

PAUL CHEERED IN PRISON BY HIS LORD
NO. 3153

A SERMON
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*“And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain,
fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down,
and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.
And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said,
Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.
And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together,
and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.
And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.”*
Acts 23:10-13

FROM the midnight whisper of the Lord to Paul we may draw forth sweet encouragement. Those of the Lord's children who have been engaged in His work and are called to suffer in it, have here a special word of consolation.

Paul had been in a great tumult and had been roughly rescued from the wrath of the people by the chief captain, who saw that otherwise he would be pulled in pieces. Paul was like the rest of us, made of flesh and blood, and therefore liable to be cast down. He had kept himself calm at first, but still, the strong excitement of the day had no doubt operated upon his mind, and when he was lying in prison all alone, thinking upon the perils that surrounded him, he needed good cheer—and he received it. The bravest man may find his spirit sinking after the battle and so perhaps it was with the apostle.

I. In this passage, we note the good cheer that came to Paul in the dungeon. This consisted, first, in HIS MASTER'S PRESENCE, “the Lord stood by him.”

If all else forsook him, Jesus was company enough. If all others despised him, the smile of Jesus was patronage enough. If the good cause seemed in danger—in the presence of his Master victory was sure. The Lord, who had stood *for* him at the cross, now stood *by* him in the prison. The Lord, who had called to him out of heaven, who had washed him in His blood, who had commissioned him to be His servant, who had sustained him in labors and trials oft, now visited him in his solitary cell.

It was a dungeon, but the Lord was there. It was dark, but the glory of the Lord lit it up with heaven's own splendor. Better to be in a jail with the Lord than to be in heaven without Him. The harps above could make no heavenly place without Jesus—and Jesus being there, the clanking fetters and the cold pavement of the stony cell could not suggest a sorrow.

“The Lord stood by him.” This shall be said of each one who diligently serves God. Dear friend, if you are a worker for the Lord Jesus, depend upon it, He will not desert you. If, in the course of your endeavors, you are brought into sadness and depression, you shall then find it sweetly true that the Lord stands by you.

Did *you* ever forsake a friend who was spending his strength for you? If you have done so, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, but I think I hear you say indignantly, “No, I have always been faithful to my faithful friend.” Do not, therefore, suspect your Lord of treating you ungenerously, for He is faithful and true. All your former helpers may desert you—Sadducees, Pharisees, and scribes may all set themselves to oppose you—but with the Lord at your right hand you shall not be moved. Cheer up, desponding brother,

*“God is near thee, therefore cheer thee,
Sad soul!”*

*He'll defend thee when around thee
Billows roll."*

II. The next comfort for Paul was the reflection that THE LORD'S STANDING BY HIM PROVED THAT HE KNEW WHERE HE WAS AND WAS AWARE OF HIS CONDITION.

The Lord had not lost sight of Paul because he was shut up in the common jail. One is reminded of the Quaker who came to see John Bunyan in prison and said to him, "Friend, the Lord sent me to you and I have been seeking you in half the prisons in England." "Nay, verily," said John, "that cannot be. For if the Lord had sent thee to me, thou wouldst have come here at once, for He knows I have been here for years."

God has not a single jewel laid by and forgotten. "Thou seest me" is a great consolation to one who delights himself in the Lord. Many and diverse are the prisons of affliction in which the Lord's servants are shut up. One may be lying in the prison of pain, chained by the leg or by the hand, through accident or disease. Or perhaps he is shut up in the narrow cell of poverty, or in the dark room of bereavement, or in the dungeon of mental depression, but the Lord knows in what ward His servant is shut up and He will not leave him to pine away forgotten, "as a dead man out of mind."

The Lord stood by Paul despite doors and locks. He asked no warden's leave to enter, nor did He stir bolt or bar, but there He was—the Companion of His humble servant. The Lord can visit His chosen when nobody else could be allowed to do so, because of contagion, or from fear of exciting the fevered brain. If we come into such a peculiar position that no earthly friend knows our experience—none having been tempted as we are—yet the Lord Jesus can enter into our special trial and sympathize in our peculiar grief. Jesus can stand side by side with us, for He has been afflicted in all our afflictions.

