

## “ARE YOU WORTHY TO SUFFER FOR HIM?”

Acts 5:33-42

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### INTRODUCTION

“We must obey God rather than men” said Peter and the apostles to the Sanhedrin. We are His appointed witnesses, along with the Holy Spirit—who bears witness by Inward conviction, by mighty signs and wonders, and by the revelatory teaching through the apostles. Christ is raised from the dead and has been exalted to Heaven and is both **Prince** and **Savior**; He grants *forgiveness of sins* to those who *repent* of their sins. **This is our message: preach it personally and we must preach it as a church.**

Have you heard and accepted this message?

Today we see the result of the persecution of the early church. What will they do?

- Cower in fear under the threat of persecution and even death?
- Join the opponents in an ecumenical endeavor—pledging not to aggressively evangelize nor to make the followers of the Jewish faith feel inferior or in error. **After all, do we not all worship the same God?**
- Continue to aggressively evangelize in the name of Jesus Christ?

**We must not back down from doing the job given to us by our Lord!**

As a side light from this passage, we must also consider what our approach should be if we were on the other side and another religious group was aggressively teaching and promoting genuine error—not merely our opinion but based on the clear teaching of Scripture.

**Illus: We are surrounded by false cults and false religions.** What do we do?

Military general: “Sir we are surrounded by the enemy.”

“Great! What an opportunity! Do not let one of them escape.”

How should we react?:

- Ignore them. They will not succeed if they are not of God. Their cause will come to nothing. (As Gamaliel recommended here) OR
- Fight them—get on a crusade against them.  
OR
- **Teach truth, AND expose error. Aggressively attempt to reach even the false cults with the gospel message.**

In this passage we see the *Anger of the Enemies of the Gospel (33)*, the cautionary *Advice of a Wise Counselor*, the resulting *Affliction of the Apostles*, and *Actions of the Apostles*.

- I. ANGER OF THE GOSPEL'S ENEMIES (SANHEDRIN) (34)
  - A. Literally, "they were being sawn through"; that is, **they were furious**. (The word is also used in 7:54 in their reaction to Stephen's speech.)
    - This is not the same as being "pierced in the heart"—pricked in conscience—2:37.
    - Hebrews 4:12 tells us about the "cutting" effect of the Gospel—it is "sharper than any two edged sword."
    - Any time the Gospel is preached it will have these two effects. We can always expect anger and opposition from the Gospel's enemies.
    - Peter had reiterated the same charge (v. 28) to which they had been so sensitive (v. 28 with vv. 30-31)
    - **If you are unsaved, you too are guilty of His blood!**
  - B. They Were Intending to Kill the Apostles ("To take them off or away"—to execution)
- II. ADVICE OF A WISE COUNSELOR (34-39) —Gamaliel
  - A. His Identity (34)
    - A Pharisee [Background--& vs. Sadducees]
    - A "Law teacher" [Rabban—the **1<sup>st</sup> of 7 to be so called**—see 22:3—Paul's mentor!]
    - Held in utmost respect by all the people.
    - When Gamaliel spoke, people listened!
    - Those on trial were put temporarily out of the chambers.
  - B. His Caution (35-37)
    1. Be careful of your course of action with these men—*Don't take the risk of fighting against God (39)*. Then you will be His enemies also!
    2. God is sovereign—obey Him and leave the consequences to Him! He gives a "**Hands off**" policy—"Stay away from these men and let them alone" (38).
    3. If the movement is of purely human origin, "it will be overthrown" (38). But if it is of divine origin, it cannot be overthrown—even by them! (39).
    4. He gives two examples.
      - a. Theudas and his 400 men who rebelled against Rome. (36)
        - He claimed to be someone significant.
        - He was killed.

- His followers were scattered.

Although no such Theudas is mentioned by name in such an early rebellion, there were thousands of such rebel leaders and rebellions according to Josephus, and most of them are unmentioned. Luke had good sources, and surely Gamaliel knew of what he spoke!

b. Judas of Galilee rebelled in the days of the census.

- Some people followed him.
- He perished.
- All his followers were scattered.
- This Judas is the ancestor of the later zealots. His rebellion failed; but later his three sons arose and carried on a more successful rebellion. Luke's accuracy here is shown, for by AD 45 this statement would no longer have been true.

*It is amazing that the same age that produced such men could also have the Messiah Jesus and His apostles—who were nothing like these men! Jesus was meek and lowly; He stirred no revolt; He sought no earthly crown and withdrew from those who had such designs on Him; He preached no revolt; He taught obedience to government; He had no policy of bloodshed and murder.*

**These apostles were nothing like the rebels mentioned here by Gamaliel.**

WAS GAMALIEL'S ADVICE GOOD OR BAD? There are a several things we must note

- He uses two different kinds of hypothetical statements: "If of men" is 3<sup>rd</sup> class conditional clause using the subjunctive—which makes it more uncertain. "If of God" is a first class conditional clause using the indicative which tends to make it more likely true.
- There is no basis to say that Gamaliel was a Christian sympathizer or especially that he was saved!
- He is simply a good Pharisee—less radical politically than Sadducees.
- His words here conform to his known character in other historical writings.
- Here he simply gives "wise" policy.
- Yet, there is danger in judging a movement by its success in the short term. A movement could be successful and yet not be of God. "Success" is not necessarily a measure of accuracy or of divine approval. If so, **what do we say of Islam or of Mormonism etc?**
- There is also danger in avoiding correction of false doctrine—if it is truly false.
- It is true that the Lord will prosper His true work—IN THE LONG RUN! But, sometimes it seems to be a failure in the short term!

- **The proper measure of a movement is its conformity to God’s revealed will in the Scriptures.**

C. His influence: They accepted his advice (v. 40)

Now that the advice was accepted, what would be the result for the apostles?

### III. AFFLICTION OF THE APOSTLES (40b)

- A. They flogged them—39 stripes for disobeying their orders.
- B. They warned them again not to be speaking in the name of Jesus.
- C. They released them—in order not to unduly stir the wrath of the crowds. “They stood by their guns, but refused to shoot”!

This was the first official persecution of the church. How would they respond?

- *Discouragement?*
- *Fear and intimidation?* NO
- *Anger with God?*

### IV. ACTIONS OF THE APOSTLES (41-42)

A. Rejoicing (41)—continually!

- That they were **worthy to suffer shame**—for His name (His person, who He is).
- Such a statement is an *oxymoron*—“honored to experience dishonor.”
- Peter speaks later of this willingness to suffer for Christ, for in doing so we follow Jesus’ own example (I Peter 2:19-24).
- Moreover, Jesus had often warned them of coming persecution (e.g. Mt. 10:17ff; Lk. 21:12ff; Jn. 15:18ff; 16:2ff).

B. Preaching and Teaching: **THAT JESUS IS STHE CHRIST—THE MESSIAH!** (42)

1. Daily
2. Publicly
3. Privately

### CONCLUISON

If you are saved, **Rejoice, you are on the winning side—even if persecuted for your faith.**

**Don’t back down—get out there and do the job!**

Let’s get excited about Jesus!

Unsaved? If your life is not right with God, it will be overthrown!

*Christianity may be down, but not out. We will win—only a matter of time.* [ILLUS: down to last point.—then win!]