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Will Purpose Opportunities for Witness Above Freedom Acts Chapter 25

We have been going through the Book of Acts. Little did you know that we would talk about government. Starting with Chapter 22, there is a lot of interplay between the government and the church, *i.e.* the apostle Paul, who is part of developing the foundation of the church.

Remember that Christ Jesus is the cornerstone of the church, and He worked through the apostles to lay the foundation. Much of the book instructs us how the church is to react or respond to certain circumstances. I think it is important that we realize how valuable this is to the church. Unfortunately, I think a lot of times people have a certain perspective of the church that is erroneous basically because their perception is based on other things. What we have looked at in the Book of Acts is what the church is about. It is essentially the birth of the church. Where does the birth begin? Well, Acts Chapter 2. Right? When the Holy Spirit is breathed into the church, it becomes alive. Up to that point, it is a lump of clay—like Adam in the Old Testament—until the Spirit of God breathed into him. This same Holy Spirit

came upon the church and it became alive. Then we began to see this thing called the church; we did not even know this was going to exist. This is one of the reasons why Paul repeatedly said, “This is a mystery.” God has ordained the church to be the body of Christ. We as members of His body will rule with Him forever. Wow. Who would have seen that coming? It is a wonderful truth as we see the word repeated over and over. In the Book of Acts, that word church is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which refers to the called-out ones. We are a called-out assembly. We are to be called out in many respects like the children of Israel were—to be different—or, as Scripture will call us, saints, which is another word for holy ones, which is another word for those who are separate, set apart, different, unique, pure as under the Lord. God has called us to be part of that church. It is one of the reasons why I want you to consider this Book of Acts as it defines what the church is about. Unfortunately, we get our ideas about church from many things in our life and based on our own backgrounds. I want to talk to you a little about this grid. A number of years ago when I was attending Moody, they would say that Scripture is actually a grid for truth. What you want to ask yourself is whether or not

what you are thinking goes through the grid of Scripture. If it does, it is truth. If it does not, then it is not truth. The Word of God is that which causes us to perceive what is right and what is wrong if you will use the Word of God in such a way. In other words, perceive it as being the source of truth rather than your own paradigm, so to speak. We all have our personal sense of what should be. Often, our grid includes family, peers, sometimes education, our home culture. I mean, there could be a thousand things that I could list here. Often when people say that they believe something, they believe it in relation to their particular grid. Unfortunately, if your grid is based on anything but Scripture, anything but the Bible, it is erroneous. It is not true. It is false. Your thoughts are a perception of imagination or your own mind or of the background or your lifestyle. For instance, a person may have a perception of what morality is, but that perception of morality may be based on what his family has often told him.

I remember being asked by a couple to counsel them as they were thinking about getting married. I said, "Well, I would be glad to meet with you." I usually meet with couples at least the first time to tell them that they need to receive Christ in their hearts. I figure that this is an

opportunity. I will tell them right off the bat, “Look, if you are not going to call Jesus Lord, there is no reason for me to tell you anything because you are not going to do anything He says.” I try to lay that foundation right at the very beginning. I sat down with them; and they said, “We figured after five years of living together that we should probably get married.” I asked, “Are you living together now?” “Yes. We are living together now.” I said, “Well, I would suggest that you live apart until you get married.” They looked at me strangely. I said, “Do you know what is wrong with living together before you get married?” There was shock on their faces. The reason for that is that they had a different grid. Somebody had told them it was okay. It was probably a pattern of their life. Some people include morality and integrity in their grids, but others do not. I mean, some people think it is okay to steal certain things from their places of work. Some people think it is okay to continually be late. Either way, you are stealing from your boss. What is your grid? What is causing you to think the way that you do? Why do you come up with these conclusions? Is it according to your life? Whether it is ethics, or whether it is theology, I have heard people talk about God. I ask, “Where did you get that idea about God?” “Well, my dad told me this.” But it is not what

