

## 40. People's favorite excuse

May 18, 2014

How many of you would raise your hands if I ask, "Is there anyone who sometimes procrastinates the things you didn't want to do or had to do?" All of us, one time or another. Of course, some people are into more frequent procrastinations than others. You may know a few of them or you might be one of them.

Good evidences of procrastination can be found in the garage that is filled with unfinished projects, or messy rooms, or an unmade bed which is my favorite. Because I can get in without moving away all the fancy pillows which my wife loves to arrange neatly on our bed .

I saw this funny cartoon strip of "Calvin and Hobbes". It seems legit.

It is one thing to procrastinate chores around the house, but it is a completely different thing for us to procrastinate what God tells us to do. In spiritual reality , it is a defiance to God; and for unbelievers, it will be very hazardous for their eternal health.

Since Paul came back to Jerusalem to participate in the Day of Pentecost, it had been 12 days. On the 13th day, he finally had a chance to defend himself in front of the Roman Governor Felix and the Jewish delegation. However, from God's viewpoint, it was not Paul who was on trial, rather Felix, his wife Drusilla, and the Jewish religious hotshots. When Felix was confronted with the truth and he had to make the most important decision of his life, he used the favorite excuse of mankind – "I will do it later."

### A. PAUL'S DEFENSE

*Acts 24:10-21 Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak , answered: "Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, 11 because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. 12 And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city . 13 Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me. 14 But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. 15 I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. 16 This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. 17 Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, 18 in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. 19 They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. 20 Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, 21 unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.'"*

Paul began by addressing Felix, not with a sickening flattery like Tertullus', but with polite honesty. As far as the temple charge was concerned, the temple records would show that Paul was registered to pay the costs for the four Jews who had taken a

Nazirite vow. Besides, Paul had been in Jerusalem only a week. That was hardly enough time to organize and lead any kind of rebellion against the Jews or the Romans.

By the way, Tertullus called Christianity 'the sect of the Nazarenes' as if it was nothing more than a mob of rebellious people. But Paul called it 'the Way' because Christianity is more than a religion, rather it is the way to live for God. The word 'Christian' was first started at Antioch of Syria where apostle Paul headquartered his missionary ministries. But the name 'Christianity' was pretty much localized and not well known at this period of history.

Now Paul reached the heart of his defense, because it was required by Roman law that the accusers must face the accused at the trial, or else the charges would be dropped. Ananias had cunningly not brought any of the Hellenistic Jews with him, because he knew for sure that their witness would fall apart under official examination. These men were good at inciting riots; they were not good at producing facts.

Just for my own curiosity, I asked our resident criminal law attorney Jeff Thorpe regarding this. I asked him, "Can a person be charged with a crime when there is no eyewitness or evidence?" Mr. Attorney Thorpe replied, "No. Even if you were to walk into a detective's office and make an admission to them, you are not supposed to be able to be convicted or even charged unless there is some other piece of evidence to support it."

The Jewish religious delegation accused Paul of being anti-Jewish and anti-Roman, but they could not produce any evidence for either of the charges.

## **B. BALANCING ACT**

*Acts 24:22-23 But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case." 23 So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.*

Felix was caught in a sticky dilemma here. He knew Paul was innocent, yet he had to also appease the powerful Jews before him. So he used the favorite excuse of any indecisive person, "Later."

The habit of always putting off something you need to do until you can afford it, or until the time is right, or until you know how to do it is one of the greatest burglars of joy. Be deliberate, but once you've made up your mind – jump in. I like what Benjamin Franklin said, "You may delay, but time will not."

Did you notice what it said in v22 regarding Felix's knowledge about the Way? He had more accurate knowledge of the Way which means that he heard about the resurrection of Jesus and what the Lord had done while He was on the earth. Yet, he chose to do nothing. He saw the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but he preferred to live in the darkness of his own depravity.

To calm his conscience for unnecessarily delaying Paul's release, Felix gave him a light sentence and extended him freedom to see his friends.

Some biblical scholars believe that during the time while Paul was under the custody of Felix in Caesarea, he authored the Book of Hebrews. I know that there is a lot of

dispute on the authorship of that Book. But I believe that it was Paul who wrote the Book, because Paul was there in the Jerusalem church where many of those who embraced Christianity were starting to lean back toward Judaism again. As many of you know the Book of Hebrews gives a stern warning against going back and trying to find a righteous standing before God by the law and human effort, as well as showing them the superiority of Christianity over Judaism.

