

LESSON 10

Equipped to Defend the Faith: Paul's Trials

Acts 22–26

So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision

Acts 26:19

Class Overview: From his arrest in Jerusalem to his final hearing before King Agrippa, Paul faced rulers, soldiers, and councils—defending both his faith and his mission. Throughout every trial, he remained calm, courageous, and confident in the gospel. Instead of viewing his imprisonment as a setback, Paul saw it as a platform to share Christ with influential audiences. This lesson illustrates how God equips His servants to stand firm under pressure, give a reason for their hope, and turn opposition into opportunity. Paul's example shows believers that our faith is most convincing when it is lived and spoken with integrity, boldness, and grace.

Class Objectives:

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Summarize Paul's primary defenses before the Jewish leaders, Felix, Festus, and King Agrippa.
2. Understand how Paul used his personal testimony as a tool for sharing the gospel.
3. Recognize how the Holy Spirit equips believers to speak with courage and clarity under pressure.
4. Identify lessons from Paul's example for responding to criticism, hostility, or injustice.
5. Apply these principles by learning to share personal faith stories that point others to Christ.

Introduction

FROM THE MOMENT PAUL RETURNED TO JERUSALEM, his journey was marked by conflict. False accusations, angry crowds, and unfair treatment followed him everywhere. Still, through it all, God's hand remained steady. What seemed like defeat turned into a series of divine opportunities. Paul wasn't just on trial for his life; he was standing as a witness for the gospel before rulers and kings.

When the Jews accused him of defiling the temple, Paul remained calm and defended himself. He shared his background as a Pharisee, his passion for the law, and his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. Every time he appeared before a new audience—whether the Sanhedrin, Governor Felix, Festus, or King Agrippa—Paul used the moment to tell his story and to honor Jesus as the risen Lord.

Paul's defenses show how a Christian can face pressure with courage. He didn't panic or fight back. He spoke honestly, respectfully, and confidently. Even when his audience mocked or rejected him, he stayed focused on his mission: to testify about what he had seen and heard. The same Spirit that strengthened him during his missionary trips now helped him stand firm in chains.

Acts 22–26 show that faith under pressure is one of the strongest testimonies of all. Paul's calm confidence in God displayed a peace that no court could take away. His life reminds us that defending the faith isn't just about answering arguments—it's about demonstrating the power of the gospel through steadfast trust and clear witness. When we live faithfully under pressure, we become living proof that Christ is real and that His grace is enough in every trial. *God himself will be with them and will be their God.* That is the promise. Heaven will be heaven because we will live in the eternal presence of God.

Historical Background

Paul's trials happen during the final years of his third missionary journey and at the start of his long trip to Rome. Around A.D. 57, he returned to Jerusalem after years of ministry among the Gentiles, bringing a collection from the churches to support the poor saints there. His arrival

caused controversy. Jewish leaders accused him of teaching against the law of Moses and of defiling the temple by bringing Gentiles into its courts—charges that were both false and inflammatory.

A riot erupted in the temple area, and Roman soldiers stepped in to prevent the mob from beating Paul to death. The commander, Claudius Lysias, arrested Paul and allowed him to address the crowd. From the steps of the fortress (Acts 22), Paul gave his testimony in Hebrew, describing his past as a persecutor of Christians and his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. His mention of being sent to the Gentiles sparked the crowd's fury again, prompting the Romans to take him inside for his safety.

The next day, Paul stood before the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 23). Recognizing that his audience was split between Pharisees and Sadducees, he strategically emphasized his belief in the resurrection. This led to disagreement, and the Roman commander removed him again for his safety. That night, the Lord appeared to Paul and said, *Have courage! For as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so it is necessary for you to testify in Rome.* (Acts 23:11)

From Jerusalem, Paul was moved to Caesarea for trial before Governor Felix (Acts 24). Felix was interested in Paul's message but postponed judgment, hoping for a bribe. Two years later, when Festus took over from Felix, Paul again defended himself against Jewish accusations (Acts 25). When Festus suggested sending him back to Jerusalem for trial, Paul used his right as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar.

