

## A ROYAL BLUNDER

### I. Acts 26:1-32

**A. We have been talking about regeneration, being born again, born from above, born of the Spirit, about being made alive in Christ, about conversion.** **Charles Spurgeon** said: "The new creation is as much and entirely the work of God as the old creation." **J. Alec Motyer**: "Just as in the beginning God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light' so, at the moment He appointed for our new birth, He said, 'Let there be life' and there was life." **Erroll Hulse**: "Spiritual life is the consequence of spiritual quickening. The baby cries because it is born; it is not born because it cries."

**B. Today's message takes us to Caesarea where the Apostle Paul's been held a prisoner for 2+ years. He has stood trial before the Jewish Council, before governors Felix and Festus, and today before King Agrippa II. Agrippa II was the grandson of Herod the Great, the same one who killed all the infants around Bethlehem while trying to snuff out Jesus. His father, Herod-Agrippa I, had James, John's brother, executed. Agrippa II enters our story with Bernice-the queen, his sister, and his lover. (You can Google the word, *incestuous*.) Agrippa II was deemed an authority on Jewish life & customs, including the Law & Prophets. He'd been appointed by Rome as the curator of the temple, rendering him charge to appoint high priests and oversight of the temple treasury. Today he'll hear the eternal life message of the Gospel rendered by Paul. But how will he respond?**

**C. And who is Saul who became Paul? Saul was from Tarsus but moved to Jerusalem at an early age. He was a devout Jew (Pharisee) a Roman citizen, and multi-lingual. He was well educated, studied under Gamaliel, a prize student. Admired by the Jewish leaders, he was a rising star, perhaps a future high priest, a man who could mix it up well with the Romans. He was zealous and cheered Stephen's stoning, persecuted *The Way* (men & women alike) dividing families and approving death sentences for many. **Acts 22:4** are his own words: "*I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison...*" **So with authority from Jewish leaders, Saul went to Damascus to arrest more believers. On his way he meets Jesus and everything changes. Saul's conversion accounts are also found in Acts 9 & Acts 22.****

**D. Acts 26:1-32 (ESV)** takes us before King Agrippa II where Paul will not only defend himself but preach the Gospel. Luke covers it as vividly as a courtroom reporter.

**1) V1-5:** **1** So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: **2** "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, **3** especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. **4** "My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. **5** They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. **(The Pharisees were a very religious sect among the Jews. They memorized the OT and sought to adhere to all the Law of Moses as well as their traditions which often were apart from the Law. They believed in the coming Messiah but rejected Jesus as Him. Unlike the Sadducees, they believed in a resurrection. Pharisees were self-righteous, prideful, and gave Jesus much grief.)**

**2) V6-7:** **6** And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, **7** to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! **(Paul's hope was in a Deliverer greater than Moses because the prophets all pointed to Him. By Moses' decree, the blood of the lamb was sprinkled on doorposts and the angel of death passed over. But that only foreshadowed a Greater Deliverer, the One who was Himself the Lamb of God, who would die and rise again, who would deliver us from slavery to Satan, sin, and death. Paul is being tried for proclaiming the Messiah has come!)**

**3) V8-14:** **8** Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? **9** "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. **10** And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. **11** And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities. **12** "In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. **13** At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. **14** And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' **("Kick against the goads" is a proverbial adage, like saying, "You're banging your head against the wall." It's futile, in other words, to oppose the all-powerful sovereign God who knows best, is always right, and always gets His way!)**

**4) V15-18:** **15** And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. **16** But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen Me and to those in which I will appear to you, **17** delivering you from your

people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you **18** 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.' (Paul's sharing his testimony but using Jesus' very own words to proclaim the Gospel to the king!)

**5) V19-26: 19** "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, **20** but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. **21** For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. **22** To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: **23** that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, He would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles." **24** And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." **25** But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. **26** For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. (Remember, Agrippa's an expert on Jewish history, customs, religious practices, and Scripture. Now watch Paul turn the tables...)

**6) V27-29: 27** King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." **28** And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" **29** And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains." (Agrippa feels the heat. The Word has penetrated. There's conviction. His evasive reply reveals he's in the crosshairs. But how will he respond?)

**7) V30-32: 30** Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. **31** And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment." **32** And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." (How very sad!)

