

## Unpersuaded?

### Acts 26:24-32

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 8-30-2009

## Introduction

Last month in Macharkay village, in the Punjab region Pakistan, a Christian got off a bus to find something to drink. He went to a roadside tea stand. Unfortunately he didn't read a sign that said, "All non-Muslims should introduce their faith prior to ordering tea. This tea stall serves Muslims only." Anyway, he ordered tea, drank it, and when he went to pay for his tea the owner noticed that he was wearing a necklace with a cross. He grabbed the Christian, and without asking any questions, called for his employees to beat him with anything that they had. The owner and 14 employees beat him to death with iron rods, clubs, stones, and stabbed him numerous times with knives. Most civilized people would recoil at such barbarous hatred for Christianity. I think most people would think that at least *these* guys were totally depraved. *What is wrong with them?* But I think many Christians have a harder time believing everyone is totally depraved.

But total depravity manifests itself in many different ways, including very nice, polite, amiable responses to the Gospel that still do not submit to King Jesus. A polite "No thank you" might be every bit as much an evidence of depravity as the first example.

John 6:44 says that because of our depraved human nature, no one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him. No one. Romans 3:11 says, "**There is none who seeks after God.**" We might be puzzled why some people are persuaded by evidence very quickly while others are not persuaded at all. But I think this section of Scripture gives us some clues as to why this is.

## I. Utterly Unpersuaded (v. 24-25)

### A. *A rude unbelief (act of will – v 24a)*

Festus is the first example. He is bold in his rejection of the Gospel. Verse 24 says, "**Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad.'**" When you understand the court protocol of Rome, this was rude. He's interrupting the defendant in the middle of his speech, and not only is he interrupting, but he is judging the evidence before he has completely heard

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it. Festus obviously has his mind made up. He doesn't even want to hear any more. He interrupts Paul's speech with this outburst. So it is a rude unbelief.

***B. An emotional unbelief (response of emotions - v. 24b)***

It is also an emotional unbelief. This yelling with a loud voice shows that he was emotionally upset by what is going on. This is not just a calm evaluation of the evidence. If it was, he could have just calmly have said, "I disagree." But no, he shouts. The loudness of his voice makes it clear that he is emotionally upset with the Gospel.

***C. A mental unbelief (response of unregenerate mind – v. 24c-d)***

And thirdly, it is a mental unbelief. He thinks Paul is beside himself and mad. He thinks that what Paul is saying is ridiculous. As far as he is concerned, Paul's gospel is irrational. His whole heart is in opposition to the Gospel, and the heart is made up of the mind, the will, and the emotions.

***D. An irrational unbelief (v. 25)***

But look at Paul's response in verse 25: "**But he said, 'I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.'**" We'll look at that verse a bit more when we see how fully persuaded Paul was, but for now I just want to look at the implication of Paul's contradiction. If Festus thinks Paul is crazy, but Paul thinks everything he is saying is perfectly rational, perfectly truthful, and perfectly reasonable, what does it imply about Festus? It implies that Festus's mind is out of touch with reality.

And that's true, isn't it? If every blade of grass, every star, and every humming bird clearly demonstrates the wisdom of a Creator, it is pretty irrational to deny that God exists. When Natural Laws such as Gravity, Inverse Squares, Cause and Effect, and Thermodynamics imply a Lawgiver, to ascribe law and order to chance is absurd. If the irreducible complexity of the human eye, or the ear, or even the fantastic irreducible complexity of a simple cell, demonstrate Intelligent Design, it is irrational to say that it all happened by chance over millions of years and that this is a meaningless universe. In terms of statistics, there is about an equivalent probability of a Boeing 747 coming together as a result of an explosion as there is of the millions of complex creatures that we have on planet earth coming together by evolutionary processes. This is why Psalm 14 says,

**Psalms 14:1 ¶            The fool has said in his heart,  
"There is no God."**

You see, foolishness has nothing to do with lack of intelligence. According to the Bible, there are brilliant fools. There are fools who are far more brilliant than any of you. Foolishness has nothing to do with lack of intelligence. Foolishness is thinking that our puny minds (however brilliant they may be) can properly interpret this vast universe without any recourse to the revelation of the God who made all things, knows all things, and interprets all things. That is foolish. The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.”

Let me outline six reasons why that is foolish: First, the guy who is saying this has only lived for a tiny blip of time, and has only personally experienced an infinitesimally small amount of the vastness of this universe. To pretend to dogmatically know that God does not exist is a pretty big pretension for a tiny spec on this tiny planet to make.

