

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

UNDER THE EXALTED CHRIST, THE GOSPEL BEGINS TO SPREAD

THE ACTS

† THE BOOK OF ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

An overview of the Book of Acts, by Given O. Blakely

ACTS 5:31-32

"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Lesson # 18

COMMENTARY ON: 4:15-22

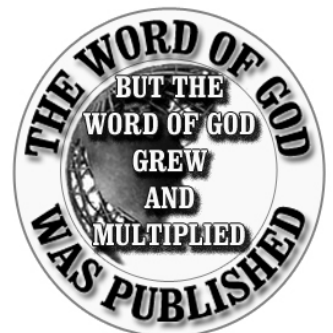
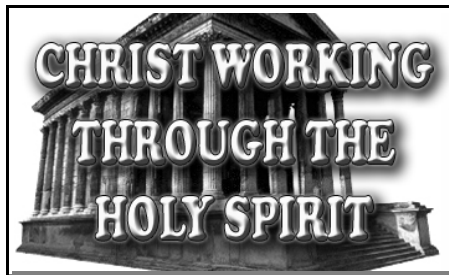
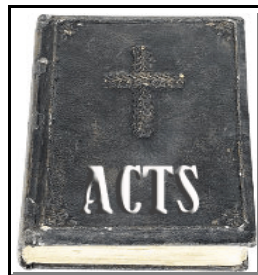
DIALOG BETWEEN PETER AND THE LEADERS

The initial answer of Peter has moved the council to withdraw for a brief caucus. The apostle has proved a bit challenging for them, even though they considered him to be "unlearned and ignorant." They determine to stop the spread of this Gospel by threatening Peter and John. However, when they called for the two disciples to stand again before them, and informed them of their decision, they found it had no effect at all upon the men. They continued to speak boldly, challenging the council to consider if it was right to listen to men rather than to God. They then informed their judges they could not refrain from speaking what they had seen and heard, whether it met with their approval or not. The words of Peter and John, coupled with the people glorifying God for the work that had been done, so frustrated the council, that they let them go.

ACTS 17:26-27

"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."

" . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

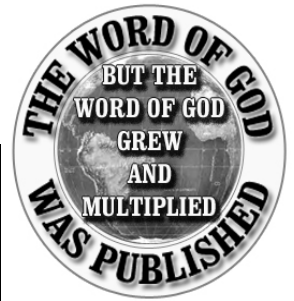


Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Book of Acts

Lesson Number 18



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

TRANSLATION LEGEND: ALT = Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED = Amplified Bible (1965), ASV = American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA = Douay-Rheims (1899), ERV = English Revised Version (1885), ESV = English Stand Version (2001), GNB = Good News (1966), GWN = God's Word (1995), IE = International English, ISV = International Standard Version (1967), JPS = Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV = King James Version (1611), L.ITV = Literal Translation of the Bible ((1976), LIVING = Living Bible (1971), MKJV = Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD = Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB = New American Bible (2002), NASB = New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU = New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB = New International Bible, NIV = New International Version (1984), NJB = New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV = New King James Version (1979), NLT =New Living Translation (1996), NRSV = New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS = J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT = BISHOP'S New Testament (1595), RSV = Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK = JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster = The Webster Bible (1833), WEYMOUTH = Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS = William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE = Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE = Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT =Young's Literal Translation (1862).

----- Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----
LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT = Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, LEH = LEH Lexicon, GINGRICH = Gingrich Lexicon

THE INSPIRED RECORD OF HOW THE ENTHRONED CHRIST, BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKED THROUGH HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND GODLY MEN, TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, AND TO BRING EDIFICATION AND STABILITY TO MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.

DISCLAIMER: The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

DIALOG BETWEEN PETER AND THE LEADERS

“ 4:15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, ¹⁶ Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. ¹⁸ And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. ²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. ²¹ So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. ²² For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed.” (Acts 4:15-22)

INTRODUCTION

The initial answer of Peter has moved the council to withdraw for a brief caucus. The apostle has proved a bit challenging for them, even though they considered him to be “unlearned and ignorant.” **The wisdom of God that is graciously given to men is precisely that – wisdom!** As also confirmed in Stephen,

it is a wisdom that cannot be successfully resisted, or coped with by those who are opposed to it (Acts 6:10). This is precisely why Peter and John have been arrested, as though they were lawbreakers. Their opponents were not able to contend with what they were saying, so they resorted to threats and attempts to restrain them.

Because the leaders cannot contend with Peter and John on a rational level, they determine to stop the spread of this Gospel by threatening them. However, when they called for the two disciples to stand again before them, and informed them of their decision, they found it had no effect at all upon the

Peter again speaks fearlessly before the religious authorities, having no fear of men – by Given O. Blakely

CONTENTS

- THEY CONFERRED AMONG THEMSELVES (4:15)
- WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THESE MEN? (4:16)
- A WORLDLY SOLUTION (4:17)
- COMMANDED NOT TO SPEAK OR TEACH (4:19)
- ANSWERING WITH A QUESTION (3:19)
- COMPELLED TO SPEAK (4:20)
- NOT WORTHY OF PUNISHMENT (4:21)
- A NOTABLE MIRACLE (4:22)
- CONCLUSION

men. They continued to speak boldly, challenging the council to consider if it was right to listen to men rather than to God. They then informed their judges that could not refrain from speaking what they had seen and heard, whether it met with their approval or not. The words of Peter and John, coupled with the people glorifying God for the work that had been done, so frustrated the council, that they would let them go.

It is important to take note of who is opposing Peter and John. It is not the political authorities – even though Pilate had been known to mingle the blood of some Jews with their sacrifices. Some people had “told Jesus about what had happened to some people from Galilee. Pilate had killed those people while they were worshiping, mixing their own blood with the blood of the animals they were sacrificing”^{1E} (Lk 13:1). He had also had Jesus crucified, violating his own conscience, to please the people. Yet, this wretched man was **not** interfering with the preaching of Peter and John. Nor, indeed, was Herod, who had also joined in the responsibility for Christ’s death. He too was no defender of the faithful, and even “killed James the brother of John with the sword . . . because he saw it pleased the Jews” (Acts 12:2-3). Yet, even that despot was **not** seeking to stop Peter and John from preaching. Instead, their opponents were the “rulers of the people, and elders of Israel” – God’s chosen people.

When Peter and John began preaching “through Jesus the resurrection of the dead,” it “grieved” these leaders (4:2). It was disruptive to their work, and contradicted their influence. They could not view the apostles as men of spiritual understanding, but could only see them as competitors. How could such things be? How could those with a working acquaintance with Scripture raise such opposition against men chosen by God?

SOMETHING TO BE SEEN

Although all delusion is potentially damning, there is a form of delusion that is in a class by itself. It is **religious delusion**. There are at least five forms delusion can take. Ranked from the highest to the lowest they are, Christian delusion, Jewish delusion, heathen Idolatry, Philosophical, and Sensual. Permit me to briefly define these terms as I am using them.



- ⇨ **CHRISTIAN.** This centers in “another Jesus,” “another Gospel,” and “another Spirit” (2 Cor 11:4). It involves the embrace of an erroneous view of Christ, and a spurious view of salvation and Divine purpose.
- ⇨ **JEWISH.** This is a view of Judaism, or the Old Covenant, that does not accept Jesus Christ as the Savior. It sees Jesus as being in conflict with the truth, and thus vigorously opposes Him and those who embrace Him.
- ⇨ **IDOLATRY.** This form of delusion embraces another God – not Jehovah. It maintains religious

devotion, yet recognizes neither the true God, nor the Scriptures which He has given. This approach to religion is generally based on fear.

- ⇨ **PHILOSOPHICAL.** This approach to life sees religion of all kinds as mindless superstition. It ranges from outright atheism to the power of positive thought.
- ⇨ **SENSUAL.** This manner of life capitalizes on the lust of the flesh, and sees life as revolving around the satisfaction of lower appetites, ranging from pleasure and the accumulation of goods to all manner of fleshly indulgence and immorality.

Men tend to rank these manners of life from sensual to Christian delusion. However, they are actually ranked the opposite, with Christian delusion being the most difficult from which to recover. Jewish delusion comes next because it is a distortion of something God has revealed. Idolatry is next because it retains the idea of Deity, yet creates its own God, together with ideas of how to approach him.

The more revelation God has given on a matter, the more serious the perversion of it becomes. When there is an effort to attach meanings to Divine revelation that were not intended, Satan gains a more firm grasp on the mind and soul of the individual. Under such conditions the soul becomes insensitive to God, and the conscience becomes “seared” (1 Tim 4:2). This whole circumstance is enhanced if the individual has once known the truth, yet falls from it.

If a person has not received “the love of the truth” (2 Thess 2:10), or if they “turn away their ears from the truth” (2 Tim 4:14), they at once become hopelessly vulnerable to all of these forms of delusion. Recovery from such a condition is not simplistic, and can only take place through the authority of Christ and the truth of the Gospel, which is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16).

IN OUR TEXT

In our text, the opponents of Peter and John have sinned against much truth. Certain advantages had been

providentially given to them – all by divine intention.

- ⇒ The ministry of the Law, that was designed to bring them to Christ (Gal 3:24).
- ⇒ The ministry of the Prophets, whose children they were (Acts 3:25).
- ⇒ The ministry of the Old Covenant, with its varied ceremonies and directives. They were the children of that covenant, and should therefore have prepared for Christ (Acts 3:25).
- ⇒ The ministry of John the Baptist,

who was sent by God to prepare the way for Christ (Lk 1:76; Mk 11:32).

- ⇒ The ministry of the Son of God, whom God “*approved*” in their presence by many incontrovertible signs, miracles, and wonders (Acts 2:22).
- ⇒ The notable miracle of the healing of the man who was lame from birth (Acts 4:14,16).
- ⇒ The illuminating explanations of Peter and John (Acts 4:8-13).

It is not possible to account for

the hardness of these people apart from the powers of darkness. Their condition confirms what happens when a place is made for Satan – whether on purpose or inadvertently. I say that because these men were not knowledgeably yielding to the devil. Yet, because of their refusal of the truth, Satan’s power over them was totally dominating. Only the true can free men from delusion. Therefore, when truth is rejected, delusion dominates.

Now, we will see if these men will yield to godly reasoning. Will their wills give way to the truth? Will they change their intentions, or acknowledge their own waywardness?

THEY CONFERRED AMONG THEMSELVES

“^{4:15} *But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves . . .*”

Peter has made his first defense, and it has been a powerful one. Consider again what he said.

- ⇒ They had crucified Christ, yet **He** had made the man whole who was standing before them (4:10a).
- ⇒ They had crucified Christ, yet **God** had raised Him from the dead

Peter and John had spoken with remarkable power, so that the council marveled. They had also taken note of them “*that they had been with Jesus*” (4:13). They also had beheld the healed man standing before them, and “*could say nothing against it*” (4:14). Surely, that will be enough to turn their hearts!

