

Felix, Drusilla and Paul

by Danny Brown

The book of Acts contains accounts of many conversions and some non-conversions. Among the accounts of non-conversions, none is more interesting than the account of Felix and Drusilla recorded in Acts 24:24-27.

The event which led to Paul's discourse before Felix and Drusilla was the riot in Jerusalem. (Acts 21:27) Paul was being attacked by the Jews for the alleged crimes of having taught against the law and having profaned the temple. He was rescued from the mob by Lysias, the chief captain. When Lysias learned that Paul was a Roman citizen and that there were secret plots against Paul's life that could entail serious consequences upon himself and finding that Paul was charged on religious and not civil grounds, sent him to Felix in Caesarea for trial. (Acts 21:31 – 23:34) Upon his arrival Paul was delivered to Felix who kept him in Herod's judgment hall waiting for his accusers to arrive. (Acts 23:23-35) After five days Paul's trial was begun.

Tertullius, an orator, was employed on behalf of the Jews to plead the case against Paul before Felix. He charged Paul with first, exciting the Jews to sedition, second, with being the ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes and third, with profaning the temple. Paul answered each of these charges.

First, he showed that it had been only twelve day since he had gone up to Jerusalem. The last five days he had been in prison in Caesarea and in prison one day in Jerusalem. The previous six days would not have given him sufficient time to stir up a sedition.

Second, he confessed that he was a member of that way which they called a sect, or heresy; yet he believed all the law and the prophets and had hope of the resurrection of the dead and was making every effort to lead a conscientious life.

Third, his purpose in Jerusalem was to bring alms to the people. Also, that certain ones from Asia found him purified in the temple, neither with a multitude, nor with tumult. He concluded by pointing out that the wrong ones were present. They were not the ones who beheld his action in the temple. (Acts 24:1-21) Felix deferred judgment. He used the non-appearance of Lysias, the chief captain, as the reason for the delay. Had Felix acted upon a strict regard for justice, he would have released Paul, for he had no sustainable charge on which to condemn him. He did treat Paul with leniency, for he allowed Paul to have liberty and allowed his acquaintances to minister to him. (Acts 24:22-23)

"And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ" (Acts 24:24)

Here are the three main characters in the story: Drusilla, Felix and Paul.

Drusilla

The text tells us she was a Jewess. She was one of three daughters of Herod Agrippa I who put James to death and put Peter in prison intending to kill him also. (Acts 12:1-5f) This is the Herod that took glory unto himself and was smitten of an angel and died. (Acts 12:21-23) Drusilla's sisters were Bernice, who was very envious of Drusilla's beauty, and Mariamne. Her brother was King Agrippa before whom Paul had the opportunity to speak and who said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." (Acts 26:28) Her great uncle, Herod Antipas, was the Herod that had beheaded John the Baptist. (Mark 6) Her great grandfather was Herod the great, who had the infants murdered at the time of the birth of Christ. (Matt 2) She, like the other Herods was characterized by the love of money and the love of power. History tells us that she was first married at about the age of fourteen. Her second marriage to Felix was not long after the first so that at this time she was perhaps eighteen or twenty.

"And when Agrippa had received these countries (the Tetrarchy of Philip and Batanea, db) as the gift of Caesar, he gave his sister Drusilla in marriage to Azizus, king of Emesa, upon his consent to be circumcised; for Epiphanes, the son of King Antiochus, had refused to marry her, because, after he had promised her father formerly to come over to the Jewish religion, he would not perform that promise. "But for the marriage of Drusilla with Azizus, it was in no long time afterward dissolved upon the following occasion: While Felix was procurator of Judea, he saw this Drusilla, and fell in love with her; for she did indeed exceed all other women in beauty; and he sent to her a person whose name was Simon, one of his friends; a Jew he was, and by birth a Cypriot, and one who pretended to be a magician, and endeavored to persuade her to forsake her present husband and marry him; and promised, that if she would not refuse him, he would make her a happy woman. Accordingly she acted ill, and because she was desirous to avoid her sister Bernice's envy, for she was very ill treated by her on account of her beauty, was persuaded upon to transgress the laws of her forefathers, and to marry Felix . . ." (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Ch VII, pg 594)

Felix

Felix, Antonius Claudius, Roman administrator: flourished 60 A.D. Originally a slave in the household of Antonia, mother of the Emperor Claudius, he owed his freedom and advancement to his brother Pallas, who was one of Claudius' favorite freedmen and secretaries. After an apprenticeship as governor of Samaria (c48-52), Felix received the procuratorship of Judea (c52-60). According to the Roman historian

