

Religion is Not Enough

Acts 26:1-11,18

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 8-9-2009

Introduction

When I title this sermon, “Religion is Not Enough,” I do not in any way want to disparage true religion. Some people are so frustrated with religion that they contrast Christ with religion. But James speaks of a pure and undefiled religion that *is* the outworking of God’s transformational life. So the Bible is not opposed to the religion of Christianity. But James also speaks of people who have religion but who do not have God. In fact, they have the religion of *Christianity*, but they do not have God. Religion is not enough. Or as Paul worded it, it’s not enough to have the form of godliness and to deny the power thereof.

The danger of using a passage like this to illustrate this principle is that it is easy to think of Agrippa, the Pharisees, and the pre-conversion Paul as if they were from a different religion. That’s actually not true. At this point in history, most churches still saw themselves as part of Judaism. It was a conflict within the church, and sometimes a conflict that drove true believers out of the synagogues. But the point is that there was enough similarity between true Christianity and what the Pharisees held to that we had to have the Jerusalem council to deal with people who felt comfortable with the religion of the Pharisees. In the previous chapters and in this chapter Paul says that he is defending some of the doctrine of the Pharisees, but that this doctrine was not enough.

So there was a great deal about the religion of Agrippa, the Pharisees, and pre-conversion-Paul that was right. But it was devoid of God’s power. And I think it is easy for any of us to become comfortable with religion and to miss the supernatural. I want every one of you to experience the supernatural. So this sermon is designed to accomplish two things: First, it is my desire that this Scripture would make us long for more of God. Second, it is my desire that this Scripture would help you to figure out how to reach out to people who are religious but who don’t seem to be experiencing the reality of God in their lives.

I. Realize that the “religious” are often ready (and even longing) to hear about a supernatural Christianity.

My first point is that we need to realize that the “religious” are often ready (and sometimes even longing) to hear about a supernatural Christianity. Even when they argue against you, they know that something is missing. And this sometimes gives you an opportunity to speak into their lives. In chapter 25:22 Agrippa had expressed a fascination with Paul. He too wanted to hear Paul preach, and asked his superior, Festus, if he might be invited to do so. In verse 1 Agrippa gives the invitation to Paul, “**You are permitted to speak for yourself.**” He wants to hear from Paul. What made Agrippa so curious? I think it was because he saw something different about the lives of Christians in his jurisdiction. He knew that they too were Jews, but there was something different about them. They had something he did not have. Let me give a little bit of background.

A. Agrippa practiced Judaism. (v. 3)

Agrippa practiced Judaism. He may not have been the most consistent follower – especially when it came to his personal life – but the Herodian family had converted to Judaism generations ago. He was an Idumean in background (a descendent of Esau), but he was a Jew in religion. Paul was not kidding when he said in verse 3, “**especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews.**” He was a convert to Judaism and understood and practiced it all. He was an expert. He went to church regularly, he was generous with the mandatory three tithes, he knew his doctrine, he read the Scriptures, and outwardly conformed to most of the standards of Judaism. Now, his incestuous relationship with his sister was a bit of a scandal, but aren’t there scandals in most churches today? Yes there are. I think that Herod Agrippa fully expected to go to heaven when he died. He was a fairly decent religionist.

B. His Judaism didn’t transform his life (25:23)

However, his Judaism didn’t transform his life. He was able to rationalize his temper, his relationship with his sister, and other personal sins and still go through the motions of religion. There are a lot of similarities to many modern Christians. Even though he had everything from a worldly perspective, he was missing something. If you have religion without God, your life is empty. If you have Christianity with God, your life is empty. And Agrippa is simply the first of three specimens in this chapter of empty religion. Paul is addressing dead men who are trying to live.

Jack Higgins, the successful author of sixty novels, was once asked what he would like to have known when he was a boy. His answer was this: “That when you get to the top, there's nothing there.” What a depressing way to end your life. But I am convinced that this is the way that Herod ended his life. Not too many years later he died in Rome, a lonely and dejected man.

C. Yet something made him want to talk to Paul (25:22; 26:1).

Yet something here made him want to talk to Paul. I don't think he ever became converted. That's not our job anyway. Our job is to reach out to such people. But, one of the things we can bank on is that religionists like Agrippa, the Pharisees, and pre-conversion Paul will all have the same emptiness. There is a hunger there that can only be filled with God. Tommy Tenney gave this as *his* testimony. He said, “a hunger had been birthed in my heart that just wouldn't go away. The gnawing vacuum of emptiness in the midst of my accomplishments just got worse.”¹ You probably know plenty of people like that. And the question I want to address is, “How do we reach out to such people?” We want to be a congregation that can reach them.

