

Felix Trembled

All scripture quotations are from the NKJV, unless otherwise stated.

Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment

Paul's Defense Before Felix

In Acts 21, Paul is falsely accused of wrong by his persecutors in the temple and is arrested by the Roman commander. He is eventually delivered to the governor, Felix, in Caesarea, where Paul makes his defense.

Acts 24:24, 25 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."

Let us now briefly examine what the Bible says about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. There is a logical progression to these topics.

1. Righteousness

The word translated "righteousness" means not just doing or thinking that which is right in the sight of God but also the doctrine or the due judgment concerning it:

{DIKAIOSUNE, dik-ah-yos-oo'-nay, noun: "1) in a broad sense: state of him who is as he ought to be, righteousness, the condition acceptable to God 1a) the doctrine concerning the way in which man may attain a state approved of God 1b) integrity, virtue, purity of life, rightness, correctness of thinking feeling, and acting 2) in a narrower sense, justice or the virtue which gives each his due."}

{DIKAIOS, dik'-ah-yos, adjective: "1) righteous, observing divine laws 1a) in a wide sense, upright, righteous, virtuous, keeping the commands of God ... 1a2) innocent, faultless, guiltless 1a3) used of him whose way of thinking, feeling, and acting is wholly conformed to the will of God, and who therefore needs no rectification in the heart or life 1a3a) only Christ truly 1a4) approved of or acceptable of God 1b) in a narrower sense, rendering to each his due and that in a judicial sense, passing just judgment on others, whether expressed in words or shown by the manner of dealing with them." Both definitions are from J. H. Thayer (JHT) }.

1.1. Righteousness and atheism

The notion that some things are right is only sensible if there are some things wrong by comparison. Therefore, for the atheist, this presents a dilemma.

1.1.1. Hypothesis: there is no right and wrong

If we accept the evolutionist's proposition that the earth and life within it are only the result of mindless time and chance in the presence of eternal matter, then there is no basis for distinguishing good from evil. In the wild, when a male lion dominates a less-powerful male lion, he will kill that lion and his cubs, take his mate, and raise his own new family with that female. Nevertheless, the female lion does not have a problem with this, and there is no outcry in the lion community regarding the brutal killing of those cubs. This is because they have no standard of good and evil.

Now if humans also are only higher-evolved animals, then we are fundamentally no different than wild, brutal beasts driven by carnal impulses. Responsible for nothing and accountable to no one, "freedom" is our condemnation. When a human society adopts this worldview, there will be no regard for human life and no equity, so we should not be surprised when holocausts occur or when serial murderers and rapists prevail – and no one could say that they are "wrong."

1.1.2. Hypothesis: society determines right and wrong

However, if we affirm that some things are indeed wrong while somehow still holding to atheism, then we must attempt to establish our moral standard from human traditions, while also grappling with not knowing from whom or from what we inherit a sense of justice in the first place. Ultimately, this will fail, for each man will believe what he thinks is right for himself and maintain that no one else has the authority to declare otherwise.

Psalm 12:3-4 May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, And the tongue that speaks proud things, ⁴ Who have said, "With our tongue we will prevail; Our lips are our own; Who is lord over us?"

{Proverbs 21:2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts.}

1.1.3. Godlessness results in corruption

Any human society with a godless worldview is destined to corruption. Consider the ancient nations of Israel and Judah who, devising a righteousness of their own, ultimately fell to ruin.

{Amos 2:4-6 Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, Because they have despised the law of the LORD, And have not kept His commandments. Their lies lead them astray, Lies which their fathers followed. ⁵ But I will send a fire upon Judah, And it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem." ⁶ Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, Because they sell the righteous for silver, And the poor for a pair of sandals.}

1.2. A righteousness from God

A righteousness established by the law of the one true and living God is the only reasonable answer for a human moral standard. Being the creator of the universe, He alone has the sovereign authority to declare what is good and evil.

