

Paul's Testimony in His Own Words

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Acts 26

Preached on: Sunday, June 16, 2013

Truth Community Fellowship

Creation Museum

2800 Bullittsburg Church Road

Petersburg, KY 41080

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

This is a little bit different message than you're accustomed to hearing from me. It's all straight from Scripture, that will never change, but the manner of what we're going to talk about today is different in that we're really going to follow a narrative through a portion of Scripture rather than trying to exposit one or two verses. If you've been here at all, you know that I can go seventy minutes on two or three verses and so if I told you that I was about to go for 23 verses here today, you would probably panic. Let me assure you that that's not necessary.

Today, what we're going to do, we're really starting something new and I want you to know that today is a pivotal day in the life of our fellowship. We are rounding a corner and we're moving into an important series for the life of our fellowship. Next week, I'm going to start a series on the book of Titus. Paul speaks to Titus and tells him to go in and to establish churches in the island of Crete and gives him instructions on how to do that, it's how to give birth to a church, really, in many ways and that's kind of what we've been doing for the past year and a half and as we move into Titus, we're moving into some really important foundational things that the next several decades of this church are going to be built on and so it's very, very important what we are about to do over the course of the summer. Now, I realize that people go on vacations and are away a lot during the summer and so that's okay but I just want you to know that what's about to come is just especially important and so even if you're away, I encourage you to make sure that week by week, you're hearing the messages because this is a very important time that we're embarking upon in the corporate life of our church.

Now, I want to emphasize that, just the corporate nature of our life and our church because it's so very easy for us to approach church in terms of what we get out of it. We all, to one degree or another subconsciously, bought into the consumer mindset for everything and the efficiency of something is measured by what it contributes to us. Well, the Lord Jesus Christ when he lay down his life for the church, bought us to redeem us out of our sins and to purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works and so as we come together more closely in the months to come around the book of Titus and as we come together, we need to understand and start to cultivate within our minds that there is a corporate life that transcends in importance what happens to any one of us and we come to contribute, to serve and to be a part of this corporate life, to be part

of that which supports the teaching and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the process of that, we're going to minister to one another and have our needs met and that's going to be good but we need to understand that the real purpose of this place, the real purpose of what will one day soon become Truth Community Church, is the furtherance of the purposes of Jesus Christ, not the purposes of our own individual selves.

We offer ourselves to Christ in response to the sacrifice that he offered on our behalf and so we come together and as we come around Titus, we're going to see what that is supposed to look like and I'm very excited about that. I'm excited about it not only because I'm a pastor, not only because I love the word of God and what it teaches on these things but I am excited because of the people that are gathered together here in this room. We've been at this for about a year now since my family and I first moved here and arrived full-time and the people that stay are the ones that I know share in the commitment and the love for the word of God and so for us to have a group of this size that loves the word of God, that loves each other and is committed to the pursuit of what Jesus Christ teaches about his church in the Scripture is very exciting because we're not only going to be able to benefit from this personally, we are all corporately contributing to the planting of many, many trees that are going to grow up over the years and people who have not even heard the name of Truth Community are one day going to come under the shade of those trees and find safety and shelter in an increasingly hostile world. So as we do that together, I want you to know that we are doing together is extremely important, it's extremely in a position to be blessed by Christ and for us to be able to do this together is the highest joy of my life and I am so glad to be the pastor of this place and I thank you for the way that you supported this work with your love, with your prayers, with your resources. We have some really, really great days ahead of us and I can't wait to get into it.

To lay a foundation for that, you know, the book of Titus was written by the Apostle Paul, if you want to turn to Titus for just a second, just after 1 and 2 Timothy and as we're turning there, I would just ask you, if I weren't so proud I would get on my knees and beg you to be much in prayer for the life of our fellowship in these coming months because these days are going to be so very important to the future of what we're doing here. So in Titus 1:1, this is the only moment we're going to spend in Titus here, we see it opening up and in the custom of letter writing in that day, the author sets forth his name from the start and he says, "Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ." Drop down to verse 4, "To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior."

So, we're going to be studying a letter that was written by the Apostle Paul. We haven't talked about Paul too much in this place even though he was one of the great figures in all of world history, 13 books in the New Testament were written by him. And as we have this great privilege of embarking on the study of Titus, I thought that it would be a great opportunity for us to take a closer look at the life of the Apostle Paul. Then I realized something: that's utterly impossible. If you're going to actually deal appropriately with the Apostle Paul, you've got to deal with 17 chapters in the book of Acts, that's Act 12-28; you'd have to accurately summarize 13 books of the New Testament to say nothing

about the outworking of his theology in many other ways as people have studied his writings in the ensuing 2,000 years. To do an adequate study of Paul would take us the rest of the decades of the life of this fellowship and that just didn't seem to be possible in light of the fact that I have maybe 50 minutes left now.

