



Acts 5:17-42 “Fighting or Trusting God?”

Intro:

This week we will observe the attitudes of the religious leaders versus those of the apostles, contrasting a religious heart that fights against God with a God-fearing heart that obeys Him. All with the goal of examining ourselves and asking God to show us whether we are fighting against Him or trusting Him.

V.17-23

“But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and **filled with jealousy** they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. But *during the night* an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, “*Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.*” **And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.** Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, “*We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.*””

1. **Jealousy vs. Zeal**

God was healing the sick, delivering the afflicted, and bringing salvation to the people through the apostles. Yet instead of marveling at the powerful hand of God moving among them, the religious leaders were filled with jealousy as they saw God use the apostles. In contrast, though the apostles had spent the entire night in prison for preaching the gospel, the moment the angel commanded them to return, they wasted no time. At daybreak they were already back in the temple preaching Christ. It almost seems that they never even went home, but went straight from the prison back to proclaiming the gospel.

As disciples of Christ, our lives should likewise be marked by a zeal for the gospel that flows from our daily walk with Christ. Our hearts should be so filled with the Word and so grateful to our Savior for His work on the cross that it produces a genuine desire to make Him known. Yet sadly, many times what we see in our lives is more like what we see in these religious leaders. Instead of allowing God's Word to expose our sin and transform our hearts, we settle for merely head knowledge. We harden our hearts, seeing the Word only as information, so that we experience no true transformation. So rather than producing zeal for God, we become jealous of those whom God is using because they are living in obedience to Him, even to the point of resisting or discouraging them. (*More passages to consider: James 3:13-16, Romans 12:11*)

V.24-32

“Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, *they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to.* And someone came and told them, “*Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.*” Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for **they were afraid of being stoned by the people.** And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, “*We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.*” But Peter and the apostles answered, “**We must obey God rather than men.** *The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things,* and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.””

2. **Fear of Man vs. Fear of God**

The religious leaders don't seem to fear God at all. When this situation comes before them, there seems to be no seeking Him in prayer, no searching the Scriptures, and no concern for His will at all. Their greatest concern is what the people might think or do to them, not what God thinks or what He is able to do. This same religious attitude can quietly take root in our own hearts. *We become more concerned with appearing godly than actually being godly, more concerned about our sin being discovered than grieving*

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that we have sinned against God. Instead of living before God's eyes, we begin living before people's eyes, slowly slipping into a religious double life.

The apostles, however, feared God more than men. When they were commanded to stop preaching Christ, their answer was simple: "We must obey God rather than men." Identifying with Jesus did not make someone popular. It cost them their reputation, relationships, freedom, and eventually many of their lives. *Yet their desire to obey God was greater than their fear of anything man could do to them. (More passages to consider: Proverbs 3:5-8, 29:25, 2:1-7, Gal. 1:10, Matt. 10:28)*

V.33-42

"When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. But a Pharisee in the council named *Gamaliel*, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. And he said to them, ***"Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!"*** So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, *they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus*, and let them go. **Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.**"

3. Rage vs. Joy

When someone is truly walking with Christ, trusting Him, and living in obedience to Him, their life is marked by joy (Gal. 5:16,22). This does not mean they are free from trials or suffering. On the contrary, Jesus promised that His followers would face tribulation (John 16:33). Yet beneath every hardship is a deep and lasting joy that comes from knowing Christ. Though we deserve only judgment, by God's grace we have come to know Him and belong to Him. It is the gratitude of knowing Christ that produces a joy no circumstance can take away. That is exactly what we see in the apostles. Rather than being discouraged by the threats of the religious leaders or embittered by the beating they had just received, they rejoiced that they had been counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Christ. The religious leaders, however, were full of rage and anger. A heart that walks in obedience and trusts Christ is marked by joy, while a heart that continually resists Him naturally produces anger, bitterness, and hostility. *(More passages to consider: Gal. 5:16,22, James 1:2-4, Romans 5:3-5, Philippians 4:4)*

Conclusion and Main Idea:

******Read Revelation 2:1-7******

As we examine ourselves, we must remember that a religious heart can know a great deal about God while still fighting against Him. If we find that our lives have recently been marked by a lack of zeal for sharing the gospel and instead by jealousy toward others; if we see that we are more bothered when others discover our sin than when we sin against God; or if we find that the joy of our salvation has begun to diminish, being replaced by continual anger, bitterness, or a bad attitude, it may very well be that we have left our first love and allowed our relationship with God to become nothing more than religion. Yet there is hope. Today we can repent and do the works we did at the beginning. We can once again live lives of childlike dependence upon God, no longer believing that because we have walked with Him longer or know more of His Word, we no longer need to seek Him as desperately or depend on Him daily as we did at the beginning. Instead, we can return to trusting Him with all our hearts, acknowledging Him in all our ways, and He will make our paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-8).

Memory Verse: Acts 5:39