1.2.1. The beginning of law

We speak of the delivery of God's laws to mankind: the dispensation of Christ, the dispensation of Moses, and the dispensation of the patriarchs (Hebrews 1:1, 2). Yet before this, there was another dispensation, that is, to Adam:

Genesis 2:16-17 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ¹⁷ "...Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat..."

This very first law was the only prohibition upon Adam and Eve; everything else was permissible; they had no natural knowledge of right and wrong. Nakedness is shameful, but God had not yet instilled that in them (Genesis 2:25).

{Genesis 3:6-11 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. ⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." ¹¹ And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?"}

1.2.2. The beginning of sin

Unrighteousness, or sin, is the violation of divine law (1 John 3:4; 5:17), so without law, there can be no sin. However, it was not God that brought sin and unrighteousness into the world but man – by freely choosing to eat the forbidden fruit.

Romans 5:12-13 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. ¹³ (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law).

1.2.3. The natural law of conscience

Once Adam and Eve sin, they are divinely enlightened to instinctively know good from evil. Likewise, their children after them, when having come of age, "know to refuse the evil and choose the good" (Isaiah 7:16). Paul expounds on those who violate the inherent law of good and evil:

Romans 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

Paul also commends those who have conformed to the natural law of conscience:

Romans 2:14-15 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves,¹⁵ who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.

Cain knew that it was wrong for him to kill his brother, and God held him accountable for it. God had not yet delivered the ten commandments, but Cain did not need to see it engraved in stone to know that murder is sin. He already knew it in his heart, for God had said to him, "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door..." (Genesis 4:7).

Our knowledge of good and evil is instinctive to the mature; it is an endowment from God of His divine nature and a testimony to His creative wisdom. It is not something we must learn, but it is indeed something we can choose to suppress.

{Isaiah 40:21 Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?}

{Acts 17:26-28 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,²⁷ so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;²⁸ for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, "For we are also His offspring."}

{Hebrews 5:14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.}

1.2.4. The written law of God

So by instinct we know right from wrong, by creation we know God's sovereign judgment, but this is no comfort to us, for we are all guilty of doing wrong. However, by the scriptures, we come to know God's righteous forgiveness and redemption.

{Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.}

{Psalm 119:160 The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.}

{Proverbs 22:17-21 Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, And apply your heart to my knowledge;¹⁸ For it is a pleasant thing if you keep them within you; Let them all be fixed upon your lips,¹⁹ So that your trust may be in the LORD; I have instructed you today, even you.²⁰ Have I not written to you excellent things Of counsels and knowledge,²¹ That I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, That you may answer words of truth To those who send to you?}

{Deuteronomy 30:11-15 ...This commandment ... is not too mysterious for you....¹⁴ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it. (Ref. Romans 10:8)}

Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

{Romans 10:8-11 "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach):⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."}

{Ephesians 3:2-4 ...How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already,⁴ by which, when you read, you may understand)}

{2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.}

1.3. False righteousness

We earlier considered the original New Testament word translated "righteousness," but Thayer's definition further includes: "1a1) of those who seem to themselves to be righteous, who pride themselves to be righteous, who pride themselves in their virtues, whether real or imagined."

Luke 18:9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

{Romans 10:3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.}

2. Self-Control

This introduces the next topic that Paul discusses with Felix. If God has revealed a standard of righteousness, He should expect us to abide in it. This requires submission on our part, demonstrated in self-control.

2.1. Moral strength – the body enslaved

The noun translated "self-control" {EGKRATEIA, eng-krat'-i-ah} means: "the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites." {The adjective form of this, EGKRATES eng-krat-ace', means "1) strong, robust 2) having power over, possessed of (a thing) 3) mastering, controlling, curbing, restraining 3a) controlling one's self, temperate, continent."} The root of this means: "1) force, strength 2) power, might ... 3) dominion" {KRATOS, krat'-os, all definitions JHT.} Paul uses the analogy of athletics to explain:

*1 Corinthians 9:25-27 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate [EGKRATES]....²⁶ Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.²⁷ But I discipline my body and bring it into **subjection**....*

The word translated "subjection" {DOULAGOGEO, doo-lag-ogue-eh'-o} means, "1) to lead away into slavery, claim as one's slave 2) to make a slave and to treat as a slave i.e. with severity, subject to stern and rigid discipline" (JHT).