Before being sent to Rome, Paul made a final defense before King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice (Acts 26). In this powerful scene, Paul again shared his testimony and boldly declared Christ's resurrection. Agrippa famously replied, *"Are you going to persuade me to become a Christian so easily?"* (26:28). Although the rulers found him innocent, Paul's appeal to Caesar meant he would be sent to Rome, just as the Lord had promised.

God used imprisonment and injustice to bring Paul before rulers, governors, and kings. Each hearing became a platform for the gospel. What seemed like the end of Paul's freedom was actually the start of the

gospel's spread into the heart of the empire.

Equipped with a Clear Testimony (22:1–21)

Standing on the steps of the fortress in Jerusalem, surrounded by soldiers and an angry crowd, Paul asked for permission to speak. The situation was tense, yet he did not shout or retaliate. Instead, he calmly addressed the crowd as *brothers and fathers*, showing respect to those who despised him. When he began speaking in Hebrew, the crowd fell silent.

Paul's defense was clear and strong: he told his story. He reminded them that he was a Jew, born in Tarsus, educated under Gamaliel, and zealous for the law; just like they were. He explained how he once persecuted followers of Jesus, arresting and imprisoning them. But then came the turning point: the day he met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.

He recounted how a bright light from heaven surrounded him and how he heard a voice saying, *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* When Paul asked who was speaking, the answer came: *I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are persecuting.* That single encounter changed everything. The persecutor became the preacher; the enemy became the servant.

Paul's testimony revealed both God's mercy and his mission. He described how Ananias came to him, restored his sight, and said, *'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear the words from his mouth, since you will be a witness for him to all people.'* (vv. 14–15)

Then came the commission that defined the rest of his life: God sent him not only to his own people but also to the Gentiles. That statement again angered the crowd, but Paul's purpose was clear. He wanted them to understand that his faith was not rebellion; it was obedience to the God of Israel. Paul's example shows the power of a personal testimony. When explaining the gospel, he didn't rely solely on argument; he shared what Christ had done for him. Every believer can do the same. We may not all stand before crowds, but we all have a story of grace, a story that can open hearts to the truth. The Spirit equips us to speak it clearly, humbly, and boldly whenever the opportunity comes.

Equipped for Courage Under Pressure (Acts 23–25)

Paul's defense before the Sanhedrin and the Roman governors shows remarkable courage under continuous pressure. He faced angry mobs, false accusations, and powerful men who could end his life with a single word, yet he never wavered. His strength came not from his own resolve but from his trust in God's plan.

When Paul stood before the Sanhedrin, he began by saying, *Brothers, I have lived my life before God in good conscience up to this day.* (23:1). His statement provoked anger, and the high priest ordered him to be struck on the mouth. Even then, Paul kept his composure, showing that conviction does not require hostility. When he saw that his audience was divided between Pharisees and Sadducees, he wisely highlighted the resurrection, the doctrine at the center of both his faith and their division. The uproar that followed forced the Roman commander to intervene once again.

That night, as Paul sat confined in the barracks, the Lord Himself appeared to him with reassurance: *'Have courage! For as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so it is necessary for you to testify in Rome.'* (23:11). That promise became the anchor of Paul's heart. No matter what plots or trials came next, he knew God's purpose would not fail.

Over the next two years, Paul faced multiple hearings before Governor Felix, Festus, and the Jewish accusers who sought his execution. Felix delayed judgment, hoping for a bribe, while Festus tried to please the Jews by sending Paul back to Jerusalem for trial. Knowing the danger he faced there, Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar. His decision ensured he would eventually take the gospel to Rome, fulfilling the Lord's promise.

Throughout all of this, Paul's courage relied on God's sovereignty. He didn't see himself as a victim but as an ambassador in chains. Every court became a platform, every hearing a pulpit. Even when people in power were corrupt or indifferent, Paul's faith never wavered. Courage in the Christian life does not mean the absence of fear. It means trusting God in the face of it. Paul's calm endurance reminds us that no circumstance,

no authority, and no injustice can silence the message of Christ when the Spirit equips us to stand firm.

Equipped to Proclaim the Truth Boldly (26:1–32)

When Paul stood before King Agrippa, he faced one of the most dramatic moments of his life. He was in chains, surrounded by soldiers, rulers, and Roman officials, men of rank and influence. Yet Paul's tone was not fearful or defensive. He spoke with calm conviction, showing respect for the king while seizing the opportunity to proclaim the gospel.

