

Confronting The World With Truth

Acts 5:17-42

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Several times Jesus told His disciples and said, "If they persecuted Me, your Lord and Master, they will also persecute you." If you follow Christ, you will find opposition. Just as the world persecuted Jesus, so the world persecutes Jesus' followers. Paul the apostle said, "All that live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." If you're living a godly life, you're going to be confronting the world with the light of the gospel and the truth of your life, and you're going to run into conflict with this unbelieving, hostile world.

Just to catch us up a little bit where we are in the book of Acts, we saw in chapter 5 that there was the attack of Satan inside of the church through Ananias and Sapphira and their hypocrisy. Their hypocrisy wasn't that they kept back part of the price of the land that they sold, but their hypocrisy, their sin, was they made as though they were giving everything to God when, in reality, they had kept back part. They had a right to keep back part, it was theirs. They didn't have to give anything to the Lord, but it was the hypocrisy that God was dealing with, so Satan was attacking the church from the inside. No sooner had Satan attacked the church from the inside, and God brought the purity by taking Ananias and Sapphira out, but now Satan attacks from the outside. We see that Satan does that, he attacks from the inside with sin and hypocrisy and false doctrine, and he also attacks the church from the outside with persecution.

Go back real quickly, I don't want to get bogged down or caught there, but I want to give you a running start on verse 17. Go back to verse 12. It is actually a prelude to the persecution, verses 12-16. It says, "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people," signs, in that they pointed to the deity of Christ, and wonders, in that it caused wonder and awe in the hearts of those who saw the miracles. He's referring to the miracles that were done by the apostles, "(and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch," or portico. "And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. 14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) 15 Inasmuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. 16 There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits," which are a reference to demons or demonic possession, "and they were healed every one."

What is happening here, verses 12-16, brings the apostles into conflict with the Jewish authorities. They were hostile toward them because they were threatened by their preaching, the miracles, and the crowds that were following them. They thought they had done away with Jesus, and now they have a bunch of Jesus' running around healing and preaching, and they're freaking out. Verses 12-16 is kind of a prelude that shows us why the apostles were brought into conflict with the hostile, unbelieving Jewish authorities.

I'm going to outline this passage tonight into four sections. The first is, verses 17-28, we have

the Jewish counsel and authorities attacking the truth. We just read, verses 12-16, the unbelieving world is going to attack the truth in what God is doing, so go back now to verse 17. Luke says, "Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, 18 And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison," or public prison. It was believed that it was possible that this prison was out where people could see them incarcerated. It would be used to kind of be a warning to others that if you come against us, you break the law, this is what you will get. You'll be put into jail or prison. It says, "But the angel of the Lord..." a better translation is actually "an" angel of the Lord. The King James has "the" angel of the Lord. It's actually just referring to an angel of the Lord, "...by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said," three things, "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." I love that title for the gospel message and the truth of Christ, they're "the words of this life." "And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought." This is one of those stories that you can't help but chuckle and laugh—God has a sense of humor.

"But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told 23 Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within." I'm already kind of putting little "ha ha's" in the text right next to it. God is just kind of blowing their minds. "Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted..." or literally they were greatly perplexed. They were at a loss. "...of them whereunto this would grow. 25 Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people." Let's stop right there for just a moment.

As I said, you can't help but laugh. This would be an amazing movie if it were put into a drama. The truth is, it's a real story that is just amazing how God works. It says in verse 17, "Then the high priest rose up," so they were being threatened by the apostles' preaching. The fact that they were preaching the resurrection and they were Sadducees, they didn't believe in the resurrection; the fact that people were becoming Christians, the group was growing, and they'd also told them, "We command you no longer to preach in the name of Jesus. We don't want you preaching in Jesus' name," and they were preaching in Jesus' name—they were disobeying their orders and so they come against them. They rise up, "and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation," that word conveys the idea that they were jealous, envious, angry, and upset.

