

Paul Before Agrippa, Part 2: The Commencement of Paul's Testimony

Scripture: Acts 26:4–18

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INTRODUCTION

A good title for Acts 25:13--26:32 would be "Are you trying to convert me?" In Acts 26:28, after Paul finished his testimony, King Agrippa II said in effect, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian? Are you, with so few words, trying to convert me?" Of course that's exactly what the apostle Paul was trying to do. And he was trying to convert not only Agrippa, but also everyone else in the auditorium.

A. Reviewing the Historical Context

Paul was repeatedly called to answer accusations brought against him by the Jewish leaders. He was accused of sedition--of stirring up trouble against Rome. He was accused of sectarianism--of being a Jewish religious heretic. And he was accused of sacrilege--of blaspheming God by desecrating the Temple. But he didn't do any of those things. He was totally exonerated on all counts by all courts because there was no evidence or eyewitnesses.

Although Paul was innocent, he remained a prisoner. The reason is simple. Felix knew Paul was innocent, but he wouldn't let him go because that would upset the Jewish leaders and the political applecart in Judea. When Festus took over the governorship, Paul was still in custody. But he didn't want to release him because he didn't want to upset the Jews either. Both governors had been blackmailed into keeping Paul a prisoner.

Festus had another problem surface when the apostle Paul appealed to Rome. Since Paul couldn't get any justice in Caesarea, he decided to do what all Roman citizens had the right to do: Appeal to Caesar so his case would be transferred to Rome. But the problem for Festus was that he couldn't send Paul to Rome without any written accusation. And he couldn't find anything to accuse him of. In the midst of his dilemma, King Herod Agrippa II arrived to pay a courtesy call on Festus. At that point, Festus saw a possible way out of his dilemma. He figured that if he could get Agrippa to listen to Paul, Agrippa might come up with some viable accusation that Festus could write in his report so that the trial in Rome would have some justification for taking place. Then Festus could maintain a balance with the Jewish leaders.

B. Reaffirming the Christian Commission

The thing that stands out in Paul's testimony to Agrippa is not so much the defense Paul gives as his effort to convert Agrippa to Christianity. He attempts to get Agrippa to respond to the gospel. Paul even extends an invitation to him at the end of his testimony. Now, Paul didn't have to appear at this hearing because legally his appeal to Rome had to be honored. But I believe he appeared because he saw it as an opportunity to preach the gospel. Festus looked at it as an opportunity to get an accusation. Agrippa looked at it as a curiosity--he wanted to hear Paul. So Paul's testimony took place in the Roman praetorium in Caesarea before King Agrippa, Bernice, and all their entourage, before Festus and all the chief captains, and before all the famous people in the city of Caesarea.

1. Paul's passion

As we look at Paul's testimony, we can't help but be reminded of the one great passion of Paul: preaching the gospel. His own security didn't matter to him. It didn't matter if he was embarrassed or if people thought he was strange. It didn't matter if they thought he was crazy, which they did. It didn't matter if they put him in chains, in jail, or killed him. Boldness is the result of realizing that you are

expendable for the cause of Christ. Paul believed that, which is why he was so bold. One of the great passions of the apostle Paul was to preach the gospel. It didn't matter where he was or what the circumstances were.