### C. MORE PROCRASTINATIONS

*Acts 24:24-27 And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. 25 Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." 26 Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him. 27 But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.*

For whatever the reason, Felix and his wife Drusilla wanted to hear from Paul concerning the faith in Christ. Since they asked for it, how could Paul resist this open door? And they got their ears full.

Dr. Luke has given us only the three points of Paul's sermon to this infamous couple: Righteousness, Self-control, and the Judgment to come. But what an outline! Paul gave them three compelling reasons why they should repent and believe on Jesus Christ:

#### 1) Righteousness – We had to do something about yesterday's sin.

Did you notice that the very word 'sin' has gradually dropped out of people's vocabulary – the word itself along with the notion. Even many Christian pastors and Bible teachers don't talk about it anymore. They talk about mistakes, weaknesses, inherited tendencies, faults, and even errors; but they do not face up to the fact of sin.

We can never be saved by our own righteousness of good works. We can be saved only through Christ's righteousness made available by His finished work of salvation on the cross.

#### 2) Self-control: We must do something about today's temptations.

Man can control almost everything but himself. Here were Felix and Drusilla, prime examples of total lack of self-control. She divorced her husband to become Felix's third wife, and though a Jewess, she lived as though God had never given the Ten Commandments at Sinai. Felix was an unrestrained official who did not hesitate to lie, or even to murder, in order to get rid of his enemies and promote himself. Self-control was something neither of them knew much about.

#### 3) The Judgment to come: We must do something about tomorrow's judgment.

Jesus Christ is either a person's Savior or Judge by our own choice.

Felix was afraid as it says in v25. Roman leaders prided themselves in their ability to be stoical and restrain their emotions under all circumstances, but a conviction from God gripped Felix's heart, and he couldn't hide it. Paul had diagnosed the case and offered the remedy. It was up to Felix to receive it.

What did Felix do? He procrastinated, again. Procrastination is the thief of time and souls by satan who uses it against humans very effectively.

Dr. Clarence Macartney, a great American theologian of yesteryear told a story about a meeting in the satan's domain. Satan called his four chief demons together and commanded them to come up with a new deception that would trap more souls.

"I have it!" one demon said. "I'll go to earth and tell people there is no God."  
"It will never work," said satan. "People can look around them and see that there is a God."

"I'll go and tell them there is no heaven!" suggested a second demon, but satan rejected that idea, too. "Everybody knows there is life after death and they want to go to heaven."

"Let's tell them there is no hell!" said a third demon.  
"No, conscience tells them their sins will be judged," said the devil. "We need a better lie than that."

Out of dark shadows the fourth demon spoke quietly. "I think I've solved your problem, your eminence," he said. "I'll go to earth and tell them that there is no hurry and they can do it later." For a moment satan sat motionless. Then, slowly, he let out a big wide grin from ear to ear and let out a long hideous laugh that echoed through his dark domain.

The best time to trust Jesus Christ is – NOW!  
And the best time to repent from our sins and obey the Lord's command is – NOW!

I want you to pay attention to what happened in Felix's heart between v25 and v26. As he procrastinated his decision of repentance, his heart got harder. He no longer was thinking about repentance, rather thinking about making money on Paul.

Speaking of money, procrastination is like a credit card: it's so easy to use it and no pressure until you get the bill.

You may have heard the name Skip Heitzig, the senior pastor of Calvary Albuquerque in New Mexico. He told this true story. Not very long after he got saved and before he moved out of California to Albuquerque, NM to start a church, he had been witnessing to this guy time after time. The guy always had the same excuse about his decision for salvation: "I will do it later."

One day Skip felt that the Lord told him to witness to this guy again. Without hesitation, he jumped in his car and drove 100 miles one way to tell him about Jesus. The man listened to Skip and said, "I will do it later." Two weeks later, he died without Jesus in his heart. He was Skip's own brother.

## **D. APPLICATIONS**

### **1) Procrastination dulls the edge of the awareness of your spirit.**

Each time you say, "I will do it later," the conviction from the Holy Spirit becomes less effective. Eventually, we give little more than a lethargic yawn in response to God's truth. Soon, a thick callous forms over your heart that you won't feel the Holy Spirit's conviction at all. Don't even go there.

## **2) Procrastination blinds the mind with lesser issues.**

In your life, have you pushed aside a spiritual concern and let other things fill your view? Take hold of that spiritual concerned matter first and take action to be obedient to the Lord. If you need forgiveness, repent, Jesus is there to forgive you; if you need hope, seek, Jesus is there to give you that eternal hope.

*Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

Our God is faithful to forgive you; restore you; and give you hope and peace. Come to Him right now, not later.