

# Ignorance or Apathy?

Ron Roberts

When we cannot reach the lost with the Gospel we wonder if the problem is **ignorance** or **apathy**. Perhaps they do not understand what we are trying to teach them. Maybe they do not care to learn. Sometimes the **ignorance** is not theirs but ours. We do not know how to approach them. We do not know the Bible well enough to teach others. Or maybe it is our **apathy**. We do not care enough about God or the lost souls to put forth any substantial effort to reach them.

In Acts 25 and 26 we see both **apathy** and **ignorance** in Paul's audience. In this part of Luke's narrative the Apostle Paul is in prison in Caesarea. A new governor is appointed and inherits the holy prisoner. Festus, the new official, visited Jerusalem to talk to the Jews about the charges against Paul. He is the man of **ignorance**. He did not understand the Jewish customs and was at a loss as to what to do with Paul. The Jews wanted the Apostle brought to Jerusalem for trial because they secretly planned to ambush and kill him. Festus returned to Caesarea and asked Paul if he would be willing to face the Jews in Jerusalem. Being a Roman citizen, he exercised his right to appeal to Caesar for judgment. This gave Festus a problem with his **ignorance**. He now had to know something to tell the emperor about Paul's offense against the Jews.

When King Herod Agrippa visited Festus he told him about his dilemma. He explained how the Jews came an accused Paul of unusual crimes. In Acts 25:18-19 he explained the event. 18 *Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed:* 19 *But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.*

Festus goes on to explain his need of Agrippa's assistance. Acts 25:25 *But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.* 26 *Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.* 27 *For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.*

Festus was a man who was **ignorant** of the Jews, Jesus, the resurrection, and the Apostle. When Paul made his defense before the royal audience Festus thought he was nuts. Acts 26:24 *And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee **mad**.*

Although Festus did not know about Jesus and His resurrection King Agrippa did. Paul said in Acts 26:26 *For the king **knoweth** of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that **none of these things are hidden from him**; for this thing was not done in a corner.*

The king is **not** our example of **apathy**. Although he did not become a Christian he said he was almost persuaded (Acts 26:28). He also told Festus that Paul was innocent of any wrongdoing and could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar (Acts 26:31-32).

Our example of **apathy** is King Agrippa's wife, Bernice. She is mentioned a total of three times in the Bible (Acts 25:13, 23, and 26:30). What we are told about her is that she came and left. Her entrance was with great pomp. Although she was privy to the same information as Agrippa and heard the same message from Paul, from what the text suggests, she was totally unmoved.

We have all met people who are totally disinterested in spiritual matters. They will talk for hours about ballgames, fashions, Hollywood, or jobs. But they clam up when the Bible is introduced into the discussion. They just do not care anything about God, His Word, or eternity. They want to focus on the pomp of the here and now.

There are many reactions to the Gospel. The Jews had a **violent hatred** for it and wanted to kill Paul to shut his mouth. Festus thought anyone who believed a dead man was alive must be crazy. He saw the Gospel message as **foolishness**. King Agrippa was **almost persuaded** by what he heard. Another reaction we read about is **delaying** a response. In Acts 17 Paul spoke to the men on Mars Hill about the Unknown God and the resurrection. Some **mocked** and some **delayed**. They said they would hear Paul again on the subject (Acts 17:32). And, of course, we also have people like Bernice who seem to have **no reaction** at all. She did not get mad like the Jews, get amused like Festus, or get close like Agrippa. She appears to be motionless and emotionless through the whole ordeal.

The one thing all these reactions have in common is that they keep the hearers in a lost state. It does not matter if you hate it, like it, or ignore it. Anything short of complete obedience keeps you from being saved. When Agrippa said he was almost persuaded Paul said he wished he was altogether changed. Anything short of this does not save our souls. Acts 26:29 *And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.*

An old joke says, "What is the difference between apathy and ignorance?" "I don't know and I don't care." These two positions will keep the word of God from helping us. Remember what we ignore leaves us in ignor-ance. You think about that the next time you have a chance to discuss the Bible with someone.