I've mentioned it before, but I want to point it out again. In verse 17, you have what's called the "Sadducees." There were two Jewish sects that were real common in the New Testament, the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The priesthood was controlled and dominated by the Sadducees; but the Sadducees, it's interesting, were the aristocrats. They were the wealthy, the uppity-ups. They were the ones that were in power. Sadly, they were the ones that were quite liberal. They weren't as orthodox as the Pharisees. They didn't believe in spirits. They didn't believe in angels. They didn't believe in life after death. They didn't really believe in the

resurrection of the dead. They were very liberal by even those standards in those days. They were considered just the wealthy aristocrats that were in power, and they wanted to keep control over the priesthood and over the temple precincts. We're going to see in just a moment, Gamaliel, who was actually a Pharisee. They were the more orthodox, the more religious, devout of the Jewish sects.

It's interesting, in the story here they were preaching the resurrection—the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection. The Sadducees didn't believe in angels, and we have a story about an angel who actually lets these prisoners go. In verse 18, they grab them and they were arrested. This is the first arrest. Earlier, Peter and John had been arrested. They were put in prison, threatened and warned, and then let go. This time, all of the apostles are arrested and put into prison. They "laid their hands on the apostles," all of them, not just Peter and John, "and put them in the common prison." It specified that it's the "common prison." That word "common" means that it's visible. It can be seen. It's a public prison. Again, that's why some Bible scholars believe that it was actually a place of incarceration that the public could see them in prison as kind of a warning that you don't want to disobey us or this is where you're going to end up.

I love it in verse 19 there's that "but." "But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth," and gave them a commandment, "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." Now, we could spend the night talking about angels, but if you're smart, you're going to make a note as we go through the book of Acts of all the references to angels. The angels are mentioned in the Old Testament; there are angels mentioned in the gospels. If you want to do an interesting study, study angels in the life of Jesus. It's amazing how often angels came to strengthen or comfort Jesus or to help Him in a time of need. The angels are mentioned here in the book of Acts and as well in the epistles of Paul, but the angels are created by God. When they were created, we don't really know, but it seems that angels were created probably before the heavens and the earth were created, before Genesis 1. Angels are not eternal, only God is eternal. Before anything else existed, there was God. God created angels. Angels are spirits and are created by God. The book of Hebrews tells us to be servants or to help or assist those who are the children of God.

I believe that angels help us, and do God's service, and watch over and protect us. I believe that we're often unaware of that. There are times that maybe you can't explain something that's happened, it just seems miraculous and you go, "Wow! That was God," and it was God, but it could have been God's messengers that were sent to deliver you. I know there have been times that I'd been in real close calls, almost in an automobile accident. It's like you can almost see an angel kind of holding the automobile back and keeping you from getting in a collision. I believe that God puts angels around us, and He protects and goes before us. They're ministering spirits. There's a Scripture that indicates that God assigns angels to children, that He refers to their angels which are in heaven. Some feel that it's possible, you know, when you're born, God gives an angel an assignment to watch out for or to take care of you. Some of you are going to wonder, Well, why did he let me get in the accident, or Why did I fall and bump my head? When I get to heaven, I want to talk to my angel and wonder where he was? Angels

are amazing. I don't often recommend books, but if you want to read an entire book on the subject of angels (and it's excellent, believe it or not) it's written by Billy Graham. He's got a book just titled Angels. It is an amazing, amazing study of angels through the whole Bible and all the references to angels in the Bible.

Angels are clearly taught to be alive and real, and they're with us. Demons are angels that rebelled against God, they've fallen. Some demons are incarcerated, waiting for judgment, and some are loose. There are demon spirits, but just an amazing thought. In Hebrews it says, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." You never know, you could actually encounter an angel—maybe at Costco or something like that—you never know where you might encounter an angel. You thought, I wondered why his coat was kind of sticking up, you know, like the wings under there. It's just an interesting thought that God would actually send angels to protect, watch over, assist, or to help us. Truly, this is an awesome story. Angels sprung them out of prison. Now, if I ever get in prison for preaching the gospel, I'm going to be praying for an angel to spring me. I'm going to be praying for an angel to show up and open the prison doors.

