

February 10/11, 2007

*The Unstoppable Church*  
**Defensible Behavior**  
**Acts 24:1-27**  
Pastor Bryan Clark

So what do you think of when you think of evangelism? If you're like most Christians, just the thought of it gives you a fairly high level of anxiety. The reality is we do deeply care about the people around us—the people next door and the people we work with. We want to share the Gospel with them, but sometimes the thought of it is just a little bit overwhelming.

Your methods probably aren't quite as extreme as those in the sketch. But still, what is the best way to do it? How do we present the message in a way that people will actually hear it and receive it?

I think one of the reasons we experience so much anxiety is because we tend to think of the Gospel as a presentation, and so that's the mindset. We've got to find the right moment. We corner somebody in the break room or next door and we're going to "give them the presentation."

But the Gospel isn't a presentation. The Gospel is in essence a way of life. The Gospel is a body of truth that we believe and we embrace that therefore defines the very way that we live our lives. The Gospel is lived out in every arena of our lives in such a way that when we proclaim the words of the Gospel, it rings true to people that know us. Another way of saying that is: The way we live our lives in every single arena of our lives should be consistent with the message we proclaim.

There's no question that God calls us, as His people, to be different. But different doesn't mean weird or odd. It needs to be different in such a way that the unbelieving people around us find some level of appeal and want to know more about what has radically changed us from the inside out.

So how do we do that? If you have a Bible this morning, turn with us to Acts chapter 24. Paul is going to give a defense of the Gospel, but in this particular text his defense of the Gospel is in essence defending his behavior, his way of life, how he conducts himself.

There's no question these last chapters of the book of Acts are difficult to deal with. There is one trial after another, and it all starts to sound kind of the same. It has the potential to get kind of monotonous. We'll just have to concentrate on the text and each week try to understand what God has for us.

I do think there are two primary themes that come out in these final chapters as we finish up this wonderful book of Acts. One of those things would be God's sovereignty in the sense that in this final season of Paul's ministry, God gives him the opportunity to stand eyeball-to-eyeball, toe-to-toe, with the most powerful leaders in the world and declare the message of the Gospel. That is God's sovereignty. (Mark talked about that a little bit last week.) But that's really remarkable when you think about it.

We could in essence say that these last chapters of the book of Acts really cover Paul's fourth missionary journey. We've talked about his three journeys, but his fourth journey is having the opportunity to stand before the most powerful leaders in the world and face-to-face share with them the message of the Gospel. That's a remarkable culmination to an amazing ministry that God has given Paul.

The second theme that I think is covered in these final chapters is the historical defense of the Gospel. Paul will stand before all of these different leaders in what in essence is a court of law and

will proclaim to them the historical facts of the Gospel. We've mentioned this several times in the book of Acts: that this time period in the book of Acts was such that those people that were eyewitnesses to the historical events of the Gospel were still alive. They were still around.

In the Roman court, to have made a statement like that, it could have easily been demonstrated that either what Paul was saying is true or it's false. The fact that no one was able to disprove Paul's claim—to the extent that from the end of Acts on, the church flourished—is evidence that the historical facts of the Gospel were indeed true.

As a matter of fact, one of the unique characteristics of these final chapters is they are filled with historical detail. This isn't a legend with generalities. This has exact places. It has exact people. It has times and dates that can be verified. It would be very easy for a historian to go back into the first century and verify whether or not the final chapters of the book of Acts are indeed true.

So with all of that being said, there is a clear understanding that this is about a defense for the historical facts of the Gospel. With that in mind, we pick it up in chapter 24. Paul has been taken from Jerusalem to Caesarea to stand judgment before the governor by the name of Felix. In order to understand the story, we first need to know the characters, and we get that in the first couple of verses.

**After five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul. After Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying to the governor [then he gets into the charges].** (Acts 24:1-2a, \*NASB)

There are three characters we need to understand. The first is Ananias, the high priest, the most powerful leader in all of Israel. Ananias was extremely corrupt. He was very violent; he was very brutal; he was very corrupt. As a matter of fact, in the history of the Hebrew people, he was probably the most corrupt high priest they ever had. He did tremendous damage to his people. He was much more interested in power from Rome than he was in shepherding and caring for his own people. Clearly, this was about him preserving power more than anything else.