Second, he would actually have to know all things to even make such a universal statement. For example, he has not looked for God in every place that God could occupy. He hasn’t even been able to travel beyond our solar system, which is a tiny spec in our galaxy, which is itself a tiny spec in our universe. He knows next to nothing of all the data that holds this universe together. And yet he makes dogmatic assertions about what does not exist. That is foolishness.

Third, you can’t prove a universal negative. It’s philosophically impossible – unless of course you were God and omniscient. But then, if you were God, you would be lying to say there was no God.

Fourth, God does exist, and this man is in trouble. He is headed toward hell. It is foolish for him to not repent when God is holding him on a thread over hell and could drop him at any time. Absolute foolishness.

Fifth, every atom of this universe is a testimony to God’s existence. The world is literally screaming God’s existence. Intelligent Design is everywhere. Romans 1 says that even the atheist knows that God exists but he suppresses that truth in unrighteousness. It’s foolish to suppress the truth, is it not?

Sixth, God has revealed His manual for interpreting reality in the Bible. To ignore our manufacturer’s manual is foolishness.

And so if there is overwhelming evidence for God’s existence (which Paul in a moment is going to say that there is), why does the fool say there is no God? According to Psalm 14, the atheist is trying to escape from accountability for his sin. He doesn’t *want* there to be a God. And you can see this ethical rebellion against God in many modern evolutionists. British anthropologist Sir Arthur Keith said: ‘Evolution *is unproved and unprovable*. We believe it only because the alternative is special creation,

and that is unthinkable.’<sup>1</sup> He does not *want* a creator to exist. D.M.S Watson made a similar statement. He said, “The theory of evolution (is) a theory universally accepted not because it can be proved by logically coherent evidence to be true but because the only alternative, special creation, is clearly incredible.”<sup>2</sup> And Psalm 14 says that it makes people uncomfortable because they know that if God exists they will have to answer for their sins. Let me read the first four verses:

**Psalms 14:1** ¶           **The fool has said in his heart,  
“There is no God.”**

**They are corrupt,  
They have done abominable works,  
There is none who does good.**

**Psalms 14:2**   **The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men,  
To see if there are any who understand, who seek God.**

**Psalms 14:3**   **They have all turned aside,  
They have together become corrupt;  
There is none who does good,  
No, not one.**

**Psalms 14:4**   **Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge,  
Who eat up my people as they eat bread,  
And do not call on the LORD?**

Festus is an example of an intelligent fool. He wants to reason independently of God. He does so with hostility because everything about Christianity makes him feel uncomfortable. It is an alien worldview, an alien ethics, and an alien Lord who would so change his life that it would be highly inconvenient.

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<sup>1</sup> As cited in R. L. Wysong, *The Creation-Evolution Controversy*. (Midland, MI: Inquiry Press, 2006), p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> D.M.S. Watson, “Adaptation,” *Nature*, Vol. 123 [*sic* Vol. 124] (1929), p. 233. As quoted by Henry Watson in *Impact* #26.

## II. Somewhat Persuaded<sup>3</sup> (v. 27-28)

### A. A polite unbelief (v. 26a)

Next comes a guy who is fairly comfortable with many of the concepts that Paul talks about, but is still not able to submit to the Gospel. In verse 26 Paul shows that it was much easier to talk with Agrippa: **“For the king, before whom I also speak freely...”** This hints that Agrippa was very politely listening and willing to hear Paul out. Though he does not ultimately believe, he has been quite open-minded all along.

### B. An unbelief that has correct knowledge about the Gospel (v. 26b)

The next phrase shows that Agrippa’s unbelief had a correct knowledge about the Gospel. It says, **“For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things** [What things? The things he has just been talking about – the Gospel.]; **for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner.**” He cannot excuse his unbelief because of ignorance. He knows all about Jesus life and death, and he must have been familiar with at least the basics of the Gospel from either his knowledge of the Old Testament or his familiarity with the Christianity within his borders over the past thirty years. He has been king for twelve years, but Christianity had been in his region for much longer. But my point is that he has unbelief despite the fact that Paul says Agrippa **“knows these things.”** He knows its true, but he doesn’t submit.