Tacitus. Felix was cruel and lustful and exercised imperial power with a servile spirit. He tried to rule forcefully, but failed to preserve peace among riotous provincials and eventually was recalled to Rome. He thrice married foreign princesses: Drusilla, daughter of King Juba II of Mauretania, the granddaughter of Anthony and Cleopatra and Drusilla, daughter of King Herod Agrippa I or Judea." (The Encyclopedia Americana, Vol 11, pg 100)

"The next governor, Antonius Felix (52-60), faced increasing incidents of rebellion, particularly attacks from the sicarii (from sica, a curved dagger, used to assassinate Jews seen as cooperating with Rome). Felix was also ruling when a Jew known only as the "Egyptian" let a large number of people to the Mount of Olive, having promised them that he would bring down the walls of Jerusalem. The governor's heavy-handed approach to squelching these incipient revolts only exacerbated local tension. His greed is attested by Acts 24:26; he had hoped to relieve Paul of his funding. Felix's person life, no lest suspect, demonstrates the interconnection of Roman rule and Judean royalty. His wife, Drusilla, was the daughter of Agrippa I. Although she was betrothed to Epiphanes of Commagene, that contract ended following Agrippa's death, when Epiphanes recanted on his promise to be circumcised. Drusilla was then betrothed by her brother, Agrippa II, to Azizus of Emesa, who did agree to the ritual operation. The queen would later dissolve her marriage in order to wed Felix, who had been courting her by proxy." (The Oxford History of the Biblical World, pg 178)

F. W. Farrar describes the character of Felix as follows: "He had been a slave in the vilest of all positions, at the vilest of all epochs, in the vilest of all cities. He had crept with his brother Pallas into the position of a courtier at the most morally degraded of all courts. He had been an officer in those auxiliaries who were the worst of all troops. What secrets of lust and blood lay hidden in his earlier life we do not know, but ample and indisputable testimony? Jewish and Pagan, sacred and secular, reveals to us what he had been – how greedy, how savage, how treacherous, how unjust, how steeped with the blood of private murder and public massacre – during the eight years which he had now spent in the government, first of Samaris, then of Palestine."

Paul

Paul tells us in his own word of his past history and conversion to Christ.

"I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be

punished. And it came to pass that as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. and I fell unto the ground and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me, and I said, what shall I do. Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:3-16)

To King Agrippa Paul said, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coast of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." (Acts 26:10-20)

For the next 9 to 10 years Paul made three preaching trips through Cyprus, Asia Minor, Macedonia and Achaia teaching the gospel and establishing local congregations. In order to accomplish his mission and as a result of his preaching, Paul suffered many things. He said, "Of the Jews five time received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness a painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." (2 Cor 11:24-28) In spite of all the suffering and difficulties he did not give up or quit. He continued faithful to the Lord.

Paul's apostleship was unique in that he was one born out of due time. (1 Cor 15:7) He said of the gospel he preached, "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Gal 1:11-13) However the gospel he preached was/is the most important message in the world. By this gospel we are called into the glory of the Lord. (2 Thess 2:14) By it we are begotten again. (1 Cor 4:15) This

gospel is God's power to save both Jew and Gentile. (Rom 1:16) It will be a sad day for those who do not obey its commands when the Lord returns. (1 Thess 1:8-9).

This gospel contains facts to be believed; death of Christ, burial of Christ and the resurrection of Christ. (1 Cor 15:1-4) It contains commands to be obeyed: Faith in Christ (John 8:24); Repentance (Acts 17:30-31); confession of ones faith that he believes that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God (Rom 10:9-10) and baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). The gospel Paul preached also contains blessings to be received; remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), the promise of eternal life (1 John 2:25). This gospel is God's final message to man, none other is promised and none other is to be preached. (Gal 1:8-9)

When Paul wrote to the saints at Philippi he made known to them what he desired to accomplish in this life: 1. To Gain Christ. 2. To have the Righteousness of God which is by Faith. 3. To Attain unto the Resurrection of the Dead. 4. To Gain the Prize of the High Calling of God in Christ. (see Phil 3:4-8)

Paul then had the opportunity to speak to Felix and Drusilla concerning the faith in Christ. He reasoned with them of righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come. Considering their character, these were the things they desperately needed to give serious consideration to.