The second character is a lawyer by the name of Tertullus. We really don't know much about him other than understanding that Ananias was playing for keeps. He needed a mouthpiece who was an expert in Roman law in order to make sure they didn't make any mistakes. And that's the role of Tertullus in this story.

Third is the governor, Felix. Felix was quite an interesting man. He was actually born a slave and spent the first part of his life as a slave. The mother of the emperor took some sort of a liking to Felix and his family and released them from slavery. Mostly, Felix's brother connected with the emperor, and the emperor liked him, and because of that Felix got a number of different appointments, finally ending up as governor.

Now Felix was a very bad leader. He was very insecure; he was very violent; he was very brutal. He shed a lot of blood during his reign which was from about AD 52 to about AD 59. During his rule in this area, there were more riots, more insurrections and more unrest than probably under any other governor. And every time there was unrest, he would respond with brutal violence which only made the people hate him more, which caused the next upheaval. That's kind of the way his reign went.

For the emperor, the most important thing a governor was responsible for was to make sure that the cities remained quiet and tranquil. The emperor simply wouldn't tolerate that kind of unrest because of the potential of that spreading. There being some sort of a movement against the government was simply not tolerated. So if a governor could not keep things quiet under his reign, then he was removed.

This is about AD 57. This is about two years before Felix is removed. He knows at this point that he's hanging by a thread. He knows that Nero has had it about up to here with him. So if there is any more unrest, he's done for. So when these Jews bring Paul before him, the last thing he can afford is to have them mad at him. So that kind of creates the setting here. He's somehow got to resolve this, or he's done.

Now what ultimately happens is that two years later there's a conflict between the Syrians and the Hebrew people. Felix asks them, requires them, to disperse. Many of the Jewish people didn't disperse, so he responded with violence. He slaughtered many of them in the streets. He ransacked their homes. The Jewish leaders went to Nero, and that was it for Nero. He pulled Felix out and replaced him with a guy by the name of Festus. And we'll learn more about him next week.

So that's a little of the background; that's the historical backing behind this particular story. So Tertullus comes before the governor and says:

**“Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation, we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing.”** (vs. 2b-4)

Now understand, in the first century it was customary that when the lawyer stood before the judge, it started with a series of flattering statements. That's just the way the game was played. And Tertullus plays it extremely well.

But you do have to understand, if you were the average Jewish person you would have been horribly offended by what Ananias' mouthpiece just said, because it wasn't true. Felix hadn't brought reform, and he hadn't brought peace. He had slaughtered their people. But as the old saying goes, “Politics makes strange bedfellows,” and that's what's happening here. These people are all coming together for one common purpose, and that's to eliminate Paul. Now the charges:

**“For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. And he even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him. [We wanted to judge him according to our own Law. But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands, ordering his accusers to come before you.]”** (vs. 5-8a)

There are three charges there, and all three of these charges are in some degree of political terms. Tertullus understood that if he brought religious terminology, Felix really could have cared less about that. He's got to put it in a language that he would respond to.

So the first accusation is he's a pest. Now for those of you that are children and you have brothers and sisters that sometimes tend to be a pest, you might make a note that according to Tertullus, that was a crime. So you could remind your parents of that when necessary. The word actually means “to be a public nuisance.” This is someone that was constantly stirring up trouble. He says that “he

stirs up dissension.” That’s the word for insurrection. As a matter of fact, this Greek word is translated “riot” in quite a number of places in the book of Acts.

So again, understand that the worst thing that could happen if you’re the governor is you’ve got someone in the city who keeps stirring things up. And Tertullus understood that historically Felix dealt with these people by executing them. There was a long list of insurrectionists that he didn’t mess with. He just executed them.

So Tertullus, knowing that, is putting this in that language, “This is a guy that’s a public disturbance; he’s stirring them up; he’s starting riots.” He’s hoping that Paul would receive the same fate. So that’s charge number one.