II. Don't be judgmental of the “religious” – show them life

A. Paul was polite (v. 1b).

The first thing I would say is to be polite. There is a place for giving a scathing attack against your accusers like Jesus did with the Pharisees on occasion. I'm not saying that you can't debate or even ignore religionists sometimes. But when the Pharisee, Simon, asked Christ to dinner, Jesus treated him differently. Jesus appealed to Simon's emptiness and he showed him a power of love, forgiveness, and transformation that had been accomplished in the harlot – and it was something that Simon had never experienced. Though Simon was critical of the woman, Jesus was showing Simon real life, and power, and transformation. When the Pharisee, Nicodemus, came to Jesus at night, Jesus showed him life; life he was devoid of. And that is what Paul does with Agrippa. He's not judgmental. He doesn't look down his nose.

He is first of all polite. Verse one says, “**So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself.**” How many times do we lose the privilege of testifying because we are rude, or we look down our noses at a person, or

¹ SOURCE: *The God Chasers: My Soul Follows Hard after Thee* by Tommy Tenney. Destiny Image Publishers, 1998. Chapter 1.

we are judgmental of them? Of course they are wrong, but giving them the stare doesn't help. That completely closes off investigation in a seeker, and it appears that Agrippa might be a seeker at this point. Rudeness rarely wins people. If there are enemies who have no interest in dialoguing, and their only goal is to destroy you and other believers, I have no problem with rudeness. Jesus was rude on occasion, and those people deserved it. However, most religionists know nothing different than their religion without power. They aren't sinning against knowledge. They are simply trying to live the best they know how. So *politeness* can win an audience.

B. Paul was enthusiastic about sharing (v. 2a).

Next, he is very enthusiastic about sharing: **“I think myself happy, King Agrippa...”** Paul loved sharing how he had been rescued from a dead and empty religion into a relationship with God that had power, joy, and meaning. He loved to share. Enthusiasm hints that there is something in your possession to be enthusiastic about. We as Christians have every reason to be enthusiastic about our faith. If we approach a religionist about how wonderful the Gospel is and we have no joy, peace, comfort, or enthusiasm, it won't be too credible, will it? You share what you have, and if what you have is wonderful, you will be enthusiastic about sharing that with people who are willing to listen. And Agrippa is definitely willing to listen.

Last week I was talking with someone via email who told me that he didn't believe in pushing Christianity on his children. Someone else responded that he must not be too enthralled with his own Christianity with an attitude like that. In fact, he valued his views on Iraq (which he definitely pushed on everybody) much more than he valued his Christianity. Why not share Christianity if it has transformed you? But you see, I think that was the problem. This guy had religion, not Christ. What's to get excited about religion?

C. Paul was willing to answer objections (v. 2b).

Third, he was willing to answer objections. He said, **“I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews...”** Anybody who is a thinker is going to have objections to the testimony that you give. It's just human nature. And if we show a willingness to answer objections, and a confidence that such objections can be answered, it again gives more credibility to our defense of what we have. On the other hand, when we have a judgmental attitude toward people we tend to write them off and not take their objections to Christianity very seriously. But Paul is willing to answer as fully as is necessary.

D. Paul respected what Agrippa did have right (v. 3).

And then, fourth, Paul respected what Agrippa did have right. He didn't just focus on the negative. There were plenty of things about Agrippa that he could have criticized. But instead, in verse 3 he says, "**especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews.**" He is basically saying, "You know the faith, and I respect that." He acknowledges areas that Agrippa had right. Paul is later going to be telling Agrippa things that had the potential of turning his world upside down, but this politeness makes Agrippa willing to keep listening. We too need to show respect to people if we want them to respect our bringing of a message to them. This can be as simple as commenting on how much you love their flower garden as you meet them at the door, or it could be much more extended asking of a person's opinion on a current event that has been troubling the nation. I think Paul is a wonderful model for how to approach religionists and how to interact with them. We can't allow the huge differences that exist to make us avoid them.

