

When its OKAY to DISOBEY **Acts 5:12-42**

Today we pick up where we left off last week – The church was growing – and both the religious and the political leaders of the day took notice – and were NOT happy.

They had already arrested Peter and John once – threatened them – and commanded them to speak and teach no more in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

But these church leaders disobeyed them.

Acts 4:19-20

“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, make your own judgment; ²⁰ for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

And after threatening them further – the political and religious authorities of Judea (The Government) released Peter and John

Who, after an encouraging prayer meeting with the church – **went right back to preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus.**

- **Because that is what HE told them to do.**

God was working miracles through these men who were preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus. And the instructions to the church were to

But the political and religious authorities of the day didn't care about miracles. They cared about their positions, their authority, and their agendas.

So, the religious and political authorities arrested them **again** – This time arresting ALL the Apostles.

Acts 5:17-21

*¹⁷ But the high priest stood up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸ They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public prison. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and leading them out, he said, ²⁰ “**Go, stand and speak** to the people in the temple area **the whole message of this Life.**” ²¹ Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple area about daybreak and began to teach.*

On ONE hand- the religious and political authorities over the people were clearly DEMANDING that they STAY- SIT – and SHUT-UP regarding the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

But on the OTHER hand – God was clearly at work. – and His affirmation of the mission of the church was clearly being communicated.
GO – STAND- SPEAK- THE WHOLE MESSAGE OF THIS LIFE.

This puts the faithful disciple of Christ in a challenging position.

On one hand – Scripture teaches us to respect and be obedient to those in the authority over us.

But on the other hand – Scripture teaches us to follow and obey Jesus and the authority of the word of God.

What are we to do when those come into conflict with one another?

- **When is it OKAY to DISOBEY?**

Let's consider this as we see how this encounter between the Religious and political authorities and the Apostles played out.

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The Perplexation of the Priests

I actually love this part...

I am sure there were meetings late into the night about what the Jewish leaders might do to stop the spread of the message of Jesus of Nazareth.

But as is always the case – God is working well ahead of the plans and plots of men...

The Perplexation of the Priests

Acts 5:21-24

Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, that is, all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison for them to be brought. ²² But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported, ²³ saying, "We found the prison locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." ²⁴ Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this.

Perplexed: Baffled, puzzled

At least ONE of the Jewish leaders had to have groaned... "Not again...."

We read the story in Matthew 27:62-66 - After plotting to put Jesus to death His body had been laid in a tomb. The religious leaders were so worried that Jesus would actually rise, or that his followers would steal the body, that they had the tomb sealed AND placed guards on the "door".

FINALLY – they had solved the problem of this man, His message, and His ministry.

- But despite all this – The door had been opened, and Jesus had risen, and been seen alive by many still living those days.

Supposedly the man himself had ascended into heaven – But leaders had emerged from among His followers, preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus.

Through them, in the name of Jesus, miracles were AGAIN be worked. The lame made to walk, the sick healed and demons cast out.

And these uneducated, common men, claimed to be **empowered**, and **filled** with the **Holy Spirit of God**, as were all who came to believe in message of Jesus of Nazareth.

They were preaching and teaching boldly and thousands, multitudes were BELIEVING their message.

The numbers of followers were EXPLODING. The growth of their "ecclesia" was out of control!

Arresting and threatening them had not worked.

So, arresting them again they conspired how next to silence the message and stop the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

There was just one problem: **They were gone.**

They had done what they could to accomplish THEIR will – but God will always find a way to ensure that HIS will gets done!

In Proverbs 16:9 we read *"A man's heart plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps."*

The guards were still in place, the doors will still locked, but the men were just ... **GONE**. Perplexed is as good a word as any.

But then – those with eyes, ears and hearts tuned to the ways of the world – are constantly "perplexed" by the message and the ministry of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 2:14

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

Ephesians 4:18

“They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.”

And this is the case for **BY FAR** the majority of those who sit in the seats of authority both politically, and religiously. Sadly, even among some in the churches.

These leaders DO NOT perceive the workings of God - because they CANNOT perceive the workings of God - because they have hardened their hearts toward HIS WAYS with their selfish, pride-filled, agenda to preserve THEIR WAYS.