Charge number two: He’s the ringleader of a sect of the Nazarenes. Now Nazarenes is a very negative term. It’s like when they called Jesus, “the Nazarene”. They didn’t mean that as a compliment. The idea of a sect is saying this is a division off of the beliefs and traditions of the Hebrew people that is going to cause all kinds of trouble in the city—understanding that the Hebrew people were governed by their religion. And the Roman leadership understood that. So the Hebrew traditions, their beliefs, and all of that was the basis by which they maintained order.

So when you have somebody that’s starting to go down a different path—a division or a sect, proclaiming something contrary to the traditions and beliefs of the people—it can only mean chaos. So again, this is ultimately a political charge, saying, “If this isn’t stopped, it’s going to throw the city into chaos.” So it has got to be stopped.

Thirdly, he even tried to desecrate or profane the temple. The Roman government had given the Jewish people permission to deal with anyone who desecrated their temple or violated their traditions. So they had every right, if someone desecrated the temple, to arrest that person and to carry out a sentence on that person.

So that’s exactly what Tertullus says. He says, “We know the Roman government has given us permission if anyone desecrates the temple, then we’re free to deal with them. And that’s exactly what we did. We arrested him, and we were going to deal with him. But Lysias got all high and mighty and came in, and with great violence he stole Paul away from us. He brought him here, and now we’re wasting your time having this trial because he didn’t let us carry out the sentence that you’ve empowered us to carry out.” That’s kind of the tone of what is being said here.

Now Tertullus fails to mention the fact that the reason things got so violent was because the Sadducees and the Pharisees actually starting going at one another, and Lysias was afraid that the violence would mean that Paul would be murdered. As a Roman citizen, if that happened, it was Lysias’ responsibility. So he goes in and pulls Paul away from the violence. That’s why they end up in Caesarea, in order that as a Roman citizen Paul might get a fair trial. So a little bit different spin on the facts there, and of course Felix knows that, because in chapter 23 Lysias put that in his letter. So Felix is pretty much up to speed on what actually happened.

So Tertullus goes on and says:

**“By examining him yourself concerning all these matters you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him.” The Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so.** (vs. 8b-9)

So these are the charges laid before the governor. At this point the governor gives Paul the nod, and as a Roman citizen he has the right to respond to the charges.

**When the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded: “Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense, since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship.”** (vs. 10-11)

Paul goes into his defense. One thing to note here: Paul says that he cheerfully presents his case before Felix because Felix is well aware of the situation in Jerusalem. Before Felix was governor of this area, he also had other political positions, and what Paul is saying is, “Felix, for a long time you’ve known about Ananias. You know about the hypocrisy of the Council and the religious leaders. You’re very aware of the circumstances in the city. Therefore, I’m happy to make my defense, because I think you’ll see it for what it really is.” That’s in essence what Paul is saying back to him. He says:

**“...twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. Neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city itself did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot. Nor can they prove to you the charges of which they now accuse me.”** (vs. 11b-13)

So he answers the first charge—that he’s a pest, he’s someone who’s a public nuisance—saying, “Number one, it has only been twelve days since I arrived in Jerusalem.” Five of those days were spent in Caesarea. That gives him about a week in Jerusalem. So he’s saying, “For starters, I couldn’t have possibly done everything they’ve accused me of. But number one, I went to the temple, I went to the synagogue, I went to the city—and there wasn’t one time in any of those environments where I ever caused conflict, where I ever stirred up trouble, where I was ever a public nuisance.”

“As a matter of fact,” he says, “if there is one person out there that can stand before you and make an accusation that I started trouble in any of those environments, let him step up and make his charge—because it’s not true.” One of the interesting dynamics of this particular text is that it was required in a Roman courtroom that an accuser be present and make his or her accusation. And if the accusation was demonstrated to be false, that accuser would suffer the serious penalty of the law, which included imprisonment.