Righteousness

The terms "righteousness" and "justification" are used interchangeably in various translations. The definitions of each is very similar:

Righteousness: "The virtue or quality or state of one who is just; . . . in the broad sense, the state of him who is such as he ought to be, righteousness; the condition acceptable to God . . ." (Thayer)

Justification: "the act of God's declaring men free from guilt and acceptable to him, adjudging to be righteous . . ." (Thayer)

Just: "Righteous; observing divine and human laws; one who is such as he ought to be. (1) In a wide sense; upright, righteous, virtuous, keeping the commands of God." (Thayer)

Notice in particular that the righteous person is the one who is "such as he ought to be." That would be the person who is free from the guilt of sin. For he who sins is not as he ought to be. He is separated from God, spiritually dead. (Isa 59:1-2; Ezek 18:20; Rom 6:23) He becomes a servant of sin. (Rom 6:16; John 8:34) He is spiritually unclean. (Jas 1:27) He is on the road that leads to destruction. (Matt 7:13) He is in the wrong kingdom serving the wrong master. (Col 1:13-14; Rom 6:16) Sadly, at the

judgment he will hear Jesus say, "Depart from me, ye worker of iniquity."

There are three ways in which the Bible uses the term "righteousness."

1. It is used as a characteristic or attribute of God. "shall not the judge of all the earth do right." (Gen 18:25) "But if our unrighteousness commendeth the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance?" (Rom 3:5) "And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou are righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shall be, because thou hast judged thus." (Rev 16:5)

2. It is used to refer to God's plan for making men righteous. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed (that is how God makes men righteous, db) from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Rom 1:16-17)

Paul said, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (Rom 10:1-3) The Jews were not ignorant of God's attributes or character. They were ignorant of how God made men righteous. They were ignorant of the gospel of Christ. God's plan for making men righteous included the coming of Jesus to earth and going the way of the cross. (1 Cor 15:1-4) This salvation that God provided by the sacrifice of His son is conditional. It is conditioned on a number of things.

A. Faith in Jesus as the Christ the Son of God. (John 8:24) Since faith is the belief of facts based on evidence which result in trust and confidence, God has provided all the evidence necessary for belief in Jesus in the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The apostle John tells us, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:30-31).

B. Repentance, a change of mind, which leads to a change in life from wrong doing to right doing. (Acts 17:30-31) God commanded repentance and provided many motives (the goodness of God; godly sorrow; fear of condemnation; etc) to lead men to change from wrong to right. He does not save men in their sins. Mankind cannot continue sinning and not expect to suffer the consequence thereof. God saves men from the guilt of sin and its consequences by the gospel.

C. Confession of one's belief, before men, that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God is also essential to being righteous. (Rom 10:9-10) One cannot be ashamed of Christ and expect to be a Christian.

D. Be baptized for remission of sins. (Acts 2:38) The word "baptism" means an immersion, not sprinkling or pouring. The necessity of baptism is seen in the Scriptures in which it is used: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16); "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16); "Baptism doth also now save us." (1 Peter 3:21) The necessity of baptism is also seen in the fact that it is the one act that puts one into Christ. All spiritual blessings, of which salvation is one, is in Christ. (Eph 1:3) The apostle Paul said, and he should know, that we are baptized into Christ. (Rom 6:1-4; Gal 3:27) Also baptism is essential because we are saved, made righteous, by the blood of Christ. It was in his death that Jesus shed his blood. (John 19:24) We are buried by baptism into the death of Christ. (Rom 6:3-4) Thus it is in baptism that the benefits of the blood of Christ are applied to the one baptized.

These are the essential conditions for being pardoned by God of the guilt of sins committed. When pardoned one is free from the condemnation and uncleanness of sin. He is no longer separated from God but is in communion with God. He is now on the straight and narrow road to eternal life. He is now, as he ought to be, free from the slavery of sin. He is righteous.

3. Righteousness is the state of the man who submits to God's plan for making men righteous. Upon his faith and obedience to the gospel he is forgiven of past sins. "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." (Rom 6:16-17) He is now, as he ought to be, that is, in a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Notice this passage in 1 John where all three characteristics of righteousness are spoken of in one passage: "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous." (1 John 3:7)

Suppose we read it again with some notes added: "Little children, let no man deceive you: that doeth righteousness (submits in obedience to God's plan of salvation) is righteous (is as he ought to be, he stands right before God for his sins have been forgiven), even as he is righteous (God's character or attribute for God is always as He ought to be).

Thus Paul reasoned with Felix and Drusilla of righteousness, that is, how God makes men righteous. He taught God's plan of salvation to two lost souls.

Self Control

Jesus taught self-denial. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matt 16:24). Self-denial requires self-control. Self-control is the ability to hold ones desires, appetites,

tempers, passions and fears in check so as to walk righteously before the Lord. The practice of self-control requires great strength of will and he who becomes the master of himself has won a great victory. If ever any two people needed a lesson on self-control, it was Felix and Drusilla.