III. Admit to your own times of dryness over "religion" (vv. 4-5).

A. Paul is humble enough to admit that his life conformed, but was not transformed (v. 4).

Of course, we do need to confront the sin and the emptiness eventually. But one way to soften the blow is to show the humility of Paul by admitting that we too have been empty and we too have had sins. Here Paul says that he too was once a religionist. In verse 4 Paul says, "**My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem all the Jews know.**" Now I admit that it was easier for Paul to admit this because everyone knew that he was a leader of the Pharisees who had persecuted Christians. And some people's lives are not as public, and it is harder for them to open up. But transparency is one of the things that breaks down barriers. Just let them know – I've been in the same boat. I can identify with what you are going through.

B. He was once even more "religious" than the religionists who accused him (v. 5).

In verse 5 Paul is going to admit that he was the worst – he was more "religious" than the religionists who had accused him. "**They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.**" Paul knew what he was

talking about – he hadn't just been a Pharisee – he was the strictest sect of Pharisees. But as we will see, though he had the right doctrines, he didn't experience the reality of those doctrines. It's easy to be an empty religionist.

When Jack Miller used to confront Phariseeism in the members of his church he would always preface his remark with a statement to the effect that he was a recovering Pharisee. He was doing the same thing as Paul. Paul was identifying with Agrippa and the Pharisees in a way that would make it harder for them to accuse him of judgmentalism. When you are helping others to get out of a dry stage in their Christianity, it might be helpful for those people to know that you too have had your dry times; you too have struggled with legalism; you too have felt distant from God. Paul is going to be giving an awesome testimony of the supernatural power in Christianity in verses 12-18, but he can also testify that he has not always appreciated that power.

IV. Admit to how easy it is for any of us to lose a life-giving relationship. Israel (including pre-conversion Paul) had lost:

Fourth step: admit to how easy it is for any of us to lose a life-giving relationship. Israel was once a true church. It was once in covenant with God and had accomplished much for God's glory. In fact, Paul identifies with the Jewish church. He speaks of "our fathers" and "our twelve tribes." You don't say that if the church is not a part of the true Israel. But Israel (like pre-conversion Paul) had lost a whole host of things.

A. Hope in the supernatural (v. 6a).

First, they had lost hope. Verse 6 says, "**And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers.**" He was being judged by the Jews for a hope that Jews had always held to. This means that the Jews had lost their hope. And this is always the way it is. When God is absent, the fruit of the Spirit is always absent. We might speak theologically of hope, but when we aren't walking close to God we feel hopeless many times. God is the giver of hope, and without an intimate relationship with Him, our hope can wear thin and we can give in to discouragement, bitterness, anger, and frustration. Religion is not enough. We need a God-given hope.

B. Faith in God's ability to do what he had promised (v. 6).

They had also lost faith in God's ability to do what he had promised. Their faith hadn't worked so many times that they had become cynical.

Verse 6 speaks of the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. The Pharisees denied that these promises had happened or could have happened. They didn't have faith to believe even though the Scriptures were clear. And Christian religionists today have a hard time believing that God can do healings, miracles, or guide them. They become skeptics and critics. We need to be very careful that opposition to the charismatic movement is not a holding to religion and a discomfort with God's presence and activity.

C. Zeal and enthusiasm in serving God (v. 7a).

Third, they had lost zeal and enthusiasm in serving God. Verse 7 says, **“To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain.”** To do anything night and day, it must be all consuming. And for the heroes of the faith in the Old Testament, it was. They had a zeal and enthusiasm that came from God and led to God. But Israel seems to have lost this. And we too can so easily lose a zeal and enthusiasm for the things of God. It can happen to the best of churches.

D. Focus on the right thing (v. 7b – “God”).

And the word “God” in verse 7 shows that they had lost their focus on God. You see, religion is preoccupied with activity, doctrine, meetings, etc. It is for the most part horizontal. Real Christianity is focused on God 24-7. It's focused on what God wants in our lives with the doctrine that we are learning. It's focused on God in worship, dependence on God in evangelism, wisdom of God in child discipline, etc. It's God-focused. In contrast, religionists can have the Scripture that says “God is in none of their thoughts” true of them.

E. So that ironically they are missing the very thing that they are hoping for (v. 7) and they oppose those who have it.

Ironically these Jews were missing the very thing that they were hoping for, and not only were they missing it, they opposed those who had the hope. Paul said, **“For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews.”** See – there's the irony. The hope that was part of their doctrinal standard is now being opposed in practice. In other words, their practice is not lining up with their central hope.

