

Paul Before Agrippa, Part 3: Are You Trying to Convert Me?

Scripture: Acts 26:19–32

Code: 1798

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)

LESSON

IV. THE CULMINATION OF PAUL'S TESTIMONY (26:19-23)

In any act of God's sovereignty, it is necessary that there be a response of the human will. God does not hit people over the head with a sovereign hammer; there must be an act of the will. And that was true in the case of Paul.

A. His Commitment (vv. 19-20)

1. The principle of submission (v. 19)

"Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."

Once Paul realized that Jesus of Nazareth was the living Messiah, he submitted His will. That is a necessary part of commitment. There must be obedience. Salvation is a sovereign act of God, but it also involves a human response. In Galatians 1:16 Paul said that when the Lord called him into the ministry, he "conferred not with flesh and blood," but immediately began to do what God had called him to do. He didn't seek human wisdom; he responded to God in instant obedience. That is the response God asks for.

The response of obedience is an important part of the paradox of sovereignty and responsibility. God acts sovereignly to carry out His will, but he demands a human response within the framework of that sovereignty. When you give your testimony you don't say, "One day I was walking along and I was suddenly saved in an instant. One moment I didn't know what a Christian was, now I am one." It isn't that simple. There had to be an act of your will for salvation to occur. When you give your testimony you say, "One day I committed myself to the Lord Jesus Christ." You were saved consciously, as an act of your will. Yet the Bible says that salvation is a sovereign act of God designed before the world began (Eph. 1:4). Both are true. The sovereign life of Christ is lived through you, but you need to submit your will to allow Him to live through you. God sovereignly motivates your will, but it has to be activated. God ultimately knows what will happen, and He will accomplish His work; but Paul said he was obedient. That is the most important thing in the Christian life--the submission of your will to God.

Principles of obedience

1. Obedience is a mark of conversion

First Peter 1:14 says that you ought to walk "as obedient children." Romans 6:16 says, "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are whom ye obey?" If you've yielded yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ, who then should you obey? The Lord Jesus Christ.

Obedience is a mark of conversion. If you're God's child, you'll obey what He says.

2. Obedience is a recognition of authority

When you obey, you are telling God that He is in control and that you're in submission to Him. When

you do not obey God, you are playing God--you have just usurped divine authority. If you know clearly that God wants you to do something, and you don't do it, then you have replaced God as the controlling authority in your life. Yet that's what goes on most of the time. In Acts 5:29 Peter said, "We ought to obey God rather than men." You have that choice. Perhaps God has spoken to your heart many times about serving in a particular ministry, but you said no. When you said that, you replaced God as the sovereign ruler of your life.

3. Obedience is a characteristic of faith

Hebrews 11:8 says that Abraham obeyed God by faith. When you believe God, you'll obey Him because you know He has your best interests at heart. When you disobey, you are actually saying, "God, You don't know what's best for me. I don't trust You." When you disobey God, you're not trusting Him. Abraham was willing to go to the Promised Land without knowing anything because He trusted God. Every time you disobey God, you're telling Him that He's not worthy of your trust--and that's blasphemy.

4. Obedience is a proof of love

Don't tell God you love Him unless you obey. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Then He said, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John 14:21).

Obedience is a mark of conversion, a recognition of authority, a characteristic of faith, and a proof of love. Obedience is the prerequisite to power and effectiveness. A disobedient Christian is useless.

Paul was not disobedient; he had to submit. The living Messiah commanded him from out of heaven.

2. The practice of submission (v. 20)

"But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the borders of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works fit for repentance."

Salvation becomes apparent by the works that believers practice. James said that he could know if someone's faith was real by their works (James 2:18). Matthew 7:16 says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits."

Paul indicated to Agrippa that Christianity is the logical and necessary sequel to Judaism's past. The central hope of the Jew was the resurrection and a living Messiah. The resurrected One spoke to Paul, who saw His glory and heard His voice. He could do nothing but obey. Christ commissioned Paul into His ministry, and he obeyed instantly. He began at Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and then into the borders of Judea. Afterwards, he went on three journeys into the Gentile world. He preached about repentance and doing works that prove one's repentance is real.

B. His Capture (v. 21)

"For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me."

The Jews wanted Paul dead because he was offering equal salvation to Gentiles. They couldn't tolerate equality with Gentiles. So they tried to kill him while he was in the Temple. That's how he became a prisoner.

