

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Paul and a Kangaroo Court: How Christians Respond to Injustice

Acts 25:1–12

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to Acts 25. And let me start today by making an obvious statement: "We live in a fallen world that is full of injustice!" Do you agree with that statement? And dealing with injustice is a tricky thing as a Christian. I know in my life I've often struggled with whether or not to battle against it. When should I speak? When should I be silent? When should I fight? When should I just accept it and persevere through it?

There's also the added confusion of "Social Justice Warriors" out there fighting against misperceived and misidentified "injustices" in our world. That's made the issue more complicated. So what's a Christian to do?

Several years ago while I was on vacation, I read a book entitled *Tortured for Christ*, which was written by Richard Wurmbrand the founder of "The Voice of the Martyrs."¹ It wasn't the *cheeriest* book to read while on vacation. But it was meaningful and sobering. And it gave me a needed perspective on the nature of suffering and injustice in our world.

Wurmbrand was a Romanian Jew who lived through the atrocities of the Nazi invasion of Romania. And then he lived through the *even worse* atrocities of the Soviet Communist regime. He was imprisoned for nearly fourteen years, three of those years in solitary confinement.

What Wurmbrand went through in prison is almost unreadable. Wurmbrand's wife Sabina went through just as many trials as her husband. And she is someone who I consider equally admirable for her faith and godliness.

At one point in the book she and her husband were at this "communist convention" where the name of Jesus was being blasphemed. And she told her husband to stand up and speak up for Christ. He said, "If I do so, you lose your husband." And she replied, "I don't wish to have a coward as a husband."

Well as we come to the book of Acts, we realize that nineteen hundred years before Richard Wurmbrand suffered in a Communist prison, Paul suffered in a Roman prison. And his suffering is instructive for you and me. As we've seen already in the book of Acts, Paul was wrongfully accused of a crime in Jerusalem. He was beaten and imprisoned. A group of Jewish vigilantes took a vow to exterminate him. He was rushed out of Jerusalem to stand trial in Caesarea. And while in Caesarea, he defended himself and preached the gospel before Felix, the governor, while the Jewish leaders hired a big-shot attorney, Tertullus, to prosecute him.

And at the end of chapter 24 we saw *heartbreakingly* how Felix rejected the gospel, and then left Paul to languish in prison for two years, just because Felix wanted to placate the Jewish leaders in Judea. And Acts 24:26 says that Felix kept calling Paul to speak to him, not because he wanted to respond to the gospel, but because he was hoping for a bribe from Paul. And so Paul had to sit in prison for two years because this guy was playing fast and loose with the Roman judicial system. Injustice. Injustice. Injustice.²

By the way, the Romans prided themselves in the first century world for being this great bastion of judicial process and justice in the ancient world. But, as we see in the book of Acts, not so much.

¹ Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 50th anniversary ed. (Bartlesville, OK: The Voice of the Martyrs, 2018). See also the movie entitled "Tortured for Christ," directed by John Grooters (Bartlesville, OK: The Voice of the Martyrs, 2018).

² Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 155: "It is better to live as a prisoner who belongs to Jesus than a free man without a relationship with God."

What happens next for the Apostle Paul? Well, let's see. And before we get to **chapter 25**, look at the end of **chapter 24**, because these historical details are instructive. Luke writes in **verse 27**.

When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

Felix was a terrible governor. Eventually he gets fired, because he was absolutely incompetent as a ruler. In fact, during his reign in Judea, the tension between Jews and Romans had reached fever pitch. Revolt was imminent. So when word got back to Emperor Nero, he fired Felix, and put this guy Festus in charge instead.³

And Festus, unlike Felix, was a competent ruler.⁴ But still, the situation in Judea is a volatile one. It's approximately AD 59.⁵ The Jews in the region are escalating revolt. Festus has to assuage the powers-that-be.

So, **Acts 25:1** tells us:

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

That's an odd thing to do for a new governor in the province.⁶ Why's he in such a hurry to get to Jerusalem? Caesarea is a much more comfortable place for a Roman ruler like Festus.⁷ So why would he want to go to uncomfortable Jerusalem so fast?

Well, the Jews are threatening revolt. There are significant tensions between them and the Romans. Festus, as a wise ruler, does what a wise ruler should do. He goes to the principal city in his region where all the tensions reside, and he tries to make peace.

Look at **verse 2**.

² *And the chief priests and the principal men⁸ of the Jews laid out their case against Paul⁹*

Now, hold that thought for a moment. It's been two years since Paul was in Jerusalem. He's been languishing in prison without causing any problems for them. Even when he was in Jerusalem two years before this, he was only there for about a week. And yet, when the new governor of the region comes to visit these leaders, what's the first thing that these chief priests and leaders want to talk about? What's the first thing they want done? They lay out their case against Paul.

and they urged¹⁰ him [Festus],³ asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem—

We know historically that Ananias was no longer the high priest in Jerusalem at this time.¹¹ Things have changed in Jerusalem over the last two years, but not that much. Paul's been in prison for two years. He's been a non-factor as an evangelist and "agitator" for that time. And there are literally hundreds of issues that these

³ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 153: "Festus came from a very different background than Felix. Festus was a blue-blooded Roman whose family had long been influential in the Roman Empire. Felix had left things in such a mess that Rome was, apparently, determined to send someone of noble pedigree to try to clean up the mess that had been made in Judea."