How do we line up on these points: We need to realize that religionism doesn't happen over night. It starts with parents who are saved but compromised. It continues with children who are content with a form of godliness that is without the power. It finishes with a generation that doesn't know God. They know their religion, but they don't know God. They aren't

true believers. And if we are to avoid this cycle, we must spend much time teaching our children more than religion – connecting our children with the God of this universe in a relationship that is meaningful and daily. We must avoid the satisfaction with religion that is seen in these first eleven verses.

V. Challenge people to think through why they oppose the supernatural.

A. It isn't because of the Bible (v. 7a).

Let me explain what I mean by point V. Point V says, “Challenge people to think through why they oppose the supernatural.” The Pharisees and Sadducees were skeptical about all of Christ’s miracles. They were utterly skeptical that a resurrection had happened. They were utterly skeptical that people needed anything beyond following the law. In fact, they were skeptical that Jesus cast out demons. When Jesus said, “Without Me you can do nothing,” that just didn’t seem believable. They had gotten so used to living religion without grace that it seemed natural. And what Paul is saying here is that their unbelief in the supernatural wasn’t because of the Bible. Verse 7 says that the Old Testament promised the resurrection hope and all that was involved in the Messianic Kingdom. Why do people not believe in the supernatural today? Many times it is their experience (or lack of experience) that drives their exegesis. It’s not because the New Testament doesn’t talk about it a lot.

B. It isn't because of the historical position of the church (v. 7b).

The Pharisees were out of accord with the Bible and they were out of accord with the historical position of the church. He insisted in verse 7, “**To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain.**” This was the historic faith.

By the way, just as a rabbit trail, this is one verse that you can use to disprove the Identity movement and British Israel movement. These are racist organizations that do not believe Jews are really Jews. They believe that back in 722 BC when the ten northern tribes of Israel were deported by Assyria into the various nations, that they never returned to Israel. These are the supposedly “ten lost tribes of Israel.” And those ten lost tribes are supposedly the British and Western Europeans. They claim that modern Jews are Khazars and not really descendants of Abraham. I’ve done some research on the Khazar theory recently and it is full of holes. For example, genetic studies of the Y-chromosome have demonstrated common ancestry of Jews from all over the world and distinguishes them from European

ancestry.² Besides, the ten tribes weren't lost. Several Scriptures show that all twelve tribes returned to Israel with Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 6:16,17; 7:13; 8:35; 10:5; Neh. 11:34; 12:47) and continued to be in existence at the time of Jesus (Luke 2:36; Acts 1:39). Here Paul speaks of all twelve tribes as still in existence. They weren't lost. I thought I would give this rabbit trail because the Identity Movement is strong in the Midwest, and it is important to know that their racist teachings on Jews have no backing from Scripture or science.

C. It isn't because it is irrational (v. 8).

But back to Agrippa's problems with what Paul was saying. He knew he couldn't argue with Paul. His incredulity wasn't because Paul's doctrine was irrational. No. He had other problems. Perhaps Agrippa was giving a facial expression of doubt. But Paul is obviously picking up on something when he says in verse 8, "**Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?**" Agrippa hasn't said anything, but obviously Paul thinks that Agrippa thinks that this is unbelievable. But a supernatural Christianity cannot be intellectually discarded. It is only prejudice that discards the supernatural in science. I've talked to many Christians who insist that you can't bring Bible or supernatural into science – that it isn't science unless you only deal with materialistic issues. But that is an anti-intellectual prejudice against non-material evidences. God has never asked us to turn off our brains. Paul's question implies that there is a deeper reason for the resistance. And I believe the reason is stated (at least in part) in point D:

D. Ultimately people are afraid that God might do to them what He did to Paul (vv. 12-19), and they opt for a "comfortable" Christianity instead of a "real" Christianity.

Ultimately people are afraid that God might do to them what He did to Paul in verses 12-19. God might ask them to do something they don't want to do; something uncomfortable. You can feel in control when it comes to religion, but you don't feel in control with a real Christianity. In this passage the risen Jesus commanded Paul to drop what he was doing and consecrate his life unreservedly to him. And by the way, salvation is about unconditional surrender. There are two armies, and the only hope of survival

² See studies by Michael Hammer, University of Arizona in Tucson; Dr. Harry Ostrer, director of the human genetics program at New York University School of Medicine.

that anyone has is to lay down his arms and surrender to Jesus. And the rest of our life is unconditional surrender.

