

## Unintended Consequences

### Acts 25:13-27

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 7-19-2009

## Introduction

Here are some headlines that I have read in the last couple of weeks.

1. “Obama’s fuel standards may have unintended consequences.”
2. President Obama’s 35.5 mpg CAFE and the law of unintended consequences.
3. Unintended consequences of nationalization of GM and Chrysler.
4. Obama’s Mexico trip highlights unintended consequences of U.S. policy on Mexican farmers.
5. Unintended consequences of managed economy.
6. Unintended consequences of new credit card regs.
7. Hate Crimes Bill! Unintended Consequences.
8. Obama’s regulation leads to another unintended consequence
9. The unintended consequences of immigration reform

There are so many of these recent headlines that one wag wanted to rename the law of unintended consequences as the law of Obama. Actually, I don’t want to lay the total blame at his feet. There are hundreds of Senators and Congressmen, and there are previous presidents and staff who have made similar decisions and then been frustrated with the unintended consequences of their actions. We are going to see something similar in this chapter.

Last week we looked at the first twelve verses of this chapter and we saw an example of politicians who are frustrated with each other, and citizens who are even more frustrated with their politicians. Any time the state takes on Messianic pretensions, things get bogged down. We saw that Festus was a conservative who tried to make a difference, but he was compromising within two weeks, and finding that even his compromises were not getting him where he wanted. Not being as ruthless or sophisticated or well connected as Felix had been, Festus was at a loss for what to do. In this chapter we are going to look at the unintended consequences of his one simple compromise.

## I. Festus needs advice from Agrippa (vv. 13-14a)

### *A. He can't seek advice from the Jewish leaders because he has already gotten into a dilemma with them.*

The story starts in verse 13 – “**And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus.**” Remember that Agrippa is the brother-in-law to the former governor Felix, so he is interested in what goes on at Caesarea. And no doubt he likes this fabulous resort. So the next phrase indicates that he is in no hurry of leaving. Verse 14 says, “**When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king...**” Festus had obviously begun trusting this king and by the end of these “many days” he wanted to get his advice. He can't really seek advice from the other Jewish leaders because he's already gotten into a dilemma with them.

### *B. So he seeks advice from the pervert, Agrippa*

So he seeks advice from the pervert, Agrippa. Agrippa had a many year incestuous relationship with his sister Bernice. But Festus opened up to him because Agrippa was known to be very loyal to Rome (Josephus, *J. W.* 2.16.4 [2.345-401]). It never ceases to amaze me how quickly moral perverts in our congress or senate can become trusted politicians, speakers and advisors. Apparently Festus turns a blind eye to his moral perversion and presents a sticky problem that he has found himself in.

## II. Festus tries to paint himself as reasonable judge (vv. 14b-19b)

### *A. His views on justice (vv. 14b-16)*

First, Festus tries to paint himself as a very just man. Beginning at the second part of verse 14:

**Acts 25:14b ...Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying: “There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix,  
Acts 25:15 about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him.  
Acts 25:16 To them I answered, “It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.”**

That all sounds very pious and nice, but the fact of the matter is that Paul has already had three trials, and no one has been able to prove a thing at any one of those trials. It will become very evident as we keep reading that

Festus is a hypocrite who wants to give the illusion that he is a decent judge. John Phillips said,

The world is always ready to level the charge of hypocrisy against some failing church member; it conveniently forgets the political hypocrite, the business hypocrite, the intellectual hypocrite, the professional hypocrite, and, in this case, the judicial hypocrite it has in its own midst.

But since I am addressing church people, I want to reverse that. It is ever so easy to see hypocrisy in judges, presidents, congressmen, and senators, and to be utterly blind to our own hypocrisy. As we go through this passage let's make it our prayer that we would be principled, and not hypocrites. It's hypocrisy to be more concerned about the consequences of our sins than we are of the sin itself. In any case, Festus' views on justice are half-decent, even if they haven't been completely lived out. He's a conservative with conservative instincts.

