

Scripture Reading:

Acts 24:23 “So [Governor Felix] commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him. ²⁴ And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. ²⁵ Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." ²⁶ Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him. ²⁷ But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.”

"Paul Reasons About Self-Control"

As I laid out last week, my plan is to have three sermons to consider three important subjects which Luke tells us that the Apostle Paul reasoned about with Governor Felix and his wife, Drusilla.

- Last week we considered righteousness, this week we look at self-control and next week we will look at the judgment to come!

We saw how natural it was for the Apostle Paul to speak about righteousness because it is the nature and life of his Savior Jesus. We learned that God’s righteousness is at the heart of the Gospel where God is both just and the justifier of those who have violated His character. With self-control, we see Paul turning to the impact that the Gospel must have on our lives and next week we see its impact on eternity.

- As Paul teaching in his Epistles and letters, perhaps we can see him reasoning about justification, sanctification and glorification.

It is interesting to note how Paul touches on all of these even when witnessing to hardened unbelievers calling them to repentance and yes, causing them to be afraid. It is also a reminder of how we are to be the instruments that the Holy Spirit uses as He brings glory to the Son by filling the earth with His Kingdom! We learned last week that the Spirit justifies us by faith, this week we will see that we are sanctified by faith and in the end we are to be glorified as a result of that same faith! This is how we should live:

- As those who are righteous because of what Jesus has done...
- As those who are learning self-control because of how Jesus lived, and...
- As those who know we will one day be raised in glory with our resurrected bodies at the judgment to come because Jesus was raised from the dead as the first fruits!

That is all well and good for us to remember as Christians, but wait...

The Apostle Paul is not reasoning with believers but with a notorious governor and his wife.

- Why would Paul be reasoning about justification, sanctification and glorification with them?

I want to argue that he did so as a witness to them and that it should be a pattern that we follow today with those who God may put in our paths as well.

Remember that Paul taught the Saints in Rome, and by extension all of us, that the unrighteous must suppress the truth of God in their unrighteousness!

- They are not suppressing untruth or falsehoods, they are suppressing the truth: The truth about God!
- God’s creation, their own conscience and the Word of God that we bring to them, as well as the example of our own lives ALL testify of God’s truth and convict them of their sin!

- They know they are not righteous before a Holy God and thus must suppress their need to be justified.
- They know that their day to day actions continue to offend God and thus they need to make excuses for why they are not being sanctified or living up to God's standards.
- And finally, they know they are not fit for the judgment and are in need of God's grace to be glorified and avoid the judgment to come, even though many refuse to repent.
 - In other words, I believe that the Apostle Paul was witnessing to these lost souls by reasoning about and demonstrating what God had done for him!

I believe that Jesus also foretold of this important work that the Spirit would do through His servants, but first we need to consider just how lost this couple really was...

- I mentioned that Governor Felix and his wife Drusilla were a notorious couple and that may be an understatement.

The reputation that Felix had as a governor was that of a man who ruled as a king with the mind of a slave: In other words he lacked the wisdom required for such an office and was often very impulsive in his actions. This would nearly get him executed late in his life, and certainly carried over into his personal life as well.

The Drusilla who came before Paul was the second of three wives for Governor Felix, and actually the second Drusilla that he married. His first wife was the granddaughter of Anthony & Cleopatra! [mention Wilkins history tapes!] Felix divorced the first Drusilla when he became enthralled with the more beautiful daughter of King Herod [Young people, please remember such things when you are tempted to base relationships on outward appearances: You will always find greener grass on the other side of the hill... IF your partner does not do so first!]

Drusilla was six years old when her father, King Herod, was eaten by worms as part of God's judgment of his pride, an account we studied back in Acts 12. Before his death, King Herod had betrothed Drusilla to another King's son Epiphanes upon the condition that he convert to Judaism, something he in the end refused to do so Drusilla's brother broke off the engagement. He then gave her in marriage to Gaius Julius Azizus, Priest King of Emesa, who, in order to obtain her hand, consented to be circumcised.

It was not long after this marriage that Governor Felix met Drusilla and was stricken by her beauty! [mention those Hollywood violins] Felix wants her as his wife which not only meant taking her away from her actual husband, but also denying her Jewish faith by marrying a gentile. Here is how Josephus tells us Felix accomplished this task...