But too many Christians are hoping they can have their cake and eat it too. They are hoping they can have a Christianity that is predictable and is safely in a box. The moment you bring the supernatural into the equation, and you have a God who gives visions, dreams, and guidance through the Scripture, and he intervenes in my life in various ways, it can get scary. “What if God calls me to give up something that I cherish? Horrors, what if God calls me to be a missionary? I prefer a God that I can control to a God who might push me out of the nest.” But you see, real Christianity is a Christianity that has God as Lord of all that we are and do. And it trusts God to be good in all He does.

We speak of this as consecration. Let me tell you a story that illustrates consecration. Ruth Mitchell was the sister of General Billy Mitchell in World War II. She was the first foreign woman to ever join the death-defying Comitaji of the Belgrade underground. These heroes were set apart to harass Hitler’s forces when they came across the Yugoslav frontier. And Ruth wanted to give her life for the cause. When she signed up, she was given a vial of poison because no member of the centuries-old Comitaji had ever been captured alive. After the initiation she watched Pecanec, the leader of the group, cross her name off the list of those who had applied for membership. He explained his reason in these words: “We just cross your name off, my girl, because we consider you dead when you become one of us. We value our lives as nothing.” That is consecration. Is this not what Christ called us to? In Luke 14:27 Jesus said, “**Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.**” L.E. Maxwell explains:

Christian consecration means that I have been crossed out, killed off at the Cross, that I count not my life dear unto myself. Then I am prepared to join the old Methodists in their covenant of consecration. [Here’s the Methodist pledge:]

I am no longer my own, but Thine.
Put me to what Thou wilt;
rank me with whom Thou wilt;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for Thee or laid aside for Thee,
exalted for Thee or brought low for Thee;
let me be full, let me be empty;
let me have all things, let me have nothing;

I freely and heartily yield all things to Thy pleasure and disposal.”

Can you say that? When you are utterly consecrated to God, you are in a much better position to call your children to consecration. When you are utterly consecrated to God, your life will have something that will either attract people to Christ or make them upset with you and opposed to you. But at least they can't ignore your Christianity. Consecration is saying to the Lord, “Speak Lord, Thy servant heareth. I'm willing to do whatever you want me to do Lord.”

VI. Of course, some people redouble their efforts to make their religion work. But help them not to confuse zeal, enthusiasm, defending the “cause,” sacrifice, or even fanaticism with real Christianity. Paul had all those before he was converted (vv. 9-11).

Now let me make a caution here. There is always a danger of legalism when people talk about consecration. If you seek consecration apart from grace, you are going to simply have a more dedicated religion, but it will still be empty. Paul tried to answer his emptiness in religion by redoubling his efforts to be dedicated to a cause. It was consecration, but in a wrong way. Look at what Paul did in verses 9-11 before God knocked him off his horse and converted him.

Acts 26:9 ¶ “Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Acts 26:10 This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*.

Acts 26:11 And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities.

Agrippa knows all about the zealous persecution of Christians by the Sadducees and Pharisees. His own father had killed James. What is fascinating to Agrippa is that this *leader* of the persecution (known as Saul of Tarsus) had been turned upside down by the very Jesus whom he persecuted. What's going on here? Paul could not have been changed in that way by mere philosophy or doctrine. And Paul is about to explain his supernatural conversion, and the reality of the risen Jesus. And we will look at that Lord willing next week.

But what Paul is doing in these verses is making it clear that no one should confuse zeal, enthusiasm, defending the “cause,” sacrifice, or even fanaticism with real Christianity. Those can be counterfeits that insulate people from supernatural Christianity. Paul had done all of those things before he was converted. For example, all Pharisees were required to be evangelistic and try to convert pagans to Judaism. It’s not like they didn’t try to serve God. But Jesus said, **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”** You mean praying, evangelizing, serving in the church doesn’t save you? No. And even after you are saved, those things don’t guarantee that you are maintaining a close walk with God. So much of our ministry is self-righteousness. So much of our hyperactivity is dry and empty of God.