Scripture says. It is very difficult for people to think in terms of Scripture. I get in conversations all the time where people say, “I think this or I think that.” I ask, “Do you know what the Bible says about it?” “I have no idea.” “Well then, you are not dealing with reality.” One of the reasons I ask in almost every conversation is, “What does the Bible say?” There is no reason for us to go any further beyond that. I mean, if it is my imagination or my thoughts or your thoughts, then who knows what truth is? I mean, we all would become agnostics at that point. However, we know that there is an absolute. We know that there is truth. We know it is the Word of God. When we talk about the way that the church should respond or react there is no option. This is the way Scripture tells us to do it. Now, let me tell you this. Because we live in a certain culture such as in the United States where stereotypically we think a certain way, it is easy to allow that to permeate our thinking. Churches often have an amalgamation of thought. But you have to continuously go back to Scripture and ask yourself, “What does Scripture say?” I am not saying that I have all of the truth. I am saying that we need to read the Scripture to learn what it says. What are the patterns that we see in Scripture?

I constantly get emails which tell me that they want to do me a favor. It is the way the email starts off. “We can help you raise lots of money.” Then they go into their spiel of how they can double our receipts, how we can get you to give more, or maybe how we can make more money. I do not think they have read the Bible. They are telling me that they want to help the church, but I do not think they have read the Word of God. From everything that I read in Scripture, the church is not to be involved in making money. Period. If you give, you give as unto the Lord. If you do not give as unto the Lord, do not give. We are not trying to build a mega facility. We are doing what God tells us to do. We hope that in your life, you are drawing closer to God. The church exists to help you with that. There is no precedence at all in Scripture where we should be engaged in any business. Start with Acts. Go to the Epistles. You are not going to find it anywhere in the Scriptures. In fact, you will find the opposite. Beware of the charlatans who are involved in business that Paul wrote against. In fact, one of the things that he wrote to the church at Corinth is:

(II Corinthians 2:17) “For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.”

The reason why people perceive the church as a money-making venture is because we live in a capitalistic society. I understand that. Yet, it has permeated our thoughts in that we have allowed our society to define how we think. This is wrong for a church to do that. We must allow the Scripture to tell us how to think so that we live in truth and not according to the world. It is not wrong for you as an individual to go out to earn money. You need to do that as you are probably the breadwinner. But the fact of the matter is that the church is not to do that at all. The church is not to involve themselves. I hate to say this, but I know that a lot of what I am saying is going to rub against a lot of people. I am not talking about you. It has to do with one's values. This is one of the reasons that I am not on radio or TV because I would be sued. Or people would hate me more, and I have enough people hating me. The Book of Acts teaches us that the church is not to be involved in politics. Period. That does not mean that we do not take stands on certain issues. We are going to be strong on certain

issues, but we will not become involved in politics. We believe that God has ordained its authority. Take a moment as we review some verses that show the interaction between Paul and the government or the church and government.

(Romans 13:1) “Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”

(Romans 13:2) “Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.”

(Romans 13:6) “For because of this, you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.”

Paul is talking about the government which God has ordained. You say, “Wait a minute. God has not ordained the government.” Oh, yeah? Have you ever read Isaiah:

(Isaiah 45:1) “Thus says the Lord to Cyrus His anointed, whom I have taken by the right hand, to subdue nations before him and to loose the loins of kings; to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut;”

Who was that? Cyrus. What did He call Cyrus? He called Cyrus His anointed—*moshiach* or Messiah—for this particular purpose. In other words, God had ordained him for this particular work. Cyrus was king of the Medes and the Persians which were godless societies. God had ordained that the temple walls would be rebuilt. Cyrus financed it. This guy was not even a believer in *Yahweh*. Why would he do such a thing? Because God is in control of all governing authorities. There is none that exists which are not under His control. What if it is a bad governing authority?

(Ecclesiastes 5:8) “If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight; for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them.”