While Felix was procurator of Judea, he saw this Drusilla, and fell in love with her; for she did indeed exceed all other women in beauty; and he sent to her a person whose name was Simon, a Jewish friend of his, who pretended to be a magician. Simon endeavored to persuade her to forsake her present husband, and marry Felix; and promised, that if she would not refuse Felix, he would make her a happy woman. Accordingly she acted unwisely and, because she longed to avoid her sister Berenice's envy (for Drusilla was very ill-treated by Berenice because of Drusilla's beauty) was prevailed upon to transgress the laws of her forefathers, and to marry Felix."

- So at the young age of 22, Drusilla now comes before Paul with her new husband Governor Felix!
- As an interesting historical note, Drusilla was one of the few people actually named who died at Pompey!

Obviously we have a couple who were not righteous people, had little or no self-control and were certainly in danger of hell fire at the judgment to come!

- Thus the Apostle Paul comes witnessing to them by reasoning about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come.

Such is the Spirit's work, which Jesus foretold in His last discourse to His disciples beginning in the upper room where He was preparing them for His death, burial and resurrection and the coming of the Comforter.

John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."

If we abide in Jesus what will our desires be? They will be His desires and thus, the desires of the righteous are righteous desires. St. Augustine put it much more bluntly: "Love God and do as you please." On the surface, that may seem like a license for sin that could be easily be abused today —

- "As long as I love God, I can do anything I want, and God's okay with that."

But Augustine was teaching that if you genuinely love God, then you will want to do what honors him most:

- You will want to live righteously reflecting the life and actions of Jesus!
- If we truly love God, then his Holy Spirit transforms us such that what pleases God becomes what pleases us: True self-control!

Again, it is very important to remember, as we learned last week, that we do not try to act righteously so that God will love us...

- But rather we do so BECAUSE God first loved us!

Jesus continues, 9 "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."

- This is the secret to the joy and contentment we can all have in the Christian life!

It is what the Apostle Paul would likely have contrasted with the tumultuous lives of Felix and Drusilla as he reasoned with them about self-control, likely pointing to his own sanctification!

- I want us to see how all of this is the Spirit's work and it is obvious from the context in which we find the next command that Jesus gives:

12 "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."

- How can we love as Jesus loved and know what Jesus knows unless it is given to us by the Spirit?

Jesus confirms this as He continues: 16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."

- Tweaking Augustine's statement just a bit, we see here that we are to love God and ask for whatever we want!

I hope you can begin to see what a stark contrast this is with much of the 'name it & claim it' teaching that we have in some of the modern church.

- Jesus goes on to warn the disciples of the persecutions that lies ahead and then in verse 26 He tells them that help is on the way!

"But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."

- **This is the witness that Paul is bringing here in Caesarea before the governor and his wife and the witness we are called upon to be today!**

John 16:1 "These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. 2 They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. *[remember the forty men who took a vow to kill Paul?]* 3 And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me."

- **The Apostle Paul was no stranger to these persecutions and yet even here during an extended stay in prison he continues to witness as Jesus commanded!**

Jesus then explained that He must go away and in verse 7 says, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. 8 And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 of sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; 11 of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. 12 I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you."

- **Again we must remember that the story of the Book of Acts is how the Spirit fills the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus!**

And in Acts we see Paul being used by the Spirit to convict this royal couple of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment... They need God's righteousness which they can find only in Jesus, they need to live righteously which they can do only in the power of the Spirit and they will be judged in righteousness at the Great White Throne judgment!

- **May we learn to be such witnesses, reasoning with the lost about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, not only in word but also in deed!**
- **So what does it mean to be self-controlled in our modern age?**

It is really no different than it has been in any age: We must learn to have God's desires be our desires!

As with any age we have our own particular challenges... *[tell the story of the Romanian missionaries]*

I have been asked to speak at the Future Men's camp for the young men at our sponsoring Church in Oregon City later this year.

