



World Christian Fellowship

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Philippians 26 Almost Christian

Acts 26:28, *Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”*

Acts 26th chapter you have the apostle Paul’s apology and defensive plea, which he makes for himself against those blind Jews which so maliciously prosecuted him before Agrippa, Festus, Bernice, and the council.

Paul in his plea, chiefly insists upon three things.

1. The manner of his life before conversion.
2. The manner of his conversion.
3. The manner of his life after conversion.

V 4-13, How Paul lived before conversion?

V 13-18, How God shaped on him to conversion?

V 19-23, How Paul lived after his conversion?

Before conversion he was very pharisaic. The manner of his conversion was very wonderful. The fruit of his conversion was very remarkable.

Before conversion he persecuted the gospel, those who preached the Gospel after their conversion. Now he preached the gospel which himself had persecuted.

While he was a persecutor of the gospel, the Jews loved him! Now by the grace of God, he became a preacher of the gospel, the Jews once loved him now they hate him, and sought to kill him.

He was once against Christ, and then many were for him but now that he was for Christ, all were against him.

- When Paul was being an enemy to Jesus, other Jews became his friends.
- When he came to own Jesus, then they became his enemies.

The Jews had this great charge against him.

A great opposer has become a great professor!

Because God had changed him, therefore this enraged them. God had wrought on him by grace, and they seem to envy him the grace of God.

He preached no treason, nor sowed no agitation but only repentance, faith in Christ, and the resurrection. For this he was charged and brought before them.

This is the sum of Paul's defence and plea for himself, which, you find in sequence, had a different effect upon his judges.

Festus seems to censure him

Acts 26:24, *Now as he thus made his defence, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"*

Agrippa seems to be convinced by him.

Acts 26:28, *Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."*

The whole bench seems to acquit him.

Acts 26:30- 31, *When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them;³¹ and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains."*

- Festus thinks Paul was beside himself.
- Agrippa is almost persuaded to be such a one as himself.
- ✓ Festus thinks him mad, because he did not understand the doctrine of Christ and the resurrection.
"Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"

- ✓ Agrippa is so affected with his plea, that he is almost wrought into his principle. Paul pleads so effectually for his religion, that Agrippa seems to be upon the turning point to his profession.

“Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”

“Almost.”

The words make some debate among the learned.

This word shows what an efficacy Paul’s doctrine had upon Agrippa’s conscience. Though he would not be converted, yet he could not but be convinced his conscience was touched, though his heart was not renewed.

Observation:

There is that in religion, which carries its own evidence along with it even to the consciences of ungodly men.

“You almost persuade me.”

Now this shows the influence of Paul’s argument upon Agrippa, which had almost proselyted him to the profession of Christianity.

“You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”

“A Christian.”

Who is a Christian?

Many that are called Christians, do not know what a Christian is, or if they do, yet they do not know what it is to be a Christian.

A Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ, one that believes in, and follows Christ.

- As one who that embraces the doctrine of Arminius, is called an Arminian;
- As one who that embraces the doctrine and way of Luther, is called a Lutheran.
- As one who that embraces the doctrine and the way of Anglican, is called Anglican.
- As one who that embraces the doctrine and the way of Baptist, is called Baptist.

One that embraces, owns, and follows the doctrine of Jesus Christ, he is called a Christian.

All that profess God in Christ come in the flesh, are called Christians, in opposition to heathens that do not know Christ. Muslim don't believe that.

But now in Scripture, the word is of a stricter and narrower acceptance, it is used only to denominate the true disciples and followers of Christ.

Acts 11:26, *And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*

1 Peter 4:16, *Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.*

“You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”

The word is used but in these three places (**Acts 11:26, Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16**), as I find, in all the New Testament, and in each of them it is used in the sense previously mentioned.

The Romans make the name to be a name of accusation among them, and usually abuse the word Christian to signify a fool.

Paul said in

1 Corinthians 1:18, *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

It is no wonder that the disciples of Christ are to the world fools.

The whole of godliness is a mystery!

- A man must die, that would live,
- A man must be empty, that would be full,
- A man must be lost, that would be found,

- A man must have nothing, that would have all things,
- A man must be blind, that would have illumination,
- A man must be condemned, that would have redemption

So, he must be a fool that would be a Christian.

