

The Almost Christian

*Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."
(Acts 26:28. NKJV)*

King Agrippa will always be remembered as the man who "almost" became a Christian. The greatest preacher in human history stood just a few feet away. Having been arrested for claiming that Jesus was Lord, Paul was on trial for his life. Because he had appealed his case to Caesar, a legal brief needed to be prepared outlining the charges against him. King Agrippa had been called in to help finalize the report.

As Paul recounted the dramatic story of his conversion, Agrippa was deeply moved. As a Jew, he was impressed with how Paul cited the prophets to support his claim that Jesus was the Messiah. The defining moment came as Paul neared the conclusion of his defense. Looking the king in the eye, he boldly said: *King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.* (Acts 26:27) Suddenly, Paul had become the prosecuting attorney and Agrippa was the one on trial!

There is scholarly debate about the meaning of Agrippa's reply. Many newer translations imply that the king answered with sarcasm: *Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?* (NIV). However, the older King James Version still has much to commend it: *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.* Regardless of whether Agrippa's response was a cynical dismissal or a plaintive lament, Paul seized the moment to plead with the king and all his royal retinue to put their faith fully in Jesus and become his disciples. *I would 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.* (Acts 26:29. NKJV)

The dictionary defines "almost" as: *slightly short of; not quite; all but; very nearly.* Agrippa was not quite what he needed to be; almost but not quite. He only missed the goal by a slight margin. Thus he has gone down in history as "the almost Christian."

Friends, being "almost Christian" makes as much sense as being "almost pregnant." The words convey an oxymoronic reality that masks a noble effort to evade the truth. There is no such animal. The Bible makes it clear there are two human conditions and only two: the saved and the lost, the once born and the twice born, those who are spiritually alive and those who are spiritually dead, those who are bound for heaven and those who are bound for hell. There are no other options.

This morning, if your faith is only an intellectual affirmation of Bible doctrines, if the God you worship is a distant moralistic therapist, if your spiritual practice consists of outward conformity to religious duties, if your future hope lies in the goodness of your works and the sincerity of your heart, and if your confidence is based solely on past memories of grace rather than present experiences of victory... then you, my friend, are an oxymoron, a logical absurdity, an "almost Christian." So close to the truth yet so far from the reality.

Today, invite God's Spirit to invade your heart and flood your soul with transforming grace. Turn from your sin and believe in the power of Jesus' death to give you a fresh, new start. Then, surrender your will to his and trust in his promises. You will then become an altogether Christian!

Pastor Stan