THEY COMMANDED THEM TO GO OUTSIDE

“*But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, . . .*” Other versions read, “*withdraw from the Sanhedrin,*”^{NIV} “*leave the council,*”^{NRSV}

present. **They could not speak freely while the men they were judging were in their presence.** Had they been truthful and possessing noble motives, they could have proceeded with Peter, John, and the healed man in their presence.

Like the wicked whom David faced, this council spoke in secret about this matter. “*Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words: that they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not. They encourage themselves in an evil matter: they commune of laying snares **privily**: they say, Who shall see them?*” (Psa 64:4-5).

Just as the wicked are prone to do, these men plot their strategy in secret, removing those on trial from their presence. “*He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the **secret** places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are **privily** set against the poor. He lieth in wait **secretly** as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself; that the poor may fall by his strong ones*” (Psa 10:8-10).

When Peter and John began speaking, they did not ask for any religious officials among them to leave. In

Just as the wicked are prone to do, these men plot their strategy in secret, removing those on trial from their presence.

(4:10b).

- ⇒ He identified Jesus as “*the Stone*” that was **rejected** by them – “*the builders*” (4:11).
- ⇒ He announced there was **no** salvation in any one other than Jesus (4:12a).
- ⇒ He declared men “*must be saved*” through Christ (4:12b).

“*leave the council room,*”^{GWN} “*remove them from the presence of the council,*”^{MRD} “*go away out of the sanhedrim,*”^{YLT} and “*sent them out of the Council chamber.*”^{LIVING}

Since the man that was healed was standing with them, it is probable that he was sent outside with Peter and John. At any rate, they did not want to continue their deliberations with them

fact, being filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter said, “*Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel*”(Acts 4:8). Further, when Peter gave his first defense before the council he was careful to say, “*Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel*” (Acts 4:10). But when these men address the matter, they put Peter and John away from the chamber in which they were meeting.

THEY CONFERRED AMONG THEMSELVES

“ . . . they conferred among themselves . . .” Other versions read, “discussed the matter with one another,”^{NRSV} “had a discussion among themselves,”^{BBE} “had a private discussion,”^{NJB} “The Jewish Council wanted to talk among themselves,”^{IE} “They conferred [debated] among themselves,”^{AMPLIFIED} and “hold a conference among themselves.”^{PHILLIPS}

I suppose this would have been an excellent time to ask for the view of Gamaliel, a man held in high esteem among the Jews. Later, after considerably more had taken place, he would deliver a word of wise caution concerning the handling of Peter and John. However, at this stage of the events, the council appeared self confident in their own judgment.

These men were not aware that they were opposing the Lord Himself – but they were. The words of the Psalmist certainly applied to them: “*There is no*

They did not sent out Peter and John so they could pray or seek the face of the Lord. They did not call for the high priest to bring in the Urim and the Thummim so they could inquire of the Lord. Nor did they call for a prophet who could declare the mind of the Lord to them.

king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength”(Psa 33:16). They were trusting in their own hearts, imagining they were sufficient to carry out an initiative against the messengers of Jesus of Nazareth. In this matter, they proved themselves to be fools. As it is written, “*He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered*” (Prov 28:26).

They did not sent out Peter and John so they could pray or seek the face of the Lord. They did not call for the high priest to bring in the Urim and the Thummim so they could inquire of the Lord (Num 27:21). Nor did they call for a prophet who could declare the mind of the Lord to them (1 Sam 28:6).

This council gave no evidence of even the smallest degree of consciousness toward God. Of course, that is the way of “*the flesh.*” It does not reason with God at the center of thought. Instead, ungodly

personal objectives and the maintenance of a cherished, yet lifeless, religious system is dictating their approach to this threatening situation.

To emphasize the matter, and lest we forget the absurdity of *the flesh*, let us remember the unsettling things that had happened in the Temple courts. These had arrested the attention of these men.

⇒ A man who was lame from his mother’s womb had been healed, and was present with the people in a state of perfect health.

⇒ Peter and John have been preaching through Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

Although a wonderful work had been done, and a marvelous Gospel was being preached, it had caused grief for the Temple authorities. Now a council has been called as though a law had been broken, and wrong had been done.

WHAT SHALL WE DO TO THESE MEN

“¹⁶ *Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.*”

When works and words of truth are disruptive, the cause that is disrupted by them is neither right nor true. Truth is always harmonious, and one facet of it never contradicts or competes with another aspect of the truth. Any valid work of God will never negate or diminish another work of God.

The fact that what was done and said by Peter and John had caused trouble among the Jewish leaders proves they were not engaged in the work of the Lord.

WHAT SHALL WE DO TO THESE MEN?

“*Saying, What shall we do to these men?*” Other versions read, “*What are we going to do with these men?*”^{NIV}

The idea here is not how they would punish the men, but how they could restrain them from preaching.

Would it require the council to kill this pair of preachers? Would incarceration be the only alternative? Should they be severely punished? Or, was their authority sufficient to simply order Peter and John to stop preaching. That is what this unholy caucus was all about: stopping the apostles from preaching.

A NOTABLE MIRACLE

“ . . . for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “*For,*

Peter again speaks fearlessly before the religious authorities, having no fear of men – by Given O. Blakely

indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem,^{NKJV} “the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem,^{NASB} “Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle,”^{NIV} “They said, “For it is obvious to all who live in Jerusalem that a notable sign has been done through them,”^{NRSV} “for certainly it is clear to all who are living in Jerusalem that a most important sign has been done by them,”^{BBE} “for surely a manifest sign is done by them, and it is openly known to all them that dwell in Jerusalem,”^{GENEVA} “clearly, they’ve performed a miracle that everyone in Jerusalem knows about,”^{GWN} and “For that an extraordinary miracle has been performed by (through) them is plain to all the residents of Jerusalem.”^{AMPLIFIED}

The miracle of the lame man being made whole was “notable” in that it was seen by all: “And all the people saw him walking and praising God. And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him” (Acts 3:9-10).

religion. What do they do when the work is done in the name of the One they rejected, delivered up, crucified, and killed? What justification can be offered for opposing such a work and the One in whose name it was done?

We will find that incontrovertible facts do not necessarily cause the opponents of the Lord to change their mind. This is because they are not driven by sound reasoning. Their minds have been “blinded” by the god of this world, so that they cannot receive the Christ or believe the Gospel that declares Him. Because of this condition the light of Divine illumination does not shine upon them. As it is written, “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, **lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them**” (2 Cor 4:3-4). Unlike citizens of Samaria who would later believe, this council did not see the miracle that was done. That is, they did not perceive or discern it. They knew something supernatural had been done, but they obstinately refused to embrace its implications.

conscience would not let them deny it. That would have been easy enough for them to do, for they were not honest men. Now, however, they are out of their league. Their religion consisted of nothing more than talk. Peter and John had backed up their message with a mighty work, and it was done publically. **The healing of the lame man was not an experiment. It was rather a revelation of the power of the exalted Christ.** These men would appear to be nothing more than fools if they denied the miracle of a healed man who was standing before them – a miracle that was known throughout the city of Jerusalem.

Not A Kingdom of Talk

The Kingdom of God is not a domain of talk. As it is written, “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power” (1 Cor 4:20). That is, it is not limited to talk, doctrine, or verbal communication. Even the preaching of the Gospel would be pointless if “the power of God unto salvation” was not resident in it (Rom 1:16). Spiritual life is more than a belief system contained in words. Words without power are like a body without a spirit. Herein is the uniqueness of the Gospel – it is “the power of God” to effect a very real salvation, or deliverance.

We will find that incontrovertible facts do not necessarily cause the opponents of the Lord to change their mind. This is because they are not driven by sound reasoning. Their minds have been “blinded” by the god of this world, so that they cannot receive the Christ or believe the Gospel that declares Him.

This is not to insinuate that speaking has no place in the Kingdom of God. In fact, the primary placements in the body of Christ had to do with the communication of knowledge: “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that . . .” (1 Cor 12:28). However, these words are supported by eternal verities, and are the means through which the very power of God is realized. When it comes to life in Christ Jesus, men are not merely promoting philosophical views. Jesus said His words were “spirit and life” – i.e., they give and sustain spiritual life. **The miracle of the healing of the lame man confirmed this was the case, for it was brought about by words: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk”** (Acts 3:6). That same power undergirded the teaching of Peter and John, which had so irritated the Temple officials. Those officials were grieved because “they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead” (4:2).

The reaction of the council is reminiscent of the reaction of the same council to Jesus. “Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, **What do we? for this Man doeth many miracles. If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation**” (John 11:47).

Exactly what can men do when they face a work of God – a “notable work” that contradicts the thrust of their

WE CANNOT DENY IT

“ . . . and we cannot deny it.” Other versions read, “and it is not possible to say that it is not so,”^{BBE} “we are not able to deny it,”^{YLT} and “that is something we cannot deny.”^{PHILLIPS}

It was not that these men could not deny that a notable work had been done. It was rather because that work was “manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem.” That is why they could not deny it. It was not because their

The Need for Something in Religion That Men Cannot Deny

Contemporary Christianity suffers much because of the inconsistency of many of its adherents. When the lives of those who profess identity with Christ contradict the “*doctrine of Christ*” (Heb 6:1; 2 John 1:9), a most serious condition exists. A doctrine that affirms deliverance from the world does not allow for harmony with the world. A doctrine that places stress on the hope of what is to come cannot be joined with a stress that is placed on things that are here and now. If citizenship in heaven is fundamental, there can be no room for at-homeness in **this** world. If we have been “*joined to the Lord*” (1 Cor 6:17), there can be no place given for a lack of

interest in Him. **If we escape the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of God, and obtain everything pertaining to life and godliness through the same means, how is it possible for a fundamental ignorance of God to exist in those so described?**

What I am saying is that a religion that has a manner that contradicts its profession cannot possibly be true. Those who wear the name of Christ must have lives that support the doctrine – “*that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things*” (Titus 2:10). This is letting our light shine (Matt 5:16), walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we have been called (Eph 4:1), living a life that becomes the

Gospel of Christ (Phil 1:27), shining as lights in the world (Phil 1:27), having our manner of life honest among the Gentiles (1 Pet 2:12), and being in possession of a good conscience (1 Pet 3:16). It involves walking in wisdom toward those who are without (Col 4:5), giving no occasion to the adversary (1 Tim 5:14), and making no place for the devil (Eph 4:27).

By walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16,25) and living by faith (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38), **we will remove any justification for the enemies of Christ to accuse us.** We will be like the testimony of the healed lame man before the council. They will behold righteous and focused life that cannot be effectively denied.

A WORLDLY SOLUTION

“¹⁷ But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.”

Thus the members of the council are cast upon the horns of a dilemma. They cannot deny the reality of what has been done, because the inhabitants of Jerusalem have seen it, and know it is true. Furthermore, however, they can find no just cause to punish Peter and John, for they have broken no law – either of God or man. Still, they will not back away from this matter. They will insist on maintaining their opposition.

