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## Defending Your Life

### Acts 26:24-29

#### Introduction

1. All of us at some point or another have had to defend a belief we hold, a choice we made or an action we took in our lives.
2. We have been asked . . .
  - a. "Why do you believe that?"
  - b. "Why did you make that choice?"
  - c. "Why did you take that action?"
3. One of two things happened:
  - a. You admitted you were wrong.
  - b. You strongly defended your belief, choice or action.

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4. Long ago, the apostle Peter wrote these words to the Christians throughout Asia Minor who were suffering for their faith:

"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect," (1 Peter 3:15, NIV84)
5. Here, in Acts 26, we have Paul's final recorded defense of his life.
6. It takes place in Caesarea before the Roman governor, Festus, who has recently replaced the former governor, Felix.
7. He has invited King Agrippa II and his sister, Bernice, who are the oldest children of Agrippa I who as we noted last week died a horrible death some 20 years earlier in this same city.
8. Because Paul has appealed his case to Caesar, Festus has asked them to listen to Paul's defense and provide him with the charges to send to the Emperor.
9. This morning I would like for us to examine Paul's defense before King Agrippa

and then consider the reasons that some stop short of coming to Christ.

10. My goal is to persuade you, if any of these reasons prove to be yours, to put them aside and “take hold of the hope set before us”(Hebrews 6:18).

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## I. Paul’s Defense

### A. PAUL’S UPBRINGING AS A PHARISEE (ACTS 26:4-8)

1. Paul was no stranger to those in religious circles among the Jews of his day.
2. As he said, “they have known about me for a long time” (v. 5a).
3. He had been a student of one of the most famous teachers of his day — Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).
4. All teachers remember their star pupils — the ones who stand out in class.
5. He had lived his life as a Pharisee, the strictest sect of the Jewish religion (v. 5).
6. The reason he was now standing before them (Agrippa II, Bernice & Festus) was because of the hope of the resurrection, a promise which God had made to the Jews long ago (26:6).
7. It was a promise which God had fulfilled in Jesus, whose resurrection not only proved Him to be the Messiah, but also guaranteed our own resurrection.

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### B. PAUL’S FANATICAL PERSECUTION OF CHRIST (ACTS 26:9-11)

1. As a Pharisee, Saul, as he was known in those days believed it was his solemn duty to oppose this Jesus of Nazareth who he believed to be an imposter.
2. He systematically began a hostile persecution of all those who claimed to be followers of Jesus.
3. The chief priests in Jerusalem gave him the authority to lock many of them up in prison (v. 10).
4. When they were “sentenced to death,” he cast his vote against them (v.

10).

5. He went to the synagogues (places of worship) looking for them and “tried to force them to blaspheme” (v. 11) — most likely through public lashings.
6. He was so obsessed with destroying them that he pursued them “even to foreign cities” (v. 11).

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### C. PAUL’S VISION ON THE DAMASCUS ROAD (ACTS 26:12-18)

1. On one such journey, Paul was on his way to the city of Damascus with extradition orders from the chief priests in Jerusalem (v. 12).
2. At noon, before he reached his destination, “a light from heaven, brighter than the sun” shone all around him and his traveling companions (v. 13).
3. They all fell to the ground, and Paul heard a voice speaking to him in his native language.
4. The voice said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (v. 14).
  - a. With His second question, our Lord used an idiom which would have been familiar to those of Paul’s day.
  - b. Just as it was futile for an animal to resist being prodded with goads (sticks), so it was futile for Saul to resist the Lord’s constant prodding from the truths and people he continually encountered.
5. Paul (Saul) asked, “Who are You, Lord [Sir]? (v. 15a).
6. The voice responded, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting” (v. 15b).
7. Immediately, Paul must have realized two things:
  - a. First, the Jesus who had been crucified was truly alive.
  - b. Second, to persecute the Christians who so closely identified with Him was to persecute Him.

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8. In that vision, our Lord commissioned Saul (Paul):
  - a. “I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only

to the things which you have seen, but also to the things which I will appear [reveal] to you” (Acts 26:16, NASB95).

- b. “I will deliver [rescue] you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles” (Acts 26:17, NKJV).
- c. “I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:18, ESV).

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#### **D. PAUL’S LIFELONG OBEDIENCE TO THE VISION (vv. 19-23)**

1. This “heavenly vision” was not lost on Saul (Paul).
2. From the point of his baptism into Christ by Ananias there in Damascus, Saul began telling people they should “repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance” (Acts 26:20, ESV).
3. He started in Damascus, then went to Jerusalem and Judea and finally to the Gentiles preaching the good news of salvation to anyone who would listen.
4. It was for this reason that the Jews had seized him in the temple some two years earlier and tried to put him to death.
5. Since his own obedience to the gospel message, Paul had simply been restating what Moses and the Prophets of old had said was going to take place — namely, “that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”” (Acts 26:23, NASB95)

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## **II. Almost? Maybe?**

#### **A. FESTUS’ INTERRUPTION**

“While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.”” (Acts 26:24,

NASB95)

1. Festus was unable to contain himself any longer.
2. Earlier, he had admitted to Agrippa that he did not understand this business “about a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive” (Acts 25:19).
3. In his mind, sensible people did not believe a person could rise from the dead.
4. To him, Paul’s devotion to the O.T. had made him a religious maniac.
5. Paul didn’t try to argue with the Roman governor but focused on King Agrippa.

