

WORKS BEFITTING REPENTANCE (ACTS 25:23-26:1-32)

This narrative account, is part of what the Apostle Paul went through before he was finally imprisoned in Rome, and that is the last that we can read about Paul in the Scriptures. Through the course of his ministry he was beaten, imprisoned, and shipwrecked but it was all for the greater good, that is, according to God's perfect plan. You can read a summary of Paul's sufferings for Christ in **2 Corinthians 11**. When Paul was finally imprisoned in Rome he then had time to write what we call his "prison epistles", Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. The book of Acts ends by saying, "Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him." (**Acts 28:30-31**) In fact, in his letter to the Philippians, he had said "All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household." (**Philippians 4:22**)

To those willing and obedient, God will send them to where he wants them to share and show the love and the gospel of Christ Jesus. Yet, Jesus warns us to count the cost, which is essentially the same as considering life vs. death, blessings vs. curses, God's Way vs. your own way (ooh!). Jesus said, "whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple ["is not worthy of Me" (**Matt.10:38**)]. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it— lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'? Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple." (**Luke 14:27-33**)

Similarly, Jesus also said, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." (**Matt 16:25**) But Jesus comforts us with these words, "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (**Matthew 11:27-29**)

There is a very tragic element to our story today (**Acts 25 & 26**), beyond what Paul had to endure physically, and as well, what Jesus had to endure. They had to endure time and again, including in this story, others who rejected the goodness of God through His saving grace in Christ Jesus, even though the Apostle Paul had given a clear and sound explanation to what it means to believe on Christ, to be a

Christian, or as it was called, to be of "The Way". Once the Roman government got involved in the case of the Sanhedrin vs. Paul, the governor Felix was told by Paul, "But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which THEY call a sect [yet as we know Christ Jesus is not a sect, as He stated, "**I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.**" (John 14:6) Paul continues:], so **I worship the God of my fathers, believing** all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. **I have hope in God**, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead [not believed by the Sadducees], both of the just and the unjust. This being so, I myself always **strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.**" Paul is saying that he worships God (loves Him), puts his unwavering trust in God, and does his very best to not hinder what God is intending to accomplish, especially based on his past actions. Strive, in this case is not the Greek word "agonizomai" that means to "strive, struggle, fight, labor fervently that Paul used in saying "**Fight [agonizomai] the good fight of faith**, lay hold on eternal life [ie-cling to Jesus for He is your life!], to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." The Apostle Paul used the Greek word "askeo", which is a term used in exercising and means to "practice, endeavor to do your best".¹ So, Paul was telling Governor Felix that He did his very best to not have any offenses between himself and God or man. Then Paul said, "Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day." But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of **the Way**, he adjourned the proceedings and said, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case." (Acts 24:21b-22) We then read that after several days Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla show up to hear the Apostle Paul "concerning the faith in Christ." Then it says "Now as he [Paul] reasoned about **righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid** and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you. Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him." (Acts 24:24-26)

Unfortunately, Felix feared but did not have a fear of God. King Solomon tells us, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Proverbs 9:10) If anything, Felix had a fear of being brought into accountability to God. He also clearly did not have a godly sorrow that leads to repentance. As Paul says in **2 Corinthians 7:10**, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." He also surely did not have a love for God. The Apostle John says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love." (1 John 4:18) Instead,

¹ <https://biblehub.com/greek/778.htm>

Felix chose the temporal, looking for a cash payment, of which he never got.

Now after two years, Paul was still detained [ah, the justice system!], Festus took Felix's position. We are then told that King Agrippa (II) and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus. Festus told Agrippa of Paul's case and they said they would like to hear him. Before we go on, we can be reminded that it was the Apostle Paul who said in **Romans 8:28-29**, "And we know that **all things** work together for **good** to those who **love God**, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew [who would choose life vs death/blessings vs curses/God's Way vs. our way], He also **predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son**, that He [Christ Jesus] might be the firstborn among many brethren." That has roots going back to the Creation, where we read in **Genesis 1:27**, "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Yet due to sin, the sin of man, that image became distorted. It is then, through Christ Jesus alone, that we are being restored and are restored into the image of Christ, and through Christ Jesus. The Apostle John gives us this promise, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (**1 John 3:2**)

Earlier in the book of **Acts (16)**, Paul and Silas, had been imprisoned in Philippi because Paul had cast out a demon out of a girl, who did fortune-telling for her masters (**Acts 16:16**), of which they were not happy about that because they were making good money off of her. Then, while Paul and Silas were in chains in prison, singing hymns to God as the other prisoners listened (**Acts 16:25**), there was a great earthquake and the prison doors opened and all of the prisoners' chains fell off. The prison guard was about to kill himself, thinking that the prisoners had escaped, but the Apostle Paul assured him that they were all still there. We can then read, "And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." [While they indeed said believe on Jesus and be saved, it goes on to say:] Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house [ie' "ok, this is what it all means to believe on Christ Jesus to be saved." Our passage of Scripture today in **Acts 26**, elaborates on that, which we'll get to shortly]. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household." Right away he was serving the Lord! God can and will, either good or bad situations, work it for the good. Not what WE think is good, but His good, as He is perfect in ALL of His Ways (**2 Samuel 22:31**) and His Works (**Deuteronomy 32:4**) and according to the foreknowledge of God.

