



Confident Witnesses

Devotional

There is a faint knock at your door. You open it to find a cowering man who timidly asks, “You wouldn’t want to buy a vacuum cleaner, would you?” Unless you either took great pity on this poor excuse for a salesman or you badly needed what he was selling, you would not respond positively to his weak presentation.

While there are many differences between salesmanship and evangelism, most notably that evangelism depends on the power of the Holy Spirit and the gospel, there are a few parallels. An obvious parallel is that if you want to communicate effectively, you must be confident about your subject. The best salesmen honestly believe that their product is something that people really need. The best evangelists are confident that Jesus Christ is the only Savior and that people desperately need to trust in Him or they will perish.

God had just used Peter and John to heal a beggar in his forties who had been lame from birth. The spectacle of this man walking, leaping, and praising God drew a crowd, and Peter proclaimed the gospel to them. Perhaps after the main message, John joined Peter in responding to the crowd, since Acts 4:1 says, “As they were speaking to the people....” Suddenly they were interrupted as the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees came upon them, extremely upset that they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. They arrested Peter and John, put them in jail overnight, and the next day brought them in front of the Jewish Sanhedrin.

Although they were on trial before this intimidating council, Peter quickly turned the tables on the Sanhedrin, showing that it was they who were on trial. He points out that it was not a crime to do a good deed to a cripple. Then he indicts the Sanhedrin because they had crucified Jesus, whom God had raised from the dead and in whose name this lame man had been healed. Furthermore, Peter let them know that “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (4:12).

The members of the council were amazed at the confidence of Peter and John, who had not been educated in the rabbinical schools. When the council saw the man who had been healed standing there (proof positive of his healing), they had nothing to say. After a private conference (Luke may have learned of the details from Paul or Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus), the council commanded Peter and John not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Peter and John replied that they had to obey God, because they could not stop speaking about what they had seen and heard. After further warnings, the council let them go, since the crowd was glorifying God on account of this miracle.

While Peter and John had to be commanded to stop speaking, most of us need to be reminded of the command to speak to others about Jesus Christ. Many modern Christians think that Jesus' Great Commission was really the Great Suggestion. Or, we think that it applies to those called into missionary work, but not to the rest of us. But every believer should be able to say with Peter and John, even under threat of persecution, "I cannot stop speaking about what I have seen and heard." If we are prone to be timid witnesses for Christ, we should pray that the Lord would give us the confident boldness that we need to speak out for Christ, even if we suffer for it.¹ ***We all should seek to be confident witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ.***

Open it

1. When have you purchased or done something that initially you were unsure of, but after buying or doing it, you loved the results?²

Read it

Acts 4:1-22

Explore it

2. Why did the religious leaders confront Peter and John?
3. What did the religious leaders do to Peter and John for preaching?
4. What were the religious leaders' impressions of Peter and John as they spoke with them?
5. What order did the religious leaders give to Peter and John?

¹ Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-12-confident-witnesses-acts-41-22>

² All study questions written by Tim Badal, lead teaching pastor, Village Bible Church, Sugar Grove, Illinois.

Apply it

STOP IT! YOU ARE ROCKING THE BOAT.

Certainly few in the temple could have missed the commotion. Soon “the priests” (Levites who were giving their annual service in the temple), “the captain of the temple guard” (the temple police chief), and “the Sadducees” came together and terminated the meeting. Those who believed now came to 5,000, but the leaders made the arrest anyway. There were undoubtedly some unhappy words between the crowd and the authorities.

Note the Sadducees’ leading role in the incarceration. Little good can be said about this bunch. The Pharisees opposed Jesus for religious reasons (misguided conviction). The Sadducees’ opposition, however, came largely from political motivations. This is why the Sadducees were not as involved in early persecutions against Christ. But as they saw the incipient threat to their political structure, they became implacable enemies. In the book of Acts persecution was largely Sadducean. They were the materialistic rationalists of their day — denying the supernatural, denying evil spirits, denying angels (see Acts 23:8). Above all, they denied the Resurrection (see Mark 12:18), which the apostles boldly preached. To the Sadducees, the Messiah was simply an ideal and the messianic age a process.