a) The theological base Second Corinthians 5:17--6:2 forms the base of theology on which Paul operated in Acts 25 and 26.(1) The motivation In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul said, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Paul believed that the gospel transformed men. That became Paul's motivation in preaching. When you have confidence in something, you tend to be motivated by it. Paul believed in what the gospel could accomplish; therefore, he was motivated by it. It's hard to promote something you don't believe in. Paul believed in the transforming power of the gospel, and that was the basis of his desire to proclaim it.(2) The ministry Verse 18 says, "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." The word "reconciled" means "to bring back into proper adjustment." The New Testament uses it only of men, never of God. He doesn't need to be reconciled because He's never out of adjustment. Some people think that God is reconciled to man. No, it is man who must be brought back into proper adjustment to God. That's the ministry of reconciliation. The Bible tells us that we have been given the ministry of bringing people into proper adjustment to God. We are in the business of converting maladjusted, anti-God people into well-adjusted, God-oriented people. We are trying to bring men to the place where they can become a new creation in Christ, with old things passing away and all things becoming new. Verse 19 says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." God has given us the gospel message, which is the word of reconciliation. We are to carry it to the world, which is the ministry of reconciliation. We are ambassadors (v. 20). An ambassador is a foreigner in a land who represents a foreign government. We represent the government of God in a foreign land.(3) The method What does an ambassador do? What does the ministry of reconciliation involve? Verse 20 says, "As though God did beseech you by us; we beg you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." We must be engaged in a driving, compassionate activity. We are to beg people to be converted. We are to plead with them. There is nothing wrong with begging people to come to Christ. We are to beg them to be reconciled to God--to be rightly adjusted to Him. We need to be committed to the ministry of reconciliation.(4) The moment There must be a tremendous sense of urgency connected with this ministry. Second Corinthians 6:1-2 says, "We, then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain (for he saith, I heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I helped thee; behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation)." Paul tells us that we've been granted the word of reconciliation--the good news of how people can be properly adjusted with God. We also have been given the ministry of reconciliation, which is carrying that good news to the world. And there is to be an urgency about it--today is the day it must be done.b) The practical business We have been placed into this world to bring maladjusted men into adjustment with God, and that involves conversion. When Agrippa asked Paul if he was trying to convert him (Acts 26:28), he put his finger on the goal and objective of every believer who confronts an unbeliever. We are in the business of converting people in the power of the Holy Spirit. We can become so complacent in our sanctification, so happy in our fellowship, and so blessed with what is happening in the Christian community that we forget about a world full of people who are going to hell. We must keep them in perspective. In Mark 16:15 our Lord laid down this simple commission: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." In Luke 24:46-48 He said, "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission [forgiveness] of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things." The commission is clear.

2. Paul's commission

Paul understood his calling from the first day of his conversion. In Acts 26:16-18 Paul tells us what the Lord said to him, "Rise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Paul knew that the Lord had given him the ministry of turning people from darkness to light and from Satan to God. It was a commitment to convert people. Notice verse 17: "Delivering thee from the people [the Jews], and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee." When God saved you, He took you out of the world to send you back into the world.

Have you become too satisfied?

I fear that we as Christians can become so satisfied with learning, fellowship, unity, and growth, that we forget we have been taken out of the world to be sent back into the world to transform people in the energy of the Holy Spirit. That is the gospel commission.

1. Ephesians 6:19-20--The apostle Paul told the Ephesians to pray "for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds; that in this I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." That's a prayer we ought to pray for each other.

2. 2 Timothy 4:5--Paul said, "Do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." He was saying that for Timothy to make full proof of the ministry, he would have to do some evangelizing. I remember a kid who said to me, "I don't think I have the gift of evangelism." I told him that no one has the gift of evangelism; you just have the command. It isn't an isolated gift; it's something that all of us should do. We are to change people. If someone asks if you are trying to convert them, tell them you are. That's our calling. And I trust that we're doing it in a loving way.

Paul's task was clear. He was given the opportunity to preach the gospel before many significant people in Caesarea. And he seized that opportunity--the marvelous privilege that the Spirit of God gave him. Paul's testimony provided entertainment for Agrippa, became desperately important for Festus's need of an accusation, and was a tremendous opportunity for Paul to proclaim the gospel.

REVIEW

I. THE CONSULTATION OF PAUL'S TESTIMONY (25:13-22)

II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF PAUL'S TESTIMONY (25:23-27)

III. THE COMMENCEMENT OF PAUL'S TESTIMONY (26:1-18)

A. Paul's Readiness (v. 1)

"Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself."

B. Paul's Report (vv. 2-18)

1. His courtesy (vv. 2-3)

"I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee concerning all the things of which I am accused of the Jews, especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews; wherefore, I beseech thee to hear me patiently."

I believe Paul thought Agrippa would be objective. The Jerusalem leaders were biased against and hateful of Rome. But Agrippa was part Jewish and had been educated in Rome. His total allegiance was toward Rome. He played politics in Israel, but deep in his heart he was a Roman. Given that background, Paul thought that Agrippa would understand the character of his argument. He also thought Agrippa would be more objective in evaluating it. He wouldn't be swayed by the terrible Jewish hatred of Jesus Christ. So Paul figured there was a good chance that Agrippa might have his

life changed. A person with an open heart would hear the gospel, so Paul used the opportunity to try to convert Agrippa.