THAT IT SPREAD NO FURTHER

“*But that it spread no further among the people, . . .*” Other versions read, “*But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people,*”^{NIV} “*But that it be noised no farther among the people,*”^{GENEVA} “*But that the fame of it spread no further,*”^{MRD} “*But to keep this matter from spreading any further among the people,*”^{NET} “*But to keep them from spreading their propaganda any further,*”^{NLT} “*But perhaps we can stop them from spreading their propaganda,*”^{LIVING} and “*But in order that it may not spread further among the people and the nation.*”^{AMPLIFIED}

The teaching and preaching of Peter and John were so diametrically opposed to that of the council that they

we had made this man to walk? . . . And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see

The council feared the spread of the report of this healed man – but even more, the spread of the Gospel preaching that had attended it. These men could not deny that the miracle had occurred, but they sought some means to suppress the spread of the report of it.

felt it should not be allowed to spread. Particularly since it was confirmed by this leaping and praising man whom everyone knew had been sitting helpless at the Temple gate for years.

The council feared the spread of the report of this healed man – but even more, the spread of the Gospel preaching that had attended it. These men could not deny that the miracle had occurred, but they sought some means to suppress the spread of the report of it. This particularly referred to the report and interpretation of the event by Peter and John. “*Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness*

and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all . . . Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole” (Acts 3:12,16; 4:10). That is the particular report they were seeking to suppress.

It is the nature of lifeless institutionalism to oppose anything that does not promote its own interests. This is particularly true of the proclamation of the name of Jesus. It is very obvious to “*the enemies of the cross of Christ*” (Phil

Peter again speaks fearlessly before the religious authorities, having no fear of men – by Given O. Blakely

3:18) that the message of Christ cannot promote their cause. It is at a sharp variance with it, and therefore they oppose it in every way possible.

However, when those who profess to follow Christ support the truth of God by their manner of life, it makes it more difficult for opponents to suppress the Gospel. They will not be altogether stopped unless they are judged from heaven, but they will have to work harder in their efforts to suppress the truth of God.

LET US THREATEN THEM

“... let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.” Other versions read, “let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name,”^{NKJV} “let us warn them to speak no more to any man in this name,”^{NASB} “we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name,”^{NIV} “let us put them in fear of punishment if they say anything in future in this name,”^{BBE} “let us threaten them severely no longer to speak to any man in this name,”^{DARBY} “let us threaten and charge them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this Name,”^{GENEVA} “So let’s threaten them. Let’s tell them that they must never speak to anyone about the one named Jesus,”^{GWN} “let us interdict their speaking any more to any man in this name,”^{MRD} “We’ll tell them that if they do it again we’ll really throw the book at them,”^{LIVING} “we must make them afraid to talk to anyone about this man,”^{IE} and “let us warn and forbid them with a stern threat to speak any more to anyone in this name [or about this Person],”^{AMPLIFIED} and “let us warn them that if they say anything more to anyone in this name it will be at their peril.”^{PHILLIPS}

These men have an inordinately high estimation of their own perceived authority. They imagine that their word carries a lot of weight. That supposition, however, is founded upon two cracked pillars.

- ⇨ The assumption that those who declare the truth have any respect for authorities who oppose the truth.
- ⇨ That those who proclaim Christ have interest in any organization that is an end unto itself.

Righteous men are not motivated by the fear of man, or the institutions they have formed. Ungodly men, however, have no understanding of this. They cannot conceive of someone who does not shake with fear when they are called to account before them. Thus, when charges were brought against Jesus and He did not reply to them, the

Thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin” (John 19:10-11).

Completely unacquainted with this kind of fearlessness, the council actually thinks a severe threat will cause

Righteous men are not motivated by the fear of man, or the institutions they have formed. Ungodly men, however, have no understanding of this. They cannot conceive of someone who does not shake with fear when they are called to account before them.

high priest “arose, and said unto Him, Answerest Thou nothing? what is it which these witness against Thee? But Jesus held his peace” (Mat 26:62-63). Again, when the high priest “asked Jesus of His disciples, and of His doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard Me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. And when He had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou Me?” (John 18:19-23). **You sense the consternation of the high priest at a person who did not fear him at all.**

Peter and John to cease preaching in the name of Jesus. These holy men knew something the council did not know: “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe” (Prov 29:25). They had heard Jesus speak concerning the fear of man, and had heartily embraced His words. “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28). And again, “And I say unto you My friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him” (Luke 12:4-5).

I do not doubt that the Spirit brought these words to the minds of Peter and John, buoying up their spirits, granting them boldness, and making them more firm in the resolute determination to declare the truth in the persuasion and confidence of faith.

Now, we will behold the audacity of carnal men, who think they have a right to suppress speaking in the name of Jesus. We will also see how those who did not fear such men will respond. There is much in this text that needs to be learned in our generation.

COMMANDED NOT TO SPEAK OR TEACH

“¹⁸ And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.”

The council now summons Peter and John into their presence. They have settled among themselves how they will address, what they conceive to be, a most serious problem.

THEY CALLED THEM

“And they called them . . .” Other versions read, “summoned them,”^{NASB} “called them in again,”^{NIV} “sent for them,”^{BBE} “called them back,”^{NAB} “called the apostles back in,”^{NLT} and “they recalled the Apostles.”^{WEYMOUTH}

Although we have nothing to fear from the tribunals of men, I must admit I am still irritated by the brazenness of religious professionals. They have the temerity to summon holy men before them and speak to them as though they are, in any legitimate sense, subject to them. Oh, that more would have the spirit of Paul in such circumstances: “*But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself*”^{NKJV} (1 Cor 4:3). It is ever true, “*But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man*” (1 Cor 2:15). It is not that godly men fear such conflicts. Rather, it is that they attach no real significance to them.

If one was to judge according to appearance, which Jesus expressly forbids (John 7:24), it would seem that Peter and John were actually subject to these men. However, they were not, for **those who declare the truth are not subject to those who reject it**. Peter and John know this, but the members of the council do not. They will therefore proceed as though the two men before them were under their jurisdiction.

COMMANDED NOT TO SPEAK

“. . . and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach . . .” Other versions read, “ordered them not to speak or teach at all,”^{NRSV} “charged them not to speak or teach at all,”^{RSV} “gave them orders not to make statements or give

teaching,”^{BBE} “gave them a warning on no account to make statements or to teach,”^{NJB} “told them never again to speak,”^{LIVING} “ordered them altogether to give up speaking or teaching,”^{WEYMOUTH} “imperatively instructed them not to converse in any way or teach at all,”^{AMPLIFIED} and “ordered them bluntly not to speak or teach a single further word.”^{PHILLIPS}

SOME MODERN EXAMPLES

1. In March 1998, The ACLU put pressure on the small town of Republic, Missouri to remove a fish symbol from its official logo, calling it a "secret sign of Christianity."
2. In April 1998, Rev. Patrick Mahoney was arrested for praying on the steps of the Supreme Court.
3. Tourists visiting Washington D.C. in 1997 were ordered by the police to stop praying in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol.
4. In 2003, the National Park Service removed 30 year-old plaques inscribed with Bible verses at Grand Canyon following complaints from the American Civil Liberties Union.
5. A Christian employee of Hewlett Packard was fired for posting Bible verses condemning homosexual behavior on his desk in response to posters displayed during a company campaign to promote a diverse work force.
6. The City council in Oceanside, CA banned public prayers that begin or end with the phrase "in the name of Christ."
7. In 1997 U.S. District Court Judge Ira DeMent struck down a law that required schools to allow voluntary student-initiated prayers at school events, saying it created excessive state entanglement in religion. He ordered the end to school-sponsored religious activities, such as prayers during morning announcements and at school events even though it isn't forced on students.
8. In 1997, a high school student in Florida was suspended for handing out religious literature before and after - but not during - school hours.
9. Two high school students in Texas were told by their principal they could not wear rosaries. The Principal claimed that they were symbols of gang activity, even though the boys were not involved in any gang.
10. In 2002, music teachers in Michigan, Maryland, and Virginia didn't allow students to perform traditional carols like "Silent Night" and "The First Noel" during Christmas.
11. A New Jersey public school banned the Charles Dickens play, "A Christmas Carol" because of its spiritual overtones and message of redemption.
12. Confessed child rapist James Arnett's sentence was overturned by an Ohio appeals court. The reason: the judge in his case quoted from Matthew 18:5-6 during sentencing.
13. Even though Krispy Kreme promises to give students a free doughnut for each "A" on their report cards, a store in Schereville, Indiana refused to reward the Kamp children for A's received in Bible classes.

Taken from, JEREMIAH PROJECT: War Against Christianity – <http://www.jeremiahproject.com/prophecy/warxian.html>

Notice with what authority they speak – yet these men did not have so much as one weightless mote of authority over Peter and John. Jesus had told them to preach (Matt 28:19; Mk 16:15), and now these men command them not to speak at all or teach, and are bold to do so. **Flesh is that way – it asserts itself against the believer.** Our text will provide us an example of how those in Christ react to legislation against the spread of the Gospel or the promotion of the name of Jesus.

Believers cannot be naive about this matter. In American we are already experiencing aggressive initiatives against those who speak of Christ and things associated with Him. Below are a few examples.

- ⇒ Not to pray publicly in the schools.
- ⇒ No more religious baccalaureate services.
- ⇒ Not to pray in Jesus' name (Armed Services chaplains).
- ⇒ Not teach creation in the schools.
- ⇒ School children in some states forbidden to carry Bibles.
- ⇒ Some schools forbid singing Christmas carols.
- ⇒ A move to remove "in God we trust."
- ⇒ A move to remove "one nation under God."
- ⇒ Ordered to remove public manger scenes.
- ⇒ Ordered to remove Ten Commandments from public places.
- ⇒ Removing Christian meeting places on the basis of zoning (currently [11/2006] Washington DC and Tennessee).

The Gravity of the Situation

When the church is in a weakened state, laws like these can be more readily passed. Some will counter that we should not be concerned about this. Since the church is the pillar and ground of the truth, they say, we should not expect Christian representations to be condoned by the State. However, this reasoning is not sound.

First, modern attempts are to **remove** a presence that **already** exists. It is an effort to withdraw from society an **existing** influence, thereby reducing the level of God-consciousness. In that case, this Divine utterance applies: “*The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all*

Peter again speaks fearlessly before the religious authorities, having no fear of men – by Given O. Blakely

the nations that forget God" (Psa 9:17).

IN THE NAME OF JESUS

"... *in the name of Jesus.*" Other versions read, "*teach about Jesus, or even mention His name.*"^{GWN} "*about Jesus,*"^{LIVING} and "*by the authority of Jesus.*"^{IE}

They did not command Peter and John to do no more healing – although they were no doubt opposed to that because of the interest it caused. **It was speaking in the name of Jesus that raised their furor.** I suppose if Peter and John had healed the man, swearing by

the gold of the Temple, it would have been acceptable (Matt 23:16-17).