No doubt some of us have thought of Christianity as busyness in ministry. But you can be as busy as Paul was in serving his synagogue system and still be empty of Christ. You can be as zealous as Paul in defending a cause, and still be lost. You can be as enthusiastic about your faith as Paul was, and still not have the reality of God’s presence. 1 Corinthians 13 says that you can be so sacrificial that you are willing to give your body to be burned, and still be without divine love. There are Christian fanatics who may not know Christ.

So when you ask these religionists what their hope of salvation rests in, you will likely get answers that are similar. They will say that they attend church, teach a Bible study, extend hospitality, evangelize, and pray. But what is common to all those activities is self-righteousness. They are restless because they have not found their rest in Jesus. I have had times in my ministry when I have done ministry in my own fleshly strength. It’s Pharisaism. Even though I was saved, I was reverting to religion, not Jesus. Paul wanted everything he did to flow from union with Jesus. Everything else will be burned up as hay, wood, and stubble.

VII. There is no substitute for sovereign grace bringing us into relationship with the living God (vv. 12-18, next week DV).

There is no substitute for the sovereign grace of verses 12-18. We will look at that next week, Lord willing. But let me read a short piece from a blog that shows how covering up our mess by faking it will let us down. Transparency, humility, casting our sins at the cross of Christ, receiving His forgiveness, grace and mercy is the only way out. This blog said,

Barb's life is a mess. Her drinking problem is out of control, and her husband Ken refuses to cover for her anymore. Everyone around her sees Barb's problem, but they all pretend like everything's just fine, a classic case of denial. Every Sunday Barb and her family dress in their Sunday best and go to church as the perfect family. Everyone at church looks at Barb and her family as the model family...they look so...perfect.

Sitting in the row behind Barb at church each Sunday morning is Joe. Everyone likes Joe, especially all the guys, because he's a man's man. Joe played football in college for a PAC 10 school, and he's filled with stories of athletic conquest. But when Joe's all alone his heart is filled with emptiness because of his inability to sustain long-term relationships. His marriage only lasted six months, and over the years he's driven away everyone close to him with his sort fuse. But that Sunday when a friend asks Joe how things are going he quickly says, "Great...never been better."

Joe and Barb have both learned that church is a place for plastic people, a place for perfect people. So Barbs become Barbie, complete with her husband Ken and her perfect plastic children. And Joes become G. I. Joe, a plastic action hero everyone admires but no one really knows. But inside Barb and Joe are dying, because they're not made of plastic. Churches throughout our culture today are filled with Barbies and Joes. We've learned that image is everything, that what counts is how you look, the impression you make. So we in the Christian community have perfected the fine art of faking it.

Wow! Does that describe your family? Some of us are content to be evangelical Pharisees who fake it. We don't have the joy of the Lord, but we don't want to expose our joylessness to ask for help to achieve that joy. Paul faked it for many years as a strict, legalistic Pharisee of the Pharisees. The Sadducees faked it by reducing God's demands, but at the same time being zealous defenders of straight-laced worship. Agrippa faked it with his generosity, his adherence to a modified code, and his faithfulness to the synagogue. There are all kinds of fakers that we need to minister out there. But we will only be able to minister effectively if *we* stop faking it. Religion is not enough.

Conclusion – May we put off powerless “religion” and put on verse 18.

We will look to the solution to all this next time, Lord willing. But let me give you a hint by looking at verse 18. When Jesus turned Paul's world upside down, one of the things that He told Paul was in this verse. Paul's commission was **“to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”** Now *that's* real Christianity. Only the power

and presence of God in our lives can accomplish any of this. And we should not be satisfied with anything less. Let me just quickly break down that verse:

First, Christianity is about opening blind eyes, and that is a miracle of grace. We've not been seeing the miracle of conversions happening very frequently in this congregation. In part it may be because we have been content with the first opening of our blind eyes, and have not asked God day by day, "**Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from your law**" (Psalm 119:18). Every day we need our eyes opened. Only God can help religionists to see life as God sees life; to read Scripture in a way that feeds our soul and sets our heart on fire.

Second, he turns us away from darkness to light. We aren't saved to suffer under darkness. God's purpose is to usher us into more and more light. If you struggle daily with the darkness of depression and oppression, don't just heroically struggle to endure. Learn how to resist the prince of darkness who is afflicting you. It is likely that you need to renounce legal ground that you have given to Satan, and daily resist him with the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony. Darkness doesn't just go away. It requires the supernatural to dispel the darkness. I urge you to start realizing the behind the scenes struggles we must engage in to escape from Satan's darkness and to enjoy the kingdom of light.

