

In the early days the church had grown leaps and bounds. Thousands turned to faith in Jesus Christ. Many were miraculously healed in Jesus' name. The church regularly met in the temple, in Solomon's colonnade, the home turf of the Sadducees. In a jealous rage, the High Priest, along with a group of the Sadducees, had the Apostles arrested and thrown into jail. They called an emergency meeting of the Sanhedrin Council for the purpose of punishing the Apostles, and stopping the Jesus movement before they lost their position, power, reputation, and wealth.

When the council assembled, they sent for the Apostles to stand trial, but an angel of the Lord released them the night before. Rather than finding them in their jail cells, the Apostles were back in the temple, preaching the gospel, and proclaiming salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The major themes of their message were that Jesus is the Messiah, salvation is offered to all who place their faith in Him, and the religious leaders of Israel had Him put to death.

For fear of the crowds, the temple guards arrested the Apostles quietly, and brought them before the council. The High Priest was furious because they had not obeyed his command to not speak at all anymore in Jesus' name, and for the fact that they were making the religious leaders look bad in the eyes of the people by accusing them of having put Jesus to death. In his highly exalted position, the High Priest should be God's spokesman, but the Apostles pointed out that he was just a man, and they were obeying God. Immediately they began to preach the gospel to the religious leaders who had gathered to pass judgment upon them, and repeated all the things that had gotten them into trouble in the first place.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke recorded these events; I believe, in order to give the church, throughout the generations, an example to follow. We are to boldly stand upon the gospel of Jesus Christ, regardless of our circumstances or any opposition that we might face. We must speak the truth, and trust God with the outcome. It will not always be easy, or pleasant, but our God is in sovereign control, and we must obey God rather than men.

In tonight's passage we learn of the outcome of the Apostles' stand, and we gain some insights into the effects of our stands for Christ today. Please read along with me, Acts 5:33-42.

The Bible says that when the religious leaders heard the Apostles again proclaiming the gospel, they were furious, and wanted to put them to death. This is the exact same hostility they showed against Jesus, and the spirit behind the opposition to the gospel today. Sometimes we wonder why people do not accept God's grace when they hear of the love of Christ, and God's offer of redemption. Why would anyone reject the gospel, and lash out at the messenger?

Whenever I share my faith with others, it is out of the purest of motives. I do not pass judgment on others, because I am as guilty of sin as anyone else. I share the gospel of Jesus Christ because I am concerned about their eternal soul. Through faith in Christ, God has blessed my life in ways beyond description. I have the fruits of the Spirit that sustain me regardless of my circumstances. I have an intimate personal relationship with the Lord, where I am aware of His continuous presence. I can speak with Him at any time, and He hears and answers my prayers. Through faith in Christ, and His sacrifice on the cross, I have meaning and purpose in my life. The Holy Spirit gives me discernment, and the assurance of eternal life. The blessings of God are not some secret to be stored away in a safe location, rather they are something that I want to share with everyone, so that they too may be blessed. The more God uses me to be a blessing to others, the more I receive blessings from Him.

Just like the religious leaders in the days of the early church, people today do not like to be confronted with their sin. The accusations the Apostles laid upon the Sanhedrin Council were true, and in order to find forgiveness, they had to confess and repent of their sin. But, sinners do not like to be reminded of their sin. The flesh rejects correction. People do not like to be told that there is something in their life that needs to change. They don't want to be told what to do, or how to live. In effect, they want to be their own god, and in control of their own destinies.

Herein lies the spiritual battle that rages in every lost person before they come to Christ. Just as the gospel convicts us of our sin, it also calls us to a decision. Will I reject God's grace so that I can remain in control of my life, or will I surrender my life, my will, my all, and give complete control to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Salvation is about trusting Jesus completely. This aspect of Lordship is sometimes neglected in our gospel presentations. Jesus cannot be our Savior if He is not also the Lord over our lives. It is in this area that professing Christians continue to struggle in their flesh. Victory over sin, and the flesh, along with the full blessings of God's grace, comes as we learn to surrender our all to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Based upon the wording of verse 33, the situation looked pretty hopeless for the Apostles, but that didn't stop them from taking a bold stand. It seems to me that God was not finished with the Apostles just yet, and He delivered them through the wise counsel of a man named Gamaliel. The only other place in the bible where we read about this man is in Acts 22 where Paul identifies him as his professor while he was training in the ways of the Pharisees. Here he is identified as a teacher of the law who was honored by all of the people.

When we take our stand for Christ, God is able to work in our circumstances, and raise up defenders, in order to see us through whatever trials we might have to suffer in our service to Him. Because of my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I long to be with Him, but so long as He still has a purpose for my life here on earth, I will gladly serve Him. When He says it is my time to go to my heavenly reward, I am ready. Until then, I know that He is with me, and will be with me until the end.