What is more, that part of our circumstances which we do not ourselves know, Jesus knows, and in these He stands by us, for Paul was not aware of the danger to which he was exposed, he did not know that certain Jews, to the number of forty, had banded themselves together to kill him. But He who was his shield and his exceeding great reward had heard the cruel oath and arranged to disappoint the bloodthirsty ones.

Dear friend, the Lord knows all about your troubles before they come to you—He anticipates them by His tender foresight. Before Satan can draw the bow, the Preserver of men will put His beloved beyond the reach of the arrow. Before the weapon is forged in the furnace and fashioned on the anvil, He knows how to provide us with armor of proof which shall burn the edge of the sword and break the point of the spear.

Let us therefore sing with holy boldness, "In the time of trouble he shall hide me in His pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock." How safe we are, for JEHOVAH has said, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn."

With joy, therefore, let us draw water out of these two wells of salvation—the Lord is present with us and He knows us altogether. Putting the two thoughts together, we may hear Him say to our inmost souls,

*"I, the Lord, am with thee,
Be thou not afraid!
I will help and strengthen,
Be thou not dismayed!
Yea, I will uphold thee
With my own right hand;
Thou art called and chosen
In my sight to stand.
Onward then, and fear not,
Children of the day!"*

*For His Word shall never,
Never pass away.”*

III. When the Lord Jesus came to Paul, He gave him a third reason for courage. He said, “Be of good cheer, Paul: for thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem. **THERE WAS MUCH COMFORT IN THIS ASSURANCE THAT HIS WORK WAS ACCEPTED OF HIS MASTER.**

We dare not look for much joy in anything that we have done, for our poor works are all imperfect. And yet the Lord sometimes gives His servants honey in the carcasses of lions which they have themselves slain, by pouring into their souls a sweet sense of having walked in integrity before Him. Before the great day of reward, the Lord whispers into the ear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Or He says openly before all men, “She hath done what she could.”

Herein is good cheer, for if the Lord accepts, it is a small matter if men condemn. The Lord says to Paul, “Thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem.” The apostle had done so, but he was too humble to console himself with that fact till his Lord gave him leave to do so by acknowledging the brave deed.

Perhaps, dear friend, you also shall be made to remember that you have borne witness for Jesus and that your life has not been altogether in vain. It may be that your conscience makes you more familiar with your faults than with your services, and you rather sigh than sing as you look back upon your Christian career. Yet your loving Lord covers all your failures and commends you for what His grace has enabled you to do in the way of witness-bearing. It must be sweet to you to hear Him say, “I know thy works; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and have not denied my name.”

Be faithful to your Lord, dear friend, if you are now in prosperity, for thus you will be laying up a store of cheering memories for years to come. To look back upon a well-spent life will not cause an atom of legal boasting to an experienced believer—but it will justly create much holy rejoicing. Paul was able to rejoice that he had not run in vain, neither labored in vain, and happy are we if we can do the same.

If it be right for us to chasten our conscience on account of omissions, it must be lawful ground for thankful joy that our heart condemns us not, for then have we confidence towards God. [See sermon #3152, *The Lower Courts*] If any of us should fall into straitened circumstances, it will be a comfort to be able to say, “When I was rich, I freely used my wealth for my Lord.” If we are ill, it will be a satisfaction to remember that, when we were in health, we used our strength for Jesus.

These are reflections which give light in the shade and make music at midnight. It is not out of our own reflections that the joy arises, but out of the witness of the Holy Spirit that the Lord is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith and labor of love.

