

Text: Ac 24.10-21

In the impeachment trial of Bill Clinton, one of the grand-standing senators, Arlen Specter, made a show of voting “not proven” rather than “guilty” or “not guilty,” as the law required. He said “not proven” was an option in Scottish law, so he employed it to make a show of making a point.

Well, last week we talked about the charges against Paul before the Roman governor Felix. Our message was, “**Be Sure They Can Only Charge You Falsely.**”

We will continue this week with Paul’s defense, found in Ac 24.10-21

Read Ac 24.10-21

Our theme this week is:

Not Guilty or Innocent?

Here we are going to make a distinction between these two terms. It is one thing to be declared “not guilty” on a technicality or a parsing of the law. It is a good bit more to be found innocent.

To give away the plot, we will find Paul, as he himself does, innocent of all the charges laid against him.

This will continue the theme we started last week. We will find ourselves in conflict with unbelieving society at some points. Such conflict *might* result in persecution in some way: formal charges, public attacks, attempts to hinder or shut down ministries, etc.

Christians must do all they can to be found “innocent,” not merely “not guilty.”

We will be working on a theme, based on Paul’s argument, about what it means to be innocent before the world of any charges they may make against us.

Except for one: we should always be “guilty” of the hope of the resurrection. This last we will touch on today, but it will be the theme of our whole message next week.

This week, we will show that Paul is innocent and we will strive for our own innocence as well — not just “in the court of public opinion,” but real innocence of any wrong-doing.

Proposition: The believer should live in such a way as to be guilty only of faith, not of any crimes or misdemeanors.

I. The charges summarized

A. Sedition/insurrection

⁵ For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world

B. Divisive neo-religionist

⁵ a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes

C. Disturber of Judaism

⁶ he even tried to desecrate the temple

The first charge is most serious from the Roman perspective; the others support the basic charge of a pernicious rabble-rouser, a troublemaker.

They also attempt to claim jurisdiction on the last charge.

II. The defense mounted

A. Paul's readiness: (10)

1. Less flattering than Tertullius, but polite
2. Expectation of justice: Felix had experience governing the Jews

"Felix had had contact with the Jews in Palestine for over 10 years, first in Samaria and then in Judea."¹

3. Paul's confidence implies innocence, an important stance in a Roman court

B. Paul's innocence

1. Of sedition (11-13)
 - a. The brevity of time: no time to mount any kind of sedition (11)
 - 1) Some discussion of "twelve days" — from when to when
 - 2) Polhill: "The most likely solution is to construe the rather awkward Greek expression in v. 11 as meaning that not more

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ac 24.10.

than twelve days were involved in his worship in Jerusalem, thus referring to the time between his arrival in Jerusalem to his arrest.”²

- 3) Not much time to organize a revolution
- 4) Paul could prove his timeline – he had witnesses to his presence in Caesarea (see Ac 21.8-14, in house of Philip, prophecy of Agabus)

b. The purpose of the visit: worship (11b-12)

- 1) Word order different in Gk

Neither in the temple did they find me arguing with anyone or making a stirring of the crowd or in the synagogue or around the city

- 2) There was no disturbance in the temple: he was there to worship
 - a) No disputes (no violent arguments, no disagreements)
 - b) No riot (no pressure – *implication: no pressure on the crowd*)

Idiomatic expression, no stirring up of a crowd

With this statement, “Paul denies the two charges that were serious and the only one that concerned Roman law (insurrection).”³

- 3) The centerpiece of Paul’s legal defense

“This verse is a *propositio*, the proposition or thesis of Paul’s speech; this was a standard part of ancient speeches.”⁴

² John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 482 n. 108.

³ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ac 24.12.

⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Ac 24.12.

c. No evidence (13)

- 1) The weakness of the Jews case: no evidence
- 2) Here Paul turns from his own (provable) defenses to point to the weakness of their charges

2. Of sectarianism (14-16)

a. Paul's "confession" — he confesses faithfulness to the God of the Jews (14)

- 1) He denies that his religion is a sect, rather it is "the Way"
- 2) "The Way" is the right approach to the God of the Jews
- 3) "The Way" believes everything in the Law & the Prophets (the holy books of the Jews)

Thus, not a sectarian, but a proper continuation of Judaism (as Christianity really is).