It says God will take care of them. He will raise another authority to take care of that authority. In fact, as you read in Isaiah and Jeremiah, you see God doing that exact thing as He raised up Assyria to take Israel into captivity. Assyria became arrogant about it. God said, “Because you became arrogant about it, I will raise up Babylon to get you.” Then Babylon became arrogant, and

God said, “Because you are arrogant, I will raise up the Medes and the Persians to get you.” God raises up whatever nation he chooses to discipline whatever nation He wants to discipline. Does this mean that the government is this holy cloud? Absolutely not. But it does say that we are to submit to that governing authority. According to the way I read Scripture, we are to do it in such a way that we want their good. That should be the desire of our heart. In fact, is that not what we have been reading in Jeremiah? The Babylonians had Jeremiah in captivity; but the commander had him released, telling him to go to the families who remained to tell them that they were to till the land. He wanted the best for them.

I was talking to my dad today. I said, “You know, dad, we probably should not tell many people this, but this planet is not our home.” This is what Scripture tells me. I read in Hebrews Chapter 11 that Abraham was searching for another country, which is the Promised Land. But it was not Canaan. He was looking for a heavenly home. Our citizenship is not here. Yes, they were in captivity in Babylon for a while. Are we to wish the best for our government? Absolutely. According to Timothy, we are to pray for those who are in authority. We are to wish them

well. We are to do the best we can. But we know this is not our home. We do not get that involved in politics in the sense that I am trying to change the government because I know that the only One who can change this world and everything in it is Christ. I myself must try to do what is right. I want to walk in the integrity of Christ, but I have not been called to change the world. One major problem is that some people perceive themselves as the savior of the world. Christ is the Savior of the world. If you do what is right, God will reward you. He will be with you. He will bring you safely home.

There are some foundational principles that we are laying down that remind us that it is hard not to think like the world in which we live. This is why Jesus came on the scene. God sent John to tell people to repent. Right? The original word is *maritaneo*, which means to think differently about. Then Jesus comes on the scene and tells people to repent. What did He mean? You must think differently. Scripture is full of things that do not come naturally to us. Jesus says in:

(Matthew 10:37) “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

That goes against our grain, especially if our grid is all about family. See? Jesus was told that His mother and brothers had come to Him in Matthew Chapter 12.

(Matthew 12:48) “But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, ‘Who is My mother and who are My brothers?’”

(Matthew 12:50) “For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.”

That goes against almost everybody's grid. You must change your way of thinking. If you are not using Scripture to lay that foundation, I would say you will have a lot of erroneous thoughts. Psalm 131 is written by David the king. Do you know how he started off in that Psalm? He basically said, “I do not involve myself in things too difficult for me. I keep myself peaceful.” We human beings are really small in the scheme of things. Some are trying to save the planet. If so, don't you think you are involving yourself in something a bit too big for yourself? Should you be environmentally conscious? Yes. But you are not going to save the planet. I would lose

sleep over that if I thought that I was the one who was going to save the planet. Are we going to make the government right? You are not going to make the government right. Scripture is very clear about the end times. Things will proceed from bad to worse. Things are not going to get better—they are going to get worse. That does not mean you throw up your hands and do nothing. Scripture tells us that we should be doing good; we should be working harder and more than ever before all the way to the very end until Christ takes us home. However, we are not doing this to make the planet better. We are doing this to obey our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is why we do the things we do. If you think about it, it takes away all that frustration of when things do not happen in the way we want and things are not getting better. How frustrating must that be to people? They work and work and work, but things get worse. That must be extremely frustrating. God has called us in a very unique way. As a reminder, in John Jesus makes it very clear to Pilate:

(John 18:36) “Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants

would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”