### C. An unbelief that affirms the truth of Scripture (v. 27)

Verse 27 indicates that this unbelief is even able to affirm the truth of the Bible, yet still reject its demands and fail to understand it. **“King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.”** Those are amazing words. You can believe the Bible and still not be saved. Did you know that the devil believes the Bible is true? He can quote it, but

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<sup>3</sup> There is controversy on whether verse 28 should be translated as a positive expression (either “You almost persuade me” or “in a little [time] you persuade me,” or “in a small measure you persuade me”) or as a negative expression of irony (“With little labor [or with few words] you persuade me!”) or ridicule (“You think you can persuade me in a little time?”). It is a difficult phrase to translate. Evidence against the negative interpretation is: 1) The word in verse 29 should be translated the same way as in verse 28, unless there is overwhelming evidence against it. 2) 99.5% of the Greek manuscripts have πολλῶ in verse 29, not μεγάλῳ. 3) The use of the Greek phrase in verse 29 (καὶ ἐν ὀλίγῳ καὶ ἐν πολλῶ) argues strongly for a positive interpretation of Agrippa’s words. They appear to be a compliment, and Paul seems to take them that way. 4) It would be unlikely that Paul would respond with the same sarcasm as Agrippa did. See Gloag, volume II, p. 384. 5) Versions that support a positive rendering are NKJV (“you almost persuade me” – see also the ancient Peshitta, Chrysostom, Luther, Webster), BBE (“A little more and you will be making me a Christian”), NJB (“A little more, and your arguments would make a Christian of me”), NASB (“In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian”), Darby (“In a little thou persuadest me to become a Christian”), Bishop (“Somewhat thou persuadest me to be a Christian”).

he hates it. Our hearts can be so deceitful that we can believe the bible and still not have a saving faith that submits to King Jesus. That was James' point when he said that the demons believe that there is one God and tremble over it.

***D. An unbelief that wants to believe (v. 28)***

But this man seems to get even closer to being saved than that. Look at verse 28: **“Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You almost persuade me to become a Christian.’”** You've heard the expression, “So close, but no cigar”? That was Agrippa. Agrippa was close to the kingdom, but not in it.

Now I admit that there is great debate over how to translate this verse. Part of the problem is solved if you follow 99.5% of the Greek manuscripts in verse 29,<sup>4</sup> because verse 29 helps to interpret the same word that is translated “almost” in verse 28. If you follow the Majority Text (as I do), then the sarcasm or rebuke that the NIV has is extremely unlikely. You see, some translate it, ““Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” They see it as a rebuke. But if we follow the Majority Text in verse 29 (as I do), then that narrows the possibilities down to one of the other positive translations I have given in your footnote. But whether you translate this as, “you almost persuade me,” “in a short time you will persuade me,” or “a little more, and your arguments would make a Christian of me,” the end result is the same. Agrippa, who knows the Scriptures, is almost convinced that what Paul is telling him is true. What keeps him from going over the edge and being persuaded altogether? It seems that his heart almost wishes that he could become a Christian. Maybe he sees something there that his heart longs for. But he just can't do it. “I'm almost there with you Paul, but .... I just can't go there.”

***E. Yet in verse 30 he avoids believing (v. 30)***

Look at verse 30: **“When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with him.”** He is abruptly ending the proceedings. It appears that things were getting too hot. Paul had put him in a dilemma by asking if he believed the prophets. If he said “No,” he would offend Jews, and if he said “Yes,” he would admit that he should become a Christian. And Agrippa simply avoids more interaction rather than putting his faith in Christ. It appears that he can't take the heat.

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<sup>4</sup> κ.Α.Β have μεγάλω, and the rest of the over 600 Greek manuscripts in Acts have πολλω. 3 is 99.5% of 600.

***F. An unbelief that is favorable to Christians (vv. 31-32)***

But I find it surprising that he is still nice about it. In verses 31-32 Luke makes it clear that Agrippa's unbelief did not make him antagonistic to Paul in the least. Instead, he affirms Paul's innocence, and in verse 32 he says, "**This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.**" He doesn't want to be opposed to Paul (just in case Paul is right), yet he doesn't want to agree with Paul. What's going on?

***G. An unbelief that only God can fix (v. 29). Note that even when the Gospel makes sense to people, apart from regeneration they cannot repent and having saving faith. Apart from grace this is the state of all natural men:***

It's total depravity. That's what's going on. Paul knows that apart from God's regeneration of the human heart, no one can repent and have saving faith. That's why Paul says in verse 29, "**I would to God [literally, "I pray to God] that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.**" Paul knows that he can't reason people into the kingdom. God does use our witnessing, and sometimes regenerates people through a Scripture that we bring. Our apologetics can help prepare people to listen. But Paul knows that God is the only solution. Other translations are "I pray God," "I pray to God," "It is my prayer to God." Paul is acknowledging that faith and salvation are a gift from above. But faith will not come until a new heart is given, and the heart is made up of the mind, the will, and the emotions.