"Confessing what was not a crime was a typical masterful rhetorical move; it would heighten one's credibility while doing nothing for the opponents' charge that the defendant had broken the law."⁵

b. Paul's religion hopes in God for final judgement (15)

- 1) The hope is the hope of resurrection
- 2) These men cherish the same hope (some Pharisees must make up a portion of the party against him)

c. Paul's practice involves making every effort to avoid offense to God or men (16)

- 1) The resurrection of "righteous and wicked" implied judgement
- 2) Because of judgement, he avoids offense

"Do I also exercise myself (και αὐτός άσκω [*kai autos askō*]). 'Do I also myself take exercise,' take pains, labour, strive. Old word in Homer to work as raw

⁵ Keener, Ac 24.14.

materials, to adorn by art, then to drill. Our word ascetic comes from this root, one who seeks to gain piety by rules and severe hardship. Paul claims to be equal to his accusers in efforts to please God.”⁶

3) Paul keeps a blameless conscience

“Conscience is the capacity to feel guilt.”⁷

In the Roman courts, probability and implications were more important than hard evidence (though evidence must be there to imply probabilities).

“Here Paul means that one who truly believed the hope stated in verse 15 would be careful to do right before God and people. This is an implied argument from probability, a strongly favored line of argument in ancient law courts.”⁸

3. Of sacrilege (17-21)

a. After a long absence, Paul’s visit meant to honour his heritage (17)

- 1) Bringing alms (only clear ref. in Acts to the offering he collected)
- 2) Presenting offerings (at the temple)

The religious observances would not impress Felix, but they play to the probability of his innocence:

“Again on a probability argument (v. 16), this point would make the charge of violating the temple absurd.”⁹

⁶ Robertson, *Word Pictures*, Ac 24.16.

⁷ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Ac 24.16.

⁸ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Ac 24.16.

⁹ Keener, Ac 24.17.

- b. In making observance, Paul was found purified (not defiling) in the temple (18)
- 1) No doubt temple records could prove Paul's purpose in the temple
 - 2) The process made him ceremonially pure, not somehow defiling the holy place
 - 3) For good measure, there was no "crowd or uproar"
- c. The whole thing is trumped up by "out-of-town" Jews (18-19)

Note: verse divisions off; for some reason NAU has the ref. to Jews from Asia in v. 18, Gk and KJV have it in 19

- 1) Uproar actually instigated by these Jews

Paul pauses dramatically to underscore this point: breaks off in mid-sentence and starts again.

- 2) Their absence a telling point in Paul's defense: they ought to be present

"Roman law demanded accusers to be present, so Paul notes that his accusers are absent."¹⁰

- d. The whole thing thrown back in the laps of the Jews (20) to bring a charge against him

"Paul's present accusers could not even testify that the Sanhedrin had found him guilty when he appeared before that body."¹¹

- e. The final point brings it back to the religious question: a dispute about the resurrection (21)

"Some of them had disagreed with his belief about resurrection. Therefore, Paul concluded, he was on trial over the issue of the resurrection. This put Felix in the

¹⁰ L. Scott Kellum, *Acts*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2020), 274.

¹¹ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Ac 24.20.

awkward position of having to decide a theological issue over which his Jewish subjects disagreed.”¹²

III. The central theme

- A. Paul demonstrates quite handily that no charge that concerned Rome could stick
 - 1. He caused no insurrection (he could prove it)
 - 2. He came to Jerusalem to worship (he could prove it)
 - 3. He caused no uproar (that lay at the feet of others)
- B. Paul uses the opportunity to mount yet another gospel proclamation: this whole thing is a dispute about the resurrection

“Paul now had the whole trial scene in his own control. He had the issue where he wanted it, where it really was. He had broken no law—certainly no Roman law, and not even the Jewish religious law. The resurrection was the bone of contention with the Jews. And most Jews shared that conviction in principle. What separated him from his fellow Jews was that he was a follower of ‘the Way,’ that he believed that the Messiah had come and the resurrection had begun in Christ. The stakes were high. Paul was on trial for nothing less than his Christian faith. It was essential that the Roman courts realize this was a matter of Jewish religious conviction and not a matter involving Roman law.”¹³

Conclusion:

Proposition: The believer should live in such a way as to be guilty only of faith, not of any crimes or misdemeanors.

Paul pled his case in court, not by mounting demonstrations or disturbing the peace.

Paul used every opportunity to preach the gospel, that was his mission.

¹² Constable, Ac 24.20.

¹³ Polhill, *Acts*, 484–85.