

Paul: From Persecutor to Preacher, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 10: On Trial for the Hope of the Resurrection

Acts 26

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson places us in Paul's defense before King Agrippa at Caesarea, around A.D. 59, after two years of imprisonment. The historical setting is striking: a chained prisoner testifying before royalty and a Roman governor amid 'great pomp.' Rather than a narrow legal defense, Paul gives a gospel testimony, recounting his former zeal, his conversion on the Damascus road, and his commission to the Gentiles, and insisting that the real issue is 'the hope and resurrection of the dead.' The chapter showcases bold, gracious, reasoned witness before the powerful, and it places the resurrection of Jesus at the very center of the Christian faith.

This lesson is doctrinally sensitive because it deals directly with the resurrection and the Christian hope, and the teacher must keep that hope biblical and sober. Present the bodily resurrection of Jesus as a historical fact and the ground of our hope, and present the believer's hope as the bodily resurrection of the dead at the one return of Christ, followed by judgment and eternal life. The heaviest doctrinal block (Question 9) handles this hope. Keep it in line with the plain New Testament teaching of a single return of Christ and a resurrection of the just and the unjust (John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15). Do not introduce premillennial or speculative end-times schemes, no earthly thousand-year political reign, no secret rapture timetable; Christ reigns now and will return once to raise the dead and judge the world.

This lesson also aims at the heart. Press students to anchor their deepest hope in the resurrection rather than in comfort and security in this life, and to let that hope reshape how they face death, grief, and loss. Hold up Paul's bold, respectful witness before the powerful as a model for their own timidity, and his reasoned defense as assurance that the faith rests on true and rational grounds. Finally, use Agrippa, 'almost' persuaded but holding back, to confront the danger of delay, calling every student to answer Christ without postponement. Send them home with their hope anchored above and their witness emboldened.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul told the court, "Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?" and said he was on trial "with respect to the hope and resurrection of the dead" (Acts 26:6–8). Why was the resurrection the very heart of the matter for Paul, and why is the hope of resurrection so central to the Christian faith?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice how Paul frames the whole trial. Behind the political charges and the hostility of his accusers, the real issue was the resurrection. This was not incidental to Paul; it was the hill he was willing to die on. For him, Christianity stood or fell on whether God raises the dead, and specifically on whether God raised Jesus.

Explain why the resurrection is so central. If Christ is not raised, Paul says elsewhere, our preaching is in vain, our faith is futile, we are still in our sins, and the dead in Christ have perished (1 Corinthians 15:14–19). But if Christ is raised, then sin and death are defeated, His claims are vindicated, and there is real hope beyond the grave. Everything hangs on the empty tomb.

Show that the resurrection is both an event and a hope. It is the event of Jesus rising bodily from the dead, and it is the hope that, because He rose, His people will rise too. Paul was on trial for proclaiming both: that Jesus had been raised, and that this guarantees the resurrection of the dead. The Christian faith is not merely about going to heaven as disembodied souls; it is about God raising the dead to everlasting life.

Apply it by asking whether the resurrection is as central for us. Many believers treat it as a once-a-year topic rather than the beating heart of their faith and hope. Paul's example calls us to put the resurrection back at the center, where it belongs.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The resurrection as the center of the Christian faith (1 Corinthians 15:14–19)
- Christ's resurrection as the vindication of His claims and the defeat of death
- The resurrection as both historical event and living hope
- The Christian hope of bodily resurrection, not mere disembodied survival

Discussion Prompts

- Why was the resurrection the real heart of Paul's trial?
- What hangs on whether Christ was raised?
- Is the resurrection as central to your faith as it was to Paul's?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul staked his whole life and hope on the resurrection. Where is your own deepest hope anchored, in comfort, success, and security in this life, or in the promise of resurrection and life with God beyond it? How would your priorities change if the resurrection truly anchored your hope?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the centrality of the resurrection into the student's actual hopes. We say we believe in the resurrection, but our daily anxieties and ambitions often reveal that our real hope is anchored in this life, in health, security, success, and comfort. Paul's hope was anchored beyond the grave, and it freed him to risk everything.

Help students examine where their treasure really lies. Jesus said our hearts follow our treasure (Matthew 6:21). The things that most control our moods, fears, and decisions reveal where our hope is actually anchored. An honest look often shows we are far more invested in this life than our creed admits.