IV. A fourth comfort remained for Paul in the words, “As thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.” The Lord would have us take comfort from **THE PROSPECT OF FUTURE SERVICE AND USEFULNESS.**

We are not done with yet—and thrown aside as vessels in which the Lord has no more pleasure. This is the chief point of comfort in our Lord’s word to the apostle. Be of good courage, *there is more for you to do*, Paul. They cannot kill you at Jerusalem, for you must bear witness also at Rome.

Brace yourself up, O weary, working brother, for your day’s work is not yet over and your sun cannot go down till, like Joshua, you have finished your conflict with Amalek. The old saying is true, “You are immortal till your work is done.” Possibly not one half of your work is even begun and therefore you will rise again from sickness, you will soar above depression, and you will do more for the Lord than ever. It will yet be said to you, as to the angel of the church in Thyatira, “I know thy works, and the last to be more than the first.”

Wycliffe could not die though the malicious monks favored him with their best wishes in that direction. “Nay,” said the Reformer, “I shall not die, but live, and declare all the evil deeds of the friars.” The sight of rogues to be exposed aroused his flickering life and revived its flame. Disease could not carry off Melancthon because he had eminent service yet to do, side by side with Luther.

I have admired the way in which the great Reformer dragged his coadjutor back to life by assuring him that the great work needed him and he must recover. “He devoutly prayed, ‘We implore Thee, O Lord our God, we cast all our burdens on Thee; *and will cry till Thou hearest us*, pleading all the promises which can be found in the Holy Scriptures respecting Thy hearing prayer, so that *Thou must indeed hear us* to preserve at all future periods our entire confidence in Thine own promises.’ After this, he seized hold of Melancthon’s hand and said, ‘Be of good courage, Philip, YOU SHALL NOT DIE.’”

He prayed his friend back from the mouth of the grave and sent him on his way comforted with the truthful prediction that he had yet to bear more testimony for the truth. Surely there is no restorative from sickness and no insurance for continued life like the confidence that our task is not done—and our race is not ended.

Godly Whitefield, when smitten with a dangerous illness, rose again to renew his seraphic activities after his death had become matter of daily expectation. It is said, in connection with this event, that shortly after his recovery, a poor coloured woman insisted on having an interview with him. On being admitted, she sat down upon the ground, and looking earnestly into his face, said to him in broken language, “Massa, you just go to heaven’s gate, but Jesus Christ said, ‘Get you down; you must not come here yet, but go first and call some more poor negroes.’” And who would not be willing to tarry here to win more poor Negroes for Jesus? Even the bliss of heaven may be cheerfully postponed for such a gain.

Come, then, ailing and desponding one, there is no use in lying down in despair, for a life of usefulness is still in reserve for you. Up, Elijah, and no more ask to die, for God has further errands for His servant. Neither the lion nor the bear can kill you, O David, for you have yet to fight a giant and cut off his head!

Be not fearful, O Daniel, of the rage of Babylon’s drunken king, for you are yet to outlive the rage of hungry lions! Courage, O you mistrustful spirit—you have only run with the footmen as of yet—you shall yet contend with horses and prove more than a match for them, wherefore lift up the hands that hang down!

“Thou must stand before Caesar.” A divine decree ordains for you greater and more trying service than as yet you have seen. A future awaits you and no power on the earth or under the earth can rob you of it—therefore be of good cheer.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

ACTS 25-26 AND 1 JOHN 4

Acts 25:1. *Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.*

Porcius Festus had been appointed governor in the place of Felix, who had left Paul a prisoner so as to please the Jews, though he would have been willing enough to release him if Paul or his friends would have given him a sufficiently heavy bribe. He had trembled as Paul had “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,” but his conscience had not been so quickened as to make him act justly towards the apostle.

Yet his unrighteous conduct was made to serve the Lord’s purpose, which was that Paul should testify before one earthly ruler after another until he should ultimately appear before the cruel Nero himself at Rome. Paul was at Caesarea, but he was not at once brought before Festus. And when the governor went up to Jerusalem, the apostle’s enemies renewed their plotting against him

2-3. *Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, and desired favor against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.*

They had been foiled in their previous attempt to assassinate the apostle, but their malice led them to try again to put him to death in that dastardly fashion.