Paul's testimony was centered on this: Christ is the Messiah as proven by His resurrection. And Christ's resurrection is proven by Paul's transformed life. So Paul's testimony follows the events of his transformation when he met Christ on the road to Damascus. In effect, Paul is saying, "I couldn't argue when the Lord Jesus Christ, alive from the dead, struck me down on the road to Damascus, changed my life, and commissioned me into the ministry. He has to be the Messiah; He has to be the Savior." That is Paul's argument.

Paul wanted to give his testimony because he wanted the people in that auditorium to see the change in his life that Christ had made. One of the great proofs of Christianity is a transformed life. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul said, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation." That is one of the great motives of evangelism. And one of the great testimonies of the gospel is what Christ has done in someone's life. Paul wanted Agrippa to know what Jesus did in his life. Agrippa didn't need to hear the facts of the gospel--he already knew them (v. 26)-- but he did need to hear what Christ had done in His resurrection power.

LESSON

2. His conduct (vv. 4-5)

"My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews, who knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee."

a) Paul's experience From the earliest years of his life, Paul was educated at Jerusalem. If the Jewish leaders had the courage to testify, they would admit that he had belonged to the strictest sect of their religion, the Pharisees. A Pharisee was a strict legalist. And Paul was at the strictest end--he was a right-wing Pharisee. From his youth he was trained in orthodox Judaism in Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders knew he had sat at the feet of Gamaliel, a chief rabbi.b) Paul's emphasis In verse 5, Paul does something in using the word translated "strictest" that Greek writers and speakers are allowed to do that we're not allowed to do in English: He uses a double superlative. That puts heavy emphasis on "strictest" in the Greek text. Paul is saying that he belonged to the most strictest sect. He stresses that if there was anyone who ever lived who was convinced that Judaism was the final word from God, it was him. He belonged to the most extreme legal view. And everyone knew he was. Paul was setting his audience up for the account of his transformation. He wanted to show them how zealous he was as a Jew so they might understand the tremendous, cataclysmic effect of the transformation that took place in him.

3. His condemnation (vv. 6-8)

a) The revelation of the hope (v. 6) "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers" Paul was raised a Jew, had been a Pharisee, and now was being condemned for believing in the promise God made to the Jewish fathers. What promise? Verse 6 says it is "the hope of the promise." What was the Jewish hope? It was the coming of Messiah. The hope of every Jew was that Messiah would come and deliver Israel. The nation of Israel had been struggling against bondage from the days in Egypt right up to the time under Rome. They had had some years of independence and some years of success under David, but for the most part, they knew nothing but fighting, struggling, and slavery. Since 586 B.C. they had known abject slavery under various world powers, such as the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and now the Romans. They longed for the Messiah to come. They believed that when He did come, He would set up His Kingdom, and that the dead Jews would be resurrected to enjoy it. That was the Jewish hope. Job 19:26-27 says, "Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reigns be consumed within me" (KJV). The Jewish people knew all along there would be a resurrection. The