And the bottom line is this: John 8:47

“Whoever belongs to God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”

While they stood around, wondering what this all meant, a runner came into the room with a report:

²⁵ But someone came and reported to them, “The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple area and teaching the people!”

Well of course they were. Where else would they be?

Facing persecution, prosecution, and in open defiance of their religious and political leaders – these men weighed the weight of the authorities before them.

And chose to obey God - FIRST.

Faced with such a challenge- Where would YOU be found!

ACTS 5:26

²⁶ Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned).

As we consider our big question: “When is it OKAY to DISOBEY?”

- I want us to see here, as was demonstrated when Peter and John were first arrested – IS THE ABSOLUTE LACK OF RESISTANCE.

The captain of the guard took soldiers and returned to the temple court and AGAIN laid hands on the Apostles and removed them.

- Though to be clear – they did so with a measure of diplomacy out of fear of the size of the crowd gathered there who supported them!
- A riot in the temple square was the last thing the authorities wanted – lest Rome quickly respond with troops INTO the temple!

A demonstration of NON-RESISTANCE was the model at the first – When the Cornerstone of our faith – Jesus – was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

We read the story in Matthew 26

Surrounded by a crowd holding swords and clubs, Jesus was betrayed, and the forceful hands (*epiballo*) were laid on Him, to arrest Him.

Peter responded by drawing his sword and striking out to defend Jesus – the blow severing the ear of a nearby man.

Jesus quickly rebuked Peter and healed the man.

Let's consider the response Jesus gave-

Matthew 26: 52 "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword."

The rebuke comes from the Law God gave to Noah and his sons –

Genesis 9:6 Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.

So, let's be clear – Peter was no swordsman – **he was aiming for the man's head** and by God's providence managed to miss and only cut the ear instead of the throat! – Add to this that Jesus healed the man.

If Peter had succeeded, there would have likely been 4 crosses on the hill that day!

Jesus' response was to invoke the law given to Noah regarding murdering of another man. Moses would also receive this law.

And Peter had apparently learned his lesson when it came to civil disobedience.

As hard as it is – When we face situations like these – we must align our head, our hearts, and our hands – to allow God to work through the situation to accomplish HIS will- and not ours.

To be clear –

- God has **not** instructed His people to be punching bags for the unrighteous.
- God has **not** instructed that we cannot defend ourselves, our families, our church, or our country from attack.
 - In fact, we are given instructions on how to do so and not sin!
- But what God **HAS** instructed is that we are to be stewards of the message and the hope that has been given to us to share with others.

2 Corinthians 10:3-4

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

We are to be engaged in the battle between right and wrong – wickedness and righteousness. **But the attitude of the Christian matters!**

- Where sinful, prideful man makes war for the sake of himself –
- The righteous man seeks first the counsel of God – **asking that God’s will be done for Christ’s name’s sake.**

It is imperative for the disciple of Christ to seek to protect his witness – Because that is our most powerful weapon – the word of God wielded by a righteous man.

Here is a great opportunity to preach on “Protecting your witness.”

- Scripture speaks often on this topic – and maybe soon we will.

In first **Peter 3:9** we read-

Do not return evil for evil or insult for insult but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

The purpose of this instruction speaks to the character of the follower of Christ.

In **Ephesians 4:26** we are told “*Be angry but do not sin.*”

- What we see is that as we respond, defend, or even disobey- **ATTITUDE MATTERS**

- Acts of vengeance, retaliation, or violence from a place of anger, or self-righteousness are not the character of Christ, nor should they be a part of the character of a follower of Christ!

The same can be said for how we respond when defying those holding positions of authority over us.

God does not forbid defying authorities – But our attitude in doing so matters.

WHY? Because it is in moments like this when a faithful disciple of Christ can have an immense impact.

- Think about it – The crowds will hear your words – Persons in authority will hear your words – and who knows what God might do through you – in that moment – if you have acted righteously before God and the character of your witness is beyond reproach.

ACTS 5:27-28

²⁷ When they had brought them, they had them stand before the Council. The high priest interrogated them, ²⁸ saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this Man’s blood upon us.”

The high priest’s comments were all true!