These men had gained special ascendancy during the intertestamental Maccabean period. During subsequent political regimes, they created a priestly nobility. They were the educated, wealthy elite. But they were also unprincipled collaborationists, political sycophants who would sell their mothers to stay in power. Though a minority, they controlled Jewish political and religious life. They were evil control freaks, and they did not want anyone rocking their boat.³

6. As noted above, the Sadducees saw little need to engage with Jesus during His earthly ministry, but now they seemed to be quite concerned with this burgeoning movement. What things about church and their message made the Sadducees agitated and nervous?

7. In what ways can the church today cause the surrounding culture to become nervous or agitated? How are we to balance Jesus’ words of being attractational as salt and light while usually living and believing counter-culturally?

³ Hughes, R. Kent. Acts: The Church Afire (Preaching the Word) (Kindle Locations 1033-1036). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

8. In what ways does the prevailing culture of the world seek to keep Christians in check from proclaiming the truths of Scripture?

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING???

Teaching was regarded as the right possessed only by themselves or at least “franchised” by them to those whom **they approved**, those who had **been trained by them** and whose teaching would be **acceptable to them**. Peter and John were not accredited by them, and yet they were teaching in the temple—their turf—and they were teaching the people, the masses. The ability to control men has always been based upon the ability to indoctrinate them. For the people to be taught by someone other than themselves, and to be taught something different from that which they taught, was to lose control of their power over the masses. This was a great threat to them.⁴

9. What qualifications does the broader Christian community put on their pastors who teach the Bible publicly? How do these align with the qualifications of the disciples? If some of our present qualifications don't come from the Scriptures, where do they come from and why are they so important to us?

10. How was the teaching of the disciples different from that of the religious leaders of the day? Why was it so attractive to those who heard it?

⁴ Sermon by Bob Deffinbaugh found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/7-truth-or-consequences-acts-41-31>

11. How is one to determine the veracity of sound teaching in a culture where all kinds of good and bad teaching flourish?

Jesus had promised that it would come, and as always, He was right. Those who opposed Him and who had brought about His execution were now joining forces to do away with these two men who would cause trouble in the temple. It was a veritable “who’s who” gathered against the apostles. The rulers and elders and scribes of Israel were present, along with the high priest and the whole group of those of high-priestly descent. These people made up the Sanhedrin. Most of these we have seen before at the various trials of Jesus.

There is no specific charge made against the apostles. Rather, the “trial” seems to be more of a “fishing expedition” in which the religious leaders seek to find some transgression of the law or of their traditions, giving them a handle on the situation. There is plenty of innuendo and a great deal of intimidation evident here. Perhaps they can at least succeed in scaring these men into giving up their activities. Putting the men in the center, they demand to know, “by what power, or in what name, have you done this?”⁵

12. Put yourself into the apostles’ shoes. It had been only a few months since the religious leaders had condemned Jesus to death. In Jesus’ time before the council He remained silent, but here Peter and John speak boldly for God and against the religious elite. This creates an all-important question for every believer to ask — When is it right for us to remain silent about our faith and when should we be more vocal? What can happen when we mix these times up?

13. In what ways does the world seek to defame or catch the church in wrongful behavior or activities? What things can a church do to make sure that they remain above reproach in the eyes of both believers and non-believers alike?

⁵ Ibid.

HOW DID YOU DO THAT?

Peter was full of the Spirit (Acts 4: 8) and champing at the bit. This was precisely the kind of situation Jesus told his disciples they would face. He'd said not to worry because the Holy Spirit would teach them what to say. "By what power or by what name have you done this?" (Acts 4: 7 NKJV) the inquisitors asked. Peter and John stood before the very court that condemned Jesus. They knew the potential consequences of confronting these hostile men with the claims of Christ. But to tell them anything but the truth would be an act of cowardice and denial. (Peter had been there, done that! But no more!)⁶

14. In what ways have you covered away from sharing the truth when facing an ambivalent or even hostile person or crowd?

15. What fears might have been going through the minds of Peter and John as they stood before the religious leaders? What things are you most afraid of losing as a result of standing for your faith?