4-5. *But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.*

Whether Festus suspected their real reason for being so anxious for him to send for Paul, we cannot tell, but at any rate, their scheme was once more a failure.

6-7. *And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea, and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought. And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.*

It was easy for them to lay many and grievous complaints against Paul, yet it was not only difficult but impossible for them to prove their charge against the apostle.

8-9. *While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended anything at all. But Festus, willing to do the Jew's pleasure,*

In that respect he was just like his predecessor, Felix. No doubt he took into account the number and position of Paul's accusers, and thought it would be the wiser policy to side with them rather than with the prisoner, and therefore "Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure,"

9-11. *Answered Paul, and said, Will you go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I am an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar.*

As a freeborn Roman citizen, he had the right of appeal to the emperor, and that right he exercised. It may be that he also realized that this was the way in which the Lord's prophecy should be fulfilled, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."

12. *Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.*

The die was cast—there was no need to argue the matter any further.

13-16. *And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: about whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.*

Festus must have felt profound contempt for the chief priests and elders of the Jews who clamored for Paul's death even before he had been tried, and he gave them plainly to them that this was not the Roman way if it was the Jewish method of dealing with accused persons.

17-19. *Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. [See sermon #2016, Jesus Affirmed to be Alive]*

Festus may have supposed that they would have accused Paul of plotting against Rome or of some other political crime. He would have thought such matters of far greater importance than the "certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive." Paul could make that affirmation with the utmost confidence, for Christ had appeared to him on the road to Damascus, proving without doubt that, though once dead, He was again alive.

20-22. *And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar. Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.*

So Paul's witness-bearing was made to spread still further. It is scarcely possible to conceive of any other circumstances in which the Gospel could have been made known to such an audience as the apostle was, on the morrow, to have the opportunity of addressing.

23. *And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.*

It was such a congregation as Paul was only too glad to address, and the Gospel could not have had a nobler or worthier advocate—yet we do not read of anyone who were present yielding up himself or herself to the Lord Jesus Christ.

24. *And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.*

Festus took care that the Jews would not be able to forget that they had demanded the death of a man who had not even been put upon his trial.

25-27. *But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. Of whom I have nothing certain to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and especially before thee, O King Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.*

The governor talked like a man of sense, and he even went so far as to say that the prisoner before him “had committed nothing worthy of death.”

Acts 26:1. *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:*

I do not suppose Agrippa imagined that Paul would take all the liberty that he did, but inasmuch as the king had said to him, “Thou art permitted to speak for thyself,” Paul, who even when he was permitted to speak for himself, did not forget that he was the servant of God, and used that liberty as the servant of God, and so he took the opportunity to seek to impress the truth upon the conscience and heart of the king. Thus Paul answered for himself:

2-3. *I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.*

It is always well to try to be on good terms with the person whom you wish to impress with the truth of the Gospel. Paul therefore did not begin bluntly, as some foolish people would have done, but he addressed the king most courteously and respectfully. I think I see the little man, as he doubtless was, Paulus—the man with feeble eyes and with no great bodily presence to command attention—yet bravely stretching out his hand, and like a preacher, thus addressing Herod Agrippa:

4-7. *My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.*

The Jews still had hope concerning the promise of the Messiah and all the promises in God's covenant with them. And Paul says that for the sake of this hope he had been led to do that which had now brought him as a prisoner before the king.

Notice that the fiction concerning “the ten lost tribes” has no foundation in Scripture. There are no lost tribes, several of them are mentioned by name in the New Testament. The apostle James writes “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,” and here Paul speaks of them as “our twelve tribes.” The Jews whom we have among us at this day belong to all of the twelve tribes, as they will tell you if you ask them.