He said the same thing to His disciples in Luke Chapter 22; He said, “You are not a part of this either. You are not a part of this world.” I know it is difficult to think like a stranger or an alien. Hebrews Chapter 11:13 says much the same thing. Paul said in Second Timothy Chapter 4:7-8, “God will bring me safely home into His kingdom.” Jesus told us in John Chapter 14:2, “I go to prepare a place for you. This is not My place.” God has placed us here to be good stewards with what we have. We are to seek our country's good. First Timothy Chapter 2:1-4 tells us to pray for those who are in positions of authority. God raises up nations where we live, and we want the best for them. In fact, I think the passage that I was talking about is Jeremiah Chapter 29 beginning in Verse 10. The Israelites were in Babylon, but the day would come when He would bring them home. I am looking forward to the day when God will say to me, “Okay, come on home.” He will deal with the nations like the Babylonians here on this earth; He will bring us home. It tells us in Revelation Chapter 18, Jeremiah Chapter 51,

and Isaiah Chapter 13 that God will deal with those things. We are strangers and aliens.

As we now come into the Book of Acts Chapters 22 through Chapter 25, we recognize that Paul is involved with the government. If you look at what is happening within the text, it is clear that he is not trying to change the nation. If you want to do the world a favor, proclaim Jesus. That is the responsibility of the church—period! We believe that Christ is the answer for the world. That is it. We are not going to change our message. You are not going to make this world a better place. I am not going to make this world a better place by bringing in different policies that are Christian policies until that person receives Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Only then will his heart be right. Then we will not even have to have policies. People will do what is right. If you give Christian policies to people who have evil hearts, guess what they do? They twist the godly policies for their own benefit. Things will not change that way. This is why you and I proclaim the Gospel. If you look at Acts Chapter 22 the handout sheet, the heading at the top deals with the church because this is about the birth of the church. It is about the Acts of the Apostles who are laying the foundation of the church. It tells us what the church is to

do. In the chapters that we have been reading, Paul is interacting with government officials. When we initially read these texts, we go, “Well, Paul is trying to defend himself. He is trying to stay out of prison.” I would say to you that no, he was not. We are going to see the dialogue as we read along. If you look at the heading for Chapter 22, we are saying that the church will recognize tradition without compromise to testimony. This is a very interesting thing. We live in America. There are certain things that we Americans do. We recognize the traditions that we have as Americans. Even though we are not an old nation, we still have certain traditions. We recognize those. Remember that our grid is the Bible. As long as those traditions do not go against Scripture, they are okay. Let me give you an example. There are a number of texts that you could note along the side of your sheet. Romans Chapter 12:17 says what?

(Romans 12:13) “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.”

What it is telling us is that there are things that every nation does that are of high quality. It is an honorable quality. If in fact you were to go over to Syria or some of

the nations in the Middle East, you would realize that some of their traditions are honorable. I remember my folks when they were part of Sudan Interior Mission. When they would go over there, my mother would have to buy full length dresses that covered her ankles. In their culture if the ankles were showing, then that was a sign that maybe she was a “floozy” or something. Is that a bad policy? No. That culture was saying that we perceive that a woman who shows her ankles would be promiscuous. We want to do what is honorable. We are not going to try to figure out the motivation behind this. It is still an honorable tradition. But what are we going to do? We are going to respect what is right and honorable in that nation by making sure that our ankles are covered. There is a sense that we are here to present the Gospel. If we are going to present the Gospel, we are going to present it as good news. This not only means that it is beneficial, but good news means that it is virtuous. I know that people think, “Well, good news. We are out of hell.” Yes. We understand that. That is good. That is great news that we are out of hell. But it is also telling us that this is a virtuous message of godliness. Is there something honorable in this tradition? Yes. We recognize this. Paul writes in:

(I Corinthians 10:32) “Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God;”

In other words, do not try to be offensive. Unfortunately, and maybe this is the American in us, we feel like it is our God-given right to be offensive. We are Americans. We can do whatever we want to do. As Americans, you might be able to do whatever you want; but as Christians, you cannot because we represent the Gospel. I am not talking about political correctness here. I am talking about representing the Gospel. If there is an honorable tradition, we need to do what is honorable. I do not think we ought to go along when something is not honorable. We do not allow the culture to define us. Paul says:

(I Corinthians 9:20) “To the Jews, I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;”

(I Corinthians 9:22) “To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.”

