

9. Knowledge and responsibility

September 1, 2013

Someone who was thoughtful said, "Ignorance is dangerous, but knowledge without responsibility is more dangerous." Especially when a person is in the position of a leader and he or she knows something very important, but others don't, that person has an absolute responsibility to let them know what the truth is.

We see many bad examples of this idea among the politicians in America lately. In March 9, 2010, then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi said regarding Obamacare, "But we have to pass the bill so that you can find out what is in it."

Two thousand years ago the politicians in Jerusalem were not much different than the ones we have in the US now. The Jewish religious rulers who knew the OT Scriptures like the back of their hands, but they were so entrenched in their dead traditions and so comfortable with their power over people that they chose to not know the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth and had Him killed. They thought that everything would go back to normal just as they were before.

A couple of months later, they had a bigger problem in their hands. Not only the people of Jerusalem declared that they'd seen the risen Jesus Christ, but also His disciples were performing miracles and everyday thousands of people were becoming the followers of this once-dead-now-risen Jesus. They had to do something to stop this movement, otherwise, it would be worse than the last time.

This morning we are going to be in the Sanhedrin's courtroom which is equivalent to our Supreme Court again where we see a confrontation between the apostles and the religious leaders.

A. CONTINUING POWER IN THE CHURCH

Acts 5:12-16 And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. 13 Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. 14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. 16 Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

The sudden death judgment against Ananias and Sapphira didn't hurt the growth of the church, rather it helped. Satan wants to divide the church, disgrace the church, and decrease the church; and he will do it, if we let him.

I want you to notice a couple of things in this section, please:

1) **The people were added to the Lord** v14

The people who came to become followers of Jesus realized that being a Christian was a serious matter that included being ostracized by the rulers and society. Yet they wanted the truth and so they put their faith in the Lord.

The apostles were not into a 'number game' like many modern day churches that emphasize how big they are in number of their congregation, budget, and buildings.

2) The apostles performed miracles without a failure through the power of the Holy Spirit. v16

There are some silly self-appointed apostles nowadays. They should not be called 'apostles' by anyone, because they have not met Jesus in person, nor can they perform miracles at will like these real apostles did.

By the way, Dr. Luke who wrote this Book of Acts used the word 'fall on' or 'overshadow' in other versions which is "episkiazo" in Greek and he also used in his Gospel of Luke twice to describe the overshadowing of God's presence. Dr. Luke was not a type of person who used words carelessly. He clearly meant that the presence of God was upon those who were sick and they were healed by the Lord, not by the mere shadow of Peter.

B. DIVINE JAIL BREAK

Acts 5:17-23 Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, 18 and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. 19 But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life." 21 And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22 But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, 23 saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!"

I bet they were not happy to hear this unexplainable jail break by the apostles. Not a good way to start the morning, I might add.

The Sadducees did not believe in angels or resurrection. While the Pharisees were more of conservatives and orthodox people, the Sadducees were liberal people. I strongly believe that the Lord used an angel to affirm the faith of the apostles since they were threatened by the high ranking Sadducees.

The religious leaders were filled with indignation that came from envy at the great success of these untrained and uneducated followers of Jesus. The dead 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."

Let's go back to v21:

Acts 5:21b And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught.

These apostles were just sprung out of jail by an angel. If it was me or you, many of us try to negotiate with the angel by saying, "Don't you think that it is a good idea to lay low until the high priest's anger gets simmered down a little?" No, these guys were bold and had a rock solid faith in Christ and obedience. It is rather difficult to threaten someone who is not afraid of death, wouldn't you think?

C. ON TRIAL AGAIN

Acts 5:24-32 Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be.

25 So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" 26 Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. 27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, 28 saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" 29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. 31 Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

When the apostles went back into custody, they knew how easy it would be for God to release them again if it pleased Him to do so. Their past experience of the power of God had filled them with faith for the present. Whenever we are facing difficulties in our lives, it is the right thing and "a-must-do" for us to reflect our God's faithfulness in our lives. This teaches us to put more faith in Him.

