

**“THE CHURCH ROOTS AND
REACH -**

LESSONS FROM ACTS”

PRINCIPLES FOR TODAY’S CHURCH

WEEK 3

**SEPTEMBER 16TH
AND SEPTEMBER 17TH**





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FAITHFULNESS IN PERSECUTION

The Holy Spirit gives believers courage to proclaim the truth.



UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

USE THE FOLLOWING PAGES TO PREPARE FOR YOUR GROUP TIME.

Peter and John demonstrated spiritual courage by healing a crippled man in Jesus' name at one of the temple gates (see Acts 3:1-10). The healing stirred a lot of astonishment among the people. Peter seized the opportunity to explain that the source of the power for the miracle was the risen Christ. Moreover, Peter challenged the crowd to repent of their sins and place their faith in Jesus (see vv. 11-26).

The boldness of Peter and John in publicly proclaiming the gospel put them in direct conflict with the temple authorities. The two were arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin for questioning (see 4:1-12). The council warned Peter and John not to continue preaching in Jesus' name, but Peter courageously answered that their testimony about Jesus was a matter of being obedient to God. "When they observed the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and recognized that they had been with Jesus" (v. 13). Unable to find a way to punish the two apostles, the council released them with additional threats (see vv. 14-22).

Temple leaders decided that new measures had to be taken against the followers of Christ. Thus, they had the apostles jailed to await a hearing before the Sanhedrin. When the Sanhedrin convened and ordered the apostles to be brought in, it was reported with surprise that the apostles not only were absent from their cells but were standing in the temple courtyards teaching the people.

The police then retrieved the apostles and escorted them before the council, whereupon the high priest reminded them of the council's demand that they stop their evangelistic activities. Speaking for the apostles once again, Peter boldly explained that they were witnesses of what God had done in Christ. They had no option; they were compelled to obey God and to tell the people the truth about Jesus and the gospel (see 5:17-32).irate council members wanted to kill the apostles, but a Pharisee named Gamaliel persuaded them otherwise. He advised the council to take a cautious approach. As a result, the apostles were flogged, threatened, and released (see vv. 33-42).

"I WANT TO INVEST MY
LIFE IN SOMETHING THAT
IS GOING TO OUTLIVE
ME."—Vance H. Pitman

➤ ACTS 5:21,25-35,38-42

Think About It

Take note of words or phrases that reveal the attitudes and motives of the religious leaders.

Then identify words or phrases that reveal the attitudes and motives of the apostles.

How do the lists compare and contrast?

21 When the high priest and those who were with him arrived, they convened the Sanhedrin—the full Senate of the sons of Israel—and sent orders to the jail to have them brought.

25 Someone came and reported to them, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple complex and teaching the people.” **26** Then the commander went with the temple police and brought them in without force, because they were afraid the people might stone them. **27** After they brought them in, they had them stand before the Sanhedrin, and the high priest asked, **28** “Didn’t we strictly order you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to bring this man’s blood on us!” **29** But Peter and the apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than men. **30** The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had murdered by hanging Him on a tree. **31** God exalted this man to His right hand as ruler and Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. **32** We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.” **33** When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. **34** A Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law who was respected by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered the men to be taken outside for a little while. **35** He said to them, “Men of Israel, be careful about what you’re going to do to these men.

38 “And now, I tell you, stay away from these men and leave them alone. For if this plan or this work is of men, it will be overthrown; **39** but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even be found fighting against God.” So they were persuaded by him. **40** After they called in the apostles and had them flogged, they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them. **41** Then they went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonored on behalf of the Name. **42** Every day in the temple complex, and in various homes, they continued teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.



EXPLORE THE TEXT

RETURNING TO THE SCENE (*Acts 5:25-28*)

²⁵Someone came and reported to them, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple complex and teaching the people.” ²⁶Then the commander went with the temple police and brought them in without force, because they were afraid the people might stone them. ²⁷After they brought them in, they had them stand before the Sanhedrin, and the high priest asked, ²⁸“Didn’t we strictly order you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to bring this man’s blood on us!”

After having been thrown in jail to await the council’s convening and then miraculously being delivered by an angel, the apostles were once again teaching in the temple courtyards (see vv. 17-21a). The council convened for the hearing, but the apostles were not in the jail (see vv. 21b-24). An unidentified person came and reported to the Sanhedrin that the apostles were at that moment standing in the temple complex and teaching the people. The temple police once again detained the apostles but this time without force. The people were sympathetic to the apostles. A strong-arm tactic might enrage the crowd.

Behind closed doors the high priest exhibited his animosity toward the apostles. He reminded the apostles of the council’s prohibition against teaching about Jesus. Notably, the high priest didn’t ask how the apostles had escaped from the jail.

The council had a deep-seated fear that their place and control over the people were slipping away. They took great offense at the apostles' insistence that the religious leaders had Jesus' blood on their hands. However, the apostles weren't speaking or acting with vengeance. They were testifying to the truth. The Jewish leaders had the same opportunity as others to hear, repent, and trust God's redeeming plan through Jesus the Messiah.

*What motivated the religious leaders to silence the apostles?
How is that motive seen in today's world?*

STANDING THEIR GROUND (Acts 5:29-32)

²⁹But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had murdered by hanging Him on a tree. ³¹God exalted this man to His right hand as ruler and Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. ³²We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Again Peter served as the speaker for the apostles. He explained that as witnesses of the truth, the apostles had no choice but to obey God rather than men. His point was that for followers of Christ, God's commands take precedence over everything else.