(I Corinthians 9:23) “I do all things for the sake of the Gospel so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”

We want to proclaim Christ. It is not a strange thing. When you walk into a Sunday school class, you have these little kids with a teacher talking to them and sometimes playing with them. It might sound or look stupid. You go, “What are you doing?” They are getting onto a level that the children can understand. That is what they are doing. What is wrong with that as long as you are not compromising the dignity of the office, as long as you are not compromising the message?

(II Corinthians 8:21) “for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but in the sight of men.”

(I Corinthians 9:23) “I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”

This is the key. We are not doing this to appease men. I am doing this as a platform that I might proclaim the Gospel to these men. That is the only reason I would do it. I am not trying to be a “kiss up”, but I am trying to get them to like me. In fact, after I finish presenting the

Gospel, they may hate me. But I want that opportunity to present the Gospel; that is the reason why we are doing it.

For Chapter 23, the title is the church will bear witness to the truth with an honorable cooperative spirit. We are not trying to buck the system. We are trying to work within the system. We are not rebels. We are not rebellious. We should not be Protestants. It is where the word protestant comes from. God has not called the church to that. I am not saying that Protestants are bad people. I am saying that was a bad name to choose for them. As you look at Chapter 23, we are called to submit, to obey, wherever possible. The bottom line in that is that where man's laws offend Christ's laws, you do not obey man's laws. We saw that in Chapter 4 of Acts. Right? Acts Chapter 4 Verse 19 says, "Whether it is right for us to obey God or man, you be the judge." We cannot stop speaking about the Gospel of Christ. If the government were to tell me that I had to stop preaching, I would say, "Sorry." What would I do? I could get a lawyer, but there is no precedence for that in Scripture. You might say that they did not have lawyers back then. But they did. In Chapter 24, we read that Tertullus was hired by the Sanhedrin to be their lawyer. They did have lawyers. Paul

could have gotten a lawyer, but he did not because he was not trying to fight the government. Arrest me. If that is God's will, I will have a prison ministry. Some of his greatest ministry was in prison. We are not to rebel or protest. We believe that God has ordained the government to do whatever the government does. Even though they mean it for evil, God will take care of us. He is orchestrating it for our good. He is putting us exactly where we need to be. If in fact you read Scripture and then come up with the idea that we should be fighting the government, I do not think you have read it correctly. Maybe you did not understand the Scripture. Once again, I know this goes against the grid of many people; but it is not what Scripture is telling you. You have to be honest with yourself and ask, “What is it actually saying?” The church will bear witness to the truth with an honorable cooperative spirit.

In Chapter 24, the church will live by faith that God will vindicate the righteous. In other words, we believe that it is not our court system that will vindicate us. It is God. Now I know that is a huge leap, but that is exactly what we believe. If you look with me in Acts Chapter 24, Paul was brought before Ananias who was the chief priest. There is a difference between religion and our faith.

Religion is man-made. If you wonder what the enemy of God is, it is religion. The government is ordained by God. The enemy is religion. Colossians Chapter 2 Verse 23 talks about self-made religion. Romans Chapter 10 Verse 3 talks about man attempting to be good without subjecting himself to God's righteousness. That is what man's religion is. But I have news for you. I cannot be holy without Him changing my heart. Unless Christ changes my heart, I cannot be holy. Self-made religion tries to maneuver and tries to fight. It tries to manipulate organizations into doing things that it should not because it perceives itself as the answer. As you look in Chapter 24, it is religion, *i.e.* Judaism, with Ananias the high priest who is trying to manipulate. Who tried to kill Paul? Was it the government that tried to kill him? Now the government did kill him later; but, as Paul said in Second Timothy Chapter 4:8-9, "God will bring me safely home." Now, I do not know how chopping your head off is bringing you safely home; but listen, if the Spirit of God told him he would come safely home, he came safely home. God used Nero. Let me say this at this juncture. Nero was in office at this point. How do we know that?