So one of the things that’s true throughout this trial is the accusers don’t show up. There’s no way they’re going to take this chance, because they know the charges are fabricated. So Paul calls them on it every step of the way. “Hey, if there’s an accuser out here with a specific charge, have them step up, make the accusation. Where are they?” In essence, what he is saying is, “I was the model citizen. I didn’t create conflict in any environment that I was in.”

Second defense:

**“But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.”** (vs. 14-16)

You remember the accusation was that Paul was leading a division off of the beliefs and traditions of his people that would eventually cause chaos in the city. Paul says, “You know, I admit the fact that I am a part of this movement called the Way. But the Way is not a movement that is a split-off of the Old Testament Scriptures. As a matter of fact, it’s in perfect alignment.” He is saying, “If

you understood the Scriptures, you would know that what we're teaching is in perfect alignment with the Law and the Prophets. This is the fulfillment of everything that our people have been about. I'm not serving some other God. I'm serving the very God that these people say they're serving. And I'm not violating their beliefs and traditions, but we're living out the fulfillment of them."

What he is saying in essence is, "I am the most Hebrew of the Hebrews. I am most in alignment with the beliefs and traditions of all of these people." So much so that he believes that God is going to raise up the wicked, and He's going to raise up the righteous. Everybody is going to stand before God in judgment. That causes Paul every day to seek to live with a blameless conscience in order to stand with integrity before God and before men.

In other words, what he is saying is, "I am the most religious among them. I am the most Hebrew among them. If anybody is living the fulfillment of our traditions and the Law and the Prophets, it's me." And Felix is thinking, you know, *This guy is the real deal. He knows the hypocrisy of Ananias. He knows the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders.* And he's thinking, *This is everything these people are supposed to be.*

When Paul says in verse 16, "**In view of this, I also do my best,**" it's a Greek word that's an athletic term. It means "to practice, to train, to be self-disciplined." What he is saying is, "Every day, I train to be the best follower of God I can possibly be, because I do believe one day I'll stand before God and give an account." So he's living out his faith with the highest degree of integrity before God and before men.

You have to imagine that Felix is saying, "I wish I had a thousand of these people in my city." This is everything you'd want somebody to be.

The next defense:

**"Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings; in which they found me occupied in the temple, having been purified, without any crowd or uproar. But there were some Jews from Asia—who ought to have been present before you and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me. Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council, other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, 'For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.'"** (vs. 17-21)

Paul is saying, "When I got to Jerusalem, we had taken an offering from all these churches on my last missionary journey." This has come up several times in Acts. On Paul's third missionary journey, the churches wanted to give money to help the poor and needy in Jerusalem. So Paul was the carrier of this offering. If you read I Corinthians 8 and 9, it gets pretty specific about that offering. So these people sacrificed a great deal. Paul brought it to Jerusalem.

When he got to Jerusalem, he distributed it among the poor and needy. So rather than him being a public nuisance, he's the one out there taking care of the people. He's the one out there taking care of the poor and the hungry and the needy, with this wonderful offering that these believers had contributed.

While the religious leaders were big on talk and hypocrisy, Paul was out in the trenches feeding the hungry and giving money to the poor. And Felix is thinking, *This is the kind of guy I want in my kingdom.*

By the way, the same is true today. There's a fascinating new book out. It's called *Who Really Cares?*<sup>1</sup> The writer of the book is seeking to find out, in our culture today, at the end of the day who is it that is really giving time and money to the needy among us in our communities. And for all of the talk of the social liberals, at the end of the day what he finds is they give no time and they give no money. They have very strong opinions about how the government should spend *its* money, but they don't spend *their* money. The ones who give time and the ones who give money are the conservatives and primarily the conservative Christians. Much to this author's surprise and chagrin, it's the conservative Christians that are giving the money and the time to the most basic needs in our community and around the world.

That's exactly the way it was in the first century. For all the religious talk, it was Paul and the Christians that were collecting the money and distributing it among the poor and the hungry. He goes on to say that as part of that process, he ended up at the temple. But rather than profaning the temple, he says he purified himself. "Purified" is the antonym, the exact opposite, of "profane." He's saying, "Actually, it's just the opposite. Rather than profaning the temple, I showed up, I dotted every 'i,' I crossed every 't,' I bent over backwards to make sure I kept every single requirement and tradition to make sure that I did not unnecessarily offend my Jewish brothers and sisters in order to provide the best environment for proclaiming the Gospel."