The true gospel cannot be presented unless the importance of repentance is emphasized. Verse 18 says that the first thing Paul was to do was to open people's eyes. That involves conviction of sin and turning from sin. There can be no legitimate salvation when there is no turning from sin toward God. There must be a transformation. A person who is truly saved will set aside his sinful patterns. Because Paul offered salvation equally to Gentiles and to Jews, the Jewish leaders caught him in the Temple and tried to kill him.

C. His Continuance (vv. 22-23)

1. Confidence in God (v. 22a)

"Having, therefore, obtained help from God"

Paul was always getting help from God. In 2 Corinthians 1:8-10 he said he endured trouble that

almost took his life, but the Lord helped and delivered him. He wrote to Timothy about how God delivered him (2 Tim. 3:11; 4:17-18). He constantly was being helped by God as he ministered. That is a promise the minister can depend on. If God calls you to a ministry, He will sustain and undergird you with His own strength to accomplish His will. People often say to me, "John, how can you do so many things?" I have help from the Lord. I believe the Lord strengthens me when I need strength and gives me wisdom when I need wisdom. I believe that if God puts you in a position, He will support you in that position. You can step out and do what you sense God is leading you to do when you have the confidence that He'll support you. The Lord helped Paul even though the Jewish leaders wanted to kill him.

2. Confidence in the gospel (vv. 22b-23)

"I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first [Gk., protos; not the first in chronological order, but in preeminence] that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles."

Paul continued to preach equal salvation to Jew and Gentile. And he continued to have help from God to preach that the Messiah would have to suffer. That's in the Old Testament in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. His rising from the dead is prophesied in Psalms 16:10, "Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (KJV). Paul continued to preach what the Old Testament taught.

This is essentially what Paul said to Agrippa: "I've been changed. I've been turned into a minister of Jesus Christ by a sovereign act of the living Christ. I submitted myself to Him and now I'm proclaiming Him. People have tried to shut my mouth by attempts on my life, but they haven't succeeded. Here I am two years later saying the same thing I said then, and saying it just as boldly today. There is an equal salvation to both Jew and Gentile." Saying that took courage!

V. THE CONSEQUENCE OF PAUL'S TESTIMONY (vv. 24-32)

A. The Interruption (v. 24)

"And as he thus spoke for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad."

Today, we think much learning makes people intelligent. On that day, they had a different view of education. Festus told Paul that he was over-educated--that too much learning had made him go insane. What made Festus say that? Because of what Paul said in verse 23: that Christ should rise from the dead. Festus could not understand the concept of the resurrection. He thought only one kind of man babbled about visions, revelations, voices out of heaven, and resurrections, and that was a crazy man. Festus had to acknowledge that Paul was intelligent, but a Roman with any reason would have difficulty in believing all that he taught. Festus' interruption set the stage for what Paul wanted to say next.

B. The Invitation (vv. 25-29)

1. Paul's incisive reasoning (vv. 25-27)

a) Wisdom (v. 25)"But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness."The word translated "soberness" is sophrosune in the Greek text. The prefix soph is derived from the word sophia, which means "wisdom," or "total control of the senses." Paul spoke with total control of his senses--with a sound mind.b) Truth (v. 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."Paul is telling Festus that he isn't mad, but that he is speaking with a clear mind, and that King Agrippa knew he spoke the truth. The thing that was "not done in a corner" was the death and resurrection of Christ. It was common knowledge. Everyone knew that Jesus had lived and died and that there was a claim to His resurrection. Paul was brilliant in his reasoning. He presented the gospel to Agrippa and now forces him to come to a conclusion that he probably wouldn't have made on his own. He turns Agrippa into a silent witness to Festus.

The king hadn't said a word, but by that very fact was attesting that what Paul said was true. The case is clear and the king knew it. Anyone who believed in the prophets, Moses, and historical facts would have to conclude that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. And Agrippa would have to make that conclusion. Knowledge (v. 27) "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest." Paul was telling Agrippa that if he believed the prophets, he would have to believe Jesus is Messiah. He knew the truth. Paul made Agrippa responsible. On one particular occasion when I was sharing Christ with someone, I said, "Now that you've heard the gospel you're responsible because you know the truth. You may reject it at this time, but God holds you responsible for the truth you know." Paul was trying to capture Agrippa's will. He wanted Agrippa to do what he had done himself - make the logical conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah. Agrippa was now in a bind. If he said, "I do believe the prophets," then he would be tacitly admitting that Jesus is the Messiah. That would put him in deep trouble with the Jewish leaders. But if he said, "I don't believe the prophets," then he would be in even deeper trouble with them. So he couldn't say yes or no.

