

## WHY THE DELAY TO OBEY?

**INTRODUCTION:** The last day of 2017! Some of us look at the ending of one year and the beginning of the next as a time of reflection and resolutions; others of us maybe not so much. I personally am one that likes to look back over the year and use it as an opportunity to consider making changes. It is pretty tough—at least in my opinion—to make improvements in *any* area of our life if there isn't a time of evaluation.

Watching the Eau Claire news the other night, I found it interesting that the station had conducted a poll regarding New Year's resolutions. I was quite surprised to see that 85% indicated they did NOT make any kind of resolutions. Why is that? The poll results did not reveal "why" so I can only guess. Here's some that I came up with:

--"It's just another day; why treat it differently than any other?"

--"I'm happy with the way I am; why should I change?"

--"Any time I've made resolutions in the past I've broken them, so why make them in the first place?"

--Some might even take a more spiritual approach—the Bible says it is better to NOT make a vow than to make a vow and not carry it out (a paraphrase of Ecclesiastes 5:5)

Should Christians make resolutions? Should they make decisions to do certain things—then do their best to follow through on those decisions?

--Jacob did (Gen 28:20); Joshua did (Josh 24:15); Hanna did (I Sam 1:11).

What are some good resolutions for Christians to make?

--Read your Bible every day: Daily Bread, Songs of Praise, Bible reading schedule; pray more; memorize Scripture; be in church every time the doors are open; give to the Lord's work

Are those good resolutions? They most certainly are, but I can't decide them for you. Some of you have health issues that stop you from being here; others of you have difficulty reading. It is not my place to go to each of you and "dictate" what the Lord wants you to do because that is between you and Him.

There is one resolution, however, that I believe I can say *is* God's will **for each and every one of us** and that is found in Acts 24:22-27. So, what is the resolution that is applicable to all of us? It is simply this—"Obey God Immediately." Do what God wants you to do right away. Don't delay to obey; don't procrastinate; don't tell God to wait.

**BACKGROUND:** Rome was the world power at this time and the Jews were living under their rule. Paul was accused by the Jews of starting a riot in the temple at Jerusalem and forty Jewish men bound themselves under an oath, agreeing among themselves not to eat anything until they had killed Paul. Paul's young nephew got wind of this and told Paul, then was instructed by Paul to tell the chief captain. Because Paul was a Roman citizen, this captain was obligated to protect Paul and sent him to Caesarea under the watchful eye of 270 armed soldiers. Felix was the governor of this region and would be the one that would conduct the hearing. Verse 22 tells us he would wait until Lysias, the chief captain and main witness, came there before hearing the case. Verse 24 tells us that he was married to a Jew named Drusilla. Historians tells us that Drusilla was Felix's third wife and that he "enticed her" into leaving her husband in order to become his wife.

**1. The desire for truth:** v 24—“he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.” In other words, he wanted to hear what Paul had to say about faith in Christ. **Why** did he want to hear about the faith? **What** was his motive? Not entirely sure, but we can make some educated guesses based on the rest of the passage.

Verse 22 says that Felix had a “perfect”—meaning exact—knowledge of that way—the way of faith in Christ—so it is possible that Drusilla was the one that was curious and wanted to hear. It is also possible that Felix wanted to gather more information regarding what Paul believed so that when the official hearing took place, he would have better information on which to make a decision. Verse 26 gives us a third reason—he hoped to be given money “that he might loose him.” In other words, he wanted to be bribed!

We also know from verse 25 that his motive for wanting to hear about the faith was not so that he would know what God wanted him to do. He did not want to obey right away; he **wanted to delay**. “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” When it is the right time—when it is convenient for me—I’ll do what God wants me to do.

What about us? Why do we come to church? Why do we want to hear the word of God? Our motive should not be to satisfy our curiosity or enlarge our knowledge of Bible facts. The main reason we should want to hear the Word of God and read the Word of God and study the Word of God is to **receive instruction** from God on what He wants us to do!