### ***B. His views on Judaism (vv. 17-19a)***

He next speaks of his views on Judaism. Verses 17-19:

**Acts 25:17 Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in.**

**Acts 25:18 When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed,**

**Acts 25:19 but had some questions against him about their own religion**

That word “religion” is rather interesting. It's not the ordinary word for religion, but a term that means superstitious worship of demons. It is δεισιδαιμονία. A *daimon* is a demon, and this naïve Festus thinks that the Jews were superstitious or worshippers of demons. I'm sure that Agrippa winced at this major *faux pas*. Festus maybe didn't realize it, but Agrippa practiced Judaism, so it was an unintended insult. But in any case, it shows the naïveté with which Festus is ruling this country. He's not even familiar with the monotheism of the Jews. They are not worshippers of demons. They are monotheists. And how many rulers are just like him – totally out of touch with reality. They are in their own little world.

### ***C. His views on Jesus (v. 19b)***

Next, his views about Jesus are summarized in the last half of verse 19 – “**and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.**” Poor Festus has no idea of the depth of his ignorance. He writes off the creator of this universe – the one in whom he lived and moved and had his being – as being a *certain* Jesus. He is utterly ignorant of Jesus.

Likewise, he had no idea that the greatest missionary in history was the apostle Paul. In the next chapter he thinks that Paul is crazy. To him Christianity sounds insane. So even though he paints himself as being a reasonable judge, it is obvious that he is not well read and that he is a man who is out of touch with reality.

So far Festus shows himself to be a greenhorn, and he wants Agrippa to show him the ropes of ruling here. “Could you do me a favor?” That’s basically what he is asking.

### **III. The dilemma that Festus has gotten himself into (vv. 20-27)**

#### ***A. He admits to incompetence (vv. 20-23)***

##### **1. He had failed to judge the matter himself (v. 20a)**

If Agrippa hasn’t already guessed at his incompetence, it is clearly revealed in verses 20-23. Verse 20: “**And because I was uncertain of such questions...**” Festus prefers to admit to ignorance rather than to admit that he had deliberately tried to give the Jews a favor. A judge doesn’t like to admit to injustice, bribery, favoritism, or politicism. He prefers to plead ignorance. I’m always amazed at the number of brilliant people being examined by Congress who just can’t seem to remember. But that seems preferable to admitting guilt. Well, pleading ignorance may work with some people, but it will never work before the throne of heaven. Romans 13 says that magistrates will be held accountable before God.

##### **2. He unnecessarily caved in to Jewish demands (v. 20b)**

Secondly, he shows that he had already unnecessarily caved in to Jewish demands: “**I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters.**” Notice that he leaves out the words “before me” that he had told Paul earlier. He is admitting that he had intended to abdicate jurisdiction. If you know Roman law, you know that it would have been a bit embarrassing for Festus to admit that he had so easily given up jurisdiction. But the alternative was even more embarrassing. Festus knew that the Jews already wanted Paul dead before they had tried him. He knew it would not be an impartial court. He knew the court record of Paul’s innocence. And now, his attempt to please the Jews has boomeranged on him, and he has no idea what to do. Agrippa will later suggest that he should have just let him go. But such an easy solution had escaped the mind of Festus who was more interested in politics than justice.

### 3. He unnecessarily allowed a trivial matter to be appealed to Caesar (v. 21)

But verse 21 is where Festus' real concerns come into play. This is why he is really sweating. It says, **“But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar.”** As will be evident when Agrippa hears Paul in the next chapter, this case is a trivial matter that Nero will be incensed with once it gets to his court. In fact, it may explain why Festus loses his job in two years. I don't know. But Festus is sweating bullets. If he had simply given Paul justice and let the political flak strike where it may, he would have had fewer problems. But by making a political move rather than a move of justice, he has a new dilemma. He still has the Jews irritated with him, but he is now going to have Nero irritated with him that he didn't handle the situation himself. Thirdly, even admitting this to Agrippa is embarrassing. He will be most indebted to Agrippa if that king can help him out of his dilemma. The embarrassing nature of this probably explains why it was **“many days”** before Festus has the courage to bring this up.