**1. The unregenerate mind is hostile to God and cannot understand spiritually or be subject to Him (Rom. 3:7; 8:7; 1Cor. 2:14).**

Let's consider the unregenerate mind: (You haven't had a systematic theology sermon for awhile, so I'm giving you a bit of systematic theology.)

Romans 8:7 says, "**the carnal mind is enmity against God [that means it is hostile to God]; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.**" He says that it is impossible for the unregenerate mind to be subject to God. What regeneration does is that it changes our heart so that our mind can be subject to God and can understand spiritually.

Romans 3:11 says, "**There is none who understands.**" That is a universal statement. It's not just the Festuses of this world. It's also the nice Agrippas who do not understand spiritually. They are blind.

1Corinthians 2:14 says, "**But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he**

**know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.**” What Paul is saying is that man’s mind must be renewed and turned around before he can really understand Scripture. Thousands have testified about a point at conversion in when they suddenly saw themselves, God, and the world in a whole new light. In fact, Saint Augustine said it was almost as if a candle had been lit “and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.” That’s regeneration. The first part of regeneration is illumination or having the lights turned on in your mind.

**2. The unregenerate emotions/affections love independence and want to do what Satan tempts them to do (John 3:19; 8:44; Eph. 2:3)**

Let’s look next at the emotions. I’ve heard people say that they loved God before they became Christians. Scripture says otherwise. The Bible is quite clear that even the most even-keeled and polite unbeliever does not love God with all of his heart, soul, strength, and mind. He’s broken the first and greatest commandment. His affections are idolatrous, not godly. Let’s look at some Scriptures on our affections:

John 3:19 says, “**And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.**” It’s not a surprise when pagans don’t love God with all their being. It is a miracle when they suddenly do at conversion. It’s the miracle known as regeneration. There are testimonies at conversion of enormous reversal of emotions, and various emotions being set on fire: hatred for their sin, sorrow, love for God flooding their hearts and overwhelming them. But sometimes the change in emotion is more calm – a settled peace that they had never had before. But at the time of our rebirth, God renews our affections. He realigns them.

John 8:44 says, “**You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.**” Prior to conversion, the natural man’s desires are unrenewed and easily controlled by Satan.

Ephesians 2:3 says, “**among whom also we *all* once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.**” And notice that Paul puts himself as a former good-Pharisee in the same category. His mind and his emotions were not subject to God.



### **3. The unregenerate will is unable to break free from the flesh's desires and will not come to God.**

What about the will? Surely, it must be free? But Scripture indicates that people cannot come to God apart from grace. Salvation is 100% of grace. We contribute nothing.

John 6:44 says, “**No one can come to Me** [It takes the will to come, right? He says, “No one can come to Me”] **unless the Father who sent Me draws him.**” No one. Both the Festuses and the Agrippas of the world are utterly unable to come to Christ.

John 5:40 says, “**But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.**” That's man's natural state: they are not willing. Festus was rude in his unwillingness and Agrippa was very polite in his unwillingness, but he was still not willing.

1Corinthians 2:14 “**But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God.**”

We will look at the solution to this in a bit, but right now I think it is helpful to note that it's not because Festus was worse than Agrippa that he rejected the Gospel. Both rejected it because both had depraved hearts. The earthly things that influenced those hearts may have been quite different. As a Roman, Festus may have had many more reasons why he thought Paul was nuts.

In your outlines I've listed a few of the possible reasons that people have given for why *Agrippa* did not come. So those do factor into why people stay unconverted. Their will follows their nature. Until a renewed nature is placed within them man will creatively have a multitude of ways in which his nature keeps him from faith. As some you are joining me in evangelism, these facts will help you to not be troubled by responses to the Gospel. And God can break through every one of these obstacles just like he did with Paul.

#### ***H. Agrippa is no doubt stopped short by:***

##### **1. Pride? (Prov. 16:18; Psalm 10:4; 73:6)**

For example, Scripture indicates that pride frequently keep people from believing. Proverbs 16:18 says, “**Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.**” Psalm 10:4 says, “**The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.**” Pride keeps many people from seeking God.

## 2. Riches? (1Tim. 6:9)

Or like the rich young ruler, it may have been Agrippa's riches that kept him from believing. 1 Timothy 6:9 says that **“those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.”** If riches is your god, God cannot truly be your God. Jesus said that you cannot serve God and mammon. So desires for riches can keep people from genuine faith.

