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WHEN OPPOSITION HIT THE CHURCH FROM WITHOUT

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 19
ACTS 5:16-29

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We have just studied opposition from within the church in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. Now we are going to see opposition fall upon the church from without. In some ways this passage illustrates that the Lord has a sense of humor. The Sadducees didn't believe in angels, and the Lord is going to turn around and use angels to deliver these men who were thrown in prison.

ACTS 5:16 "There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one." Here Peter and John heal many sick. Let me state again, this healing was not for the purpose of alleviating suffering but was to open up an opportunity so the Gospel could be proclaimed. They healed so they could focus attention on the work and person of Jesus Christ. Healing power was given to Peter and John so they could turn the attention of the people on Jesus. Those who had the gifts of healing and tongues had these gifts before the canon of Scripture was completed. Once the Bible was finished, they didn't need healings and tongues. So these miracles stopped and they have never been restored since. You don't need miracles of healing and tongues when you have the Bible. It is miracle enough! God heals often but there is no such thing as a divine healer. In fact, no divine healer is alive in the earth today. The issue is not the alleviation of suffering but rather, "What think ye of Christ?". Healing did then what the Bible does today--it focused attention on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Vexed means, "Demon possessed". The tense of the verb healed is imperfect, and it means they were healed one at a time. God always deals with people individually.

ACTS 5:17-18 "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, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison." I call this, "The Counter-attack from enthroned religion".

The Sadducees were rationalists. They were the intellectuals and they were the aristocrats of their time. They discredited all spiritual power, didn't believe in the resurrection, life after death, or angels. If they were living today, they would be in the "God-Is-Dead" crowd. In the realm of spiritual things, rationalism is stupid and cannot deal with the absolute and the infinite. If you can create a God by rationalism, then by that same rationalism, you can destroy God.

These verses say that these so-called religious leaders were filled with indignation, and jealousy. Let us remember that mental attitude sins are the worst kind of sins. Envy, jealousy, hatred, bitterness are the worst sins of all. These members of the Sanhedrin were determined to get rid of Christianity. You see, they believed in human freedom, but their bitter jealousy is going to lead them to be inconsistent and violate human freedom. "Laid their hands on them" really means, "They seized them violently". As we would say today, they beat them up then said to them, "You are under arrest". They threw them in the common prison with all the other criminals.

ACTS 5:19-20 "But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." Here we read of their deliverance. Keep in mind that everything about the government of that time was corrupt. The Sadducees didn't believe in the supernatural--in angels--in life after death. So God, showing his sense of humor, is going to deliver his men by the assistance of angels. The command is threefold--GO! Stand! Speak! They were told where to go and the stand really

means "Take a stand", and they were to keep on speaking the Gospel message. The first line of verse 21 tells us that Peter and John obeyed, and went early to the temple. The word early means "At the dawn". Now, as we say, "Back at the ranch" something was happening. The High Priests, the members of the Sanhedrin, and the leaders of the twelve tribes were aroused at dawn and called to a meeting at the temple.

ACTS 5:21 "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." Now we have a report from the prison.

ACTS 5:22-23 "But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, 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." This report really brought frustration and amazement to the religious leaders.

ACTS 5:24 "Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow." The real meaning of this verse is this--The high priest and the captain of the temple say--"If they would only stop these miracles, we would be able to put a stop to all of this."

ACTS 5:25-26 "Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned." Here is the story of the second arrest.

Peter and John have "taken a stand" and the people are believing what they say. Since they are so popular this time, the officer takes them without violence. I suppose he said to them, "Excuse me gentlemen, would you mind coming with me. We haven't finished with you yet."

ACTS 5:27-28 "And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Now we hear the cross examination. Look at what they say of Peter and John, "You have filled Jerusalem with doctrine". This is one of the greatest compliments they could have given to Peter and John. Let us get five points on this statement--"They have filled Jerusalem with doctrine".

1. Here is the secret of power and production in the Christian life--knowing doctrine and storing it in your mind.
2. Peter and John knew doctrine and they proclaimed doctrine. They made the issue clear.
3. The power of Christianity depends on knowing and giving doctrine to the people. Doctrine is the power of Christianity. It is the power of evangelism.
4. Please notice that the statement, "They have filled Jerusalem with doctrine" was not made by Peter and John but by the head of the opposition, the high priest.
5. The significance--They recognize the power of Christianity only when doctrine is taught. The impact of Christianity is not found in healing, tongues, or emotional experiences. The power of Christianity is in doctrine.

ACTS 5:29-32 "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. 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.

And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him." This is the testimony of Peter and John. Possibly the greatest statement was this, "We ought to obey God rather than men". Let us get eleven statements on this great truth.

1. Mental attitude doctrine is the first prerequisite for doing the will of God in any situation.
2. When God's will and man's will are in direct opposition to each other, God's will takes precedence.
3. This is patriotic. Remember, divine blessing on a nation hinges on individual obedience to God.
4. This truth has a direct application to people who are enslaved by Communism or a dictatorship. They ought to obey God rather than the state.
5. This Sanhedrin group did not have a right to dictate doctrine to the church. No government has a right to dictate to a man what his religion will be or what it will not be. This verse, along with many others, gives us the foundation for the separation of church and state. Governments can put political pressure on people, but they have no right to try to persuade people to accept or not to accept Christ. Each individual must choose for himself.
6. If freedom is to exist, there must be the separation of church and state.
7. Individuals must have freedom of choice in matters of religion. Religious organizations must have the freedom to formulate their own doctrines.
8. The early church had Bible doctrine. Peter and John here state that they believe this church had the right to practice their doctrine.
9. The Sanhedrin was acting as a political organization and they had no right to dictate to the conscience of the early church. Satan was using the Sanhedrin to stamp out the church. The Sanhedrin was exactly what the Ecumenical Movement is in our day--an organization moving in the direction of exerting power over the state.
10. The same kind of opposition the early church faced from the Sanhedrin confronts the church of our time.
11. Obedience to God means obedience to His Word. When the government issues a directive contrary to the plain teaching of Christianity, then the Christian must go against the government. This is exactly what Peter and John did here. They refused to obey the government. They put their case in the Lord's hands. They had no weapons. They stood on the Word of God. Remember, before you defy the government be very sure that you know definitely the plain teaching of the Word of God.

A Solemn Thought

There are two reasons why we have many nations, and not one glorified nation.

1. To preserve a balance of power. God ordained that there would be many nations, so one would not become too powerful and the strong dominate the weak.
2. To make evangelism possible. Nations have risen and fallen in order for evangelism to have a chance at the hearts of people.

Remember, it is always right to obey God rather than men. And if men and governments shut their minds to God, disobey him, disregard his Word, then those nations will fall under the discipline and destruction of God.