

"THE LIMITS OF THE GOSPEL"
(Acts 25:23-26:32)
(Chuck Swindoll)

Paul's powerful defense of Christian truth before the social and political leaders of Caesarea prompts two observations concerning the good news and what it will not accomplish for humanity.

First, *hearing about Christ doesn't automatically bring internal changes*. Some hear the good news of Christ all their lives yet never respond in belief. They go from Sunday to Sunday and Bible study to Bible study without making a decision concerning their eternal destiny. Each time, they close the Bible and say, "Well, we'll meet again." They apparently think that if they spend enough time in church they will become Christian enough to deserve heaven. It is true that spiritual awakening can be a journey. But for those who die on the way—that is, before making a decision to trust Christ—hell awaits, not heaven. The grace of God presents us with an opportunity for salvation from sin, and He requires nothing more than trust in His Son; but without a response, the truth accomplishes nothing in the unbeliever.

Second, *responding to Christ doesn't instantly remove external chains*. Despite what many religious hucksters may tell you, becoming a child of God doesn't release the powers of good fortune from heaven to exempt us from the evils of earth. Some would have you believe that it's God's will for His people to live lives that are healthy, wealthy, and free from troubles, and if you do struggle with difficulties, it's because you don't have enough faith. A brief review of Paul's life should be enough to dispel that bit of heresy. In Caesarea, he stood in chains, alone, and poor as dirt because he believed in Jesus as the Messiah and faithfully followed God's plan for his life. Difficult as it is to understand, God's plan for His people might not lead to our living in comfort and privilege, but to endure difficulties just like His own Son and the apostles who followed Him.

Responding to Christ doesn't remove our chains of affliction in this life. Our health, wealth, and freedom from troubles will come in the life to come, when our lives in the fallen realm of evil and sin have ended. He has promised victory at the end of our strife. He has promised to carry us through our difficulties in the here and now to give us a hope and a future beyond anything we can imagine. That is the promise of the good news.