He goes on to say, "You know, the real problem are these legalistic Jews from Asia that showed up at the temple, and they're the ones who started the riot. They were accusing me of bringing a Gentile into the temple area." And he looks around (you can kind of imagine the scene) and Paul says, "By the way, where are they? Where are these legalistic Jews from Asia? Aren't they supposed to be here? And aren't they supposed to stand before you and make their accusation?"

He goes on to say, "As a matter of fact, if any of these people have one specific accusation they can make against me, this would be a good time for them to step forward and to say something." But the fact is, the only possible charge they might have against him is that when the Council met, he did indeed shout, "This is about the resurrection."

Now there are two ways to take verse 21. Some say that Paul is saying, "The only possible claim that these religious leaders might have as a misdeed would be that when I met before them, I did shout this." And he's saying, "If that's their claim, then I'm guilty."

The other way of taking it is that Paul himself is saying, "Yeah, it probably was a misdeed." We know in chapter 23 he knew that if he said it, it would probably result in a riot. And he's maybe rethinking that and saying, "You know, that probably wasn't the best choice."

Either way, it doesn't really affect the text. You can take your pick. What does happen is Felix has lived around Jerusalem enough to know he's noticing there are no real accusers there. He's seeing the integrity of Paul's life, and there's something about that that rings true.

But he has got a problem—and the problem is there is no way in that political climate that he can afford to say, "Not guilty." If he upsets these Jewish leaders, they're going to Nero and he is done. But he also understands, as a governor he cannot convict a Roman citizen knowing that there were no accusers and that he is not guilty. So he is stuck. And when you're stuck, you do nothing.

**But Felix, having a more exact knowledge** [meaning he was well aware of really what was going on] **about the Way** [or the Christians], **put them off** [it's a technical term that means he did nothing], **saying, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case."** **Then he gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody**

**and yet have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him.** (vs. 22-23)

So this is his solution: *I'm going to put him in prison. I'm going to put him in chains. But we're going to allow enough freedom that some of his friends can come visit him. But he's just going to sit there, and I'm not going to make a decision until Lysias comes down. We'll have a little chat, and then we'll work this out.* And you can tell he's hoping that the temperature will go down and maybe the people will forget, and somehow he can get out of this.

Well, for the next two years Paul will sit in that prison, chained to a prison guard, waiting, while Felix does nothing. But there is something about Paul's message that rings true enough to Felix that he wants to hear more for himself personally. So we pick it up in verse 24:

**But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you." At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him. But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.** (vs. 24-27)

Felix was impressed enough with Paul's character and his message that he wanted to hear more. So he pulls his wife together with him and they want to hear from Paul. Now Felix's wife was a very interesting person. She was about 19 years of age, apparently quite beautiful. This would have been her second husband. This would have been Felix's third wife.

Drusilla had some interesting roots. She was part Jewish, which is why they call her a Jewess, but also she would have been the youngest daughter of Herod the king. Her father would have been the Herod the king of Acts chapter 12, who put the apostle James to death and then arrested Peter and was going to put Peter to death, but God miraculously delivered Peter. And then when that Herod declared that he was God Himself, God struck judgment on him and he was eaten by worms. At that point Drusilla would have been about six years of age. So a fairly dramatic event when her dad chose to conflict with Paul's God.

In addition to that, her uncle would have been the Herod that beheaded John the Baptist. And her grandfather would have been the Herod of Matthew 2 that slaughtered all the baby boys two years old and under. So she comes from quite a heritage.

As the story is told, she lusted for power and Felix lusted for her because she was beautiful. So they worked out an arrangement. She'd dump her husband, and he would marry her. So, all of that was very controversial about the time that Paul comes onto the scene.