These rulers made another attempt to intimidate the apostles with their institutional authority, but I don't think that the apostles were intimidated, nor were they even overly impressed by them. Because they knew that the Lord got their backs.

Romans 8:31b If God is for us, who can be against us?

Please note how much effort the high priest put in his comment not to mention the name of Jesus in v28 by saying, "this name" and "this Man's blood." Look around in our country that once was founded in Christ's name, now they are doing everything in their power to remove the name of God from any public place, the name of Jesus from Christian prayers, and removing the cross that is the symbol of Christ's death for our sins from any place they can.

In v28, the high priest claimed that the apostles were making a false accusation of the death of Jesus that was caused by these religious rulers so that the blood Jesus was on them.

Matthew 27:24-25 When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." 25 And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children."

These blood thirsty people were screaming and demanding the life of Jesus from Pilate who wanted to release Jesus. How quickly they ended up having a Green Valley Moment for this!

Here is a stark contrast between the apostles who had the knowledge of Jesus the Messiah and they did faithfully what they were told vs. the religious rulers who knew the OT Scriptures that point to Jesus far better than the apostles, yet they did not do what they were supposed to do.

We can find two types of sins we accumulate in our lives: the sin of commission which means the sins we commit and the sin of omission which means it becomes our sin because even though we know what we ought to do, we choose not to do the things. This is what the religious rulers did.

How does this sin of omission apply to you and me? If you 've been saved by the grace of God for some time and you 've been attending church for a while, you 've learned more than what the believers in the third world would learn in their life time. Yet those faithful believers are willing to risk their lives against the daily persecution to live the life that brings glory to the Lord.

They evangelize and live the godly life for Christ 's sake. Some of you don't evangelize or live the godly life because you are thinking that you might be isolated if the unbelievers around you know that you are a devout Christian. You have a command from the Lord to tell the Good News of Jesus Christ to everyone who comes across in your life, but you don't do it. That is a sin of omission like the Sadducees and Pharisees committed.

Knowledge brings responsibility. When we don't do what we should do as the Lord commands, that is a serious sin of omission and disobedience.

Luke 12:48b For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required

D. GAMALIEL'S ADVICE

Acts 5:33-39 When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them. 34 Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. 35 And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. 36 For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. 37 After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. 38 And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; 39 but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God."

Gamaliel was the grandson of the esteemed Hillel, the founder of Israel's strongest school of religion. Gamaliel was given the title 'Rabban' which means "our teacher", which was a step above the title Rabbi – "my teacher". Gamaliel was a teacher of Saul of Tarsus before he became an apostle.

Gamaliel spoke for himself and not for God. There are many movements that may be considered successful in the sight of man, but are against God's truth. Success is not the ultimate measure of truth. In reality Gamaliel was a fence sitter. He spoke as if they should wait and see if Jesus and the apostles were really from God. But what greater testimony did he need, beyond Jesus' resurrection and the apostles' miracles? He took a "wait-and-see" attitude when there was plenty of evidence.

This applies to all the so-called agnostics. The word 'agnostic' comes from Latin word 'ignoramus' which means "ignorant". These agnostic people make a conscious decision to be ignorant against the existence of God in spite of all the evidence around them even though many of them are highly educated and have brilliant minds. They also commit a sin of omission by not choosing to follow Christ.

E. THE TEMPER TANTRUM OF THE SANHEDRIN

Acts 5:40-42 And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the

name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

You talk about a serious childish temper tantrum with power . Since they couldn't stop them now, they did beat them up and hoped that they were threatened. But for the apostles, it was like a medal to encourage them more, because now they could identify with the suffering of their Lord Jesus.

Philippians 3:10-11 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if , by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Our biblical knowledge comes with the responsibility to evangelize and live the godly life for the glory of God.

2) We should not think that it is not a sin if we choose not to do the things we are commanded to do by the Lord. It is a sin of omission and disobedience.