(Acts 24:27) “But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus...”

See the text? When Festus was brought in as governor, it was Nero on the throne in Rome. Historically, we know it was Nero who assigned him to be governor to the Jews. In Chapter 25 with Festus coming into office, it is probably the autumn of 59 AD. We know what time it is. Scripture was not written in a vacuum. It was written in history. God is revealing how He is controlling absolutely every single thing. In Chapter 24:1, the high priest brought an attorney which we talked about last week. Remember? In Verse 2, the attorney talked for the Sanhedrin. Right? It was the attorney who talked instead of Ananias after Paul was summoned. “Felix” is an interesting word; it means happy. You thought Pilate was bad? Felix historically was one of the worst governors. He was known for his tyrannous ways. He was unscrupulous. This was one of the reasons why the Jews began to revolt during his time. He was put out of that office in two years. But within six years, the Jews revolted. I think it was called the Great Rebellion of the Jews from 66 to 70 AD. Titus came in with an army of 60,000 Roman soldiers who slayed over 100,000 Jews. It

did not end well. In a way, Felix was the governor who started a lot of the problems because he was unscrupulous and manipulative. In fact, he was known to have said, “I am willing to manipulate the courts any way that I want to in order to get what I want.” Now the lawyer for religion addressed him.

(Acts 24:2b) “...Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation,”

Does that sound like politics to you?

(Acts 24:3) “we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness.”

There is nobody whom the Jews hated more than Felix at that moment, but they want Paul killed.

(Acts 24:5) “For we have found this man a real pest and a man who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”

As we know, however, the Jews were the ones who stirred up the problems. What is interesting to me is that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. They knew who he was. Everybody knew who he was. Do you know what Paul talked about in Felix's presence? Paul knew how unscrupulous this person was. He knew how tyrannous he was.

(Acts 24:24) “But some days later, Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.”

The text says that she was his wife. She was a Jewess. Felix also had three other wives. Drusilla, being Jewish, was probably his first wife. This is God's way of saying his only wife. Now watch the next verse as he was discussing what?

(Acts 24:25) “But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, ‘Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you.’”

Was he feeling convicted? Do you think Paul was trying to manipulate Felix in any way to get a better position? He could not have talked about anything worse if he was trying to position himself. He knew that God had given him this opportunity to speak to Felix.

This is our point in Chapter 25—that the church will pursue opportunities for witness above freedom. The church will pursue testimony above anything else. The church will often be in a place that is not advantageous. I see it coming fast when many people start interviewing others about this or about that. If the church is going to talk about righteousness, it has to be very clear about it. Sadly, the first thing that a lot of churches talk about is fear that its tax deduction status will be taken away. We are pillars of the truth. We are not here to appease the world. Jesus had warned the disciples,

(John 15:19) “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.”

Paul was clear. What could Paul have done to protect himself? He could have asked the church to take up a

collection. Why didn't the church take a collection to get him out of prison since Felix could have been bought with a bribe? I could see this happening since Felix was undoubtedly hoping that money would be given him by Paul. Maybe he thought that Paul was naive. But Paul would have sat down with him and used it as another opportunity to talk to him about righteousness. What Paul did was to appeal to Caesar. Finally, Felix gave up. He left him sitting in prison for two years. Where was the strategizing of Paul? Was this guy a moron, or was he following a higher standard? See. The church does not get into manipulation.

(II Corinthians 5:7) “for we walk by faith, not by sight.”

