

Memory Verse

“For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.” (Acts 22:15)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Work [Behavior]
God gave us the important commission to preach the gospel and defend the truth.	God is our living hope.	Prepare ourselves to defend the truth by sharpening the tools we have received from God.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. Paul Is Persecuted in Jerusalem
- B. Paul Defends the Gospel
 - 1. Before the Jews
 - 2. Before the Sanhedrin
 - 3. Before Felix
 - 4. Before Festus
 - 5. Before Festus and Agrippa

Life Application: Defending the Truth

Memory Verse

Conclusion: Let us emulate Paul by boldly defending the gospel and preaching the truth to the end of the earth, no matter whom we face.

Introduction

In the last section of the Acts of the Apostles, Paul resolved to go to Rome (Acts 19:21). Rome already had believers, but he was determined to go and continue to preach, despite the long and difficult journey. Today, we will look at some of the challenges Paul encountered on the way and learn how he handled them.

A. Paul Is Persecuted in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17–36)

At the end of his third missionary journey, Paul traveled to Jerusalem (Acts 21:17). He knew that danger, and possibly death, awaited him in Jerusalem, but that did not stop him. He understood that God had a reason for him to go back.

When he arrived in Jerusalem, Paul's expectations were fully realized. The Jews believed he had been wrongly teaching the Jews on his journey through the Gentile areas. Upon spotting him in the temple, they took action against Paul, incorrectly assuming that he had defiled the temple by taking some of his Gentile companions into its inner court. This was a serious crime in the eyes of the law, so he was dragged out of the temple and beaten (Acts 21:30, 32). The Jews continued beating him until a Roman commander arrived, arrested Paul, and took him to the barracks (Acts 21:33).

This was not the first time that Paul had been beaten or arrested for preaching the gospel, nor was it his last. Jesus Christ encourages us, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:10). Paul understood that his earthly suffering was only temporary. Moreover, Paul knew that God was with him as he accomplished God's work. Likewise, when we face persecution, we do not have to be afraid because God is always on our side.

B. Paul Defends the Gospel

To defend the gospel does not mean to win an argument or to debate. It means to give a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Pet 3:15). It is clear that Paul understood that he was defending the gospel and the truth of the kingdom of heaven, not himself. Whether before the Jews plotting to kill him or before foreign political leaders, Paul stated his defense clearly and with conviction. Let us study the different times Paul defended the gospel.

1. Before the Jews (Acts 21:37–22:29)

As the Roman soldiers prepared to lead Paul into the barracks, he turned to the commander and asked to address the crowd. After receiving the commander's consent, Paul began addressing the Jews in Hebrew. He recounted his conversion, how Jesus Christ appeared to him near Damascus, and God's command, "Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles" (Acts 22:21). Hearing this, the Jews became enraged and wanted to kill him. Seeing the chaos, the commander brought Paul into the barracks – a building used to house soldiers – to be examined under scourging. He wanted to know why the Jews were so incensed at Paul. As they prepared him to be scourged, Paul demanded, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?" (Acts 22:25). Shocked at hearing he was a Roman citizen, the men immediately drew away from him, and the commander also became afraid.

2. Before the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:30–23:10)

The next day, the commander brought Paul before the Sanhedrin for judgment. As he spoke before the council, Paul observed that several members were Sadducees while others were

Pharisees. To defend himself, Paul quoted from the Scriptures and cleverly started a quarrel among them by stating that he was a Pharisee who believed in resurrection. Subsequently, the council became hotly divided in opinion regarding Paul's innocence, with the Pharisees seeing no fault in Paul. With the uproar, the Roman commander feared that Paul would be pulled to pieces, so he commanded his soldiers to pull him out from among them and bring him back to the barracks (Acts 23:10).

3. Before Felix (Acts 23:11–24:27)

Around forty Jews plotted to kill Paul, swearing not to eat or drink until they had succeeded. But Paul's nephew overheard the plot and told Paul, who commanded him to tell the Roman commander. Under the commander's orders, Paul was taken to Caesarea under strong guard, and with a letter addressed to Felix, the Roman governor. Upon arriving in Caesarea, Paul was kept in Herod's Praetorium until his accusers arrived to speak before Felix. Five days later, the high priest and other elders arrived at Caesarea and brought false charges against Paul before Felix.