Because "*there is none other Name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12), Satan opposes speaking or acting in His name. **Candidly, he has no aggressive objections to people speaking with the family in mind, or the government, or the assistance of the poor.** None of these things are wrong of themselves, but they are not the **foundation** upon which eternal issues are based. The remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit do not depend upon such matters. Nor, indeed, is the New Covenant centered in

them. As vital as they may seem, they are auxiliaries to life, and not life itself.

The real issues of life all depend upon Jesus Christ – who He is, what he has accomplished, and what he is doing! Therefore, the powers of darkness, against whom we wrestle, seek to put Jesus into the background at the least, and altogether remove Him from consideration at the worst. They are very active in our time. These powers have moved the Sanhedrin to mandate the cessation of speaking in the name of Jesus, or even mentioning His name. How will holy men respond to that?

ANSWERING WITH A QUESTION

¹⁹ ***But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.***

Just as Shadrach, Meshach, and

read, "*But Peter and John replied,*"^{NIV} "*But Peter and John answered them,*"^{NRSV} "*Peter and John, however, said to them in reply,*"^{NAB} "*But Peter and John retorted,*"^{NJB} and "*But Peter and John gave them this reply.*"^{PHILLIPS}

mouths will not be stopped.

There are statements that ought to be answered, and there are also times when silence is golden. Blessed is the one who can distinguish between the two. There is no handy set of rules that make that distinction easy to perceive. Such wisdom is rather the result of walking in the light as Jesus is in the light.

RIGHT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD

"... *Whether it be right in the sight of God . . .*" Other versions read, "*right in God's sight,*"^{NIV} "*right in the eyes of God,*"^{BBE} "*righteous before God,*"^{DARBY} "*just in the sight of God,*"^{DOUAY} "*whether God wants,*"^{GWN} "*God wants us,*"^{NLT} and "*What would God want?*"^{IE}

The Law-mentality asks, "Is it wrong?" The insightful person asks, "*Is it right.*" The word "*right*" comes from the Greek word δίκαιόν (di-kai-on), which has the lexical meaning, "*righteous . . . such as it ought to be, upright, righteous, virtuous,*"^{THAYER} "*morally and ethically righteous, upright, and just,*"^{FRIBERG} "*conforming to the standard, will, or character of God; upright, righteous, good, just, right,*"^{UBS} and "*pertaining to being in accordance with what God requires.*"^{LOUW-NIDA}

Peter adds "*in the sight of God*" – that is, in the presence of God, or before Him. In other words, if a person was consciously in the presence of Almighty God, would this be considered the right

There are statements that ought to be answered, and there are also times when silence is golden. Blessed is the one who can distinguish between the two. There is no handy set of rules that make that distinction easy to perceive. Such wisdom is rather the result of walking in the light as Jesus is in the light.

Abednego, Peter and John are "*not careful*" to respond to the demand of the counsel (Dan 3:16). That is, they really did not even "*need to answer*"^{NKJV} what was demanded of them. **The Sanhedrin had overstepped their bounds, and Peter and John were not obligated to enter into any dialog with them.** Actually, the council is responsible for their own conduct, not Peter and John. Therefore, the two apostles will hurl the matter back at their accusers.

PETER AND JOHN ANSWERED

"*But Peter and John answered and said unto them, . . .*" Other versions

Here is an interesting thing: the council had not asked them anything, but had rather made a threatening demand of them. Yet, Peter and John are said to *answer* them – **answering a commandment of men!** That is, when men speak foolishly and outside the circumference of their responsibility, it is correct to challenge them to think more clearly about what they have required.

Note that the boldness of Peter and John did not wane when they were threatened, and even order, to keep silence. If anything, this council has increased their boldness, so that their

thing to do? Would it incur the judgment or approbation of God? Would it please or displease Him? **For the sensitive soul, this is an arresting consideration.**

Of old time, the whole of a persons life was evaluated upon the basis of whether he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord or not.

- ⇨ The Law commanded men to do *“that which is right in the eyes of the LORD thy God”* (Deut 13:18).
- ⇨ It is said that David, *“did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any thing that He commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite”* (1 Kgs 15:5).
- ⇨ During the first part of his rule, Asa also *“did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, as did David his father”* (1 Kgs 15:11).
- ⇨ Omri, on the other hand, *“wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that were before him”* (1 Kgs 16:25).
- ⇨ Jehoshaphat *“walked in all the ways of Asa his father; he turned not aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord”* (1 Kgs 22:43).
- ⇨ Zedekiah *“did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done”* (Jer 52:2).
- ⇨ Jesus spoke of things that were highly regarded or esteemed by men, yet were *“abomination in the sight of God”* (Luke 16:15).
- ⇨ Paul wrote to Timothy concerning things that were *“good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior”* (1 Tim 2:3).
- ⇨ The aim of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus is to present the people of God *“holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight”* (Col 1:22).
- ⇨ All of this is accented by the fact that no person *“is not manifest in His*

sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13).

Peter and John do not philosophize about right and wrong. They do not leave the matter to human discretion, as though every person had a right to their opinion. They knew that *“we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad?”* (2 Cor 5:10). Things that are **“right in the sight of God”** will be *“right”* in that day – after *“the heavens and the earth which are now”* have passed away (2 Pet 3:7-12). No imagined earthly advantages will exist at that time. No personal agendas will be in place, other than the purpose of God Himself. No institutions

rather than to God, you be the judge,”
NASB *“to obey you rather than God, you must judge”*
NRSV *“It is for you to say . . . to give attention to you more than to God,”*
BBE *“to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge,”*
NAS *“Should we obey you or God?”*
IE and *“to listen to what you say rather than to what He says.”*
PHILLIPS

This is a weighty consideration, indeed! The men now addressed are religious men. In fact, they are leaders among the chosen people of God. They have a knowledge of Scripture, and some measure of awareness of the One who gave them. **Now, rather than allowing this council to judge them, Peter and John call upon them to turn their supposedly discerning minds to this consideration.** Is it right for their word to

No imagined earthly advantages will exist at that time. No personal agendas will be in place, other than the purpose of God Himself. No institutions or competitive kingdoms will exist, for they shall all have been decimated by the Kingdom of God. At that time, it will be evident that only God’s will really matters.

or competitive kingdoms will exist, for they shall all have been decimated by the Kingdom of God (Dan 2:44). **At that time, it will be evident that only God’s will really matters.**

Now Peter and John call upon their judges to consider their mandate with Divine judgment in mind. **They insist that their judgment be in light of God, not their own corrupted wills.** They make no allowance for their judges to say they do not know what God wants, or how He views their decision. If they are religious leaders, it is their business to know the will of the Lord, and to have an accurate perception of what it right in this matter.

JUDGE YE

“. . . to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.” Other versions read, *“to listen to you more than to God, you judge,”*
NKJV *“to give heed to you*

supercede the word of the Lord? Is it proper in the sight of God for His servants to go about as though they were actually answerable to this council?

Peter and John challenge their critics to consider that they are demanding **their** word to be honored above the word of the One whom God had approved among them. Of course, Peter and John will not subscribe to that condition. Their fear is of God, not man, and they choose to obey Him.

The response of Peter and John may appear to be pointless. Flesh reasons that their critics had hard hearts and would not subscribe to an honest consideration of this challenge. Therefore it reasons, **“What is the use of making such a statement?”** **When one considers the nature of the Kingdom, and the involvement of heavenly influences, it makes perfect sense to speak as Peter**

Peter again speaks fearlessly before the religious authorities, having no fear of men – by Given O. Blakely

and John did. Their words became a means through which the Holy Spirit would work – either to convict or harden. Additionally, their determination was precious in the sight of God. He would therefore take their side in this matter, and work in their behalf.

There Are Matters to be Judged

Even if we had not been specifically told to judge certain matters, we should know to do so by what has been said about our future. *“Do ye not know that **the saints shall judge the world?** and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that **we shall judge angels?** how much more things that pertain to this life?”* (1 Cor 6:2-3). These words are not given to us to promote speculation and vain imaginations. **Rather, through this revelation we are provoked to learn to judge righteously while we are tabernacling in the flesh:** *“judge righteous judgment”* (John 7:24). Believers are exhorted, *“Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but **judge this rather,** that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way”* (Rom 14:13). Again Paul wrote, *“I speak as to wise men: **judge ye what I say**”* (1 Cor 10:15). And again, *“Let the prophets speak two or three, and **let the other judge**”* (1 Cor 14:29).

The Right Approach

Let men have done with merely emotional approaches to the things of God. **Every word and every action among those wearing the name of the Lord is subject to righteous scrutiny.** If someone says they have a word from God, the wise among the assembly must judge whether it is the truth. If a person declares God has shown something to him, then those with the mind of Christ must put it to the test. If the apostle Paul challenged those to whom he wrote to judge what he said, where is the person who would draw back from such an approach today?

Those who speak in the name of the Lord are to submit to the judgment of the wise, as confirmed in Paul's direction to the Corinthian prophets (1 Cor 14:29).

A Mode of Reasoning

There is a mode of reasoning that

characterizes newness of life. It enables one to arrive at proper conclusions and avoid falling into Satan's snare. The word *“judge”* comes from a word meaning, *“to separate, put asunder, to pick out, select, choose,”* THAYER *“reaching a personal or group decision,”* FRIBERG *“to come to a conclusion in the process of thinking and thus be in a position to make a decision,”* LOUW-NIDA and *“distinguish.”* LIDDELL-SCOTT

All of this presumes contradicting things that must be weighed, being carefully considered. This judgment is to lead to a conclusion that is in keeping with what is right – the will and nature



of God. Because righteousness and truth hold up under the strictest scrutiny and most careful consideration, honest and good hearts will arrive at the proper God-honoring conclusion. Further, this summons to *“judge”* is not an invitation to express a private opinion. This is rather a call to judge righteously. Peter and John already know the answer to the question. That is why they have chosen to obey God. It is why they have chosen to hearken to Him rather than to men.

Notice that Peter and John do not preface their remarks by suggesting that the council's view of God and His will have any bearing on the subject at all. They obviously have no tolerance for varying views of God or His ways. If there is only one God, which the Jewish

Scriptures affirm (Deut 6:4), His ways cannot possibly be diverse, for that would contradict the revealed concept of God.

This is not a philosophical question, as though these apostles were merely asking the council what they thought about the matter. **There are, in effect, asking the council to judge whether Peter and John were right in hearkening unto God, or whether the council was right in demanding that they not do so.** In other words, these two men were actually doing what God had told them to do, and now a council of religious authorities was commanding them **not** to do it.

There are issues within the religious community that must be addressed in a similar manner. Men should be called to judge whether it is right to do this or that. Let me give you a few examples. Is it right to hearken unto God and insist that elders be *“apt to teach”* (1 Tim 3:2), or is it right to allow men to be elders who do not have the slightest interest in teaching? Is it right to hearken to God and insist that wicked and immoral men be expelled from the church (1 Cor 5:13), or is it right to allow them to remain in hopes of changing them? Is it right to hearken to the Lord and command men who believe to be baptized (Acts 10:48; Mk 16:16), or is it right to declare baptism is nothing more than an option? Is it right to hearken to God and require all things to be done *“unto edification”* (1 Cor 14:26), or is it right to let the novices establish the priorities of an assembly?