### 4. He unnecessarily involved Agrippa (v. 22-23)

Of course, this in itself shows a lack of leadership. It was utterly unnecessary for Agrippa to even be involved. But Agrippa (who is a manipulator looking for ways to control others) is more than happy to hear this case. Look at verses 22-23

**Acts 25:22** Then Agrippa said to Festus, **“I also would like to hear the man myself.”** **“Tomorrow,”** he said, **“you shall hear him.”** [Now keep in mind that Agrippa is an inferior to Festus. Festus doesn't have to do this. He wants to do this. Verse 23:]

**Acts 25:23** So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in.

Oooh! I think Festus was probably cringing that Agrippa brings the whole city leadership with him. Why couldn't he just come by himself? But whatever Agrippa's motives, God uses this to get even more prominent men to hear the Gospel in the next chapter. Almost every prominent dignitary was present. I love the way the Lord works. Politics is one of the seven leverage points in any given society that need to be captured by the gospel, and Paul's gospel penetrates politics and almost captures Agrippa's heart. Perhaps it captured the hearts of some of these others. Just as a side note – those seven leverage points that must be captured by the Gospel even the early church captured them are: 1) religion, 2) civil government and legal

system, 3) the arts and entertainment, 4) education, 5) business, science and technology, 6) media, 7) family and social welfare. Let me repeat those: The first leverage point is religion. Until a nation is willing to affirm that it is a Christian nation, you cannot say that the nation is disciplined. The second leverage point is the civil government and legal system. It is not enough for it to declare itself Christian. It must also follow God's moral laws on every level of the three branches of civil government. The third leverage point is the arts and entertainment. Many people don't realize that art has a powerful impact on our thinking. To immerse yourself in pagan art will not achieve this. I am looking for the time when art and entertainment will be thoroughly Christian. The fourth leverage point is education. We must have a Biblical curriculum, methodology, goals, and content. The classroom approach to education is not Biblical. We can't just assume that the way we have always educated is the Biblical way. Education must be captured by God's grace. The fifth leverage point is business, science, and technology. Those things are not neutral. They must be transformed. The sixth leverage point is the Media. This is one of the most powerful tools of either Satan or God. William Carey went to work to capture this leverage point right away by printing newspapers. You need to get alternative media. Then the seventh leverage point was family and social welfare. We can't imitate the world in how to get a mate. We can't look to the world to inform us on how we relate to our spouses, or our children. It was because the Bible was applied to all seven areas in the first few centuries that Armenia, and then Rome became Christian, and numerous other nations followed. It is because the church adopts the world's ways of thinking in these seven areas that the church has been captured instead of vice versa in America. Nation discipling must always penetrate and capture those leverage points. There can be no neutrality.

***B. He admits to having a serious problem on his hands (vv. 24-27)***

**1. A serious local dilemma (v. 24)**

But back to our text: The remaining verses summarize the two biggest problems that Festus had upon his hands. Verse 24 shows that he had a serious local problem. **“And Festus said: “King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer.”** This was not just a peaceable petition of the Jews. The Greek word “crying out,” means “to use one's voice at high volume, call, shout, cry out” or “to roar like a lion.” (BDAG)

For the political leaders of Israel to cry out like this shows that they were so frustrated that they were close to rioting. They are mad. It is unthinkable for a Roman judge to hand a Roman citizen over to the Jews to be lynched. But it is equally unthinkable to lose control of the Jewish population. What a fix you can get in with one tiny compromise! The sensible thing for Festus to have done would have been to give him a military escort out of the country and to tell him not to come back in. But that opportunity is now long gone because Paul has appealed to Caesar. So Festus has serious social problems on his hands with the Jews.

## 2. A serious legal dilemma (v. 25-27)

Then verses 25-27 outline the serious legal dilemma that he also faces.