2. Agrippa's incredulous response (v. 28)

"Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

The King James Version doesn't capture what Agrippa said. The Greek text should be translated as: "In such a short time are you trying to convert me?" Agrippa avoided the question.

3. Paul's intimate restraint (v. 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."

That's a confusing verse, so let me give you the best translation: "Whether in a short or long time, I would to God that not only you but also all who have been with me this day might become such as I am, except for these chains." Whether it was a short or long time, Paul was trying to convert Agrippa and everyone else. Then he added that he wished them to be like himself, except for the chains. Paul had a gentle and honest approach to them. He wasn't bitter over his circumstances. He didn't say, "You ought to have these chains and I ought to be sitting on that throne!" Paul wanted them to know the liberty he had in his soul, not the physical chains he wore. Paul looked at all those fancily dressed people and told them that he wished they were like him. They had everything in the world, but they really had nothing. Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark. 8:36- 37). Paul probably was willing to die to save Agrippa, but he wouldn't wish his chains on him. That's the heart of the Christian. That's evangelism with love. How could anyone resist that kind of message spoken with such concern and love?

C. The Impact (vv. 30-32)

1. Paul's innocence affirmed (v. 30)

"When he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them; and when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds."

Paul was innocent. The Holy Spirit included this verse to show that the king of Palestine and the governor from Rome both agreed Paul was innocent. Christianity is not an insurrection, heresy, or political treason; it is a spiritual relationship to the living God. People have accused true Christianity of all kinds of atrocity, and it isn't so. True Christianity is guilty of nothing worthy of death or bonds. It's great that they judged him to be innocent, but what about their personal spiritual responses?

2. Paul's message avoided (v. 32)

"Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar."

They could have let him go since there wasn't any reason to let the appeal to Caesar go ahead. There wasn't any case. Caesar hadn't heard a word about it. There hadn't even been a letter written. But Festus and Agrippa hid behind the appeal of Paul. Although a man can have the gospel directed

right at him, he is lost unless he activates his will.

a) The hindrance of popularity What hindered Agrippa and Festus? Since Paul was innocent, why would they push the case to Rome, hiding behind his appeal? Because the most important thing to them was popularity and their immoral life-styles. Agrippa was vile, self-centered, unbelieving, prideful, ignorant, and indifferent--the same things that hinder other people from receiving Christ.b) The honor of faithfulness The rejection of the gospel message didn't discourage Paul. People would believe him and people would curse him, but he didn't change. When he made it to Rome, the first thing he did was to preach Jesus. People will say to me, "I've tried to share Christ, but there doesn't seem to be any response." But that's all right because God didn't call you to save people; he called you to preach Christ. God does the saving. All He asks of you is to be faithful. Paul's passion and dominant spirit could not be squelched. He continued to be faithful. Why? Because his service was for God and not based on man's response. It wasn't up to him to determine the results. He preached to a great crowd and no one responded positively, but that didn't change him. May we be like him.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Although salvation is a sovereign act of God, what must it also involve?
2. Explain the paradox involved in the salvation of an individual.
3. What are four principles of obedience? Explain each one.
4. How does salvation in one's life become apparent (Acts 26:20)?
5. What needs to be emphasized if the true gospel is to be presented?
6. What promise can those who are called into the ministry depend on?
7. Why did Festus think Paul was mad? What didn't Festus understand (Acts 26:24)?
8. How did Paul turn Agrippa into a silent witness to the truth of what he said (Acts 26:26)?
9. Explain Paul's gentle approach to Agrippa and Festus (Acts 26:29).
10. How did Agrippa and Festus avoid the truth of Paul's message?
11. Why wasn't Paul discouraged when his message was rejected?

Pondering the Principles

1. What is your reaction when you present the gospel and someone rejects it? Does that reaction affect your willingness to continue to share the good news with the unsaved? God has called you to share Christ with the unsaved, but you are not responsible for saving them. With that in mind, what should your attitude be when you communicate the gospel? Ask God to give you boldness as you approach people. Thank Him that he has the responsibility for bringing people to Himself. Make it your goal to communicate the gospel whenever you have the opportunity.
2. Reread the principles of obedience. Take a good look at your Christian life and ask yourself if you habitually seek to obey God. Is obedience really important to you or do you usually obey God only when it is convenient? Remember, Jesus said that the one who truly loves Him will obey Him. Commit John 14:15 to memory: "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (NASB).

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