

PAUL'S DEFENSE CONTINUED

Acts 26:19-32

In this lesson we find Paul continuing his defense, which we studied in our last lesson. So far we have studied his opening remarks (26:2-3), his early life reviewed (26:4-11) and his experience of conversion (26:12-18). We now consider:

4. His Christian life. Acts 26:19-23.

(1) His obedience to the heavenly vision. Acts 26:19.

This is Paul's account of the decisive moment on which all of his future, as well as much of the future of Christianity and of the world, hung. The Voice had spoken from heaven, and now much depended on the answer made.

Paul would have been regarded by some as a fanatic because of his enthusiasm about that vision on the Damascus Road. In fact, Festus accused him of being crazy. Such visions were not common. They are of such a nature that people cannot appreciate them. They are not subject to rationalizing. In the case of Paul, it was Divine intervention. He was not in a heavenly frame of mind, nor in a position to have such a vision. In the case of John, on the Isle of Patmos, the vision came because he was in a heavenly frame of mind and God had an approach to him.

a. What was that vision?

(a) It was an appearance of Jesus Christ in person.

This appearance of Jesus to Paul was real because it was necessary. There was need for such a credential from heaven to convince Paul and to completely change his views and convictions since he was a chosen vessel of the Lord and was to be sent to a work foreign to all that he had believed before.

(b) It was a vision of Paul himself.

He saw himself a lost sinner for the first time. Prior to this he had regarded himself as a righteous man because he had observed the rules of the synagogue. Such a vision is tremendously important to any man. It is important that men today see themselves as lost sinners.

(c) It was a vision of a lost world.

He saw that the Jews were lost in spite of their claims on God. He saw that while the Gentiles were lost, they could be saved, as well as the Jews. Jesus appeared as the hope of all men. What a revelation this must have been to a man who had been born and trained a Pharisee!

(d) It was a vision of his life's work.

He was commissioned by Divine authority to go as a missionary to the Gentiles. What could have been more repulsive to this Pharisee? Yet a vision of Christ and of a lost world prepared him for that part of the vision. He saw himself as an instrument in the hands of God in winning a lost world from sin to righteousness.

(e) It was a vision of the meaning of the prophets.

He read the true meaning of the Scriptures for the first time. He had misread them until then. He had failed to see that the prophets had been saying all these things through the ages past. This vision caused him to reinterpret the Old Testament Scriptures.

b. What was the effect of that vision?

(a) It completely crushed Paul, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

His strength left him, he collapsed, his mind was filled with confusion, and his religious views were swept away. It is necessary sometimes for men to be overwhelmed with great floods of the inexplicable. There may be no other approach to the soul of men. The storms may have to sweep the barriers away before the gentle sunlight can come in.

- (b) It completely remade Paul.
He became a new creature instantly. His old life gave way to a new life. He had a new conception of what it meant to live, and to serve God. His old theology was clothed with a new garment. The heart of his message was now Jesus Christ, "that he is the Son of God."
- (c) He swore allegiance to God and to his new task with undying devotion. He was not disobedient to that vision, which means he was no longer a rebel, but was wedded to his new assignment. This was no weak submission. It was the positive acceptance of a challenge.
- (d) His obedience cost him much in suffering.
He was betrayed. He was beaten many times. He was arrested and dragged into the court on false charges. He was slandered and misrepresented. He was finally killed for his obedience, but through it all he never became disobedient. That heavenly vision never grew dim in his memory. It inspired him, comforted him, guided him, strengthened him, and at last supported him in the hour of death.

Not all visions are heavenly, but all heavenly visions should be immediately obeyed. You will not get another vision of God until you obey the last one you received.

- (2) His call to repentance. Acts 26:20.
The true life is one of ever-widening usefulness--Damascus, Jerusalem, throughout Judea and to the Gentiles. Wherever he went, he preached repentance.
- (3) His life endangered. Acts 26:21.
On account of his preaching the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles, the Jews seized him and attempted to kill him.
- (4) His witness from the Scriptures. Acts 26:22.
His teachings had not gone beyond what Moses and the prophets had taught.
- (5) His testimony concerning the death, resurrection and mission of Christ. Acts 26:23.
Paul was entirely yielded to the interests of Christ. Unless our lives are entirely yielded to Him, our testimony for Him will be powerless and fruitless.

