

Christians are sometimes called upon to defend their faith and obedience to Christ, and if their personal character and actions are also in question, it is appropriate to give this defense in the form of a “personal testimony”.

Introduction – Quote from American atheist Dan Barker about Christmas to describe our culture’s religious environment.

I. The Need for Personal Testimony

A. What it is; what it isn’t

1. A personal story; not a sermon, an argument or a gospel presentation (although it should include elements of these).
2. A story about your new birth in Christ (personal background, conversion experience, what you now believe as a Christian, what God has called you to do, and how your life has changed).
3. A winsome method of gaining an audience for sharing the gospel and how Jesus relates to your life; not an irrefutable method of evangelism.

B. To give contextualized reasons why you obey God by following Jesus (vv. 1-21)

His speech is contextualized (seeks common ground) to his audience by emphasizing things they shared: love for their people, zeal for God and his commands, hometown, spoken language, respected religious education, respected human authority, respected spiritual experience, respect for the temple, prayer as dialogue with God. Christians are exhorted throughout the NT to give this kind of testimony ([1 Pet 3:15b-16](#); [Jude 3](#)).

So to summarize Paul’s “Jewish defense”: he is a good Jew, and when a good Jew receives visions and commands from the Lord he can do nothing but obey them. Any Jew who saw and heard the things Paul did could only obey God.

Do not miss this important aspect of the Acts narrative: that Paul is charged as an apostolic law-breaker. But the verdict is clearly no—Paul proves to be a faithful Jew, obedient to the Torah, Roman law, and to God’s direct commands to obey Jesus. The rest of the book of Acts tells how Paul was enabled to give a defense for the gospel within the Roman halls of power, and this story explains how Paul found himself on this path.

C. To show that God’s Spirit is still working in people through Jesus (vv. 6-10, 13, 17-21)

1. A bad evangelical example (me-centered, no gospel, sin-glorifying, religious jargon, moralistic).
2. A good biblical example (Christ-centered, gospel-oriented, sin-debasing, miraculous conversion, God-obeying, grand mission). Paul’s testimony includes his pre-conversion sinful life (vv. 3-5); his conversion experience, changed heart, and encounter with Jesus (vv. 6-11); his calling/mission from Jesus (vv. 12-16); and his continuous following of Jesus’ commands (vv. 17-21).

II. The Opposition to Personal Testimony

A. From religious people (v. 22)

Hostile Objection: You can't obey God by following Jesus because Jesus is a liar. Away with you!

Self-righteous Objection: Jesus' forgiveness gives immoral people license to sin. Keep Jesus to us!

Relativist Objection: Jesus is fine for you, but I don't believe in him. Keep Jesus to yourself!

B. From secular people (vv. 37-38, 24)

Pax Romana Objection: Your religion is fanatical and makes you a danger to civil society. You should be locked away!

C. From family and friends (v. 22)

Dishonored Objection: You used to believe what we believe. You're no longer one of us!

III. The Power Behind Personal Testimony

A. A spiritual encounter with God (vv. 6-10)

Paul made it clear that God himself is the author of his sudden and radical conversion. God knocked him off his horse with a blinding light from heaven in order to turn him around from his murderous life mission. His meeting Jesus changed his whole way of thinking and way of life.

B. A heart changed by God (vv. 10-13, 19-20)

Jesus changed Paul's heart. He went from a hater of Jesus to a submissive disciple of Jesus. Now Paul is no longer arrogant and breathing murder. Paul's conversion is a wonderful picture of what it means to turn to the Lord: to bow in humility to willingly bear the yoke the Lord places on you, and ready to do his will (*whatever* that may be). Notice that Paul *continued* in humility. Paul received the word of God from the mouth of Ananias (another servant of the Lord). Paul objects to God—but not in a rebellious way. Paul asks God to reconsider making him leave Jerusalem because he finds it hard to believe that the Jews will not be moved to consider the claims of Jesus Christ upon seeing his dramatically changed life and doctrine. Paul even uses the stoning of Stephen (which he approved) to bolster his point! Stephen (the first Christian witness to be martyred) is followed by Paul as an eager witness. Paul's heart is dramatically changed—the opponent of Jesus has become the proponent!

C. An assigned mission from God (vv. 10, 14-16)

God appoints Paul according to his plan for him to the specific task described by Ananias. To know God's will (i.e., believe in Jesus and obey his commands), to see the Righteous One (Jesus), to hear a message from the mouth of God (God's specific instructions for Paul), to be a witness to all men of what Paul saw and heard from God (preach the gospel of the risen Jesus Christ to both Jews and Gentiles).

Conclusion – Does Paul's story stir your heart? If Paul's personal testimony doesn't even faintly remind you of your own encounter and relationship with God, then perhaps God has not yet "knocked you off your horse." If that power is utterly incomprehensible and unknown to you, then you need to respond to God's call to you like Paul did: turn from your complacency in happily living without the power of God, put your life in Jesus' hands, and ask "What shall I do, Lord?" But if you know and feel God's power in your story, then give your defense when the opportunity arises. God will give you the courage when the time comes. And despite the response, you will glorify God.