So, he came by night, "opened the prison doors, and brought them forth." Now, God doesn't always deliver us from the prison. We're going to see in a little while in the book of Acts that James was arrested and was actually beheaded. Peter was arrested and was released. So, not always does God's purpose or plan or design have for our deliverance. Sometimes God purposes or designs that we go to heaven, that we go to be with Him, and He has other purpose, plans, and ideas in mind. The angel gave them an instruction that I think applies to everyone of us, "Go, stand and speak," I've circled each one of those words, "Go, stand and speak." I believe that God wants us to go into all the world and to preach the gospel to every creature. Amen? That same command is given to us. God wants us to go, He wants us to stand for the truth, and He wants us to speak the truth in love, "all the words of this life."

It's interesting that they were delivered not to run for their life but to speak the words of life. He didn't say, "Run for the hills! Get out of town! Get a donkey and ride as fast as you can because they're going to come looking for you." He actually said to go back to the temple and I want you to stand and preach. He's telling them to do what got them in trouble in the first place. So, they go back the next morning. Notice their prompt obedience, verse 21, "And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning." They didn't say, "Well, let's just wait another day or two, you know, we've been in prison. Let's kind of hang out and catch our breath." No, they just got up the first thing in the morning, they're right back at it, they're right back in the temple. Had they run, then they would've been fugitives or cons on the loose. The truth is, they were standing for truth and righteousness. They went right back into the temple and preached the gospel.

They sent the Jewish council, which is actually known as the Sanhedrin, which means seventy. It was the Jewish supreme court. They get together. They've got their big hats and robes on and all the pomp and circumstance and everything is set up. They say, "Bring us the prisoners," and they call for the prisoners. The guards go down and the guards are standing in front of the

prison doors. They open the door. Everything seems to be fine, but the prisoners are gone. They vanished. They come back and go into the prison, but they're not there. Another guy comes running in and says, "Hey! You know those guys you arrested last night? Well, they're back in the temple right now, and they're preaching all the words of life." You can imagine what these Jewish Sanhedrin were thinking. They're thinking, "Wow! What are we dealing with here? This is absolutely insane!" So they send back and find that they're missing. They get word that they're gone, and they told them (verse 25), "Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people."

What a contrast between the Jewish Sanhedrin and the apostles. The apostles were basically poor, peasant, Galilean fishermen—no formal education, no power as far as the world is concerned—and they're standing up against this Jewish supreme court which is made up of the elite, the aristocrats, the Sadducees. They're highly trained, highly educated, very wealthy, very powerful, but these Sadducees have no power over these apostles because they're filled and anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. What an awesome picture that is! God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. Amen? God has chosen the things which are not so that He will bring to nought the things which are so that no flesh will glory in his presence. God isn't looking for great ability, He's just looking for availability. God isn't looking for great talents, He's just looking for a heart that says, "Here am I, Lord, use me." Sometimes the greatest candidate in God's book is the one most likely not to be used by God. God takes a person which the world would reject and despise, and God uses them for His glory. An interesting contrast, I think, as you imagine the apostles, these Galilean fishermen, standing before the Sanhedrin, this Jewish high court. They were obediently going back and preaching as the angel had told them in verse 20.

Now, verse 26. "Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence," they actually went back to them and said, "Excuse me, you guys, I know we arrested you, we put you in jail, but would you mind coming and talking to the Jewish authorities?" It says, "... brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned." The Bible says the fear of man brings a snare and they were afraid, but the apostles were not filled with any fear but boldness. Verse 27, "And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them," this is the second time they'd been arrested and brought in. He asked them, "Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?" Notice that the high priest doesn't want to use the name "Jesus." He actually refers to "this name" or "His doctrine." He doesn't even want to mention the name. He's so demoralized and so embarrassed by this whole thing, but he says, "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold," I love this. This is one of my favorite statements in the book of Acts, "ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Oh, I love that statement, "ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine."