Oh, that there were more godly men and women who would demand that righteous judgment be found among those who profess to be leaders. When there is a disputation, particular regarding what is spoken, someone must be found who can distinguish who is hearkening to the Lord and who is not. What is more, a demand ought to be placed upon the decision-makers, that they make a determination if it is better to listen to God or to men. Once that judgment is made, let the will of God be clearly articulated and substantiated. **The modern church is deficient in this matter. However, there is no need for it to remain in this condition. Salvation provides for making right choices.**

COMPELLED TO SPEAK

“²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

Hearkening to God assumes that He has addressed words to Peter and John – that He has made demands of them, and revealed certain matters to them. Peter and John are engaged in doing the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, and they are challenging their opponents to put their deeds to the test, and to do so publicly.

THE COMPULSION OF LOVE

“For we cannot but speak . . .” Other versions read, “for we cannot stop speaking,”^{NASB} “we cannot help speaking about,”^{NIV} “it is not possible for us to keep from saying,”^{BBE} “for we are unable to stop speaking about,”^{CSB} “for as for us we cannot refrain from speaking of,”^{DARBY} “We cannot stop talking about,”^{GWN} “for it is impossible for us not to speak about,”^{NET} “We cannot stop proclaiming,”^{NJB} “We cannot stop telling about,”^{NLT} “We are not able to keep silent,”^{IE} “We cannot keep quiet about,”^{CEV} and “For we can do none other but to speak.”^{EMTV}

Peter and John were not compelled by a moral law. They were not motivated by the threat of condemnation if they did not speak. It is to be acknowledged that men can be moved by law and threats. Further, this is not necessarily wrong – although the requirement for such things confirms a deficiency in the person that must be so constrained. **That is a valid, but lower, form of motivation. It is for those whose hearts have not been touched by grace, and are more obstinate in their rebellion.** That is why Jesus said to the Pharisees, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation” (Mat 23:14). And again, “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (Matt 23:33). He did not set the hope of glory before them, for their hearts were hard – calloused by sin.

This was not the case with Peter and John. Their hearts had been made

new. Their affections had been purified, and their consciences purged. **In such a state, there is a loftier and more effectual constraining power:** “For the love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Cor 5:14). In my own estimation, the following traits characterize those who cannot refrain from speaking the things of God, even when they are severely threatened. This is by no means a complete list, but does show the kind of traits that make for competent and faithful witnesses.

- ⇨ A pure heart (1 Tim 1:5).
- ⇨ A strong faith (Rom 4:20).
- ⇨ Living hope (1 Pet 1:3).

3:14).

- ⇨ Compelling desire to know Christ (Phil 3:10).
- ⇨ Dominate desire to do God’s will (John 7:17).
- ⇨ Thankful spirit (Col 3:15).
- ⇨ Spiritual understanding (Col 1:9).
- ⇨ The love of the truth (2 Thess 1:9).

Things of this order cannot be produced by Law. They can be commanded, but in order for them to be experienced, the heart must be drawn to

The person who has a dominating love for Jesus obtains the ability to hear and see what He is doing. With that love comes a determination to speak that cannot be suppressed. This is being lived out in our text.

- ⇨ Full assurance of faith (Heb 10:22).
- ⇨ Full assurance of hope (Heb 6:11).
- ⇨ Full assurance of understanding (Col 2:2).
- ⇨ Purged conscience (Heb 9:14; 10:22).
- ⇨ Confidence (Heb 3:6).
- ⇨ Fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9).
- ⇨ Communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14).
- ⇨ Walking in the light (1 John 1:7).
- ⇨ Separation from the world (1 John 2:15).
- ⇨ Crucifixion of the flesh (Gal 5:24).
- ⇨ Pressing toward the mark (Phil

the Lord through a perception of His great love and great salvation. I affirm that it is not possible to truly love Jesus until His love for us, and His great salvation are perceived to some significant measure. That is why the Scriptures speak of knowing Christ’s love: “And to **know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God**” (Eph 3:19). **Knowing a love that surpasses knowledge is not knowing about that love, by realizing it by experience.** Through the Holy Spirit, who sheds the love of God abroad in our hearts (Rom 5:5), a measure of understanding is realized that cannot be obtained academically.

The person who has a dominating love for Jesus obtains the ability to hear and see what He is doing. With that love comes a determination to speak that

cannot be suppressed. This is being lived out in our text.

THINGS SEEN AND HEARD

“... the things which we have seen and heard.” Other versions read, “the things which we saw and heard.”^{ASV} “the wonderful things we saw Jesus do and heard Him say.”^{LIVING} and “what we have actually seen and heard.”^{PHILLIPS}

In order for one’s religion to be effective, it must be lifted out of the realm of philosophy. **In some effectual way, the individual must be exposed to the person of Jesus Christ.** For Peter and John, this exposure was twofold: in the flesh and in the Spirit. At the time of their exposure to Jesus in the flesh, their perception was very limited. When, for example, Peter, James, and John came down from the mount of transfiguration, Jesus told them not to say anything about what they saw and heard until He was risen from the dead. At that time the disciples “kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean” (Mark 9:10). Following Christ’s ascension into glory, however, they spoke discerningly of what they had seen and heard on that mountain (John 1:14; 2 Pet 1:16-18). **This is owing to the indispensable ministry of the Holy Spirit.** Jesus promised them the following.

- ⇨ “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, ¹ **He shall teach you all things**, and ² **bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you**” (John 14:26).
- ⇨ “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, ³ **He shall testify of me**” (John 15:26).
- ⇨ “Howbeit when **He**, the **Spirit of truth**, is come, ⁴ **He will guide you into all truth**: for **He** shall not speak of **Himself**: but whatsoever **He** shall hear, that shall **He** speak: and ⁵ **He will show you things to come**” (John 16:13).
- ⇨ “⁶ **He shall glorify Me**: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall ⁷ **show it unto you**. All things that the Father

hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:14-15).

There are seven things Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would do.

1. Teach them all things.
2. Bring what Jesus had said to their remembrance.
3. Testify of Christ.
4. Guide them into all truth.
5. Show them things to come.
6. Glorify Christ.
7. Show the things of Christ to them.



In this text, we see the impact of the ministry of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts and minds of the apostles. Once the truth was seen in clarity, and its extensive horizon dawned upon their souls, it was not possible to keep them silent. They became like young Elihu who spoke to Job – they could contain what they confidently knew within. They and to speak it out. Elihu said, “For I am **full of matter**, the spirit within me **constraineth me**. Behold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is **ready to burst** like new bottles. **I will speak, that I may be refreshed**: I will open my lips and answer” (Job 32:18-20).

The Spirit of Faith

Peter and John had “the spirit of faith,” that always moves a person to speak. As it is written, “We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, **I believed, and therefore have I spoken**: we also believe, and therefore speak; **Knowing** that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you” (2 Cor 4:13-14).

Observe the role of believing and true knowledge in holy speaking: “we also believe,” and “knowing that . . . ”This is

a micro view of confidence: wholeheartedly believing the truth, and knowing, or possessing a cognitive familiarity [thinking and reasoning, as opposed to mere emotion or exhilaration] with what has been seen and heard.

This is something that cannot be accomplished through academic learning or humanly devised routines of learning. This relates to “the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual” – something Paul affirmed is required by those who are in Christ Jesus (Col 1:9).

This also involves “rightly dividing,” or “handling accurately.”^{NASB} the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). That is, not only must what has been seen and heard be declared accurately and without err, it must be discreetly imparted, so that the audience is given what is appropriate for the occasion. It would not have been proper for Peter and John to have described what they saw and heard when Jesus came walking to them on the water, and even summoned Peter to join him on the tumultuous water (Matt 14:25-33). That would certainly have been true, but it would not have been what was needed at that time.

They Preached the Resurrection of the Dead

The circumstance that brought about this whole occasion was Peter and John preaching “through Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (4:2). This revealed the decided advancement in their understanding that had taken place after Christ’s enthronement.

Remember that at the time of the transfiguration the disciples questioned among themselves “what the rising from the dead should mean.” However, in our text, they have been preaching “through Jesus the resurrection of the dead,” affirming that Jesus Himself had been raised from the dead (4:10). In other words, they were declaring what they had “seen and heard” with understanding. **They were not merely rehearsing some mysterious facts, but expounding their significance as well as their reality.** Their love for Christ and understanding of the Gospel would not allow them to keep silence on these matters, regardless of the demands of the council before whom they stood.

This, among other things, is why you cannot train people to be witnesses. Nor, indeed, is it possible for one man to confer spiritual understanding upon another. Effective witnesses have been exposed to the truth in their hearts as well as their minds. They have a love for the truth as well as a knowledge of it.

This, among other things, is why you cannot train people to be witnesses. Nor, indeed, is it possible for one man to confer spiritual understanding upon another. Effective witnesses have been exposed to the truth in their hearts as well as their minds. They have a love for the truth as well as a knowledge of it. They not only see the need for declaring the truth, but have an unquenchable desire to do so. This kind of experience

moved the prophet Jeremiah to say, "Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jer 20:9).

The modern church stands in great need of competent witnesses – people who know and love the truth, see

its implications, and are compelled to declare it without regard to the consequences of doing so. Such people will not yield to the threats of the ungodly, but will speak for and of Jesus. They will faithfully bring the truth to bear upon the consciences of the people.

As painful as it is to consider, much of contemporary *Christianity* has very little to do with proclamation – with the confident affirmation of eternal verities. The variety of pulpit offerings to the people appear to cover a range of things from entertainment to problem resolution. In the seemingly more advanced assemblies, the presentations are peppered with "good words and fair speeches" through which the people are "deceived" (Rom 16:18). However, there is very little proclamation of spiritual verities that have been "seen and heard." This is a tragic circumstance with far reaching implications.

NOTHING WORTHY OF PUNISHMENT

"²¹ So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done."

How important is it that the church be holy? What if all kinds of questionable conduct is found within it? Will that circumstance have any impact on its message – if it is, indeed, even noted for its message?

A Peculiar Modern Circumstance

The nominal church has introduced a peculiar circumstance. It is **perpetrating a doctrine that tends to minimize sin and transgression.** Unacceptable behavior is being traced to things like physiological conditions, chemical abuse, environment, or some other influence that has nothing to do with choice or human reference.

There are certain things that God has associated with sin – things that have been revealed. Although these are rarely mentioned in church circles, they are very much present wherever sin is

found. A failure to clarify the association of these things with sin has caused the people to be unable to relate them to the moral flaws that are found within the church itself, which are often traced to **psychological disadvantages.** Here is a sampling of those terms or conditions.

⇨ **REBELLIOUS.** "Because they **rebelled** against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High" (Psa 107:11). To rebel is an aggressive human response against God – one in which the individual refuses to hear or obey the Lord.

