

Fearing God, Not Man

Introduction

In our text today, Luke informs us that this is the second attempt of the leaders in Israel to rid themselves of the Apostles and their teaching. They threaten the Apostles saying, [“We strictly charged you not to teach in this name”](#) (v. 28) referring to Jesus Christ and the resurrection. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection or Jesus and thought they were in control instead of God.

Why do the Jewish leaders, both the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who were always at odds with each other, become so united and so desperate in trying to see everything about Jesus erased from existence? As we learned through the Gospel of Luke, the Jewish leaders had the desire to be looked up to, to be in charge, to have the power to shape the nation. They prayed long prayers and wore long robes for the purpose of notoriety. If they could be seen as the authority when it came to religion, then they could make up the rules for Israel. This would enable them to enslave the people with multitudes of their man-made laws and statutes. By doing so, they thought they could insure their own prosperity and fame. Their fame is preserved in the Bible but not the fame they had wanted. Having control and making up a multitude laws in an effort to control the populace sounds like what is currently going on in our own government. The Sadducees sought fame and history has determined their fame as it has leaders of countries in the past – their desire for immortality in history proved in the end their self-serving evil intentions.

Now, these Apostles come along with a new way to relationship with God that completely pulls the rug out from under these leaders. So, to maintain their authority,

the leaders of Israel must rid the country of this teaching, to maintain control they had to stop these followers of the new “Way”, those who believe in Jesus as the Messiah, so they again command the Apostles to stop and they think they had the power to do so. It is the same, for the USA leadership to maintain their authority they must also control through multitudes of laws and call evil good and good evil, they desire to silence the remnant church. Like the early church the remnant church today must stand for God’s truth and this will bring persecution.

The Prime Directive we observe in today’s passage and must hold onto tightly is; **when men forbid what God has commanded or command what God has forbidden, believers have but one option: we must obey God rather than men!**

Allegiance To God (vs. 17-21)

No matter what authorities we may have in this life, whether it is our government, parents, teachers, bosses, or any other human authority, we must realize that all true authority belongs to God and we must obey Him over all others. Even though there may be some earthly powers that seems to be the authority, always remember the true authority is always God. This passage explains to us that when earthly power and heavenly power are in conflict, our allegiance must be to God.

Please open your Bible to Acts chapter 5, verse 17 and follow as I read God’s Word, “**But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy** ¹⁸ **they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.** ¹⁹ **But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said,** ²⁰ **“Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.”** ²¹ **And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.”** The main issue here is that the Sadducees’ authority is being severely challenged. That is why Luke tells us that they were “**filled with jealousy**”. The Apostles were continuing to disobey the Sadducees and

preach Jesus Christ, healing in His name and it was the Apostles who were getting more and more popular with the people and a result of the gospel preached the number of disciples was rapidly increasing in and around the city. The long-held power structure is being challenged and shaken.

To help curb the opinion of the people toward the Apostles, the Sadducees have them arrested publicly and placed in a public prison. It was their purpose in the arrest to make sure everyone knew they had been arrested so that public opinion would turn against the Apostles. In reality, these Jewish leaders were nothing more than cheap politicians who thrive on popularity and polls. It is interesting how history repeats itself when mankind does not learn from history and focus on God. We see this power seeking and manipulative behavior in our own country?

The Sadducees sought power and control and yet they disappear from power in 70 A.D., all their efforts could not secure their future, God's plans cannot be thwarted by men. In fact, it would be this public arrest that would come back on the Sadducees to haunt them. What they had intended to use to humiliate the Apostles actually worked to humiliate themselves. The Sadducees were wrong about a number of things, they did not believe in the existence of angels. They taught that one was a fool who believed that God had appointed heavenly beings as His messengers. We must not miss the fact that it was an angel who sprung the Apostles from prison. The angel freed the Apostles and gave them God's message of ["Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life."](#) (v. 20) The Sadducees were locked into the Torah, the first five books of the Bible and discounted everything else of the Scriptures. Unlike the Pharisees, they denied the immortality of the soul and the bodily resurrection after death. The resurrection of Jesus turned their man-made teaching upside down. When one reads the history of religions, the church and denominations it becomes apparent that many were started by men seeking power for themselves and they made-up laws, rules or doctrines to justify this. However, history

always exposes their false efforts because the truth of God cannot be overridden by man. Today, 2000 years later history exposes the Sadducees as false. By God's truth we observe the false Sadducees or leaders in our own time, there are false leaders, both political leaders and those within what is labeled as Christian. So, my beloved, let me be crystal clear, hear these words; our sovereign God accomplishes His purposes again and again, no matter who looks to have authority, God always has ultimate authority. May we be as the Apostles, who, without regard of cost, were more concerned about God's truth and glory than what the Jewish rulers were concerned about. They looked to God and not the power the leaders thought they had over the Apostles. It was God's will they were freed to preach the saving Gospel to the lost. As we see here in Acts and I hope we believe also, there is great freedom when one gives their allegiance to God and does not let the temporary things of the world or current leaders have any power over them.

