

“BREAKING THE LAW FOR JESUS”

Acts 4:13-22

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INTRODUCTION

What does the word of God teach us about our relationship with civil government?

Romans 13:1-4; Titus 3:1; I Peter 2:13-15.

Yet, here we have Christian lawbreakers! How can their behavior be justified, and how can we learn from their example? Although God’s Word puts a high priority upon submission to authority:

Yet God shows us that we have a higher authority that sometimes requires us to disobey a lesser authority when there is a conflict between God and men.

AS GOD GIVES US COURAGE AND WISDOM, WE MUST OBEY GOD, RATHER THAN MEN.

In this passage we note that God gives His servants *Confidence* in order that we may at times practice *Non-Compliance* with wicked authorities who would cause us to disobey our God—even as those authorities experience *Confusion* and *Desperation* over the progress of the Gospel. Sometimes, God leads these authorities to *Compromise* with Gospel preachers due to the popularity of the Gospel with the common people!

But let us be very clear, God does not promise that we will always be delivered from wicked earthly authorities—WE MUST STILL STAND FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS EVEN IF IT LEADS TO SUFFERING AND DEATH.

I. THE CONFIDENCE OF PETER AND JOHN (13)

The Sanhedrin members were “staring” at Peter and John, and they could not help but notice that they were acting very **BOLD**. The word for “boldness” literally means “telling it all”; in classical Greek it meant “freedom of speech”; here the idea is **unrestrained speech.**”

Compare the use of the word again in 2:29—Peter; 4:29—the Church’s prayer for boldness; and 4:31—the result of the Church’s prayer. *Hebrews 4:16* shows us that this is the way we ought to approach God’s throne.

The amazing thing about this confident speech was that these men were merely:

A. Common Men (The Sanhedrin “understood”—grasped firmly with their minds, that they were

- “Uneducated”—Literally, “unlettered.” They had no formal training in “holy letters” (the Jewish writings as taught by the Rabbis or Scribes—“men of letters”) **Please note**

that they found the same deficiency in Jesus (John 7:15). *The word does not mean that the men were “illiterate”!*

- “Ignorant”—This word means “untrained or unskilled”, a layperson. Properly it meant “a private person (ιδιωτης), one occupied with self and not a public person—one holding office. Compare our word “idiosyncrasy”, expression of one’s own traits; when one is totally immersed in self traits he is an **idiot!**

Note also that the Sanhedrin was “marveling continuously! They noted not only that Peter and John were *common men*, but also began to recognize that they had been:

B. Companions of Jesus—*this obvious evidence now seemed to be relevant!*

- Compare v. 2—They were known as Jesus’ followers
- John 18:15 showed that John was known to the high priest.
- Verses 16 and 21 show that all Jerusalem spoke of them—they were well known.

When had they seen the disciples with Jesus? During his *temple teaching*, or during *Jesus’ trial at the court of the high priest (Jn. 18:15-16)*? At any rate, these leaders noticed a **drastic change in Peter and John** since their dejection and denial that night of His trial. *Peter had been accused of being with Jesus and he denied it!* (Lk. 22:56)

Why this recognition of having been with Jesus?

- Authority like Jesus (Mt. 7:28-29)
- Power like Jesus (healings and miracles)
- Their use of Scripture (v. 11) like Jesus did constantly.

What were you like before Jesus? What are you now? CAN PEOPLE SEE JESUS IN YOU AND ME?

All of this created a great deal of confusion within the Sanhedrin.

II. CONFUSION OF THE SANHEDRIN (14)—“They had nothing to say in reply.”

The leaders saw the formerly lame man “standing” with the disciples here at the trial! He was here either as a witness for the defense or in order to show gratitude to the men who had healed him. *He was not sitting as he had for all those years when asking for alms. **He was no longer a cripple!***

SUCH GRATITUDE AND LOYALTY ARE SORELY MISSING TODAY!

Compare Jesus’ experience with the 10 lepers.

Jesus had promised His disciples that they need not worry about times of persecution and trial before their adversaries—for Jesus would allow them to use such times for testimony; He would give them “utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute” (Luke 21:12-15).

