

Almost A Christian

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(A Non-Conversion)

Acts 26:19-29

In Acts 26:19-29 we have the record of a non-conversion. What does it mean to be “almost” a Christian? Is it possible for a person to be a believer in Christ and not be a Christian?

When the Apostle Paul was addressing King Agrippa, he declared in verse 27, “...*I know that thou believest.*” The king responded in verse 28, “...*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*”

Was King Agrippa a believer? Was he a Christian?

Was King Agrippa a believer?

When Paul said in verse 27, “*King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?*”, he simply was saying, “Do you believe in Jesus Christ as foretold by the prophets?”. There is no doubt about it! In verses 22 through 24 of this text, Paul certifies the prophets and Moses as proclaimers of four things:

- Of Christ’s coming.
- His death on the cross.
- His resurrection from the dead.
- And His glorious gospel of salvation.

Then he specifically and pointedly asked in that 27th verse, “...*believest thou the prophets?*” Which was to say, “Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God? Do you believe that He died for your sins? Do you believe in His resurrection from the dead?”

There can be no doubt about the answer! The Bible records Paul’s own conclusion in these words, “...*I know that thou believest.*”

Really, was King Agrippa a believer? Yes! Was he a Christian? No! There is no doubt that King Agrippa was a believer. From his firm declaration of Jesus Christ, His crucifixion and resurrection, as foretold by the “*prophets and Moses*”, Paul was convinced that the king was a believer. In fact, when he asked King Agrippa, “...*believest thou the prophets?*”, he was evidently sure of the answer.

Then, with the next stroke of the pen, Luke records Paul's own affirmative answer, "...*I know that thou believest.*"

Faith and obedience

From this record of non-conversion we see the necessity of faith expressing itself in action — in obedience to God's will.

There is a theory, taught by many religious people today, that there is nothing a man can do to be saved — that salvation in Christ is by faith alone — that is all you need to do to be saved is just believe on the Lord — right then and there, the very moment you believe, without any further acts of obedience — your salvation is guaranteed.

But, my friends, what a fatal delusion is being spread throughout the religious world!

King Agrippa knew that theory of salvation was false. The Apostle Paul knew that such a presumptuous conclusion was false. He knew that King Agrippa was a believer, and he also knew that he was not a Christian.

Paul was attempting to persuade the king to be a Christian, just as he was a Christian. Paul told of his own conversion to King Agrippa earlier in this same chapter.

Although Luke (who wrote the book of Acts) does not reveal all of the details of Paul's conversion in this particular account, one can be sure that the Apostle Paul left nothing out as to how he became a Christian.

In verse 25, Paul declared that he spoke forth "...*words of truth and soberness.*" Luke gave a more detailed account of Paul's conversion in the 9th and 22nd chapters of the book of Acts.

One thing one must not forget, Saul (as Paul was called before his conversion) was informed by Jesus that he would be told what he must do to be saved (Acts 9:6). Jesus told Saul to go to Ananias and he would tell him what he must do to be saved. And he was not told to believe only.

If believing was all that was necessary, Paul already did that when he stood before Christ and acknowledged Him. Paul was told by Ananias in Acts 22:16, "*And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*"

If Paul related the case of his own conversion to King Agrippa in his effort to persuade the king to become a Christian — and he did, as I already pointed out — did he not speak the "*truth*" to the king about his conversion to Christ? The Bible says he did in verse 25.

Therefore, did he not inform the king that he (Paul) was a penitent believer who was baptized into Christ to wash away his sins, as Ananias, the gospel preacher, had commanded him? Jesus, our Lord, gave those imperatives, so Paul would not have left any of it out.

Here is Luke's account of Paul's conversion as recorded in Acts 22:3-16: Luke 22:3-16, "*Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude. Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat. And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready. And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover. And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*"

We do not know for certain just what part of Saul's conversion was a "stumbling block" to King Agrippa. We do know that he was a believer. The Bible says so; Paul knew he believed.

We know that King Agrippa was not baptized into Christ to wash away his sins, like Paul had done. Paul said in verse 29 of the 26th chapter of Acts, "...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."

Paul wanted the king to follow his example. He wanted the king to do something that he had not yet done. Who knows, perhaps the Lord's command to be baptized for remission of sins was the dividing line between King Agrippa's becoming a Christian and not becoming a Christian. It certainly has been the terminal point for many millions who refused to become Christians.