resurrection was their hope that the Messiah would deliver Israel, set up His Kingdom, and raise the dead Jews to enjoy the Kingdom. And that is going to happen. So Paul says he was being condemned for believing what Jewish people have believed throughout history.^{b)} The representatives of the hope (v. 7a)"Unto which promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God day and night, hope to come."Paul didn't invent the hope; all twelve tribes agreed to it. By the way, Paul didn't believe there were only two tribes and the other ten were lost. Paul indicates that the twelve tribes were still together. That's what the Bible teaches. Before the ten tribes were taken away by the Assyrians, individual members filtered into the two tribes in the south. The two tribes became a composite of all twelve. So Paul says that the twelve tribes still earnestly hoped for the coming of Messiah.^{c)} The rejection of the hope (vv. 7b-8)"For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?"Agrippa couldn't have had a problem with God raising the dead because that's what most Jews believed. Paul wanted to know why he had to suffer abuse and condemnation for simply believing in the resurrection. That was not an incredible belief. The Pharisees couldn't argue against the resurrection, or say that Paul should be condemned, because they believed in it as well.⁽¹⁾ By AgrippaAgrippa was probably thinking, "We know that it's all right to believe in the resurrection, but we don't believe that Jesus is the resurrected Messiah." Paul anticipated that.⁽²⁾ By the Jewish leadersPaul also knew that many of the Jewish leaders believed in the resurrection, but that they wouldn't accept the resurrection of Jesus. That is one of the most startling acts of willful rejection anywhere in Scripture. The resurrection had already occurred when Matthew 28:11-12 says, "Behold, some of the watch [the Roman soldiers who were guarding the tomb] came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave much money unto the soldiers." If you know anything about how the Jews hated the Romans, you know they wouldn't want to give them any money. Why did they do it? For bribery. They said, "Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept" (v. 13). But if they were asleep, how could they possibly testify that the disciples stole the body? The chief priests bought the soldiers off. Then verses 14-15 say, "And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day." They still believe it even today.

4. His confession (vv. 9-11)

^{a)} Paul fought against Christ (v. 9)"I verily thought within myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."Paul could relate to what Agrippa was thinking. He tells him that he had the same problem: He thought it was right to do things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Paul understood how Agrippa felt. That must have been devastating for Agrippa. Paul poured out his heart in confession, and I'm sure that was a painful thing for him to do. If anything in his life disturbed his conscience, it was that he slaughtered Christians and compelled them to blaspheme the name of Christ. Although he was redeemed, he always knew what he had done (1 Tim. 1:13-15).^{b)} Paul imprisoned Christians (v. 10)"Which thing I also did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests. And when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them."The Greek word for "voice" referred to the little pebble that was used in the Sanhedrin for casting a vote. Paul was referring to his membership in the Sanhedrin and his voting in favor of the death of Christians.^{c)} Paul persecuted Christians (v. 11)"And I punished them often in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme [he tried to force Christians to recant their faith]; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto foreign cities."Paul was the chief officer of the Jewish inquisition. He was like a mad man chasing Christians. The Bible says he was "breathing out threatenings and slaughter" (Acts 9:1). He hated and despised Christians and compelled them to blaspheme. No wonder he saw himself as the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). If the Christians wouldn't blaspheme, he made them martyrs.Paul is

saying, "Agrippa, I'm being condemned for believing what all Jews believe. But I know it's really for the sake of Jesus Christ. I know that's true because I used to hate Christ, and I didn't believe He was the Messiah. I went out under the authority of the Jewish leaders and slaughtered Christians."

5. His conversion (vv. 12-15)

Verse 12 begins the account of Paul's conversion. This is the high point of his testimony. He persecuted Christians to foreign cities, and one of them was Damascus.

a) Fighting a losing battle (vv. 12-14)"Whereupon, as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them who journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads." Jesus was saying, "Saul, give up; you can't win. Why are you continuing to do this against such odds?" The implication is that Paul was unsuccessful in trying to get Christians to blaspheme God. He was fighting something he was supposed to be submitting to. He was fighting a losing battle. You can imagine there wasn't a person on earth more miserable than Paul, trying to fight what he was supposed to submit to. b) Submitting to Christ's lordship (v. 15)"And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." Paul brought down a sledge hammer on the audience when he said, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." That was Paul's conversion.