So I was thinking, "How do we do this? How can we introduce Paul even in a cursory fashion?" I thought, "Well, let's just let Paul tell us about himself." We're going to see the testimony of Paul's conversion in his own words. This is really a remarkable passage of Scripture and it's going to take us to the book of Acts and I invite you turn to the book of Acts. This is preparatory for being able to study the book of Titus together in what is going to be a very crucial time in the life of our fellowship. So, in three different places in the book of Acts, you see Paul giving his testimony. We're going to focus on the one in Acts 26 and I would invite you to turn to Acts 26 as we start here and we'll just kind of pick it up and then we'll go back and set the context for it.

What I want you to see is this: one of the things that Paul said about his life when he was talking about himself in Philippians 3 is that the supreme desire of his heart was to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and if Paul were here today, he would be happy, I think, for us to study his testimony because it's recorded in the inspired Scriptures but for Paul, we should look at the life of Paul merely as a window through which we can see the Lord Jesus Christ. What we're going to see as we study the testimony of the Apostle Paul here today is that you are going to have an opportunity to draw closer to the Lord Jesus Christ in all of the majesty of his work in conversion and if anyone is a Christian, the idea of seeing Christ up close and personal played out in the life of an apostle's testimony is a great opportunity to know Christ and to make him known, to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, to know Christ and who he is and what he is like. What should see as you examine yourself as a Christian today is that in light of the preaching that's about to come, what you should see is a mirror of your own testimony. The things that Paul spoke about in his testimony become the things and the elements that you recognize in your own testimony and when you know how to properly interpret your Christian testimony, it teaches you about the attributes of Christ in a most significant way and that's what we're going to see with the Apostle Paul here.

Now, just to start with the text that we're going to use in Acts 26, let me just read the first three verses here. Paul, as we're going to see, is in front of some of the great dignitaries of his day and he's about to give his testimony and King Agrippa, in chapter 26:1 said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense," and he said and I quote, "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently."

Now, Paul is in front of, as we're going to see, a great display of secular pomp and circumstance and he comes to them and he says to King Agrippa, "I'm going to give you my testimony and I ask you to bear patiently with me as I do so." Now, if Paul could ask a king to listen to him patiently, I would ask you today to listen to me patiently; this may

take a little bit of time. Well, you know what we're going to do? I'm going to give an introduction to the main points of this sermon that's going to take probably 30-40 minutes and then we'll do the final three points, the three points of the message in maybe 15 minutes and so I ask you, because the context is so important, I ask you to bear with me patiently even as Paul asked a king to bear with him patiently as he laid the foundation to say something really crucial and important. I want to set the context for what Paul is doing here and the circumstances under which he gave his testimony and after we go through that, then we're going to see Christ displayed to us in unmistakable splendor and glory as Paul talks about the way that Christ saved him and the reason that he saved him. This is going to be really different but I'm excited to share these things with you.

Now, stepping back and kind of setting a little bit of context. We kind of have to pick up the story some place in the middle and let's just put it this way: as you know, the Jews of the day were opposed to the Apostle Paul after his conversion. They actively tried to silence him; they persecuted him; they beat him. They chased him away from city to city, trying to silence his testimony on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ and one day, as Paul was teaching in the temple, they attacked him. Look at Acts 21:27. Now we're going to get into the narrative and basically what we're going to do for the next half hour or so is we're just going to read a lot of Scripture together and I'm going to try to stitch things together in a way that help you see the high points of the narrative that leads up to Acts 26.

So, Paul was being faithful to Christ as he so faithfully was. He was so good about testifying of Christ and not letting opposition intimidate him into silence. I love that about him and we could all draw upon his example in that way.

But in Acts 21:27, this is all introduction here, "When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing Paul in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, 'Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.' For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple." There was an area where Gentiles in the temple were not allowed to go and they thought that Paul had brought this Gentile into that place and had defiled the temple. That wasn't true but that's what the accusation was.

Verse 30, "Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut. While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. At once he took along some soldiers and centurions and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul," and so the Romans were there to bring order out of this chaos and Paul was being beaten by the Jews and the soldiers showed up and stopped the chaos and took Paul into custody, they brought him into protective custody. While Paul was in custody, the Jews plotted together to kill him just like they killed the Lord Jesus.

Turn over to Acts 23:12. Obviously, we're skipping over a lot of detail here but I'm just trying to help you see the high points so that we can enjoy Paul's testimony together. Acts 23:12, "When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. There were more than forty who formed this plot. They came to the chief priests and the elders and said, 'We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul. Now therefore,'" here's their plot, "you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you," he's speaking of the Roman Commander, they're telling the Jewish leaders, "Work with the commander and tell the commander to bring him out in the open to you, "as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near the place."

Now, you want a sense of how wicked these people were? How obsessed they were with their evil plot to kill Paul? They were going to attack Paul while he was under the care of Roman soldiers. They were willing to engage a fight with Roman soldiers who would, no doubt, kill many of them in response. They were so hostile to the name of Christ that they were willing to die for the sake of having the opportunity to kill and silence the Apostle Paul. That is the extent of their furor, the extent of how obsessed they were to silence the gospel.

Well, if you've ever read the book of Acts, you know that the plot was exposed and the Roman soldiers, rather than taking Paul to the Jewish leaders there in Jerusalem, decided to remove him to the city of Caesarea that's about 60 miles away. They were in Jerusalem and you go 60 miles to the northwest and there's a city on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea known as Caesarea and they delivered Paul into the custody of a Roman Governor named Felix. Look at Acts 23:23 and, again, I'm having to summarize some of this just so that we get out of here before supper time.