They are intrigued by Paul and invite Paul to come and speak to them. So Paul speaks on three things: righteousness (doing the right thing), self-control, and God's judgment. Now just because Paul wasn't around town stirring up trouble doesn't mean that he soft-pedaled the message. He stood before this incredibly powerful man and said, "One thing you've got to think about is doing the right thing. You need to get a little bit of control of yourself with self-discipline. And by the way, God is going to hold you accountable for the choices you've made."

Felix's response was what? He became frightened. It's a Greek word that means he was terrified. That's the last thing he wanted to hear. And he immediately dismisses Paul and recovers from that.

We're also told that on occasion he would bring Paul back hoping he would bring a bribe. He's assuming Paul, as the leader of this movement, has access to a tremendous amount of money and is hoping one of Paul's friends will bring some money and that Paul would bribe him, which is what was customary in that day. Because that never happened, Paul sat in a prison for two years, chained to a guard, until Felix is removed by Nero, and Festus is put in his place.

Next week we stand trial with Festus. We'll pick it up there. For this morning, what is the application to us? What is the point we walk away with? It's very interesting that in this particular trial, Paul's defense of the Gospel is a defense of his behavior. As a citizen, as a follower of his religion, in every environment, he was the model. He was a model citizen. He was a model in terms of following his religion. He was a model to the poor and the needy. He was a model in terms of following their traditions and laws.

You have to imagine Felix was thinking, *This is the kind of guy I want in my kingdom. This guy is the model citizen.* And that was Paul's defense. That's what gave the message its integrity.

It's an interesting thing for us to think about. When we move away from understanding the Gospel as a presentation, we realize the Gospel is a way of life. It's a body of truth that we embrace that then defines who we are, how we behave, and what we live for. And it is our behavior that then gives our message its credibility.

Therefore, we should be the model neighbor. We should be the model employee. We should be the model student. We should be the model family. We should be the model employer. We should be the model manager. We should be the type of person that everyone says, "Those are the kind of people I want to do business with"—because that is what gives our message its credibility.

The problem is, Christians aren't often thought of in those terms. We tend to be thought of more in terms of being judgmental and being critical and "everywhere we go, we stir up trouble." You have to ask yourselves this question, "Do you think the unbelieving world finds that attractive?" Well, let me ask you this question, "Do *you* find that attractive? Do you find yourself compelled to be like people that are judgmental and critical and seem to always be stirring up trouble?"

The reality is we have to be different in such a way that the difference has appeal to the unbelieving world around us: To understand that we should be the model employee, that an employer in our city would say, "You know, I really don't know what those Bereans believe, I think that's kind of a cult, *but* they make the best employees." That people in our community would say, "You know, one thing I know is when you work for a Berean, they make the best employers." That people in our community would say, "If there's one person you can do business with in this city, it's one of those Bereans." That there's an understanding that when one of our families sends their children to public school, the administration in the public school says, "We love to have their kids, because we love their parents. They're encouraging; they're supportive; they're involved. They try to make this a better place." That people would say, "You know, the Bereans in our community, they make the best neighbors." That the leaders of our city would say, "You know, I'm not sure what those Bereans are all about, but they are great citizens. They're involved with the people in our community in every way imaginable, and they make this a better city."

That's what begins to create an environment that will cause people to listen. The message we proclaim is that the God of the universe has actually changed and transformed us from the inside out. That's quite a claim! If we're going to claim that, then our lives need to reflect that in every single arena of our lives.

Several years ago there was an article in the Lincoln paper about a self-proclaimed agnostic that had moved from L.A. to Lincoln. In the first part of the article he tells his own story and how he views religious people and Christians. And it's not very positive at all. He talks about all the different religious pursuits that he tried, and everything came up empty. So as of the day of writing of the article, he defined himself as an agnostic.

But when he moved to Lincoln, he moved next door to a Christian. And he begins to unfold what that experience was like. I don't have time to read the whole article, but listen to what he says:

Three days a week, we ran and talked. Most of our conversations centered on family life, work sometimes religion. He never preached, I never argued.