One fellow worker years ago told me after several days of discussion, "I know the Bible says you must be baptized to be saved, but I think the Lord will make an exception in my case."

On what basis can one make such a statement?

I hear so many religious people say that all we need to do is believe in Jesus, love God, love our fellow man, and then we will be saved; that “love fulfills the law” (Rom. 13:10). That scripture does not mean that love is the end of the law, but that true love causes one to fulfill the rest of the law.

Matt. 7:21, “*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*” These were believers, but not doers of God’s law.

Luke 6:46, “*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*” They fail to understand the “*love fulfills the law*” scripture.

We must not overlook the great, fundamental truth revealed by the inspired Apostle John in 1 John 5:3, “*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.*”

My friends, how could any person say that he really loves the Lord and truly believes in Him, but refuses to do what He says?

It would be well to remember the attitude of the Pharisees concerning the baptism of John the Baptist in Luke 7:30, “*But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.*”

King Agrippa, who was a “believer”, rejected the Lord as His Saviour by refusing to obey the Lord’s command to be baptized — to “wash away” his sins — like Paul did.

As far as we know, King Agrippa left this life unprepared to meet the King of kings when the Judgment Day comes.

Almost a Christian is not a Christian!

There is a theory taught by many religious leaders that there just isn’t anything a person can do to be saved. Nothing he can do! Just wait for the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, then his heart is sanctified, set apart from sin, and he becomes a Christian.

No doubt, you have heard men on the radio say, “Just lay your hand on the radio; or, just hold up your hands in the audience; just believe on the Lord right now; accept Him as your personal Saviour; nothing else; nothing more; you are now saved; now you are converted to Christ; now you are a born-again Christian.”

My friends, do not be deceived! You will never read anything like that in the Bible in your lifetime. It just isn’t there.

King Agrippa was no exception, and you may be sure that no one today is an exception, either.

Although people may be sincere, such actions and reactions are non-conversions — just as much non-conversion as the case of King Agrippa.

In such cases, I'm afraid that many people are “converted” to the preacher, not to Christ.

Shall we persuade God or men?

Men are to be persuaded to become Christians by the preaching of the gospel. Many think all they have to do is believe and then the Holy Spirit will enter the heart and cleanse it. Is that what Paul taught King Agrippa? Paul first taught King Agrippa, who then replied, “...*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*”

The power of persuasion was through Paul, the preacher of the gospel; not by the Holy Spirit directly from heaven. Paul had declared to the Romans in Rom. 1:16, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*”

There are those who try to persuade God to accept people as His children, whether or not they have been born again through obedience to the Lord’s word. “Oh, God, save all those with their hands on the radio...”

But Peter answered how men are born again in 1 Pet. 1:22-23: 1 Pet. 1:22-23, “*Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*”

These are the people who listened, repented, and were baptized for the remission of their sins, as revealed in Acts 2:38, 1 Pet. 1:1, and Acts 2:9-11.

Again, I remind you, that King Agrippa said the power affecting his heart came from the message of Paul (verse 27), not by direct intervention of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, there are preachers who plead with God; beg God, “Save these people who wait before you!” But, my friends, you have never read anything like that in the Bible.

Was King Agrippa a Christian? No, he was not.

Almost a Christian is not a Christian. Paul was a believer and a Christian. King Agrippa was a believer and **not** a Christian.

There can be no doubt that Paul was a Christian. And the Bible leaves no doubt that King Agrippa was **not** a Christ. The king himself said that he was not a Christian. "Almost" a Christian was the king's admission. Paul said he knew that King Agrippa was a believer. Also, he knew that he was not a Christian.

Dear friends, a person cannot be a Christian unless he is a believer, but every believer is not a Christian.

Was Paul a Christian?

The Apostle Paul attempted to persuade the king to become a Christian, just as he himself was a Christian. He concluded in Acts 26:29, "...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."

Question to Paul: "What are you?" The answer is given in unmistakable terms, firmly and clearly, he said, "*I am a Christian!*".

Remember, as a Christian, Paul was determined to wear and to honor no name but Christ's name. The apostle warned members of the church in Corinth about sectarian and party names; denominational names. Hear the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 1:12-13, "*Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?*"

The conclusions from the inspired statements of the apostles are obvious. Christ, not Apollos, was crucified for you; you were baptized into the name of Christ, and not Paul's; Christ is not divided. Therefore, you should wear and honor the name of Christ only.