Oh, would to God that we filled the Temecula valley, Meniffee, Murrieta, Wildomar, Hemet, Lake Elsinore, we filled this valley with the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Amen? That we would go out everywhere, "Go, stand and speak," that through this whole valley we would go out as believers

and stand and speak, and that the unbelieving world would look at us and say, “You filled this whole valley with your doctrine. Everywhere I go, I run into you, Christians. You’re driving me crazy.” And then they were saying, “and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us?” Did they not say, “His blood be upon us and upon our children?” They actually said that. Now they’re upset saying, “You’re trying to indict us as though we were the ones that killed Him?” They can’t admit that they’re wrong. They can’t admit that the apostles are right because if the apostles are right, then they are wrong, and they have to realize that we crucified our Messiah. We took our Messiah and nailed Him to a cross, as Peter is going to indict them in a sermon in just a moment, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us. They filled Jerusalem with their doctrine because they were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, and what a blessing that is!

We move from the attacking of the truth by the Jewish council to verses 29-32, and we see the apostles proclaiming of the truth led by Peter. “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus,” they were afraid to say the name, but Peter speaks the name, “Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree,” a reference to the Cross, “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.”

Again, here you have these Sadducees. They don’t believe in angels. They don’t believe in the resurrection, and the apostles are preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and they were delivered by an angel. Isn’t it amazing how God turns the wisdom of the wise around and uses it against them? They don’t believe in the resurrection, but Jesus is alive and people are being saved, and healed, and delivered. They don’t believe in angels, but it was an angel that sprung them out of prison and released them. Peter responded to them when they said, “You have preached this doctrine and filled Jerusalem, and you intend to bring his blood upon us,” and “we told you not to preach any longer in the name of Jesus.” Peter says this, and we ought also to say the same thing, “We ought,” or must, “obey God rather than men.”

Ask yourself, “Do you live by that philosophy?” I must obey God rather than men. I must live for God. I must obey God. It doesn’t matter what people say. It doesn’t matter what people think. It doesn’t matter what people do. It doesn’t matter what the consequences are—I must obey God. I counsel people all the time and they’ve gotten their lives kind of in a quagmire—they’ve gotten their lives all messed up. They’ve got these relationships that have all gone south and everything is all twisted, and my counsel is always to them, “You know what? You need to just obey God.” “Yeah, but...,” I love the ‘Yeah, but’s,’ people love to ‘Yeah, but.’ “Yeah, but such and such,” “Yeah, but this’ll happen,” “Yeah, but you know,” and “Yeah, but that,” and “Yeah, but this,” and “Yeah, but that,” and it’s like, “Yeah, but you ought to obey God rather than man.” “Yeah, but if I do that, this’ll happen. If I do that, that’ll happen. If I do this, this’ll happen. Yeah, but if I do that, you know, they won’t like me anymore.” It’s like, “Oh, I wish I had a dime for every ‘yeah, but’ I’ve heard in my life.” Whatever the consequence is, you obey God. That’s what faith is.

Faith isn’t believing in spite of seeing, it’s just obeying in spite of the consequences. It’s like,

"Okay, God. I'm going to do what You said. I'm going to obey You, and if my boyfriend leaves me or my friends don't like me or if I lose my job or this happens, I'm going to do what You want me to do. I'm going to be obedient," and I know that God is going to take care of you. It's when we try to circumvent God's Word or God's plan or God's purpose and we try to kind of want to make people happy and try to cater to other people rather than saying, "God, what's Your will for me? What does the Word say? What does Scripture say? How can I be obedient to You? I'm not going to follow the crowd. I'm not going to follow my friends. I'm going to do what You've called me to do, and if no one goes with me, I'm still going to follow. If no one likes me anymore, I know You'll still like me, Lord." I'd rather walk a lonely road with Jesus than be without Him in the crowd. Wouldn't you? As long as I've got Jesus hanging out with me, I'm cool! That's fine. Though none go with me, still I will follow. As Jesus hung on the cross and died for me, the least I could do is say, "Lord, I'll follow You in obedience." So, I love that! They said, "We ought to obey God rather than men." The truth is, by obeying God, they had to disobey their orders. They were told no longer to preach in the name of Jesus anymore, and they said, "No, we've got to obey God. We've got to do what God has told us to do. We ought to do what God has commanded us to do."

