

THE SHAME OF SIN

August 23, 1959

"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 24:25

No wonder that Felix trembled! Paul, a prisoner, appeared before him in a command performance. Perhaps this Jew might be amusing and help to alleviate the dullness of court life. But instead of performing, Paul preached the gospel to Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla. As he "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled . . ." (vv.24 f). Focusing our attention upon Felix and Drusilla, this unholy pair, we are introduced to the shame of sin. Thus we see, first, a couple in sin; second, a conviction of sin; third, the convenient season of sin.

First, note a couple in sin. "When Felix came with his wife Drusilla." Hardly in so few words could a more sinful picture be painted. Here we see womanhood and manhood at its worst.

Drusilla was the third wife of Felix, who was her second husband. She was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells of her vanity, jealous nature, and ambition as a social climber. Probably Felix had little difficulty in seducing her away from her first husband, a petty king, to enjoy the social advantages of being the wife of a Roman governor. Looking at her family tree we discover that her father murdered the apostle James (Acts 12:1f); her great-uncle, Herod Antipas, slew John the Baptist (Mk. 6:17ff); and her great-grandfather, Herod the Great, killed the babes of Bethlehem in an effort to slay Jesus (Matt. 2:16). So Drusilla was the infamous product of sinful forebearers compounded by her own vain, jealous, ambitious, and voluptuous spirit.

Felix was a former Greek slave who by intrigue had risen in the corrupt Roman court to a position of influence. Of him Tacitus says, "He reveled in cruelty and lust, and wielded the power of a king with the mind of a slave." Strangely enough when he became a free man he chose the name of Felix which means happiness. But according to his record his happiness seems to have consisted of cruel misuse of power, sensual lust after another man's wife, and the corrupt practice of receiving bribes.

But while few, if any, listening to me are the equals of Drusilla and Felix in open sinful living, let no one excuse himself for that reason. For the Bible in Romans 3:23 says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Doubtless this corrupt couple had broken every one of the Ten Commandments. However, James 2:10 says, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

Look at Jesus' attitude. Not once did He call a notorious sinner a hypocrite. He reserved that dubious title for the Pharisees who openly were paragons of virtue. Not that He condoned open sin, but that He condemned the sins of pretense and pride. Sins of the flesh destroy both body and soul, but sins of the spirit do also, and most deceitfully.

Paul in I Corinthians 10:12 warns, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." The Pharisee in the temple preened his moral feathers as he looked with contempt upon the sinful publican, not knowing that he was also under condemnation. The Bible says that unbelief is the greatest sin of all (Jn. 3:18). You may commit the sins of the flesh, and through confession and faith be forgiven. But no matter how great your personal virtue, if you harbor

unbelief with respect to Jesus in your heart there is no forgiveness.

Second, the conviction of sin. The scripture says that "Felix trembled." He was under conviction for his sin. We may well imagine this as Paul "reasoned of righteousness, temperance [self control], and judgment to come." The apostle correctly diagnosed the trouble of Felix and Drusilla. Dr. A. T. Robertson points out that Paul reasoned of "righteousness" which they did not possess, 'self-control' or temperance which they did not exhibit, and 'the judgment to come' which was certain to overtake them." Apparently this left vain and voluptuous Drusilla unmoved, except to hate Paul all the more. But Felix trembled or was terrified. The same gospel affects different people in different ways.

Notice that Paul preached these things as a part of the gospel. He spoke "concerning the faith in Christ" (v.24). Too often we think of the gospel only in terms of love. It is that to be sure, but it is more. In Romans I Paul describes the gospel as "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth . . . for therein is the righteousness of God revealed . . ." (vv.16f). But in the very next verse he adds, "For the wrath of God is revealed . . ." A gospel which does not include the wrath of God empties the righteousness of God of all meaning.

We have seen previously that the righteousness of God is the saving activity of God whereby He lifts a sinner out of the wrong and places him down in the right, as though he had never been in the wrong. This activity of God is made necessary because of the wrath of God "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men . . ." (v.18). Therefore, when Paul preached "concerning the faith in Christ," he focused his attention upon the sins of this unholy couple.

Before you can be saved you must realize that you are lost. This is the

meaning of conviction of sin. As Paul preached, Felix saw his sin in its true light. He realized what his sin did, not only to him, but to God as well. For the Roman governor's sin was not only against himself, against Drusilla, and society. It was primarily against God. And because his sin was rebellion against God, he became aware of "the judgment to come."

Your sin, whatever it may be, is not only personal and social. It is theological as well. Sin may wreck your life and that of others. But first, last, and always, it violates the holiness of God. It nailed the Son of God to a cross. No wonder then that if you reject the offer of God's love in His Son, there remains but the judgment. The wrath of God abides upon you.

Realizing this, Felix trembled or was terrified. What is your attitude as you face your sin and the judgment to come? Like Drusilla you may rebel into greater sin. Or like Felix, you may be terrified. My prayer is that you will face up to your sinful life, and in so doing will be so convicted of your sin that you, too, will be terrified at the prospect of God's judgment upon you.

If you knew that this was the last second you would live, would this not be so? It may be. At the same time, although you may live for many years, the judgment of God is already upon you. In John 3:18 Jesus said, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God." Again in John 3:36 the Son of God's love said, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Third, note the convenient season of sin. Felix trembled, but he did not turn to Christ in faith. Instead we read, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a

convenient season I will call for thee" (v.25). Which suggests that conviction of sin is not enough. You may realize your sin, yet choose to remain in it. Being convicted you must turn to Christ as your Saviour from sin.

"When I have a convenient season." Why did Felix procrastinate? Luke says that he hoped to receive a bribe from Paul. He chose money in the rejection of Christ. But in this story other things are implied also. To admit his sin could have meant the loss of his position as governor. His comrades would mock him as he displayed what to them were signs of weakness. Doubtless Drusilla's attitude played a great part. Like Herod Antipas who trembled at the preaching of John the Baptist yet was overwhelmed by the defiant attitude of his wife, Herodias (Mk. 6:16ff.), so Felix was hardened by the influence of Drusilla.

Do you see yourself in this picture? You too are under conviction. But because of your love for money, position, pride, or even for some person, you reject Christ. If so, like Felix, in the judgment to come you will stand alone, bereft of wealth, position, or even your closest human ties. Others may cause your soul to go to Hell, but you and you alone can determine your soul for Heaven—and that through faith in Jesus Christ.

The "convenient season" of sin is the devil's most potent weapon in his destruction of souls. A master psychologist, he does not suggest that the wages of sin is not death. Nor does he tell you never to trust in Jesus. Instead he admits the truth of both things. He simply says, "Wait for a convenient season." If he can keep you waiting for the convenient

season which never comes, he will send your soul to Hell.

The Bible speaks of God hardening Pharaoh's heart. This is not an arbitrary act on the part of God. God kept impressing Pharaoh's heart to submit to His will. Each time Pharaoh rejected the impression, until finally his heart no longer responded. A law of psychology tells us that each time you deny response to a given stimulus, the next stimulus will cease to be.

Right now you are under conviction of your sin. Your desire is to respond to the stimulus to accept Jesus as your Saviour. Satan does not deny the stimulus or your need to respond to it. He simply says, "Wait for a convenient season." But the time will come either through death or through a hardening of your heart that you will cease to have the desire to be saved. After that, though God still loves you, you will have lost your power to respond to His love.

Notice the two mentions of time: "Go thy way for this time" and "When I have a convenient season" (v.25). "This time" is God's time. The "convenient season" is Satan's time. Satan says, "Wait for a convenient season." God says, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2).

"Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart" (Ps. 95:7ff.).

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