There are no lost tribes yet to be discovered, neither are we, as a nation, those ten tribes that are supposed to have been lost. We are Gentiles and not Jews. The apostle speaks here concerning the hope of the whole nation of the Jews. We who have believed in Jesus are the inheritors of that grand hope, as we have understood it aright and have realized that it is fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only-begotten Son of God.

8. *Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?* [See sermon #1067, The Resurrection Credible]

That great fact of the resurrection of Christ is the cornerstone of the temple of truth, the keystone of the arch of the Gospel. The apostles made this truth very prominent in their preaching and here Paul began his address with it. It was the great difficulty of the Christian religion at that period, so Paul went straight to it at once.

9-10. *I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem:*

For Paul was the kind of man who, if he thought he ought to do anything, he always did it. Even in his unregenerate state, his conscience, unenlightened as it was, swayed him. But now, with an enlightened conscience, he looked back upon that part of his life with deep regret, and he did not fail to acknowledge and mourn the wrong that he had ignorantly done to the Lord Jesus Christ and His faithful followers.

10-11. *And many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.*

Paul was a whole-hearted man. Whatever he did, he did intensely, so that, when he did wrong, he did it with a kind of madness. Such a furious hatred of Jesus of Nazareth was upon him that all Judaea was not large enough for the indulgence of his persecuting malice against the saints, so he “persecuted them even unto strange cities.”

12-14. *Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* [See sermon #202, The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus] *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

He was like a stubborn ox kicking against the goads—the harder he kicked, the more the sharp points of the goads pricked him.

15-18. *And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.* [See sermon #1774, God’s Work Upon Minister and Convert]

Part of this address was spoken to Paul by Ananias when he came to open his eyes, hence some have thought that Paul here mixed up what was said to him by Christ and what was said by Ananias, yet all the while recognizing it as being virtually all one message from Christ—but I think not so. I believe that Paul would have us understand that the Lord Jesus Christ actually said to him, on the road to Damascus,

all that we have recorded here—and that when Ananias came to him, he, without having heard what the Lord had said to Paul, said the same thing to him—and this would be a kind of sign and token to the apostle that what was said to him was really a message from God.

How often this happens under every true Gospel ministry! The very thing that you were talking about while on your way to the service will be spoken to you by God’s servant in the house of prayer. That which you were reading before you came here may be the very subject selected for our present consideration, for God has a wondrous way of making one of His calls tally with another, so that the two meeting without any collusion on our part shall confirm and establish one another—and the more deeply impress the heart of the hearer.

19-23. *Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.*

Paul stuck to the Scriptures and to the Gospel revealed in them—and was not a teller-out of his own thoughts, and ideas, and notions, but he was a herald proclaiming what his King bade him say and telling out what the grace of his Master made him only too glad to say.

24-25. *And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.*

He had been “mad” once, as he had just confessed, but he had recovered from that madness. Now how calmly he replies to the taunt of Festus—there is nothing of anger or resentment about his dignified answer, “I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.”

26-27. *For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa,*

Now the apostle comes to close grips with the king:

27-28. *Believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.* [See sermon #871, To Those Who Are “Almost persuaded”]

A great deal of effort has been put forth to prove that Agrippa did not say anything of the kind, but that he was only laughing at Paul when he ironically said, “Are you going to make me a Christian so easily as this?” If so, the reply of Paul was singularly inappropriate, but taking Agrippa’s words to be as they appear here, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian,” Paul’s answer can be well understood.

29. *And Paul said, I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.*

And in so speaking he adroitly hinted how unfairly he was chained before his judges, and yet how he wished ill to none, but only wished good to all.

30-31. *And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: and when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.*

He had impressed Agrippa most favorably and it is quite clear that the king was not jesting with him—he was at least convinced that Paul had done “nothing worthy of death or of bonds.”

32. *Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.*

But it was not God’s purpose that Paul should be set at liberty—he must go to Rome, and must there, before the emperor himself, bear witness which he could not bear as a free man, but which the emperor must hear when Paul was brought before him as a prisoner who had appealed to him—and must therefore be heard in person.