I want you to note what Peter and the others preached. He said, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus," so the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—the God of the Bible, the true and living God—raised up Yeshua, Jesus, "whom ye slew and hanged on a tree." They start with the fact that Jesus came from God, He's the God of our fathers indicating His Messiahship, and you crucified Him. They're preaching the crucifixion. If you're sharing Jesus Christ, you never want to get very far from the Cross. If you miss the Cross or you skip the Cross or you avoid the Cross, you're not preaching the gospel. The Bible says that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and you can't adequately preach the Cross without preaching sin. If you're communicating the gospel to anybody somewhere, somehow, sooner or later, you've got to get to the idea of that we have sinned, and the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ because He died for our sins.

One of the best ways to remember the Cross and how to convey it is that Jesus took our place. It's called the substitutionary death of Christ—He took your place. That's the essence of the Cross, that His death was substitutionary. He died in your place. He took your place. He preaches the Cross of Jesus Christ, the crucifixion, and then the resurrection—you've got to get Him out of the grave. "Him hath God exalted," verse 31, "with his right hand," or with His strong arm, "to be a Prince," the word "Prince" and Jesus is called the Prince of Life and different ways, but this word "Prince" has the idea of the source or the origin of life, "and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." You have these three things: the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ who is the Saviour. They're preaching the gospel—Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that Jesus was buried, Jesus rose again according to the Scriptures, and that through faith in Jesus Christ, God forgives our sins and we're forgiven and given eternal life. That's the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Then, verse 32, he says, "And we are his witnesses of these things," we actually saw Him

crucified. We saw Him buried. We saw Him resurrected from the dead. We saw Him after His resurrection. "...and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him." We did all this through the work of the Holy Spirit. We're witnesses of these things as "also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him."

Let me make sure that we don't misunderstand this statement in verse 32—God's given the Spirit to them that obey Him. The Holy Spirit isn't given as a reward. You don't get the Holy Spirit because you do some performance. That concept of "to them that obey him" is conveying the idea of believing and trusting in Jesus Christ and, I believe, it involves all Christians. You know, when God calls us to repentance, He's commanding us to repent and to believe, so doing that is obedience to God's command and would include that concept "to those who obey him." God calls us to repent, and obedience to God is repenting and believing and trusting in Jesus Christ. When you do that, you receive the Holy Spirit. This is not some elite group of super saints, the deeper life club, you know, they have obedience to God. It's actually a reference to all Christians. Don't let anyone ever tell you, "Some Christians have the Spirit and some do not. If you don't have the Holy Spirit, you're not a believer. You're not even saved." If you're born again, if you've been regenerated, if you're a child of God—you have the Holy Spirit. Now, the Holy Spirit may not have you, you have Him. The key is: Does He have you? That's what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Is He controlling your thoughts, attitudes, actions and your words? Is He animating your life?

Peter and the others proclaim the truth, so they've been brought into conflict with the council and now they are proclaiming the truth. Remember, Jesus said to His disciples that when they are brought before the council, not to think about what you're going to say. He actually said the Holy Spirit will give to you in that hour what you need to say. So, this is a fulfillment of that.

