

The Spirit Of The Gospel

Introduction. This sermon is going to study the spirit of the gospel as portrayed in the life of the apostle Paul. As a setting for the discourse, let us allow our minds to revert back through the centuries to the wonderful scene in the royal palace of Caesarea, where Paul is defending himself before Agrippa.

One can note the wonderful display of courage and consecration to the cause of Christ. This defense has been pronounced one of the most masterful pleas in the annals of oratory and law. As a masterpiece of homiletic literature, it is unexcelled.

I. ***Paul's Youth (vss. 1-8)***

A. Vss. 1-3.

1. Paul opened his defense in a pleasant, scholarly way, calculated to win for him respectful attention and earnest consideration of what he has to say.
2. He appeals directly to Agrippa's knowledge of Judaism, to support his defense. This appeal opened up the way for a clinching argument by putting the king on his side in the very beginning.

B. Vss. 4-5.

1. He calls up his manner of living from early youth and he proves his previous orthodoxy by showing that he has been brought up a "Pharisee of the strictest sect."
2. The entire Jewish nation having been familiar with his early life, he shows that he can prove by any good Jew that he was brought up in accordance with the strict principles of Judaism. This fact should lend weight to his argument.

C. Vss. 6-8.

1. Paul is called into question because he believes in the hope of all orthodox Jews: the coming of the Messiah and the resurrection. The coming of the Messiah was promised all the way back to Abraham (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:8).
2. The law contained many wonderful types of the gospel (Hebrews 10:1). Moses and the prophets pointed forward to the Messiah in all of their writings. Paul, having been a strict Pharisee (Philippians 3:5), believed in His coming.

II. ***Paul's Argument (vss. 9-21)***

A. Vss. 9-11.

1. Paul had consented to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58). He had persecuted Christians, chasing them even to foreign cities. He had wrought havoc with the church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-4).

2. As a member of the Sanhedrin, he had given his voice against them. Yet he had been perfectly sincere in trying to crush this new religion. He was following his conscience all the time; yet he says himself that, while doing so, he was the "chief" of sinners (1 Timothy 1:12-15).

B. Vss. 12-18.

1. Some had heard that the new religion had been established in Damascus. So he had obtained letters from the chief priests at Jerusalem authorizing him to seize the Christians at Damascus and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.
2. Saul heard a voice after seeing the dazzling light. He recognized the divine personality and inquired who was talking to him. On being informed that it was really Jesus of Nazareth, he no longer doubted the resurrection. He at once, in a humble, contrite manner, inquired, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). This is the true spirit of the gospel.
3. Why did Jesus appear to him in person? To make him a minister and a witness to the Gentiles. In other words, to make him an apostle. Our Savior did not appear to Saul to convert him; neither did He tell him what to do to be saved. He sent him to Ananias to find out what to do, because God had ordained that men shall find out what to do to be saved from the preaching of the gospel (Acts 9:6-9; Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:21). He was converted by obedience to the gospel (Acts 9:18; 22:16; Hebrews 5:9).

C. Vss. 19-21.

1. Paul was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. No matter what his past life had been, now that he had seen Christ, he was ready to forsake everything for Him.
2. He did not consult his preacher, his teachers of the law, his relatives nor anyone else about the matter. He began at once to preach Christ and Him crucified. He was ready to do anything the Lord commanded. When duty pointed the way, he was ready to follow it.
3. The spirit of the gospel is obedience -- subjection to the will of Christ -- putting Him above all earthly matters. We hear people quibble about being baptized. It is a positive command of our Lord and should be obeyed without question (Acts 2:38). Our attitude should be in all matters: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"
4. Paul had preached to the Jews at Damascus, Jerusalem and throughout all Judea. He had even crossed the Hellespont and established Gentile churches in Macedonia and Greece. He taught the complete abrogation of the Jewish law (Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:13-15). The Jews hated Paul because the new religion

spread over all the Mediterranean world as a result of his untiring work.

III. ***Paul's Appeal (vss. 22-29)***

A. Vss. 22-23.

1. "Small" were those in humble positions in life (the poor, the ignorant and the obscure), while the "great" were the rich and noble, the kings, princes and governors.
2. Paul proclaimed that the Old Testament's perfect fulfillment was found in Jesus. The Old Testament predicted the forgiveness of sins and the final resurrection. The long cherished Jewish hope of resurrection had now taken a new turn because of the resurrection of Jesus. The Messiah's resurrection was the beginning of the resurrection itself (1 Corinthians 15:20).

B. Vss. 24-29.

1. With the courtesy and respect due to rulers, Paul calmly rejects the conclusion to which Festus has come.
 - a) "Sober" was one of the favorite terms used by the Greek ethical writers. It had a higher meaning than "temperance," and was used to express the perfect harmony of impulse and reason. The word was the exact opposite of the term "madness" which Festus had just spoken.
 - b) "Know" means knowledge gained by proximity to what was known. By personal experience he could testify to the truthfulness of Paul's presentation of the Old Testament and the truths about Jesus.
2. With Paul, it was only logical that if one believed the prophets, they would believe in the One of whom they spoke. There was no logical alternative. Paul's appeal had placed Agrippa in an uncomfortable position.
 - a) As a representative of Rome and a colleague of Festus in the administration of government, he did not wish to appear to Festus to share Paul's insanity; and therefore, it would have been unpleasant to agree with Paul and admit that he believed the prophets.
 - b) He knew what Paul's next question would be. It would have something to do with believing in Jesus. If he would have denied that he believed the prophets it would have seriously impaired his influence with the Jews.
3. The response of Agrippa in vs. 28 has left many wondering if Agrippa was sincere or sarcastic. We honestly do not know, but it appears as if Paul took him seriously because of his response in vs. 29.

4. Paul's true desire was to convert all to Christ, but he wanted them to be free of the persecution and bonds which he had to endure. He wanted all men to be pardoned, at peace with God and man and have a hope which stretches beyond the grave. Paul had sought to vindicate the gospel rather than himself.

IV. ***Paul's Verdict (vss. 30-32)***

- A. Agrippa determined that Paul was innocent.
 1. The other rulers were Romans, but now we have the statement by a Jewish king, an authority on Jewish affairs, as to Paul's innocence.
 2. Such testimony would come in handy when, and if ever, they presented their case in Nero's supreme court.
 3. No one would be able to sustain all their charges in light of all these testimonies as to Paul's innocence.
- B. Paul had appealed to Caesar so the legal process had to be continued and the appeal fully exercised. No one but Caesar could convict or acquit him now. If he had not have appealed, he certainly could have been set free then and there.

Conclusion. Paul's conversion was genuine. He changed from a Pharisee of the strictest sect to the boldest champion of the gospel. Oftentimes the worst sinners become the most consecrated Christians (Luke 15:7). The greatest power over men is the transforming power of the gospel. The spirit of the gospel is that of obedience, consecration and courage, as manifested in the life of Paul after his conversion.