1 John 4:1. *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*

This is an injunction of which there is great need in the present day, when so many accept anything that they hear from a “priest” or from a pastor without searching the Scriptures to see whether what they hear is in accordance with the inspired Word.

2. *Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.*

Some say that Jesus Christ was not God, others say that He was not man, while some talk as if everything about Him was a mystery. But they who are truly sent by God declare plainly that Jesus Christ did literally come in the flesh—and such teachers are “of God.”

3. *And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.*

That was the form that antichrist took in John’s day. It is constantly taking different forms, but it is always anti-Christ—against Christ.

4. *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them:*

If you have a childlike spirit, if God has made you teachable as little children, and His Spirit dwells within you, you will not be overcome by these false prophets, but you will overcome them.

4. *Because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*

They may dupe the world, but they shall not dupe you. If it were possible, they would deceive the very elect, but that is not possible.

5. *They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.*

They are the world’s prophets—they preach the world’s doctrines, they flatter the world, and the world likes that—so “the world heareth them.”

6. *We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us, he that is not of God heareth us not. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.*

They who accept the apostolic teaching prove that they are “of God.” There are some nowadays who say, “We accept the teaching of the Gospels, but we will have nothing to do with the apostles and their epistles”—thus they clearly show that they are not of God, for John says, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “He that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth us not.”

7. *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.*

He who has the spirit of love within him “is born of God,” “for love is of God.” He who constantly seeks the good of others, he whose heart beats with love to those who are not within the narrow confines of his own ribs, he whose love goes forth to God and His people, and to the sons of men in general—this is the man who “is born of God, and knoweth God.”

8. *He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.*

He may be very orthodox, but if he does not love, he does not know God. And if he does not know God, what does he know? There is such a thing as holding the truth in bitterness, but those who know God, and are truly his children, hold the truth in love.

9. *In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him.*

That was the highest possible proof of love that even God could give us.

10-11. *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.* [See sermons #1707, Herein is Love”; #2447, Same Title and #2394, Love’s Climax]

As God “so loved us” when there was nothing lovable about us, and so loved us as to give His only-begotten Son to save us, “we ought also to love one another.”

12-14. *No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.* [See sermon #2383, Seeing and Testifying]

John could testify as an eyewitness to the sufferings and death of Christ, for he stood at the foot of the cross, and saw the Savior die, and he had aforetime laid his head upon his Master's breast. He knew that Christ was real flesh and blood, and he knew that Christ really died, so he could truly say, "We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world."

15-16. *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*

This is a deep Book. The words are very simple and plain—mainly monosyllables, yet who among us can ever fathom the depth of this epistle? May we fathom it so far as to plunge into its wondrous depths!

17-18. *Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.*

Questioning, mistrust, unbelief, doubt—all these die when we come truly and heartily to love our Lord. And in proportion as our love to Him burns like a flame of fire, it burns up all this wood, hay, and stubble of trembling, slavish fear.

19. *We love him, because he first loved us.* [See sermons #229, Love; #1008, Love's Logic and #2730, The Secret of Love to God]

We never should have loved Him unless He had "first loved us." His love to us begat our love to Him.

20. *If man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar:*

John is very emphatic in his condemnation of such a man as that. Some of the most tender-hearted men in the world are the most blunt in their mode of speaking. And some of the most fawning flatterers are the most cruel in their hearts. We love John all the better because he writes so plainly, "If a man say I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar:"

20. *For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*

Why, sir, if you could see God, it is clear that you would not love Him. If you talk about your love to Him whom you have not seen, it is utterly false if you do not love men like yourself whom you have seen.

21. *And this commandment have we from him,*

That is, from the Lord Jesus, who again and again gave this commandment to His disciples,

21. *That he who loveth God love his brother also.*

O lovers of God, prove the reality of your affection for Him by the genuineness of your love to your fellow men!

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.