{The word "temperance," in English means restraint. What we call "tempered steel" is iron made stronger by the infusion of alloying elements and a heating and rapid cooling process. Tempered steel knives stay sharp. A man of righteousness has the law of God infused in his heart, and when the heat of life's trials are experienced, failure is averted in the strength of self-control.}

2.2. Self-control can be painful

2.2.1. A self-inflicted chastisement

The word "discipline" (NKJ) or "buffet" (NAS 1977) translates a word {HUPOPIAZO, hoop-o-pee-ad'-zo} that means: "1) to beat black and blue, to smite so as to cause bruises and livid spots..." (JHT).

Mark 9:43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched....

God does not literally require that we inflict physical harm on our own flesh. Our bodies are temples of the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:19), which God expects us to nourish and cherish, "just as the Lord does the church" (Ephesians 5:29). Instead, with astonishing hyperbole, God is revealing just how serious it is that we serve Him ahead of serving ourselves – at all extreme costs.

2.2.2. A crucified self

Paul calls it self-crucifixion:

{Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.}

Galatians 5:24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

{Colossians 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth....}

Romans 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, ... that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

{Romans 6:11-12 ... Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin,...¹² ...do not let sin reign in your mortal body....}

{2 Corinthians 5:14-17 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;¹⁵ and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.¹⁶ Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.}

Crucifixion is the most severe form of physical punishment ever devised. The apostle cannot more emphatically express how a man of true righteousness purges from himself the sinful desires of the flesh.

2.2.3. A sacrificial life

Scripture makes abundantly clear that righteous living will not always be easy but will require effort and sacrifice with challenges and tribulations, sometimes suffering hardships and adversity (Matthew 10:34-39; John 15:19, 20; Romans 8:18; 12:1, 2; 1 Thessalonians 3:3, 4; Hebrews 10:32-34; 1 Peter 4). When we stop loving the world, be not surprised that it begins hating us.

1 Peter 4:3, 4 For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles – when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.⁴ In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.

2.3. The lack of self-control – enslaved to the body

While self-control is making my body my slave, without it, I am made the slave of my body. The word translated "lewdness" {ASELGEIA, as-elg'-i-a} in Galatians 5:19 describes those "as living without any moral restraint, licentiousness, sensuality, lustful indulgence; especially as indecent and outrageous sexual behavior, debauchery, indecency, flagrant immorality" {Friberg}. This is not liberation, as they suppose; they "are slaves of corruption" (2 Peter 2:19), "serving ... lusts and pleasures" (Titus 3:3).

Romans 1:21-32 Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.²² Professing to be wise, they became fools,²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.²⁴ Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,²⁵ who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.²⁷ Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.²⁸ And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers,³⁰ backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,³¹ undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;³² who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

Reset the context here from verse 18 through 20 and note that these people knew God –not by the scriptures– but because creation reveals His sovereignty, and they understood that these behaviors are unnatural, wrong, and punishable –not by the scriptures– but because God made it "evident within them" (NAS 1977), as developed earlier at length. The point is this: we do not need to know the Bible or even maintain a belief in God to know that these things are wrong!

Note particularly in verse 30 that they are called "proud."

2.3.1. Pride

The English word, "pride" has two senses: good and bad.

- In a good sense: 2 Corinthians 7:4 "...I have great pride in you..." (ESV).

This word translated "pride" {KAUCHESIS, kow'-khay-sis}, means "to express an unusually high degree of confidence in someone or something being exceptionally noteworthy" {Louw and Nida}, used of those who, by their faithfulness, act commendably and bring no reproach.