Slowly, I began to know my would-be savior as a friend and to understand his Christian perspective. Perhaps because his faith remained strong and deeply integrated into his life, he never found my skepticism threatening. We spoke freely. And without ever advocating his beliefs, he showed me how well his faith served him.

I watched him get through times of sickness and financial adversity; his forehead didn't wrinkle. He trusted God. In prayer, he looked for the lesson in his situation without anguishing the future. My method for handling life's downers includes lawyers and insomnia. I trust myself and that's not always reassuring. In contrast, I don't think my neighbor ever missed a good night's sleep.

I learned more about religion by watching him deal with his triumphs and tribulations than I had from all my reading and experimentation.<sup>2</sup>

That is *exactly* what we're talking about. There's no question that as God's people we are called to be different. But we are to be different for good, in order that the message we proclaim might be heard as credible, that those around us might have ears to hear and consider the life-changing message of Jesus.

*Our Father, we are thankful that our salvation is in Christ alone. It is a sobering thought that we proclaim a message that we have been changed from the inside out. As a matter of fact, we have been changed to the core where we now claim we have the very nature of Jesus Himself within us. Lord, for the people around us to hear and believe those words, there has to be clear evidence that there is something different. Lord, we need to be the ideal neighbor. We need to be the best employees and employers in the city. We need to be highly supportive families in the school system. Lord, in every arena we need to demonstrate there's something about us that's different for good. We need to be the best, most loving soccer coaches of our children's teams. Lord, I pray that You would convict us of any area in our lives where we need to rethink the way that we're behaving, that the people around us might be attracted, that they might have ears to hear the message of what has changed our lives. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*

<sup>1</sup>Who Really Cares: The Surprising Truth about Compassionate Conservatism, Arthur C. Brooks, Basic Books, 2006.

<sup>2</sup>Fernando Pages Ruiz in L.A. agnostic finds Christians not so scary, Lincoln Journal Star, September 8, 2001.

**Study Questions**  
*The Unstoppable Church*  
**Defensible Behavior**  
**Acts 24:1-27**  
Pastor Bryan Clark

**Opening Discussion**

1. In accomplishing the mission God has given the Church which is more important, the message or the lifestyle of the messenger of the Gospel? Why?
2. Describe behavior that would be inconsistent with the message of the Gospel. Can the message of the Gospel have credibility if the messenger acts contrary to the message?
3. What does it mean to be a good Christian, to live consistent with the Gospel message at work, at play, in your neighborhood and as a citizen?

**Bible Study**

1. Read Acts 24:1-9. What are the charges against Paul?
2. Read Acts 24:10-21. How does Paul answer each charge?
3. Rework each charge made against Paul and put each into language that would be appropriate for today's culture.
4. Rework Paul's defense in terms that would fit today's culture as you've redefined the charges in question # 3.
5. Read Acts 24:22-27. What is the conflict Felix feels that causes him to "put off" any decision on the charges against Paul?

Does he really find Paul's behavior worthy of anything but praise?

What has been his experience with those in "The Way"?

Is the movement in general worthy of condemnation or praise?

6. What did Paul share with Felix and Drusilla, and how did they respond (see verse 25)?

Why did they respond as they did?

7. It's important to recognize the tension between the fact that Paul's conduct or behavior was exemplary but he was still thrown in prison for two years because of political tensions. What do we learn from this?

What part can we control and what part is out of our control?

## **Application**

1. From the viewpoint of a neutral observer, the Gospel caused Paul to live an exemplary life. He conducted himself in a respectful manner, embraced the fulfillment of the Scriptures, honored their religious customs, generously distributed offerings to the needy and abided by the laws of the land. Other than false charges, what was there to criticize?

Think through the various relationships and spheres of influence in your life – at work, in your neighborhood, as a citizen, etc. Would others say the Gospel has made you better in these areas or not? Why?

Is there an area you need to work on?

2. Are there any behaviors or attitudes in your life that people could point to as being inconsistent with the message of the Gospel?

What do you need to do to change that?

3. What can you expect from others if you live an exemplary life as a proclaimer of the Gospel?