

CHAPTER 5

TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE TRUTH

Acts 5:17–42

After Pentecost, the message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ spread rapidly in Jerusalem as Spirit-empowered witnesses shared the Gospel with the lost. Signs and wonders accompanied the preaching of the Word, and no one could deny that God was at work in a new way among His ancient people.

But not everybody was happy with the success of the church. The “religious establishment” that had opposed the ministry of Jesus, and then crucified Him, took the same hostile approach toward the Apostles.

These words were beginning to be fulfilled:

“If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you,” said Jesus. “They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service” (John 15:20; 16:2, NKJV)..

We see in this account four different responses to God’s truth, responses we still see today.

1. The Council: Attacking the Truth (Acts 5:17–28)

The high priest and his associates had three reasons for arresting the Apostles (this time it was *all* of the Apostles) and bringing them to trial.

- A. Peter and John had not obeyed the official orders to stop preaching in the name of Jesus Christ. They were guilty of defying the law of the nation.
- B. The witness of the church was refuting the doctrines held by the Sadducees, giving every evidence that Jesus Christ was alive.
- C. The religious leaders were filled with envy (“indignation”) at the great success of these untrained and unauthorized men (see Matt. 27:18; Acts 13:45).

The traditions of the fathers had not attracted that much attention or gained that many followers in such a short time. It is amazing how much envy can be hidden under the disguise of “defending the faith.”

The Apostles did not resist arrest or organize a public protest. They quietly went along with the temple guard and actually spent a few hours in the public jail. But during the night, an angel set them free and told them to return to their witnessing in the temple.

Acts 23:8 – The Sadducees, of course, did not believe in angels.

NOTE: In the Book of Acts, you will find several instances of angelic ministries as God cared for His people (Acts 8:26; 10:3, 7; 12:7–11, 23; 27:23). The angels are servants who minister to us as we serve the Lord (Heb. 1:14).

What a contrast between the Apostles and the members of the council.

The council was.

Educated, ordained, and approved, and yet they had no ministry of power.

The Apostles were.

Ordinary laymen, yet God’s power was at work in their lives.

The council was trying desperately to protect themselves and their dead traditions, while the Apostles were risking their lives to share the living Word of God. The dynamic church was enjoying the new; the dead council was defending the old.

You find a variety of emotions in this section.

Envy (Acts 5:17)

Bewilderment (Acts 5:24)

Fear (Acts 5:26; see 4:21 and Matt. 21:26)

Yet, when the Apostles came in, the high priest boldly accused them of defying the law and causing trouble. He would not even use the name of Jesus Christ, but instead said “this name” and “this Man’s blood,” by speaking His name he would defile his lips or bring down the wrath of God (see John 15:21).

But even this hateful indictment was an admission that the church was increasing and getting the job done!

Ps. 76:10 – The wrath of man was bringing praise to the Lord

As this “trial” progressed, the Apostles became the judges and the council became the accused.

2. The Apostles: Affirming the Truth (Acts 5:29–32)

Acts 4:19–20 – The Apostles did not change their convictions

- A. They obeyed God and trusted Him to take care of the consequences. They could not serve two masters, and they had already declared whose side they were on.
- B. They did not change their message (Acts 5:30–32).
- C. Peter indicted the leaders for the death of Jesus (see Acts 3:13–14; 4:10)
- D. Boldly affirmed once again that Jesus Christ had been raised from the dead.

The work of the Holy Spirit in recent days was evidence that Jesus had returned to heaven and sent His Spirit as He promised. The Sadducees certainly did not rejoice to hear the Apostles speak about resurrection from the dead.

That Jesus Christ is at God’s right hand is a key theme in the Scriptures. The right hand is, of course, the place of honor, power, and authority. Psalm 110:1 is the basic prophecy, but there are numerous references:

Matthew 22:44

Mark 14:62; 16:19

Acts 2:33–34; 5:31

Romans 8:34

Ephesians 1:20

Colossians 3:1

Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2

1 Peter 3:22.

Acts 7:55 – Stephen would see Jesus standing at God’s right hand.

In his second sermon, Peter had called Jesus “the Prince of life” (Acts 3:15); and here he called Him “a Prince and a Savior.”

Prince = “a pioneer, one who leads the way, an originator.”

The Sanhedrin was not interested in pioneering anything; all they wanted to do was protect their vested interests and keep things exactly as they were (see John 11:47–52). As the “Pioneer of life,” Jesus saves us and leads us into exciting experiences as we walk “in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). There are always new trails to blaze.

Savior was not new to the members of the council, for the word was used for:

- Physicians (who save people’s lives)
- Philosophers (who solve people’s problems)
- Statesmen (who save people from danger and war)
- It was even applied to the Emperor

But only Jesus Christ is the true and living Savior who rescues from sin, death, and judgment all who will trust Him.

