

Who's the Boss?

Devotional

One of my earliest memories comes from when I was about two or three years old. We lived in an apartment in Los Angeles. My parents had instilled in me that I was never to go into anyone's house unless they were with me. A neighbor named Fanny offered me an Indian hat made up of different colored feathers. But to get the hat, she wanted me to go into her house. I stood outside and loudly scolded her, "No, Fanny, I will not go into your house!"

Every parent wants to instill unquestioning obedience into his child. His safety and very life may depend on it. And God wants to instill the same kind of obedience, no matter what, into His children. Sometimes obeying God will not bring us into a place of safety, but rather, into danger and harm. But, as soldiers of the cross, we must be ready and willing to obey our Commander without question or complaint.

Our text follows on the story of two disobedient people whom God struck dead as a warning to the early church against the deadly sin of hypocrisy. Verses 12–16 show the church recovering from that frightening incident, reporting both the atmosphere in the church and in the surrounding community. No hypocrites dared to join them, for fear of being struck dead! And yet the Lord was adding many more—Luke has stopped counting—to the church. And the apostles were performing extraordinary miracles of healing and deliverance.

It is in this context of great power and popularity that the Jewish leaders rose up against the apostles, putting them in prison. But the Lord sent an angel to deliver them, and in so doing shows us the theme of this story (5:20): "Go your way, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life." That command was sure to get them into big trouble! They had just been arrested, but now they are to go right back into the most conspicuous place of all and continue proclaiming the gospel. But they didn't question the command. They didn't even go out for breakfast first. They obeyed (5:21), leading to their arrest again. When the high priest confronted them for disobeying their earlier commands, filling Jerusalem with their teaching (5:28), Peter again states the theme (5:29): "We must obey God rather than men." Peter preaches a short sermon to the Sanhedrin, emphasizing again the issue of obedience (5:32).

When the high priest and his cronies wanted to kill the apostles, Gamaliel intervened, resulting in their being flogged and ordered again to speak no more in the name of Jesus (5:40). So what did the apostles do? "Every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (5:42)! They were unstoppable in their obedience to God, especially on the matter of proclaiming the good news about Jesus. Thus, the lesson for us is, **No matter what, we must obey God by proclaiming and teaching that Jesus Christ is the risen Savior and Lord.**¹

¹ Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-15-obeying-god-no-matter-what-acts-512-42>

Open it

1. What was your first job? How would you describe your first boss?

Read it

Acts 5:12-42

Explore it

2. What was the response to Christianity in Jerusalem?
 3. What did the religious leaders do in response to the growth of the church?
 4. What miracle did the angel perform?
 5. What did the religious leaders tell the apostles not to do?
 6. Who brought some wisdom and clarity that tempered the religious leaders' response?
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Apply it

WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU MAKES YOU STRONGER

We have learned that the Spirit-filled church is unified, magnified, and multiplied. Satan wants to divide the church, disgrace the church, and decrease the church, and he will do it, if we let him. But the church described here completely triumphed over the attacks of Satan! The people were still unified (Acts 5: 12), magnified (v. 13), and multiplied (v. 14).²

7. In our previous passage we saw the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. How does sin within the church affect a church's evangelistic efforts?
8. How could the sin of Ananias and Sapphira lead to division and a decrease in the church membership? What can a church do to keep these things from happening when sin jeopardizes its health?

THE CHURCH: NO WOMEN ALLOWED...WRONG!!!

Multitudes were added to the Lord, and for the first time, Luke mentions the salvation of women. Both in his gospel and in Acts, Luke has a great deal to say about women and their relationship to Christ and the church. There are at least a dozen references in Acts to women, as Luke shows the key role women played in the apostolic church. This is a remarkable thing when you consider the general position of women in the culture of that day (see Galatians 3: 26–28).³

9. What would these new female converts bring to the church? Why is it so important that a church have a good balance of both men and women?
10. In what ways can church leadership seek to minister to the unique spiritual needs of the women under their care?

² Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Dynamic (Acts 1-12) (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 82). David C. Cook. Kindle Edition.

³ Ibid.

ALL I NEED IS A MIRACLE

Tremendous healing ministry—restricted only by the presence of Peter and the apostles—healing only took place in their presence; healing each and every one—no failures, no lack of power; look how many lives were being touched—each person healed had his own network of relatives and friends—that's how the gospel should spread so effectively—each person whose life is transformed has his own network of relatives and friends and associates (school mates, fellow workers, neighbors, etc.).⁴

11. In what ways would a miracle impact a person and his family more than a sermon?

12. The impact of these miraculous healings had quite an effect on the people of Jerusalem. Why would the apostles bother with preaching when they could have dedicated themselves solely to a healing ministry?

John MacArthur says:

The streets of Jerusalem were an incredible sight. Everywhere there were beds occupied by rich and poor alike, all waiting for the apostles to move through town. The inhabitants of Jerusalem actually believed that Peter's shadow could heal. Some ancient peoples believed that a man's shadow carried his influence, so parents would place their children into the shadow of great men and snatch them away from the shadow of someone they disliked. The text doesn't say that Peter's shadow healed anyone, only that the people believed so. Their actions display a tremendous respect for Peter. Great miracles indeed occurred.⁵

13. Why are miracles not so commonplace today? How do we know we aren't missing out on something by not seeking them out more frequently?