- In a bad sense: James 4:6 "...God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

Here, the word "pride" translates a different word {HUPEREPHANIA, hoop-er-ay-fan-ee'-ah}, meaning "1) ...haughtiness, arrogance 2) the character of one who, with a swollen estimate of his own powers or merits, looks down on others and even treats them with insolence and contempt" (JHT). {The adjective form of this word appears in Romans 1:30.} This pride is the opposite of humility, and it is the keystone of unrighteousness.

2 Timothy 3:1-4 (abbreviated) ...In the last days perilous times will come: ² For men will be lovers of themselves, ... boasters, ... without self-control, ... headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

2.3.2. Pride in an abused sense

In our society today, the word "pride" has become synonymous among homosexuals with their perceived strength and courage to shamelessly and openly profess their chosen lifestyle. Gospel preachers who teach that homosexuality is sin are accused by them of being haters or fearful of homosexuals and are berated by them in arrogance as being ignorant and intolerant.

Isaiah 5:20-21 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil

Malachi 3:15 So now we call the proud blessed, For those who do wickedness are raised up; They even tempt God and go free.

The practice of homosexuality is absolutely condemned in scripture:

*1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 13, 18 ... Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, ... nor adulterers, nor **homosexuals**, nor **sodomites**,¹⁰ ...will inherit the kingdom of God...¹³ Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord¹⁸ Flee sexual immorality....*

1 Timothy 1:9, 10 ...The law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers,...¹⁰ for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers....

- The word translated "homosexuals" {MALAKOS, mal-ak-os'} means, "...of men effeminate, unmanly; ...especially of a man or boy who submits his body to homosexual lewdness..." (Friberg).
- The word translated "sodomites" {ARSENOKOITES, ar-sen-ok-oy'-tace} means, "one who lies with a male as with a female..." (JHT).

Some homosexuals attempt to justify themselves by claiming that Jesus never condemned the practice of homosexuality. This is not true. Jesus said:

*Mark 7:20-23 ...For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts... **fornications**,... lewdness,... pride....*

- The word translated "fornications" {PORNEIA, por-ni'-ah} means, "illicit sexual intercourse, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism; intercourse with animals,... close relatives,... {[or] a divorced man or woman" (JHT)}. It is plural because there is more than one way of committing fornication.

Note that homosexuals are in the same company as murderers and thieves. To God, it is not all happiness and rainbows.

The law of Moses prohibited a man to dress like a woman or a woman like a man (Deuteronomy 22:5), but society today makes every effort to confuse gender distinctions. God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).

2.3.3. Choosing unrighteousness

Some who practice homosexuality declare that God made them that way and they cannot change what they are. Certainly, there are people with chromosomal or hormonal abnormalities who suffer an array of birth defects where anatomy is indistinguishable or maldeveloped or having both some male and some female organs, which results in emotional confusion and social distress. Though the Bible is not intended to be a biology or sociology textbook, Jesus indeed acknowledges that such anomalies sometimes occur and have to be considered.

Matthew 19:12 For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men....

However, such cases are very rare, and God calls us to deal with mercy and gentleness upon all who suffer. These admonitions are not for those who have such problems but for those who with healthy minds and bodies choose to practice homosexuality in defiance of God's pattern.

Scripture is clear that it is not God who puts illicit desire into the heart of a man.

James 1:13-16, 21 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.... ²¹ Therefore, lay aside all filthiness....

{1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world.}

2.4. Overcoming sin

2.4.1. Denying self

Remember: self-control is a demonstration of moral strength. To openly choose to practice homosexuality is not an indication of moral strength; it is a self-serving surrender to carnal pleasures. To the contrary, God calls us to deny fleshly passions for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 19:12 ...and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it.