Peter again called the nation to repentance (Acts 2:36; 3:19–26; 4:10–12) and promised that the gift of the Spirit would be given to all who “obey Him.”

It was a bold witness that the Apostles gave before the highest Jewish religious court. The Spirit of God enabled them and they were not afraid.

3. Gamaliel. Avoiding the Truth (Acts 5:33–39)

Gamaliel was a Pharisee who probably did not want to see the Sadducees win any victories.

-He was:

A scholar highly esteemed by the people, rather liberal in his applications of the Law, and apparently moderate in his approach to problems.

- It was Said.

“When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died,” said the Jews, “the glory of the Law ceased and purity and abstinence died.”

- Paul was trained by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).

- Gamaliel’s “counsel” was.

Unwise and dangerous, but God used it to save the Apostles from death.

- His Place of honor:

That the Sadducees would heed the words of a Pharisee shows how distinguished a man Gamaliel was.

In spite of the fact that Gamaliel tried to use cool logic rather than overheated emotions, his approach was still wrong.

- A. He automatically classified Jesus with two rebels, which means *he had already rejected the evidence.*
- B. Gamaliel assumed that “history repeats itself.”
- C. Gamaliel also had the mistaken idea that, if something is not of God, it must fail.
- D. The biggest weakness of his advice was his motive

Jesus made it clear that it is impossible to be neutral about Him and His message.

Matt. 12:30 -- “He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathered not with Me scattered abroad”

1 Kings 18:21 -- “How long will you waver between two opinions?”

There are times when being neutral means making a quiet (and perhaps cowardly) decision to reject God’s offer.

NOTE. It is significant that the first group named among those who go to hell is “the fearful” (Rev. 21:8), the people who knew the truth but were afraid to take their stand.

If Gamaliel was really afraid of fighting against God, why did he not honestly investigate the evidence, diligently search the Scriptures, listen to the witnesses, and ask God for wisdom? This was the opportunity of a lifetime!

Daniel Defoe, author of *Robinson Crusoe*, claimed that nobody was born a coward. "Truth makes a man of courage, and guilt makes that man of courage a coward."

4. The Church. Announcing the Truth (Acts 5:40–42)

Part of the council wanted to kill the Apostles (Acts 5:33), but Gamaliel's speech tempered their violence. In a compromise move, the council decided to have the Apostles beaten; so the men were given thirty-nine strokes. Then the Apostles were commanded to stop speaking in the name of Jesus Christ lest something worse happen to them.

William Temple said that Christians are "**called to the hardest of all tasks, to fight without hatred, to resist without bitterness, and in the end, if God grant it so, to triumph without vindictiveness.**"

How did the Apostles respond to this illegal treatment from their nation's religious leaders?

They rejoiced!

- Jesus had told them to expect persecution and had instructed them to rejoice in it
Matt. 5:10–12
- The opposition of men meant the approval of God, and it was actually a privilege to suffer for His name Phil. 1:29

Phillips Brooks says the purpose of life is to glorify God by the building of character through truth.

Neither the threats nor the beatings stopped them from witnessing for Jesus Christ. If anything, this persecution only made them trust God more and seek greater power in their ministry.

True believers are not "quitters."

Acts 5:42 – summarized the apostolic pattern for evangelism

1st – they witnessed “daily.” Eph. 5:15–16

= *Every* Christian is a witness, either a good one or a bad one

“The more we use the means and opportunities we have, the more will our ability and our opportunities be increased ... I live for souls and for eternity; I want to win some soul to Christ.” -- D.L. Moody

2nd – The believers witnessed “in the temple.”

“Go back to your home and church, be a loving witness for Christ, and stay until they ask you to leave” (see 1 Cor. 7:17–24).

3rd – The early Christians also witnessed “in every house.”

4th – Their ministry went on without ceasing.

5th – The witness of the church included both teaching and preaching

6th – It was Jesus Christ who was the center of their witness.

“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Cor. 4:5)

“Ye shall be witnesses unto Me” (Acts 1:8).

In his clever and convicting book *The Gospel Blimp*, the late Joe Bayly wrote: “Jesus Christ didn’t commit the Gospel to an advertising agency; He commissioned disciples.”

That commission still stands.

In your life, is it commission—or omission?

Home Work

1. Peter said that the apostles and the Holy Spirit were both witnesses to Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation (5.30-32). The apostles were testifying to these facts through preaching and miracles (5.12-16,21). How was the Holy Spirit witnessing to Jesus' identity?
2. How did the apostles respond to their sufferings (5.41-42)?
3. What lessons can we draw from 5.12-42 that are relevant to our lives?
4. What actions can you take in response to this section?
5. Can you add anything to Page 24-25 of your notes?