⁴ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 38: "Festus was a welcomed successor to the miserably debauched Felix, governor of Judea (24:27). When he took over, tension with the Jews was near the breaking point." Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 986: "Festus is portrayed in v. 1 as a competent governor who is well aware of his responsibilities and duties as the governor of a difficult province."

⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 986: "[Festus] became governor of Judea when Felix was recalled in AD 59... He died in office in AD 62. During the interregnum between Festus's death and the governorship of Albinus, his successor, there was total anarchy in Judea."

⁶ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 490: "The province of Judea was a section of the larger Roman province of Syria. Syria was under the authority of a Roman legate, while the province of Judea was under the lesser jurisdiction of a procurator. So at this point, Festus began his procuratorship."

⁷ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 155: "Governors typically liked being in Caesarea because it was the most Roman city in the area, and they did not enjoy being in Jerusalem—which shows that, in staying there more than a week, Festus indeed had some significant issues to address during his trip."

⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 700: "leaders [ESV: 'principal men'] (literally, οἱ πρῶτοι, *hoi prōtoi*, the first men; Luke 19:47)."

⁹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 316: "Perhaps they feared that the new governor would, as often happened, quickly dispose of the cases left by his predecessor and release Paul. Hoping to capitalize on Festus's inexperience and desire to placate them, they were repeatedly urging him, requesting a concession against Paul."

¹⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 700: "The imperfect tense in the request (παρεκάλουν, *parekaloun*) presents it as an ongoing request and may suggest an element of pressure."

¹¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 700: "During this time, the high priest was Ishmael ben Phiabi. There was much infighting for power within the leadership in this period (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.8.8–9 §§179–82; 20.8.11 §§194–96)."

Jewish leaders *could* be discussing with Festus right now. There are problems everywhere.¹² But all they want to talk about is this washed-up Christian convert, Paul, stuck in prison fifty miles away in Caesarea. What's wrong with these guys? They really hate Paul!

Now when a new ruler comes to power, it's not uncommon for the people under that ruler's authority to ask for a favor. And you can really only cash in one or two favors like this.¹³ These guys want to use their "favor" to get Paul transported back to Jerusalem for a new trial.

This is after they failed to get a conviction in Caesarea. This is after they tried to kill him already while he was imprisoned in Jerusalem. This is after two years of inactivity.

And the asking of this favor is even worse than you think. Because they really don't want him prosecuted in Jerusalem. They know they don't have a case against him. They just want Festus to transport him to Jerusalem according to **verse 3**:

because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way.

So here's the situation. This guy Festus is trying to ingratiate himself with the Jewish population, so he's willing to meet with them and talk with them. The Jewish leaders try to leverage a favor with this new ruler by getting Paul transported to Jerusalem. And they plan to kill him on the way.

Now if this actually happened, how do you think this little conspiracy is going to go over with the new ruler? When Festus finds out about this, he's going to respond with shock and awe. He's going to unleash Roman vengeance on Jerusalem, and a civil war will erupt, and thousands of innocent people will be killed. Actually that's exactly what happens a few years later in AD 66–70, when the Romans invade Jerusalem killing tens of thousands of Jews and destroying the temple.

These Jews are willing to risk Roman retribution, and the betrayal of the trust of this new governor, Festus, all so that they can put an end to this guy Paul. Can I just make an obvious observation? These guys really don't like Paul.¹⁴

Now I want you to put yourself in Festus's shoes for just a moment. What would you do if you were in his situation? He's a new ruler. He's impressionable. He's trying to make peace in a volatile situation. He's trying to ingratiate himself with these new subjects of his. I'm sure they painted a picture of Paul like he was the devil in disguise. "He's a rebel-rouser. He causes riots everywhere he goes. He profaned our temple. He worships this man Jesus, so he's a threat to Ceasar and the Empire." I'm sure they laid it on pretty thick when they presented their case against Paul. I'm sure they made him sound like Hitler or Mussolini with their accusations.

What would you do if you were in Festus's shoes? Let me ask it this way—what have you done in the past when people have been quick to make accusations against other people in your presence? Have you nodded your head in agreement without ever hearing the other side of the story?

The Bible says this: "The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him" (Prov 18:17). **One of the reasons that every person in America has an equal right to a fair trial is because the Bible speaks against bias in prosecution (e.g., Exod 23:2–3; Lev 19:15; Deut 16:19; Prov 18:5;**

¹² Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 154: "Of all the things Festus might have had on his agenda on that visit, there was one topic that took precedence above all else for the chief priests and Jewish leaders: Paul. The Jews urgently 'laid out their case against Paul' (v 2), which shows that he was the number one concern that they wanted to address with the new governor."

¹³ JOHN CALVIN: "We know that new governors, seeking to win the favor of provincials, are in the habit of granting them many things on their arrival. One might therefore well believe that the death of Paul would not be unacceptable to Festus, as a preliminary way of grasping at favor. Therefore the faith of the holy man is assailed and tested all over again, as if the promise of God, on which he had rested so far, had been empty. But the grace of God reveals itself all the more clearly in liberating him, because, contrary to expectation, he is snatched out of the jaws of death." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 333.

¹⁴ RUDOLF GWALTHER: "In this passage it can be seen how restless the minds of the impious are after they are inflamed with hatred of the truth. For wherever their wicked works are disclosed by the light, it cannot be that they easily lay aside their hatred once it is conceived. But rather they boil and froth in their minds like the raging sea, busily watching every small opportunity in which they can extinguish the light of that truth that they hate so much. Often the force of this hatred is such that without any regard to their personal benefit, they strive for and desire this one thing: to remove from their midst the ministers of the Truth, whose teaching they perceive to be such torment." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 333.

