



Links Players

Almost!

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. (Acts 26:28, KJV)

On September 6th, 2021, I had my tenth hole-in-one. As they always are, this one was special. My foursome included a good friend, my son-in-law, and, most importantly, my grandson.

This one was special, if for no other reason than watching my grandson, nine years old at the time, smile like a mule eating briars. I also ended a twenty-five-year slump. My last hole-in-one, my ninth, was playing with my dad and his attorney on my fortieth birthday.

In that 25-year slump, I had come close on a few occasions. In other words, I “almost” made an ace numerous times. Three of them stand out: I left one hanging on the lip at Pine Needles Lodge and Golf Club. I had one go in and out at Hideaway Golf Club, and I had one circumnavigate the hole at Benvenue CC.

As we used to say when we were kids, “Close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades.” Yet, the idea of “almost” has merit in golf. While your shot might have lipped out, more than likely, that means you hit a good shot. Additionally, it probably means you made birdie. But “almost,” while significant, is not the same as seeing your ball at the bottom of the cup.

Don’t get me wrong, almost “holing it” makes for great conversation and produces great thrills, but it is not the same as the real deal. Almost hitting the bullseye in a game of darts is impressive. Almost hitting the game-winning free throw, not so much. Almost making the field goal in overtime to win the game is, I’m guessing, something that lives with the kicker the rest of his life.

Depending on the subject matter, “almost” can mean many things, positively or negatively. But when it comes to being right with one’s Maker, “almost” is tragic. Agrippa is a case in point. Paul preached the gospel to King Agrippa. Agrippa listened intently. Sadly, Agrippa ended up “almost” surrendering his life to the risen Christ.

Like the old country preacher once said about being in Christ’s kingdom, “You either is or you ain’t!” His grammar was awful, but his theology was spot on. To be clear, there is simply no neutrality when it comes to loving God. Jesus said, “You are either for me or against me.”

What might an “almost Christian” look like? First, one who recognizes that God exists and then lives a moral life, relatively speaking, is one case of “almost” being a Christian. Why? This wrongly

presupposes that God will accept the moralist based on his behavior. This is precisely what Jesus, Paul, and others decried. On this understanding, Jesus died needlessly.

Another “almost Christian” position is when someone recognizes the historical accuracy of the person of Jesus and his death on the cross but fails to savor the Savior and his atoning sacrifice. That is, mere intellectual assent to the fact of Jesus and his cross work falls woefully short of what Scripture teaches—a supernatural heart change is required.

Another “almost Christian” position is that person who hears the gospel, acknowledges the truth of its content, and feels the pangs of conscience for his sinfulness but fails to repent and believe. That is, anyone who knows but fails to radically (i.e., at the root) repent and give himself wholly to Jesus is “almost,” but not yet a Christian.

The question that must preoccupy every human being is this: “Have I responded to the risen Christ in the way he requires?”

Prayer: Father, pour out the Holy Spirit to bring men and women into your kingdom.

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Dennis Darville

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