



THE BEREIA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

Witness in Action

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We [previously](#) affirmed that the first disciples prevailed in what Paul saw as a war of ideas (2 Cor 10.3–5) because they complied with Jesus’ charge to be “witnesses” (μάρτυς, *martyrs*; Acts 1.8), the word that functions as the theme of Acts. The nouns and verbs that refer to a witness, the act of testifying, and the disciples’ testimony appear thirty-eight times in Acts, distributed almost evenly throughout its three main sections (chapters 1–9, 10–20, 21–28) (Oster 1989, 40–45). We will now consider what these words show about their preaching.

The verbs—μαρτυρέω (*martyreō*), μαρτύρομαι (*martyromai*), and διαμαρτύρομαι (*diamartyromai*)—refer to the action of *testifying to a fact or truth*, solemnly and urgently, often with a focus on *confirmation or gaining approval for an idea*. The noun *martyrs* refers to the person who attests to *the fact or truth of a thing* (Danker 2009, 222–223; my emphasis). Culturally, the words were used in law court settings where evidence for claims and counter claims was disputed. Similarly, in the New Testament, the terms depict interactive discourses wherein believers gave evidence to show *why* their hearers should believe their claims. In view of Jesus’ charge and the disciples’ response to it, we can say that had the disciples failed to give evidence for their claims, they would have been “conceding defeat” to their opponents (Trites 1978, 1048).

The records also show that propagating a body of teaching with a specific content informed the goal and method of their witness, a conclusion reinforced by other words that describe their communication. We’ll note just five of the terms, beginning with the noun ἀπολογία (*apologia*; 8 times in the NT) and its cognate verb ἀπολογέομαι (*apologeomai*; 10 times). “Apology,” the English word derived from *apologia*, primarily focuses on admitting an error or expressing regret, but the New Testament’s focus aligns with Merriam-Webster’s second meaning: “something that is said or written to defend something that other people criticize; defense” (Merriam-Webster n.d.).

As defined by Danker, *apologia* means, “response to charges of misconduct, *defense* freq[ue]ntly in legal context—a. with focus on speaking in defense Ac 22:1 (legal); 1 Cor 9:3 (general sense).— b. the act of defensive response: in a legal venue Ac 25:16; 2 Ti 4:16; general sense 2 Cor 7:11; Phil 1:7, 16; 1 Pt 3:15.” *Apologeomai* refers to the act of speaking in one’s defense (Danker 2009, 48). Thus, to engage in *apologia* is to give a reasoned defense to justify an idea or behavior. While New Testament writers sometimes use the term to refer to a personal defense (Acts 19.33; 25.16; 1 Cor 9.3; 2 Tim 4.16), it is featured in several settings where believers were defending their faith, either to convince others of the truth of the events that establish its authenticity or to defend components of its teaching (Acts 22.3; 25.8; 26.1–2; cf. esp. Phil 1.7, 16; 1 Pet 3.15).

Four other verbs also show the first disciples’ emphasis on engaging their hearers’ minds. The

first is διαλέγομαι (*dialegomai*; 10 times, in Acts: 17.2, 17; 18.4, 19; 19.8–9; 20.7, 9; 24.12, 25), used “of speech exchange, *dispute, argue, debate,*” or “of presenting a reasoned position in public *make a speech, speak, address*” (Danker 2009, 91). The other three have more literal meanings that are properly applied to the act of evidence evaluation: διανοίγω (*dianoigō*), which refers to opening the ears, eyes, mind, or heart to receive a message (Danker 2009, 92; cf. Acts 7.56; 16.14; 17.3); παρατίθημι (*paratithēmi*), which means to place alongside or set something before someone for consideration (Danker 2009, 270; cf. Acts 14.23; 16.34; 17.3; 20.32); and συμβιβάζω (*symbibazō*), which refers to inviting someone to see how ideas that are presented fit together (Danker 2009, 333–334; cf. Acts 9.22; 16.10; 19.33).

In Acts, these words convey the idea of a dialogue, persuasion, proof, or explanation that appeals to the mind and calls for a rational decision about what is said. The appearance of three of them in Acts 17.2–3 is instructive for understanding the nature of Christian persuasion. Upon arriving in Thessalonica, “Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned [*dialegomai*] with them from the Scriptures, explaining [*dianoigō*] and proving [*paratithēmi*] that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” Although his presentation may have been interesting and emotionally evocative, his primary goal was not to give an engaging speech or elicit an emotional response. Rather, he aimed to convince his hearers that the events upon which he based his life were supported by evidence and therefore worthy of their intellectual assent, conviction, and changed lives.

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