⇨ **BLINDNESS.** "But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath **blinded** his eyes" (1 John 2:11). This has to do with not being able to understand, perceive, or discern. Since Jesus has come, there is no justification for such a condition, for regeneration includes God shining light and knowledge into the heart, so that sin is seen and can be avoided (2 Cor 4:6).

⇨ **HARDNESS OF HEART.** "And when He had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for **the hardness of their hearts**" (Mark 3:5). This is a deliberate hardness, where the people steels themselves against the Lord and His word.

⇨ **STIFFNECKED.** "Ye **stiffnecked** and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts 7:51). This is yet another human response in which they refuse to turn to the Lord, choosing rather to indulge themselves in sin.

⇨ **DISOBEDIENCE.** "For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of **disobedience**" (Col 3:6). Disobedience is deliberate. It takes place when one knows what God requires, yet refuses to yield the heart to Him.

⇨ **NOT WANTING GOD.** "But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel **would none of Me**" (Psa 81:11). Here men prefer their own ways to

Peter again speaks fearlessly before the religious authorities, having no fear of men – by Given O. Blakely

those of God, and therefore do not want Him or His influence among them.

⇒ **UNHOLY.** *“For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, **unholy**”* (2 Tim 3:2). This is being unlike God – that is, contrary to Him.

8. **REPROBATE.** *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be **reprobates?**”* (2 Cor 13:5). The ultimate conclusion of sin is reprobacy, or being rejected by God. If a person refuses to turn from sin, this is the inevitable result.

present. Sin within the church is a flagrant contradiction of the affirmation that Jesus came to *“destroy the works of the devil.”*

⇒ **DISPLEASING TO GOD.** *“And God was **displeased** with this thing; therefore he smote Israel”* (1 Chron 21:7). God does have a reaction to sin, and it is not one of pleasure or pity.

I have mentioned these things because they are totally absent in our text. Peter and John have not been confronted with any personal sin, spiritual dullness, or inappropriate conduct before God. The work for which they have been called to account – the healing of the lame man – was unquestionably a good one. The word

THEY FURTHER THREATENED THEM

“So when they had further threatened them . . .” Other versions read, *“After further threats,”* ^{NIV} *“After threatening them again,”* ^{NRSV} *“And when they had said more sharp words to them,”* ^{BBE} *“The authorities threatened them even more,”* ^{GWN} *“The court repeated the threats,”* ^{NJB} *“The court added further threats,”* ^{WEYMOUTH} and *“So the Council warned them even more strongly.”* ^{GNB}

These warnings all postulate a fear of those who were speaking them. They assume that those who were warned were afraid to fall into the hands of this tribunal. It is not possible to have a legitimate *“threat”* if these things are not so. For example, if a man in the ICU unit of a local hospital who possessed neither a local authority nor influence threatened you, there would be no reason to fear his words. Or, if a two-year-old boy shouted a threat at you, it would mean nothing, and would simply be discarded. **Threats presume that the ones issuing them are actually dangerous, and that their words must be respected.**

Now, on the surface, it may appear that this council should have been feared. Later they would stone Stephen, so they were actually able to carry out a judgment leading to death – at least that is the way it appeared. **However, Peter and John have knowledge of One who is greater than their judges, and they are deferring to Him.** They have already announced His exaltation by *“the God of the Jews”* (Rom 3:29; Acts 2:33-34). His power was confirmed in the raising of the lame man in the presence of the people (Acts 3:16). They have also confirmed the word of Moses that foretold anyone failing to listen to Jesus would be *“destroyed from among the people”* (3:23).

Fearing Men Is Sinful

Solomon said, *“The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe”* (Prov 29:25). That is, *“the fear of man”* is the exact opposite of trusting in the Lord, producing danger rather than safety. For those who believe, such a fear is wholly unwarranted. That is why God Himself said, *“Stop regarding man, whose breath of life is in his nostrils; For why should he be esteemed?”* ^{NASB} (Isa 2:22).

Whatever may be said about being only human, or being among those who are beset with moral or spiritual weaknesses, no such charges are leveled against Peter and John. They have broken no law of God, nor have they violated any known law of man.

⇒ **REJECTING THE WORD.** *“The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, **they have rejected the word of the LORD;** and what wisdom is in them?”* (Jer 8:9). In this case, the person hears the Word of the Lord, but simply refuses to receive or yield to it.

⇒ **IMPENITENCE.** *“But after thy hardness and **impenitent** heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God”* (Rom 2:5). This is a refusal to turn or repent. The soul who is impenitent is obstinate, and insists on continuing in sin, even when he knows it is wrong.

⇒ **BEING OF THE DEVIL.** *“He that committeth sin **is of the devil;** for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil”* (1 John 3:8). Sin is the result of the devil’s work, and where it is committed, he is always

that had grieved their critics – preaching through Jesus the resurrection of the dead – was also good, announcing through Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

Whatever may be said about being only human, or being among those who are beset with moral or spiritual weaknesses, no such charges are leveled against Peter and John. They have broken no law of God, nor have they violated any known law of man. They have not participated in an insurrection like Barabbas (Mark 15:7). They were not like a notable Egyptian who would surface later, causing an uproar and leading four thousand known murderers into the wilderness (Acts 21:38). **They have not been charged with any moral indiscretions.**

Now we will see that however their judges may view them, it will not be as immoral people who have displeased the Lord, or those who have not spoken in strict accord with Scripture.

When king Saul went against the word of the Lord, he confessed, *"I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice"* (1 Sam 15:24). That, however, was not a satisfactory explanation. Samuel corrected Saul by saying, *"thou hast rejected the word of the Lord"* (1 Sam 15:26).

Those whose faith is in the Lord will not be moved by the threats of mere mortals. Thus it is written, *"So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me"* (Heb 13:6). The liberating knowledge of God strengthens the soul, so that the servants of God are not moved by the threats of men. Therefore, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were threatened by the King of the whole world with death if they did not bow to his image, they replied, *"If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up"* (Dan 3:17-18). When Daniel was threatened with an edict from a world emperor that prohibited prayer being made to the God of heaven, *"he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime"* (Dan 6:10).

Only a person with faith has any intelligent view of these reports. Such know that **the fear of God is a legitimate fear, while the fear of man is nothing but the result of delusion.**

Notwithstanding these fairly obvious facts, they were neither perceived or acknowledged by the council. They placed an inordinately high value on their position among the Jews, and thus imagined that their words were with power. Because this council cannot be moved by the fear of the Lord, God will restrain them in other ways, even though they will not be able to detect them.

NO CAUSE FOR PUNISHMENT

" . . . they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them . . ." Other versions read, *"they let them go,*

finding no way of punishing them,"^{NKJV} *"they let them go (finding no basis on which they might punish them),"*^{NASB} *"they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them,"*^{NIV} *"they released them. They found no way to punish them,"*^{CSB} and *"they let them go, not seeing how they could secure a conviction against them."*^{AMPLIFIED}

Some of the versions totally obscure the meaning of the text, suggesting that they simply could not reach a consensus among themselves on how to punish Peter and John.

The key to this text is found in the words *"finding nothing."* First, they diligently sought for a person or a

no evil thing to say of you" (Titus 2:8). The structure of contemporary Christianity makes no such demands. Instead, a God is being presented that does not require such a condition. When these things are absent, we are told to be patient and uncondemning, for the transgressor has just showed his human weakness. **Such approaches betray corrupt hearts, and bring reproach upon the cause of Christ.**

Peter admonished all believers to maintain *"a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ"* (1 Pet 3:16). While no child of God will boast that they are perfect, all of

Those in Christ are not to be found with glaring moral and spiritual blemishes that can be perceived by the ungodly. That is what James would call the "superfluity of naughtiness," or the "overflow of wickedness." Such things are to be "put away," together with "all filthiness." There can be no defense of moral corruption within the church.

condition that would clearly justify the punishment of the two standing before them. However, they could find *"nothing."* **There was no person, word, or deed that clearly justified the punishment of these men – and they made a diligent search to find one.** I suppose they could have hired someone to bear false witness. However, the next clause explains why they did not choose that course of action.

Spotless Lives

Believers are reminded to be *"blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world"* (Phil 2:15). Blamelessness is something to be found in the body, as well as the spirit and the soul (1 Thess 5:23). Paul admonished Titus to take care to show himself a *"pattern of good works,"* having *"uncorruptness"* in his doctrine and *"sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having*

them will confess their earnest desire to be found in such a state. **Those in Christ are not to be found with glaring moral and spiritual blemishes that can be perceived by the ungodly.** That is what James would call the *"superfluity of naughtiness,"* or the *"overflow of wickedness."*^{NKJV} Such things are to be *"put away,"* together with *"all filthiness"* (James 1:21). **There can be no defense of moral corruption within the church.** Such a condition gives power to the enemy, a place being made for the devil (Eph 4:27).

The council could find no cause for punishing Peter and John – that is, they could find no wrong in them. The apostles could have shouted out as Paul did before another tribunal: *"to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest"* (Acts 25:10). **If they had been able to lay some "wrong" at the feet of Peter and John, the whole of Christian history would have been impacted.** Such a condition would have contradicted the message Peter preached, affirming that *"God, having raised up his Son Jesus,*

sent him to bless you, in **turning away every one of you from his iniquities**" (Acts 3:26).

One of the seeming advantages of a false gospel is that it sets the stage for a carnal allowance of iniquity. There is not a shred of this kind of preaching at the time of our text. Nor, indeed, was flawed conduct kindly tolerated among the believers. I do not doubt that in today's *Christian* circles, the sin of Judas would be conveniently explained, and a hearty effort made to restore him to his office, or bishopric. However, such an approach is not found in Scripture.

BECAUSE OF THE PEOPLE

"... because of the people: for all

It ought to be noted that we should have a holy optimism about the power of the truth. While we may not be surprised when people reject the truth, we certainly should not be astounded if they receive it. Throughout history God has spoken of the acceptance of the truth by the people.

men glorified God for that which was done." Other versions read, "on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened,"^{NASB} "because all the people were praising God for what had happened,"^{NIV} "because of the people; for all men were giving praise to God for what had taken place,"^{BBE} "because they didn't know how to punish them without starting a riot. For everyone was praising God,"^{NLT} "on account of the people, because all gave God the glory for the thing that had happened,"^{WEYMOUTH} and "because all the people continued to praise God for what had happened."^{ISV}

This statement must be understood within its context. If they could have found some supposedly credible witness of iniquity in Peter and John, they would have proceeded with punishing them. They did so after false witnesses rose up against Jesus (Matt 26:60-62), and against Stephen as well (Acts 6:13-14).

The point here is that the people were so praising God for the work that had been done through Peter and John, that the council did not dare to conjure up false witnesses against them. The work of Peter and John was too unique, and the glory of it was still fresh in the minds of the people. The council saw it would be politically incorrect to make any attempt to invent charges against the two standing before them.

Not the First time

This was not the first time rebellious Jews faced the good response of the people to Divine workings.