2. Second, notice **the deliverance of truth**; Paul was called to speak about “the faith in Christ” (v 24).

A. What Paul could have spoken about

--Paul obviously could have spoken about the differences between Christianity and the Old Testament form of worship

--He also could have used the opportunity to proclaim his innocence and the reasons that Felix should release him

B. What Paul did speak about: v 25—“righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come”

--V 25: “And as he reasoned” does not mean it was an intellectual argument based on logic; rather, it means he “discoursed”—a term used in reference to making an address to the public and preaching

--Paul did not merely talk about generalities, however. He did not do a discourse on comparative religions. In other words, he did not give them what they wanted to hear—he gave them what they **needed** to hear.

i. Paul preached about **righteousness**—about being right with God and doing right by man. Felix was a governor—a ruler and a judge—and Paul reminded him of his duty to be right with God—and do right when he judged.

ii. Paul preached about **temperance**. *Temperance* refers to restraint—self-control—in all areas of life, not just excessive eating or drinking. Felix was known for his unbridled passions and Paul no doubt used this opportunity to drive home the fact that God knew about and was against the way Felix lived.

iii. And Paul preached about the **judgment to come**. God is righteous—and judges righteously **all** the time—Felix did not. God knew the evilness of Felix and hated the evilness of Felix and would punish the evilness of Felix—and Paul made sure Felix understood this.

3. Lastly, notice **the delay in obeying the truth**: v 25—“Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” In other words, “It is not the right time to obey God—I’ll do that later; when it’s more convenient.”

Why do people procrastinate? One of the most famous instances of procrastination in the Bible was that of Pharaoh. Because of Pharaoh's refusal to let Moses lead God's people out of the land of Egypt, God brought plagues upon the land. The first was that of turning the waters of Egypt into blood. The second was that of frogs (Exodus 8:3-4). Imagine frogs being everywhere:

--in your bedchamber—bedroom—and on your bed

--in your ovens—and in the kneading trough. Imagine making a loaf of bread. Dip a cup into the flour barrel—and there's a frog. Dip a different cup in the water pot—there's another frog. Take the bread dough and put it in the kneading trough—there are frogs there, too. Open the oven door—more frogs.

--on your way to the outhouse—frogs. In the outhouse—frogs. Put a bed-pan in your bedroom so you don't have to use the out-house—frogs.

--frogs would come upon them. One funny thing I read suggested that one man might say to another, "Hey, there's a frog on your shoulder." The other replies, "So what—there are 2 on your turban!"

When Pharaoh finally asked Moses to remove the frogs (Ex 8:8-9), Moses asked when he wanted them to be gone. Pharaoh then gives this mind-boggling response: **TO MORROW**

Why **tomorrow**? Why would Pharaoh wait one more minute? Why would you want "One more night with the frogs"—the title of a little booklet by evangelist Hugh Pyle? What could Pharaoh possibly gain by waiting?

A. Felix was no different—and delayed obedience in spite of conviction

--From verse 25 we know that Felix *trembled...*" In other words, Felix was convicted.

Barnes writes: "He was alarmed and terrified, and looked with deep apprehension to the coming judgment. This was a remarkable instance of the effect of truth on the mind of a man unaccustomed to such alarms, and unused to hearing such truth. It shows the power of conscience when thus, under the preaching of a prisoner, the judge is thrown into violent alarm."

B. Felix also delayed obedience in ignorance of convenience

--Felix did not say "Don't speak to me of this ever again," he simply said, "Go thy way for this time—let's not talk about this anymore today—we'll discuss it again when it is more convenient."

To again quote Barnes: "Felix was troubled; but instead of asking what he should do, he sent the messenger of God away....He sought peace by sending away his reprover, and manifestly intended then to banish the subject from his mind. Yet, like others, he did not intend to banish it altogether. He looked forward to a time when he would be more at leisure; when the cares of office would press less heavily on his attention; or when he would be more disposed to attend to it. Thus, multitudes, when they are alarmed, and see their guilt and danger, resolve to defer it to a more convenient time."

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS:**

1. Are you certain you are saved; do you know for sure you that if you died today you would go to heaven? God convicted Felix about that need—but Felix didn't think it was the right time. Although Felix communed with Paul often (vs 26), we have no record of Felix getting saved. Don't be like Felix and put off the decision to trust Jesus—and Jesus alone—as your Savior. Why wait? In II Corinthians 6:2 we read: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

2. Christian; what is God asking you to start doing—or stop doing? Are you waiting for a more convenient time to start reading your Bible? When will that convenient time be? Is God asking you to give up some sinful pleasure, but your response is to wait for a more convenient time? When will that be? Why delay? What are you hoping to gain?