Acts 23:23, "And the commander called to him two of the centurions," leaders of 100 soldiers, "and said, 'Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen.'" How concerned was a trained Roman commander about this threat to Paul? He had nearly 500 men gathered around to escort Paul to Caesarea, that's how serious he viewed the threat.

Now look at verse 24, "They were also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor." Felix was a Roman governor who was the over territory there in Caesarea.

Drop down to verse 33, "When these had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him," and so they show up with this prisoner, they present Paul to him and they delivered a letter that described the circumstances under which Paul was brought into protective custody and so Paul is now in front of a Roman governor in the city of Caesarea.

Verse 34 when this governor whose name is Felix “read it, he asked from what province Paul was from, and when he learned that he was from Cilicia, he said, 'I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also,' giving orders for him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium,” and so Paul was in protective custody, he was going to be kept in this former home of King Herod and here they are, he's going to call up his accusers from Jerusalem to have the hearing in Caesarea.

So, what happens is what we see in chapter 24:1: the Jews came and made their charges against Paul. Look at what's said here in chapter 24, verse 1, “After five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul.” The Jews are now stating their case why Paul should be prosecuted.

Verse 2, “After Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying to the governor, 'Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation, we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness.’” Not much has changed in politics over the years, has it? A lot of obsequious greetings and things like this just designed to try to curry favor of the one doing the hearing.

Verse 4, “But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing.” Now he's going to state the charges against Paul. He says, “we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.” Verse 6, “And he even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him.” We'll stop there. There you have it. The Jews have now laid out their charge and their case against the Roman governor, “This is why he was arrested. This is why he needs to be prosecuted.” So they had this attorney to make their case kind of on behalf of the prosecution, you might say.

Well, Felix and, again, skipping over many, many details here, Felix did not resolve the case. Felix did not make a decision. Instead, in the wickedness of his heart, he kept Paul in prison for two years. He would periodically bring Paul in to speak with him because he was hoping that Paul would give him a bribe so that he could get out of custody and you can see that at the end of Acts 24. Let's begin in verse 26, let's say, and I understand that even with all this context we're setting, I'm leaving a lot of things out. Verse 26, “At the same time too, he,” meaning Felix, “was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him.” Verse 27, “But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned,” and so this was a gross miscarriage of justice that was taking place. This governor who had authority over Paul as a prisoner did not act on his case. He left him in prison for two years and only brought him from time-to-time in, in the hopes that Paul would bribe his way out of prison and that Felix would get the financial benefit of that. So, here's Paul imprisoned for two years under false charges against him before a corrupt governor. So, you start to get a sense of what's happening, what leads up to Paul's testimony. He was the victim of injustice. This had been going on

for a long time and he's sitting in prison and although he has some privileges, he's restrained from pursuing the ministry that he otherwise would have chosen to pursue.

So Felix passes the baton to Festus, another Roman governor over the same territory and when Festus assumed office, history tells us that he was a more noble man than Felix and he decided to act on what was in front of him. Look at chapter 25:1-5. Remember, two years have passed now since Paul was transported to Caesarea and, remember, this is all just introduction. Chapter 25:1, "Festus then, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea." So he's going to meet the Jerusalem leaders on their own turf.

Verse 2, "And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul, and they were urging him," meaning Festus, "requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem." Let's stop right there. In legal terms, they're just asking for a change of venue. They're saying, "Move Paul from Caesarea and we'll try him here in Jerusalem. It's a more convenient place and this is where the crimes took place anyway." It all seems on the surface like a reasonable legal maneuver for the prosecution to take but those filthy, wicked Jews were merely using a legal maneuver to cloak their real intentions against Paul from Festus's perception.

Look at verse 3 again, they say please bring him to Jerusalem and then look at the parenthetical comment in verse 3, "(at the same time," they were, "setting an ambush to kill him on the way)." Let's not give any quarter to these Jews who were involved. These were the leaders of the Jewish religion and they were wicked murderous men out to get the Apostle Paul.

What did Festus do? Well, you've got to give the guy some credit here. He showed some savvy even though he was new to the office. Verse 4, "Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly." He says, "Look, I'm going back to Caesarea. I don't want to come back to Jerusalem. If you guys want Paul, you're going to have to come to Caesarea to prosecute your case."

Look at what he says in verse 5, "'Therefore,' he said, 'let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him.'" So, Festus is playing it straight here.

Now, when Festus got back to Caesarea, he addresses Paul about this. I love the legal maneuvering of this. I can't imagine why this all interests me so deeply but you can speculate on that for yourself sometime. Verse 6, "After he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he," meaning Festus, "went down to Caesarea, and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. After Paul arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove, while Paul said in his own defense, 'I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.'" He says, "They're charging me with these things but I categorically deny all of it. These things are not true, Festus."

Verse 9, “But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, 'Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?’” Now see, Festus was unaware of the plans to ambush Paul. He was new to the position and so he didn't know the full background of everything that had led to this particular moment in Paul's case but Paul knew. Paul knew what those wicked Jews were like and he knew that nothing good was going to happen in Jerusalem and so he refused that request by Festus.