After they had stated their case against him, Paul began his defense by stating clearly that he was innocent of their charges. He admitted to being a follower of Jesus Christ, but said that he also believed in the Law and in the Prophets, which the Jews themselves also believed. After hearing Paul's defense, Felix postponed further action. Though he was convinced of Paul's innocence, Felix continued to keep him prisoner, hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe for release.

4. Before Festus (Acts 25:1–12)

After two years, Porcius Festus succeeded Felix, but he kept Paul imprisoned instead of releasing him to please the Jews. When Festus traveled to Jerusalem, the high priest and the chief Jews asked him to lure Paul to Jerusalem to be killed. Festus refused, but instead said that those with authority should go with him to Caesarea to accuse Paul. Later, when Paul was brought before Festus, many Jews from Jerusalem falsely accused Paul with unproved claims, all of which Paul denied. However, even after hearing Paul speak, Festus, wanting to please the Jews, asked if Paul was willing to be judged in Jerusalem.

So Paul said [to Festus], "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar."

(Acts 25:10–11)

Paul had already been imprisoned for two years, and he knew there was the risk of an assassination if he went to Jerusalem. He was determined to reach Rome, even if it meant that he would have to go as a prisoner. So, he exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar. He could not be killed, tortured, or sentenced within a certain time period until he went to Rome to lodge his appeal.

5. Before Festus and Agrippa (Acts 25:13–26:32)

Unsettled by Paul's appeal to Rome, Festus called Paul to appear before him and Herod Agrippa II, who was in town visiting. Festus wished for Agrippa, who was more familiar with Jewish

affairs, to suggest a solution. Once again, Paul had to give a defense. He began by sharing his background as a Pharisee, and then recounted how Jesus Christ called him on the way to Damascus. He concluded his defense by stating his mission in life: to preach and testify to all.

Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.

(Acts 26:22–23)

As Paul was giving his defense, Festus declared that Paul must be mad. Though people thought him a madman, Paul still bravely testified for the Lord. But King Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.” King Agrippa could see the truth of the gospel, but he resisted it. Though Paul spoke boldly in his mission to preach and defend the gospel, the desired result did not come automatically. Likewise, we are unable to control how others respond to our message, but it is still our mission to speak up for the gospel.

His actions may have seemed inexplicable in the eyes of man, but Paul understood the importance of his commission and his call to go to Rome. Paul experienced firsthand the greatness of God’s salvation, and he truly wished for everyone to receive the message and become a part of God’s church. Paul gave such a powerful defense because of his strong conviction in his beliefs and his courage to simply speak what God wanted him to speak.

After the conclusion of Paul’s defense, King Agrippa and other officials discussed the case. It was clear that they found no guilt or fault in him. However, due to pressure from the Jews and Paul’s own request to appeal to Caesar, Paul was to be sent to Rome.

We can see that during each defense Paul gave, he recounted how the Lord had called him to serve. He repeatedly shared this testimony because his calling was a major turning point in his life. The experience impacted Paul so strongly that he still firmly held on to God’s commission even years after his calling. In addition to sharing personal testimonies, Paul defended the gospel by drawing upon his wealth of knowledge and speaking with wisdom. He was familiar with Jewish laws and customs, with Roman law, and more importantly, he was also familiar with the Scriptures, so he could make connections between the Old and New Testaments.

It takes great courage to stand before people that oppose you or may pass judgment on you. However, Paul spoke with strength, courage, power, and authority because he not only had knowledge, but also the power of the Holy Spirit. We must follow his example in taking courage and speaking boldly through the power of the Holy Spirit to say what we need to say (Lk 12:11–12).

Check for Understanding

- 1. Why was Paul arrested?** The Roman commander wanted to know why Paul had made everyone so enraged.
- 2. Which authorities did Paul appear before?** The Sanhedrin, Felix, Festus, and King Agrippa.
- 3. What did Paul do when set before the Sanhedrin?** He cleverly started a quarrel between them by making a statement that he knew would split the Pharisees and the Sadducees due to their different beliefs.

4. **How did Paul defend the gospel?** He recounted his calling by the Lord and drew upon his knowledge of Jewish customs, of the Scriptures, and of the ways of the world.
5. **What allowed Paul to defend the gospel so boldly? How does this encourage us today?** He understood that it was God's will for him to go to Rome, so he was able to speak boldly and with courage. We do not have to be afraid of defending the gospel when we understand that we are doing it for God.

