

Paul before King Agrippa**Acts 26:4–23**

After being in custody of the Roman government in Caesarea for over two years, and giving his testimony several times to defend himself against his Jewish accusers, he now stands before King Agrippa. King Agrippa was quite knowledgeable about Jewish ways and customs because he had married a Jewish woman as his second wife. Paul begins with his family background and how he was trained as a Pharisee and had zealously attempted to stamp out those who believed in Jesus Christ, the Little Flock of believers.

Paul's life history (Verses 4–23)

Paul chronicles his ministry call from the Lord. Unlike today, Paul had a specific, direct, verbal, and visual call from the Lord. Almost everyone in so-called full-time Christian ministry today speaks of a call they received from the Lord to serve Him. Most applications for pastors or missionaries ask the question about when the applicant had received their call from the Lord. What they fail to understand is that all believers have the “call” through Scripture to serve the Lord full-time. Our call into full-time Christian ministry came at the point of our salvation. Those who claim a special call from the Lord also fail to explain why their call is so different from biblical calls, as exemplified by the Apostle Paul. Those who speak of a special calling given to them by the Lord seem to hold themselves out as being just a little bit better than the rest of us who are only “called” to support them in their ministry.

Paul told King Agrippa of the personal change he experienced beginning while on the road to Damascus when Jesus Christ appeared to him personally. The Person he so hated confronted him and made it clear that He was Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, and was the same God Paul thought he was serving by stamping out Jews who worshiped Jesus. Paul explained how he was made a minister and a witness to the Gentiles, to Kings, and to unbelieving Israel. The message Paul had been given as God's steward could open people's eyes so that they would turn from darkness to light, and from Satan's domain to God's.

Those who believed by putting their faith in Jesus Christ would receive forgiveness of sins and also an inheritance. Ephesians 1:11–14 makes it clear that this inheritance is eternal life. Members of the Church, the Body of Christ, are sealed with the Holy Spirit who guarantees that we have this inheritance right now (Romans 8:16–17). This is in contrast to the Little Flock of believers who are waiting for their inheritance (1 Peter 1:4; Hebrews 9:15). The overcomers who were saved by the Gospel of the Kingdom will inherit what is coming to them when Christ comes back to earth to set up His kingdom (Revelation 21:7). It will be the meek, the Little Flock of believers who humbled themselves before God, who will inherit the earth when Christ returns at the Second Coming (Matthew 5:5; 19:29).

Paul continues to fill in King Agrippa about the results of his commission from God. Since he is following Jesus Christ, preaching Him to the Gentiles and acknowledging Him as Israel's Messiah, the Jews wanted him dead. In spite of this, God was watching over him, keeping him alive so that he would be able to continue to be a testimony to all, both small and great. He is also not contradicting anything written in Scripture, including what Moses had written and all the prophets. He was preaching Christ's suffering, His death, and resurrection in order to bring light to the world. In other words, Paul's defense shows that he has not violated anything that the Jews hold dear. This

account made Festus and Agrippa wonder why Paul was being held in chains, and why he needed to stand before Caesar.

Doing works appropriate for repentance (verse 20)

Many who do not understand Paul and his message will misinterpret Acts 26:20 by gaining their understanding of it from Matthew 3:8. Paul stated that his message to the Gentiles was that they should repent and turn to God and then do works meet for repentance. This sounds like the same thing John told the leaders of Israel as they came out to see what he was doing. They were told that they needed to bear fruit. Was Paul teaching the same thing as John?

At best, people use this to prove that Paul was preaching a Kingdom gospel. At worst, it is used to show that we need to do works to be saved. Both are completely wrong. Paul makes it very clear that works are not involved in our salvation (Romans 4:5; 3:28; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8–9; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:4–5). When comparing two different passages with seemingly two different interpretations, it is always wise to use the clear passages to interpret the more obscure passage. In this case, when Paul says to repent and do works meet for repentance, we know by the above verses that he could not mean we are saved by doing works. It is so clearly stated in other books that he penned that we can discard ideas that contradict his straightforward teaching.

The idea that Paul was preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom during the book of Acts is also popular. There are actually at least two flavors of this idea. The first is that he was just continuing to preach the gospel that was already being preached by Peter. The second was that he was preaching a gospel that offered the Kingdom to both Jews and Gentiles. This is often seen as an extension of Peter's ministry to Israel, but expanded upon to include the Gentiles through Paul. It is understood by some that Paul was given the Gospel of the Grace of God (the Mystery) sometime after the events recorded in the book of Acts.

To understand what Paul was saying in Acts 26:20, we first need to define the word *repentance*. It does not mean to turn from your sins, or to stop sinning, as is commonly preached. It merely means to change your mind. Turning from your sins could be the result of repenting, but is not what repenting is. When Peter told Israel to repent in Acts 3:19, they were being told to change their minds about who Jesus Christ was. They needed to come to the understanding that He was their Messiah. When this is applied to Paul saying he was given the commission to tell the Gentiles to repent and turn to God, all he was saying is that they had to change their minds about who Jesus Christ was, and then they were to turn to Him. In other words, repentance is not about changing behavior, but about changing your mind. Once your mind changes, so too will your behavior. The gospel message in any age is about repenting and turning. It cannot be proven that Paul was preaching a kingdom message in Acts just because the word repent was used. All too often, those who are desperate to prove their points will cherry pick verses while wearing blinders. Every verse must be interpreted in terms of the whole Bible, rightly (not incorrectly) divided.

Once a person is saved, then they should be doing works that come out of their changed mind. Israel was to prove their faith by doing the works of the Law (James 2:14–17). Those who did not produce fruit were not connected to the vine (Christ) and were not truly saved (John 15:1–8). Members of the Body of Christ never need to add works to our salvation (Romans 3:28), however, we are to bear fruit unto God (Romans 7:4; Colossians 1:10). Although we are to bear fruit, it is possible to be saved in this dispensation and not bear fruit but still be saved (Romans 6:4; Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 2:6). This is not true for Israel under the prophetic program.

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