## 3. Chained to pleasures? (Phil. 3:19)

Was he chained by the pleasures of life? Possibly. Philippians 3:19 says, **“whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame – who set their mind on earthly things.”** What a remarkable phrase, **“whose god is their belly.”** Your belly can keep you from submitting to God.

## 4. Fear of making a decision? Procrastination? (v. 30; 17:32)

Some people say that Agrippa went to hell because of procrastination, and an inability to make a decision. Certainly the Athenians in chapter 17:32 had that problem.

## 5. Peer pressure? (see v. 24,30; James 4:4; Gal. 1:10)

Could it have been peer pressure? After all, Festus was his superior and had already said that Paul was mad. Maybe he didn't want to be thought poorly of. James 4:4 says, **“Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”** Yes, peer pressure can keep you headed toward hell. Galatians 1:10 says, **“If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”**

## 6. Worried about his position?

Another possibility is that he may have been worried about his position. We aren't told.

## 7. Lust of the flesh and fear of having to give up Bernice? (v. 30)

Was it the lust of the flesh and fear of having to give up his incestuous relationship with his sister Bernice? Possibly. Lust has kept many a man and woman from Christ.

## 8. A failure to realize that each moment could be his last? (1Sam. 20:3)

Maybe it was a failure to realize that (as David worded it) **“there is but a step between me and death.”** We can die at any time, and Agrippa

would soon die under the volcanic ash of Mount Vesuvius. He was maybe presuming that he had plenty of time. Many people do.

***I. How is all this consistent with the free offer of the Gospel? (see attachments.)***

So when we say that man cannot turn to God apart from regeneration, we are not saying that it's God's fault. Men don't want to turn. Their will is bound by their nature. God offers salvation, but all men refuse it. But here's the cool thing: God goes one step further than simply offering the Gospel. He graciously draws some men, women, and children to a saving knowledge of Him by changing their minds so that they see straight for the first time, and changing their emotions so that they hate their sin and hunger and thirst after righteousness, and changing their wills so that they are willing to come.

If you look at the attachments, you will see some Scriptures that summarize the theology that this passage illustrates so well. The first handout deals with faith being a gift of God. 1 Peter 1:1 says that all Christians have "obtained like precious faith." Ephesians 2:8 says that faith is a gift of God. When God gives us the ability to believe, it means that we have nothing in which to boast. 100% of our salvation is of the Lord. Praise Him and worship Him for His generosity and kindness. He supplies what we could not.

The second handout answers the objection that this would contradict the free offer of the Gospel. "Surely if God offers salvation to all who believe, it means that all *can* believe!" That's what some people think. But that does not logically follow. And this chart shows that the objection is definitely not Biblical. Let me just read the first two examples:

Life is offered to those who will come in John 6:35. It's freely offered to anyone who wants to come. We have such a generous God. That's the free offer of the Gospel. But just nine verses later Jesus says, "**No one can come to Me...**" So there is our utter inability to respond to the free offer of the Gospel. The third column tells us God's remedy for our inability. "**No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.**" God's drawing power enables our feeble hearts to come when we could not come on our own. Augustine said that God enables what He commands.

Next row of the chart: Life is offered to those who will believe. There's the free offer again. The problem is that Jesus said, "**...you do not believe because you are not of My sheep.**" Apparently you have to be made into a sheep before you can believe. It's a sheep thing to believe.

That's why John 12 says to those who were not yet His sheep, "**they could not believe.**" It wasn't simply that they did not want to – they could not. What is the solution? The third column shows you: Acts 18:27 speaks of "**those who had believed through grace.**" It takes grace to produce faith. Acts 3:16 speaks of "**the faith which comes through Him.**" And you can see a similar pattern in all the forms of the free offer of the Gospel. Life is offered if people will seek, look, hear, but they can't seek, look, or hear because they are dead, blind, and deaf until God restores their ability in regeneration.

The last chart gives several Scriptures that show that regeneration or the new birth must occur first before people can turn, believe, and seek the Lord. I'll just read one: Acts 16:14 says "**whose heart the Lord opened so that she heeded the things which were spoken by Paul.**" Or as the NASB words it, "**the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.**" God had to do an operation on the heart before the heart would respond. Regeneration is first, and response is second. So don't say (as so many Christians do) that you are born again after you believe. No. You have to be born and given life before you can believe.

And that's exactly what had to happen to the apostle Paul. One minute he was hating Jesus and persecuting His followers, and the next moment he loved Jesus and had committed his life to Jesus. We've looked so far at Festus who was utterly unpersuaded, and Agrippa who was almost persuaded. Let's just spend a few minutes looking at Paul's genuine faith that was totally persuaded. And we are going to throw in a little Biblical philosophy and apologetics here too.

