

Acts 4:1-31 – Courage in Opposition

The Scriptures make it clear that opposition will come to those who desire to live in obedience to God's Word. **1 Peter 2:21:** *“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.”* **2 Timothy 3:12:** *“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”*

Sometimes a significant source of opposition, and even persecution, for Christians is religion. If someone messes with someone's "religious system," there is going to be a confrontation, and it is not always pleasant. Remember it was religious people that had Christ crucified!

Opposition Is to Be Expected (v 1-7)

Three groups were on the temple grounds. First, there were the priests who carried out the evening sacrifices. The priests were upset because this event was getting in the way of their sacrifices. Second, there was the captain of the temple guard. The principal duty of the temple police was to keep order on the temple grounds. The third group was the Sadducees. The Sadducees were the most influential people in Israel. Most all of the High Priests were Sadducees and most of the Sadducees were also wealthy land owners. The Sadducees dominated the Sanhedrin (the Jewish supreme court), and politically they were tight with the Roman officials, collaborating with them.

Opposition Is an Opportunity (v 8-31)

Here is the point we need to get. If we are serious about Christ and the Gospel, we will face opposition that arises even if it is to the level of persecution. Don't be shocked by it; don't back away from it in fear. See it as an opportunity to put our Savior on display. That is easy to say and difficult to do. However, God has, in His inspired Word, given us an example through Peter and John of the very actions we should take.

One reason that we miss so many opportunities to share the Gospel is that we shy away from possible opposition. Rejection is a very strong emotion that will motivate us to respond in self protective ways.

Opposition Is an Opportunity That Calls for Being Filled with the Holy Spirit (v 8a, 31b)

The apostles were able to do the miracles and to endure persecution because they were totally yielded to God which enabled them to be filled with the Spirit as it says in verses 8 and 31. The filling of the Spirit is when the Spirit of Christ is sought after for the power to accomplish everything God has for us to do. Being filled with the Spirit has a double meaning; controlled and permeated. We empty ourselves so we can be permeated and controlled by the Holy Spirit. When we yield control to the Holy Spirit it means all that we say, think, and do. We are to always be filled with the Holy Spirit because we are to always be on call, always be prepared for those opportunities God brings our way. The question each of us have to ask ourselves is, "What is it in my life that demands the domination of the Holy Spirit? What have I discovered I can't do without Him?"

Opposition Is an Opportunity to Be Confident in the Spirit's Enabling (v 8b-13)

With boldness and confidence provided by the Holy Spirit, Peter was able to share Jesus Christ in a situation that was dangerous and threatening. People who try to be bold apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit usually just come across as self-serving, uninformed, or obnoxious. Peter was not confident in his own strength, he trusted the Holy Spirit to empower him and speak the appropriate words through him.

In verse 10, the Sanhedrin questioned them about their authority. Being filled with the Holy Spirit Peter answers that question. Peter, an uneducated fisherman changes from being the one on trial before this highly educated worldly powerful group and becomes the prosecutor! Notice verse 10 again, he is quoting their own Scriptures from **Psalm 118:22**. He confidently tells them that Jesus Christ was the one prophesied by our prophets and when He came, they rejected Him and nailed Him to a cross. In verse 12, Peter makes a statement that no doubt infuriated these esteemed leaders of Israel and still infuriates people today. Christianity proclaims an exclusive Christ in an inclusive world.

Because of that we are often accused of being narrow minded, bigoted, and intolerant. While we are to show kindness and respect for those of other religions, we cannot back off from the exclusivity of Christ which is proclaimed clearly in the Scriptures. (**John 14:6**)

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Opposition Is an Opportunity to Be Uncompromising (v 14-22)

The strong defense of Peter and John and the indisputable evidence of the healed man standing before them put the Sanhedrin in an impossible situation. The religious leaders decided to call a council to discuss among themselves what they should do. In their deliberations, from verses 16-17, we can observe that they did not seek the truth; they sought a way to avoid the truth. In facing a miracle they chose to deny the truth. Don't be surprised when witnessing to someone today if this very same thing happens-- denial of the truth of the gospel.

During their consultation they devised a plan they thought would stop the name of Jesus being proclaimed. The Sanhedrin called the disciples and probably the healed man also, and gave them this command: **Acts 4:18b**: "...they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus."

The Sanhedrin *did* have governmental authority over the apostles (delegated from the Roman Empire). Here is the case where civil disobedience is condoned (and even commanded) in the New Testament. It is when a direct command of the governing authority contradicts a direct command from God. Jesus Himself said in **Acts 1:8b**: "...you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." Their response is in **Acts 4:19-20**

Opposition Is an Opportunity to Pray with and for Boldness (v 23-30)

In the infancy of the church there was a culture of prayer. This was helped by the fact that the church was born during a corporate prayer time as the 120 waited in the upper room for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Now that the persecution had begun, prayer wasn't their last resort, it was their first response.

Vs. 24 – Five times in the first five chapters of Acts, it tells us that the church (or those that would become the church) were in one accord. The Geek word for "accord" is a compound word combined from two Greek words. One word is the word "together" and it is combined with another word which means *passion, heat, or glow*. To be of one accord means more than a group of people who get along well without fussing and fighting. It is a group of people who share the same passion for God's glory and the same desire for the advancement of God's agenda of going into all the world to preach the gospel and make disciples.

In the last part of verse 24, the church begins to put their complete focus on God. The Greek word for *Lord* is not the most common one. It means the one with absolute authority (*despota*.) The quote in verses 25-26 is from **Psalms 2:1-2**. They took comfort that all they had seen and experienced was planned and even prophesied by God. They trusted in the God who can, as **Acts 4:28** says, "... do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur."

Nowhere in this prayer do they pray to escape persecution or uncomfortable circumstances. They do not pray for conservative leaders to replace the current "liberal" leaders. They prayed for boldness and power to accomplish God's agenda and glory.

Opposition Is an Opportunity to Expect God to Answer (v 31)

It is as if God said "Amen" to their prayer with an earthquake! This was God affirming that He heard and was answering their prayer. I am praying for this church that we will be men and women of courage. I am praying that we are not surprised by opposition and perhaps even by persecution.

1. First, you will need to have the conviction that Jesus came back to life. The questions for each of us--do I believe that?
2. Secondly, you will need to have the conviction that Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal life. Have I arrived at that conviction?
3. Thirdly, you will need to have the conviction that salvation through Jesus Christ is the most important decision in life. Have you made that decision?
4. Fourthly, you will need to have the conviction that obedience to Jesus Christ is the only lifestyle worth living.