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### **B. PAUL’S APPEAL TO KING AGRIPPA**

“For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.” (Acts 26:26, NASB95)

1. Paul knew that King Agrippa was knowledgeable of the writings of the prophets.
2. He also knew of this movement known as “the Way.”
3. His father, Agrippa I, had put one of its leaders, James, to death a number of years before and attempted to have another, Peter, executed as well.
4. The preaching of the Gospel and the growth of the church were not something which had been done in secret.
5. Having said this, Paul turned to Agrippa and said, “King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.”” (Acts 26:27, NASB95)
6. Agrippa was not only the Jewish king, he was also an astute politician.

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7. He was not about to change his religious viewpoints as the result of one sermon from a former Pharisee who now stood before him in chains.

“Agrippa replied to Paul, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.”” (Acts 26:28, NASB95)

“And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?”” (Acts 26:28, ESV)

“Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”” (Acts 26:28, NIV84)

8. Many today are not so unlike Agrippa.
9. There are many reasons as to why people choose not to come Christ in obedient faith.

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## II. We Fall Short of Coming to Christ Because . . .

### A. WE HAVE A WRONG VIEW OF SUCCESS

1. From the world’s standpoint
  - a. Festus, Agrippa II and Bernice were successful
    - 1) Festus – Governor of Judea
    - 2) Agrippa II – King of Judea
  - b. Paul — a nobody, a man declaring a strange teaching
2. From God’s standpoint
  - a. Festus, Agrippa II and Bernice were poor — in need of God’s truth
  - b. Paul — successful, a defender of the faith
3. How do we gage success in our world today?
  - a. In business — size of the company, value of your stock, personal net worth
  - b. In sports — percentages on the court or field, salary you command, number of advertising endorsements.
4. In the eyes of God, the marks of success are vastly different.
  - a. A Christian has God for his father and Christ for his Savior and his brother.
  - b. A true follower of Jesus Christ is a better husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, employer, employee because of the change Christ has brought into his or her life.

**Slide 12****B. WE WORK TO IMPRESS OTHERS WHILE FORGETTING GOD**

1. By all indications, Festus, Agrippa and Bernice were more concerned with impressing others than with pleasing God.
2. Unfortunately, it is no different today.
3. I have heard it said by more than one person, "We buy things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't like."
4. Our lives were never meant to be about impressing others, but about honoring God.
5. God once said through the prophet Isaiah, "to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2).

**Slide 13****C. WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT OTHERS MIGHT THINK**

1. Consider one more time, Paul's challenge to Agrippa.  
"King Agrippa do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do." (v. 27)
2. Agrippa didn't want others to think that he believed this Jew named Paul, so he dodged the question:
  - a. The KJV translates it as, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."
  - b. The Greek says something more like,
    - 1) "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" (Acts 26:28, ESV)
    - 2) "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" (Acts 26:28, NIV84)
3. It wasn't popular in Paul's day to be a Christian and it isn't popular today.
4. Many still avoid obeying the gospel because they are afraid of what others will think.
  - ❑ Don't let this be true of you.

**Slide 14****D. WE PRIZE OUR POSSESSIONS**

1. There is no doubt that Festus, Agrippa and Bernice had the finer things of life — money, clothes, fine places, servants to attend to their every wish.
2. Paul, on the other hand, walked away from those things in order to follow Christ.
3. There is nothing wrong with a servant of God being wealthy — many of the faithful in Scripture were people of great means (i.e., Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon, etc.)
4. However, God said that the person who “stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” is foolish (Luke 12:15-21).
5. Paul wrote to Timothy to, “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share.” (1 Timothy 6:17-18)
6. Don’t let your material abundance become an obstacle to your obedience to Christ.

**Slide 15****E. WE LOVE THE SENSUAL ABOVE THE SPIRITUAL**

1. It was rumored in Paul’s day that Agrippa and Bernice, brother and sister, were living together in incest.
2. Bernice had been married to her uncle until he died some eleven years earlier at which time she moved into the royal palace with Agrippa.
3. In order to put down the rumors, she married the king of Cilicia.
4. She later divorced him and became the mistress of the Roman general, Titus.
5. These rulers were living lives of sensual gratification rather than those which adhered to God’s moral standards.
6. Today, we are continually confronted with the strong temptation to satisfy the sensual.

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from

the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.” (1 John 2:15–17, NASB95)

7. Because God’s word speaks against such a sinful lifestyle, many avoid following Christ.

## Conclusion

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1. I want you to focus on the last words which Paul spoke to King Agrippa and the others in the room that day so long ago.

“I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.” (Acts 26:29, NASB95)

2. Here stood a man in chains who had been beaten and persecuted by Jews, ridiculed by both Greeks and Romans.
3. Still, he wanted them to accept His Savior.
4. In his words we hear the desire of his heart that all might be saved.
5. As with Felix & Druscilla of whom we learned last week, there is no indication in God’s Word that either King Agrippa and his sister, Bernice, or the Roman governor, Festus ever obeyed the gospel.
6. They stood up and walked out.
7. What will you do today?