

STUDY OF ACTS 23-26, PAUL'S DEFENCE

There is both truth and practical exhortations which we can learn from Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, and his defense before the governors and the king. Prior to this imprisonment Paul had written to the saints in Rome of his desire to see them (Romans 1:11; 15:23,24). I'm not sure that Paul knew how or when he would see them, but during his imprisonment the Lord stood by him saying, ". . . Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11). Knowing this must have been a comfort to Paul in all that he endured before he actually arrived there. God's promises are a comfort to all believers who believe them and wait for them to be fulfilled. God is faithful and His promises to us are sure.

We must note the providences of God for Paul both before and after receiving this promise from the Lord (Acts 20:3; 21:30-32; 23:10,16; 26:22). As the Jews plotted to kill Paul, God providentially has Paul's nephew hear of the plot (Acts 23:16), and at Paul's bidding he is ushered in to speak to the chief captain. The chief captain readies soldiers, horsemen, and spearmen to deliver him to Caesarea. God also moved Festus not to bring Paul up to Jerusalem (Acts 25:4). As Paul appears before the governors knowing there is no hope for justice, he appeals to Caesar the Emperor. It is not known whether Paul knew that this would be the way God would get him to Rome, but it turned out it was God's ordained way. We should be able to look at our own lives and see the Divine providential hand of God at work.

There is another reason why Paul must bear witness at Rome which is often overlooked. God was bringing the program of the kingdom of heaven to climatic point. Because of this Paul must be in Rome for the Divine purpose of uttering the judgment upon Israel (Acts 28:23-28). This must take place that the unprophecied dispensation of the mystery be revealed.

Paul also must testify before kings (Acts 9:15,16). The main accusation against Paul was that he preached the resurrection of the dead. "Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day" (Acts 24:21). Felix had a more perfect knowledge of "that way" (Acts 24:14,22), but was not moved to release Paul. The next time Felix heard Paul he brought his wife who was a Jewess, and heard Paul concerning the faith in Christ. The power of Paul's speaking was seen as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. Felix trembled and sent Paul away saying, "Go thy way for this time; when I have convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25). Felix wanted money, not the truth, and sent for Paul often and communed with him, but we never read of his believing what Paul taught him.

It was before Festus that Paul appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:10-12). When Agrippa came Festus told him why Paul was bound. The Jews had accused him of teaching the resurrection, "But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (Acts 25:19; see 17:18 also). The other problem which the Jews had with Paul was his preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21; 26:17,20).

When Agrippa allows Paul to speak to him, Paul addresses him as a fellow member of the Hebrew church, and as believing in the coming Messiah (Acts 26:1-3). He asks Agrippa, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8). Paul's defence reveals a progressiveness in what he knew. First, he states almost what John the Baptist was preaching (Acts 26:20), a Jewish message of the Messiah. This is not what Peter preached at Pentecost, and it is not what saves us today. Second, he speaks what the prophets and Moses did say should

come (Acts 26:22,23), and after Acts 28:28, Moses and the prophets are left behind. As Paul continues his defence Festus says he is mad, but Festus as a heathen could not understand as Agrippa could. Paul replies that he is only speaking the truth, and surely it concerned the gospel which fulfilled the predictions of the prophets (Acts 24:14,15; 1 Corinthians 15:3,4), according to the Scriptures.

Then Paul answers Festus saying that king Agrippa knew these things because they were not done in secret. He then turns to Agrippa, and says, ". . . believest thou the prophets?" Paul does not wait for Agrippa to respond, but states, "I know that thou believest" (Acts 26:27). This implies that Agrippa was a believer, and Agrippa's answer is not "almost thou persuadest me to be saved," but "almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." It appears that Agrippa was a saved man, but there was a price to pay and he was not going to pay it. Are there believers like that today? or are we like that? Perhaps one can be saved, and not be a Christian. Can a person be saved, but not necessarily be a Christian? Let us examine this statement.

The word "Christian" appears three times in the Scripture (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). The word itself is a composite of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Christ (Messiah) comes from the Greek, the "ian" comes from the Latin, and the Hebrew sums it up with the idea of "one who is in the likeness of." They were first called Christians at Antioch as it was the first place men took upon them the likeness of Jesus Christ. All the elect of God have been saved to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29), i.e. this is the purpose of saving grace. The true believer is in the process (sanctification) of becoming a Christianos, i.e. one in the likeness of Christ. It will be perfected one day because God is working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). We are justified, which is God declaring us to be what we are not, and we are being sanctified, which is God making us to be what He has already said we are. Both are taught (2 Timothy 2:19).

Agrippa is telling Paul something like this. "Paul you have almost persuaded me to step down from my throne, give up my royal garments, and become a Christian." Paul's answer. "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." Paul would have all that heard his message of salvation and freedom from the law be as free as he was except the chains that held him.

Paul had the credentials to say he was not an almost Christian. ". . . **for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus**" (Acts 21:13). "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but **I laboured more abundantly than they all**: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10). ". . . beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:22-28). "And **I will very gladly spend and be spent for you**, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved" (2 Corinthians 12:15). "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, **crucified among you?**" (Galatians 3:2). "Yea, and **if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service** of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all" (Philippians 2:17).

Without doubt there are many today who are almost Christians, i.e. they say they believe, but will not pay the price of identification with Christ. Crucifixion is the beginning point of being a Christian. It is only a small remnant who can say they are living in the likeness of Christ. Are we among them? Almost Christianity is saying I believe the Bible, but then not obeying it. If we are to be Christians as Paul was, the cross becomes a real necessity. Paul was not the first man saved, but he was the first Christian. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now

live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world . . . From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Galatians 6:14,17). "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

In the likeness of Christ is to have the mark of Christ upon me daily, i.e. a realized identification. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2). "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering,; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, . . . And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:12-14). An intellectual grasp of facts is not being conformed to the image of Christ, and many believe the facts, but they practice nothing. They are almost ready to be identified with Christ, they are believers in the facts, but do not yet live in His likeness.

Being a Christian is union with Christ, and manifesting a life of holiness through obedience to the Word of God. Holiness is not pioucity, but rather being Scriptural. It is to take the writing of Scripture off the printed page and put it in practice. **Holiness is being Scriptural.** A Christian cries out to be holy. Through this is manifest the fruit of the Spirit, and being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ (Galatians 5:22,23; Philippians 1:11). A Christian is sanctified, or set apart unto God, but he is also morally righteous by obedience to the Word. He is in the world, but not of the world. A Christian seeks to please Jesus Christ whatever the cost. A Christian has freedom and liberty, but not license. A Christian is not satisfied with a moral atmosphere, attending church, and being around nice people, but wants to know Christ and live for Him. A Christian not only professes salvation, but acts like a saved person should.

An almost Christian says he loves God, but won't do anything to prove it. An illustration of this is the man who was told by his pastor they were going to cut out prayer meeting. The man was vehemently against it, and the pastor then said, "we have not had it for five weeks." An almost Christian does not hunger and thirst for righteousness, will not live for Christ, will not pray, will not witness for Christ, and has no desire to learn of Christ. A almost Christian never sees the sin in his own life, but always sees it in others.

What Agrippa would not do is be a consecrated Christian, love Christ with his whole heart, and submit in obedience to the Word of God. Which describes us? An almost Christian as Agrippa, or a Christian like Paul who is in the likeness of Christ?