

Almost or Altogether?

by Rick Lanning

The old saying, “Almost only counts in horse shoes and hand grenades” makes a very illustrative point. You get a point in horse shoes even if you don’t get a ringer simply by being “close” to the stake. The purpose in military combat is simply to get the hand grenade “almost” to the target, allowing the explosion to damage or destroy the surrounding area. This popular idiom emphasizes the exception, not the rule. The rule being, “almost is not good enough.”

“Almost” jumping over a ten foot hole lands you at the bottom with an injury or death. “Almost” winning the game leaves you as a loser. “Almost” passing the test means you failed. “Almost” starting the car in a Minnesota winter means you are stranded and paying big bucks for a tow truck and auto repairs. “Almost” being in Noah’s ark means you drowned in the flood. You can see that “almost” just doesn’t get it. Yes, there are exceptions to that rule, but not many. And the one example of that rule that is sadder than all others put together is the story of King Agrippa.

Paul had been arrested and had already given his defense to the Roman commander Claudius Lysias (Ac. 22-23), and to the Roman governor Felix, who sadly replied: “*Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you’*” (Acts 24:25). His convenient time likely never came, leaving him “almost” saved. Two years later Paul stands before the next governor Portius Festus, and when seeing he would not get a fair trial, used his right of Roman citizenship to say, “*I appeal to Caesar!*” Before sending him Festus needed some worthy reason and so had Paul appear before his court, having invited King Agrippa to hear the case. Paul’s power of reason and persuasion hit home to the king. Listen to this exchange in Acts 26:26-28:

“King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.”

Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”

*And Paul said, “I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both **almost and altogether** such as I am, except for these chains.”*

This Biblical record of the trial leaves us with the distinct impression that this governor and this king never obeyed the gospel. They were both oh-so-close, but as we have learned, almost doesn’t count. Just like you cannot be “almost pregnant” (either you are, or you aren’t), neither can you be “almost Christian.” Either you are born again, and thus have put on that “*new man*” in Christ, or you are still that “*old man*” who stands condemned (Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10). You can’t be half old and half new. You are one or the other. Which is it?

Yes, “almost only counts in horse shoes and hand grenades,” for it sure doesn’t count in salvation, nor will it count for anything at Judgment. You will cry out, “*Lord, Lord...*” but He will only reply, “*Depart from Me, I do not know you*” (Matt. 7:23). Don’t be almost, but altogether, saved. Become a Christian today!

— Northwest Church of Christ bulletin
New Hope, Minnesota

343403