- **My working title is "The Biblical View of Wine, Women and Wealth."**

All three are certainly areas where we need much self-control today with rampant drunkenness and drug abuse, especially among our young people, with pornography and sexual sins abounding on all sides and the cruel excesses of wealth taking most eyes and hearts far from God as those in Russia and Romania realized could happen.

As I am sure most of you suspect, I am going to point out that the Biblical view of each of these important areas does NOT involve complete avoidance!

Going to a monastery where you have NO alcohol, NO women and NO money will NOT solve the problems one might have with temptations in these areas and it is certainly NOT God's plan.

The Bible strongly condemns drunkenness giving this graphic picture in Proverbs 23 at verse 30: "Those who linger long at the wine, Those who go in search of mixed wine. 31 Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly; 32 At the last it bites like a

serpent, & stings like a viper. 33 Your eyes will see strange things, And your heart will utter perverse things. 34 Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: 35 "They have struck me, but I was not hurt; They have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?"

However, we must remember that there are even more verses in the Bible that celebrate the glories of wine and proper festivals...

- We see our Lord Jesus not only turning water into fine wine but inviting us to remember His death each week with wine at this Table.

The difference between the drunkards downtown looking for their next drink this morning & members of the covenant coming forward to receive the Lord's Supper does not lie with what is in the cup...

The difference is in the heart where one has no self-control and the other is being sanctified by God's Spirit and able to enjoy the good gifts of God.

The same is true with sexual sins:

- The Bible condemns ALL sexual acts outside of marriage as sin.
- But the same Bible goes to great lengths to show how sex in marriage, described as the two becoming one flesh, is a glorious demonstration of the very nature of our loving Triune God.

The difference between the young man who enters the house of the seductive woman in Proverbs & Isaac taking his new bride Rebecca into his mother's tent to consummate their marriage, is not in what physical act was done...

The difference is in the heart where one young man has no self-control even when his passion takes him on a road to hell and the other begins a relationship of love and commitment that brings glory to His God for the rest of his life and on into eternity.

And finally we come to the third "W", wealth which is difficult for us to grasp in relation to most of the rest of the world and even almost all of history... Even the poorest among us here in the Sacramento valley have food and water in abundance and material wealth that would be unimaginable in most other places and times.

Children, the next time you open the refrigerator and take out something nice to eat that has not spoiled, please remember that virtually no one had such a blessing just hundred years ago!

Moms, when you turn on that water facet, think about the fact that you do not have to wonder if the water that comes out will give you children cholera!

And Dads, as expensive as we all think healthcare is these days; rejoice at the fact that when one of our children gets injured, we have doctors and nurses in abundance to care for them.

Yet even with all of this abundant wealth, we are seldom satisfied, showing little or no self-control in financial matters [*think of our massive debts*]

- AND we as a nation have, as God predicted in Deuteronomy, forgotten Him in the midst of all our plenty.

Again the difference between Job who was a wealthy man who lost everything and the rich young ruler who Jesus told to sell all that he had, was not in the material goods they possessed:

- They were BOTH very rich!

The difference was in their hearts where Job could praise God even after all his goods were destroyed, saying: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. Jehovah gave, and Jehovah has taken away; Blessed be the name of Jehovah!"

- While at the same time the rich young ruler could go away very saddened because he could not give up his wealth, even to follow Jesus.

For the sake of our own peace and contentment AND for the reputation of our witnessing, let us be those who know what it is to be self-controlled.

If I have not already managed to step on your toes, I am sure Paul will with the list of the world's priorities in his second letter to Timothy: We all know the areas where we need more self-control and we must bring those to God in prayer for the help only He can give.

II Timothy 3:1 "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! 6 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

- What a stunning indictment on our so-called "information age!"
- But rather, as those who belong to Jesus, let us strive to bear much fruit: The fruit of the Spirit given to the Saints at Galatia:

Galatians 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

- We are those who are righteous because we have trusted in the finished work of Jesus
- We are those who are being sanctified as we walk in the Spirit being the witnesses that Jesus commanded us to be for Him!
- And Lord willing we will see next week that we have nothing to fear from the judgment to come!

Communion Meditation: Exodus 12:21

"Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb. 22 And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. 23 For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you.

- Not the only lamb eaten in Egypt that night: But this lamb was eaten in faith!