### **III. Genuine Faith - Totally Persuaded (v. 25-27,29)**

#### ***A. A belief that can be defended (v. 24)***

First, Paul had a belief that *could* be defended. Verse 24 says, "**Now as he was thus making his defense...**" This was not a wild leap in the dark. This was not Fideism. This was a faith founded on fact; a faith that could be defended. And those who are not willing to defend the faith are not imitating Paul. Fideists say that you just read Scripture and don't try to defend it. But the word for defend is what we get apologetics from, and I would urge you to study apologetics. There are some great apologetics courses in the church library. We need to be able to defend the faith and reason from the Scriptures. So apologetics is a good thing, not a bad thing. Paul had a faith that could be defended.

### ***B. A belief that is perfectly rational (v. 25)***

Second, it was a belief that was perfectly rational. Verse 25: “**But he said, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.’**” To be mad would be to be irrational. It is to be out of touch with reality. But Paul defends a Christianity that is made up of words, is founded on truth, and that uses reason. It’s not simply feelings – it is mind surgery that God has performed. I agree with Gordon Clark that apologetics must never be willing to affirm contradictions. According to this verse, Christianity is propositional truth. Now let me assure you that I like Van Til as well, but I think Clark is a needed corrective on this issue. We must affirm that Christianity is rational, logical, and truthful in all that it says.

Any church that makes you turn off your brain is deviating from the Christianity that Paul affirmed. In fact, this is one of the marks of a cult – that they make you turn off your brain to anything that might question the leader. On the other hand, any church that wants to use reason without using Scripture is affirming humanistic rationalism, not the rational faith of the Bible. And unfortunately, much Christianity today embraces the world’s thinking.

So to summarize: 1) verse 24 defends the concept of apologetics as opposed to Fideism, 2) verse 25 is consistent with Clark’s insistence that Christianity is rational, and 3) verse 26 is where Cornelius Van Til really shines. I think we can benefit from both of these guys.

### ***C. A belief that fits the facts (v. 26)***

Look at verse 26. The third thing we see about Paul is that his system of thought is consistent with all of life. And the closer we get to the Scriptures, the less inconsistencies we should see with our Christianity and the world around us. Verse 26 says, “**For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner.**” He is appealing to all kinds of evidence that Agrippa could have known. Romans 1 is a masterful expansion on this verse. It shows that unbelievers know the truth, but they seek to suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Just as one example, verse 20 says that the whole creation speaks of God so clearly that every unbeliever is left without excuse. As I said when we started this sermon, it was Festus who was out of touch with reality. It is evolutionists who are out of touch with reality. We have nothing to fear from the study of creation. It is a magnificent testimony to the truth of Scripture.

But let me make a caution here. We will see in a minute that the next verse corrects those who see Creation as being a “second book of revelation” that is supposedly equal to the Bible. Some Van Tillians have fallen into this mistake. You’ve probably heard the slogan, “All truth is God’s truth.” Many of these scholars will use that slogan as a means for making science equally a source of truth with the Bible. For example, Vickers wrote a book defending Keynesian economics as being the truth claiming that the science of economics needs to be taken just as seriously as the Bible as a source of truth. (Let me point out that the mess we are in today is because of Keynesian economics.) As another example, Christian evolutionists have insisted that Genesis 1 can’t mean that the cosmos was created in six days in the recent past because that would contradict God’s truth as found in “science.” Almost always, God’s Bible becomes secondary to the so-called findings of science. So the next point insists that we’ve got to look at the world through the lens of the Bible.

***D. A belief that is founded on the word of a God who cannot lie (v. 27)***

Point D - Paul’s faith was a faith founded on the word of a God who cannot lie. Verse 27 says, “**King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?**” That’s the question we need to be asking. Do you believe the Scriptures? If not, why not? The God who made all things has revealed His will and everything we need to know in the Bible. And this is really at the heart of the difference between the Scripturalism of Paul and the worldviews of Festus and Agrippa. And once again, this is where Gordon Clark brings an absolutely essential corrective.

Clark points out that there are three enemies of Christianity. The first enemy is rationalism, or what Gordon Clark called “reason without faith.” This viewpoint makes *our* minds the determiner of truth. Rationalism is the antithesis of Christianity, which starts with God’s mind. The beginning of the Bible starts where we need to start – “**in the beginning God.**” So the first enemy is rationalism – beginning with man’s mind instead of God’s mind.

