastor, any pastor, anywhere, admit that his real motivation is dollars and cents by getting people in seats. They're just not going to admit it, but really in their heart, that's what is driving the decisions that they make.

So again, yeah, the evangelical life in my opinion is terminally infected with nonbiblical self-centered religion. It's just a religious construct. That's all it is. And there are seminaries full of theologians that go to the mat for it, defend it, you know, come up with all kinds of new teachings in Scripture to support some of the stuff that gets done, books written by the truckloads, and it's just garbage. It's just plain garbage. It's skubala to use Paul's word.

At the risk of having thrown another cat out in the middle of the road, I think we'll button it up unless there is something else, specifically something else.

Well, they weren't having a great influence on the governmental structure, that is true. I absolutely would agree that they were not influencing the Roman governmental structure. The church not having an impact on society, I don't know because, I mean, the church in the first 200 to 300 years of its existence expended phenomenally. I mean, it went from

being a small group of believers, probably less than 100 souls during the ministry of the Lord Jesus, to spreading all over the ancient world by about 300 AD.

Well, yeah, but the people they were affecting were the everyday folks.

No, I don't think our task is to organize the community and never have thought it was to organize the community. The church's task is to preach the Gospel. Be ready in season and out of season.

So okay. All right, well, let's pray and then we'll be dismissed.

Father, again, we just praise you and thank you for the day that you have given to us. We glorify you for your great love and for your mercy. Father, we just simply ask that you would help us day in and day out to seek to live within the fellowship of your church, not to give in to the fellowship of the world, and not to be influenced by the world. Lord, we pray that by your Spirit you would confront us with those areas in which we are living more in the world and grant to us repentance and confession. Help us, Father, to take that same confrontation that you have accomplished in our lives and be salt and light to the people around us, that we would help them see the sin that separates them from you. Help them to see the Savior which came to take upon himself your wrath and to save a people for your own possession. Help us, Father, to be change agents to confront others around us lovingly, with concern and deep-felt love and identification with our own sins. Lord, just to be used of you to bring others to the knowledge of the Gospel. Father, we ask that you would so move upon us and that you would grant to us the grace that we need to help in our times of weakness and to glorify you as we just live every day. We love you, Father. We praise you. We thank you and continue always to ask these things in your name. Amen.

All right, well, Lord willing, we'll see you guys next week.