Move toward reanchoring. Ask students how their priorities, spending, worrying, risk-taking, generosity, would change if the resurrection truly held their hope. Encourage one concrete shift this week toward living for what lasts, as people whose deepest hope is secure beyond death.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The contrast between hope anchored in this life and hope anchored in the resurrection
- Where our treasure is, there our heart will be (Matthew 6:19–21)
- The freedom that comes from a hope death cannot touch
- Living for what lasts beyond the grave (Colossians 3:1–4)

Discussion Prompts

- Where is your deepest hope actually anchored?
- What do your fears and ambitions reveal about your real hope?
- How would resurrection hope reshape your priorities?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul recounted his conversion and the commission he received: to turn people “from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith” (Acts 26:18). How does this verse summarize what the gospel actually does in a person's life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This verse is one of the richest summaries of salvation in Acts. Walk through its movements. The gospel opens blind eyes, it turns people from darkness to light, it transfers them from the power of Satan to God, it brings forgiveness of sins, and it gives them a place among God's sanctified people. Salvation is a rescue, a transfer, a cleansing, and an inclusion.

Highlight the radical change of allegiance: ‘from the power of Satan to God.’ Apart from Christ, people are under the dominion of darkness, whether they know it or not. The gospel is a

deliverance, a rescue from one kingdom into another (Colossians 1:13). This is not mere self-improvement; it is a change of masters and of realms.

Note the means at the end of the verse: 'sanctified by faith in me.' All these blessings, forgiveness, light, a place among God's people, come to those who are set apart through faith in Christ. This is the obedient faith we have seen throughout Paul's story, the faith that turns to God, as the verse itself says: people are to 'turn' and 'receive.'

Apply it to assurance and gratitude. Help students see their own salvation in these terms: eyes opened, darkness exchanged for light, Satan's power broken, sins forgiven, a place secured among God's people. Marveling at what the gospel has done fuels both worship and witness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel as rescue from darkness and the power of Satan (Colossians 1:13)
- Forgiveness of sins and a place among God's sanctified people
- Sanctification through faith in Christ
- Salvation as a change of masters and realms, not mere self-improvement

Discussion Prompts

- What does the gospel actually do, according to this verse?
- What does it mean to be turned from the power of Satan to God?
- How do these blessings come to a person?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul was not ashamed to tell his own story of turning from darkness to light, even before a king. What is your own story of coming to Christ, and how readily do you share it? Who in your life needs to hear how God turned you from darkness to light?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul's defense was largely his testimony. He simply told what God had done in his life, from persecutor to preacher, from darkness to light. Personal testimony is a powerful and accessible form of witness; no one can argue a person out of what God has done for them.

Help students value and articulate their own story. Some have dramatic conversions; others were raised in the faith and cannot point to a single moment. Either way, every Christian has a story of God's grace, of turning from darkness to light, of forgiveness received. Encourage students to be able to tell it simply and honestly.

Move toward sharing it. Ask each student to identify one person who needs to hear their story, and to look for a natural opportunity to share it. Like Paul, we need not be ashamed; we are simply witnesses to what God has done, and our stories can open doors that arguments cannot.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The power and accessibility of personal testimony
- Every believer has a story of grace worth telling
- Witness as bearing testimony to what God has done (1 John 1:3)
- Boldness rather than shame in sharing our story (Romans 1:16)

Discussion Prompts

- What is your story of turning from darkness to light?
- How readily do you share it with others?
- Who in your life needs to hear it?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul declared that Christ, “by being the first to rise from the dead,” would “proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:23). What does it mean that Jesus was “the first to rise from the dead,” and how does His resurrection secure the hope of resurrection for all who belong to Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Clarify the phrase ‘the first to rise from the dead.’ Others had been restored to life before Jesus (such as Lazarus), but they died again. Jesus is the first to rise to never die again, raised to a glorified, immortal body. He is the pioneer of a new kind of life beyond death, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Explain the firstfruits image. In the harvest, the firstfruits were the first sheaf, the guarantee and sample of the full harvest to come. Christ’s resurrection is not an isolated miracle but the beginning and pledge of the resurrection of all who belong to Him. Because He rose, His people will rise; His resurrection secures theirs.

Show the link between His resurrection and our hope. ‘As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to him’ (1 Corinthians 15:22–23). Our future resurrection is as certain as His past one, because the two are bound together. He is the head; we are His body.

Apply it to confidence in the face of death. The believer does not merely hope vaguely for an afterlife; we have a living guarantee in the risen Christ. Help students rest their hope on the historical fact of His resurrection, which makes their own resurrection sure.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ as the firstfruits, raised to immortal, glorified life (1 Corinthians 15:20)
- His resurrection as the guarantee of the resurrection of His people
- Believers raised 'at his coming' (1 Corinthians 15:22–23)
- Hope grounded in the historical fact of Christ's resurrection

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Jesus was 'the first to rise from the dead'?
- How does the firstfruits image explain our hope?
- How does His resurrection make ours certain?