Life Application

Defending the Truth

Just like Paul, we have also been called to defend the gospel, which is the truth that is in the Bible. Though we may not have to defend the gospel before a judge as Paul did, we still have to defend our beliefs before our family and friends. Thus, it is crucial that we have a firm conviction in our beliefs, that we understand what it is we believe in, and that we learn how to defend our beliefs. Paul used four tools to defend the gospel:

1. Personal testimony

For the opening of each defense, Paul recalled life before his conversion, God's calling at Damascus, and the commission given to him by God. Personal testimonies such as these are powerful because they are your own experiences that no one can deny.

2. Knowledge of his audience

Paul purposely spoke in a way he knew would connect with the audience. When speaking to the Jews, he spoke in Hebrew. When speaking to political leaders, Paul drew upon his knowledge of them in relation to his defense. For example, in his defense before King Agrippa, Paul mentioned how he knew that King Agrippa was well acquainted with all the Jewish customs (Acts 26:3).

3. Knowledge of the Scriptures

As a Pharisee, Paul was well versed in the Scriptures, and he cited this knowledge in his defense before the Sanhedrin and the Jews.

4. Familiarity with the ways of world

Paul knew his rights as a Roman citizen. But more importantly, he knew to use these rights to his advantage, such as when he was about to be flogged or when he refused to return to Jerusalem to face trial.

We have the very same tools available today. We need to learn how to wield them, so that we are able to effectively support our beliefs. In order to defend properly, we must prepare ourselves. Let's think about how we can wield these four tools, so that we can be prepared to defend the truth.

1. Personal testimony

- a. How has God strengthened your faith in Him?
- b. How has God guided and helped you and your family?
- c. Share a time when God helped you in your time of need.

When we are convicted of God's presence, recalling His works in our life is a powerful way for us to defend our faith. Our personal experiences with God cannot be denied by anyone else, and when we recall them, we strengthen our faith. Therefore, it is important that we continually recount the blessings of God in our daily life, perhaps by keeping a faith journal, or by sharing the blessings of God with our family and friends on a regular basis. Through these constant reminders, we are able to share the blessings of God with any who question our beliefs, or with those who have not experienced God before.

2. Knowledge of our audience

- a. What obstacles hinder someone from coming to believe?
- b. Identify the people with whom you would like to share your beliefs.
- c. What are some challenges you have faced when preaching?

Every relationship that we have is an opportunity to share our faith. It is important to remind ourselves of the people we can preach to. As we are preaching to them, we can recall the things that they are going through and use those as a way to bring up our faith. The challenges they encounter may be the opportunity that God is giving to us to share our faith with them. It is times like these that we need to prepare ourselves to preach to them. We can do this by practicing what we would say to them with a practice partner at church, and by making a conscious effort to care for them and to get to know them.

3. Knowledge of the Scriptures

- a. Why is knowledge of the Scriptures important when sharing or defending our faith?
- b. How have you consistently sought a better understanding of God's word in order to prepare yourself?
- c. What are obstacles or challenges that you encounter when trying to study the word of God?
What are ways we can overcome them?

We need to study the Bible diligently by reading it often and thinking about what it is teaching us. When we have a deep understanding of the Bible, we are more able to weave His words naturally into our dialogue when defending or sharing the truth. It is easy to feel overwhelmed at the impossibility of fully understanding the Bible, enough that we may become discouraged from defending or sharing our faith. When we feel like we are lacking in knowledge, we can ask God to give us wisdom. Jesus' twelve disciples were not scholars but were still filled with wisdom and understanding of the Scriptures through the fullness of the Holy Spirit. This demonstrates that when we have the heart to seek after the word of God, the Holy Spirit will give us understanding.

4. Familiarity with the ways of the world

- a. Reflect on your education. What gifts do you believe God has given to you?
- b. Think of a personal interest that you have. How can you use the skills that you apply to this interest for the church? Or, how can you use what you learn in school to help God's work?
- c. Are there any particular challenges or dangers that we have to consider in using our education and schooling for the church?

Our worldly education allows us to function in this society and make a living. More importantly, it allows us to support God's work. When we learn a second language or a technical skill like graphic design, we can use these to benefit the ministry and to share the gospel with even more people. We never know when the things that we learn in school can be useful in our servitude later on!