Thirdly, we move to Gamaliel avoiding the truth. There's the opposing the truth, the proclaiming the truth, and the avoiding of the truth, verses 33-39. It's a large section, but follow with me in your Bibles. "When they heard that, they were cut to the heart," they're preaching and they're cut to the heart, "and took counsel to slay them," notice that. This "cut to the heart" (verse 33) is not a reference to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, which brings genuine repentance and faith like we had in Acts 2, this is just they were angry. They were upset. The words "cut to the heart" literally means to saw in two. It indicates that they were just in a rage. They were beside themselves. Have you ever heard the expression, "I was beside myself?" That means there's two of you now. If you're beside yourself, there's two of you. You just become another person, "Raaaaahhh!" You freak out, you know, you're like out of control. You're beside yourself with anger. That's the response that they had. They weren't repenting of their sin. They weren't contrite and broken before God. They were just in a rage that they would be preached at like this. What's happening in this Jewish supreme court here with all these Sadducees is that they are actually the ones on trial. The disciples are preaching to them. I love that! The boldness and the power which only a few days earlier Peter was denying the Lord at the fireside, and now he's proclaiming the Lord because he's filled with the Holy Spirit. Whenever we're filled with the Spirit, our mouths are open in proclamation or praise. Peter's emboldened now. They're on trial rather than the apostles, and they're in a rage.

"Then stood there up one in the council," here we're introduced to a Pharisee—Sadducees and Pharisees. It's interesting that a Pharisee was even there because the council and the priesthood were mainly made up of the Sadducees. This was a particular Pharisee. His name was Gamaliel, "a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space." This Gamaliel (any Bible student knows about Gamaliel) was a famous, famous Jewish rabbi. Saul of Tarsus, who gets converted in Acts 9 and becomes Paul the apostle, sat at the feet of Gamaliel. There's even unbiblical writing (the Talmud and so forth, Jewish writings) that talk about what an amazing man Gamaliel was and so forth. He was one of the great teachers that Paul sat under there in Jerusalem.

This Pharisee stands up, and he probably doesn't want the Sadducees kind of running things, so he thinks he'll kind of get involved. He was "a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space," just move them out of the courtroom for just a moment, I want to talk in private. Just a little footnote here, where did Luke then get his information if the apostles were in the courtroom and they're relating the story perhaps to Luke. Where did Luke get his information? One hypothesis and theory is that Saul of Tarsus was in the council chambers. He was actually part of the Sanhedrin and one of the members, maybe, at least in the council chambers, observing what was going on. When he became a Christian, he gave Luke this information, which I think is pretty cool.

In verse 35, "And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves," Gamaliel is going to advise the Jewish council on how to handle the situation. "...take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men." Then he gives them a little history lesson. He said, "For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. 37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed." He says, "And now I say unto you," here's his counsel, verse 38, "Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought," or nothing. He says, "But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

This is a fascinating little episode here with this great wise man named Gamaliel and the counsel that he gives. He gives them a little history lesson. He says, "You know, I want you to stop and think for just a moment. Remember this guy named Theudas and how he made a rebellion against the Roman government and it was squelched and died and petered out? And this Judas from Galilee (verse 37) in the days of taxing? He tried to rebel against the Roman government, and it didn't last and came to nought and was dispersed." His advice was, be neutral. Don't do anything. Take your hands off. Leave things alone. "Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel...be of men, it will come to nought, But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

There's a lot that can be said about this. Let me give you some principles about interpreting the

Bible, and then I'll give you some things I want to say. When you interpret the Bible, you always have to ask yourself, What kind of literature am I in? You ask, "Well, what do you mean, 'what kind of literature?' Aren't we in Bible literature?" No. We're in the Bible. The Bible has 66 books, and they come into different categories. It's called genre. We have history, poetry, prophecy, epistles—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians—those are called doctrinal epistles. Those are letters or epistles. You have the book of Revelation which is prophecy. When you interpret a portion of the Bible, you have to ask yourself, What kind of material or genre or literature are we interpreting here? When it comes to the book of Acts, we are in history. We find in the gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—that we are in history. Within the gospels, you'll find preaching and teaching. Jesus gives His teaching and so forth, and you do in the book of Acts, but you still have to keep in mind the context and the type of material. In light of that, when you're reading a historical narrative, you have to ask yourself, Who's talking? In this case, it's Gamaliel. Gamaliel is not a Christian. Gamaliel isn't giving us the wisdom of God here, necessarily.