**E. King Agrippa II was ushered by Paul right up to the fork in the road where one road runs wide and away from God, and the other, a narrow path, runs straight to God's heart. But instead of letting his eyes be opened, Agrippa blinked. Jesus said, "I am the door," and Paul walked Agrippa to that Door, put his hand on the nob, but he would not turn it and cross the threshold. I doubt this king could ever shake the message he had just heard. Instead of a dream come true, Agrippa chose a never ending nightmare. This is a royal blunder if there ever was one!**

**F. Christ took hold of me 50 years ago. Since that time I've been blessed to share the same Good News that won me over. For 31 years I've done so as a pastor. But the saddest experiences of my life have been those who've made the same royal blunder as Agrippa. Some of you are at that same fork. Some of you've had your hand placed on the same nob. Some of you may never be given another chance. Perhaps fear grips you. Perhaps you've counted the cost and are afraid to let go. Perhaps you're enjoying life too much as it is. My plea is that you take the narrow path, turn the nob, cross the threshold! I urge you to sell all you have and buy the field where the True Treasure's lies!**

**G. John 1:9-13 (AMP) is the Truth I urge you to take hold of and make your own: 9** There it was—the true Light [the genuine, perfect, steadfast Light] which, coming into the world, enlightens everyone. **10** He (Christ) was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. **11** He came to that which was His own [that which belonged to Him—His world, His creation, His possession], and those who were His own [people—the Jewish nation] did not receive and welcome Him. **12** But to as many as did receive and welcome Him, He gave the right [the authority, the privilege] to become children of God, that is, to those who believe in (adhere to, trust in, and rely on) His name-- **13** who were born, not of blood [natural conception], nor of the will of the flesh [physical impulse], nor of the will of man [that of a natural father], but of God [that is, a divine and supernatural birth—they are born of God—spiritually transformed, renewed, sanctified]. (Receive and welcome Him now!)

\* Close with Prayer...

## [Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff](#)

### [Acts 26:1-32 \(ESV\)](#)

**1** So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: **2** "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, **3** especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. **4** "My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. **5** They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. **6** And now I stand here on trial

because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, 7 to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! 8 Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? 9 "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. 11 And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities. 12 "In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. 13 At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. 14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' 15 And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen Me and to those in which I will appear to you, 17 delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you 18 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.' 19 "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. 21 For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. 22 To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: 23 that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, He would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles." 24 And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." 25 But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. 26 For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." 28 And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" 29 And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains." 30 Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. 31 And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment." 32 And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

#### **John 1:9-13 (AMP)**

9 There it was—the true Light [the genuine, perfect, steadfast Light] which, coming into the world, enlightens everyone. 10 He (Christ) was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. 11 He came to that which was His own [that which belonged to Him--His world, His creation, His possession], and those who were His own [people--the Jewish nation] did not receive and welcome Him. 12 But to as many as did receive and welcome Him, He gave the right [the authority, the privilege] to become children of God, that is, to those who believe in (adhere to, trust in, and rely on) His name-- 13 who were born, not of blood [natural conception], nor of the will of the flesh [physical impulse], nor of the will of man [that of a natural father], but of God [that is, a divine and supernatural birth--they are born of God--spiritually transformed, renewed, sanctified].

#### **Quote by Charles H. Spurgeon**

"The new creation is as much and entirely the work of God as the old creation."

#### **Quote by J.A. Motyer**

"Just as in the beginning 'God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light' so, at the moment He appointed for our new birth, He said, 'Let there be life' and there was life."

#### **Quote by Erroll Hulse**

"Spiritual life is the consequence of spiritual quickening. The baby cries because it is born; it is not born because it cries."

#### **Film Clips & Article Links**

**I Want You - John Piper**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xc5Qm8KkFX0>

**C.S. Lewis on His Conversion**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXbq3aVNIgq>

## Saul's Conversion Story (With Artistic Renderings)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bN4tqrCgWwc>

## "The Hound of Heaven" A Modern Adaptation (w/song, "I Finally See" by Maggie Ritchie)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXlgz4aBKt8>

### Bonus Stuff

#### Acts 9:1-31 (ESV)

**1** But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest **2** and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. **3** Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. **4** And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" **5** And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. **6** But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." **7** The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. **8** Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. **9** And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. **10** Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." **11** And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, **12** and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." **13** But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to Your saints at Jerusalem. **14** And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." **15** But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine to carry My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. **16** For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name." **17** So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." **18** And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; **19** and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. **20** And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." **21** And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" **22** But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. **23** When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, **24** but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, **25** but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. **26** And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. **27** But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. **28** So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. **29** And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. **30** And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. **31** So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

