

WITNESSING TO THE TRUTH

BIBLE BASIS: ACTS 5:27–29, 33–42

BIBLE TRUTH: The apostles knew that they were obeying God's calling, even when the authorities tried to stop them.

MEMORY VERSE: "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

LESSON AIM: By the end of this lesson we will: **EXAMINE** the apostles' proclamation of Jesus

as the Messiah despite being ordered not to do so by the Sanhedrin; **ASSESS** our commitment to witnessing and proclaiming the name of Jesus; and **IDENTIFY** and overcome barriers to evangelism efforts within and without the church community.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 5:12–42 & Revelation Read and incorporate the insights gained from the Background Scriptures into your study of the lesson.

TEACHER PREPARATION

MATERIALS NEEDED: Quarterly Commentary/Teacher Manual, Adult Quarterly, Adult Resources —charts, worksheets, and other teaching tools, including tablets, laptops, screens and projectors, and various translations of the Bible.

OTHER MATERIALS NEEDED / TEACHER'S NOTES:

LESSON OVERVIEW

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

Sometime people are so dedicated to a cause that they will go to any lengths, even enduring pain and suffering to achieving their goals.

BIBLE LEARNING

The apostles believed their commitment to Christ was greater than the authority of others.

BIBLE APPLICATION

Christians can develop a stronger commitment to God and a willingness to follow Christ.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

Believers learn that in spite of difficult times, they can depend on the Lord.

LESSON SCRIPTURE

ACTS 5:27–29, 33–42, KJV

27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them,

28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

ACTS 5:27–29, 33–42, AMP

27 So they brought them and presented them before the Council (Sanhedrin, Jewish High Court). The high priest questioned them,

28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this [a]Man's blood on us [by accusing us as His murderers]."

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29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

34 Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

35 And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

36 For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

38 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

29 Then Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than men [we have no other choice].

33 Now when they heard this, they were infuriated and they intended to kill the apostles.

34 But a Pharisee named [a]Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law [of Moses], highly esteemed by all the people, stood up in the Council (Sanhedrin, Jewish High Court) and ordered that the men be taken outside for a little while.

35 Then he said to the Council, "Men of Israel, be careful in regard to what you propose to do to these men.

36 For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody [of importance], and a group of about four hundred men allied themselves with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were scattered and came to nothing.

37 After this man, Judas the Galilean rose up, [and led an uprising] during the time of the census, and drew people after him; he was also killed, and all his followers were scattered.

38 So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men [merely human in origin], it will fail and be destroyed;

39 but if it is of God [and it appears that it is], you will not be able to stop them; or else you may even be found fighting against God!"

40 The Council (Sanhedrin, Jewish High Court) took his advice; and after summoning the apostles, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and released them.

41 So they left the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy [dignified by indignity] to suffer shame for [the sake of] His name.

42 And every single day, in the temple [area] and in homes, they did not stop teaching and telling the good news of Jesus as the Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed).

BIBLICAL DEFINITIONS

A. Obey (Acts 5:29) *peitharcheo*-To submit to authority or reason by way of conformation or compliance.

B. Suffer shame (v. 41) *atimazo*-To dishonor, disgrace; to cause to have low status.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

The council. This refers to the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish council. Comprised of the high priest, elders, scribes, and members of prominent families, the Sanhedrin presided over civil, criminal, and religious matters. Both Pharisees and Sadducees were represented in the council.

Apostles. This word comes from the Greek *apostolos*, which means “sent ones.” These were the twelve men that Jesus chose from among His wider group of disciples to be with Him and to teach. This title was conferred upon them by Jesus Himself in **Luke 6:13**. Paul is also considered an apostle, though he was not one of the Twelve. He was personally commissioned by Jesus to be an apostle.

TEACHING THE BIBLE LESSON

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY’S LESSON

AIM: Students will know that some people are so dedicated to a cause that they will go to any lengths, even enduring pain and suffering, to achieve their goals.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching in Difficult Times

The fifth chapter of Acts gives an account of the powerful ministry of the apostles. The apostles had been commissioned by Jesus Himself to teach and be witnesses in **Matthew 28:19–20**. Following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the apostles taught powerfully, and their teaching was accompanied by signs and wonders. The high priest and the Sadducees were filled with jealousy and had Peter and John arrested. However, an angel appeared to them during the night, freed them, and instructed them to teach the Word of Life, the words of salvation and eternal life. At this time, Christianity was called “The Way” and “The Life” (**Acts 9:2**).

