

"A WITNESS WORTH HEARING"
(Acts 21:40-22:29)
(Chuck Swindoll)

Paul believed evangelism to be his sole purpose for living, so he viewed every circumstance as an opportunity to be a witness or to create more opportunities for witnessing. When a mob tried to kill him and a contingent of Roman soldiers carried him to safety, he saw another opportunity to testify. His example highlights three principles worth remembering.

First, *a factually based personal testimony is unanswerable; internal experience alone is questionable.* The most compelling case for Christianity is a personal testimony. It follows a simple outline:

1. Before Christ
2. Encounter with Christ
3. After Christ

No one can argue with your personal experience. Subjective experience alone, however, doesn't convince others to believe. Paul laced his personal testimony with verifiable facts. He highlighted the parts of his life that many had observed before his salvation, during his experience with Christ on the road to Damascus, and then after. And he referred to objective witnesses the audience could respect and trust.

So if you're going to prepare a testimony, think through the wording. In fact, write it down and limit it to two pages. Include only relevant details that others have observed and could affirm. Read it through a few times, not to memorize it, but to become comfortable with what you would like to say. Then let the opportunities and the Holy Spirit be your guide as you testify from the heart.

Second, *humility is one thing; indignity is something entirely different.* When the soldiers stretched out Paul for an unjust whipping, he looked into the face of the officer and declared his citizenship in order to avoid unnecessary suffering. In Philippi, Paul had taken his undeserved beating because it served his purpose. He had used the illegal punishment as leverage to secure greater safety for the church in Philippi. In Jerusalem, however, his suffering would serve no constructive purpose, so he put an end to it.

A strange trend in Christian teaching has twisted the doctrine of submission into something grotesque and tragically unlike anything Jesus taught. It's the idea that Christians should submit to any kind of abuse that happens to come their way. Consequently wives endure battering while churches shout, "Submit!" Children suffer bizarre forms of neglect and mistreatment in the name of submission and discipline. Christians everywhere seem to believe that accepting abuse and humiliation is part and parcel of the Christian life and, therefore, that they should take their beatings when they could otherwise avoid injustice. But that's not biblical teaching.



Paul suffered when he saw something greater to be gained. He accepted—submitted, if you will—to the unalterable will of God when it called for suffering. When escape was not an option, he bore his mistreatment with dignity. That is quintessentially Christian. Volunteering for mistreatment and injustice is a perversion of the doctrine of submission. God created humans for dignity. Evil has been tearing down God's creation from the moment of the first sin. We, as Christians, are called to suffer with Christ in the war against Satan and sin, but God never calls us to lay down human dignity when we have the option to see justice prevail.

Third, *an honest testimony is our responsibility; a positive response is not.* In terms of positive response, Paul's testimony was a massive crash-and-burn failure. His defense of the gospel and his ministry to the Gentiles didn't convince the audience to change their opinion and decide to fund a fourth missionary journey. He merely told the truth of his own experience with Jesus Christ: his life of sin before, his conversion, and his ministry after. The audience saw themselves in his "before" picture and they didn't like what they saw. The audience saw themselves in contrast to Paul's "after" picture and they liked the reflection even less. The apostle didn't set out to convince the Jews to convert; he only determined to tell the truth. What they did with the truth, he left to the Holy Spirit.

People won't like what we have to say. Our job is not to change their minds; our responsibility is to proclaim the truth. Nothing more. Nothing less.