I'll say something, and I'm hesitant to say it. It'll freak some people out, and it's dangerous for me to even say, but I'll say it anyway. There are things that are said in the Bible that aren't true and aren't from God, but they're accurately recorded. What was actually said is true, but what they're saying isn't right. You read the book of Job. Job's three friends tell Job things that aren't right. The cults love to take the book of Job, and the words of Job's three friends, and build doctrine on it. That's a big mistake. Do you know that satan talks in the Bible? You don't want to take what satan says and believe it, right? Now, what he said is truthfully recorded for us, but not everything recorded is coming out of the mouth of Christians. We're reading a story, so we've got to take it in context and compare Scripture with Scripture taking into consideration who is speaking. I have heard some of the most bizarre interpretations of Scriptures used so far out of context because they've taken them out of the mouth of unbelievers and quoted, misapplied, and misinterpreted them. It's tragic. I say all that because I don't necessarily think that what Gamaliel says is the best counsel. Some of what he says is true, but some of what he says is not true. Some of what he says is good; some of what he says is bad. Let me explain that.

When he says, "...if it be of men, it will come to nought," yes and no. Ultimately, it will come to nought, but we know from experience that false teaching and cults flourish. Let me give you one example, it's called The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the LDS. They boast in their numbers and in their money and in their influence, and what a great big, wonderful church they are, and they've been around for quite some time. If you've got to wait to see if it's not of God, it will come to nought, how long do you have to wait? People ask me all the time, "Have you heard this preacher? Do you think he's right on? Have you heard this preacher? Do you think that's right? Have you heard this one? What about..." I got a text today about some cult group, and "Pastor John, do you know about this group? Do you know about this teacher?" I'm not going to just say, "Well, if it's not of God it will come to nought. Don't worry about it. Just leave it alone," because cults are growing. Sadly, a lot of times when orthodox Christian groups are shrinking, the cults are growing. So, Gamaliel, you're not necessarily hitting the nail on the head here, Buddy. What you're saying is not necessarily true.

The guideline that we determine what is of God and what is not of God is the Scriptures—not whether it's growing or it's big or it's exciting or they have a lot of money or they have a lot of people, they have a beautiful choir—that doesn't matter. What matters is truth. You open your Bible and you ask yourself, What is their doctrine of Jesus Christ? What is their doctrine of God? What is their doctrine or teaching about the Scriptures? What is their doctrine of salvation? I can guarantee you that if a group is cultic, they're going to deny the trinity, the deity of Jesus Christ, and they're going to deny that you're saved by grace through faith in Christ alone, through faith alone, by the grace of God alone. Those are standard cult teachings. They deny the trinity. They deny the deity. They deny the bodily resurrection of Christ; and for sure, they deny the idea that we're saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. You don't just kind of leave it alone and go, "Well, it'll work itself out. It'll be alright." No. We open up our Bibles and say, "What's your doctrine of Jesus Christ? What's your doctrine of God? What's your doctrine of salvation?"

Now, we don't want to be critical, fault-finding, censorious, and grumpy about it. We want to speak the truth in love, but we want to be uncompromising. We want to stand for truth. So, Gamaliel's advice should have been, "Open the Bible. Study. Listen to their preaching. Examine what they're saying." Gamaliel should've said, "Let's listen to them. Let's ask them what they believe. Let's go to the Old Testament Scriptures. Let's search these things to see whether they be so." No. He just kind of takes a neutral stand, "Let's just take our hands off. Let's just leave things alone. If it's not of God, it will come to nought." My answer is, yes and no. That's not necessarily true that it will come to nought. We need to make sure that we stand on Scripture and that we examine biblical truth. His advice was neutrality to truth. Do you know, being neutral about Jesus is to reject Jesus Christ? Jesus said, "You're either for Me or you're against Me." There's no neutrality. If you say, "Well, I'm not against Jesus and I'm not really for Jesus," then you're choosing not to believe in Jesus. Jesus said, "You're either for Me or you are against Me."