Depending on what grid you are using, this may not work. But if in fact you are using the Scriptural grid, it makes perfect sense. It is in Chapter 25 that Festus comes into office. Though Paul had an opportunity to get out of trouble, he used this as an opportunity not to get out, but instead to proclaim, to be a witness for, Christ. Festus comes into the situation. He is an interesting character all by himself. He was sent in by Nero. Paul had been in prison for two years. Even so as he comes, if you look,

the chief priest instantly comes up with accusations. He had not forgotten. The religious leaders wanted Paul dead. Two years later, they were right there on his doorstep when Festus came in because they knew that Felix was not going to do anything. They were probably afraid that the judgment they wanted would not happen. We know that Festus would only spend two years in office. He would be dead in two years. So, the chief priests, the leading men of the Jews, brought charges against Paul.

(Acts 25:2) “And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul, and they were urging him, requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem (at the same time, setting an ambush to kill him on the way).”

They did not want justice. Right? They wanted him dead.

(Acts 25:4) “Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly.”

Festus had just been put into office. In other words, they were working ahead. You would think that, with the Sanhedrin having all this information about Festus coming into office, that they would have had the uppermanship on the whole deal. That tells us that it does not matter how manipulative you are, you cannot out-manipulate God. Verse 5 says,

(Acts 25:5) “Therefore,” he said, “let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him.”

He suggested that they go together to set up a date to prosecute him or to do whatever was needed.

(Acts 25:6) “After he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea, and on the next day, he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought.”

(Acts 25:7) “After Paul arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove,”

(Acts 25:8) “while Paul said in his own defense, ‘I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.’”

Where was Paul's attorney? He did not have one.

(Acts 25:9) “But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, ‘Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?’”

We know that Festus did not have good motives. We believe that he was trying to, once again, keep the peace. It is like Rodney King saying, “Can we not all get along?” I think most of us are old enough to remember that.

(Acts 25:10) “But Paul said, ‘I am standing before Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know.’”

Paul declared that he was already standing before Ceasar’s tribunal. This is an issue for Caesar’s court. So, he appeals to the higher courts. Now this is an interesting point and one that I want to emphasize. Why did Paul make this appeal? The answer is not that he was

strategizing to protect himself. He could have already gotten himself off. In fact, if you jump ahead with me to Chapter 26, King Agrippa was talking with Festus.

(Acts 26:32) “And Agrippa said to Festus, ‘This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.’”

You have to ask yourself this one simple question as who in their right mind would want to appeal to Nero? Think about that. Why would he want to go before Nero? Well, I can tell you why. It goes back to his calling. What was his calling? Do you remember his initial call? Go back to Acts Chapter 9. Remember when he saw the bright light on the road to Damascus? He opened his eyes, but he was blind for a while. Alright. We will pick up in Verse 13:

(Acts 9:13) “But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints in Jerusalem;’”

(Acts 9:14) “and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”

(Acts 9:15) “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;’”

This was his ordained call. You might want to mark it in your Bible. He had to go all the way up to Caesar. He was not manipulating. He was obeying his call. He knew that God was using this arrest to bring him before Caesar. It was while he was under house arrest that he wrote the Book of Philippians. It was while he was under house arrest that many of the Praetorian Guard received the Lord. These were senators, some of whom might eventually become one of the Caesars because most of them were of the equestrian order. These were the ones to whom he witnessed. Many of them came to know the Lord because of his stay in Rome. He did exactly what God had called him to do. That is the key point in all of this. In Chapter 25:11, he appealed to Caesar. To remind you once again, all we are doing is an overview of the Book of Acts. We are not trying to go into great detail as we usually do. The word he used in Verses 11 and Verse 12 is “appeal”.

(Acts 25: 12) “Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, ‘You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go.’”

(Acts 25:13) “Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and paid their respects to Festus.”