6. His commission (vv. 16-18)

a) Paul's calling (vv. 16-17)"But rise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee." (1) As an apostle The Greek word for "send" is apostello, from which we get the word apostle. Jesus made Paul an apostle. (a) Appointed by the Lord An apostle was someone who had to be personally appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ. The call of God to be an apostle involved a direct choice by our Lord. Paul was made an apostle by the Lord Himself. There are no apostles today because Christ is not here to appoint them. People are sent out to preach, but they are not apostles. (b) An eyewitness of the resurrection An apostle also had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ. Acts 1:21-22 says, "Wherefore, of these men who have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." Judas had been disqualified. The remaining disciples were trying to choose a replacement for Judas. Whomever they picked needed to have been a witness of the the resurrected Christ. Acts 26:16 says that Jesus made Paul "a minister and a witness both of these things which you have seen." Paul saw the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. The resurrected Christ appeared to him on the Damascus Road in brilliant glory brighter than the sun. At that time Jesus said this to Paul: "I will appear unto thee" (v. 16). Jesus appeared again to Paul in the Temple in Jerusalem while he was in a trance (Acts 22:17-21). Then He appeared to him again in the jail cell in Jerusalem when He told him he was going to go to Rome (Acts 23:11). He saw the Lord at least three times by the time of Acts 25. Paul fit the qualifications. He was called as an apostle. (2) As a minister Paul was also called as a minister and a witness. The concept of minister is a servant; a witness is someone who sees something and tells about it. Your testimony should come out of your own experience. In verse 17 Jesus spoke of Paul being delivered "from the people." "People" is a proper term referring to the Jewish people. And he was to be delivered "from the Gentiles [or pagans], unto whom now I send thee." Here is the cycle we are to follow: We were saved out of the world to go back into the world. Do you look at your job that way? When you go to work on Monday morning, do you recognize yourself has having been commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ as one sent to to expose that community of people to the gospel of Christ and to transform them from darkness to light? You're a missionary. In many ways you touch the world to a greater degree than I do. True, I am a minister,

yet my contacts in the world are more limited than yours are. You're an ambassador, and committed to you is the ministry of reconciliation. You've been called to bring people into proper adjustment with God.

(b) His message (v. 18)

(1) Conviction"To open their eyes" That is the starting point of the gospel. The first thing you have to do with unsaved people is open their eyes because their eyes are blind. Israel's eyes were blind. Jesus said this about the Pharisees: "They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt. 15:14). When the Word of God comes to men, they suddenly see what they never saw before. And what they usually see is sin. The key to opening a man's eyes is to uncover the blindness of sin. The Word of God opens men's eyes as the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:11). When we open men's eyes, we reveal the truth of salvation to them.

(2) Illumination"To turn them from darkness to light"

(a) Living in darknessA person without the Lord Jesus Christ lives in darkness. His mind is darkened and he is alienated from God. Ephesians 4:18-19 says, "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." That is the blindness of sin. Our objective is to use the Word of God to remove the scales of blindness and show them what is true. You can't truly evangelize unless you have some truth to reveal. Once the gospel opens men's eyes to the truth, it can transform them from darkness to light.

(b) Living in lightSalvation isn't about giving someone more light. Man doesn't need more light; he needs any light he can get! Unsaved man lives in darkness, and everything he does takes place in darkness. His understanding is dark, his will is dark-- everything is dark. Salvation is an absolute transformation from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13). Paul calls it an inheritance of light in verse 12. When you walk in the light, you see things as they are. You can see the truth of God, and your path is clear. You can understand what God is doing and saying. And it all happens in a miraculous moment.

(3) Conversion"From the power of Satan unto God" Every man in the world is under the power of Satan or the power of God. There is no such thing as a free man. You have to choose who your master will be--either Satan or God. Many people think they are free to do what they want, but that's not true. Ephesians 2:1-2 says, "You hath he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins; in which in times past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (KJV). Anyone who is disobedient to the gospel--any human being in the world other than a Christian--is guided by the spirit who works in him. And that spirit is the prince of the power of the air--Satan. Salvation means that you transfer from Satan's power to God's power. That's a total transformation. The unsaved man need more than more information about God; he needs a total rebirth.

(4) Pardon"That they may receive forgiveness of sins" I can imagine Agrippa and Bernice were squirming about that point. Paul was a penetrating person. When he said they could receive forgiveness of sins, I can imagine him following that with a long stare and a long pause. Agrippa and Bernice knew enough to know that what they did was sin. They knew it not only because they knew the Old Testament, but also because of their consciences. In a sense Paul was saying, "Forgiveness is available, Agrippa, for whatever you and Bernice have done." That's an exciting message to be able to give the world as the following verses confirm:

(a) 1 John 2:12--"Little children ... your sins are forgiven you for his Name's sake."**(b) Romans 4:8**--"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."**(c) Romans 8:33-34**--"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? Shall God that justifieth?... Shall Christ that died?" Will Christ accuse the one He died to save? No. Will Christ accuse you of the sin He died to bear on your behalf? No. There's no accusation against you. Forgiveness is full, free, and complete.