The second enemy is empiricism, which seeks to derive truth from our experience, our experiments, and looking at the world. In this approach, science is treated as infallible rather than God. Where rationalism treats our minds as infallible, empiricism treats science as infallible. Science is thought to be the source of truth. But this is just as much a rejection of God as rationalism was. Paul called it “science, falsely so-called” (1 Tim. 6:20

KJV). Science makes a lousy god, and as a result, it's dogmatic statements keep changing from generation to generation. But it is one of the competing worldviews out there.

When science proved to be a not-so-infallible guide, there were those who embraced Irrationalism, the third major worldview. Secular Post-Modernism is Irrationalism, as is the New Age Movement, and Eastern Mysticism. So the three unbelieving worldviews are Rationalism, Empiricism, and Irrationalism.

And all three of these enemies have crept into the church of Jesus Christ and destroyed the faith once for all delivered to the saints. It was primarily rationalists who sought to destroy the faith in the 1800's. It was primarily empiricists who sought to destroy the faith in the 1900's. And it is largely Irrationalists who dominate the scene today. Liberals like Kierkegaard and Schleiermacher were Irrationalists. Neo Orthodox people like Karl Barth adopted this approach. Emergent and Post-Modern Christianity has largely become an Irrationalist worldview. And there are many varieties of mysticism that would fall into this category.

Where rationalism made man's mind the ground of truth, and empiricism made man's experience the ground of truth, irrationalism made our feelings and inner experience the ground of truth. The Irrationalists have no problem with logical contradictions. They have no problem with pluralism. They have no problem with saying, "That is true for you, but this is true for me. We can all get along together."

In contrast to those three false worldviews, Paul's approach was Scripturalism. Unlike Rationalism, Empiricism, and Irrationalism, which all start with some part of creation, and as a result are all three reductionistic (which means they can't account for the mind, the experience inside and the experience outside at the same time), Scripturalism starts with the mind of God, and therefore can incorporate all three areas of life that the counterfeits have failed at.

For example, Scripturalism is more rational than rationalism because it starts with the mind of God rather than man's puny mind. Where rationalism cannot justify logic (Why? Because nobody is omniscient, and thus nobody is qualified to give universals), Scripturalists *can* because God has revealed every principle of logic in the Bible. Where rationalism cannot justify mathematics, we can because God has revealed every axiom of mathematics in the Bible. So we reject rationalism, but we don't reject the

rationality of God. Rationality is part of the image of God in us, and even pagans cannot escape from it. That's why apologetics can be so effective.

Second, Scripturalism is better science than what scientific empiricism can engage in because again it starts with God's mind. Because God made the world, we know that the world will line up with the way that God interprets it in the Bible. We've got a head start. So though we do experiments in science, we do not do those experiments independently of God and Bible. We start with the Bible. Jesus called the Bible the "key of knowledge" (Luke 11:52). Why would we want to throw away the key? Jesus rebuked those who sought to take that key away.

Third, we can do a better job at understand the invisible insides of man because even though the Bible says that no one can know the heart, God does know the heart, and what He has revealed about it can be trusted absolutely. We don't have to become irrational when we look at man's myriad and complicated experiences. With the Bible's interpretation of man, we have an anchor that keeps us from drifting into the irrationality of the 600 plus systems of modern psychology. We must always ask ourselves Paul's question, "Do you believe the prophets?" As for me and my house, we do.

***E. A belief that is not ashamed (v. 29)***

And it was because of the solid basis that Scripturalism gives to the Christian that we can have the certainty of Paul. It is because we start with the Word of a God who cannot lie that we do not need to be ashamed. In verse 29 we see that Paul was not ashamed to speak his worldview into even the public forum of a courtroom, and before kings and governors. Paul is so persuaded of the truth of Christianity, and its ability to interpret all reality properly that he had a belief that was unashamed of Jesus anywhere. Are you there? Or are you more interested in pleasing man. Jesus said, "**For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels**" (Mark 8:38).

***F. A belief that is not "almost" but "altogether" persuaded (v. 29)***

And then the same verse indicates that it was a belief that was not "**almost**" but "**altogether**" persuaded. This speaks of certainty. Evidentialists are always arguing for probability, but Paul always argued for certainty. Scripturalism is not satisfied with anything less than certainty.



For those of you who have not studied philosophy and the debates swirling around apologetics, epistemology, ontology and other doctrines, you have probably not caught all of the enormous significance of this passage. But once you start studying those topics a bit on your own, return to this passage again, and I think it will blow you out of the water on the way it answers many of the current academic questions. I've tried to give hints of that without getting too academic. It's a wonderful little passage.