#### Acts 22:1-22 (ESV)

**1** "Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you." **2** And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said: **3** "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. **4** I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, **5** as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished. **6** "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. **7** And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' **8** And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' **9** Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. **10** And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.' **11** And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus. **12** "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, **13** came to me, and standing by me said to me,

'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. **14** And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know His will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from His mouth; **15** for you will be a witness for Him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. **16** And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name.' **17** "When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance **18** and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.' **19** And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in You. **20** And when the blood of Stephen Your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.' **21** And He said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

#### **Quote by Martin Luther**

"The most damnable and pernicious heresy that has every plagued the mind of man is the idea that somehow he could make himself good enough to deserve to live with an all-holy God."

#### **Quote by A.W. Pink**

"Nothing but a miracle of grace can lead to the saving of any sinner. Oh, my reader, be not deceived on this vital matter; to mortify the lusts of the flesh, to be crucified unto the world, to overcome the Devil, to die daily unto sin and live unto righteousness, to be meek and lowly in heart, trustful and obedient, pious and patient, faithful and uncompromising, loving and gentle; in a word, to be a Christian, to be Christ-like, is a task far, far beyond the poor resources of fallen human nature."

#### **Quote by R.C. Sproul**

"It is easy to get faith into our heads. It is hard to get faith into our bloodstream."

#### **Quote by A.A. Hodge**

"Whatever man may do after regeneration, the first quickening of the dead must originate with God."

#### **Quote by John Piper**

"Minimizing the importance of transformed feelings makes Christian conversion less supernatural and less radical. It is humanly manageable to make decisions of the will for Christ. No supernatural power is required to pray prayers, sign cards, walk aisles, or even stop sleeping around. Those are good. They just don't prove that anything spiritual has happened. Christian conversion, on the other hand, is a supernatural, radical thing. The heart is changed. And the evidence of it is not just new decisions, but new affections, new feelings."

#### **Quote by Charles H. Spurgeon**

"If you are renewed by grace, and were to meet your old self, I am sure you would be very anxious to get out of his company."

#### **A Little Girl's Pearls**

From *The Intimacy Cover-Up* by Karlyn Hillerstrom & P. Roger Hillerstrom  
(Retold by David S. Johndrow, Fire & Grace)

A Father loved his daughter with all his heart, and took her on outings, just the two of them. He bought her little gifts, but she especially loved her string of "princess" pearls. Of course they were simply plastic, but she loved them so. Her father saw how much she loved them, and decided to buy her real pearls-- for she so treasured the plastic ones he was certain that she would take care of them. One evening he looked at her while she lay in bed waiting for her goodnight kiss. In his pocket was a string of beautiful pearls in a velvet jewelry box. But when he asked her for her plastic pearls, she said emphatically "No, I love my pearls, Daddy! But you can have my purple pony." Her father kissed her good night.

He returned the next night and asked her the same question. She was confused, "I love my pearls Daddy, but you can have my dolly." Each night her father would come into the room to kiss her good night, and ask her if she was ready to let him have her treasured plastic pearls.

One night he came in to say good night, and she was sitting up in the bed crying. In her hand she clutched her beloved plastic pearls. "Here Daddy, you can have them." He placed them in his pocket, and caressed her face as she sobbed. Finally, from his pocket he withdrew that little velvet box, and with delight, he watched her open it. "Oh Daddy, they are beautiful!"

He lovingly looked at her and said, "I have been longing to give you these."



## **King Agrippa II and Bernice**

Article Excerpt by Rev. P.G. Mathew

King Agrippa II was the great-grandson of Herod the Great, who had attempted to kill infant Jesus and who did kill many baby boys in Judea. Agrippa's father was King Agrippa I, who beheaded the apostle James and arrested Peter in an attempt to kill him also. The Lord was angry with King Agrippa I and he was killed in the city of Caesarea in A.D. 44, as we read in Acts 12.