Paul was an apostle; he was a great man of God, but no one should wear his name.

Peter was an apostle; one to whom the Lord had given the keys of the kingdom (Matt. 16:18-19), which were used on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2, when the first gospel sermon was preached by Peter. 3000 souls were baptized into Christ for the remission of sins.) Still, it would be wrong for them to honor the name of Peter.

Paul's God-directed conclusions were: Christ was crucified for you; therefore, wear the name of Christ only.

People say, "What's in a name? The name is unimportant!"

Paul indicated the name was important because Christ died for the church. He gave His blood to purchase the church. Acts 20:28, "*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*"

Peter stated in Acts 4:10-12, "*Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*"

Those of you who were baptized were baptized in the name of Christ; therefore, wear the name of Christ, and not that of Peter, Paul, Apollos, Luther, anyone else, or method, or doctrine, or institution of human origin, but the name of Christ only.

Christ is not divided; therefore, wear only His name.

Paul was a Christian. He attempted to persuade King Agrippa to become a Christian, but he failed. King Agrippa said, "...*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*" Almost is but to fail; almost is but lost!

How significant are these divine words from 1 Pet. 4:16, "*Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*"

In New Testament times, those truly converted to the Lord were called Christians. Acts 11:26, "*And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*"

Are you a Christian? Or are you almost a Christian?

How a person become a Christian? The following are the steps necessary to make that happen:

- **Faith.** Heb. 11:6, "*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*" When I was in high school (I was about 17 years old), a neighbor boy my same age told me he was an atheist. Since I had been baptized, I took the opportunity to talk to him about the scriptures. He told me that he could see that living the life of a

Christian was good, but he wasn't sure if he believed there was a God. But to be on the safe side, maybe he should go to church, and when he dies and stands before God (if there is a God) on the day of Judgment (if there is a Judgment), maybe if God sees that he has gone to church and lived a good life that God would send him to heaven (if there is a heaven), and not to hell (if there is a hell). I told him, "It doesn't work that way. You have to believe in Him with all your heart or you cannot please Him."

- **Repentance.** Acts 2:38, "*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*" Acts 11:18, "... *Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*" If while you were sleeping, you heard a noise in the other room, and you think to yourself, "There's a burglar in my house!" So you reach for your cell phone, and as quietly as you can, you call the police, tell them there is a burglar in your house, and you give them your address. Soon, you heard them arrive and capture the thief. He yells, "I'm sorry; I'm sorry!" What is he sorry for? He is sorry that he got caught; not that he stole. In true repentance the thief would be sorry that he ever stole and wants to change his life so that he would never steal again. That is true repentance. It is a change of mind that brings about a change of action. That is what we have to do before we can become a Christian.
- **Confession.** Rom. 10:9-10, "*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" What do we confess? That we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Note that in the above scriptures that faith (believing), repentance, and confession are "**UNTO**" righteousness, life, or salvation. "Unto" means toward something; not that one has already attained.

- **Baptism.** It is baptism where righteousness, life, and salvation are attained. Jesus, himself, was baptized to fulfill all righteousness, "*But John forbid him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.*"

And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matt. 3:14-17). Jesus was baptized because God said it was the right thing to do. Did you see how pleased God was about Jesus being baptized? Jesus also said “*it becometh **us** to fulfil all righteousness.*” We are baptized because it fulfills His righteousness, not because it is of our righteousness.

In fact, if we are not baptized, we are still in our sins. “*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*” (Acts 2:38). Peter, what did you say the reason of baptism is? “*for the remission of sins*”. Why would anyone want to leave out the step that removes our sins?

Jesus commanded that to reach salvation we must be baptized. “*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth **and** is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*” (Mark 16:15-16).

Ananias told Saul (before he was rename Paul) the very same thing, “*And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*” (Acts 22:16). Baptism is a requirement given by God.

Baptism is called a burial. “*Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*” (Rom. 6:4). Our old man is to be dead to us. “*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*” (Rom. 6:3-6). Baptism is God’s blueprint for applying the blood of Christ in our lives by baptism. We are free from our old sins only when we are baptized.

This doesn't mean "sprinkling. The scripture above says baptism is a burial. We don't take a dead body to the cemetery and sprinkle a little dirt over it; we bury the body.

If you have not become a Christian, won't you consider it today?

