

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Keith Chuvala, Keith@BackToTheBibleCatechism.com

Paul Before King Agrippa

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Then Agrippa said to Paul: Remember Paul now stands before the man whose great-grandfather had tried to kill Jesus as a baby, whose grandfather had John the Baptist beheaded, and whose his father had martyred the apostle James. Paul would certainly have been mindful of Agrippa's family history.

I think myself happy, King Agrippa...: Paul is happy to speak before Agrippa, because (a) he wants the evidence in his case (or lack thereof!) examined closely by the highest officials, and (b) because he is also eager to preach the gospel, even to kings! Remember what the Holy Spirit said to the disciple Ananias in Damascus when Paul was converted: "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, *kings*, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). This is a fulfillment of God's plan for Paul.

According to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee: Paul offers his credentials as a faithful Jew before his conversion, and reminds Agrippa that he is still walking in faithful fulfillment of "...the promise made by God to our fathers."

Agrippa was called to examine Paul by Festus because he was an expert on Jewish customs and questions (26:3), but he did not believe that God could, or would, raise the dead. Paul boldly exposes the foolishness of limiting God this way when he asks "Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?"

I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth: Paul describes his hatred of Christianity before his conversion, and his vigorous persecution of them. "I cast my vote against them" implies that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin, having a vote against Christians who were tried before the Sanhedrin (e.g., Stephen in chapter 7).

There's reason to question whether Paul was actually a member of the council; perhaps he was instead an influential consultant or confidant of one or more members. The question is raised because members of the Sanhedrin were required to be married. We know from 1 Corinthians 7:7-9 that Paul was not married, at least at the time of that writing. So it's possible that Paul had indeed been married previously, and that his wife either died or deserted him when he became a Christian. We just don't know.

Paul Describes His Conversion ([26:12-20](#))

As I journeyed to Damascus: Here Paul gives us the fullest account yet of his experience on the road to Damascus, detailing the fact that he was made aware of his commission to the Gentiles at that time.

Paul was commissioned to be two things. First, a minister, which means he was to be a servant of the things which he had seen and experienced, as well as things which Jesus would yet reveal to him. Second, Paul was called to be a witness of those things. Our commission as Christians is not to make the message of the Gospel or our testimony to it serve ourselves; we are instead called to serve the message. Like Paul, our commission is not to create experience, or create the message, but to witness it, experience it, and share it.

Paul knew this well. The importance of telling others what Jesus had done in his life is always apparent in his preaching. He knew how to present the gospel not only in words, but also by his life story, presenting the truth that he was once lost, but now was found (hey, that would make a pretty good song...!)

That they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance: This tells us the "why" of his commission as servant and witness.

Paul Summarizes His Defense ([26:21-23](#))

For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me: Paul plainly states the truth of the case. It is only because he sought to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles that the Jews seized him and tried to kill him. It wasn't because he was a political revolutionary, nor was it because he violated the sanctity of the temple.

Saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come: Paul also states his unswerving commitment to the same gospel, because

that gospel is based solidly on the Word of God (“the prophets and Moses”), and not on the traditions or even the spiritual experiences of man.

Festus Freaks; Paul Responds ([26:24-32](#))

Paul, you are beside yourself!: The Gospel, properly presented, will at times make some people think we are crazy! Paul later put it this way: “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason: Paul’s even-tempered response shows his calmness and confidence in Christ. Paul knows that not only is the Gospel true, it is also *reasonable*. God may sometimes act above reason, but never contrary to it.

Martin Luther understood and reflected this when he concluded his statement at the Diet of Worms:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen.

So “Paul’s” Gospel was characterized by truth and reason, because it was based on historical events (such as the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus), things which were not done in secret, but open to examination.

King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe: Paul, even though he was aware of who he was addressing, goes for the shot to the heart of the matter: “do you believe?” Paul perceived it was the right time to press this challenge home, and how to press it.

You almost persuade me to become a Christian: The literal idea behind “almost” is “in a little, you seek to persuade me to act a Christian.” The meaning could be taken as “in such a short amount of time”, or it could also mean “there is little distance between me and Christianity”. How tragic that it was “almost”, regardless of Agrippa’s intent and meaning. Agrippa here effectively condemns himself by admitting how close he has come to the gospel, how clearly he has heard and understood it, yet finally rejecting it.

What stopped Agrippa short? Why did he only almost become a Christian? We don't know for sure.

We do know from this passage that in front of Agrippa is Paul, a strong man, a noble man, and man of wisdom and character. But also a man in chains. Perhaps surrendering to Paul's message would be tantamount to admitting he deserved to be in chains, himself, because of his sinfulness.

And we know that alongside him were two strong influences, Bernice and Festus. Perhaps Agrippa thought, "I can't become a Christian! Festus will think I'm crazy, too!" Or perhaps he was unwilling to leave behind the "lifestyle" he had with Bernice.

I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains: Paul declares his continued trust in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He does not retreat from his stand one bit, despite his long imprisonment for the sake of that Gospel.

Paul shows that even though he is in chains, he has more freedom in Jesus than Agrippa, or any of the leaders and judges listening have.

This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains: Agrippa sees there is no evidence offered to support the accusations against Paul, and it seems he respects Paul's integrity, even while rejecting Paul's gospel. So, Agrippa and the others pronounced a "not guilty" verdict.

This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar: Even so, Paul cannot be set free because he has appealed to Caesar. Once that appeal was formally made, it could not be retracted.

So was Paul trusting in the power of the Roman legal system, instead of in the power of God? No. Rather, what we see here is the fulfillment of God's plan through all these events. By his appeal to Caesar, Paul will have the opportunity to preach to the Roman Emperor, just as he had to Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, again fulfilling Jesus' promise that Paul would bear His name before kings, among others.