

## **How Can We Defend Our Faith in the Gospel?**

Acts 26:1-11

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*Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today . . ." - Acts 26:1b-2a, ESV*

*. . . but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect. - 1 Peter 3:15, ESV*

Are you ready? If you knew you were going to be accused of something, do you think you would spend some time thinking about your defense? Of course, you would! But here's a sad reality: Christians have been told by Jesus Himself that we will be persecuted, hated and falsely accused because of our faith in Him, yet precious few spend any serious time thinking about their defense. Peter tells us to set apart Christ the Lord in our hearts as holy. This means we are to be devoted to Him. Then he tells us that a vital part of our devotion to Christ is "*always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.*" Are we ready?

Paul was ready. He had studied the Scriptures well. He had also studied his culture and knew his audience. He knew what the Bible said, and he knew what King Agrippa knew and understood. In Acts 17, on Mars Hill in Athens, Paul was able to quote from the Greek poets and connect with his audience. Likewise, here he addresses King Agrippa with respect and a knowledge of his convictions. Paul is a great model for how to live Peter's command. He has dedicated himself to Christ, and he is well prepared to make his defense, with gentleness and respect.

Sadly, so often, Christians are unprepared to make their defense, to explain and support their convictions. Others are prepared but rarely make their defense with the gentleness and respect that properly reflect Christ's character. Let's look at a few highlights from this opening section of Paul's defense to see what we can learn from him:

1. Paul identifies with his audience. He emphasizes what he has in common with Agrippa.
2. He then builds on that common ground. He doesn't just identify the common ground, but he effectively uses it as the basis for his defense.
3. He asserts the reasonableness of the Christian faith. He asks, "*Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?*" Surely, if God is real, then it is very reasonable to believe that He can raise the dead.
4. He emphasizes his own prior unbelief and his conversion. Paul talks openly about how he used to disbelieve the Gospel, to emphasize that this is not something he just came to believe easily or naturally.

We'll see more from Paul as we continue studying his speech before Agrippa next time, but these four points give us a good starting point for beginning to think through how we can make an effective defense of the Gospel to others who do not believe.

*Heavenly Father, You have saved us and have commissioned us to represent You and carry Your kingdom message to a world in need. You ask us to always be prepared to give a defense of our Gospel hope. We need You to give us wisdom, discernment, clear articulation and a loving spirit as we present the Gospel to others. In Jesus' name and for His glory we ask, Amen.*