

him with more than a casual acquaintance with the approximately thirty-year-old movement of Christianity, which was considered a subdivision of Judaism. At any rate, his official visit to the newly installed provincial governor Festus, had provided the latter with an opportunity to consult his expertise in regard to a perplexing prisoner by the name of Paul. The unusual charges laid against this prisoner by the Jewish authorities were incomprehensible to Festus, and he was at a loss to know how to describe these charges to Nero Caesar, to whom Paul had appealed. Upon hearing of Festus' dilemma, Agrippa expressed the desire to hear Paul, who personally delivered his verbal defense, by relating the miraculous story of his conversion. After mentioning the blazing light from Heaven, the Voice of the Son of God, his conversion and commission, Paul, with characteristic quick-minded tact, makes a personal appeal to Agrippa, based upon his known belief in the Old Testament Scriptures, "*King Agrippa, believeth thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.*" This, Agrippa, being a Jew, could not deny, and the force of Paul's arguments from those prophets, whose predictions were fulfilled in the person, character, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, were too convincing to ignore, much less to rank with the ramblings of a disordered mind, as had

done Festus. The additional evidence of Paul's encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus, only served to confirm to Agrippa's mind the intrinsic probability, if not certainty of Paul's conviction.

Almost Persuaded

Paul's statements of faith could not be easily dismissed as unworthy of serious consideration. And so, Agrippa responded, "*Almost [Ἐν ὀλίγῳ] thou persuadest me to be [γενέσθαι] a Christian*" (Acts 26:28). In essence, he said, you are on the verge of converting me, thus acknowledging that Paul's testimony had brought him to the very threshold of belief. But on this threshold he was content to stay, unwilling, despite such strong inducements to believe, to step over the line that separates *conviction* from *conversion*. He represents many both within and without the church, who seem *touched* with the mysterious reality of Christianity's claims, but find themselves *untuned*, and reluctant to make a final break with the world and a full surrender to God (James 4:7). These reasons for this reluctance are manifold, but may include some of the following.

- *A religious education, that has rendered the hearer's mind sympathetically inclined to Christianity, though their wills have remained unconverted. This tendency is sometimes seen among children of pious*

parents, who grow up well-versed in the duties of pure religion, but have never made a life-changing commitment to Jesus Christ. As a result, they prove carnally-minded (Rom. 8:6) and at enmity with any true movement of the Spirit (Hosea 9:7,8; Gal. 4:29), and become the bane of the church and the grief of their parents (Prov. 17:25).

- *Those that are unwilling to relinquish some besetting sin, fleshly habit, or secret love for the world in order to win Christ. When they are brought to a crisis through the preaching of the gospel, the love of sin in general, or sinning in particular, weighs so heavily upon their minds as to keep them from a saving commitment to Christ (Agrippa, who was by this time in his early thirties, and living with his younger sister, Bernice, with whom he was suspected of engaging in an incestuous relationship, may have balked at parting with this bosom sin; Job 20:12-15; Mk. 6:17-20 [Agrippa's grandfather]; Mk. 10:17-22; I Tim. 6:10).*
- *Then again, there are individuals who, through the "pride of life" will not seek God for salvation. What would Festus and the high-ranking officers, and one's peers think if modern-day Agrippas would break rank with this world's vain shew, and fling themselves at the feet of the crucified Son of God? (Ps. 10:4,5; I Jn. 2:15-17; Jn. 12:23-25).*

As his words reveal, Paul's testimony had a profound effect upon Agrippa, and Paul, recognizing the evident impression upon his soul, declared, "*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." At these words the congregated nobility broke up, their hearts secretly acquitting Paul, though he officially remained a prisoner. We have no record that Herod Agrippa ever became a fully persuaded (II Tim. 1:12) Christian. In all probability, he died, as he had left Paul that day, an "almost persuaded," unhappy, hell-bound man. May God help us not to repeat his folly.

Altogether A Christian

Paul's desire for his assembled hearers in the audience chamber that day, is likewise God's desire for us, that we be "both almost and altogether" a Christian. This means being brought to the crisis of belief, through the Spirit's conviction (Jn. 16:8-11), coming up to the bar, that so often proves insurmountable to the superficial, and leaping over it unto life everlasting. It involves being saved to the fullest extent (Heb. 7:25), securely and completely (Eze. 20:35-38) brought into the blood-bathed bond of the everlasting covenant. Let us examine for a moment what this glorious commitment and transition will entail.