Question 6

Student Question:

Because Christ is risen, death is not the end for those who are in Him. How does the hope of the resurrection change the way you face death, grief, suffering, and loss? Where do you most need that hope to take hold of your heart right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question brings the resurrection to bear on the universal experiences of death and grief. Paul wrote that we do not grieve 'as others do who have no hope' (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Christians still grieve, deeply and honestly, but our grief is shot through with hope, because death has been defeated and our loved ones in Christ will rise.

Help students apply this to their own losses and fears. The hope of resurrection does not erase the pain of loss, but it changes its character; it turns the grave from a final destination into a temporary resting place, and it makes death a defeated enemy rather than the last word. This hope steadies us in suffering and softens the sting of grief.

Move toward a specific place of need. Ask each student where they most need resurrection hope to take hold right now, a recent loss, a fear of their own death, a season of suffering, and encourage them to bring that place consciously under the light of the empty tomb this week, letting the risen Christ speak hope into it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Grieving with hope rather than as those without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13)
- Death transformed from final destination to defeated enemy (1 Corinthians 15:54–57)

- Resurrection hope as steadiness in suffering and loss
- The comfort of reunion and resurrection for those in Christ

Discussion Prompts

- How does resurrection hope change the way you face death and grief?
- Where do you most need that hope right now?
- How can the risen Christ speak into that place this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

When Festus called him insane, Paul replied that he was “speaking true and rational words” (Acts 26:25), and he reasoned from the Scriptures and from public facts that ‘were not done in a corner.’ Why is it important to see that the Christian faith, and the resurrection in particular, rests on true and reasonable grounds rather than on blind belief?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Mark Paul’s confident reply to the charge of madness: ‘true and rational words.’ He did not retreat into ‘you just have to have faith’; he insisted his message was both true (corresponding to reality) and rational (reasonable, coherent). The Christian faith is not a leap into the dark but a response to evidence and testimony.

Note his appeal to public facts: these things ‘were not done in a corner.’ The death and resurrection of Jesus were public events, witnessed by many, open to investigation. Paul could appeal to Agrippa’s knowledge of them. Christianity rests on historical claims that happened in the open, not on private mystical experiences that cannot be examined.

Explain why this matters. Faith is not the same as gullibility or wishful thinking. Biblical faith is trust grounded in good reasons, the reliability of God’s word, the testimony of eyewitnesses, the public fact of the empty tomb. This gives believers confidence and equips them to answer skeptics without embarrassment (1 Peter 3:15).

Apply it to the student’s confidence. Many believers feel their faith is intellectually weak, something to be defended apologetically or kept private. Paul models the opposite: a faith held with reasoned conviction, declared boldly even when mocked. Encourage students to know why they believe, so they can stand like Paul.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Biblical faith as reasoned trust, not blind belief (1 Peter 3:15)
- The resurrection as a public, historical event open to investigation
- Confidence to answer skeptics without embarrassment

- Knowing why we believe as a strength for witness

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that the faith rests on true and reasonable grounds?
- What does 'not done in a corner' tell us about the resurrection?
- How well do you know why you believe?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul testified boldly before a governor and a king without being intimidated. Are there people, important, skeptical, or powerful, before whom you grow timid about your faith? How does Paul's example, and the confidence the resurrection gives, help you stand firm and speak the truth with respect?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses Paul's boldness into the student's own fears. Paul stood in chains before royalty and the Roman power that held his life, yet he spoke freely and even sought their conversion. Most of us grow timid before far less, a skeptical coworker, an intimidating relative, a respected authority.

Help students name their particular intimidations. Often it is not physical danger we fear but social discomfort, embarrassment, disapproval, or seeming foolish. Naming the specific people or settings where we shrink back is the first step toward courage.

Point to the source of Paul's boldness. He had a hope that could not be taken from him and a message he knew to be true; he had nothing ultimately to lose and everything to offer. The resurrection frees us from the fear of man, because the worst this world can do has already been defeated. Encourage each student to choose one intimidating setting and to speak with both courage and respect, as Paul did.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Overcoming the fear of man before the powerful or skeptical (Proverbs 29:25)
- Boldness grounded in a hope that cannot be taken away
- Speaking truth with courage and respect together (Colossians 4:6)
- Freedom from intimidation because death is already defeated

Discussion Prompts

- Before whom do you grow timid about your faith?
- What do you actually fear in those settings?
- How does resurrection hope free you from the fear of man?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul centered the Christian hope on the bodily resurrection: Christ raised as “the first to rise from the dead,” securing the resurrection of His people. How does the New Testament present this hope, the one return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the judgment to come, and how does keeping the resurrection central guard us from anchoring our hope in lesser, more speculative things?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal summit of the lesson, and it calls for clear, sober teaching about the Christian hope. Begin with the foundation: Christ has been raised bodily, as ‘the first to rise from the dead,’ and His resurrection guarantees the resurrection of all who belong to Him. This is the hope for which Paul was on trial, and it is the hope the New Testament holds out to every believer.