Look at verse 10. This is a crucial moment for the spread of the gospel because it's here that Paul made his way to Rome and testified before Caesar. This is what set those events in motion. Verse 10, “But Paul said, 'I am standing before Caesar's tribunal,’” meaning that, “I shouldn't be standing before Jews in Jerusalem. I'm on trial before Caesar's representative. This is where I ought to be tried,” verse 10, “I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know.” Verse 11, “If, then, I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.” As soon as Paul made that appeal to Caesar, he took the case out of Festus's hands. He was asserting his right as a Roman citizen to have his appeal heard in the court of Caesar in the city of Rome and so there is some really heavy-duty legal maneuvering that's going on here and Paul in his utter genius, including his legal genius, made his own legal maneuver, played his own legal card and said, “I appeal to Caesar where I have privilege as a Roman citizen to be heard.” So this is what's going on.

Now, we're almost through our introduction here this morning. You have to know and understand the whole setting in which Paul gave his testimony in Acts 26. Here's what this meant, Paul's appeal to Caesar meant this: Festus had to send him to Caesar with a report for Caesar to read, a summary of the case, indicating what Paul was charged with. He can't send a prisoner to Caesar and say, “Here's a problem,” and let Caesar figure it out, he had to prepare a report so Caesar knew what was in front of him. Now, stay with me, oh, I want you to stay with me on this: Festus didn't know what to write. He was new to the case, he was not familiar with Jewish ways and so he had no idea what to even write to them.

Look at verse 23. Festus arranged a hearing with another local king, not a king of Rome but with another local king named Agrippa and he wanted Agrippa to give him advice on, “What do I write to Caesar? I need some help here. If I, as a Roman governor, send this case to Caesar without telling him what this is about, I'm going to look like an idiot.” Acts 25:23, “So, on the next day when Agrippa came together with Bernice,” that was his wife, “amid great pomp, and entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.”

Now, let me back up. Let me just show you one little thing here. In verse 20 of chapter 25, Festus is talking to King Agrippa, actually, go back to verse 13. “Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and paid their respects to Festus. While they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, 'There is a man who was left as a prisoner by Felix; and when I was at

Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him.” So, one leader speaking to another and he says, “I’ve got this difficult case. Let me bring you into my confidence and see if you have some advice that could help me here.”

Verse 16, “I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face,” and so verse 17, “after they had assembled here, I did not delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought before me. When the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting,” here you see Festus's confusion taking place. He said, “they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive.” Verse 20, “I was at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem but when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, what do I do? I don't know what to do with this mess.” Verse 22, “Then Agrippa said to Festus, 'I also would like to hear the man myself.’” Festus said, “Tomorrow you will hear him.”

Now, there's been a lot of context here. I understand that, thank you for staying with me on this but what I want you to see here is the circumstances under which, the providence under which Paul gave this testimony that we're about to see in Acts 26. He is in front of the leading dignitaries of his day: men with great authority; men who were over him, that were over the whole region.

So, what happened? Acts 25:23, “So, on the next day when Agrippa came together with Bernice amid great pomp, and entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in,” and so, no doubt, they were clothed in their formal attire; this is a great formal occasion with the leading political and military commanders of the day and Paul is brought in in order to explain what is happening so that Agrippa can advise Festus on what to write to Caesar. This is not a trial that's taking place here, this is a formal occasion that Festus arranged to impress another king so that he could hear Paul's testimony and Agrippa could advise Festus on what to say to Caesar. So this is not a trial, this is an informal testimony that Paul is giving here.

Now, Festus is the host of this occasion and in verse 24 you see him introducing the proceedings, “Festus said, 'King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you see this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him. Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord.’” What am I going to say to my boss? “Therefore I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write. For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him.”

That's the long context. That's the long introduction. There is this complex legal case that's going on. Paul has exercised his right of appeal. The governors of the region say, "I don't know what to do with this. Give me some advice." He says, "If I'm going to give you some advice, I need to hear what this man has to say." And in that place of the leading men in the region, the Apostle Paul, in chains, steps up to testify about Christ. For us here today, what we're about to see as we go into Acts 26 is we are about to hear the conversion testimony of the Apostle Paul in his own words. This is a great and glorious privilege for us to be able to do. This is an inspired account, an inerrant account, of the words of the Apostle Paul as he spoke to kings about the real King of kings, about Christ, and gave his testimony.

This is Paul speaking of the work of Christ in his own words and as he gives his testimony, we're going to see three vital realities about the person of Christ to whom he testifies and see a reflection of grace in our own salvation. First of all, now you can start taking notes if you haven't been taking notes before now: what is it that we testify about when we give testimony to our Lord Jesus Christ? What is it that we look back on our lives as Christians, what is it that we look back on and we remember about the person of Christ and how he dealt with us? You see, when Paul gets here, he's really not so concerned about the legal maneuver, he's simply taking the opportunity that his legal maneuver produced to give testimony to the leading figures of the city of Caesarea in that entire region. Without shame. Without fear. Without qualification. He simply lays out the realities of his own testimony of what Christ did in his life. You can see in what Paul described, you can see a structure for your own testimony and in the structure of your own testimony, oh beloved, when we give our testimony, it's not about us. It's not about you and it's not about me. How is it that you give a testimony that points to the person of Christ? That's what matters. We're secondary. Do you understand that? That in your Christian testimony and in your Christian life, you are secondary to the Great One, to the Great Lord and King? Our lives are just a window of testimony to Christ. Our preaching is just a testimony, a window into Christ. It's not about us.