**Acts 25:25 But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him.**

**Acts 25:26 I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him.**

**Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write.**

**Acts 25:27 For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him.”**

What a mess! Festus is right now declaring Paul innocent. Now wait a shake! If Paul is innocent, why did he have to appeal to Caesar? Obviously because he wasn't getting justice in Festus' court! What an admission! There could be no other reason. He also admits to incompetence because he doesn't even know what charges to write against him for Caesar. He has to bring charges or there would be no need for an appeal. So the implication is that Festus has decided against Paul, yet Festus right now has declared him innocent. He's gotten himself into a fix.

Another thought that would come to these men is, “If Paul is innocent, why aren't you letting him go now? And the answer is that it was because he appealed to Caesar, and once an appeal has been made, I can't undo it. Now, Paul could undo his appeal to Caesar, but the fact that he doesn't is telling on the corrupt nature of this court as well. Another thought might be, “What's the big deal? Let him go to Caesar.” “But that's the problem – if I let him go to Caesar without proper charges, I will get in trouble with Caesar. He doesn't want cases like this.” And then everyone is thinking, “So are you saying that we should make trumped up charges to make the case look worthy of going to Caesar?” I think that is exactly what Festus is implying. “This is going to look pretty silly if we don't come up with some

charges against Paul.” And that is exactly why Paul did not undo his appeal to Caesar. So Festus is embarrassed and in trouble no matter which way he turns. He is turning to these men to get him out of his fix.

Unintended Consequences. Festus suffers under them and Paul suffers under them. They are like laws of harvest. We are not going to escape the unintended consequences of Washington’s ridiculous decisions just because we are Christians. And we are going to see more and more miserable unintended consequences of our nation’s Fascist policies in years to come. What are we to do?

### **Conclusion – how did Paul handle two years of such frustrating events?**

Well, I think we can imitate Paul. Paul did not get frustrated. He did not give up heart. In fact, he was able to see God’s purposes through these events. And he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon while he was there. When you read those four epistles you begin to get an idea of the worldview that enabled Paul to find joy in the midst of unintended consequences. In fact, the joy that exudes from Ephesians and Philippians is amazing. I’m not going to cover every issue in those books that helped to sustain Paul (issues like predestination, spiritual warfare, community, and prayer), but I do want to highlight five things that are strongly present in these epistles.

- **Confidence in God’s control (23:11; Phil. 1:12-13; Eph. 1)**

The first thing that sustained Paul was a supreme confidence in God’s control. In chapter 23 Jesus had told Paul directly, “**Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.**” You must bear witness. I love that “must.” The Festuses of this world cannot thwart God’s purpose. Even the unintended *consequences* of Festus’ decision were tools that God would brilliantly use. In Philippians 1:12-13 Paul said, “**But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.**” These things have actually turned out for good. You too can have confidence that God will use the unintended consequences (whether economic or otherwise) of Washington DC’s policies for the furtherance of the Gospel. Amen?

- **Awed by God's glory more than man's glory (v. 23 with Phil. 2:10-11)**

The second thing that sustained Paul in these chapters was a greater sense of awe over God's majesty than he had over man's majesty. Verse 23 uses a special word for the "pomp" that characterized this court. It is *phantasia*. It's a word that describes the glory intended to put awe into you. This word occurs in Hebrews 12 to speak of the *phantasia* – the wondrous sight of God that was so awesome that Moses said, "**I am exceedingly afraid and trembling**" (v. 21). So the sight of civil government can put you in awe, and the sight of God can put you in awe. But the more you meditate on the greatness of God, the less awesome the pomp and power of political entities will appear. Such pomp might put other people in awe and fear. But Paul knew that Agrippa and Festus were no match for Jesus Christ. Philippians 2:11-12 guarantees "**that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**" It's the glory of heaven that drives out all fear of man and enables Paul to teach Agrippa and Festus in the next chapter that *they should bow before King Jesus*. Amazing. Develop a sense of awe at God's majesty and you too will spend less time fearing what the Agrippas of this world can do to you. The fear of the Lord is absolutely essential.