II. The Interruption By Festus. Acts 26:24-26.

- 1. Festus misunderstood Paul. Acts 26:24.
- 2. Paul replied courteously. Acts 26:25.
The grace of God will always teach a person to be civil.
- 3. Paul referred to Agrippa's knowledge of the facts. Acts 26:26.

III. The Appeal To The King. Acts 26:27-29.

- 1. It revealed fearless courage. Acts 26:27.
- 2. It called for a decision. Acts 26:28.
- 3. It showed a genuine longing for their well-being. Acts 26:29.
That they might have his joy and his hopes, without the persecution, was the best prayer he could offer for them.

IV. The Verdict Or Result. Acts 26:30-32.

The verdict was, "This man doeth nothing worthy of death." Paul laid bare the heart of Agrippa and had torn it wide open with the lancet of the Gospel. Agrippa confessed that he was deeply moved, and Paul made a final appeal for a decision of complete surrender. It was a momentous occasion. The soul of a man hung by a thread. The heart of the preacher burned with a passion kindred to that of his Master. Eternity was in the balance.

sincere effort to serve God. He was sincere, but sincerity alone was not enough. One may be sincere, and yet be wrong.

b. A converted conscience.

(a) Paul's conscience was changed immediately when he met the Lord. He asked the Lord what He wanted him to do. He had found a new Master.

(b) The first step in conversion is an awakened conscience. When one is awakened, he stands at the crossroads of life. His destiny is in the balance.

(c) Decision is the next step an awakened conscience must take. In Paul's former life conscience had been his Master, but now a new monarch is on the throne, One who is higher than conscience. He had known no higher rule than to obey conscience, but now he must make conscience obey his Lord and Master.

(7) His authority for endeavoring to destroy Christianity. Acts 26:10.

This authority was obtained from the chief priests.

(8) His persecution of believers. Acts 26:10-11.

a. He shut up some in prisons.

b. He voted their death.

"I gave my voice"--literally, "I cast my pebble," that is, my vote, "against them." In ancient courts the accused was condemned by black pebbles, and acquitted by white ones. This phrase was sometimes used in the sense of giving assent or approving.

c. He punished them in synagogues.

This happened in all the synagogues in Jerusalem and the various places in Judea where he went. Scourging was the customary form of punishment inflicted in the synagogues.

d. He compelled them to renounce their faith.

That is, he endeavored to force them to rail at Christ and the Gospel.

3. His experience of conversion. Acts 26:12-18.

(1) While on his journey to Damascus. Acts 26:12.

He was on a mission of strenuous opposition to Jesus. He was carrying out his sincere conviction.

(2) At mid-day, he saw the vision of light from heaven. Acts 26:13.

It was a supernatural light, brighter even than the noon-day sun.

(3) His call from the Lord. Acts 26:14.

"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" "It is hard for thee to kick against the goads." The figure is that of an ox being pricked by a goad, then ignorantly kicking back and receiving another wound. It is a fruitless resistance to a superior power. So, it is implied, it had been with Paul. God had been dealing with him, ever since he had met with Stephen, when he was baffled by him in argument. His conscience had been touched, and his heart troubled. But he recoiled from the true light. In prejudice he had rushed madly on, and tried to crush the promptings of the Spirit and the misgivings of his soul. This certainly teaches that it is both difficult and dangerous to resist God.

(4) His conversion. Acts 26:15.

The change was radical and complete, wrought not by the will of man but by the will of God.

(5) His commission from the Lord. Acts 26:16.

When Christ appears to us, it is for a purpose. In Paul's case, the Lord's purpose was "to appoint him a minister and a witness." He was sent to be a witness for the Lord, which implies a personal knowledge. One cannot bear testimony unless he knows some fact first-hand. Paul had an experience to tell, and the world needed his experience.

He was sent to be a minister to the Lord, which implies service. You can

worship God without serving, but you cannot serve God without worshipping Him. Men cannot minister to the Lord without ministering to men.

(6) His deliverance. Acts 26:17.

He was to be delivered from the anger of the people and from sin. He was to be delivered from the Gentiles who would not persecute him, but would ignore him. He was assured a hearing among them.

(7) His message of salvation. Acts 26:18.

All the elements of the Gospel are contained in this verse. There is first the condition of man by nature. Eyes, which are blind, in darkness, under the power of Satan. The object of Paul's ministry was "to open their eyes that they might turn from darkness to light." By opening the eyes of sin-blinded men and turning them from the power of Satan unto God, they would receive the forgiveness of sins and become the heirs of God. In this verse we have: illumination, conversion, emancipation, and sanctification.