When we form, take this fellowship and migrate from being a loose fellowship to a formal New Testament church, it's not so we can say we're a church now instead of a fellowship, it's so that we can rightly be a window of testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what matters. That's what's important. That's what we pray for. That's what we labor for. That's what we serve for, is that we might be a proper window of testimony to our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul points the way. What's true individually is true corporately, that we might know Christ and the power of his resurrection, that we might reach forward to what lies ahead. Stop looking behind at the things that are past.

In this testimony in Acts 26, there is a very clear structure of the way that Paul presents his testimony about Christ. First of all, taking notes now, the first thing that you see in any Christian's testimony is the patience of Christ. The patience of Christ. His longsuffering nature with sinners. That's what you see. As Paul gives his testimony, we'll read the first three verses again just to set the context. It was a long time ago that we were there. Man, it must have been 30 minutes ago that we read these verses. Acts 26:1-3, "Agrippa said to Paul, 'You are permitted to speak for yourself.' Then Paul stretched out

his hand and proceeded to make his defense: 'In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; you are an expert, I beg you to listen to me patiently.' Then he launches and in the first part of his testimony that we're going to see in the next 7-8 verses, is you're going to see Paul testifying about his life before Christ, what he was like before Christ met him on the road of Damascus. We're going to take a little time to look at this and let Paul interpret it for us.

“So then,” verse 4, he opens it up, “all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.” He's saying, “I was a religious man before my conversion. I was a Pharisee, the strictest sect of the Jews. I was scrupulous in all that I observed. There was a religious dynamic to my prior life.”

Now verse 6, “I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews.” What was that hope? What was it that he preached? That created such problems?

Verse 8, “Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?” He says, “They're accusing me and they're angry with me because I preach the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” He says, “But they shouldn't be upset about this. Pharisees believe in the resurrection. If I'm preaching resurrection, I'm not preaching anything inconsistent with what they say they believe so what's the problem?” You see, what Paul had just said there in those verses that we just read, is that the Jews knew that he was one of them. He said, “I came out of the strictest sect of Judaism. There is a history here that is known to everyone and I was a Pharisee of highest scholarship, I was a Pharisee of religious zeal. I was disposed in my earlier life to be in complete harmony with what these Jews who are now trying to accuse me and kill me, I was in complete harmony at one time with them.” There is a religious context to this.

He goes on and he says something really remarkable. Verse 9, he said, “So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem.” Remember, he's talking about his prior life before his was converted. He said, “This is what I did, not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.”

Now, what you have in that little summary that Paul gives about his life before Christ is that he was not spiritually disposed toward Christ, in fact, he was hostile toward the name of Christ as shown by, as shown by the fact that he brutally persecuted those who were followers of Christ. He says, “I pursued them. I tried to make them blaspheme. I locked them up in prison. I cast my vote against them when they were up for execution.”

Paul was an incredibly hostile man to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ before his conversion. There is no disputing these facts. That was Paul's life before his conversion. Listen, listen, listen: he was utterly encased in false works-based religion. He was utterly hostile to the name of Jesus Christ. He was bound up in self-righteousness. He was bound up in hostility to the name of Christ. He was a serious mortal threat to those early Christians and Scripture bears witness of the fact that Stephen spilled his blood with Paul's affirmation.

What are we to think about that? I want that to settle in on your mind. Paul, as we see in his own words, was not a natural Christian. There is no such thing, being a natural Christian to begin with but you have laid out before you Paul's spiritual demeanor toward himself, "I'm a self-righteous Pharisees"; you have his hostility toward Christ laid out. This man, this man sinned and sinned and sinned and sinned and sinned and sinned by affirming all of that false religion. In Romans he speaks about how it awakened him to coveting in his life and listen, listen: dear, sweet, humble believers for whom Christ died and rose again found their earthly lives threatened and often terminated because of the authority that Paul had and exercised against them. We need to see that in the life of Paul, there was a man who was as personally hostile to Christ as they come, that he was at the pinnacle of opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ.

What are we to say about that? Well, you know what? Let's not you and me speculate about how we should interpret that. We know that Christ saved him; we know that he became an apostle. How are we to interpret the fact that Christ showed mercy to him, showed kindness to him, in light of that horrible past that Paul brought to the table? How are we to understand that? I say we let Paul tell us, right? Why don't we let Paul say what this means and why don't we, as we do that, we should approach it with a sense not of just an historical curiosity but what does that say to you and me.