24:3). And just as a practical word of warning—Be leery of the person who seems just a little too anxious to defend himself and tear down another person’s character in the process.

Now to Festus’s credit, he doesn’t fall for their trick. This guy’s not completely incompetent like Felix. He holds his ground. But he does perpetuate an injustice. Look at **verse 4**.

⁴ Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. ⁵ “So,” said he, “let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong¹⁵ about the man, let them bring charges against him.”¹⁶

Maybe Festus smelled something fishy with these guys. Maybe he thinks that the case should be made in Caesarea not Jerusalem.¹⁷ Whatever the case, he says, **“No! Bring your charges against him to Caesarea.”**¹⁸ The problem with that, as we know as the reader, is that Paul has already been charged. They’ve already had a trial in Caesarea. Paul has already been exonerated. And now, the whole thing is going to be repeated again.

We do have this thing in the American court system called *habeas corpus*. It assures a citizen the right to a speedy trial. It safeguards against the government holding individuals indefinitely without charge. Let me just state the obvious, Paul has been denied the right of *habeas corpus* in this situation. And the legal system has failed him.

Go ahead and right this down in your notes as #1. We’re talking about injustice today. The title for today’s message is “Paul and a Kangaroo Court: How Christians Respond to Injustice.” And the first principle for this passage is as follows:

1) Don’t be **surprised** when politics get in the way of justice (25:1–5)

Political authorities and political powers in our world are not intrinsically evil. In fact, on balance, they are a God-given good. But sometimes they get in the way of the good. That was true twenty centuries ago. It’s true in our day too.

Now again to Festus’s credit, when he gets back to Caesarea, he doesn’t waste any time dealing with this issue. Maybe he’s trying to do the right things where Felix failed. I don’t know.

Look at **verse 6**.

⁶ After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days,¹⁹ he went down to Caesarea. And **the next day**²⁰ [Like I said he didn’t waste any time] he took his seat²¹ on the tribunal²² and ordered Paul to be brought.²³ ⁷ When [Paul] had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around [Paul]²⁴

That’s a pretty interesting picture here. It’s as if these guys encircle Paul like a pack of wild dogs.²⁵

¹⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 700: “If there is anything amiss or wrong legally (ἄτοπον, *atopon*, literally, ‘out of place’), they must accuse him there. The term ἄτοπον here suggests that Festus is not going to commit himself to anything until a trial is held.”

¹⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 987: “Festus implies that only accusations with proper reasons will be admitted.”

¹⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 489: “Festus’s response was made on purely pragmatic grounds—it was simply more convenient for him to give a hearing in Caesarea. Inadvertently, therefore, he became Paul’s protector, delivering him once again from a dangerous threat to his life.”

¹⁸ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 38: “Did Festus know about the Jews’ plot to murder Paul along the road, or did the governor have some other reason for his decision? We do not know. We can be sure, however, that God was in control and was continuing to protect his servant.”

¹⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 987: “The reference to ‘eight or ten days’ reflects Luke’s caution not to claim what he does not know for certain: he is not sure whether Festus stayed in Jerusalem for eight or ten more days... As the new governor in the province, Festus would have wanted to get a good grasp of the Jewish institutions and traditions (such as the Sanhedrin, the temple, and the synagogues), to familiarize himself with the topography of the city, and to inspect the security arrangements in the city (e.g., by visiting the Antonia Fortress with its Roman garrison).”

²⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 988: “The fact that Festus summons Paul on the day after his arrival from Jerusalem (τῆ ἐπαύριον) suggests that he took up Paul’s case as the first item of business of his official functions as governor of the province of Judea. Clearly he wants to end this long-drawn-out case.”

²¹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 492: “Festus took his seat on the tribunal. This was a legal formality; it gave legal backing to any decision that might be made.”

²² Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 701: “He sits on the raised judgment seat known as the βῆμα (*bēma*; 18:12, 16–17).”

²³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 988: “We must assume that Festus had read the documents concerning Paul’s case: both the letter of Claudius Lysias (23:26–30) and the transcript of the trial proceedings under his predecessor, Felix.”

²⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 490: “Paul’s accusers assumed a threatening posture, surrounding him both physically and with their accusations.”

bringing many and serious²⁶ charges²⁷ against him that they could not prove.²⁸

This must have been a déjà vu experience for Paul, because this stuff has already happened. And now it's happening again. They accused Paul of profaning the temple. Couldn't prove it. They accused Paul of starting a riot in Jerusalem. Couldn't prove it. They accused Paul of being a threat to the Roman Empire. Again... they couldn't prove it!

They couldn't prove it two years before with their hotshot lawyer Tertullus, and they still can't prove it. **They are just throwing mud against the wall and hoping something might stick.**²⁹

And now it's time for Paul to defend himself again.³⁰ **How should Paul respond? If you were Paul, what would you do? How would you respond if you were in his position?** Maybe Paul should sling mud back! Maybe Paul should fabricate some false counter-accusations! Everybody stretches the truth at least a little bit in a court of law, right?

Watch what Paul does in **verse 8**.

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."

