

Acts 26

Read Acts 26:1-8: This venue is exactly what God foresaw and arranged. Paul is ministering to the Kings now. He has been trained in how to present evidence, and how to represent in the courts. King Herod Agrippa II was an expert on Jewish customs and religion.

But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. (Acts 9:15)

Paul begins with a raised hand as a salute or tribute to his judges. Paul is well aware of Herod's well-known efforts and pursuit of knowing Jewish customs and culture. This puts Herod on par with subject-matter experts. There are adages about wisdom leading in with compliments. God also addresses the seven churches in Asia with their spiritual report cards each beginning with a compliment.

Common adages and phrases

"Sandwich" or "Compliment Sandwich" — The most well-known approach: frame criticism between two compliments (compliment, criticism, compliment). This is sometimes called the "feedback sandwich."

"Start with praise, then the punch" — Lead with genuine appreciation before delivering difficult feedback, so the recipient is more receptive.

"You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar" — An older proverb suggesting that kindness and positive framing work better than harshness when trying to influence someone.

"Seek first to understand, then to be understood" — From Stephen Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*; it emphasizes establishing rapport and credibility before offering critique.

"Lead with strength, deliver with grace" — The idea that acknowledging someone's strengths before addressing weaknesses makes feedback more constructive.

The principle behind it

These adages reflect a psychological reality: **people are more open to criticism when they feel valued and respected first.** A compliment or acknowledgment of someone's strengths can lower defensiveness and make them more likely to actually hear and act on feedback.

However, it's worth noting that **authenticity matters**—hollow or insincere compliments can backfire and make the feedback seem manipulative. The key is genuine appreciation paired with honest, constructive criticism.

Next, Paul presents his credentials and credibility to the court. After all, the Jews are attempting character assassination and misdirection. Paul was brought up in the most precisely observant and knowledgeable sect of the Jewish religion, law and history. He was a Pharisee. Paul carefully pits his judges against his prosecution by saying that he is being attacked for his beliefs in the scriptures. Herod and Festus have done their homework to understand the locals. Paul poses the question; of why he is in trouble for literally believing the bible. The scriptures also have multiple instances where the dead were brought back to life. Jesus' resurrection was another example of what God has done before.

Read Acts 26:9-15: Paul identifies with his audience to create a connection. He states that he once felt the same way about Jesus as these religious fanatics do. Jesus does not fit into our views of this world when we first meet him. It is a scary notion that we would give any control over our lives to anyone; much less a dead man. It is perfectly natural and expected that you want to run your own life. Like all of us, we want to live in a self-congratulating echo chamber sharing our priorities and views.

Jesus is called the stumbling block and the cornerstone. You cannot sneak by him and just live your life. You have to accept him or reject him. To avoid him is to walk in darkness. He is like a rock that we keep tripping on. It is repeatedly in the way. If he is truly God, he is not going to follow you like a dog. If he is truly God, he is not going to grant your every wish like a genie. The bible is like a mirror and a sword. It provides the diagnosis and the tool to remove what is killing us from the inside. Deep down we all know that there is something wrong, but it is more comforting to live with a known issue than to let an unknown God into our life.

¹² For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4)

God arranges his meetings in perfect settings. In Paul's case; Paul was once and enraged disruptor of the gospel. He was like an international war crimes investigator bringing people who committed high crimes to prison.

Paul was knocked off of his horse and left begging for an explanation. This is God's poetic justice. Paul was trying to humiliate and frighten people who believed in Jesus; and he got a taste of his own medicine. Paul went from synagogue to synagogue chasing them out of town. This identical predicament came upon Paul as he preached the gospel. The Jews chased reports of him all over Asia. Apparently, Paul either lied or misrepresented the testimony of others, and now he is being misquoted. Paul subjected multiple souls to death for the gospel. And now he is being subjected to the same.

The encounter on the road to Damascus would be the hardest part for Herod to believe. On the surface, it seemed that Jesus was bypassing Moses' teachings. Upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent that he is actually fulfilling the Law of Moses. How can people be so far apart over Jesus?

Jesus is going to confront us all and make us take a stand. If someone is seeking to prove their own righteousness, they are going to become disappointed as they read the bible. If you pray for clarity from the Holy Spirit, and do not read anything into the text, you will arrive at the truth. It is amazing how some people can read very clear scripture and come away with the strangest interpretations. I have befriended and engaged several LDS/Mormons who claimed to be students of the King James bible. We drilled down on some conflicting issues pertaining to their claims of their human/priestly authority structures in scripture. I felt that their interpretation was strained at best, presumably to fit their positions. God does not let us live a lie. There is nothing convenient about scripture. We will stumble over and over until we humble ourself and receive his mysterious wisdom.

When I first started studying scripture, it was uncomfortable and seemed to be endless historic info. I knew that there was a deeper meaning, and I would literally sweat at my study desk in discomfort, as my human nature wanted to bolt out of

there. Over time, God opened my eyes to see the deeper meanings. God will not take the blinders off of anyone not intent on applying it.

Read Acts 26: 16-18: Paul receives his commission and instructions from God after being blinded. We all think that we see until God takes the scales off our eyes.

“I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles, ⁷ To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house. ⁸ I am the LORD, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another, (Isaiah 42)

Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law. (Psalm 119:18)

Paul is bringing a new awareness to his people, and to the world. Paul is supposed to be an eye-opener. That requires scripture and prayer. This is a work of the Holy Spirit. It will encounter much demonic resistance.

in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent adrift at sea. ²⁶ I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers; ²⁷ I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? (2 Corinthians 11)

Read Acts 26:19-32: Now Paul gets to preach to Herod Agrippa II. Herod is a student of Jewish culture and religion; but he is not saved. Paul re-traces that all of this Jesus-related activity was foretold by the prophets. Festus starts to get freaked

out, because Paul is making complete sense. It is not just an issue of having the facts. You have to want to be saved.

Festus yells out to Paul that this whole thing is going off of the rails. Festus is starting to question his own beliefs. Festus becomes afraid that God is getting into his brain. He does not want that. Then Agrippa confesses that he is on the verge of believing that Jesus is LORD too. Both dignitaries realize that Paul is on the money; but they do not want to change their lifestyle. They agree that he is innocent; but now his case is set to go to Caesar.