1 Corinthians 3:18, *Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.*

The true Christian is a fool to the world, but wise to salvation.

Acts 26

Doctrine:

There are very many in the world that are almost, and yet but almost Christians.

- Many that are near heaven, and yet are never the nearer,
- Many that are within a little of salvation, and yet shall never enjoy the least salvation,
- Many are within sight of heaven, and yet shall never have a sight of God.

There are two sad expressions in Scripture:

- The one is concerning the truly righteous.
- The other is concerning the seemingly righteous.

It is said of the truly righteous, he shall “scarcely be saved;”

1 Peter 4:18, Now *“If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?”*

It is said of the seemingly righteous, he shall be almost saved.

Mark 12:34, Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, *“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”*

The righteous shall be saved with a scarcely, that is, through much difficulty, he shall go to heaven through many sad fears of hell.

The hypocrite shall be saved with an almost, that is, he shall go to hell through many fair hopes of heaven.

There are two things which arise from hence of very serious meditation.

- How often a believer may miscarry, how low he may fall, and yet have true grace.
- How far a hypocrite may go in the way to heaven, how high, he may attain, and yet have no grace.

- ❖ The righteous may be cast down very near to hell, and yet never go there.
- ❖ The hypocrite may be lifted very near to heaven, and yet never get into heaven.

- The righteous may almost perish, and yet be saved eternally.
- The hypocrite may almost be saved, and yet perish finally.

For the saint at worst is really a believer, and the hypocrite at best is really a sinner.

Three things are of great use for the establishing of weak believers, that they may not be shaken and discouraged by this doctrine.

1. Gospel is to awaken the believers

There is nothing in the doctrine that should be matter of stumbling or discouragement to weak Christians. The gospel does not speak these things to wound believers, but to awaken sinners.

As there are none more averse than weak believers, to apply the promises and comforts of the gospel to themselves.

As the disciples, when Christ told them, "*One of you shall betray me;*" they that were innocent suspected themselves. Therefore, they asked, "*Master, is it I?*"

So weak Christians, when they hear sinners accused, or the hypocrite laid open, in the ministry of the word, they presently cry out, "Is it I?"

It is the hypocrite's fault to sit under the trials and yet not to mind them.

Great use of such doctrine as this is to all believers:

1. To look to their standing and find out what foundation on they are on?

Is it built on Sand or on Rock?

2. Kindle the admiration and love of God, in bringing us into the way everlasting.

When so many perish from the way, and in overpowering our souls into a true conversion. Not just empty words.

3. It provokes to search the heart, so that we approve ourselves to God in sincerity.

4. It engages the soul in double diligence:

Not just believing only,

But persevering in faith to the end.

These checklists make this doctrine of use to all believers, but they ought not to make use of it as a stumbling-block in the way of their peace and comfort.

My aim is not to make sad the souls of those whom Christ will not have made sad!

I would bring water not to “quench the flax that is smoking,”

Matthew 12:20, *A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench, Till He sends forth justice to victory;*

But to put out that false fire that is of the sinner’s own kindling, lest walking all his days by the light thereof, he shall at last lie down in sorrow as Isaiah 50:11 says.

This message objective is to level the mountain of the sinner’s confidence and not to weaken the hand of the believer’s faith and dependence.

To awaken and bring in secure formal sinners, not to discourage weak believers.

2. To Hold on until the end

Though many may go far, very far in the way to heaven, and yet fall short. Yet that soul that has the least true grace shall never fall short.

Job 17:9, *Yet the righteous will hold to his way, And he who has clean hands will be stronger and stronger.*

Though some may do very much in a way of duty and yet miscarry. The soul that does duty with the least sincerity, shall never miscarry.

Psalms 7:10, *My defence is of God, Who saves the upright in heart.*

The least measure of true grace is as saving as the greatest. It saves as surely, though not so comfortably. The least grace gives a full interest in the blood of Christ, whereby we are thoroughly purged, and it gives us the strength and power of Christ, whereby we shall be certainly preserved.

Christ keeps faith in the soul, and faith keeps the soul in Christ.
1 Peter 1:5, *who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

3. Self-Introspection

They can hear such truths without serious reflection and self-examination.

Someone who is going to bankrupt never bothered to check his accounts, he is fooling himself, rather he is a hypocrite.