"I haven't sinned against the Jews. I haven't profaned the temple. I have committed treason against Caesar. I'm innocent. I'm innocent. I'm innocent."³¹ No histrionics. No antagonism. No counter-accusations. No personal attacks. He doesn't sling mud. He doesn't falsify accusations against any of them. He just states the facts as clearly and as confidently as he can. And he defends himself.³²

Write this down as a second point in your notes. Don't be surprised when politics get in the way of justice. And secondly,

2) Don't be **opposed** to truthfully fighting injustice (25:6–8)

When injustice is being perpetrated against you, you don't have to always be silent. When you get an opportunity to defend yourself, take it.

²⁵ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 317: "They swarmed around Paul like a pack of wolves attacking a sheep. But these wolves were toothless."

²⁶ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 155–6: "The Jewish leaders brought everything they could against him, in order to see Paul executed. They knew that they would have to do more than charge Paul with teaching erroneous doctrines in accordance with the Jewish faith. They needed to make him out to be a seditious charlatan."

²⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 490: "Luke did not specify their charges, but it is clear from Paul's response (v. 8) that they were the same as those directed at him by the Asian Jews and Tertullus—teaching against the Jewish law (cf. 21:28), defiling the temple (cf. 21:28; 24:6), and plotting treason (cf. 24:5)."

²⁸ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 493: "In place of any real evidence, they simply kept up a constant barrage of accusation."

²⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 988: "Their legal strategy, which seemed to have lacked discipline and focus, backfired: in his report of the trial to Agrippa, Festus expresses his surprise that the Jews "did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected" (v. 18), leaving him with the impression that their case rested on Jewish religious questions and on questions related to Jesus who had died, but whom Paul asserted to be alive (v. 19). Thus, Festus was at a loss how to proceed in the investigation (v. 20)."

³⁰ JOHN CALVIN: "As long as Paul had lived under the Law his integrity had been known and renowned. Then, after his conversion to Christ, he had been a remarkable exemplar of a blameless life. Yet we see that he submits to many insults and severe misrepresentations. But the situation of the servants of Christ is nearly always like that. Therefore, they ought to be the more courageous, so that they may advance firmly through bad and good repute, and so that it may not be strange to them to be blamed when they have done well. In the meantime they must take care not only that their own consciences are clear before God, but also that they are equipped with a proper defense before humans, when the opportune moment is given. Paul does not neglect his own advantage but wisely opposes their false charges with the defense of his own innocence. However, let us note that the ungodly can never be restrained from slandering good people and reviling them impudently." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 334.

³¹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 318: "Since the Jews had presented no evidence against him, Paul merely said in his own defense, 'I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews (sectarianism) or against the temple (sacrilege) or against Caesar (sedition).'"

³² Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 38: "When we are wrongly accused, slandered, or treated harshly, we must remember that God, the Judge of Heaven, will hold men accountable. We must also keep on loving our enemies, as Jesus commanded (Matthew 5:43-44). Rather than becoming bitter or giving up hope, we must recognize the futility and temporality of our opponents' efforts against us."

Now someone might thoughtfully respond to that second point by saying, **“But what about Jesus, Pastor Tony? Jesus didn’t defend himself. He was silent before his accusers.”** And that’s true. That’s a good point. Do we need to imitate Jesus in that way? That’s a good question.

My answer to that is, **“No, not in every detail.”** The reason that Jesus was silent before his accusers was because of two reasons: **1) God’s plan was for Jesus to be wrongly accused and executed. Jesus knew that, and so it wasn’t necessary or fitting for him to plead innocence. Of course, Jesus was innocent! That was the point of the sacrifice. He was an innocent sacrifice to pay for the guilt of others... just like the animal sacrifices in the OT which foreshadowed Christ!**

And 2) the reason Jesus was silent before his accusers was because of OT prophecy. The prophet Isaiah said about Jesus, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth” (Isa 53:7). So can we open our mouths and defend ourselves before our accusers? Yes, I think so. Jesus’s actions here are descriptive not prescriptive for us.³³ Because we are not the fulfillment of OT prophecy. We don’t fulfill Isaiah 53. And unlike Jesus, we don’t know what God’s will is concerning our immediate future, so we are free to plead our innocence like Paul does in Acts 25.

John Calvin said as follows, “Christ’s servants . . . must be all the more courageous to carry on through good and evil reports; they should not think it anything remarkable that evil is spoken of them when they have done good. At the same time, they must easily defend themselves before men when the opportunity arises.”³⁴

I agree with Calvin! Don’t exaggerate the facts. Don’t manipulate your listeners. Don’t counter-accuse with false accusations. Just do like I said last time, “Stick to the truth and stick to the gospel and entrust yourself to him who judges justly.”³⁵ R. Kent Hughes writes, “When faced with groundless accusations, Paul did not go on a rampage but clearly and calmly stated the facts of his innocence.”³⁶

Now, are there times when we need to be silent and just endure injustice? Yes, I think so! The Bible says, “There’s a time to speak and a time to be silent” (Ecc 3:7). Psalm 39:1 says, “I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth with a muzzle, so long as the wicked are in my presence.” James 3:2 says, “If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.” Charles Spurgeon once said, “Often the less we say to our foes, and the more we say to our best Friend, the better it will fare with us.”³⁷

As a rule of thumb, I would say that if you can’t speak without sinning, it’s probably best to stay silent. Let me say that again—if you can’t speak without sinning... if you can’t defend yourself without sinning... it’s probably best to stay silent. But if you *can* control your tongue... if you *can* speak truth without exaggerations and personal attacks... then don’t be reluctant to truthfully defend yourself when given the right opportunity.³⁸

³³ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 157: “One might think that as a Christian, Paul should simply remain silent. Indeed, during his trial, the Lord Jesus remained silent before his accusers. Why then did Paul defend himself? First, Jesus’ silence before the Jews and Pilate was a matter of prophetic fulfillment. Isaiah 53:7 pointed to the suffering Messiah who would, like a sheep before its shearers, remain silent. Second, Jesus came for the single purpose of dying on the cross. He submitted to the will of the Father. He came in order to be the perfect sacrifice which would secure eternal atonement for the people of God.”