King Agrippa I had three children: Agrippa II and his two sisters, Queen Bernice and Drusilla, who became the wife of Felix. When Agrippa I died, the seventeen-year-old Agrippa II was in Rome, being trained in the court of Emperor Claudius. Around A.D. 48 Agrippa II was made king of a small territory in the Lebanon Valley which had belonged to his uncle, Herod of Chalcis. In A.D. 53, in exchange for this small kingdom, Agrippa II was given the territories of Iturea, Tracoonitis, and Abilene. Later he was given the territory of Perea and certain cities of Galilee as well.

Herod Agrippa II was considered an authority on Jewish affairs, Jewish scriptures, and Jewish conflicts. Eventually Rome appointed him as the curator of the temple, which meant he had authority to appoint high priests and was also in charge of the temple treasury.

Agrippa II did not have any children, and when he met Paul, this king was living in an incestuous relationship with his sister Bernice, who was a year younger than him. At thirteen Bernice had married her uncle, Herod of Chalcis. She lived with him for seven years, bearing two children to him. But when she was twenty years old, her husband died and she returned to live with her brother, Agrippa II. Bernice was a pervert who lived with many people. After living with Agrippa, she became the mistress of Titus, the son of Vespasian. During the Jewish revolt, King Agrippa and Queen Bernice sided with Rome and, in fact, celebrated Rome's victory over the Jewish people.

Agrippa's capital was Caesarea Philippi, which he renamed Neronias in honor of Caesar Nero. Agrippa II called himself "Great King, pious Friend of Caesar and Friend of Rome." The last of the Herods, he died in A.D. 100 at the age of 73.

- Pastor P.G. Mathew holds three graduate degrees in theology from Central and Westminster theological seminaries and is the founder and senior minister of Grace Valley Christian Center. To read more, go to:  
[http://www.gracevalley.org/sermon\\_trans/2000/Pauls\\_Trial\\_Before\\_King\\_Agrippa.html](http://www.gracevalley.org/sermon_trans/2000/Pauls_Trial_Before_King_Agrippa.html)

## **Paul the Pharisee**

By R.C. Sproul

<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/paul-the-pharisee/>

*"For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it" (Gal. 1:13).*

- [Galatians 1:11-14](#)

Luke's account of Paul's conversion in Acts 9 marks a decisive turning point in the history of the early church. In a few short chapters, Paul will begin to dominate Luke's record of the growth of Christianity. This is partly explained by the fact that Luke was Paul's travel companion on at least two of his missionary journeys. But Luke is not merely promoting a friend. Paul's work in spreading the Gospel to the Gentiles, his unrivaled intellect, and his total commitment to the cause of Christ made him the central figure in the expansion of Christianity. To learn more about this great man of God, we will spend the next three days examining his life and thought.

We know that Paul was born in Tarsus, a city in Asia Minor, sometime around a.d. 5 and that he held Roman citizenship ([Acts 22:28](#)). He was given an outstanding education; it has been said that by the time he was 21 that he had earned the equivalent of two advanced academic degrees. He was an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin and was raised a Pharisee. He studied in the Jerusalem school of Rabbi Gamaliel, one of the leading Jewish thinkers of his time.

The Pharisees were a sect that had arisen during the Intertestamental Period in response to growing secularization in Israel. They were most zealous for the law of God. Paul himself acknowledged that he was great among the Pharisees in his zeal for the group's goals, so much so that he hated any departure from the Pharisaical code. When he became aware of the group called the Way, the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, he unleashed his fury against them. Departing from the counsel of his mentor, Gamaliel ([Acts 5:35-39](#)), he went after the Christians with passion, going house to house to find them and jailing many men and women ([Acts 8:3](#)), voting for their executions, and compelling them to blaspheme ([Acts 26:10-11](#)). He was even prepared to pursue them beyond Jerusalem.

But while God was making use of Paul's persecution of the saints in Jerusalem to impel the believers outward to the world, He would not permit Paul to pursue His people elsewhere. Besides, Paul had received gifts from God that were designed to be used for holy purposes. So it was that Paul took the road to Damascus and came face to face with Jesus.

### ***Coram Deo***

Paul's conversion is as miraculous as any in Scripture or throughout Christian history. Yours may not have been nearly as dramatic, but it represented just as radical a change of direction for you. Take time to reflect on the direction of your life before and after your conversion. Be prepared to tell others what Christ did for you.