Luke 9:23 [Jesus] said..., "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

Ephesians 4:17-19 ... You should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, ... ¹⁹ who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness....

Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.

Those who choose to practice homosexuality can certainly change their behavior by the power of the gospel of the grace of God, and there is evidence of homosexuals that have indeed changed. Homosexuality was commonplace in Corinth in the days of Paul, and he said to them:

*...**such were some of you.** But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus ... (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).*

*{Ephesians 2:1-2 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² **in which you once walked** according to the course of this world}*

2.4.2. Avoiding evil influence

The world is filled with evil influences, but we can minimize their effect on us by avoiding those who practice wrong and by associating with the righteous instead. Paul admonishes in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 to "separate from them."

Proverbs 12:26 The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.

{Proverbs 13:20 He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed.}

{Ephesians 5:7-12 Therefore do not be partakers with them.... ¹¹ And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.}

James 4:4-10 ... Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.... ⁷ ... Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify

your hearts, you double-minded.⁹ Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom....

2.4.3. Resisting temptation

Many homosexuals today aggressively encourage others to support their cause through their conspicuous celebrations and by constantly pressing their propaganda. The mass media advertises it, the entertainment industry glorifies it, and the government endorses it. Some department stores are even selling children's apparel that promotes homosexuality. It might be difficult to overcome the pressures of society, but God, in love, promises to provide us the strength to resist, if we submit to Him in faith.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

1 John 5:3-5 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.⁴ For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith....

God has given to man all manner of natural, physical desires, and He has also appointed wholesome ways to fulfill them.

Matthew 19:4-5 ... Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning "made them male and female,"⁵ ... For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife....

1 Corinthians 7:2 Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.

2.4.4. Deliverance from corruption

The abundance of filthiness surrounding righteous Lot in the city of Sodom tormented him daily, and God delivered him out of it. If the abundance of filthiness around us each day does not likewise torment our souls, beware, lest we are becoming "past feeling" (Ephesians 4:19).

{2 Peter 2:6-8 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, [God] condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly;⁷ and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked⁸ (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds).}

{Matthew 24:12 And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.}

3. Judgment To Come

3.1. Punishment for wrong

This brings us to the third topic Paul discusses with Felix. If God by His sovereign power has set a standard of righteousness and expects us to abide in it through self-control, there must be some consequential punishment for disobedience. God is all loving and merciful, but these attributes cannot abide without His perfect justice and retribution.

{Matthew 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.}

{Ephesians 5:3-6 But fornication and all uncleanness ... let it not even be named among you,...⁶ ...for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.}

{Jude 1:7 ... Sodom and Gomorrah, ... having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.}

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Hebrews 10:26-31 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries....³⁰ For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord....³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

2 Peter 3:3-7 ...Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, ... ⁷ But the heavens and the earth ... are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

This caused Felix to fear.

3.2. The fear of the Lord

3.2.1. Two senses of fear

In the New Testament scriptures, "fear" translates a word {PHOBOS, fob'-os} defined in two senses:

- In a negative sense: terror, dread, and alarm,
- In a positive sense: respect, reverence, and awe.

{It is possible to have the fear of dread without reverence for the one causing fear.

2 Corinthians 7:5 ...When we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears.

It is also possible to have the fear of respect without the dread of punishment.

Ephesians 5:33 ...Let the wife see that she respects her husband.}

However, regarding authority sources, it is not just one or the other, but both senses of fear work together; one depends upon the other. To explain, it would be unjust for an authoritative regime to not punish law-breakers. There is no way to have respect for a civil power that does not enforce its laws (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13, 14). As a child learns to respect his father through the threat of punishment for disobedience, how much more it is with our heavenly Father.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 It is a righteous thing with God ... ⁷ ... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸ in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

{Philippians 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.}

{Psalm 2:11 Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling.}

3.2.2. The paradox of fear

Fear is a paradox, for Jesus also often says not to fear; however, in many cases, this is for those who already have the proper respect for God. The apparent contradiction is explained in the two senses of fear:

- {To those who have no respect for God – be afraid, be very afraid.
- However, to those who respect God and love and obey Him – there is no need for the dread of punishment.