The Apostle James tells us, in speaking of sin that leads to death, he says "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." There's that word "fruit" again. That fruit that Adam and Eve partook of, in the Garden of Eden, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that Satan told Eve would make them like God, by knowing good and evil, but only led to death, physically (eventually) and spiritually. We know that because of the curse that God spoke to Satan, that He would "put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed [speaking of Christ Jesus and the need for a Redeemer]; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." (**Genesis 3:14-15**) Emnity-hebrew "ebah", hostility, hatred. Then also God made a covering for Adam and Eve with animal skins, which was symbolically the sacrifice of the covering that would later be established through the law with the animal sacrifices, which was an image of what was to come, of the sacrifice that would ultimately not cover our sins, but take away our sins through the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. So as through Adam sin entered the world, and all afterwards are born into that sin-nature, as the Apostle Paul has told us in **Romans 5**, he continued with the good news saying, "For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive **abundance of grace** and of the **gift of righteousness** will **reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.**" Let us now see how King Agrippa responds:

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[Acts 25:23-27 (Agrippa and Bernice)]

So the next day, when Agrippa [II] and Bernice had come with great pomp, [phantasia: vain showing, like a fantasy] and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in. And Festus said: "King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus [Caesar], I decided to send him. I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him."

[Now for some background. King Agrippa II was the great grandson of Herod the Great, who tried to have Jesus killed as a child. Herod the Great "was of Arab origin, although he was a practicing Jew." And although Herod had the temple gloriously rebuilt, we are told that he "murdered Mariamne [his second wife], her two sons, her brother, her grandfather, and her mother. He was in great pain and in mental and

physical disorder. He altered his will three times and finally disinherited and killed his firstborn, Antipater. The slaying, shortly before his death, of the infants of Bethlehem was wholly consistent with the disarray into which he had fallen. After an unsuccessful attempt at suicide, Herod died.”² Herod Antipas, the great-uncle of King Agrippa II, had John the Baptist imprisoned for being rebuked by him for taking his half-brother’s wife. (**Matthew 14**) King Agrippa II’s father, King Agrippa I had James, the brother of John killed by the sword. Later, we can read in **Acts 12:20-24**, “Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king’s personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king’s country. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, “The voice of a god and not of a man!” Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God grew and multiplied.” Now King Agrippa II, despite his fathers’ legacies, had his own choice to make. He started off not doing well, in the eyes of God, even though he was also responsible for completing the work on the temple, all the way up until just 7 years before it was destroyed by the Chaldeans. Agrippa II and Bernice were actually brother and sister, yet well-reported to be living as husband and wife. How ironic that the Apostle Paul would stand before Agrippa and have to testify about his actions before such an ungodly man. As **Proverbs 29:2** says, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan.” Praise the Lord though as the Apostle Paul assures us, “He [Christ Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And **He is before all things**, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in **all things** He may have the preeminence.” (**Colossians 1:15-18**)

[Acts 26:1-11 (The Old Paul)] Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You are permitted to speak for yourself.” So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: “I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently. My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. 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. And now I stand and am judged for the

2 <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Herod-king-of-Judaea>

hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 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. 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."

[Acts 26:12-18 (Paul Recounts His Conversion)] "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from **darkness to light**, and from the **power of Satan to God**, that they may receive **forgiveness of sins** and an **inheritance** among those who are **sanctified by faith in Me.**'

[Once again, we are not just following the letter of the law, in legalism, we are believing on and receiving Christ to turn from curses to blessings, death to life, darkness to light, and from our way to God's Way, to be in Communion/Fellowship with Him! The Apostle John says in **1 John 1:6-7**, "If we say that we have fellowship [koinonia] with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light [as He IS the Light], we have fellowship [koinonia] with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." In that fellowship that we have in Christ we then are bearing the fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, patience [longsuffering], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (**Galatians 5:22-25**) It is in Christ Jesus that we have (**1 Corinthians 1:30**) Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. And we are not **merely** following Jesus to live. Jesus said, "**I AM the Door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.**" (**John 10:9-10**) The

abundance we have down here is for what God is presently doing in building His eternal kingdom.]

[Acts 26:19-32 (Paul's Post-Conversion Life)] "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should **repent, turn to God, and do works befitting** [axios: to weigh; worthy] **repentance**. For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come— that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles." Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of **truth and reason**. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe." Then Agrippa said to Paul, "**You almost persuade me to become a Christian.**" And Paul said, "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." When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains." Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

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While King Agrippa had the Apostle Paul sharing the gospel of Christ Jesus with him, he concluded, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." Despite his heritage, despite his shortcomings or sins against God, he had that opportunity to, as Jesus said to Paul, "**receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in [Him].**" Felix also, instead of heeding the Word of God by the testimony of the Apostle Paul, he chose to wait it out for some money. **1 Tim. 6:3-12**, "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man[woman] of God, flee these things and **pursue** righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight[agonizomai] the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."