Turn to 1 Timothy 1. You're going to see exactly the lesson you're supposed to take from this and the lesson is all about the patience of Christ. 1 Timothy 1:12, Paul reflecting back on the same things that he was telling Agrippa. This is Paul's commentary on that aspect of his pre-conversion experience. Look at the humility and the gratitude that marks his life and let it be a mirror of reflection for your own gratitude if you're a Christian. Paul says, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor." That's what we just saw, right? Paul is saying, "This is what I used to be like." And, "Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief." Verse 14, "and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me," here's the lesson, here's what we're to draw from Paul's pre-conversion experience, "in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life," and then he bursts into praise, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

Paul says, "Here's how to understand my testimony." He says, "You should look at my testimony and see the perfect patience of our Lord Jesus Christ on display. Can you imagine," Paul says, "how patient he is? Do you realize how vile my life was? Do you realize how actively hostile I was to his name? And yet, rather than exercise a sovereign prerogative of judgment on my guilty head, Christ showed mercy to me. Christ brought me to himself." This is nothing more than patience. Christ overlooked, in a manner of speaking, Christ passed over all of that hostility that Paul had shown to his name and saved him. Christ passed over the entire prior history of Paul's life: false religion, false teaching, works-based righteousness, killing his own disciples and saved him. You think about the way you usually respond or often respond to people who cut you off in traffic and the fact that you get peeved about that little, minor, passing provocation. Paul had, in one sense, had done things that could righteously have provoked Christ to utter judgment on his head and instead, Christ saved him, Christ forgave him, Christ brought him into his service. Paul says, "Look at that and see the perfect patience of Christ."

Now, let me say something to those of you that are Christians: you should look at this and think back on your own life prior to Christ and realize how great a patience he showed to you too. You may not have persecuted Christians, you may not have had actual guilty, literal blood on your hands but you were no less sinful, you were no less guilty, you were no less deserving of judgment than anyone else. Everyone one of you, preacher included. And the fact that we are here today, the recipients of sovereign grace, the goodness of God, the fact that we can be here as Christians with our sins forgiven and know that Christ has passed over all of our sins and paid for them at Calvary just like he did with Paul, should provoke in us the exact same response of praise that Paul gave, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God be honor and glory forever and ever."

Sometime there are aspects of preaching that just – I don't know – you just realize your limitations and I realize that unless the Spirit of God somehow impresses this upon your heart, I'm wasting my breath. This is just a time that just needs the help of the Holy Spirit upon your heart because human words can't do it justice. Everyone of us that is a Christian should look back and have such a profound sense that Christ was so patient with me, so patient with my sins, external obvious to those around. So patient with my indifference to him. So patient with my blasphemes against him. So patient with the way that I casually cursed his name. You fill in the blanks of your own sin. You've got your own history to write out in terms of your pre-conversion experience. You're guilty. You wronged Christ repeatedly and he saved you? Wow, what does that display about the character of his great heart? Of his patience? Of his refusal to exercise judgment where it could have come and say, "By an act of my will, based on my work on the cross, I will exercise patience, grace and mercy upon you in spite of your prior sin." You should love him. You should be overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude that he was patient because you know what, if he hadn't been patient with you, you would be utterly ruined. Your whole internal destiny, your whole eternal well-being hinged on the fact that Christ has been patient with you. For the love of Christ, you ought to love him in response to that. You ought to be humbled. You ought to be overwhelmed with gratitude. You should put

aside your complaining for just a little while and simply respond to him with a sense that says, "Jesus, thank you! I know I didn't deserve that!" You're not even a Christian if you don't see that that's an issue.

Let me say this to those of you that don't know Christ, those of you that aren't Christians. This is a great encouragement here. Yeah, you're guilty just like the rest of us were but you should see in the patience of Christ an expression of the love of God towards sinners. The patience of Christ manifests the love of God towards sinners and in the proclamation of the gospel, believe in Christ and be saved from your sins, you see an active expression of the love of God toward you that says right now you can have the forgiveness of all of your sins if you'll simply turn to Christ and believe on him. If Christ forgave a blasphemer and a persecutor like Paul, that's the worst case scenario and he showed mercy there. Do you know what? He'll show mercy to you too. Just come to him. Come to Christ. There is nothing to hinder you from coming to Christ at all except your own reluctance. Jesus Christ is a friend of sinners. He is a willing Savior. God is a saving God. He saves sinners and his patience is on display and if you're here and you're not a Christian, listen, listen to me: the fact that you're here under the sound of the gospel being expressed to you from the Scriptures is an evidence of God's incredible grace to you. God is presenting you right now with the words of eternal life. Through his word, he's pleading saying, "Come to Christ. I would have you be saved." Patience on full display. Your guilt waiting to be exchanged for the righteousness of Christ if you'll bow the knee. Why would you refuse? Come to Christ. Your sin is not too much for grace. It's not too much for Christ. That's why he came. He's a patient loving Savior and this is on full display in the testimony of the Apostle Paul. I love Christ, don't you? This is a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, unspeakably majestic, gracious Savior and you should love him with all your heart.

His patience is on full display. Secondly, in Paul's testimony we see the power of Christ. Turn back to Acts 26, verse 12. Paul moves on to that aspect of his testimony where he was actually converted. You know the story so we won't have to spend much time on it. "While so engaged," in all these blasphemies and persecutions, in other words in verse 12, "as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you.'" He's sending this Jewish scholar to Gentiles. Incredible. Verse 18, "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me."