- They had disobeyed the government’s mandate.
- They had continued to teach in the name of Jesus.
- The streets of Jerusalem were filling with believers of the message.
- And the religious leaders were guilty of the blood of Jesus.

The term, “to bring the Man’s blood” on us was to say they were guilty of wrongdoing, guilty of murder. – and they were.

In Matthew 27- During the trial of Jesus – Pilate knew that Jesus had done nothing worthy of His being put to death and wanted nothing to do with the guilt of shedding His blood.

In **Matthew 27:24** we read this- *he took water and washed his hands before the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “You bear the responsibility.”*

And hear the astounding response of the people: *“His blood be on us and our children!”*

The religious and political authorities – had given clear and strict orders – Teach and speak no more in the name of Jesus of Nazareth –

But the Apostles had disobeyed. They had instead engaged in “Civil Disobedience.”

- **Civil disobedience – a refusal to comply with certain laws or mandates.**

The key words here are “civil” disobedience – the Apostles had not attempted to start a riot or lead a rebellion. Nor had they even spoke out against the authorities as Jesus did.

- Jesus, being the King of kings, and Lord of Lords, had the **authority** to speak as he did. But that is not our place.
- We are to be faithful witnesses.

ACTS 5:29-32

The PROCLAMATION OF THE APOSTLES

29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31 He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

This is the SECOND opportunity God extended to Peter and the Apostles to DIRECTLY confront the government of Israel regarding their sins.

As before, Peter declares the timeless truth for those who would follow with a whole heart the way of Christ-

We must obey God rather than men.

Peter succinctly outlines the sin of the men who had arrested them and brought them up for questioning.

“The God of our fathers”– Peters first address to this council he referred to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

“Whom you put to death” Again Peter declares that Jesus – the man YOU MEN denied and put to death – God raised from the dead.

This Jesus – HE IS THE ONE – whom God exalted, honored, appointed to the highest position of honor, at the right hand of God.

This Jesus – is the **Prince and Savior** – able to grant repentance to Israel and worthy to forgive the sins of man.

Prince: Greek> archegos – {arkegos } founder, leader,

- In his first address to this council, Peter referred to Jesus as the Prince of LIFE
- Here he names Him as the “Prince” of salvation, repentance, and forgiveness.
- In Hebrews 12:2, the author refers to Jesus as the “Prince” – Author and Perfector of our faith.

And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

The follower of Christ – when given the opportunity to testify to those in authority – is to testify in the power of the Holy Spirit of God – the things the Holy Spirit of God has revealed to them.

And He – the Holy of Spirit of God – is with all those who have believed by faith.

Fear not – you are not powerless – and you are not alone.

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Jesus had told them this very thing would happen:

Matthew 10:16-20

¹⁶“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; **so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.**

¹⁷“But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues;

¹⁸and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹“But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. ²⁰“For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

Friends – if you are called upon to have the burden and the opportunity to be held accountable before authorities for the message and the ministry of Jesus Christ –

- GO – STAND- and SPEAK, THE WHOLE MESSAGE OF THIS LIFE.
- Understand that if you have stood against authorities righteously, and in faith, you will not stand alone. For where you are the Holy Spirit of our Almighty God and Father will stand with you and for you in that hour.

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ACTS 5:33-39

³³ But when they heard *this*, they became infuriated and nearly decided to execute them.

³⁴ But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. ³⁵ And he said to them, "Men of Israel, be careful as to what you are about to do with these men. ³⁶ For, some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. ³⁷ After this man, Judas of Galilee appeared in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he also perished, and all those who followed him were scattered.

³⁸ And so in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and leave them alone, for if the source of this plan or movement is men, it will be overthrown;

³⁹ but if the source is God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God."

You can imagine the scene – How DARE these common men speak the priests, the Pharisees and the Sadducees in this manner!

We are all witnesses to the pomp and circumstance, the pride and arrogance that is repeatedly on display by those with power in public office.

As the saying goes among mankind – power tends to corrupt and ultimate power corrupts ultimately.

These men had abandoned the righteousness of God to walk a path of compromise with the world. – yet while claiming to do so in the name of God!

The governments among men today are NO DIFFERENT.

Corrupted **morals**, corrupted **agendas**, and a form of godliness that does **not honor God**.