God had raised up Jesus, whom the Jewish leaders had rejected and crucified. The expression "hanging Him on a tree" (v. 30) was Peter's way of saying the Jewish leaders considered Jesus' crucifixion to be a sign of God's curse on Jesus (see Deut. 21:22-23). By resurrecting Jesus, God in fact vindicated His Son and the gospel.

Peter stated that God exalted Jesus to His right hand as Ruler and Savior because He had defeated sin and death, opening the way for our salvation. That salvation is received through repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

Peter again stressed that the apostles had been witnesses of Jesus' sinless life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit was a divine witness to these events, and the Spirit now indwelt and empowered the followers of Christ in their mission to preach and teach the gospel. Therefore, the apostles could not and would not obey the Sanhedrin.

How would you summarize Peter's defense? Do you think Peter's speech was more convincing or more convicting? Explain.

KEY DOCTRINE

Security in Jesus

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ will never fall away from the state of grace but shall persevere to the end.

WAITING DURING DELIBERATIONS

(Acts 5:33-35,38-39)

³³When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. ³⁴A Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law who was respected by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered the men to be taken outside for a little while. ³⁵He said to them, "Men of Israel, be careful about what you're going to do to these men."

Like a blade, Peter's preaching could be soul-piercingly sharp (see Acts 2:37; 4:1-2). It could evoke either repentance or rage, depending on the hearer's attitude. Most of the council members had the latter reaction to Peter's testimony. They had used their influence with the Roman authorities to get rid of Jesus (so they thought); they could do the same with Jesus' followers.

One of the more influential and popular council members, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, offered a different approach. He was concerned about the council's handing down more death sentences against the apostles. The apostles enjoyed great favor with the people at the moment. To propose his alternative response, Gamaliel directed that the apostles be taken outside the meeting area.

Gamaliel urged the irate council members to exercise caution. Issuing death sentences could stir up a popular uprising against the council. Furthermore, the council might find itself in opposition to God.

BIBLE SKILL

Memorize a verse and consider its practical implications.

Memorize Acts 4:12 in your preferred translation. Paraphrase the verse in your own words. Record three reasons Jesus is the only way of salvation. Record two commonly held cultural beliefs the verse challenges. How does the belief that Christ alone can save affect your view of missions?

³⁸“And now, I tell you, stay away from these men and leave them alone. For if this plan or this work is of men, it will be overthrown; ³⁹but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even be found fighting against God.” So they were persuaded by him.

Gamaliel knew of two recent, failed revolutionary movements (see vv. 36-37). He proposed to the council that Jesus' followers would have a similar outcome if their movement was merely of human origin.

Gamaliel also advised the council to consider the position they would be in if what was occurring had its origins in the will of God. Gamaliel's arguments thus convinced the council to spare the apostles.

What wisdom do you see in Gamaliel's proposal to the council? How might his words help believers today?

REJOICING FOR THE OPPORTUNITY (Acts 5:40-42)

⁴⁰After they called in the apostles and had them flogged, they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them. ⁴¹Then they went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonored on behalf of the Name. ⁴²Every day in the temple complex, and in various homes, they continued teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

The Old Testament law allowed for various forms of punishment, including the practice of administering public beatings (see Deut. 25:1-3). Having been persuaded by Gamaliel to back off their demand for death, the council imposed two forms of punishment. First, they had the apostles flogged. Such a whipping was meant to humiliate, injure, and scar the victim. Second, they were ordered not to speak in the name of Jesus.

The council's punishment didn't have the desired effect. The apostles walked away from their beatings not cowering and crying but, rather, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame and a beating in Jesus' name. They viewed their mistreatment as confirmation of their devotion. They bore no shame for being faithful to Jesus.

Neither did the apostles obey the order to stop teaching about Jesus. If anything, they increased their gospel activity. They taught daily. They taught both in the temple area and in people's homes. They didn't stop declaring the good news that Jesus is the Messiah. They faithfully and courageously obeyed the Lord's express command to go and tell everyone to repent and believe.

*How can opposition to the gospel produce courage in believers?
How does opposition provide a platform for the gospel to be shared?*



➤ OBEY THE TEXT

Believers are to faithfully stand for Jesus when facing personal challenges. The truth of the gospel is trustworthy and can be shared with confidence. Believers can rejoice when persecuted, realizing that the gospel is proclaimed in the process.

Consider times in your life when someone challenged your faith. How did you respond? What can you learn from the apostles' example to help you respond when facing opposition in the future?

Reflect on ways you've found the gospel to be trustworthy. How do these ways give you confidence to share the gospel? Identify one person with whom you can share about the trustworthiness of the gospel this week.

Share with others in your Bible-study group about situations in which you've faced opposition to your belief in Jesus. Record insights gained from one another's stories. Take time to thank God for the opportunity to present the gospel while standing up to opposition.



MEMORIZE

"Peter and the apostles replied, 'We must obey God rather than men.' " Acts 5:29

USE THE SPACE PROVIDED TO MAKE OBSERVATIONS AND RECORD PRAYER REQUESTS DURING THE GROUP EXPERIENCE FOR THIS SESSION.

MY THOUGHTS

Record insights and questions from the group experience.

MY RESPONSE

Note specific ways you'll put into practice the truth explored this week.

MY PRAYERS

List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.