That was the moment of Paul's conversion. In Paul, we see a display of the supernatural power of Christ, supernatural power of meeting him with blinding light, supernatural power of commissioning him into his service. What I want you to see is this: when we preach the gospel, when we tell sinners to turn to Christ so that they can be saved, we are not preaching a message of natural, moral reformation that calls people to change their behavior and makes themselves acceptable to God. The presupposition of the gospel is that you don't have the capacity to do that, that your nature is corrupt and unable to save yourself. You can't do anything to please God. No one can change you and you cannot change yourself. Paul couldn't change himself. He wasn't even looking to change himself. He was doing what he loved to do out of the wickedness of his own pre-converted heart.

So, beloved, as we preach the gospel, we are not preaching a natural message. We are preaching a supernatural message that the God of heaven saves and changes sinners through faith in Christ. That's the power of Christ and if you're a Christian here today, your life is a testimony of that power. Jesus Christ in Paul's testimony, he instantly overcame Paul's prior religion. He instantly overcame Paul's hostility and turned Paul to himself. Look in verse 15 where Paul said, "Who are you, Lord?" He acknowledged him as sovereign right in his initial response. This was nothing less than the supernatural intervention of Christ in the life of Paul and world history was never the same thereafter. You see, true salvation, biblical salvation, changes a man, changes a woman. There is a real invisible but no less real power that comes upon the human soul when God regenerates that soul and turns it to faith in Christ. This is supernatural. This does not occur by natural means. Biblical salvation is powerful because the Christ who is the author of it is powerful. He is sovereign even over a wicked human heart and the fact that he's sovereign over the human heart is the only thing sometimes that motivates a preacher to get up and preach to people who don't want to hear because you trust in the fact that just as Christ worked in Paul, maybe this time he'll work in the heart of that one who's been resistant and indifferent and cold and bored. Bored under the sound of the gospel, are you kidding me? What is that? Eternity is at stake and you're cold and indifferent under the preaching of God's word? What on earth is wrong with you? You get 60 minutes to hear that which would deliver your soul from eternal damnation and you can't wait for it to be over? What's wrong with you?

You see, the only thing that sustains a preacher in the face of that kind of indifference and hostility is trust in the power of Christ that the Christ who could confront a hostile man like Saul and stop him in his tracks is able to do the same thing through the preaching of the same gospel today. His power is undiminished. We preach a supernatural message and we trust the Holy Spirit to take it and to apply it as it pleases his sovereign will.

Those of you who aren't Christians, I have no confidence in your ability to respond to what I'm saying. None. None. I have no confidence in your ability to respond. That's not why I do this. It's because we trust the power of Christ to overcome even a stubborn sinner like you and to bring you to faith in him. The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword. But still we plead for you to come. Still you must

repent and come to Christ. There's power in the gospel. Paul said in Romans 1:16, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel. It's the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes." What's this power like? Let me show you what this power is like. This is more than carrying a bottle of nitroglycerin. This is more than sitting on a case of dynamite. This is resurrection power that we traffic in when we preach the gospel. Look at Ephesians 1. The power of Christ in salvation. Paul, writing to Christians and understanding that our minds are dull and our understanding is thick, Paul is praying and he says in verse 17, "I pray "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." He says, "I'm praying for you. I'm praying because I need supernatural help to communicate this from my mind to yours because you don't have the inherent power to receive this on your own and he says in verse 18, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is," here it is, verse 19, remember, we're talking about the power of Christ, "what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." How great is that power? "These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." Paul runs out of words to describe how great this power is but his point is this: the power of Christ that is expressed in the proclamation of the gospel is the exact same power that raised a dead man to life, the power that is at work in the gospel, the power that is at work in conversion is the exact same power that resurrected Christ from the tomb 2,000 years ago. That's power!

Have you ever been at a grave shortly after someone that you loved died? You feel that sense of overwhelming loss. Unbelief, disbelief at what's happened. That sense of, "Oh, oh, oh, if I could just have maybe ten minutes. Just one last ten minute conversation just to say the final things that are on my heart." Maybe someone taken from you suddenly in an accident or something like that, didn't even get a chance to say good-bye and you're there at the grave and you would give anything, you're consumed by an overwhelming desire, "Oh, if I could just bring him back for ten minutes to say the things that are on my heart." And you can't. You have no power to do that and the grave just mocks your impotence. Do you know what? The limitations and the inability that you have are utterly foreign to the person of Christ. When he commands a man to come out of the grave like Lazarus, you know what happens? Lazarus comes forth. When God exercised power to call Christ out of the grave, do you know what happened? Christ came forth. Nothing could restrain him. Resurrection power that is utterly foreign to the hands of men. That's the power of Christ in the gospel and that is the power that worked on your heart when you became a Christian. Christ has the power to save sinners and to change them. Christ saved Paul. Christ saved many of you. Christ saved me. Changed me. Instantly. Instantly when I wasn't even looking.