BIBLE LEARNING

AIM: Students will learn that believers can develop a stronger commitment to God and a willingness to follow Christ.

I. CHOOSING TO OBEY GOD (Acts 5:27–29)

The Sanhedrin forbid Peter and John from teaching in the name of Jesus (**Acts 4:18**). However, Jesus had given them a mandate to teach. An angel had further instructed them the previous night. Knowing that it could result in persecution, the apostles continue to “fill Jerusalem” with their teaching and perform signs and wonders. The apostles have already been imprisoned and seen the treatment Jesus received for going against the religious establishment. The apostles are very aware of the danger of spreading their message. Staring into the face of persecution and possibly death, the apostles consciously choose to obey God, even at personal cost to themselves.

Acts 5:27–29, 33–42

27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, **28** Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us. **29** Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

The disciples had been arrested and imprisoned the night before. They were now apprehended again in the morning. Having placed the disciples before the Sanhedrin, the high priest brings a threefold charge against them.

First, the apostles are accused of violating the previous injunction given to them not to preach in the name of Jesus. The phrase translated here as “straitly command” in Greek is *paraggelia paraggello* (**pah-ron-ghe-LEE-ah pah-ron-GHEL-loh**) or “to command a command.” Use of a verb with its cognate dative like this can emphasize the idea of the verb. So rather than just being “commanded,” they were “straitly commanded.” The apostles were violating the authority of the high priest, who was the de facto ruler over the Jewish nation.

Second, it is a grievous accusation that the apostles had “filled” (Gk. *pleroo*, **play-ROW-oh**) Jerusalem with their doctrine. This word means to fill up full or completely. The apostles had filled Jerusalem with the teaching of Christ’s death and resurrection. In just a short time, all Jerusalem knew of Christ’s resurrection.

Lastly, the Sanhedrin claims the apostles mean to blame the council for Jesus’ death. The Sanhedrin might say this intending to insinuate the disciples were inciting the populace to sedition, but more clearly they are revealing their own guilty consciences.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

QUESTION 1

Peter and the other apostles appeared before the Sanhedrin council. What were the 3 charges brought against them?

1. Preaching in Jesus’ name
2. Filling Jerusalem with their doctrine
3. Blaming the council for Jesus’ death

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Obedience to God

The disciples refuse to be intimidated. Without any denial or hesitation, Peter provides a powerful rejoinder that obedience to God takes priority over the conflicting orders of the Sanhedrin. The word for “obey” (Gk. *peitharcheo*, **pay-thar-KHEH-oh**) here specifically means to obey a ruler or superior. For Peter, obedience to God is non-negotiable and takes precedence over the commandments of men.

II. WORDS OF CAUTION (vv. 33–39)

The Sanhedrin is in a difficult situation. On one hand, they are furious with the apostles for teaching and healing in Jesus’ name and even more so for defying their orders. On the other hand, they fear the people and do not want to upset them. The Sanhedrin wants to kill the apostles, but Gamaliel, the most prominent rabbi of their time, cautions them not to act on their wishes (vv. 34–36).

Gamaliel urges the council to proceed with caution. Theudas and Judas had come and caused the people

to revolt, but when they were killed, their followers scattered. Unfortunately, Gamaliel put Jesus in the same category as the impostors. He felt that, given enough time, Jesus’ followers would also disband. Gamaliel also acknowledges the possibility that the apostles were sent from God. He understands that if, indeed, the apostles are from God, the Sanhedrin will not be able to stop them.

33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them. 34 Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; 35 And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. 36 For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. 37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. 38 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: 39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

When the members of the Sanhedrin hear Peter’s response (vv. 29–32), they are cut to the heart or “enraged” (RSV). The Greek verb *diaprio* (**dee-ah-PREE-oh**) translated here as “cut to the heart” has the root meaning of being “sawn through.” It is found only here and in **verse 7:54**. It means that they were violently enraged, indicating a state of very sharp vexation resulting in inward rage. It is a situation where personal rage dethrones reason. Like wounded and cornered beasts, the only recourse is to destroy their pursuers. So they resolve to kill the disciples.

