

Sunday School Lesson

Lesson IV. October 22, 1916. PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE AGRIPPA. Golden Text.—Ac. 26. Commit vs. 28, 29. (1) Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: (24) And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. (25) But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. (26) 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. (27) King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. (28) Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. (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. (30) And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: (31) And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth great influence. His sermon accomplished little in them. They were wedded to their infamy and put from them the offer of eternal life on this, as far we know, only occasion upon which they ever heard it. But Paul was preaching a sermon that would go on echoing through the world for more than eighteen centuries, and that would result in the conversion of count less thousands in centuries to come. Paul thought only of the audience before him, but God had in mind an audience in comparison with which that which Paul saw faded into utter insignificance. It was not to Agrippa or Bernice that the Holy Ghost was speaking through Paul that day, but to you and to me. Agrippa said to Paul: "Thou art permitted to speak." Agrippa will regret that permission before the hour is over, for Paul, permitted to speak, will shoot an arrow right into the royal heart. It is not easy to tell what may happen when a man of God is permitted to speak. Agrippa told Paul that he was permitted to speak for himself, but he seized upon the opportunity to speak not for himself, but for his Master. How many of us, when we have an opportunity of speaking for ourselves, speak for the Master instead of for ourselves? Note how graphic the account is, we are told the very gesture Paul made, "he stretched forth the hand." He was pleading not really for his own life, as he appeared to be, but for the lives of his hearers, that they might repent, believe, be saved and obtain eternal life through that risen Lord Jesus whom he now declares unto them and whose resurrection he proves (vs. 8-20). Paul's wonderful address (vs. 2, 23) is omitted from the lesson but should be very carefully studied and deeply pondered. It is one of the most masterly arguments in all history.

II. "In a little thou persuadest me to make a Christian," 24-28. "Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art mad." Festus was getting excited. The Spirit of God was gripping his heart. Festus was unwilling to yield, so he called the preacher a crank. The devil has cheated many a man out of eternal life in that way. He has also cheated many a Christian out of a larger life in the same way. We must expect to be called crazy, if we get our message from God. That is what they

called Jesus (Jno. 8: 48, 52). Many a preacher has been frightened by this treatment and has turned away into saying the nice thing that Festus will applaud. Poor fools! "But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus." Note Paul's unflinching courage. Many a man is loyal to the truth and is called "mad" for it, and then goes to scolding his traducers, but in Paul, unflinching fidelity went hand in hand with unflinching courage. Let us learn a lesson. Many through the centuries have taken up Festus' accusation that Paul was mad. They say his supposed sight of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus was an illusion; they are forced to say this or to admit that Jesus rose, ascended, and now lives in the glory and that therefore the whole Christian system is true. Some put it that Paul suffered a sunstroke and in his delirium fancied he saw Jesus, which amounts to the same thing. But the recorded facts do not fit at all the madness, or delirium or illusion theory. Paul was not declaring the illusions of a mad man, or the deliriums of sunstroke, but "speaking forth words of truth and soberness (rather sound sense)." He was declaring indisputable facts. Happy the man who accepts his testimony. Paul now turns directly to Agrippa with a tremendous, startling and soul-awakening question: "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?" It was a master stroke. It is a good question to put to the unconverted Jew today. It is a good question to put, also, to unconverted Gentiles, and then show them how wonderfully the prophecies have been fulfilled. The argument from prophecy is unanswerable. Many of the "higher critics" are trying to break its force, but they have failed utterly. They have succeeded in turning the eyes of some foolish people from the contents of the prophecies to questions of authorship but if any one will study the prophecies themselves, instead of wasting time in the endless jangle of words about their authorship and sources, he will soon find that God is the real author, that the position of the destructive critics can not be true, and that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." Agrippa's answer is full of suggestion: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." While the Authorized Version is not a literal translation of the original, it comes far nearer to being a literal translation than the Revised Version. The literal translation is: "In a little thou persuadest me to make a Christian." It is said that Agrippa said this in sarcasm. Perhaps so; but like many another, the attempted jest reveals the real state of his heart. Agrippa was deeply moved. He saw the cost of further consideration of the claims of Christ. He was unwilling to pay the cost. He tries to put his convictions aside, first by jest, then by a turning to other things with foreign composure (vs. 30-32). Thus, Agrippa's soul was lost. And Agrippa was within one step of eternal life.

III. "I would to God, that thou wert both in little and in great end as I am." 29-32. Paul took Agrippa's word seriously. He was wise in doing so. He said "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether (rather, might become both in little and in great) such as I am." How Paul's heart longed that Agrippa and every one in the company might become in everything, in little things and great things, thorough believers in and utterly surrendered servants to his Lord Jesus. There was one thing in which he had no desire that they should be like him, he would have them escape the chains and bondage through which they were responsible for his. What a glimpse we get here into his loving heart. He was willing and glad to suffer anything for Christ Jesus his Lord (2 Cor. 12, 10), but he would spare every one else. Paul felt in spite of his bonds that his position was higher and better than that of the king to whom he spoke. And it was. This final, pathetic, noble plea of Paul failed. The king would listen no longer. Pulling himself together he tried to appear judicial and magnanimous. He spoke a feeble word for Paul, but put aside Festus' and perished. It is not patronizing a preacher, but accepting the Saviour, Jesus, whom the preacher presents that says, "This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar." Yes, but he would never have reached Rome, and the Pretorian guard.

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Cedes Favor Matrimony. (Berkeley Correspondence to The San Francisco Bulletin.) More college women marry than do others, although they are more deliberate about it, is the conclusion of A. L. Price, a university statistician, who has just finished cataloguing graduates of the University of California.

According to Price's statistics, compiled from the vital statistics of 10,249 alumni, 58 per cent of all women over 15 years old are married. Women graduates of the university beat that average by six-tenths of 1 per cent.

Price sees a tendency for college women to wed men out of the university. Three times as many women graduates have married men who do not hold degrees as have married university graduates.

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