**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**ACTS-090. PAUL BEFORE FELIX by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"10.* *Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: 11. Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. 12. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: 13. Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. 14. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: 15. And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. 16. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. 17. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. 18. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult 19. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. 20. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil-doing in me, while I stood before the council, 21. Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day. 22. And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. 23. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him. 24. 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. 25. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.--."*

*Acts 24:10-25*

Tertellus made three charges against Paul: first, that he incited to rebellion; second, that he was a principal member of a sect; third (with a moreover, as if an afterthought), that he had profaned the Temple. It was more clever than honest to put the real cause of Jewish hatred last, since it was a trifle in Roman eyes, and to put first the only thing that Felix would think worth notice. A duller man than he might have scented something suspicious in Jewish officials being so anxious to suppress insurrection against Rome, and probably he had his own thoughts about the good faith of the accusers, though he said nothing. Paul takes up the three points in order. Unsupported charges can only be met by emphatic denials.

**I.** Paul's speech is the first part of the passage. Its dignified, courteous beginning contrasts well with the accuser's dishonest flattery. Paul will not lie, but he will respect authority, and will conciliate when he can do so with truth. Felix had been judge for several years, probably about six. What sort of a judge he had been Paul will not say. At any rate he had gained experience which might help him in picking his way through Tertullus's rhetoric.

The Apostle answers the first charge with a flat denial, with the remark that as the whole affair was less than a fortnight old the truth could easily be ascertained, and that the time was very short for the Jews to have found him such a dangerous conspirator, and with the obviously unanswerable demand for proof to back up the charge. In the absence of witnesses there was nothing more to be done about number one of the accusations, and a just judge would have said so and sent Tertullus and his clients about their business.

The second charge Paul both denies and admits. He does belong to the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. But that is not a sect; it is the Way. It is not a divergence from the path in which the fathers have walked, trodden only by some self-willed schismatics, but it is the one God-appointed path of life, the old way, the only road by which a man can walk nobly and travel to the skies. Paul's whole doctrine as to the relation of Judaism to Christianity is here in germ and in a form adapted to Felix's comprehension. This so-called sect (ver. 14 takes up Tertullus's word in ver. 5) is the true Judaism, and its members are more truly Jews than they who are such outwardly. For what has Paul cast away in becoming a Christian? Not the worship of the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, not the law, not the prophets, not the hope of a resurrection.

He does not say that he practises all the things written in the law, but that he believes them. Then the law was revelation as well as precept, and was to be embraced by faith before it could be obeyed in practice; it was, as he says elsewhere, a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ. Judaism is the bud; Christianity is the bright consummate flower. Paul was not preaching his whole Gospel, but defending himself from a specific charge; namely that, as being a Nazarene, he had started off from the main line of Jewish religion. He admits that he is a Nazarene, and he assumes correctly that Felix knew something about them, but he denies that he is a sectary, and he assumes that the charge would be more truly made against those who, accusing him, disbelieved in Christ. He hints that they did not believe in either law or prophets, else they would have been Nazarenes too.

The practical results of his faith are stated. Herein; that is in the faith and hope just spoken of. He will not say that these make him blameless towards God and men, but that such blamelessness is his aim, which he pursues with earnest toil and self-control. A Christianity which does not sovereignly sway life and brace its professor up to the self-denial needful to secure a conscience void of offence is not Paul's kind of Christianity. If we move in the circle of the great Christian truths we shall gird ourselves to subdue the flesh, and will covet more than aught else the peace of a good conscience. But, like Paul, we shall be slow to say that we have attained, yet not afraid to say that we strive towards, that ideal.

The third charge is met by a plain statement of his real purpose in coming to Jerusalem and frequenting the Temple. Profane the Temple! Why, I came all the way from Greece on purpose to worship at the Feast; and I did not come empty-handed either, for I brought alms for my nation--the contributions of the Gentiles to Jews--and I was a worshipper, discharging the ceremonial purifications. They called him a Nazarene; he was in the Temple as a Nazarite. Was it likely that, being there on such an errand, he should have profaned it?

He begins a sentence, which would probably have been an indignant one, about the certain Jews from Asia, the originators of the whole trouble, but he checks himself with a fine sense of justice. He will say nothing about absent men. And that brings him back to his strong point, already urged, the absence of proof of the charges. Tertullus and company had only hearsay. What had become of the people who said they saw him in the Temple? No doubt they had thought discretion the better part of valour, and were not anxious to face the Roman procedure.

The close of the speech carries the war into the enemy's quarters, challenging the accusers to tell what they had themselves heard. They could be witnesses as to the scene at the Council, which Tertullus had wisely said nothing about. Pungent sarcasm is in Paul's closing words, especially if we remember that the high officials, like Ananias the high-priest, were Sadducees. The Pharisees in the Council had acquitted him when they heard his profession of faith in a resurrection. That was his real crime, not treason against Rome or profanation of the Temple. The present accusers might be eager for his condemnation, but half of their own Sanhedrim had acquitted him. And these unworthy Jews, who have cast off the nation's hope and believe in no resurrection, are accusing me of being an apostate! Who is the sectary--I or they?

**II.** There was only one righteous course for Felix, namely, to discharge the prisoner. But he yielded to the same temptation as had mastered Pilate, and shrank from provoking influential classes by doing the right thing. He was the less excusable, because his long tenure of office had taught him something, at all events, of the Way. He had too many crimes to venture on raising enemies in his government; he had too much lingering sense of justice to give up an innocent man. So like all weak men in difficult positions he temporised, and trusted to accident to make the right thing easier for him.

His plea for delay was conveniently indefinite. When was Lysias coming? His letter said nothing about such an intention, and took for granted that all the materials for a decision would be before Felix. Lysias could tell no more. The excuse was transparent, but it served to stave off a decision, and to-morrow would bring some other excuse. Prompt carrying out of all plain duty is the only safety. The indulgence given to Paul, in his light confinement, only showed how clearly Felix knew himself to be doing wrong, but small alleviations do not patch up a great injustice.

**III.** One reading inserts in verse 24 the statement that Drusilla wished to see Paul, and that Felix summoned him in order to gratify her. Very probably she, as a Jewess, knew something of the Way, and with a love of anything odd and new, which such women cannot do without, she wanted to see this curious man and hear him talk. It might amuse her, and pass an hour, and be something to gossip about.

She and Felix got more than they bargained for. Paul was not now the prisoner, but the preacher; and his topics were not wanting in directness and plainness. He reasoned of righteousness to one of the worst of unrighteous governors; of temperance to the guilty couple who, in calling themselves husband and wife, were showing themselves given over to sinful passions; and of judgment to come to a man who, to quote the Roman historian, thought that he could commit all evil with impunity.

Paul's strong hand shook even that obdurate soul, and roused one of the two sleeping consciences. Drusilla may have been too frivolous to be impressed, but Felix had so much good left that he could be conscious of evil. Alas! he had so much evil that he suppressed the good. His convenient season was then; it never came again. For though he communed with Paul often, he trembled only once. So he passed into the darkness.