A hypocrite, never searches nor deals with his own heart. He that goes on in a road of duties without any uneasiness or doubting of his state, we should question the status.

Recently I have been having slight headache just checked it is because of slight increase in my blood pressure. If I don't treat, then it could be fatal.

Similarly, when sinners have no sense of their spiritual condition, it is plain that they are dead in sin and eternal death are upon them.

Doctrine. That there are very many in the world that are almost, and yet but almost Christians.

To demonstrate the truth of the statement we will look at the scriptural evidence, which speaks plainly and fully.

a) Rich Young Ruler:

Luke 18:18-23, *Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"* ¹⁹ *So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God."* ²⁰ *You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'* "

²¹ *And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth."*

²² *So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."*

²³ *But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.*

Now do but see how far this man went.

1. He Obeyed:

He not only heard the commands of God, but he kept them.

As the Scripture says in **Luke 11:28**, *But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"*

2. He Obeyed Fully/Universally:

He obeyed every command. He did not play pick and choose game with the commandments of God. Generally, tend to obey the easiest and leave the hardest but he didn't do either.

Luke 18:21, *"All these things I have kept from my youth."*

3. He Obeyed Constantly:

Not just one time out of zeal, but continually.

His goodness was not like as Ephraim's in **Hosea 13:3**, *Therefore they shall be like the morning cloud And like the early dew that passes away, Like chaff blown off from a threshing floor And like smoke from a chimney.*

But, *"All these things I have kept from my youth."*

The Rich Young Ruler made confession to desire to know more so that he can do more. Rather he wanted to be perfect that which was lacking his obedience. Therefore, he goes to Christ to instruct him in his duty.

Ask Jesus what I lack?

How would you define this man?

- A good man,
- Obedient man,
- Willing to amend his ways,
- Reached the right source.

Yet as far as he went, he went not far enough!

He was almost, and yet but almost a Christian.

He was a flawed hypocrite; he forsakes Christ at last and cling to his fleshly possession.

This then is a full proof of the truth of the doctrine.

b) Parable of Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13, *“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. ³ Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. ⁵ But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.*

⁶ “And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ ⁷ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us

and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’¹⁰ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

¹¹ “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ ¹² But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’

¹³ “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

Let us see these Ten Virgins, what a progress they make, how far they go in a profession of Christ.

1. They are called “virgins.”

Now this is a name given in the Scripture, both in the Old and New Testament, to the saints of Christ, namely Believers.

“The virgins love Jesus” so in the book of Revelation chapter 7, the “one hundred forty and four thousand” that stood with the Lamb on Mount Zion, are called “virgins.” They are called virgins, because they are not defiled with the “corruptions that are in the world through lust.” (**Revelation 7:14**)

They are called virgins.

2. They take their lamps:

They made a profession of Christ.

3. They had oil in their lamps:

They had some convictions and some faith.

To keep their profession alive, to keep the lamp burning.

4. They went:

Their profession was not an idle profession. They did perform duties, frequented ordinances, and did many things commanded. They made a progress as they went.

5. They Separated from others:

They outwent, they left many behind them. This speaks out their separation from the world.

6. They went out with Wise Virgins:

“wise virgins”—they joined themselves to those who had joined themselves to the Lord and were companions of them that were companions of Christ.

7. They were seeking the Lord

They go *“went out to meet the bridegroom”*—this speaks out their owning and seeking after Christ.

8. They trimmed their Lamps

When they heard the cry of the bridegroom coming, *“they arose and trimmed their lamps;”*. They profess Christ more highly, hoping now to go in with the bridegroom.

9. They sought for true grace.

Now do not we say, the desires of grace.

So they are, if true and timely; if sound and seasonable.

Why they here a desire of grace in these virgins, *“Give us of your oil.”*

It was a desire of true grace, but it was not a true desire of grace;

It was not true, because not timely;

It was too late.

Their foolishness was in not taking oil when they took their lamps but their time of seeking grace was when they came to Christ.

It was too late to seek it when Christ came to them. They should have sought for that when they took up their profession/confession.

