

Paul before Agrippa, Part 2 (Acts 26:24-29)

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Introduction

1. Paul gave his testimony before King Herod Agrippa II at the request Porcius Festus, the new procurator of Judea.
2. This is the longest and most thorough rehearsal of Paul's conversion because Agrippa was familiar with both Judaism and Christianity.
3. Paul's testimony addresses three very important truths and explains why the Jews were so antagonistic toward Paul.
 - a. Paul was an eyewitness to the risen Christ (see 25:19).
 - b. Paul addressed his sudden and radical conversion from persecutor of Christians to ardent Christ-follower—a transformation difficult to comprehend.
 - c. Paul stated that Christ personally commissioned him to be His ambassador to Gentile nations. Christianity was not exclusively Jewish.
4. Luke's account is, no doubt, greatly abbreviated because Festus' interjection (v. 24) makes no sense if Paul said only what is recorded in this text.
5. Today, we want to focus on Agrippa's response to Paul's pressing him with the gospel (v. 28). Paul was earnest in fulfilling Christ's purpose in his testifying the gospel before all, even these rulers (Acts 9:15).
6. This was not a trial. This was a divinely appointed opportunity to preach the gospel of Christ.

I. The Circumstances of His Response

1. Paul pressed Agrippa to acknowledge that he believed what the prophets had said would come to pass. Paul wanted Agrippa to face Christ.
2. Agrippa's response to Paul is a difficult sentence to interpret, perhaps deliberately so.
3. Agrippa chose not to answer Paul's question, sidestepping the issue, but why would he do so?
4. Did Paul's gospel get too personal—too close for comfort? Perhaps his response was rooted in his own experience with Judaism.

II. The Language of His Response

1. The sentence literally reads "In little (*en olegos*) me you would persuade a Christian to make?"
 - a. *Ev olegos* may mean "a little while" or "in a short time"—the preferred interpretation, although there is no word for time used.
 - b. *Ev olegos* may also mean "easily," "little effort," or "without difficulty" (Acts 22:41).
2. The word translated "to be" is not the usual verb for *being*. It actually means to "do," "act" or "perform"—"With so little would you persuade me to do or act the Christian?"

3. Some later manuscripts have “to become” (as in the KJV), but most scholars regard this change as an effort by some copyist to clarify the text.
4. Agrippa uses the term *Christian*, which betrays his intimate knowledge of the Way. There are only three references to *Christian* in the NT—Acts 11:26, here, and 1 Peter 4:16.

III. The Interpretation of His Response

1. Possible interpretations:

- a. He was sincere and very close to believing the gospel: “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (KJV).

Indeed, many messages have been preached on Agrippa’s sad case. He was at the door, but not in the door. It is very dangerous for people to come to the threshold of salvation, but fail to take the final step. Almost saved is still to be altogether lost!

- b. He was sarcastic: “In such a brief time or with so little effort, would you persuade me to act a Christian?” Was Paul’s long speech too short to convince him?

- c. He was sincere, saying that he needed more time or information to decide.

2. Agrippa’s saying that followers of Christ “do” their Christianity reveals his religious understanding.

He did not comprehend that becoming a Christian involved *being* (transformation), not *doing* (works).

3. Perhaps the religious history of his own race contributed to his snide response.

Did Paul, a Jew, think that he could convert this Edomite to Christianity as his forefathers had converted his people to Judaism?

His was an Edomite (called Idumean by the Romans; they were the descendants of Esau). The Edomites were conquered by the Jews under John Hyrcanus in the second century B.C. They were forced to convert to Judaism by compelled circumcision and submission to the Law of Moses. Was Paul seeking to convince him to exchange one religion for another that was merely quasi-Jewish?

IV. Paul’s Reply to His Response

1. Paul recognized Agrippa’s failure to see the gospel as no more than an alternative religion.
2. Paul pressed (“I would to God”) his own burden (“that in little or in much [*ev megas*]” whether *time* or *effort*) that not only Agrippa but all who heard his gospel would *become* what he was.
3. In this (v. 29) he also implied that Christianity was not just a *replacement* for Judaism but actually the *fulfillment* of it. Jesus is the true Israel.
4. Paul’s passion and earnest desire that men be saved could not be more obvious to Agrippa.

5. Sadly, the king's natural animosity to God moved him to excuse himself from further contact with the apostle (v. 30).

Application

1. What is a Christian?

A Christian, according to the biblical ascription, is one chosen of God to be transformed into the image of His Son (Romans 8:29; 1 John 3:2). This transformation involves all who are redeemed by Christ (Galatians 4:5; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 9:15), pardoned and justified by God (Micah 7:18; Romans 3:24; 5:9; 8:30, 33), and called out of their former state of sin and rebellion, ignorance and blindness unto salvation and holiness by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:4). The Spirit regenerates the heart (the new birth, John 3:3, 6; Titus 3:5), granting faith and repentance (Ephesians 2:8, 9; Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25), and renews the will to love and to follow Christ (Ephesians 5:2). Salvation is solely through faith by grace, resulting in a new creation set apart from the world to glorify God by demonstrating His attributes to the world (Ephesians 2:8-10; Hebrews 12:14; Philippians 2:15; Matthew 5:14-16).

2. Why aren't more professing Christians as earnest to see the gospel of Christ engage the culture as was Paul?
3. Do you "do" Christianity?
4. Does the church replace Israel?