The Sadducees tried, just like many men of power throughout history, to silence the preaching of the Gospel, but God always prevails; God sends His angel to free them and instructs the Apostles, [“Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.”](#) Let me ask you, the beloved of God, have you let the world invade your life and if so, does it keep you from speaking [“to the people all the words of this Life”](#)? Find freedom, find fulfillment, find peace and joy – live for God and share the Gospel!

As we study this passage let me ask, whose authority is now drawn into question? The Sadducees of course. Not only were the Apostles freed by an angel, whom the Sadducees denied existed, but no doubt, these free disciples were also preaching the resurrection, which they also denied. Do you see, my brothers and sisters that God is having the last Word. Study human history up to this very day and God always has the last word.

To fear God brings freedom and blessing. The Apostles are a perfect example of a group of men who care more about what God wants than anything else. They were driven by a deep-seated desire to please God rather than men. They did what was right in God's eyes regardless of what or who wanted something else and they experienced freedom. There is great freedom when we fear God. So, let me ask, how free are you?

The Bondage of Fear (vs. 21-26)

The Sadducees on the other hand, were not motivated by a fear of God but by the fear of man. Their concern at this point was not to do what was right but to do their own will and try their best to keep the people happy as they controlled them because they feared them. Read with me at verse 21, “Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.”²² But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported,²³ ‘We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.’²⁴ Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to.²⁵ And someone came and told them, ‘Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.’²⁶ Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.” The Sadducees had a preoccupation with authority and popularity. When the people began turning to Christ and away from their laws and teachings - this is when trouble began. Now, all the Sanhedrin are called to council to make a quick ruling. The Sadducees have what we would call “a conflict of interest” because they serve as the judge and jury in the case of the Sadducees vs. the Apostles.

Here is another bit of irony Luke gives us; everyone has been called in for a quick trial with a predetermined guilty charge, but no one can find those they are to convict. They are not in the prison where they were the night before. I can just imagine the anger and embarrassment of those Jewish rulers. In our day, the media is trying to control how the people perceive what is going on in our world and yet, the truth has a way of escaping and embarrassing them and the political leaders from all over the world. This why there is freedom in seeking the truth of God and not man's truth.

So, the Sadducees are frustrated and trying to figure out what is going on when in comes the report, [“Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.”](#) Then Luke reports that the captain of the temple guard returns to where the Apostles are teaching and brings them in. He was the one who was responsible for locking them up in the first place. Now he must go and round them up again because they are doing just what they were commanded **not** to do; the council of Sadducees [“warned them to speak no more to anyone in Jesus’ name.”](#) (Acts 4:17)

Because of the fear that the people might help resist their arrest, the captain gently persuaded the Apostles to come in for their hearing. It is clear that none of the events that have unfolded or will unfold come about because it is the right thing. They are not arrested and commanded to be silent because it is the right thing to do but because they, like Jesus before them, are simply bad for business and hard on the general economy of the Temple. They are teaching in the Temple but not the normal Temple instructions, they are teaching about the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are teaching that it is only through Christ and no one else that man may be saved.

The Jewish leaders do what they do, the way they do it - because they are afraid of the people and attempt to control the people. They are not driven by the fear of God but by the fear of man. Even though the disciples, who feared God, had been arrested and placed into prison, they were freer than those who were enslaved by the fear of man. God would, in fact, free them by His angel and give them further instructions. How quickly did they obey God's angel? They went directly and **“entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.”** (Acts 5:21) I thought about how quickly do I obey God and realize if I let the world influence me it negatively effects my obedience.

We see a clear contrast in this text; the Apostles feared God and not man. On the other hand, the leaders of Israel feared man and not God.

Obedience To God (vs. 27-32)

In the final section of this passage, we observe Peter with the Apostles and the failed attempt of the Sadducees. Reading at verse 27, **“And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them,**
²⁸ **saying, ‘We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.’**
²⁹ **But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men.** ³⁰ **The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.** ³¹ **God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.** ³² **And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.’”**

Notice the conviction of Peter and the Apostles in verse 29, **“We must obey God rather than men.”** What is Peter saying? You are but men and we will not listen to you for you do not fear God. We are commanded by God, not men, so we will not stop teaching and we will not stop filling this city with the Good News of Jesus

Christ. You are in complete opposition to what God commanded us to do and we will not listen to you but we will listen to God. But Peter does not stop here. He looks the council of the Sadducees in the eye and continues, “*The God of our fathers (Peter is speaking of the God of our fathers or the God of Israel whom the Sadducees should know and be obeying and glorifying) raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.*”³¹ *God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.*” Peter is saying, not only are you corrupt in your leadership but you have blood on your hands for the murder of God’s Son, the Messiah. Pretty bold when the Sadducees could have them executed or at least the Sadducees thought they could.