It was too late to seek it at the coming of the bridegroom. Therefore *“they were shut out;”* and though they cry for entrance, *“Lord, Lord, open to us;”* yet the Lord Christ tells them, *“I know you not.”*

You see how far these virgins go in a profession of Jesus Christ, and how long they continue in it, even till the bridegroom came. They go to the very door of heaven, and there, like the Sodomites, perish with their hands upon the very threshold of glory. They were almost Christians, and yet but almost.

Almost saved, and yet perish!

You that are professors of the gospel of Christ, stand and tremble!

If they that have gone beyond us fall short of heaven, what shall become of us that fall short of them?

If they that are virgins,

- profess Christ,
- have some faith in their profession,
- have some fruit in their faith,
- outstrip others that seek Christ,
- improve their profession, and
- suit themselves to their profession.

If such as these be but almost Christians, Lord, what are we?

c) Israel, House of Jacob

From the Old Testament another example.

Isaiah 58:2, *Yet they seek Me daily, And delight to know My ways, As a nation that did righteousness, And did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; They take delight in approaching God.*

See how far these people went.

If God had not said they were rotten and unsound, we should have ranked them among the worthies.

Observe,

1. They seek God:

Now this is the proper character of a true saint is to seek God.

True saints are called, “seekers of God.”

Psalms 24:6, *This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, Who seek Your face.*

God of Jacob, here a generation of them that seek You.

Are not these the saints of God?

No! they are far away.

2. They seek him daily:

Here is diligence backed with continuance, day by day.

Every day, from day to day.

They did not seek God in a time of trouble and affliction only.

That is what normally people do.

Isaiah 26:16, *Lord, in trouble they have visited You, They poured out a prayer when Your chastening was upon them.*

Many when God visits them, then they visit Him, but not till then.

When God pours out His afflictions, then they pour out their supplications.

This is seamen's devotion: When the storms have brought them to their end, then they cry to the Lord in their trouble.

Many never cry to God, till they are at their end. They never come to God for help, so long as they can help themselves.

But now these houses of Jacob here, whom God speaks of, are more zealous in their devotion. They seem to make conscience of duty.

"They seek Him daily;" certainly these are no hypocrites.

3. Delighted to know the ways of God

"They delight to know my ways." Sure, this frees them from the suspicion of hypocrisy.

A hypocrite is not interested in knowing the ways of God.

Job 21:14, *Yet they say to God, 'Depart from us, For we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways.'*

4. Practising Righteousness as a Nation

They are "as a nation that did righteousness."

- ✓ Not only as a nation that spoke of righteousness,
or
- ✓ knew righteousness, or
- ✓ professed righteousness,
- ✓ but as a nation that did righteousness.

Practised nothing but what was just and right.

They appeared, to the judgment of the world, as good as the best.

5. Kept all the commandments of God

They did not forsake the ordinances of their God.

They seem true to their principles, constant to their profession, better than many.

Did not forsake the ordinances of God but these hold out in their profession.

6. Asking God

“They ask of Me the ordinances of justice.”

They will not make their own will the rule of right and wrong, but the law and will of God. Therefore, in all their dealings with men, they desire to be guided and counselled by God.

7. Delight to approach God

They take delight in approaching to God. Surely this cannot be the pretext of a hypocrite.

Though God is the chief delight of man, yet the hypocrites will not delight in God. Till the affections are made spiritual, there is no affection to things that are spiritual. God is a spiritual good, and therefore hypocrites cannot delight in God. But these are a people that delight in approaching to God.

They were a people that were much in fasting.

Isiah 58:3, *'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?'*

Now this is not a duty that done it requires truth of grace in the heart.

Mark 2:22, *And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins."*

New wine is strong, and old bottles weak and the strong wine breaks the weak vessel.

This is a reason Christ gives, why His disciples, who were newly converted, and but weak yet, were not exercised with this serious discipline.

But this people here mentioned were a people that fasted often, afflicted their souls much, wore themselves out by frequent practices of humiliation.

Sure, therefore this was “new wine in new bottles;” this must needs be a people strong, in grace.

There seems to be grace not only in truth, but also in growth. And yet, for all this, they were no better than a generation of hypocrites.

They made a good progress, and went far, but yet they went not far enough, and they were cast off by God after all.

A man may be very near, almost, and yet no more than but almost Christians.

How about you?

Can you hear the cry of Apostle Paul?

Acts 26:29, 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.”