

## Acts 25

# Appealing to Caesar – then and now!

(How does civil government serve and or undermine the cause of the Kingdom?)

1. It is significant that the charges brought against Paul be exposed as groundless. Luke tells us these details so that we will know that the Romans did not respect the High priest's charges even though they wanted to please the Jews.
2. As we read this chapter, we ask ourselves – what is the role of civil government in the progress of the Kingdom of God? How should we view our own civil government's relationship with the cause of the Gospel?

### The chief priests plot to kill Paul.

<sup>1</sup> Festus therefore, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. <sup>2</sup> And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews **brought charges against Paul**; and they were urging him, <sup>3</sup> requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem ( {at the same time,} setting an ambush to kill him on the way). <sup>4</sup> Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly. <sup>5</sup> "Therefore," he said, "let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him."

- Luke is clear in noting that the hostility toward Paul (as with Jesus) came from the Jewish high priests not the Romans.
- This politically incorrect conclusion is attacked and rejected by many historical critics as they dismiss Luke's account as unhistorical propaganda.

### Paul appeals to Caesar

<sup>6</sup> And after he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea; and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. <sup>7</sup> And after he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove; <sup>8</sup> while Paul said in his own defense, "I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar." <sup>9</sup> But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these {charges}?" <sup>10</sup> But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to {the} Jews, as you also very well know. <sup>11</sup> If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is {true} of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. **I appeal to Caesar.**" <sup>12</sup> Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, "You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go."

- There are critical junctures in the drama of redemption that if not successfully navigated might mean the end of the story – Joseph's flight to Egypt to protect the Christ child from Herod, Jesus' decision to go to the cross, etc.
- Paul's appeal to Caesar provides a way of escape from a setting that may very well have ended his ministry and the spread of the Gospel to our day.

### Festus is at a loss as to how to examine Paul's message.

<sup>13</sup> Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea, and paid their respects to Festus. <sup>14</sup> And while they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix; <sup>15</sup> and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a

sentence of condemnation upon him. 16 And I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face, and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges. 17 And so after they had assembled here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal, and ordered the man to be brought. 18 And when the accusers stood up, they {began} bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting; 19 but they {simply} had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive. 20 And **being at a loss how to investigate such matters**, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters. 21 But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar." 22 And Agrippa {said} to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him."

- This King Agrippa was Marcus Julius Agrippa II, the son of Herod Agrippa I (12:1-11), the grandson of Aristobulus, and the great grandson of Herod the Great (Matt. 2:1).<sup>932</sup> Herod the Great had tried to destroy Jesus in Matt.2. One of his sons, Antipas, Agrippa II's great uncle, beheaded John the Baptist and tried our Lord. Agrippa II's father, Agrippa I, executed James, the son of Zebedee and the brother of John. He also imprisoned Peter and died in Caesarea (ch. 12). His son, Agrippa II, is the man Paul now faced. He had grown up in Rome and was a favorite of Emperor Claudius. He was the last in the Herodian dynasty and was the best of the Herods.
- Festus confesses that the Roman system has little capacity to investigate and try this matter. It is outside the jurisdiction of the government.
- In our system, what is the legitimate concern of the U.S. government?

### **Festus asks for clarification of the charges against Paul.**

23 And so, on the next day when Agrippa had come together with Bernice, amid great pomp, and had entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. 24 And Festus said, "King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you behold this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer. 25 "But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him. 26 "Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. Therefore I have brought him before you {all} and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write. 27 "For **it seems absurd to me** in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him."

- For more extended discussion of the relationship between church and state see [apptoteach.org](http://apptoteach.org) theology files #807
- There are three areas of interest to Christians in a secular society – How to “render to Caesar”, how to “submit to Caesar”, and how to “appeal to Caesar”?

### **Appealing to Caesar**

We can appeal to the government in two ways. We can seek protection of basic rights (as Paul did in Acts 25) and we can appeal to the government to serve the general good (as Paul instructed in Gal.6:10 “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”).

<b>Protection</b>	<b>Influence</b>
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Protection from persecution by other faith systems.	Inculcating values in citizens
Prevention from persecuting other faith systems.	A prophetic voice in public policy
Acts 25:11 “If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is {true} of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.”	Gal.6:10 “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

### The Church’s role in a secular state

- a. Stay private — **A SPECTATOR**
  1. The Church’s interest and power is primarily spiritual, not political.  
Jn.18:36 “My kingdom is not of this world.”
  2. The Church must recognize that its faith and hope are not in political powers.  
Ps.20:7 “Some boast in chariots, and some in horses; but we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God.”
  3. The lessons we have learned from history (Medieval Europe) warn us of the marriage of church and state.
- b. Build responsible citizens — **A RESOURCE**
  1. The Church’s interest and power is personal transformation, which , in a democracy will influence public policy.
  2. Matt.22:21 “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s.”
- c. Support the authority of the State — **A CHAPLAIN**
  1. The Church’s interest and power is in upholding the State’s legitimate but limited authority and role.
  2. Rom.13:1 “Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”
  3. I Pet.2:13-14 “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution: whether to a king as the one in authority; or to governors.”
- d. Be a renewing force in the State — **A PROPHET**
  1. The Church’s interest and power is in being the moral conscience of the State.
  2. Acts 5:29 “I must obey God rather than man.”
  3. Acts 25:11 “If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is {true} of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.”
- e. **NOTE:** When one of these aspects is emphasized at the expense of the others, both the Church and the State suffer. Illustration:

1. Anabaptists' radical separation of Church and State ignores the full responsibility of citizenship in an open democracy.
2. Evangelicals' "behind the scenes only" posture ignores the responsibility of citizenship.
3. Civil religion's support of the status quo does not respect the prophetic function of a church that is separate from the state.
4. Roman Catholic, liberal Protestant, and Reconstructionist wedding of Church and State with respect to moral legislation does not respect the distinct domains of the state and the church.
5. "Standing together, we work with the state. Standing apart, we witness to the state."