(5) Inheritance"[An] inheritance among them who are sanctified" The word translated "sanctified" means "holy." Another marvelous thing about becoming a Christian is the future promise of an inheritance undefiled and reserved in heaven for us (1 Pet. 1:4). Isn't that marvelous? We have an inheritance from God.

(6) Faith"By faith that is in me." On the day of Paul's conversion, Jesus told Paul to preach

so he could open men's eyes and "turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them who are sanctified by faith that is in [Christ]" (v. 18). If unbelievers would believe in Christ, salvation would be theirs. So Paul quoted to Agrippa the words of our Lord as they were given to Paul on the road to Damascus. There's only one way to know the truths of salvation, and that's by faith. The simple gospel of Jesus Christ that we're called to preach is in Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God--not of works, lest any man should boast." Paul is saying this to Agrippa: "I was a Jew of all the Jews. I was zealous not only for Judaism, but also for killing Christians and trying to get them to blaspheme. One day I was walking on the Damascus Road when a light shone in the middle of the day, brighter than the sun itself. It sent me to the ground and I heard a voice. It said, 'Why don't you quit fighting me, Paul?' And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' He was Jesus. Then He said to me, 'Arise, for I made you a minister and a witness.' Then He commissioned me to preach and told me what I was to say." In verse 19 Paul said, "Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." How could Paul disobey a voice from heaven? Paul said he had been given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). Then he said to us all, "We are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20). We are to beg men to be reconciled to God. The word of reconciliation and the ministry of reconciliation have been committed to us. Will you be disobedient to that? Paul said he wasn't. I pray that you and I will not be disobedient, but that we too will be faithful to bring people into a right relationship with God. Our objective as we touch the lives of unsaved people is to convert them to Jesus Christ.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What kind of opportunity did Paul, Agrippa, and Festus see in the special hearing of Paul's case?
2. What is boldness the result of?
3. What motivated Paul to preach (2 Cor. 5:17)?
4. Define the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18)?
5. What is an ambassador? Who are God's ambassadors? What is their responsibility (2 Cor. 5:20)?
6. What is one of God's purposes in saving people out of the world (Acts 26:17)?
7. What do Christians have a tendency to forget when they become satisfied with learning, fellowship, and growth?
8. Why was Paul happy to give his testimony before Agrippa (Acts 26:2-3)?
9. What did Paul center his testimony on?
10. Why did Paul use a double superlative in Acts 26:5?
11. What was the hope that Paul was being judged for? Explain (Acts 26:6).
12. Although most of the Jewish leaders believed in the resurrection, what wouldn't they accept?
13. Why could Paul relate to Agrippa's thinking about Christ (Acts 26:9)?
14. How successful was Paul in his attempts to make Christians blaspheme God (Acts 26:14)?
15. Describe the two necessary qualifications for an apostle of Christ
16. What is the first thing that must happen with any unsaved person before he can receive the gospel? Explain (Acts 26:18).
17. Who is the guide of those who are disobedient to the gospel (Eph. 2:1-2)?
18. What is the only way that one can know the truths of salvation?

Pondering the Principles

1. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. According to Paul, all Christians have been given the ministry of reconciliation. What are some ways that you can be involved as an ambassador for Christ? Make a list of people you know who you would like to see brought into proper adjustment with God. Begin praying that God would use you in bringing about their reconciliation with them.
2. Have you become comfortable in your Christian walk? That is, do you find that Bible study, strong

fellowship with other believers, and growth in your spiritual life are all you need to do to be fulfilled as a Christian? Read Ephesians 6:19-20. What was Paul's commitment? Remember that God saved you so He could send you into the world with His message. How do you need to change your priorities to reflect God's plan in reaching the world for Christ?

3. Read Acts 26:18. Review the six aspects of God's commission to Paul. How many of those six things do you discuss when you share the gospel with someone? As a way of reminder, recall your conversion experience and determine how each of those six aspects fit it. Remember to share your testimony and emphasize those six aspects when you do. Thank God for His message of salvation. Pray that He might use you to communicate the gospel the same way He did through Paul.

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