Another way in which their credibility was brought into question was when they themselves realized that to teach about the cross and the resurrection of Jesus was to point their fingers at themselves, because they were guilty of murdering Jesus. All the signs and wonders and all the great teaching of the Apostles solidified their authority given by God and greatly weakened the Jewish leaders’ authority. Their teaching was not authenticated with miracles or teaching the Word of God correctly or caring for the people’s souls. Even the greatest aspect of the Apostle’s’ teaching, namely the resurrection of Jesus, pointed to and condemned the Jewish leadership because they killed Jesus.

Luke points out another contrast. The religious leaders arrest the Apostles, but God releases them. The Sadducees desire control and yet have none and are in fact, working against God. Peter again shows this contrast to the Sadducees as he explains that they were responsible for the murder of Jesus. They thought they were in control but in truth, it was God, who is in control of everything, even the bringing Jesus back to life. Over and over again it should have been very evident that what they were doing was evil and what God was doing was completely different from their efforts to control. God’s way was not what they had been teaching.

Peter explains another key difference in verse 32, “we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” This is a key difference; he explains how the Holy Spirit, given by God to the Apostles worked together by the power of God. This is quite different from the Sadducees who do not have the Holy Spirit and are spiritually dead.

Who is in control? God tells the Apostles to preach the message of life and the Jews tell them to be quiet. God commands the Apostles to preach and the Jews commands them to be silent. The result is the Apostles preach the Gospel and Jerusalem is filled with the teachings and hope of Jesus and many are saved to eternal life while the Sadducees are condemned.

Whom Do We Fear?

The Bible is absolutely filled with examples of those who suffered from the fear of man and yet, the Sadducees did not learn from the very prophets God. It is God who called and who gave the people of Israel His Words through the prophets. Unfortunately, men thought they knew better than God and added many man-made laws in an effort to cause the people to fear man.

This brought to my mind King Saul who thought he obeyed God even in his disobedience. Let me take us to 1 Samuel chapter 15 where we read the conversation between the prophet Samuel and King Saul. ¹⁷“Samuel said, ‘**Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel.**’ ¹⁸ And the LORD sent you on a mission and said, ‘Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ ¹⁹ **Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?’** ²⁰ And Saul said to Samuel, ‘**I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have**

devoted the Amalekites to destruction. *Saul is beginning to realize he disobeyed the Lord so he now places the blame on the people.* ²¹ But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.’ ²² And Samuel said, ‘Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? **Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.**’ ²³ For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. **Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.**’ ²⁴ Saul said to Samuel, ‘I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because **I feared the people and obeyed their voice.**’ ²⁵ Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the LORD.’ ²⁶ And Samuel said to Saul, ‘I will not return with you. For **you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.**’” (1 Samuel 15:17-26) That’s just one example of many we could look to. The key is Saul did not fear God or he would have obeyed God. Instead, who did he fear? He told Samuel, “**I feared the people and obeyed their voice.**” My beloved, how we live our lives demonstrates to all - whom we fear and what we believe.

Let me give just one more example out of the New Testament found in John’s Gospel account in chapter 12. Jesus had been teaching the truth of God and validated His authority given by God with miracles. Beginning at verse 36, “**When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.**” ³⁷ **Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,** ³⁸ so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ‘**Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?**’ ³⁹ Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, ⁴⁰ ‘He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.’ ⁴¹ Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory

(meaning Jesus) and spoke of him. ⁴² Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in Jesus, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ **for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.**” (John 12:36-43) These are just two of a number of bad examples from the Bible that resulted with the people loving the world and listening to men instead of God. Jesus, as the God-Man gave us the example of fearing God and not fearing man. The Apostles followed Jesus’ example and feared God, not man. My beloved what will we fear? What is one of the greatest hinderance, as believers, in today’s world to our being consistently obedient to God? To answer this question let me take us to Matthew chapter 22, beginning at verse 15, “**Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle Jesus in his words.**” ¹⁶ **And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, ‘Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances.’**” My beloved, are you swayed by the appearances and opinions of other people; political leaders, entertainers, business leaders or pastors who do not follow the Word of God? Do you act based on what you perceive, like King Saul? The only right path is to live in obedience to the Word of God.

My beloved, if the opinions of people drive your behavior you will never consistently obey God, because sometimes God’s will is not popular. If you are worried about what others think of you, you will never fully obey God. Unfortunately, I have often seen the fear of man even with pastors. All they do is try to figure out who will be offended with each decision they make and preach in a way to not offend and by doing this they offend God.

Let me ask, what drives your actions? Peer Pressure? Are you only a confessed Christian depending on the crowd you are with? Let me close by reading Proverbs 29, ²⁵ “**The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.**” ²⁶ Many

seek the face of a ruler, but **it is from the LORD that a man gets justice.** ²⁷ An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous, but **one whose way is straight is an abomination to the wicked.**” My beloved, let me hear you – God or man? What say you? Do you say with me - we will obey God and not fear man!