### **What is appropriate moral legislation?**

- a. New Testament ethics are specifically prescribed for the Church, not the State (which is NOT a part of the regenerated community of the Spirit).
  1. This means that the Church should discipline false teachers and those who are living in moral rebellion, but the pluralistic State should not necessarily have the same standards or function.
  2. Just because a moral issue is clear in the N.T., does not mean it is appropriate State legislation — drunkenness, no fault divorce, preaching a false gospel, etc. are strictly forbidden in the covenant community while they are permitted in a pluralistic state.
- b. Moral legislation in a pluralistic secular society should be sensitive to four questions.
  1. What protects **individual freedom** and choice?
    - a. It should preserve the maximum individual freedom consonant with the integrity of the social order or community.
    - b. It should be slow to act, when other restraints are available.
    - c. It should respect privacy as far as possible.
    - d. It should prescribe a minimal morality only.
    - e. It should avoid harmful side effects (like invasion of privacy or blackmail).
  2. What protects the **general welfare** of the whole of society?
    - a. Government's mandate in regard to legislating morality is limited to matters of public justice and the social order. NOTE: Grace and mercy are mandates to the Church and not the primary concern of the State.
    - b. Some issues that are related to the general welfare of the State — honesty, sanctity of human life and private property, family values, etc.
  3. What reflects the **prevailing consensus** of order and civility?
    - a. To be enforceable, a law must have widespread public support and represent a consensual morality.
    - b. Legislation should not be changed with every changing moral mood, since this undermines respect for the law and public order.
  4. What projects a **realistic world and life view**? Respect for transcendent authority is needed.

- c. Some issues that need to be debated
  1. Legislation that prohibits or limits abortion.
  2. Legislation that prohibits or discourages certain types of sexual expression.
  3. Legislation that sanctions a theistic world and life view (prayer in public schools).

### **Ten rules for mixing religion and politics**

1. Religious doctrine alone is not an acceptable basis for public policy.
2. It is legitimate to discuss the moral dimension of public issues.
3. Discussion of morality is best applied to the common good, not the private preference or conviction.
4. Government has a right to demand that religious institutions comply with reasonable regulations and social policy.
5. Religious institutions may cooperate with government in programs supporting the common good.
6. Government institutions must show neither official approval nor disapproval of religion.
7. There can be no “religious test” for public office.
8. Once inside the political arena, everyone must play by the same rules.
9. Public officials have every right to express their private piety, and no right at all to use their office to proselytize others.
10. No one has the sole right to claim to speak for God.

### **How should we view the upcoming elections?**

#### ***Check your motives “Am I . . . .***

- Serving self interest or the public good?”
- Serving the short term or the long term good?”
- Realistic about the political process?”

#### ***A voting strategy***

- **Character counts.** Vote for leaders you feel you understand, who understand the world, and who you feel you can trust.
- **Ideology is important.** The ideological framework and values of a leader give us some idea of how they will make decisions.
- **Records are revealing.** The best indication of future performance is past performance.
- **Christians are not necessarily the best leaders.** “I would rather be ruled by a wise Turk than a foolish Christian.” *Marin Luther*

## **Avoid**

- **“Single issue” positions.** Just because a candidate shares your passion on one issue does not mean he or she is the wisest choice when you consider all the issues.
- **Superficial characteristics.** How a person looks or how well they speak should not override more important characteristics.
- **Empty promises.** Promises that are not backed by past performance or realistic wisdom should not be taken seriously.
- **Idealism** must be tempered with practical compromises. (Prohibition, Abortion, etc.) A single bill before congress may include many unrelated issues. In supporting one bill, you may be supporting several unrelated issues.

## **After the election**

***How can we be peacemakers and prophets at the same time?  
How do we wage a culture war and avoid a civil war?***

### **Some suggestions**

1. **Enlightened perspective** – Is our perception of the significance of the political situation inflated with respect to its impact on Kingdom values? (Jesus and His Apostles were conspicuously non political in their understanding of the world’s hope.)
  - **Tone down** – Inflammatory and exaggerated expressions get us the wrong kind of hearing.
  - **Seize Opportunity** – Can we use the political tension to address even more important issues? (The table is set for a “sensitive” proclamation of the Gospel.)
2. **Common ground** – Find common ground and build on it. (Liberals are angry at the injustice of life and at conservatives for not sharing their passion to change it. Conservatives need to express their alliance with liberal anger over a fallen world while inviting an open debate as to the most effective and appropriate response.)
  - **Love** – Truth without love is no virtue. (Deeply respecting those who do not share our values is necessary to effectively challenge their ideas. Paul tells us that we can have the power, win the debate, and sincerely believe - and still be nothing without love.)
  - **Listen** – Is it possible that we are misunderstanding the core concerns of those who see things in a different way?

### **What was the problem? (according to Democrats)**

1. Our candidate was not personable enough.
2. The media was not hard enough on the opposition.
3. Our campaign was not hard nosed enough.

### **The issue was not: (according to Democrats)**

1. The fact that we embrace the wrong values.
2. The fact that we are out of touch with the American people.

## **Republicans conclude**

1. We have a mandate to implement.
2. We have capital to spend.