³⁴ Calvin, *Acts* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1995), 384. Quoted in Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 38.

³⁵ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 157–8: “Believers today have much to learn from Paul in this episode. Believers should proclaim their innocence and point to the vitality of their living, but not as a motivation to save their own skin. Our motivation must be the purity of the gospel and of its message.”

³⁶ *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 38.

³⁷ Quoted in Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 38.

³⁸ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 156: “Oftentimes, believers will face similar opposition or mistreatment. Christians will come into contact with those who care nothing for righteousness or justice. Indeed, the cultural revolution aims at the dismantling of Christian beliefs and convictions in every corner of Western society. The cultural elites will not tolerate Christian theological and doctrinal fidelity. Festus cared nothing for Paul and his freedom, and only wanted to secure his own version of peace and prosperity. Christians today must prepare themselves for similar moves by governments and rulers who will happily sacrifice the Christian worldview and the freedoms of Christians upon the altar of the moral revolution.”

So let's say you do that. Let's say you have this false accusation that is brought against you. And let's say that you respond with perfect control over your tongue. Let's say that you stick to the truth, you don't exaggerate, you truthfully defend yourself. And you expose the false accusations for what they truly are... which is *false*. Surely after doing that then everything's going to work out swimmingly for you, right?

You'll be exonerated. Your enemies will be humiliated. And everything will be hunky-dory and you'll go home singing, "Ding Dong, the Witch is Dead!" Is that what *always* happens in this fallen world? Of course not.

Listen, hear me on this... someday, that will happen. Someday every wrong deed will be exposed and every injustice will be rectified. But that won't happen on this side of eternity, not until Jesus returns. And on this side of eternity you will experience injustice.³⁹ You will!

Case in point, the Apostle Paul. Look at verse 9.

⁹ But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor,⁴⁰

What? Another favor? Favor. Favor. Favor. Favor. There sure are a lot of "favors"⁴¹ in this vaulted Roman Empire. All its pomp and circumstance of a legitimate judicial system, and yet still injustice seeps through.

Why does he want to do them a favor? I guess Festus wasn't that much better than Felix after all. He does the same thing as Felix. He perpetuates the same injustice.⁴²

He knows that Paul is innocent. He knows that these trumped-up charges against him are false.⁴³ Why doesn't he just stand up to Paul's accusers and do the right thing? He did the right thing earlier when he refused to move the trial to Jerusalem.

But now he bows to the political pressure of his office.⁴⁴

⁹ But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor,⁴⁵ said to Paul, "Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?"⁴⁶

Now watch this. This is where Paul just loses it with this governor. The injustice of the whole situation gets the best of him. Look at **verse 10**.

¹⁰ But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal,⁴⁷ where I ought to be tried.⁴⁸ To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself [**Festus!**]⁴⁹ know very well.⁵⁰

³⁹ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 38: "It is easy to mourn this seeming injustice, to forget that God is still Judge and that he will make all things right in their time."

⁴⁰ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 493: "Within two weeks of his rule over Judea, Festus had already developed the same fearful respect of the Jewish leaders that Felix possessed. He was caving in to the pressure they put on him to bring Paul onto their own turf. He fully understood that there were no grounds for condemning the apostle under Roman law, so he knew he could not proceed with the trial as such. But it was not to his advantage to release Paul either, so he attempted to win either way by making this suggestion."

⁴¹ The same Greek word is used for "favor" (χάρις [*charis*]) in 24:27; 25:3 and 25:9.

⁴² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 490: "Earlier Festus had refused the Jews the 'favor' of transferring Paul to Jerusalem (v. 3). Now he was bending to their political pressure. Favoritism is never a basis for justice, and Paul knew it."

⁴³ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 156: "Festus shows his true colors. Again, he concerns himself with regional stability, not justice."

⁴⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 488: "Like Felix, Festus found himself unable to rise above the pressure exerted by the Jewish power structures and ultimately compromised his sense of justice with respect to Paul. In this regard Festus behaved much like Pilate in the trial of Jesus. In fact, many striking parallels occur between Paul's experience in Acts 25–26 and the trial of Jesus in Luke 23:1–25."

⁴⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 991: "While Festus, eager to grant the Jews a favor, conveniently 'forgets' the principles of Roman law as they pertain to a Roman citizen, Paul asserts the validity of Roman law."

⁴⁶ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 38: "[T]o Festus' credit, he gave Paul a choice and did not force the situation to go his way. This was probably due to his high respect for Paul's Roman citizenship, though certainly the sovereignty of God was the overriding factor."

⁴⁷ This is the same Greek word as verse 6, the βῆμα.

⁴⁸ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 493: "Paul knew that if Festus were not willing to bring justice to the situation in Caesarea, he would be even less likely to do so in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the journey to Jerusalem would expose Paul to an ambush."