Self-control is to be exercised in all areas of life. The one who is tempted by his buddies to stop at the tavern and have a few beers, but does not because the Lord said not to, that's self-control. The person who desires to gossip about others, yet because the Lord said not to doesn't, that's self-control. The one who has the opportunity to steal another's identity and possessions, but because the Lord said not to doesn't, that's self-control. The person who has been deeply wronged and hurt by another is tempted to seek revenge, but because the Lord said not to doesn't, that's self-control. Felix should have, but didn't exercise self-control when he sought another man's wife. Drusilla, likewise, should have, but didn't exercise self-control when she divorced her lawful husband and married one she had no right to. Felix indicated a lack of selfcontrol when he desired a bribe from Paul.

How is self-control accomplished? In answer to this question Robert A. Bolton suggested four things:

1. By being willing to pay the price, that is to deny self. (Matt 16:24) Self-denial is essential to self-control.

2. By learning and gaining patience. (James 1:2-4)

3. By presenting ourselves before man and God as a living sacrifice. (Rom 12:1-2) Self-sacrifice is definitely involved in self-control.

4. By being persistent in our spiritual growth and conduct. (2 Pet 3:18; Phil 1:27) The matter of self-control may be summed up in the simple affirmation of the wise man in Proverbs 16:32 when he says, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty: and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city."

Judgment to Come

The final judgment will occur. None can escape it. None can prevent it. It will occur at the appointed time. The Hebrew writer said, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." The apostle Paul said that God had, "commanded all men everywhere to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man who he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31) The judgment is just as sure as the resurrection of Christ. In fact, the resurrection of Christ is God's proof of the coming judgment.

The time of the judgment is based on three events.

1. First the resurrection of all the dead. (John 5:28-29)
2. The Destruction of this Universe. (2 Pet 3; Rev 20:11) and
3. The second coming of Christ. (Matt 25:31; 2 Thess 1:7-9)

Everyone will be present. Not one soul will be absent. Felix and Drusilla will be there. You and I will be there. Each one of us will be judged individually. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ: that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (2 Cor 5:10) Christ, the righteous judge, will judge according to the standard of God's revealed word. The apostle John said, "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works." (Rev 20:12) Jesus said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. (John 12:48) In the book of Romans chapter two Paul reveals some basic facts about this judgment:

1. The judgment of God is according to truth. (2:2) Felix and Drusilla were a part of a body of people who existed by deceit and lies.

2. He will render to every man according to his deeds. (2:4) Felix, we are told, indulged in all kinds of cruelty and lust, and ruled with the disposition of a slave. Even now he was hoping for a bribe from Paul.

3. There is no respect of persons with God. (2:11) The position of governor or the wife of the governor would be of no advantage. At the judgment the highest officer and the lowest slave will both receive a just judgment based on the same standard.

4. God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ (2:16) What secrets did Felix and Drusilla harbor. Whatever they were, they are not hidden from this judge. The judgment will not be a time for gathering evidence to determine whether each one is or has been good or bad, righteous or wicked and whether he is saved or lost. His life here and now is determining that day by day. The judgment will be a time for separating the good from the bad, a time for appointing eternal destinies:

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the

goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: . . . Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: . . . And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." (Matt 25:31-46)

Conclusion

Now for the rest of the story. Felix's immediate response to Paul's reasoning with him and Drusilla about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come was to tremble. Evidently, as he remembered his stained and guilty life he was afraid, but unwilling to change so he answered, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." (Acts 24:25) For the sinner, there is no convenient season. God requires repentance and baptism. Both require a complete change of life. He is to become a new creature, old things are to pass away; all things are to become new. (2 Cor 5:7) He is no longer to run to the excess of riot of his former life, but is to present himself as a living sacrifice to God's service. As to Felix's later response: He never responded to the truth Paul taught, but continued in his sinful ways. "He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound." (Acts 24:26-27)

Secular history reveals that the removal of Felix was the result of accusations of misgovernment preferred against him by the Jews. Josephus adds that he was replaced because his troops killed many Jews while intervening in civil strife between Jewish and Gentile factions of Caesarea. Felix was called to Rome by Nero to answer for his crimes and was spared execution because, Pallas, his brother, now a wealthy citizen of Rome, interceded for him. However, he was banished to Gaul where he died.

Of Drusilla, secular history tells us that she continued with Felix even in his failing fortunes. Tradition has it that she and her son perished in Pompeii upon the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, which engulfed the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum in 79 A.D. What a tragic death for an unrepentant sinner.