Not only did these leaders experience great *confusion*, they also experienced *DESPERATION*.

III. DESPERATION OF THE COUNCIL (15-18)

First the Sanhedrin (“Council” here =Sanhedrin) ordered the temple guard to take Peter and John out of the council chambers so that they could consult with one another (15).

Here we have a natural question: How did Luke discover what words were spoken in the council chambers once the disciples were absent?

- It is possible that Saul (Paul) was present as a council member, or at least was privy to the proceedings here because of his relationship with Gamaliel.
- It is also very possible that Christian sympathizers were present such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea.

A. What to Do? (15-16)

Great perplexity here! They **cannot deny** “*the noteworthy miracle*” that had taken place through Peter and John—in fact, the greatness of this miracle was evident “to all who live in Jerusalem”! **Denial of the miracle would be ridiculous and pointless.**

NOTE ALSO HERE THAT THEY MADE NO ATTEMPT TO DENY OR TO DISPROVE THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS—TO WHICH PETER AND JOHN HAD ATTRIBUTED THE MIRACLE. **If the Sanhedrin could have disproven Jesus’ resurrection, they would have done so!**

B. Something Must Be Done. (17a)

They do not want “it” to “spread any further among the people.” What is the “it”? They obviously refer to the teaching concerning Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead. They do not want any more Jews to come under the influence of this despicable teaching. They speak as though the teaching was a communicable disease or something like gangrene (II Ti. 2:17). Therefore, they put the burden upon the Apostles:

C. Do Nothing (17b-18)

They were “to speak no more to any man in this name.” **This is a restraining order!**

- Not to speak—that is “stop speaking” (present imperative)
- Double negative for emphasis: “**no speaking to no one.**”
- This restriction is absolute—cf. v. 18: “not to speak or teach at all.”
- The prohibition included **preaching, teaching, and even conversation!**
- Not to speak or teach at all—not on the whole; not to emit a sound; not a word!
- It was now illegal to preach, teach, and talk of Jesus!

Note that the prohibition was “**in this name**” and “**in the name of Jesus.**” (17. 18). That is the teaching resting on Him as the basis of the teaching or of their works. Notice that when the Sanhedrin speaks in verse 17 *they refuse to say “Jesus”.* *They have contempt for Him. Their words mean something like “that man” or “so and so.”* But to us who know Him, HOW BLESSED IS HIS NAME!

Now that the Council of the Sanhedrin has consulted and have given their decision, **what are the apostles to do?**

IV. NON-COMPLIANCE OF THE APOSTLES (19-20)

A. The Judges Should Judge (19).

- Notice again their boldness to speak fearlessly.
- You decide whether it is right to obey your words instead of God's words!
- It is before God, in His sight, that we stand and must give account—not before a human tribunal!
- God is our Judge—you human judges decide whether it is right for us to disobey His orders.

B. The Speakers Must Speak (20)

- Another double negative in answer to their double negative prohibition—we are **not able not to speak**. **Otherwise, WE MUST SPEAK.**
- We must speak about what we have **first hand information**—“what we have SEEN and HEARD.”
- They are eyewitnesses—See I Jn. 1:1-4.
- Note that Peter was not merely being defiant; he expressed his inability to obey their orders.
- The apostles were willing to pay with their lives if necessary.
- Compare 5:29—“We must obey God rather than men.”
- It is with such an attitude that we must approach our authorities when they order us against Scripture.

V. COMPROMISE OF THE POLITICIANS (21-22)

All the authorities could do here was to “further threaten” the apostles and then “let them go.”

- Because they “found no basis on which they might punish them”.
- Also because they were popular with the people—who “were all glorifying God for what had happened.”
- It is obvious that they were not acting here on conviction, but convenience.
- **Notice the contrast here between THE FEAR OF THE JUDGES and the BOLDNESS OF THE JUDGED!**
- The Man who was healed was “more than 40 years old.”
- The healing was obviously “a miracle”—they could not deny this!

CONCLUSION Will you and I stand boldly for our Lord—even under the threat of persecution?

The Fear of Man will keep you from Salvation.

*The Fear of Man will keep you from faithfulness and boldness for Him. **FEAR GOD!***