The man, Gamaliel, who stood up to speak is an interesting figure in history.

He was exceptionally well respected in the Sanhedrin, as had his grand-father, Hillel, been before him.

Gamaliel was an accomplished teacher, speaker, and powerful influencer who was well versed in matters of the Law.

Theudas was a patriot, who attempted to raise up a revolt early in the Roman occupation.

Judas of Galilee was the founder of a movement of zealots who did rise up to directly oppose the Roman occupation earlier in the first century.

Based on the rise and fall of extremists like these- Gamaliel's council was to do.. **nothing**.

- *If this movement is not from God, it will fade away, as other movements before it has.*
- *And if it is, well then, who would be able to overthrow it?*

The problem with his counsel was the religious and political authorities were being confronted with a decision NOW. That had consequences of eternal LIFE and eternal JUDGEMENT-

- And Gamaliel counseled that they do... nothing. Wait and see.

Sadly, far too many people follow the advice of Gamliel – faced with this LIFE AND DEATH decision, they decide to do **nothing** – Nothing being the same as saying NO to the truth of WHOLE MESSAGE OF THIS LIFE.

- *As an interesting aside – Gamaliel had at some point taken a promising and zealous young Pharisee under his wing to mentor – a man who for every reason we can expect was there, in the room, that day.*
 - *His name was Saul, from Tarsus. (Acts 22:3)*

ACTS 5:40-42

⁴⁰ They followed his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them.

⁴¹ So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name.

⁴² **And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not stop teaching and preaching the good news of Jesus as the Christ.**

In the few minutes we have remaining I hope to give you some guidance we find from scripture on the topic of "Civil Disobedience" - that is "When is it OKAY to DISOBEY?"

As was declared before the authorities both times in Acts 5 while under arrest and under the government's yoke of their command to speak and teach no more in the name of Jesus-

"Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, make your own judgment; ²⁰ for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

We must obey God rather than men.

This puts the faithful disciple of Christ in a challenging position.

On one hand – Scripture teaches us to respect and be obedient to those in the authority over us.

Romans 13:1-2

"Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

1 Peter 2:13-17

"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king"

But on the other hand – Scripture teaches us to follow and obey Jesus and the authority of the word of God.

- Jesus declares that if we love Him we will obey HIM. John 14:15
- The disciple of Jesus is to be complete, fully equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:17
- We are told to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. 1 Timothy 6:11
- We are told not to be conformed to the world but transformed by the renewing of our minds. Romans 12:2

- We are told to be blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and perverse generation, Philippians 2:15

This tension between honoring government and honoring God has been the conflict of the faithful for a LONG time.

Exodus 1 – Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to execute the male Jewish babies – but they disobeyed, to honor God.

In Joshua 2 – Rahab directly violated the command of the king of Jericho to report the Israelite spies. She disobeyed, to honor God

In 1 Kings 18 – Obadiah defied Queen Jezebel’s efforts to kill God’s prophets by hiding a hundred of them. He disobeyed, to honor God

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego – All disobeyed the king’s commands, to honor God.

So. what can we say?

As a general rule: Should the Christian living in this foreign land as an ambassador of Christ honor the authorities of this land and obey the laws of its leaders? **YES.**

HOWEVER – Christians should not compromise their witness, their character, or the authority of the laws and ordinances that come from God because HIS is the authority over ALL authority. He is the King of kings, the Lord of lords and the Almighty, Sovereign, God.

- **All other authorities are LESSER authorities.**

When the authorities of men demand that we disobey the authority of God –

- **We must obey God.**

When we disobey – in matters pertaining to the message and the ministry of Jesus Christ – we are to be as innocent as doves, and wise as serpents.

- **When we must disobey – we do so in civil disobedience**
- **Disobey – but do not sin.**

> Christian Anarchist – Uses word of God as justification chaos “in the name of God”

> Christian extremist patriot – Uses word of God to justify rebellion against authority.

> Christian disciple of Christ – SUBMITS to the word of God in responding in civil disobedience toward authorities who make commands contrary to the clear teachings of scripture.

And finally on this topic – **PRAY for those in authority.**

“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” 1 Timothy 2:1-2