Third, Christianity is about rescuing us from the power of Satan to the power of God. If you don't know how to daily experience the breaking of Satan's power in your life, talk to me, and we will schedule a time to work you through the reality of God's victory over satanic temptations, afflictions, and bondage. I get the feeling that many of you are doing all the right things but struggle with lack of joy, lack of power, lack of hope, lack of lots of things. I went through that for the first two years of my ministry in Omaha until I learned how to fight supernatural demonism with supernatural Christianity. I still miss the boat on occasion. During our vacation, Bill and Anne Huse helped me to discover a demon of unworthiness that has been afflicting me, and it was so obviously present when they brought it up. It reminded me that we can't ever stop battling with demons. Real Christianity is not satisfied with forgiveness and heaven. It wants God in every part of our lives. It knows that religion is not enough.

Fourth, Christianity is about receiving forgiveness. What a glorious thing it is to have consciences cleansed of guilt and forgiven by God. When we hide our sins, we cannot find forgiveness. We can't. When we define our

sins away as Agrippa did, we cannot find forgiveness. Forgiveness is at the heart of Christianity. We are not here to judge you, but to see you forgiven and entering into the joy of God's cleansing. If you've been hiding your sins in order to maintain the safety and security of hiding behind your religion, determine right now to crucify pride and to embrace the forgiveness that God desires to give to you.

Fifth, Christianity is about fulfillment and giving you an inheritance. He wants you fulfilled. Verse 18 says "**that they might receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance...**" Notice the order. We find fulfillment and inheritance when we cut off our sins that Satan uses as legal ground against us. But once we cut off the sin and put it under the blood of Christ and resist the demons, Satan can't touch us, and the inheritance flows naturally. Yet how many Christians rarely taste of the incredible treasures that God has reserved for us in Christ Jesus. Learning how to walk by faith and to appropriate our inheritance is a central part of real Christianity. I hope this sermon is making you despise the emptiness of mere religion and to long for more of God. I hope it is stirring up your heart to help your children, friends, neighbors and others to experience real Christianity. Our flesh loves religion, as long as it is predictable and isn't real. But we can't be satisfied with that.

Sixth, real Christianity is about sanctification by grace as promised in verse 18. And its not sanctification by trying harder. It speaks of "**those who are sanctified by faith in**" Jesus. It is a *received* sanctification. This means two things to me: First it means that we must be sanctified. To park your whole life on justification and never get to sanctification is to rob yourself of one of the glories of real Christianity – growth in the Son. But second, it means that a brutal "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps kind of Christianity" is not in view here. It is sanctification by grace. It's a sanctification that can still have hope, joy, security, and peace even when we blow it. Yet it is not content to lie on the ground when we fall down. A child who is alive doesn't quit trying to walk just because it has fallen a few times. That child is passionate to walk. And real Christianity is passionate to be holy. It doesn't worry about the fact that it falls into sin sometimes. Sure a Christian may fall and may cry for a moment. But he shouldn't stew for days in depression. He wants to walk. Real Christianity is passionate about living, and so real Christianity gets up and tries again while holding onto Daddies hand, confident that Daddy is not going to whip us for falling. Many Christians have opted for the dry, lifeless, depressing sanctification of religion and have not experienced regularly the thrill of real Christianity that

makes us walk, run, and soar on wings like eagles without growing weary. Which kind of sanctification have you been pursuing? If it's been a sanctification of religion that makes you weary, let's make this Sunday a turning point by committing to finding out what supernatural Christianity is about. And I'll commit to helping you through that.

Seventh, real Christianity is about walking by faith rather than by sight. Rarely does religion make a person get beyond his own ability to trust Jesus for something. Yet we must walk by faith to be pleasing to him. Religion is not enough. Faith constantly looks beyond religion for more. It constantly looks to the God of all blessing.

And finally, real Christianity is about fellowship. The text says, "**in Me.**" That is fellowship with Christ. But it also says, "**among those who are sanctified.**" That is fellowship with the saints. Religion may be satisfied with superficial acquaintances, but real Christianity wants deep relationship.

I don't know about you, but the kind of Christianity that verse 18 paints is what I want for my life. I have had too much of verses 1-11. Religion stinks if it is empty. But you know what? Sadly, it can sure look good to some people.

