

## Acts 25-26

Christ has commissioned us to tell the world about Him. Any time that any person is confronted with the truth about Jesus, it demands a personal response. People respond in any number of ways. Two of the most common are to respond very negatively or try to avoid a response altogether. This section of the book of Acts allows us to closely examine these common responses to the gospel.

- I. The Christianity that Paul Preached 26:20
- II. The Response of Festus: “Madness!” 26:24
- III. The Response of Agrippa: Almost Persuaded 26:28

Message: The Gospel Requires a Personal Response

- I. The Christianity that Paul Preached 26:20

- The **Personal Response** that Paul encouraged is that we should:

- A. **Repent** Change our minds about sin to the point that it changes our lives.

- B. **Turn to God** Only God can forgive us of past sins and give us hearts that desire to do His will from this point forward.

- C. **Do Works Befitting Repentance** When we understand God's will we need to do it. The Holy Spirit empowers us to do God's will.

- This matches Christ's description of Paul's mission in **26:18**.

**Message: The Gospel Requires a Personal Response**

- II. The Response of Festus: “Madness!” 26:24

- A. *much learning* He couldn't attribute Paul's faith to stupidity or ignorance; it was well known and probably obvious that Paul was a scholar. He concludes that it is Paul's “learning” that is putting him over the edge.

- B. Possibly the story of Paul's vision was too much for Festus. Some people have trouble believing in anything supernatural or outside their own experience.

- C. Paul was no doubt zealous and this may have been more than Festus could take. Many believe it's crazy to be passionate about your faith.

- D. **Examples:**

- i. Husbands think their wives have lost it – or vice-versa.
- ii. Parents think their children have been tricked into joining a cult.

**Possible Reasons:**

- They equate passion with over-the-top fanaticism: “Next thing you know, he's going to hole himself up in a survivalist compound in the mountains somewhere and wait for the apocalypse.”
- They equate passion with militant fundamentalism. “You remind me of those crazies who bomb abortion clinics.”
  - iii. Those whose values are more self-centered can have trouble with those who devote their lives to a cause with so little visible reward.
- Why do you spend so much time in those religious activities of yours?
- Why would you give money away to charity like that?
- Why would you give up a nice home or good career to go on the mission field?

**Message: The Gospel Requires a Personal Response**  
**Festus responded by saying Paul was crazy.**

*1 Corinthians 2:14 (NKJV) But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

*1 Corinthians 1:18-25 (NKJV) <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>For it is written:*

*“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
 And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”*

*<sup>20</sup>Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? <sup>21</sup>For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup>For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, <sup>24</sup>but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

**Message: The Gospel Requires a Personal Response**

III. The Response of Agrippa: Almost Persuaded 26:28

A. Agrippa II was of the Herod family. Though Edomite (Idumean) in heritage, he was, at least nominally, a practicing Jew. An appeal to Scripture should have carried some weight with him.

B. He never displayed any violent reactions against Christians, so it is unlikely he sided with Paul's accusers.

C. *“His private life seems to have been anything but creditable. The worst of reports were current at home, as well as in Rome, concerning his relations with his beautiful but profligate sister Berenice, ... (“Ant.” xx. 7, § 3; Juvenal, “Satires,” vi. 153).  
 (JewishEncyclopedia.com)*

- What kind of people are “almost persuaded” to become Christians?
  - i. People with a loose familiarity with the Bible or raised in nominal Christianity – similar to Agrippa's background in Judaism.
  - ii. People who find the evidence for Christianity compelling and, like Agrippa, do not or cannot directly oppose it, but never take that final step of faith in trusting Christ.
  - iii. People who sense the guilt of their sin or some deep, unsatisfied spiritual need. This may have played a part in Agrippa's inner thoughts and feelings, since his personal life was suspicious.
  
- What keeps them from finally becoming Christians?
  - iv. Love of sin—either the love of sin in general, or some particular sin which they are not willing to abandon.
    - a) The commandments of Christianity deter more people than the creeds.
    - b) The idea of changing their behavior keeps more people from Jesus than changing their beliefs.
  - v. Love of a prominent social position, the pride of rank and power.
    - a) Paul, as part of the Jewish religious elite, gave up much and endured much to follow Jesus.
    - b) Agrippa, observing Paul the prisoner, would have immediately seen that as a king he had huge costs to count.
  - vi. Conversely, the fear of shame, persecution, or contempt, if they become Christians. The prospect of identifying himself as a Christian might have been more frightening than Agrippa could handle. What would his peers among the Roman political elite think or say?
    - a) Of course, they were already talking about him, thanks to the strange relationship he had with his sister.
  
- Agrippa, and all like him who are “almost persuaded” to become Christians are in a place of special danger.
  - vii. There is no certainty that the “almost Christian” will ever be saved.
  - viii. Consider the special tragedy of someone who sees what they ought to do and yet does not do it. They are sadly responsible for their own demise.
    - Not stepping back from the cliff you know is there and then falling off.
    - Not getting out of the way when the train is blowing its whistle.
  - ix. Many people come to this crisis-point only once and refuse to respond.

- There is no guarantee that the deep and real sense of crisis will ever return again; very often it does not.
  - Agrippa was probably never closer to Jesus than the day he heard Paul preach.
  - The result is that the “almost Christian” loses his or her feeling of anxiety or instability.
  - What happens next? They go through life with a false sense of security and eventually die in their sins.
- Agrippa was still in power when the Romans sacked Jerusalem. He sided with the Romans and afterward he was rewarded by them. Many of his own people, the Idumeans, died because they sided with the Jews over which he ruled.
  - Bernice became the mistress of Titus the conquering general, who later succeeded his father Vespasian as emperor. At that point Titus broke up with her, because she was unpopular in Rome. Nothing more is known of her.
  - In about the year 100 AD Agrippa died. Being childless, this ended the Herodian dynasty and any remaining identity for the Edomites or Idumeans from which the Herods were descended. Links:
    - [Agrippa II on JewishEncyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1111-agrippa-ii)
    - [Berenice on Wikipedia.com](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berenice)
    - [Idumea on JewishEncyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1111-idumea)
  - May God in His grace prevent us from being satisfied with being “almost persuaded” to be Christians.
  - We should be warned by the fact that Agrippa paused and never again came under conviction.
  - We should resolve, with God's help, to forsake anything that keeps us from being a complete believer.

As Paul said in 26:29:

*Acts 26:29 (NKJV) 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.”*

- Also see Albert Barnes' *Notes on the New Testament*, from which much of this was adapted.