I see nothing in the text to suggest that Gamaliel was sympathetic to the gospel or the Apostles. Instead, as this man spoke with insight, and wisdom, God used him to deliver the Apostles, so that they could finish the work that He assigned to them. Notice that God sometimes works through unbelievers to deliver those who stand in faith. God is able to use whomever He wants, and to work in whatever circumstances He chooses, to accomplish His purpose. This truth should help to build confidence in us when we are required to take our stand in the face of opposition.

Gamaliel used two examples from Israel's recent history, where there was a movement among the people, but in the end, the movements failed. The exact nature of the rebellions is not clear in the text, but context suggests that they threatened the religious leaders in a similar fashion as the gospel movement.

In verses 38 and 39, he advises that they leave the Apostles alone and let them go. If this movement was not from God, it would fail, but if it was from God, there was nothing they could do to stop the Apostles, and the religious leaders would find themselves fighting against God. Gamaliel's words show wisdom, and perhaps an openness to the gospel message. He had not convicted the Apostles in his heart at this point, and was willing to take a wait and see attitude before passing judgment. Humanly speaking, his words were wise because had they killed the Apostles the people might have revolted. But his words also show divine insight, and God's sovereign hand in the matter, as his speech persuaded the council to let them go.

Did Gamaliel ever come to saving faith in Jesus Christ? The text does not tell us, but God used him and his words to accomplish His purpose, so the Sanhedrin set the Apostles free, but not before they had them flogged. They couldn't just release them; they had to try to teach them a lesson, and ordered them, once again, to not speak at all to others in Jesus' name.

Once again, the religious leaders acted in their own selfish interest. Had it been that the gospel had not reached so many followers, they would see no reason to spare the Apostles. The threat of revolt, and the fear of the people seeing the leaders in a bad light, made it more advantageous for them to release the prisoners.

This reminds us of how crucial it is that, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we stand together on the gospel, and the truth of God's word, no matter what opposition we might have to face. If we share true convictions that are based upon the word of God, we can make a difference. If we stand alone, our voice will be lost in the noise.

By and large, the Old Testament prophets stood as lone voices. The people did not rally around the message of God, so Israel was destroyed and the people went into captivity. In the days of the early church, with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, thousands of people trusted Jesus, and they became a powerful force that had to be dealt with delicately, and respect.

What a shame that the church today has so little influence in the world. People with agendas that oppose the clear principles of God's word largely ignore godly opposition. We have become irrelevant to the powers that be, because we don't stand together. I am not a big advocate of boycotting businesses, but there are times when such movements can make a difference. My greater concern is Christian apathy when it comes to the political process, and for not holding our officials accountable. It is as if we surrender without a fight, or we just don't care about our culture, and our children's future, or we have become ashamed of the phrase, God bless America.

The Sanhedrin had Jesus flogged before they murdered Him, and here in Acts, they flogged His followers. But the disciples did not run, and hide, with their tails tucked between their legs. They went away rejoicing, because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. In 1 Peter, Peter writes that we should rejoice when we suffer for Christ. There is blessing, and joy, for the Christian who suffers, not for poor choices, but for the sake of Christ. We are to rejoice when we are criticized for standing upon the gospel. We rejoice if we suffer for standing upon the clear principles of God's word. We rejoice when we suffer for our stand against all ungodliness, because even when we suffer for our stand, the Holy Spirit affirms us for our obedience to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The bible says that when we share in His sufferings, we also share in His glory.

After their arrest, persecution, and beating, day after day, in the temple courts, and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. In the face of great opposition and persecution, the Apostles kept on sharing the gospel. They kept on proclaiming the truth, and in large measure it was their boldness, consistency, and joyous hearts, that God was able to use them to reach the lost. Eventually they would all be martyred for their stand, but consider what a difference they made, and the reward that awaited them when they went to meet Jesus.

As we advance to chapter 6, we will see that the opposition to the gospel never stopped, and in some ways, it only grew worse. But, the opposition did not stop the spread of the gospel. In fact, one of the central themes of the book of Acts is that the greater the opposition, the wider the spread of the good news of Jesus Christ. Should we think that it is any different today? There will always be opposition to our testimonies and our stand upon the principles of God's word.

Sometimes that opposition may cause us to suffer mentally, emotionally, or even physically. But if our suffering is because of our godly stand, the world will see conviction among the followers of Christ, and they will become curious why our faith is so strong that we are willing to suffer.

We are willing to suffer for Christ because He first suffered for us. He who was by very nature God humbled Himself and took on the nature of a servant. He came to suffer all the unrighteousness sinful man could pour out. Because He was without sin, He was able to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sin. By faith in Jesus, and His sacrifice on the cross, we confess and repent of our sins. We invite Him into our hearts to be our Lord and Savior. He then pours out His Spirit into our hearts, and the grace of God into our lives, and gives us the promise of eternal life. If anyone has not yet bowed his or her knee to the Lord Jesus Christ, right now can be the time of your salvation.