You may have heard about the fate of Adele Gaboury, in Worcester, Massachusetts. I didn't verify the story, but the report I heard was that she died in her home and was not found for four years. What a mess! People wondered how that even was possible. Well, it was possible because so many people covered for her. Her elderly brother thought she had gone to a nursing home. Her neighbor, Eileen Dugan, was a good Samaritan who thought the grass was not getting cut because she was too old, and she paid her grandson \$20 a month to mow the yard. She was covering for her. When mail started stacking up, the mailman stored the mail at the post office. He was covering for her. When the pipes froze and water spilled out the door, the utilities company just shut the water off and never investigated. It took four years before the police investigated and discovered her body. The respectable external appearance had hidden the reality of what was inside. Why? Because people were covering for her.

I don't want to cover for religion any more. It doesn't do religionists any favors. I want every one of you to experience the joy of real Christianity. I want you to help your children get past verses 1-11 and to experience the power and reality of verses 12-18. Don't cover for your children.

I asked Maryanne if she would mind my sharing with you a dream that she had the other night. In the dream she was talking with two people who claimed to be Christians just like her, but after listening to their watered down Christianity, she knew it wasn't true Christianity at all, but more like the watered down gospel that Pastor Walker had spoken about that wasn't answering the true needs of the human heart. But she felt so pressed down by the power of God's Spirit that she was on her knees with words pouring out of her heart and mouth like rivers of living water. It was just like water was gushing. It was effortless as verses, tears, passion, and truth poured out as she contended for the faith and truth. She said it didn't come from her mind as much as out of her inner being. It felt normal and natural. And she said that she connected this with the passion for God that Pastor Walker had spoken about. And the dream so encouraged her that the next day she wrote effortlessly something that I thought showed the power of God's Spirit. But I loved the imagery of the dream.

That's what I want for each of us – to drink so deeply of the living waters that it is effortless to share the Gospel with others. Like Paul we can say, "I am happy to tell you about Jesus. I'm excited about Jesus. I love my Jesus. I'm excited that I have discovered that religion is not enough." If we have drunk deeply of Jesus, we will overflow automatically to others. God has given us the ability to have life, and to have it more abundantly. Receive that life and share it with others. Amen.

Religion is Not Enough

Acts 26:1-11

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 8-9-2009

Introduction

- I. Realize that the “religious” are often ready (and even longing) to hear about a supernatural Christianity.
 - A. Agrippa practiced Judaism. (v. 3)
 - B. His Judaism didn’t transform his life (25:23)
 - C. Yet something made him want to talk to Paul (25:22; 26:1).
- II. Don’t be judgmental of the “religious” – show them life
 - A. Paul was polite (v. 1b).
 - B. Paul was enthusiastic about sharing (v. 2a).
 - C. Paul was willing to answer objections (v. 2b).
 - D. Paul respected what Agrippa did have right (v. 3).
- III. Admit to your own times of dryness over “religion” (vv. 4-5).
 - A. Paul is humble enough to admit that his life conformed, but was not transformed (v. 4).
 - B. He was once even more “religious” than the religionists who accused him (v. 5).
- IV. Admit to how easy it is for any of us to lose a life-giving relationship. Israel (including pre-conversion Paul) had lost:
 - A. Hope in the supernatural (v. 6a).
 - B. Faith in God’s ability to do what he had promised (v. 6).
 - C. Zeal and enthusiasm in serving God (v. 7a).
 - D. Focus on the right thing (v. 7b – “God”).
 - E. So that ironically they are missing the very thing that they are hoping for (v. 7) and they oppose those who have it.
- V. Challenge people to think through why they oppose the supernatural.
 - A. It isn’t because of the Bible (v. 7a).
 - B. It isn’t because of the historical position of the church (v. 7b).
 - C. It isn’t because it is irrational (v. 8).
 - D. Ultimately people are afraid that God might do to them what He did to Paul (vv. 12-19), and they opt for a “comfortable” Christianity instead of a “real” Christianity.
- VI. Of course, some people redouble their efforts to make their religion work. But help them not to confuse zeal, enthusiasm, defending the “cause,” sacrifice, or even fanaticism with real Christianity. Paul had all those before he was converted (vv. 9-11).
- VII. There is no substitute for sovereign grace bringing us into relationship with the living God (vv. 12-18, next week DV).

Conclusion – May we put off powerless “religion” and put on verse 18.