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment...}

This is reflected in John Newton's beloved hymn, "Amazing Grace," which says, " 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved."

Romans 13:3-4 Do you want to be unafraid? ... Do what is good.... ⁴ ... But if you do evil, be afraid....

{Deuteronomy 10:12 And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.}

{Psalm 145:19-20 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. ²⁰ The LORD preserves all who love Him, But all the wicked He will destroy.}

3.2.3. Fear in evangelism

In Romans 3:10-18, quoting the psalms and the prophets, Paul describes in vivid symbolism the deplorable state of sinful man, and the root cause is identified: "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Some have proposed that evangelism is more effective, not by teaching doctrine or warning people that they are lost, but by telling them that God loves them and by sharing with them the joy of the Lord. Though such messages are good, they do not convince a sinner of his wrong. Love is vital, but it ought not be elevated above doctrinal correctness. 2 John 9 says, "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God...." The most loving thing we can do for an adulterer is to kindly teach him God's doctrine on marriage, for he will not be converted unless he understands it.

Proverbs 1:7, paraphrased, says that the beginning of knowledge is the fear of the LORD. If our efforts in evangelism do not somehow instill fear, then those hearing will never really begin to understand. Yet our purpose is not to frighten sinners but only tell them what they need to hear – to "convince, rebuke, [and] exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2). Fear is the end, not the means. For example, Jesus sharply rebukes the Pharisees for their hypocrisy (Matthew 23) and challenges a Samaritan woman regarding her adultery (John 4:18). Peter charges the people at Pentecost with putting to death the innocent (Acts 2:23, 36). Stephen sternly admonishes the council regarding their corruption (Acts 7:51-53). Paul tells the Athenians that they are steeped in ignorance and warns them of the judgment (Acts 17:30, 31).

Preaching that specifically identifies immoral behavior shows people what needs to change in their life and the true cost of discipleship. Generic exhortations to "serve the Lord and be faithful" are inadequate unless we describe what this actually does and does not look like. We can also unlock all the fascinating mysteries of symbolism in scripture, but this will be of little benefit if it does not show a sinner that he is lost. When the Philippian jailor finally learns godly fear, he falls down and says, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:29, 30). It is pointless to tell a sinner what he must do to be forgiven unless we first teach him that he needs it. People doing wrong need to know the true cost of rebellion, and they generally don't change unless they become more afraid of **not** changing (Psalm 55:19). We need the kind of preaching that caused Felix to fear.

2 Corinthians 5:11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...

{I often thank God that I can serve Him openly without fear of strong persecution. However, sometimes I also fear that perhaps it is not because God is shielding me from persecution, but it is because I am not turning the world upside down like Paul and Silas did (Acts 17:6).}

3.3. The joy of salvation

But we ought not despair in the message of God's righteousness and judgment, thinking that we are not permitted to ever enjoy any physical blessings of this life. God has not given us life and free will in order to oppress us but that we might willingly choose to love Him in response to His great love for us so that He can share with us His glory.

1 Timothy 4:8 ...Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

1 Peter 1:3-9 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled ... ⁵ ... through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice,... ⁸ ...with joy inexpressible...

2 Peter 1:3-4 ...His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, ⁴ by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

At Pentecost, those who recognized their sin said, "What shall we do?" and Peter replied:

Acts 2:37-41 ... Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. ⁴⁰ ... Be saved from this perverse generation.

As far as we know, Felix did not ever fear enough to change. Don't be like Felix; allow the gospel to change you. If you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and realize your need to be forgiven – to be immersed in the waters of baptism – or to confess your repentance for some sin in your life, please do so now; there is not a more "convenient time" as this.