There's one last closing section, verses 40-42, the apostles' suffering for the truth. They conflict with the truth. They preach the truth. There's people who avoid the truth, and then there's the standing and even suffering for truth. This is what we need to do as believers—be willing, no matter what the price is, to suffer if need be for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Verses 40-42, "And to him they agreed," the council agreed with Gamaliel's advice to just leave things alone, but they didn't really completely take his advice because they call them in and give them a beating. Notice verse 40. It says, "and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them," this is the first time that they physically suffer for Jesus Christ. They are physically beaten, and this has been the history of the Church ever since. It's a rare thing for us living in the United States right now that we're not being persecuted in this fashion for our faith in Christ. They were beaten, "they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 And they departed from the presence of the council," notice what they did, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. 42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ," not politics, not philosophy, not psychology, not self-helps, they preached Jesus Christ. Jesus is the greatest need in the world today, and preaching Christ is the greatest need in the world today.

They were beaten up and told no longer to speak in the name of Jesus. Gamaliel says, "Leave them alone." "Okay, we'll leave them alone." The minute Gamaliel probably left the room, "Now, let's beat 'em up first before we send them out." Here they are. They're all beat up. They're black and blue. They're missing teeth as they go out and start praising the Lord. Their teeth are busted out (speaking with a lisp), "Thank you, Jesus! Praise You!" You're like, "Are these guys losing their...," they must have gotten something knocked loose in their brain. We would've been saying, "I ain't going to church this Sunday! Is that how You treat Your people, God? Gee, this isn't very nice. Why'd You let 'em beat us up?" They were rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for His name.

Now, I've never been physically attacked or beaten up for my faith in Jesus Christ, but I believe with all my heart that when God allows a person to go through this kind of an experience, that God's grace is sufficient, that His strength is made perfect in weakness. I believe with all my heart that God gives martyr strength and martyr grace when people are suffering for Jesus Christ. It doesn't mean there's no pain, but I believe that God comes to them in their hour of need and meets their need. Jesus actually said in Matthew 5:11-12, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." What did He say? "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is," what? You guys don't want to answer me tonight, do you? You're cold, right? You're cold and you're tired and you just want to go home and have some eggnog and go to bed. He said, "Rejoice!" He said blessed are you! This is a beatitude. Oh how happy and to be envied are you when men "revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." Then He said, "...for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." You're in good company! You're hanging out with the prophets who were persecuted.

I cannot resist it. If you can turn quickly to 1 Peter 4:12-19. It's so tempting to launch into a whole other Bible study, and I promise you, I'm going to do my best. I'm just going to read it to you, but I want you to see what Peter...and he was there that day. He was beat up. Notice what Peter says about being persecuted for righteousness sake for Jesus. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you," don't think it's strange that people laugh at and mock you or come against you. This "fiery trial" was persecution. Here it is, verse 13, "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or a busybody in other men's matters. 16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed," notice, you suffer as a Christian, don't be ashamed. "...but let him glorify God on this behalf. 17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? 18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved," or be saved with great difficulty; that is, through persecution and suffering, "where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? 19 Wherefore," here's the conclusion, "let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a

faithful Creator,” right? That’s what we’re supposed to do. “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you...Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.”

The only way you can do that is with the power of the Holy Spirit. It’s a supernatural response to the persecution to truth. You live the truth, you stand for the truth, you preach the truth, and you will experience opposition and persecution. It might be in your marriage. It might be in your family. It might be on the job. It might be in the neighborhood. It might be people you work with. Somewhere along the line, people will come against you, but blessed are ye “for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.” Amen?