⁴⁹ Both the second person pronoun "you" (σύ) and the verb conjugation for "know" (ἐπιγινώσκω) in this statement are singular in Greek. Paul was speaking directly to Festus, not to the assembly.

⁵⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 490: "He was obviously rebuking the procurator when he told him that he knew 'very well' that he had in no way wronged the Jews (v. 10)."

Goodness, gracious! That's a pretty bold statement to make to a Roman authority, right there. Paul is absolutely fearless. Paul's livid at Festus's suggestion, because he knows now that Festus is abdicating his role as judge. He knows that Festus is kowtowing to the Jewish authorities and he's not about to let them take him back to Jerusalem.

Probably Paul is especially bold because he knows he's got that promise from Jesus in his back pocket. Jesus promised Paul that he would go to Rome, so he's not going to die in Caesarea or Jerusalem (**Acts 23:11**). So Paul is playing with house money here, and he fearlessly confronts the Roman governor.

But even though the governor can't kill Paul, because of Jesus's promise, the governor can still make life really uncomfortable for Paul. So this makes Paul's actions especially brave here.

Look at **verse 11**. Paul's not done.

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.*⁵¹ *I appeal*⁵² *to Caesar.*⁵³

Paul invokes here what's called the Roman *provocatio*.⁵⁴ It was the right of every Roman citizen to appeal directly to Caesar if they felt they were being treated unjustly.⁵⁵ Paul would rather take his chances with Caesar in Rome than go back to Jerusalem and accommodate those who are conniving to put him to death.⁵⁶

Paul does Festus an incredible favor here. This is probably the answer to Festus's prayers! Because now Festus can weasel out of this dicey situation involving Paul. He doesn't have to render an unjust judgment against Paul, and he doesn't have to release Paul and infuriate the Jewish leaders in his province. He can just ship Paul off to Rome and let him become someone else's problem.⁵⁷

And this was actually a pretty shrewd move here by Paul.⁵⁸ Not only does he avoid the danger of being sent back to Jerusalem, but now he gets a chance to go to Rome and preach the gospel there which is something that God had promised him previously.⁵⁹ We see once again that God is providentially working behind the scenes to fulfill his greater purposes.⁶⁰

Look at **verse 12**.

¹² *Then Festus, when he had conferred*⁶¹ *with his council,*⁶² *answered, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar*⁶³ *you shall go."*⁶⁴

⁵¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 702: "Acts 25:11 suggests that Paul thinks something is not quite right about the option."

⁵² MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 319: "Such appeals could come after the verdict (*appellatio*) or, as in Paul's case, before it (*provocatio*). Once granted, the appeal took the case out of the governor's hands and transferred it to the emperor."

⁵³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 991: "The appeal to the emperor is succinctly formulated with two words: Καίσαρα ἐπικαλοῦμαι, which corresponds to the Latin phrase *Caesarem appello* ('I appeal to the emperor')."

⁵⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 702-3: "Paul's appeal to Caesar is known as the *provocatio*, an appeal of a citizen for Caesar's judgment before a judgment has been rendered... This type of appeal is one of the oldest Roman ancient rights, dating back to 509 BC."

⁵⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 993: "The Roman character of the trial before the governor of Judea leaves no doubt that both Luke and his readers knew that Paul's status as a Roman citizen was the necessary prerequisite for his appeal to the emperor."

⁵⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 702: "Here Rome is seen as a potential puppet for Israel's leadership. Rome should not be a tool in this unrighteous pursuit of Paul. One senses Paul's desire that justice be done. There is implicit criticism of Festus here, since a verdict of innocent should be given. Nonetheless, Roman protection is better than a return to the hands of the Jewish leadership."

⁵⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 491: "He really had no desire to establish Paul's innocence for fear of the repercussions from the Jews. He probably was relieved by Paul's appeal. It took the whole troublesome matter out of his hands."

⁵⁸ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 38: "Some believers might criticize Paul here, saying he should have simply waited on God and allowed him to direct the apostle's circumstances however he willed. But certainly there is no fault with using the provisions God gives us for our lives and ministries."

⁵⁹ CHRYSOSTOM: "Someone might ask, 'Why is it that when [Paul] heard 'You must testify about me in Rome,' he did this, as if he did not believe?' God forbid! He did this not because he did not believe but because he believed very strongly, for it would have been the action of one who is tempting God to be bold on account of that declaration, to plunge himself into ten thousand dangers and to say, 'Let's see if God can deliver me even so.' Paul did not do this but made use of all that was in himself, entrusting everything to God." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 289.

⁶⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 703-4: "Once again God's sovereignty has protected Paul through the means of the state's law... Again we see how sometimes God's plan works in unusual ways, ways where our own actions can move the plan forward."

⁶¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 994: "Festus was not required to grant Paul's appeal to the emperor... Festus could release Paul since he knows that he has done nothing wrong... This, however, would be an inauspicious beginning of his term as governor of Judea; displeasing the Jewish leaders could threaten the stability of the province. Still, acceding to the demands of the Jewish authorities who demand Paul's execution would be risky, yet executing a Roman citizen at the request of Jewish accusers might create problems in

Those of you who know your history know the irony of Paul's appeal to Caesar. The Caesar at this time was Nero.⁶⁵ And although Paul does escape death again by this appeal, he will eventually die at the hands of this very Caesar in the city of Rome.⁶⁶ All I want to say about that is this: **“God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform.”**

Write this down as a third point from the passage. Don't be surprised when politics get in the way of justice. Don't be opposed to truthfully fighting injustice. And thirdly...