Remember that you have a governor who was hired by the Romans to oversee the Jews. The people in the area had their own king, but they did not vote for him. He was not a Jew but a half Jew. Who were the Herod's? They were Ammonites who descended from Esau. Jacob and Esau were brothers. Esau was the descendant of the Edomites and the Ammonites. But the Romans decided that an Ammonite king was close enough to rule the Jews. Close enough. They did not want somebody who was too close to the Jews because then the king would go over to the Jews' side. What did they do? They said, “We will let you have a king, but we will control him.” They found this Agrippa who was Agrippa the Second who was pro-Roman. He was not even pro-Jew. At this juncture, to let you know, the Jews hated Agrippa also. Why? He built a huge wall in the Jewish temple area so that he did not have to look at them from his palace. He

had literally defaced their temple. They did not like him. Nevertheless, this pro-Roman half-Jew king went to Caesarea to see the new governor. This sounds like politics to me. Paul was the entertainment. What happened was that Festus would say, “Maybe you could help me out with this, Agrippa. I mean, this is your family. Maybe you know some stuff that I do not know.” What we find, of course, is that this pro-Roman king, King Agrippa, was anything but righteous himself and was clearly hated by the Jews. A special note for those of you who have read some of Josephus’, the historian’s, writings. Josephus actually stated that this Herod, King Agrippa, helped him write a lot of his historical facts. I wanted to throw that in. He arrived, and I am going to put this in quotes, with Bernice, “his wife,” as we read in Verse 13 above. Several days elapsed after their arrival. We see Bernice mentioned again with much pomp in Verse 26. When King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea, they paid their respects to Festus. This was a very highly charged political manipulative moment here. The reason I put Bernice in quotes is, according to Josephus who was a friend of Agrippa, this was his sister. He had married his sister. One of the reasons why the Herod’s ceased to exist was because they kept intermarrying.

Scripture is letting us know that. So, he is not a righteous guy, but he came over. He was well equipped with knowledge of the customs and the history of the Jews. In Chapter 26 Verse 2, Paul said,

(Acts 26:2) “In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.”

This is one of the reasons why I told you about King Agrippa’s background. But Paul met his accusers face to face. Festus indicated to King Agrippa, “I have not found anything that this guy has done wrong. Maybe you can help me out.”

(Acts 25:21) “But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar.”

(Acts 25:22) “Then Agrippa said to Festus, ‘I also would like to hear this man myself.’ ‘Tomorrow,’ he said, ‘you shall hear him.’”

In Verses 23 through 27 of Chapter 25, they set up this tribunal, more for purposes of entertainment because Paul had already appealed to Caesar. They were not going to sign anything, but they did not have anything better to do. They listened to him. One of the points that I am trying to make is that Paul knew all of the inter-workings of their actions. We often say, “You have no idea how corrupt the government is.” God goes, “I know how corrupt it is. It is very corrupt.” He knew that. But He still used the government to do exactly what He wanted done. As Peter said shortly after Pentecost, God anointed Pontius Pilate and Herod to do exactly what God wanted them to do. God was orchestrating these things. What is the job of the church? This is the point. The job of the church is to see these as opportunities. Every time you see Paul stand up, every time he gave his defense, he brought in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He did this every single time. The church must perceive these situations not as something to get out of. The church must see them as opportunities to share the Gospel on camera. That is the way the church should be thinking. God had ordained that His message would now spread into the realm of the government region. We have seen

examples over and over again, whether it was Cornelius or the Philippian jailer, God was bringing many of these government officials to Himself. We have seen how the interaction in these opportunities turned to proclaim the message of Christ.

Prayer

Father, as we look at the very beginning of Acts, You have called the church to be Your witnesses. It was to begin in Jerusalem. It was to go into Judea. It was to go out into Samaria and then to the uttermost parts of the earth. You have called us to witness in this world, but yet not to be of it. What an interesting distinction You are showing us to think very differently. We are going to submit to the authority that You placed before us while all the while walking by faith. What a strange people we must seem to You. Lord, we would ask that You would call out this church to walk according to Your Word. Lord, if You tell us to do it, may we adjure our way of thinking to Yours. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.