## Conclusion

But let me end where the rubber meets the road. I want to end by challenging you to avoid being Festuses or Agrippas, and to whole-heartedly be a totally persuaded Paul. If you have found yourself reacting like Festus did and thinking that some portion of Scripture is crazy, stupid, or irrational, I call you to repent. I don't care how small the Scripture is, if you respond to it as Festus did, I call you to repent. There are many people in America who think the laws of the Old Testament are stupid. Some of these Christians have publically said that no one would want to live in a society that punishes juvenile delinquents. There are many who think that the economics of the Bible is naïve. There are many who think that the political laws of the Bible are too libertarian. There are many who think that Genesis 1 and 2 is crazy. But you need to realize what precarious ground those "Christians" stand on. They are calling the God of heaven and earth crazy, stupid, and irrational, and it is not a safe place to be. As Paul said in Romans 9 when people were arguing against his doctrine of predestination and claiming that it didn't make sense, "**But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?**" You know what portion of the Scripture you find to be hard to believe. Recognize this unbelief, repent of it before God, ask Him to forgive you for calling His wisdom foolishness, renounce all unbelief and break off the legal ground you have given to Satan. We must not act like Festus.

But since you are attending church, it is much more likely that some of you are an Agrippa rather than being a Festus. If you can listen to a sermon, shake the pastor's hand, tell him what a lovely sermon it was, and go on with life with absolutely no change in life, you are a polite Agrippa, and are just as surely resistant to God's will. I call you to repentance as well. Passive resistance will bring you to the throne of judgment just as surely as active resistance will. Procrastinating your faithful responses to God just hardens your heart in impenitence.

This passage is a call to put off all skepticism, whether it be the skepticism of Festus or Agrippa, and to be fully persuaded of the Scriptures

as Paul was. It is a call to a thorough going Scripturalism. It is a call to never mix secular and Christian notions. It is a call to bring every thought, word, and deed into obedience to the Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever. Amen.

# Unpersuaded?

## Acts 26:24-32

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 8-30-2009

### Introduction

- I. Utterly Unpersuaded (v. 24-25)
  - A. A rude unbelief (act of will – v 24a)
  - B. An emotional unbelief (response of emotions - v. 24b)
  - C. A mental unbelief (response of unregenerate mind – v. 24c-d)
  - D. An irrational unbelief (v. 25)
- II. Somewhat Persuaded (v. 27-28)
  - A. A polite unbelief (v. 26a)
  - B. An unbelief that has correct knowledge about the Gospel (v. 26b)
  - C. An unbelief that affirms the truth of Scripture (v. 27)
  - D. An unbelief that wants to believe (v. 28)
  - E. Yet in verse 30 he avoids believing (v. 30)
  - F. An unbelief that is favorable to Christians (vv. 31-32)
  - G. An unbelief that only God can fix (v. 29). Note that even when the Gospel makes sense to people, apart from regeneration they cannot repent and having saving faith. Apart from grace this is the state of all natural men:
    1. The unregenerate mind is hostile to God and cannot understand spiritually or be subject to Him (Rom. 3:7; 8:7; 1Cor. 2:14).
    2. The unregenerate emotions/affections love independence and want to do what Satan tempts them to do (John 3:19; 8:44; Eph. 2:3)
    3. The unregenerate will is unable to break free from the flesh's desires and will not come to God.
  - H. Agrippa is no doubt stopped short by:
    1. Pride? (Prov. 16:18; Psalm 10:4; 73:6)
    2. Riches? (1Tim. 6:9)
    3. Chained to pleasures? (Phil. 3:19)
    4. Fear of making a decision? Procrastination? (v. 30; 17:32)
    5. Peer pressure? (see v. 24,30; James 4:4; Gal. 1:10)
    6. Worried about his position?
    7. Lust of the flesh and fear of having to give up Bernice? (v. 30)
    8. A failure to realize that each moment could be his last? (1Sam. 20:3)
  - I. How is all this consistent with the free offer of the Gospel? (see attachments.)
- III. Genuine Faith - Totally Persuaded (v. 25-27,29)
  - A. A belief that can be defended (v. 24)
  - B. A belief that is perfectly rational (v. 25)
  - C. A belief that fits the facts (v. 26)
  - D. A belief that is founded on the word of a God who cannot lie (v. 27)
  - E. A belief that is not ashamed (v. 29)
  - F. A belief that is not “almost” but “altogether” persuaded (v. 29)

### Conclusion