3) Don't be **reluctant** to use legal means when justice is compromised (25:9–12)

Notice if you will that God is never mentioned in this passage of Scripture—**Acts 25:1–12**.⁶⁷ Did you notice that? There's no mention of God the Father. There's no mention of Jesus Christ. There's no mention of the Holy Spirit. It's as if God is incognito, working behind the scenes (like the OT book of Esther) to bring about his purposes.⁶⁸ Was Paul wrong to appeal to Caesar instead of just sitting back and waiting on God to move on his behalf? No, of course not. Paul's actions are perfectly defensible. And God uses those actions as part of his plan.

I think there are two lessons for us here in these last few verses. The first lesson is that we shouldn't be surprised when politics and political forces get in the way of justice. We live in a fallen world and it's inevitable that at times fallenness will get the best of governmental leaders.

But also, here's a second principle, we shouldn't be afraid to use the political processes that are available to us to fight for justice. There are a number of times that Paul invokes his Roman citizenship in the book of Acts. The government is not a necessary evil, just because it fails us from time to time. It is, according to Paul in Romans 13, an instrument in the hands of God to restrain evil. And to the extent that we can utilize laws and governmental statutes to fight against injustice, we should do that.⁶⁹

And let me say this publicly too—Christians are not anarchists! There is no legitimate support in the NT to forsake or defy every form of government. In fact there's the opposite. We are called to submit to our governing authorities.

And the truth is that bad government is better than no government. An imperfect political entity (even the Roman Empire!) is better than anarchy.

Rome. Sending Paul to Rome to be tried in the imperial court was a solution that allowed Festus to extricate himself from the difficult situation.”

⁶² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 491: “A procurator generally had an advisory council that consisted of the higher officials in his administration. Although ultimate decisions were solely in his hands, he could turn to this group for consultation on difficult matters of law. Paul's appeal was certainly no everyday occurrence, and Festus turned to his council before giving formal acknowledgment (v. 12).”

⁶³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 703: “The Caesar here is Nero, whose early reign, advised by Seneca and Afranius Burrus, enjoyed a relatively tranquil period (Suetonius, Nero 9–10) before, however, attaining a different kind of infamous notoriety.”

⁶⁴ JOHANN SPANGENBERG: “These words God certainly placed in the mouth of Festus, so that the Word of the Lord would be fulfilled that was spoken to Paul: ‘Be comforted, Paul, for as you testified of me in Jerusalem, so also must you testify in Rome.’” Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 335.

⁶⁵ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 319: “Paul's appeal seems at first glance to be sheer madness, since the emperor at the time was the infamous Nero. However, the early years of Nero's reign (during which Paul's appeal took place) were not marked by the cruelty and insanity of his later years.”

⁶⁶ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 38: “Of course, years later the Roman Empire did manage to end the earthly life of the apostle—but only because it was God's will. The sovereign God is always in control.”

⁶⁷ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 153: “In Acts 25, Luke never mentions the name of God. The hand of God, however, runs throughout the entire narrative. His providential hand orchestrates every event in this chapter... God may seem absent; indeed, it may even seem that God has abandoned Paul. His grace, however, continues to empower Paul and give him the wisdom and strength to meet his adversaries with poise, peace, and conviction.”

⁶⁸ For more on the book of Esther, see the following series at Messiah Bible Church:

<https://www.messiahbible.org/esther-gods-providence-and-protection>

⁶⁹ JUSTUS JONAS: “It is not possible for Christians to bring charges without sin. But if the accused Christian is brought before the court it is permissible for him to defend himself and explain his case clearly and simply. For injustice committed against the devout should be endured but not in such a way that you approve and praise your adversaries' false accusations. Thus Paul here appeals to Caesar not to bring charges, but to protect and defend himself.” Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 335.

Are governments prone to perpetuating injustice? Yes. Institutions are run by sinners, and sometimes sinners act sinfully. But to the extent that we can use the governing institutions that God has given us for good and for justice, we should.

Now you might say, “Don’t do this; don’t do that. What *should* I do, Tony?” Well before we’re done, let me give you five additional principles for how a Christian should respond to an injustice.

I want to be as practical as I can be with you on this issue. So if you’re struggling through an injustice right now, then take note of these things. Go home this afternoon and pray through these and start implementing these immediately.

And if you’re not struggling through an injustice right now, then praise God! But write these down anyway. Because you will struggle through something at some point. And these principles, I believe, will be helpful.

Here’s the first. How should a Christian respond to an injustice?

1) Maintain **integrity** even when under **attack**

I think there are a lot of Christians out there who say to themselves, “I’m a really good person. People like me. I don’t get into arguments. I don’t make personal attacks. I don’t gossip.” And I think a lot of us can maintain a certain level of integrity in a vacuum. But we don’t live in a vacuum. We live in a world where good and evil are constantly at war for the hearts of men. And when people are under attack, when people are falsely accused, you get a better glimpse of how much character that person really has. So learn to maintain integrity even when you are under attack.⁷⁰

When we as elders evaluate other elder candidates, one of the things that we like to assess is how does that person respond to criticism? How does that person handle adversity? Not how does that person respond when everything’s going great... how does a person respond when things unravel? That’s more often than not a true test of a person’s character.