When the Sanhedrin seemed likely to resort to violent measures against the apostles, Gamaliel, a Pharisee among them, intervenes. He was a kindly man who was loved and respected, and, obviously, was more tolerant than his fellows. Had the Sanhedrin not been restrained by Gamaliel’s

cool and wise advice, they probably would have ordered the stoning of the disciples as they later did Stephen. Three important things are to be noted of Gamaliel: he was a Pharisee, a doctor of the law, and had a reputation among all the people. Hence he was best qualified and suited to defend the apostles. He was the teacher of Saul, who became Paul the apostle (Acts 22:3), and he was the grandson of Hillel, and the most influential rabbi of his time. Ancient Jewish scholars wrote of him that, "Since Rabban Gamaliel the elder died there has been no more reverence for the law; and purity and abstinence died out at the same time." Like his grandfather Hillel, he was noted for his liberal attitude.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

QUESTION 2

Describe who Gamaliel was and his relationship to Peter and John.

Gamaliel was a Pharisee, a doctor of the law, and had a reputation among all the people. He defended the apostles.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Gamaliel, the Defender

Gamaliel's advice is to stand away from these men and let them alone. He warns the court to exercise caution lest they find themselves going against God. If the counsel or work is of men—literally "out of men," that is "of human origin"—it would come to nothing and be overthrown. To bolster his argument, he cites two examples that were probably well known to the members of the court. First he cites Theudas. In those days Palestine had a quick succession of firebrand leaders who set themselves up as the deliverers of their country and sometimes even as the Messiah. Among them was a man named Theudas, who led a band of people out to the Jordan with the promise that he could divide the waters and that they would walk over in dry land, and whose rising was swiftly dealt with. Gamaliel's second example is Judas. He had rebelled at the time

of the census taken by the governor Quirinius in A.D. 6 in order to arrange taxation. Judas took up the position that God was the King of Israel, and to Him alone tribute was due; all other taxation was impious and to pay it was a blasphemy. He attempted to raise a revolution but failed.

III. PERSECUTION AND JOY (vv. 40–42)

Bearing Gamaliel's warning in mind, the Sanhedrin calls the apostles in once again. They repeat their orders not to teach in the name of Jesus. Because they disobeyed the Sanhedrin's initial orders, the apostles are punished according to Jewish law, which called for thirty-nine lashes on bare skin with a leather whip. The beating not only gave vent to the Sanhedrin's fury but was intended to deter and shame the apostles. By bringing shame on the apostles, they hoped to also bring shame on those listening to their teaching.

Rather than being frightened or embittered, the apostles go away rejoicing. They are honored to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. Christ had warned them that persecution would come: "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in Heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way" (Matthew 5:11–12, NLT). Not only do the apostles rejoice, they redouble their efforts. Every day they teach about Jesus (v. 42), whether in the Temple or in people's homes. The apostles joyfully follow Jesus' instructions knowing that they put themselves in danger by doing so.

40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. 42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

The Sanhedrin listens to Gamaliel and once again, after threatening the apostles, lets them go, but this time with a flogging. The exact word for “beaten” (Gk. *dero*, **DEH-ro**) was originally used for flaying and skinning. It is also a general word for violent whipping. In other words, the apostles received a beating that left wounds on the skin. Flogging was the customary punishment used as a warning not to persist in an offense. It consisted of thirty-nine lashes, often referred to as the forty less one (cf. **2 Corinthians 11:24**), based on **Deuteronomy 25:3**. It was still a cruel punishment. With bared chest and in a kneeling position, one was beaten with a tripled strap of calf hide across both chest and back, two on the back for each stripe across the chest. Men were known to have died from the ordeal. As before, the apostles are warned not to continue their witness in Jesus’ name. This time the warning is reinforced with somewhat stronger persuasion.

The apostles remain undeterred. They are determined to face whatever dangers threaten. They are not cowed by the council’s threats and commands. The apostles continue to obey God rather than men. In fact, they rejoice at having suffered for Jesus’ name. This word “suffer shame” (Gk. *atimazo*, **ah-ti-MAHD-zo**) means to suffer dishonor and disgrace. This psychological suffering serves as a counterpoint to the physical beating they received. And the witness to the name continues—publicly in the Temple and privately in Christians’ homes. They rejoice in persecution for two reasons. First, it is an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to Christ. Second, it is a real opportunity to share in the experience of Christ. Those who share in the cross-bearing will share in the crown-wearing.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

QUESTION 3

What fueled the disciples’ tenacity to continue preaching, even though they would face serious consequences?