Altogether Apostolic

The "altogether Christian" is the man, woman, boy, or girl, who seeks

to come to Christ in an apostolic way, and on apostolic terms. This blessed child of God is not satisfied with the contemporary attempts to reinvent Christianity in order to make it more appealing to modern man, but is ever seeking to walk in the paths of primitive Christianity. He stands at the crossroads where various religious roads converge, and asks for the “old paths,” where is the “good way.” Such a one looks for a cross-bearing Christianity (Matt. 16:24; Acts 14:22), of counter-cultural conformity to Christ (Rom. 12:1,2; 8:29), as the strait gate and narrow way that leadeth to life (Matt. 7:13,14). Nor will he rest content until he comes to Christ on apostolic, that is New Testament, terms. This involves several things.

First of all, there must be a thoroughgoing repentance of the past-life of sin and self-interest. The apostolic answer to the heart-cry of contrition is the same today as it was in Peter’s day: “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). Thus it was that Paul preached that men should “repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20). In this day of “easy-believism,” the stress upon the necessity of repentance will set apart the true disciple from the world of nominal Christianity (Matt. 3:2,7-9; 4:17; Mk. 1:15). In

fact, it is impossible to truly believe of the Lord Jesus Christ apart from genuine repentance, for repentance and conversion are but the obverse side of faith. Therefore the man who *turns to* Christ in total trust in Him (Eph. 1:12; Gal. 2:16; Acts 16:31) and His atoning blood for the forgiveness of sins (Rom. 3:24-26; Eph. 1:7), must, as a matter of spiritual reflex, *turn from* a life of sin. Hence, there can be no genuine faith without sincere repentance, nor genuine repentance without sincere faith.

Such apostolic faith and repentance, will lead one, as an act of obedience, to submit to apostolic baptism, which is by immersion in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; Col. 2:9; 3:17).

Thirdly, to come to Christ apostolically, is to seek for the apostolic experience of the baptism with/in the Holy Spirit accompanied by the sign of tongues (Mk. 16:17; Acts 2:4; 10:45,46). Peter said, “And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). To the repentant believer who asks in simple child-like faith, God has promised to give the Holy Spirit (Luke. 11:13). This personal, old-time Pentecost, will prove an invaluable indument with power (Luke 24:49), and a means

of more effective witness (Acts 1:8).

An apostolic introduction to Christ, however, is not complete, until one has been duly united to a local apostolic assembly of believers, where he can continue steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine (Acts 2:41,42) and find spiritual support, encouragement and additional instruction (Acts 18:26). In fact, it is this willingness to continue in Christ’s teaching that constitutes the litmus test of New Testament discipleship (Jn. 8:31,32).

More Than Somewhat Saved

Finally, to be altogether a Christian means to move beyond the limitations of a lukewarm Christianity, with its fence-straddling between the world and the will of God (I Jn. 2:15-17), its compromise to ease the tension between the flesh and the Spirit (Gal. 5:17), and its mawkish, middle-of-the-road-stance between truth and error (I Jn. 4:5,6). It means to be actively involved in the cause and the service of Christ (Matt. 12:30). It means to be lifted out of the climes of a half-converted, moderate interest in things Divine, into the heavenly regions of highly-heated first-love (Rev. 2:4). Surely, Jesus our Savior deserves as much, and His solemn warning is that He will tolerate nothing less: “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:16).

Sandhill Bible Church-4505 Sandhill Road-Auburn, AL 36830-(334)749-1062-sandhillchurch@bellsouth.net

ALTOGETHER A CHRISTIAN

Acts 26:24-29: “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. 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, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. 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.”

Marcus Julius Agrippa II, the great-grandson of Herod the Great, was considered by the Romans as somewhat of an expert in the intramural, theological controversies among the Jews. As the curator of the temple, and with power to appoint or depose the high priest, he served as a liaison between Rome and Jewish national affairs. His mother, Cypros, had expressed quite an interest in the Jewish religion, and perhaps this had provided