Here’s my encouragement to you, church. This is something we should all be striving for. When you are falsely accused, when other people come after you, don’t climb into a mud-pit with them and start slinging. Every time you sling mud you lose ground. We’ve got to learn to maintain integrity and honor before the Lord even when under attack.⁷¹

Here’s a second principle.

2) Maintain spiritual **disciplines**

When you are under attack, let me give you some advice. Keep reading your Bible. Keep praying. Keep talking to God. Get to church on Sunday. Get some other people praying with you.

And that’ll help with this third point. Here’s a third principle.

3) Fight the temptation to **sulk**

If I can be honest with you, this is something I really struggle with. I love to throw myself a little “pity-party.” And I love to invite all my friends to that party. Do you guys know what I’m talking about? Anybody else struggle with that?

And here’s the bigger issue with that. I can sometimes run *from* God instead of *to* God when I’m going through a trial. I pout. I sulk. I brood.

One of the things that I so admire about Richard Wurmbrand in *Tortured for Christ* is that that guy never stopped praying. He never stopped chasing God. He never grew apathetic. He never started sulking or pitying himself.

Even when his enemies beat him to a bloody pulp—that’s not hyperbole by the way, they actually beat him so bad at times that he was beyond recognition. Nevertheless he kept running to God. He kept

⁷⁰ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 320: “Believers are to live blameless lives and so reveal their critics’ accusations to be false (Titus 2:2–8; 1 Pet. 2:12, 15; 3:16).”

⁷¹ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 157: “In the first centuries of the church, the church apologists pointed to the virtuous character of Christians as a defense of the faith. There are ancient manuscripts from non-Christian rulers and governors which point to the sublime character displayed by Christians.”

praying. He kept trusting God. He kept fighting to love the people who were doing those things to him. And in some cases, he brought them to Christ. If he could draw close to God in the midst of those circumstances, how much more can we do that when we experience injustice?

Here's a fourth principle.

4) Ask the Lord to search your **heart**

This is kind of a next level principle. Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal any wrongdoing in you. You might be surprised what God reveals to you.

What did David do when he experienced injustice? What did he cry out before the Lord when he was wrongly accused? "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! (Ps 139:23–24)."

Very rarely are we ever perfectly blameless in our behavior. And we need to be willing to examine ourselves and admit the kernel of truth that might be embedded in another person's accusation. And when we do that, when we are willing to examine ourselves like that and confess wrongdoing, I think our credibility actually grows not lessens in the eyes of the watching world. None of us is perfect, and we all have areas of weakness that people are all too willing to expose. Don't pretend those don't exist. Admit them truthfully and then as I've said before entrust yourself to God who judges justly.

And finally one last thing:

5) Trust that God will **sort** it all out in the end

There's actually a blessing that we can experience when we suffer injustice. Did you know that?

Corey Ten Boon once said that in the deepest, darkest moments of her life, a time when she was living in a Nazi Concentration Camp and experiencing more horror and pain than most of us will ever know, God's presence was so near. And she even said [try to wrap your mind around this] that she often wished she could go back to that place because never before and never after did she experience God's presence so powerfully.⁷² That's just a little glimpse there of God's grace displayed even when great injustice is committed against us.

Here's a final question for you, church. I know this is a heavy message, but we need these kinds of messages from time to time. Here's the question—do you have the kind of faith that could trust God in the midst of a horrific situation like that? Could you endure what Corrie Ten Boon did? Could you endure what Richard Wurmbrand and his wife had to endure? Could you endure what Paul went through, knowing all along that God would use it to accomplish his greater purposes?

I don't know about you, but I want to be that kind of a Christian. I want to be the kind of person who exercises faith in the midst of whatever suffering God allows in my life... faith that believes that God is good, that God loves us and has a purpose for everything that we go through... and a faith that believes that God will sort it all out in the end. Do you want to be that kind of Christian?⁷³

Job in the OT said this, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him..." (Job 13:15). That's the kind of faith and fortitude that God is looking for. God help us to exhibit that as we strive to follow him more and more each day!

And speaking of "trusting that God will sort it all out in the end!" Keep in mind the greatest injustice ever perpetrated in the history of the world was used by God to bring about his magnificent work of salvation.

Sanja and I like to watch these time travel shows every once in a while. And the temptation for people in that fictional world is to go back in time and change the future. "Maybe if we can kill Hitler in

⁷² See the book by Corrie ten Boom with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Hiding Place* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1971).

⁷³ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 159: "Today, as Christians, we will meet opposition and persecution, and face accusations. We will stand trial in the cultural courts of modernity and postmodernism. The high priests of the moral revolution will charge us with heresy and sedition. They will indict us for holding antiquated beliefs which oppose the new post-Christian status quo. Indeed, Western culture views Christian dogma as diametrically opposed to its vision of progress. The question, therefore, is this: are we, as God's people, willing to give an answer for the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15)?"

the 1930s, WWII would never have happened. Maybe if we could detain Lee Harvey Oswald, Kennedy wouldn't be assassinated and the world would be better today." Maybe. Maybe. Maybe. But, of course, there is such a thing as unintended consequences.

If you did have a time machine, and if you were motivated to stop the greatest injustice ever perpetrated in the history of our world, the execution of the sinless Christ, would you do it? Please don't. Why not? Because God used that act of injustice to redeem sinners. And without the shedding of Christ's blood, there is no payment for sin.

And God uses even the injustices of our fallen world to bring about his greater purposes.