So what do we do? What do we do as we transition from a fellowship to a church? What's the central commitment of our corporate existence as we come together and say we're going to commit ourselves to leadership and membership? What are we going to

commit ourselves to? It's not about you and me, it is about being vessels of the proclamation of the power of Christ to save sinners. That's what it's all about and so we preach and we pray until the Lord gathers his sheep into the fold. That's what it's about.

The final thing: the patience of Christ, the power of Christ, thirdly, the purpose of Christ. Go back to Acts 26. You see, you can't preach these things in an academic manner. I question the call of a man to a pulpit if he can discuss these things without some manner of passion somewhere animating him. Verse 19. These things matter, beloved. These things matter. Verse 19, the purpose of Christ in salvation. You saw it hinted at in verse 16, Christ said, "for this purpose I have appeared to you to appoint you a minister and a witness to what you've seen." Verse 19, "King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles." Christ saved Paul to use him in a great non-repeatable apostolic way. Paul proved the reality of his conversion by being obedient to the heavenly vision.

Now, on a different scale, in a different way, it's the same thing for you and me, beloved. It's the same. Christ saved us to use us. Look at Ephesians 2. We're almost done. I think I've been preaching for like 2 ½ hours here, I don't know. If you knew what I wanted to say and didn't, you'd commend me for my brevity. Ephesians 2:10, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." Christ saved you to use you, not simply to exempt you from eternal punishment. There is a purpose in your salvation that you are to ascertain and fulfill. Part of the way that we do that is we gather together in a corporate body like this and we serve one another in the context of committed Christian relationships.

Turn over to the book of Titus and this is where we'll close. You've got to see this. We've been taught a truncated gospel for too long that makes the gospel simply a matter of avoiding eternal punishment and going, "Okay, well, I'm gonna go to heaven instead of hell and that's the gospel. Now I can get back to life. Isn't that cool?" No, that's not cool because that's not the gospel. That's not the gospel. That's not cool. No, no, let Scripture speak to what Christ was doing in our salvation. Verse 14, Titus 2, it says he "who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." You were saved, purified from sin and as you're being purified from sin to serve Christ with a life of faithful good works done in his name. That's why you were saved. It's not about you. It's about the purpose of Christ being fulfilled, that for which he went to Gethsemane, that for which he spilled his blood, that for which he bore the wrath of God on our behalf. It's not about us. It's not about me. It's not about you. It's about the purpose of Christ in

saving sinners. Beloved, he's ordained the steps which we walk in. We find our purpose in life in the outworking of the purpose of his grace.

What happened when Paul gave this testimony? It's the same thing that happens everywhere. It's the same thing everywhere. There was opposition. Verse 24, Acts 26, "While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.'" Hostility. "But Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth.'" He turned his attention to Agrippa, verse 27, "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do." Festus was hostile, Agrippa played games. He put it off. "Agrippa replied to Paul, 'In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.'" This isn't a serious response. Paul had put him in a corner with the truth and he says, "I'll deal with this later." Verse 29, "And Paul said, 'I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.'" Verse 30, "The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, and when they had gone aside, they began talking to one another, saying, 'This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment. This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.'" Totally blowing off the testimony of the patience, the power and the purpose of Christ. You wouldn't be one of those, would you? Just blowing it off?

Those of you that love Christ which I take is the vast majority in this room, what would God have you do in response to a message like this? This testimony of Paul? Rehearse in your own mind the reality of your conversion. Look back and see how Christ was patient with you before salvation and that he's been patient with you since. He's dealt with your cold heart and your prayerless ways and your indifference and your worldly attitudes and he's still gracious in pouring out and cleansing you moment-by-moment from all of your sin. Can't you love him for that? Doesn't that just motivate you to want to fulfill the purpose of your salvation with faithful service to him? That's where this lead us. That's where any true encounter, for lack of a better word, understanding of Christ leads us. It leads us to praise his character, "What a patient Christ." It leads us to see his power at work in me. It leads to resolve, "I'm going to serve him faithfully. I'm going to reapply myself to devotion to this great and powerful Christ."

That's our aim at Truth Community Fellowship. Want to come? Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we praise you for your patience, your power and your purpose in our salvation. We may not have blood on our hands like Paul did but we certainly had the manifold guilt of multiplied sins against you until you faithfully intervened, displayed your power and saved us by grace. We thank you for our salvation. Lord, thank you seems so inadequate. The words of our lips can't really express the affection of our hearts but, Lord, it's all that we have to offer you. Our words are sincere even though they're inadequate. We love you and we stand amazed in your presence and we worship you and we honor you and we pray that the same power, the same resurrection power that energized our conversion would now energize our efforts to be faithful to you in our individual lives and in our corporate lives together as we move in the direction of

becoming what you would have this place to be. It's not about us, O God, it's truly not about us. It's about your blessed, beloved Son whom we love and adore and to whom we offer all that we have in this room for you to take and exercise and advance to the glory of your name. For the sake of Christ and in his peaceful name, we pray. Amen.

You've been listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church. For more information about our ministry including Pastor Don's blog and our location and service times, please visit us at truthcommunitychurch.com. You will also find Don's sermon library where you can download free messages on many biblical passages and topics. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.