⇨ "And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might

destroy Him: for they feared Him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine" (Mark 11:18).

⇨ "But if we shall say, Of men: **they feared the people:** for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed" (Mark 11:32).

⇨ "And they sought to lay hold on Him, but **feared the people:** for they knew that He had spoken the parable against them: and they left Him, and went their way" (Mark 12:12).

⇨ "And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for **they feared the people**" (Luke 22:2).

All of this would have been of little consequence if they could only have substantiated a legitimate charge against Peter and John. If they could have found a true charge against them, they would have presented that to the people and proceeded with their opposition.

However, no such charge could be validated. This is an example of being "blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation" (Phil 2:15).

The Power of Truth

It ought to be noted that we should have a holy optimism about the power of the truth. While we may not be surprised when people reject the truth, we certainly should not be astounded if they receive it. Throughout history God has spoken of the acceptance of the truth by the people. Understanding that more is involved here than meets the eye, we do well to take heed to these proclamations.

⇨ "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me: **unto Him ye shall hearken**" (Deut 18:15).

⇨ "**All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD:** and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee" (Psa 22:27).

⇨ "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and **all nations shall flow unto it**" (Isa 2:2).

⇨ "And He said, It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, **that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth**" (Isa 49:6).

⇨ "**For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,** as the waters cover the sea" (Hab 2:14).

⇨ "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, **will draw all men unto Me**" (John 12:32).

The point to be seen is that the Gospel is powerful, and capable of provoking instant and extensive results. Of course, we cannot afford to be naive about this matter. This does not mean that every time the Gospel is preached there are marvelous results without

opposition. Our text confirms this is the case. Even though above 5,000 men have believed, yet Peter and John have been arrested, and are standing before a critical and hostile tribunal.

Gospel Power Revealed

The power of the Gospel is not only revealed in its acceptance, but in its rejection as well. **Just as the sowing of the seed revealed the manner of the soils upon which it fell, so the Gospel makes known the hearts that are subjected to it.** Paul stated it this way: *“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of His knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?”* (2 Cor 2:14-16).

When declared with power and insight, the Gospel reveals the hearts of men. This is seen in both the conversion of the city of Samaria (Acts 8:5-8), and the rejection and the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58-59). In our text, the turning of 5,000 men, and the provocation of the Temple authorities were both owing to ministry of the Gospel.

Requirements for the Gospel Being “Unto salvation”

There are two fundamental requirements for the realization of salvation through the Gospel.

- ⇨ First, the true Gospel, not *“another Gospel”* (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6) must be preached. Salvation is never realized through a spurious gospel. Spiritual freedom is never experienced through a lie.
- ⇨ Second, the Gospel must be received by *“honest and good hearts”* (Lk 8:15). We know from the Scriptures that when the minds of people are blinded by the devil, they will not believe (2 Cor 4:4). This condition is not determined by men, but is revealed in the failure of people to believe the Gospel.

There Are Ungodly Generations

There are whole generations, fully

The extensive length of time during which hard-hearted people are exposed to the truth does not necessarily break them down. It can also make them more hardened. When men continue to labor among dull people, their message tends to become weaker and weaker. Their hearts grow heavy, and they can even become insensitive to the unacceptable condition of the people.

known to God, that are fundamentally ungodly, and who will not be changed. The generation of Israel who fell in the wilderness was such a generation (Num 32:13). It is called an *“evil generation”* (Deut 1:35). God referred to them as a *“froward generation”* (Deut 32:20). **It made no difference how many wonderful works they saw, their hearts remained obstinate.**

When Jesus dwelt among men, there was a body of people who *“could not believe”* (John 12:39). God Himself confirmed their fundamental hardness by blinding their eyes and hardening their hearts (John 12:40). Even the prodigious and gracious ministry of the Son of God could not turn them from their ways. They were a generation among whom He could *“do no mighty work”* (Mk 6:5). It is sobering to consider the presence of such a generation.

David spoke of *“a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God”* (Psa 78:8). Solomon affirmed, *“There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness”* (Prov 30:12). Jeremiah referred to *“the generation of His wrath”* (Jer 7:29). Only the Lord is able to fully identify such generations – but He does do so, and we must learn to reckon upon that.

When men perpetually have the marks of a rejected generation, we must consider and confirm the validity of our presence and ministry among them. This is a judgment the laborer must make for

himself – but it must be made.

It is possible to expend labor on the wrong people, so that all of one’s work is pointless. Paul referred to this dreaded circumstance when he wrote to the Galatians, *“I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain”* (Gal 4:11). Paul and Barnabas left some people, refusing to spend any more time among them (Acts 13:46). Peter and John will not develop a special ministry to the council, or the Sanhedrin.

The extensive length of time to which hard-hearted people are exposed to the truth does not necessarily break them down. It can also make them more hardened. When men continue to labor among dull people, their message tends to become weaker and weaker. Their hearts grow heavy, and they can even become insensitive to the unacceptable condition of the people. It is true that we are to be longsuffering and forbearing (Eph 4:2; Col 3:13). It is also true that we are to turn away from those who insist on maintaining a form of godliness while rejecting the power of it (2 Tim 3:5).

When men – even religious men – are grieved with the proclamation of the truth, we must **not** cease to declare it. This must be done even when we are in the territory over which they imagine they have complete control. If we have the opportunity to speak the truth, we must do so – in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:2). **If the people can be saved, then it will be through the declaration of the truth. If they cannot be saved, the truth will also make that circumstance known.**

A NOTABLE MIRACLE

“²² For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed.”

This verse is an explanation for the people glorifying God *“for the work that was done”* (4:21). The response of the people was a reasoned one, not hype. It proceeded from thought, not hysteria. Peter and John had not whipped up the people, as some false prophets are prone to do. They had wrought a work before the people, and then expounded how that work had taken place.

Although much of modern Christianity relies on raw emotion, and the expert rallying of the emotional capacities of people, this is not the manner of the Kingdom of God. This is a Kingdom that involves perception, discernment, understanding, and other facets of thought – like consideration, contemplation, and reasoning. We now will be exposed to one facet of this miracle that moved the people to give glory to God.

ABOVE FORTY YEARS OLD

“For the man was above forty years old . . .” Other versions read, *“over forty years old,”* ^{NKJV} *“more than forty years old,”* ^{RSV} and *“a man who had been lame for more than forty years.”* ^{NLT}

The age of the man is important because he had been *“lame from his mother’s womb”* – and everyone knew it (Acts 3:1,16). **Thus his age also defined the length of his affliction – “more than forty years.”** ^{NRSV} Here was an uninterrupted malady that had gripped the man for over four decades. There had to be a remarkable level of physical deterioration in his legs and ankles, so that no recovery could be expected from natural resources. **As with the miracles of our blessed Lord, this man was in a helpless state.** The work could only be accounted for by working of the Lord.

It is not that a miracle wrought on a child is any less a marvelous work of God. **It takes no more power to raise the twelve year of daughter of Jairus, than to raise the grown man Lazarus who had**

been in the grave for four days. It is only in the minds of men that duration seems to diminish possibilities. However, this work was done to get the attention of men, and to elevate their thoughts to a point where they could see God alone was capable of doing such a work.

The Necessity of Better Things

When God receives credit for things than can be done through natural means, the glory is not great. In our time, a lot is associated with the Lord that is not unique, to say the least. Perhaps it is straightening out one’s marriage or finances, or getting a child off the streets to be more productive. It may be deliverance from some purported addiction, or enslavement to immorality. Claims to recovery from things like this are also boasted by spiritists, yoga experts, psychiatrists, and doctors of medication and diet.

I must speak with care on this subject, lest I be misunderstood. **Such works were never emphasized in Christ’s miracles, or those of His disciples.** There is no record of Jesus healing a drunk, a sloth, a harlot, a whoremonger, or a talebearer. He is never said to have corrected by means of a miracle a marriage, a financial condition, or a wayward child. That such conditions are a great weight to those having to deal with them cannot be denied. Nor, indeed, am I suggesting that such things should not be taken to the Lord. What I am saying is that these are only symptoms of a more serious problem – being enslaved by Satan. Thus Jesus referred to a woman bowed over for eighteen years as being *“bound”* by Satan (Lk 13:16).

I am not sure that Jesus specializes in providing shortcuts to conditions that can be achieved by mere human discipline and attention. That is why our condition before being in Christ is described as one of absolute hopelessness: *“dead in trespasses and sins,” “no hope,”* and the impossibility of being saved (Eph 2:1,12; Matt 19:26).

There are professing Christians who say that the secret to the spread of

the truth is the conversion of the youth. In our text, the healing of a man who had been lame for over forty years was the means through which 5,000 men believed! **That condition is in stark contrast to such reasoning.** Men tell us it is too difficult to change people who are set in their ways. That is like saying it is more difficult to heal a man who has been lame for forty years than a boy who has been lame for only a few months.

What I am saying is that a mediocre church is quite willing to settle for religious improvement that is, at the best, only slight. God said of Israel’s degenerate priests and prophets, *“They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace”* (Jer 6:14; 8:11). **The result of their activity was only superficial.** Such things will not move men to glorify God, for there are also a myriad of fleshly experts who boast of being able to make slight improvements in the lives of people.



I am not sure that God is glorified through mediocre, average, and usual means. **Something must be done in His name that can be distinguished from other works.** The economy of grace is one of abundance, better, and great.

Better

- ⇨ We are persuaded of *“better things”* (Heb 6:9).
- ⇨ We have a *“better hope”* (Heb 7:19).
- ⇨ Jesus is the Surety of a *“better*

testament” (Heb 7:22).

- ⇒ We have a **“better covenant, which is established upon “better promises”** (Heb 8:6).
- ⇒ The heavens have been cleansed with **“better sacrifices”** (Heb 9:23).
- ⇒ We have in heaven **“a better and an enduring substance”** (Heb 10:34).
- ⇒ We **“desire a better country”** (Heb 11:16).
- ⇒ God has provided **“some better thing for us”** (Heb 11:40).

Abundance

- ⇒ Jesus came that we might **“have life, and have it more abundantly”** (John 10:10).
- ⇒ In Christ we receive **“abundance of grace”** (Rom 5:17).
- ⇒ God is able to do **“exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think”** (Eph 3:20).
- ⇒ The grace of God is **“exceeding abundant with faith and love”** (1 Tim 1:14).
- ⇒ God has shed His Holy Spirit **“abundantly”** on us (Tit 3:6).
- ⇒ We have been begotten through God’s **“abundant mercy”** (1 Pet 1:3).

“Great”

- ⇒ Those in Christ are said to do **“greater works”** (John 14:12).
- ⇒ God loved us with a **“great love”** (Eph 2:4).
- ⇒ We have **“great joy”** (Phil 1:7).
- ⇒ We have been granted a **“great salvation”** (Heb 2:3).
- ⇒ We have a **“great High Priest”** (Heb 4:14).
- ⇒ Jesus is ministering in a **“greater and more perfect tabernacle”** (Heb 9:11).
- ⇒ Our confidence has a **“great recompense of reward”** (Heb 10:35).

