

Witnessing to the Truth

Teaching Tips

September 20, 2015

Bible Study Guide 3

Words You Should Know

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.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Speak Out. Sometimes people are so dedicated to a cause that they will go to any lengths, even enduring pain and suffering, to achieve their goals. What is the source of their commitment? As the apostles continued to teach about Jesus as the Messiah and help many people become believers, they knew that they were obeying God's calling, even though the authorities tried to stop them.

A. Read the Bible Background and Devotional Readings.

B. Complete Lesson 3 in the *Precepts For Living*® Personal Study Guide.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Open with prayer inviting God's presence and power.

B. Ask a student to read the Aim for Change and In Focus story.

C. Ask students to examine their commitment to proclaiming the name of Jesus.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Ask for volunteers to read the Focal Verses and The People, Places, and Times. Discuss.

B. Read and discuss the Background section.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Review and discuss the Search the Scriptures and Discuss the Meaning questions and the Lesson in Our Society section.

B. Ask students to share the most significant point they learned and how to use that point this week.

N—Next Steps for Application

- A. Complete the Follow the Spirit and Remember Your Thoughts sections.
- B. Remind students to read the Daily Bible Readings in preparation for next week's lesson.
- C. Close in prayer, thanking God for His guidance and His presence in our lives.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Witnessing to the Truth

Song: "Trust and Obey"

Devotional Guide: [Revelation 22:1–7](#)



Bible Background • [ACTS 5:12–42](#)



Printed Text • [ACTS 5:27–29](#), [33–42](#) **Devotional Reading •** [REVELATION 22:1–7](#)



Aim for Change

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.



In Focus

John traveled to China every year on business, but always made it a point to visit with his friend Chen. Chen worked in the same industry but was also a local pastor for an underground house church. Each year, Chen told stories of people being saved and delivered, but he also told how careful his members had to be when they came to church. His members had to stagger their arrival, usually over several hours, to keep their meetings secret.

This year, John was excited to meet with Chen. When he arrived at his host company in China, Chen was not a part of their meeting. John inquired about him and learned that Chen had been sentenced to a work camp because the police discovered that he was leading a house church. His wife had been forced to flee to protect herself and their son. John was deeply saddened that Chen was imprisoned, but had great admiration for his faith and willingness to obey God in spite of the consequences.

Our commitment to obeying God should take precedence in our lives, even when it may be difficult to do so. In today's lesson, we will discuss the apostles' commitment to obeying God, even in the face of danger. What causes us to fail in obeying God when we face challenging circumstances?

Keep in Mind

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



Focal Verses

KJV

Acts 5:27 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.

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.

NLT

Acts 5:27 Then they brought the apostles before the high council, where the high priest confronted them.



28 "Didn't we tell you never again to teach in this man's name?" he demanded. "Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about him, and you want to make us responsible for his death!"

29 But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than any human authority.

33 When they heard this, the high council was furious and decided to kill them.

34 But one member, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert in religious law and respected by all the people, stood up and ordered that the men be sent outside the council chamber for a while.

35 Then he said to his colleagues, "Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men!

36 Some time ago there was that fellow Theudas, who pretended to be someone great. About 400 others joined him, but he was killed, and all his followers went their various ways. The whole movement came to nothing.

37 After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He got people to follow him, but he was killed, too, and all his followers were scattered.

38 "So my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their

own, it will soon be overthrown.

39 But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!”

40 The others accepted his advice. They called in the apostles and had them flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go.

41 The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.

42 And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: “Jesus is the Messiah.”

The People, Places, and Times

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.

Background

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 5:20](#), [Acts 9:2](#)).

At-A-Glance

1. Choosing to Obey God ([Acts 5:27–29](#))
2. Words of Caution (vv. 33–39)
3. Persecution and Joy (vv. 40–42)

In Depth

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

Search the Scriptures

1. How did Peter explain the apostles' disregard for the Sanhedrin's orders ([Acts 5:29](#))?
2. How did the apostles respond to the Sanhedrin's attempts to silence and shame them (v. 41)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How do you bear witness to the goodness and power of God in your own life?
2. How can we cultivate the kind of commitment the apostles demonstrated, where we are willing to obey God no matter the cost?

Lesson in Our Society

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?

Make It Happen

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.

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.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do.

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned.

More Light on the Text

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 is a grievous accusation that the apostles had “filled” (Gk. *pleroo*, **play-ROW-oh**) Jerusalem with their doctrine. This word means to fill up to the 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.

However, 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. *peitharchoo*, **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.

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

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.

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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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 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. Their witness, their proclamation of the Gospel, is their primary task and occupation.

Say It Correctly

Gamaliel. gah-**MAH**-lee-ale.

Quirinius. kwih-**RIN**-ee-uhs.

Rabban. **RaH**-ban.

Theudas. **THOO**-duhs.

Daily 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](#))