Lay out the shape of that hope as Scripture plainly gives it. Jesus will return, once, visibly and gloriously (Acts 1:11; Hebrews 9:28). At His coming the dead will be raised; ‘the dead in Christ will rise’ (1 Thessalonians 4:16), and indeed there will be ‘a resurrection of both the just and the unjust’ (Acts 24:15). Jesus said that all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, in one hour, ‘those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment’ (John 5:28–29). Then comes the judgment and the eternal state. The order is simple and unspeculative: Christ returns, the dead are raised, the world is judged, and the redeemed are with the Lord forever.

Guard against speculation, kindly but clearly. Some teachings load the future with elaborate, speculative schemes, a secret rapture, a rebuilt earthly kingdom, a thousand-year political reign of Christ on earth before the end. The New Testament knows nothing of such a program. Paul speaks of ‘Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to him,’ and immediately, ‘then comes the end’ (1 Corinthians 15:23–24). There is no earthly millennial reign tucked between Christ’s coming and the end; His coming brings the resurrection, the judgment, and the consummation. The kingdom of God is not a future earthly political realm to be set up later; it is the reign of Christ already established, and He reigns now at the Father’s right hand (Acts 2:30–36; Colossians 1:13).

Show why keeping the resurrection central is protective. When the resurrection of the dead and the return of Christ are the heart of our hope, we are anchored to what Scripture clearly teaches and freed from endless speculation about dates, signs, and schemes that have led many astray. The simple, glorious hope, Christ is risen, Christ will return, the dead will be raised, and we will be with Him, is enough to live and die on, exactly as it was for Paul.

Land it pastorally. The point of resurrection hope is not to fuel curiosity about the future but to fortify the soul for the present. Because Christ is risen and will raise us, we can face death without despair, suffer without losing heart, and live without fear. Help students rest their whole hope here, on the risen Christ and the resurrection He secures, rather than on the lesser, shakier things this world or speculative teaching might offer.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The bodily resurrection of Jesus as the ground of the believer's hope
- One visible return of Christ (Acts 1:11; Hebrews 9:28)
- A single resurrection of the just and the unjust at His coming (John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15)
- Christ's coming brings resurrection, judgment, and the end, with no earthly millennial reign (1 Corinthians 15:23–24)
- The kingdom already established; Christ reigning now (Acts 2:30–36; Colossians 1:13)
- Resurrection hope as fortification for the present, not fuel for speculation

Discussion Prompts

- How does the New Testament present the return of Christ and the resurrection?
- Why is there no room for an earthly thousand-year reign between His coming and the end?
- How does keeping the resurrection central guard our hope?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over Paul's testimony before Agrippa, the hope that put him on trial, the risen Christ, the call from darkness to light, and the king who was almost persuaded. Name one specific way you sense Jesus using this account to form you, whether to anchor your hope in the resurrection, to share your story boldly, or to answer His call without delay.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the lesson's threads: the centrality of the resurrection, bold and reasoned witness, the gospel that turns people from darkness to light, and the danger of being 'almost' persuaded. Ask students to name one concrete way the Lord has met them.

Give particular weight to Agrippa. He felt the pull of the truth and stopped just short, deflecting with a question. Many people, and even many believers in some area of their lives, live in that 'almost' space, moved but not surrendered, convinced but not committed. Use this to call students to answer Christ fully and without delay, refusing to be merely almost persuaded.

Close with Paul's remarkable longing: that all who heard him would become as he was, 'except for these chains.' Here is a man whose hope was so secure and whose joy in Christ was so great

that, even in prison, he wished his life on his judges. Send students home with that kind of hope, anchored in the resurrection, bold in witness, and fully surrendered to the risen Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Anchoring hope in the resurrection
- Bold, reasoned, personal witness
- The danger of being 'almost' persuaded
- Full surrender to Christ without delay

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of Paul's testimony speaks most to you?
- Where might you be 'almost' persuaded rather than fully surrendered?
- What full 'yes' is Christ asking of you?