- **Paul knew that he had "dual citizenship" – a temporary Roman citizenship and an enduring heavenly citizenship (vv. 10,11 with Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20)**

The third issue that Paul brings up in his epistles is that he had dual citizenship. He was a citizen of Rome, but he valued his citizenship in heaven far more. It was an enduring citizenship with far more perks and far more authority than Rome could ever muster. In Ephesians 2:19 he spoke of believers being citizens of God's kingdom. It didn't make him escapist. After all, he is appealing to the rights he has as a Roman citizen. But Paul's heavenly citizenship made him realize that he is part of an army that is demanding unconditional surrender of Rome to King Jesus. Now that seems like such an idealistic and impossible goal that some people write it off.

But listen to Philippians 3:20. Paul said, "**For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to**

**His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.**” People might question whether Jesus will ever be able to subdue politics to Himself. But is that any harder than resurrecting and glorifying our bodies? No. Yet Paul says that the same power will do both. Death is simply the last enemy to be destroyed and put under Christ’s feet, but every enemy must become part of Christ’s kingdom before that happens.

So our heavenly citizenship gives us perspective. On the one hand it makes us realize that even if someone kills us, that just hastens our enjoyment of heaven the sooner. But it also makes us realize that we are part of a greater cause than simply helping a politician to win. We are part of Christ’s heavenly kingdom that demands unconditional surrender of all American citizens and governors. The prayer of heaven’s citizens is, **“Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** We can never neglect the demands of our citizenship in heaven. It comforts us and guides how we live out our earthly citizenship.

- **Patience**

But the epistles bring up a fourth thing that helped Paul to have joy in the midst of unintended consequences – Spirit-given patience. Ephesians 4 indicates that the growth of Christ’s kingdom is going to be gradual and take a long time. In fact, Ephesians anticipates not only a long period of spiritual warfare, but also a long time in which the church will be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Yet Paul indicated that the church would still irresistibly grow and at some point be holy and united in doctrine. Well – it takes patience to be working for that.

Here’s what he wrote in Ephesians during this imprisonment. In Ephesians 1:21 he said that Christ is presently **“far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.”** And he insisted in Colossians 1:16 that Christ’s redemption reaches to everything in this universe – **“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him...** [and then He talks about the application of Christ’s redemption to these thrones and principalities and all things. It says] **and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of the cross.”** If you have the vision of worldwide conquest of the gospel that Paul had, you

must develop patience. America wasn't taken over by the humanists overnight. This happened over a period of more than one hundred years of patience on their side as they strategized on how to take back the seven leverage points of society. We too must patiently work for the long haul, building what is needed for our children or our grandchildren to see a Christian America.

- **Faith**

And of course, it takes Paul's fifth characteristic to find joy in these circumstances – faith. It takes faith to see things from God's perspective, not our own. It takes faith to say the things that Paul says in Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. And I urge you to put on **“the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one”** (Eph. 6:16). Don't be overwhelmed by the greatness of the evil in our nation. Realize Paul's promise in Romans 5:20 that where sin abounds, God's grace can abound much more. Amen? Let me end by reading you a poem.

Just where you stand in the conflict  
 There is your place!  
 Just where you think you are useless  
 Hide not your face;  
 God placed you there for a purpose  
 Whate'er it be;  
 Think He has chosen you for it,  
 Work loyally!

Gird on your armor, be faithful  
 At toil or rest,  
 Whiche'er it be, never doubting  
 God's way is best;  
 Out in the light or the darkness  
 Stand firm and true  
 This is the work which your Master  
 Gives you to do.

Anonymous

Amen

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- Awed by God's glory more than man's glory (v. 23 with Phil. 2:10-11)
- Paul knew that he had "dual citizenship" – a temporary Roman citizenship and an enduring heavenly citizenship (Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20)
- Patience
- Faith