Answers will vary

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Proclaiming the Gospel

The apostles’ witness, their proclamation of the Gospel, is their primary task and occupation. Spence-Jones sums up these verses beautifully:

“The spirit and conduct of the apostles here recorded is a precious example to their successors. To glory in the cross, to count shame endured for Christ’s sake the highest for Christ’s sake the highest honor, and to be unwearied and undaunted in teaching and preaching Jesus Christ through good report and through evil report, is the true character and work of every bishop of souls.”

BIBLE APPLICATION

AIM: Students will understand the importance of developing a stronger commitment to God and a willingness to follow Christ.

Many Christians in the United States are not willing to sacrifice their comfort, let alone their lives, for God. Around the world, Christians are persecuted, tortured, and killed for preaching Jesus. Christians are persecuted in over fifty countries, including imprisonment, torture, and martyrdom. The five countries that have the most severe persecution are North Korea, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Still, the church is growing in these hostile nations. They follow the example of the apostles, most of whom paid for their obedience with their lives. The apostles were willing to do whatever it took to obey God. Are you?

STUDENT’S RESPONSES

AIM: Students will learn that in spite of difficult times, they can depend on the Lord.

Like the apostles, we are to continue to proclaim the name of Jesus even in difficult circumstances. They never stopped proclaiming the Good News of Christ even in the face of imprisonment and beatings. Even amid persecution, the apostles rejoiced because they valued their obedience to Jesus more than their safety or lives. They were determined to make Christ known even at great personal cost, and felt privileged to suffer for the name of Christ.

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While we have relative freedom to share the Gospel in the United States, many do not have the same opportunity. Research different organizations that aid those in other countries who are persecuted, such as Voice of the Martyrs (<http://www.persecution.com>) or Open Doors USA (<http://www.opendoorsusa.org>). Look for opportunities to write to those who are suffering persecution for their faith in other countries.

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, bless us to stand up with courage and conviction for knowing and believing in You and Your Word. Our determination to witness to others about who You are is a reflection of Your strength and life. In the Name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

Witnessing to the Truth

From its infancy, the Church met with resistance from the powers that be. The events chronicled in this week's lesson culminated in one of the earliest instances of such resistance. The period of persecution against the apostles began in Acts Chapter 4 with the arrest of Peter and John for preaching in the Temple. That was when the Sanhedrin council first commanded them "not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18). The apostles understood that this injunction was one they could not obey. "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19,20).

Although Peter and John knew how to respond to the challenge, they must have felt intimidated and vulnerable. They realized they didn't have to bear the burden of the council's threats alone and called an emergency meeting of their fellow apostles. Thankfully, the leadership of the Church recognized that they all needed holy boldness to face this situation. They earnestly prayed, not that God dispelled the opposition, but that He gave them the courage to withstand it (Acts 4:29). The answer from Heaven was tangible. "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they

spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). This is what empowered their undaunted defiance of the council's edict.

We can only defeat the spirit of intimidation with the empowerment of the Holy Ghost. So, pray first and foremost for the holy boldness.

HOW TO SAY IT

Gamaliel.	gah-mah-LEE-ale.
Quirinius.	kwih-RIN-ee-uhs.
Rabban.	RAH-ban.
Theudas.	THOO-duhs.

DAILY HOME BIBLE READINGS

MONDAY

The Cause of Truth
(Psalm 45:1–4, 6–7)

TUESDAY

The Life of Truth (Proverbs 14:22–29)

WEDNESDAY

The Power of Truth (Luke 4:14–19)

THURSDAY

Avoid Foolishness; Live Truthfully
(2 Timothy 2:14–16, 22–26)

FRIDAY

Trustworthy and Truth
(Revelation 22:1–7)

SATURDAY

Prevailing Truth (Acts 4:5–12)

SUNDAY

Witnessing to the Truth
(Acts 5:27–29, 33–42)

PREPARE FOR NEXT SUNDAY

Read Acts 7:2–4, 8–10, 17, 33–34, 45–47, 53 and "Remembering God's Faithfulness."

Sources:

Alexander, Joseph A. *Commentary on Acts of the Apostles*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956 (reprint).