WHO KILLED CHRIST JESUS?⁷

Responsible Party

Sanhedrin/priests and elders (Jews)

Roman governor Pilate (a Gentile)

Herod (a Gentile)

Men of Israel (Jews)

Godless men/ Romans (Gentiles)

People of Jerusalem (Jews)

Judas, the betrayer (a Jew)

God, to rescue us

People who reject Christ (Jew/Gentile)

Human sin (Jew/Gentile)

Jesus, to be the sacrifice for our sin

Scripture Passages

Acts 4:5–11; 5:27–30; 7:52; Matthew 27:1, 20–23; John 19:6–7

Acts 4:27–28; Matthew 27:24–26; John 19:16–18

Acts 4:27–28; Luke 23:6–11

Acts 2:22–23, 36: 4:27

Acts 2:23; 4:27–28; Matthew 27:27–36

Acts 3:13–15; 4:27–28

Acts 1:16; Matthew 27:3–4

Acts 2:23; Romans 3:25–26; 2 Corinthians 5:18–21; Isaiah 53:10

Hebrews 6:6; Isaiah 53:3

1 Peter 2:24–25; Isaiah 53:4–6

John 10:14–18; Philippians 2:5–8; Hebrews 9:14; 10:5–14

⁶ Girard, Robert C.. The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 1059-1065). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁷ Ibid.

16. Put yourselves in the shoes of the religious leaders. They had thought that the movement Jesus started was now dead and done, with Jesus out of the picture. What might the religious leaders have been thinking internally as they saw Jesus' disciples speaking confidently and boldly asserting His resurrection?
17. Over the years much debate and division has been created by trying to pinpoint who is to be blamed for the death of Jesus. Why are these divisions unnecessary and unproductive?

John Stott says:

We ourselves are also guilty. If we were in their place, we would have done what they did. **Indeed, we have done it.** ... We too sacrifice Jesus to our greed like Judas, to our envy like the priests, to our ambition like Pilate. ... We may try to wash our hands of responsibility like Pilate. But our attempt will be as futile as his. **For there is blood on our hands.**⁸

18. Take some time to meditate on the quote from John Stott. How does knowing that your sin was a primary cause of Jesus' enduring all He did on the cross cause you to be filled with gratitude? How should this realization impact the believer's walk?

BOLDNESS

Peter's response is breathtaking. In the face of possible reprisals, he was fearless. This is how the early church viewed it: *"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished"* (Acts 4:13). In this age, when we are pressured to dilute the message of the gospel in deference to our ecumenical friends, Peter's insistence is something of which to take note. No doubt he was recalling Jesus' own insistence when he said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6).⁹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Thomas, Derek W. H.. Acts (Reformed Expository Commentaries) (Kindle Locations 1923-1934). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

19. Christians are often criticized by the unbelieving world for being intolerant. How can we show love and charity to unbelievers while at the same time believing and proclaiming that Jesus is the only way?

Peter then preached the same message he had preached before his arrest. He tells his captors that there is only one way a man or woman can be rescued from the guilt of sin and the certainty of the coming judgment. It is by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. In doing so, he was making a very public resolve not to be intimidated by any threat made against him by the Sanhedrin Council. Peter will obey God and not men. When the Sanhedrin admonished him not to preach anymore in the name of Jesus, Peter responded by disobeying the commands of the authorities. Peter's obedience to civil and religious authorities could not go beyond his obligation to obey the word of God. He could not obey this stricture because it violated something that is greater: the truth of God and of the gospel. Had Peter failed here, the story of the church would have been very different. The progress of the church beyond Jerusalem and to the end of the earth would have come to nothing.¹⁰

20. Peter disregarded the command of governing authorities. When is it right for present-day believers to do the same? Give reasons for your answer.

¹⁰ Ibid.