If Paul had not known his rights as a citizen or the way the courts of law worked at the time, he could very well have been forced into silence due to his ignorance. His skills in different languages also served as an advantage in his defense. The Bible teaches us to be shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves (Mt 10:16). We need to be wise enough to defend ourselves against the ways of the world, while also living upright lives in the eyes of men. This is because we are in the world but not of the world (Jn 17:14–15), meaning we have to live and survive in this world, but also live lives dedicated to God. Let's prepare ourselves by testifying often, reaching out to those around us, deepening our understanding of God's word, and learning skills that can support God's holy work, so that we can defend and share the gospel like Paul did.

Testimony

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I testify.

I came to believe in Christ at a young age and even received the Holy Spirit when I was twelve during my first Student Spiritual Convocation. However, my parents, especially my mother, would not allow me to be baptized and even wanted to convert me back to Buddhism. Since I was young, I couldn't disobey her. She would often bring home food offered to idols and try to make me eat it. When I refused, she would say very ugly things to me like, "You're not my daughter," or "You're ugly."

One time, after one of these incidents, I was crying a lot in my room, and I started to talk to God in my head. "Why are You making it so difficult for me when I am trying believe and be a good Christian?" I felt that the persecution I had to go through was too much for me who was so young at the time. As I was talking to God, I felt a peaceful spirit enter me from my head to my toes. However, because I was so mad, I told God to go away, and then He did. However, a few minutes later, the spirit came back, and again I felt this peace go from my head to my toes. This happened three times before it really left me. Looking back at this incident, it makes me realize that God loves me so much that in that time of difficulty, He was reaching out to me.

My mother would also often question me about my religion and beliefs. Most of the time, I would not know what to say since I did not have enough knowledge at the time. However, one time, I was praying more and had read the book of Nehemiah. In it, Nehemiah had prayed and fasted before going to ask the king for permission to go and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. I realized that I could do the same. The next time when my mother started to question and interrogate me, I said a silent prayer in my heart. When I opened my mouth to respond, I found that my answers were amenable and clear. I was able to answer all the questions and concerns that my mother had without making her angry. This really was the power of God working in me!

Through God's grace I was able to receive baptism when I was in college, and God continues to watch over me even today. May all the praise and glory be unto His holy name.

- Anonymous

Memory Verse

"For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard." (Acts 22:15)

Meaning

1. On Paul's journey to Damascus, God called upon him, and Ananias explained that God had chosen Paul to be His witness.
2. To be a witness to what we have seen and heard is to share about the work that God has done in our life. Our testimonies are not only for ourselves; they are meant to be shared with all people. Knowing this, Paul boldly and repeatedly recounted his calling from the Lord before others.

Conclusion

Paul understood God's will for him to preach the gospel, so he was able to boldly preach the kingdom of God. Whether before his own people, before the Roman leaders, or before the Jewish elders, he did not

shy away from the truth. Let us emulate Paul and boldly defend the gospel and preach the truth to the end of the earth, no matter whom we face.

Lesson 11 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What does it mean to witness God before others?
To share about the work that God has done in our life. Testimonies are not only for ourselves; they are meant to be shared with all people.
2. How was Paul persecuted in Jerusalem? Read and write down Matthew 5:10 below.
The Jews, convinced he had brought Gentiles into the temple and was wrongly teaching others, dragged him out and beat him. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:10).
3. How did Paul defend the gospel before the Sanhedrin?
Observing that several members were Sadducees while others were Pharisees, Paul cleverly started a quarrel between them by stating that he was a Pharisee who believed in resurrection.
4. What can we learn about preaching the gospel from the reactions of Festus and Agrippa?
Though Paul spoke boldly in his mission to preach and defend the gospel, the desired result did not come automatically. Likewise, we are unable to control how others respond to our message, but it is still our mission to speak up for the gospel.
5. What are four tools Paul used to defend the gospel?
Personal testimony, knowledge of his audience, knowledge of the Scriptures, and familiarity with the ways of the world.
6. Which of the above tools do you think you need to work on the most? How can you do so?
Answers will vary. (Ex: Increase knowledge of the Scriptures by studying the Bible more; increase knowledge of our audience by getting to know friends at school better; become more familiar with ways of the world by studying harder at school or increasing exposure to news/politics.)