I consider myself fortunate, Paul began, that today I am going to make a defense before you... because you are very knowledgeable about all the Jewish customs and controversies. (26:2–3). His words were gracious but confident. Instead of focusing on his suffering, he focused on his mission—to testify about Christ.

Once again, Paul recounted his story. He described his former life as a persecutor, his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road, and the commission he received to preach to both Jews and Gentiles. In this retelling, Paul highlighted the message Christ had given him: *I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (v. 18).*

Then Paul declared the key statement that defined his entire ministry: *“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” (v. 19).* He had obeyed Christ's call, preaching repentance and faith wherever he went. Because of that, and not for any crime, he now faced trial.

Festus interrupted, accusing Paul of being insane because of his great learning. But Paul replied calmly, *I'm not out of my mind, most excellent Festus. On the contrary, I'm speaking words of truth and good judgment (v. 25).* Turning to Agrippa, Paul pressed the question home: *Do you believe the prophets? I know you believe (v. 27).* The king's reply was famous: *Are you going to persuade me to become a Christian so easily? (v. 28).*

Paul's answer reflects the heart of an evangelist: *I wish before God that, whether easily or with difficulty, not only you but all who listen to me today*

might become like me—except for these chains. (v. 29). Even in captivity, Paul's desire was not for freedom but for others' salvation. When the hearing ended, the rulers agreed: Paul had done nothing deserving death or imprisonment. Yet because he had appealed to Caesar, he would continue his journey to Rome. Paul's defense before Agrippa demonstrates the courage and clarity that come from walking closely with God. He didn't see himself as a prisoner of Rome but as a servant of Christ, commissioned to speak truth wherever he was. The Spirit who strengthened Paul in that courtroom still equips believers today—to share our faith boldly, even when the world resists or ridicules it.

Lesson Summary and Reflection

Key Truths from Paul's Trials:

- God equips His people to speak with courage and clarity, even under pressure.
- A clear personal testimony is one of the strongest tools for sharing the gospel.
- The Spirit uses opposition and hardship to open doors for greater witness.
- True defense of the faith is shown not only in words but in steadfast character and grace.
- Every trial can become an opportunity for God's glory when we remain faithful to our calling.

Paul's trials before the Jewish leaders and Roman officials reveal a faith that could not be shaken. Though accused, beaten, and imprisoned, he never lost sight of his mission. His calm, respectful, and unwavering testimony turned every courtroom into a platform for the gospel. What others saw as defeat, Paul saw as divine opportunity.

Before angry mobs, skeptical governors, and curious kings, Paul stood as a man at peace because he knew whom he served. His testimony remained consistent in every setting—he once opposed Christ, but now he lived to proclaim Him. His strength came from the confidence that God's plan was still unfolding, even through chains.

Paul's example shows us that defending the faith is about more than

just knowledge; it's about character. The Spirit empowers us to speak the truth with kindness, respond to hostility with patience, and view every challenge as an opportunity to lead others to Jesus. Our strongest witness often comes not in comfortable moments but in times of testing.

Like Paul, we are called to give an account of our hope, not with arrogance but with sincerity and love. Whether talking to a neighbor or facing opposition, our task remains the same: to demonstrate that the gospel is true because it has transformed us. When we live and speak with that kind of integrity, God uses our lives as living defenses of His truth.

Memory Verse and Weekly Challenge

So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.

Acts 26:19 (CSB)

Weekly Challenge: Reflect on how God has influenced your life. Write down your personal testimony—how you came to faith, what Christ has changed in you, and the hope you now hold in Him. Pray for the courage to share part of that story with someone this week. Like Paul, let your life and words testify to the truth of the gospel.

For Discussion

1. How does Paul's example show that a clear personal testimony can be one of the most effective ways to share the gospel?

2. What stands out to you about Paul's courage and calmness during his trials before rulers and kings?

3. How did God use Paul's imprisonment and suffering to advance the message of Christ?

4. What lessons can we learn from Paul about responding to criticism, false accusation, or hostility with grace?

5. How can you prepare yourself to "give a defense" of your faith when opportunities arise in your own life?