- ⇒ God has given us **“exceeding great and precious promises”** (2 Pet 1:4).
- ⇒ **“Greater is He”** that is in us than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).

Exceeding

- ⇒ The New Covenant is described as one that **“exceeds”** in glory (2 Cor 3:9).
- ⇒ Our afflictions work for us a **“far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”** (2 Cor 4:17).
- ⇒ The **“exceeding grace of God”** can be in a person (2 Cor 9:14).
- ⇒ God’s power toward those in Christ is characterized by **“exceeding greatness”** (Eph 1:19).
- ⇒ In accordance with the power that is at work in us, God is able to do **“exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think”** (Eph 3:20).
- ⇒ Our faith can grow **“exceedingly”** (2 Thess 1:3).



All of these extend beyond the circumference of mediocre, ordinary, average, and common. That is because everything about the Kingdom of God is related to the two fundamental aspects of salvation: **deliverance** from the powers of darkness, and **translation** into the kingdom of God’s Son – that is, the Kingdom over which He is presently presiding (Col 1:13). Deliverance from the powers of darkness necessarily involves deliverance from this present evil world (Gal 1:4). **Mediocrity relates more to the realm from which we have been delivered, and has no place in the**

Kingdom into which we have been translated. That is why we are to **“excel to the edifying of the church”** (1 Cor 14:12), and **“abound to every good work”** (2 Cor 9:8).

The works of God invariably have His traits – **that is how an association with Him can be seen in them.** Works that can be accomplished without God ought not to be placed before the people as being from Him. **It will take an extraordinary effort to substantiate that the God of heaven assists men to do what can really be done independently of Him.**

Spiritual Babylon

Spiritual Babylon has perpetrated a false view of God, Christ, and their work. It claims an association with the Lord, but provides no evidence of such an affiliation. **Because this is so dominant, men have grown accustomed to religious deadness and ineffectiveness.** They have now accommodated themselves to claims of conversion that provide no evidence of change, theological positions that do not agree with the truth, and professions of loving Jesus that are not accompanied by obeying His commandments.

At the time of our text, these corruptions had not yet penetrated into the church. Years later Peter warned the saints that false prophets and teachers would be found **“among”** the people of God, and would privately bring in **“damnable heresies”** (2 Pet 2:1). Paul warned of the same intrusion (Acts 20:30). **One of the telling effects of this prophesied invasion of lies is the dominance of religious mediocrity, or averageness.** Jesus referred to the condition as being **“lukewarm,”** and affirmed that it would not be tolerated among His people, all excuses notwithstanding (Rev 3:16).

A MIRACLE OF HEALING SHOWED

“ . . . on whom this miracle of healing was showed.” Other versions read, **“on whom this miracle of healing had been performed,”** NKJV **“who was miraculously healed,”** NIV **“on whom this sign of healing had been performed,”** NRSV **“on whom this act of power was done,”** BBE **“in whom that miraculous cure had been wrought,”** DOUAY **“on whom this miracle of healing was showed,”** GENEVA **“this miracle**

of restoration to health had been performed,^{WEYMOUTH} and *on whom this wonderful cure had been performed.*^{WILLIAMS}

It is especially refreshing to consider it in a time when human strategies and methodologies are being stressed.

This passage is an example of the church at work – or, more accurately, of the church being used by God to do the works He has ordained. This view of the matter is consistently emphasized in Scripture. It is especially refreshing to consider it in a time when human strategies and methodologies are being stressed.

The living testimony standing before the people was one in whom “a miracle of healing” had been “showed.” Some of the translations point our thinking in the wrong direction: i.e. “performed,”^{NKJV/NRSV} and “done.”^{BBE} This tends to place the accent on Peter and John rather than the work itself. The word “showed” comes from the Greek word ἐγγύοναι (e-geg-on-ei). The following is its lexical definition: “to become, so come into existence, begin to be . . . to come to pass, happen . . . to appear in history,”^{THAYER} “come to be, originate . . . to be produced . . . be made, be done, be brought into existence,”^{FRIBERG} “to be created, to come about,”^{LEH} “to be made, created, or done.”^{GINGRICH}

This was a work that was ordained before it took place, and therefore is said to come into being. The Spirit refers to such works in Ephesians 2:10: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath **before ordained** that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). Although, from one point of view, Peter and John did the work, **it was actually God working His will through them.** They were involved because they were suitable vessels, “meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21).

This is an example of the church at work – or, more accurately, of the church being used by God to do the works He has ordained. This view of the matter is consistently emphasized in Scripture.

DIVINITY WORKING IN HUMANITY

This is a wonderful consideration, and opens up some of the remarkable involvements revealed in salvation.

- ⇨ “And what is the exceeding greatness of **His power to us-ward** who believe, **according to the working of his mighty power**” (Eph 1:19).
- ⇨ “And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, **the fulness of Him that filleth all in all**” (Eph 1:22-23).
- ⇨ “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto **good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them**” (Eph 2:10).
- ⇨ “Whereof I was **made a minister**, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me **by the effectual working of His power**” (Eph 3:7).
- ⇨ “Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, **according to the power that worketh in us**” (Eph 3:20).
- ⇨ “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to **the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love**” (Eph 4:16).

⇨ “For **it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure**” (Phil 2:13).

⇨ “Whereunto I also labor, striving according to **His working, which worketh in me mightily**” (Col 1:29).

⇨ “Now the God of peace . . . Make you perfect in every good work that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Heb 13:20-21).

What we have in our text is an example of the above affirmations – God working in and through the members of the body of Christ. This is in perfect accord with the nature of salvation and the revealed characteristics of the Covenant Jesus is presently mediating.

The New Covenant is not an economy of works, but one of God working within His people “to will and to do of His own good pleasure.” **In Christ Jesus men are “joined to the Lord,” so that He can work through them in unprecedented ways.** Because their natures have been changed, the people enter into the work insightfully and joyfully, thereby causing glory to be brought to the Lord.

There is no prophecy of a time when Christ, by intent, will cease working in His church. The prophets did not associate the New Covenant with a beginning alone. In fact, the description of the covenant is, by its very nature, something that is ongoing.

- ⇨ God putting His laws into the mind.
- ⇨ God writing His laws into the heart.
- ⇨ God being to the people “a God.”
- ⇨ The people being to God “a people.”
- ⇨ Every one within the covenant, from the least to the greatest, knows God.
- ⇨ God is “merciful to their unrighteousnesses.”
- ⇨ God remembers their sins “no more.”

Exactly what is there about that covenant that is temporal, limited to a beginning, or destined to cease before the end of the world? Has it not been ratified as an “everlasting covenant” (Heb 13:20)?

The sophist will ask what this has to do with our text. It has much to do with it. **Our text reveals a working that is within the framework of the New Covenant.** If that is not the case, then we have a temporary agenda that has been

adopted. I would consider such a postulate to be heretical from beginning to end!

In this text, Jesus is working as the Savior of the world. He is doing the

will of the Father through those who have been reconciled to God and joined to Him through the Holy Spirit. He is working for the glory of God, and in strict concert with His Father's revealed eternal purpose.

CONCLUSION

We have been exposed to the hostilities of corrupt religion. Such is never indifferent to the truth when powerfully and insightfully delivered. **Further, because false religion always tends to institutionalization, it cannot tolerate those who proclaim the Divine emphasis, and do works that are consonant with the salvation of God.** This circumstance is owing to the nature of truth, as well as that of the lie. What is true can **never** be merged with what is not true. What flows out from God's eternal purpose **cannot** blend with the

purposes of men. There is a hostility between what is false and what is true, and it **cannot** be avoided.

As soon as men begin to adjust their message to make the lie and those who embrace it more tolerable, they move into the **unacceptable** category. If they choose to obey men they at once cease to obey God. If they choose to please men, they immediately begin to displease God. If the world and its citizens become their focus, God can no longer be seen or understood. These are

the stark realities of the case. Peter and John knew these things, and therefore refused to give heed to the Temple authorities. In so doing, they have set the standard for all Kingdom labors. Paul stated it well when he wrote, "*For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ*" (Gal 1:10). That is something to be regarded with the utmost sobriety! This is particularly true when we are considering religious men who seek to suppress the truth of God.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 1/5/2007. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The Nineteenth lesson will cover verses 23 through 32 of the fourth chapter: "THE CHURCH PRAYS FOR BOLDNESS." Being threatened by the religious authorities – the same ones who "killed the Prince of life," Peter and John go straight to the brethren. Together, they pray for boldness to speak God's word. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

*The Blakely Family: Given, June, Benjamin, and Eva
406 South Sergeant Street, Joplin, MO 64801*

A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.

Telephone: (417) 782-3063, Email: Given (GivenB@aol.com) June: (JuneE01@aol.com)

ADAH's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/adah.htm> -- EVA's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/Eva.htm>

Benjamin (Bensvison@aol.com), Eva (Evablakely@aol.com)
Adah Hutchcraft (adahhutchcraft@hotmail.com), Jason Hutchcraft (preacherhutch@heatoncc.org)

WORD OF TRUTH Website: <http://wotruth.com>

Peter again speaks fearlessly before the religious authorities, having no fear of men – by Given O. Blakely

WORD OF TRUTH FELLOWSHIP Website: <http://wotruth.com/wotf/wotindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Hebrews: <http://wotruth.com/hebindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Revelation: <http://wotruth.com/revelationindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on First John: <http://wotruth.com/1stjohnindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>

COMMENTARY on Daniel: <http://wotruth.com/Daniel.htm>

COMMENTARY on Colossians: <http://wotruth.com/Colossians.htm>

COMMENTARY on Second Corinthians: <http://wotruth.com/2Corinthians.htm>

COMMENTARY on Acts: <http://wotruth.com/Acts.htm>

REMEMBER OUR WATCH-NIGHT SERVICE

Lord's Day evening, 12/31/2006, we will be crossing together the divide between 2006 and 2007. Our annual watch-night service will begin at 8:00 PM, and continue through the entrance of the New Year at midnight. A variety of expressions will take place, including singing, testimonies, reports of fellowship activities, and holy proclamations. We will conclude the sharing part of our meeting shortly before 11:30 PM, and will begin praying in the New Year. In this way we want to give thanks for the good things we have enjoyed during 2006 – particularly as they regard growing up into Christ in all things, being employed in the speaking of the truth, and being used in ministries among ourselves and outside our immediate fellowship. We also desire to sanctify, or set apart, the coming year to the Lord. We earnestly want it to be a year of confirmed growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We also want to be more proficient in speaking the truth in love, serving the Lord with excellence, ministering to the people of God, and rescuing those in the quagmire of iniquity. During the coming year we want to get further from the world and closer to heaven. We aim to put off the old man, and put on the new man – crucify the flesh, and nourish and culture that which is born of God. We desire for our assemblies to be a blessing to God, and honoring to Jesus Christ.