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### **Who were the Pharisees?**

By S. Michael Houdmann

Question: "*Who were the Pharisees?*"

Answer: The Pharisees were an influential religious sect within Judaism in the time of Christ and the early church. They were known for their emphasis on personal piety (the word Pharisee comes from a Hebrew word meaning "separated"), their acceptance of oral tradition in addition to the written Law, and their teaching that all Jews should observe all 600-plus laws in the Torah, including the rituals concerning ceremonial purification.

The Pharisees were mostly middle-class businessmen and leaders of the synagogues. Though they were a minority in the [Sanhedrin](#) and held a minority number of positions as priests, they seemed to control the decision-making of the Sanhedrin because they had popular support among the people.

Among the Pharisees were two schools of thought, based on the teachings of two rabbis, Shammai and Hillel. Shammai called for a strict, unbending interpretation of the Law on almost every issue, but Hillel taught a looser, more liberal application. Followers of Shammai fostered a hatred for anything Roman, including taxation—Jews who served as tax collectors were *persona non grata*. The Shammaites wanted to outlaw all communication and commerce between Jews and Gentiles. The Hillelites took a more gracious approach and opposed such extreme exclusiveness. Eventually, the two schools within Pharisaism grew so hostile to each other that they refused to worship together.

The Pharisees accepted the written Word as inspired by God. At the time of Christ's earthly ministry, this would have been what we now call the Old Testament. Unfortunately, the Pharisees gave equal authority to oral tradition, saying the traditions went all the way back to Moses. Evolving over the centuries, the Pharisaic traditions had the effect of adding to God's Word, which is forbidden ([Deuteronomy 4:2](#)). The Gospels abound with examples of the Pharisees treating their traditions as equal to God's Word ([Matthew 9:14](#); [15:1–9](#); [23:5](#); [23:16](#), [23](#); [Luke 11:42](#)). Jesus applied the condemnation of [Isaiah 29:13](#) to the Pharisees, saying, "Their teachings are merely human rules" ([Mark 7:7](#)).

The Pharisees taught the following doctrines:

1. God controls all things, but decisions made by individuals also affect life's course.
2. There will be a resurrection of the dead ([Acts 23:6](#)).
3. There is an afterlife, with appropriate reward and punishment on an individual basis. The Messiah will set up His kingdom on earth.
4. The spiritual realm, including the existence of angels and demons, is real ([Acts 23:8](#)).

Many of the Pharisees' doctrines put them at odds with the Sadducees; however, the two groups managed to set aside their differences on one occasion—the trial of Jesus Christ. To accomplish the demise of Jesus, the Sadducees and Pharisees united ([Mark 14:53](#); [15:1](#); [John 11:48–50](#)).

The Pharisees were responsible for the compilation of the [Mishnah](#), an important document with reference to the continuation of Judaism beyond the destruction of the temple. Rabbinical Judaism and modern-day synagogues owe their existence to the Pharisees' work.

In the Gospels, the Pharisees are often presented as hypocritical and proud opponents of Jesus. The Lord stated it bluntly: “They do not practice what they preach” ([Matthew 23:3](#)). As a general rule, the Pharisees were self-righteousness and smug in their delusion that they were pleasing to God because they kept the Law—or parts of it, at least. As Jesus pointed out to them, however scrupulous they were in following the finer points of ritualism, they failed to measure up to God’s standard of holiness: “You have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness” (verse 23).

Of course, not every Pharisee was opposed to Jesus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee who rightly considered Jesus “a teacher who has come from God” and honestly sought answers from Him ([John 3:1–2](#)). Nicodemus later defended Jesus before the Sanhedrin ([John 7:50–51](#)) and was on hand at Jesus’ crucifixion to help bury the Lord’s body ([John 19:39](#)). Some of the early Christians were Pharisees, as well ([Acts 15:5](#)).

The [apostle Paul](#) was trained as a Pharisee, and his credentials in that group were sterling ([Acts 26:5](#)). Paul called himself “a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless” ([Philippians 3:5–6](#)). But Paul found that his performance of the Law could not produce true righteousness. After he placed his trust in Christ’s finished work on the cross, he desired to “be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith” (verse 9). No one, not even the strictest Pharisee, is justified by keeping the Law ([Galatians 3:11](#)).

Recommended Resource: [Bible Answers for Almost all Your Questions by Elmer Towns](#)

- While he is not the author of every article on [GotQuestions.org](#), for citation purposes, you may reference our CEO, S. Michael Houdmann.