While God obviously can do mighty miracles in our day if He so chooses (and He often does such miracles on the frontiers of the gospel), to argue that it is His will to do them as a common occurrence is to ignore the overall teaching of God's Word. Many fail to note that while the apostles performed many great miracles, and the angel miraculously delivered them from prison, the angel did not spare them from being flogged. (There

⁴ Commentary on Acts by Paul Apple found @ <http://bibleoutlines.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/acts.pdf>

⁵ Ibid.

is a bit of humor here: since the Sadducees did not believe in angels, the Lord sent one to deliver the apostles! God did not deliver James (12:2) or Paul from prison (Acts 24:27) or spare them and most of the other apostles from martyrdom. Paul did not heal Trophimus (2 Timothy 4:20) or tell Timothy to claim healing by faith for his frequent stomach problems (1 Timothy 5:23).⁶

14. While Acts is filled with miracles, they seem to become less frequent as the New Testament continues on. What important things do we learn when miracles don't come our way?

15. How do we perceive the modern healing movement that we see on television? What things from our text seem absent from these modern examples?

WE'VE GOT OUR EYES ON YOU

The high priest and his associates had three reasons for arresting the apostles (This time it was all of the apostles.) and bringing them to trial.

To begin with, Peter and John had not obeyed the official orders to stop preaching in the name of Jesus Christ. They were guilty of defying the law of the nation.

Second, the witness of the church was refuting the doctrines held by the Sadducees, giving every evidence that Jesus Christ was alive.

Third, the religious leaders were filled with envy ("indignation") at the great success of these untrained and unauthorized men (see Matthew 27:18; Acts 13:45). The traditions of the fathers had not attracted that much attention or gained that many followers in such a short time. It is amazing how much envy can be hidden under the disguise of "defending the faith."⁷

16. What things could have made the religious leaders envious of the apostles? How can our envy "color our motives" today?

⁶ Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-15-obeying-god-no-matter-what-acts-512-42>

⁷ Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Dynamic (Acts 1-12) (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 90). David C. Cook. Kindle Edition.

17. How would the miraculous release of the apostles make the religious leaders feel? What might be some of the reasons that the angel would tell them to go to the temple and keep preaching?

The Bible commands us as Christians to be subject to governing authorities (Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 2:13–14), even when these authorities are evil people. But if the governing authorities command us to do something that would be disobedient to God, then we must obey God, even if it results in our being punished. Christians disagree over civil disobedience on the matter of abortion. While it is evil for our government to permit abortion, and we should pray and work to see the evil laws overturned, the government is not forcing us to abort our children (as the Chinese government does). If it came to that, we then should disobey the government. If the government said that we could not meet as Christians or teach what the Bible says about homosexuality, abortion, or other moral issues, we must disobey the government.

Thus, obedient Christians will fear the Lord's holiness. They will know His power through the Holy Spirit. They will obey Him above all other authorities.⁸

18. What criteria should be met before we pursue civil disobedience? What should this disobedience look like?

How can such rebellion against ungodly laws advance the gospel's work?

If you've read the mob scenes that led to the condemnation of Jesus, you're not surprised at the explosion of rage that erupted against the Twelve witnesses. Old men in priestly robes leaped to their feet and brandished angry fists. A cacophony of bitter voices demanded death to the Twelve. If not restrained, some would have gladly spilled their blood right there on the pavement in the Hall of Hewn Stone. Into the midst of the near insanity, God sent a solitary voice of authority and reason. The man in the white hat, unexpected ally and all around cool dude was a Pharisee, known as "Rabban Gamaliel" or "Gamaliel the Elder," one of Israel's most respected teachers. Fellow teachers called him "the Beauty of the Law." His most famous student was Saul of Tarsus—the apostle Paul—(see Acts 22: 3). He was, as far as we know, not a Christian, but God used him to rescue his people from a massacre.

⁸ Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-15-obeying-god-no-matter-what-acts-512-42>

Gamaliel counseled the Sanhedrin to stop bugging the Christians. If their movement wasn't from God, it would fail. If it was from God, fighting Christians would be fighting God—a really stupid thing to do! It was just common, clod-kicking horse sense. And God used it to keep his ambassadors from becoming guests of honor at a first-century necktie party!⁹

19. What made Gamaliel's words wise? What lessons can we as Christians glean from them when we are tempted with envy of others?

Even though Gamaliel's intervention averted a lynching, the punishment inflicted on the Twelve was harsh—**thirty-nine lashes with a leather whip**. As they emerged from the Hall of Hewn Stone, their backs were bloody but their hearts were full. They'd stared death in the face and demonstrated their loyalty to Jesus. Jesus told His followers to expect mistreatment by the religious establishment (Luke 21:12). They'd shared Christ's disgrace. That was reason enough for celebration! **The disciples responded to this warning not to speak in Jesus's name as they had responded to the first one—with quiet defiance**. Before the bruises healed they were back teaching in the temple court and from house to house. Jerusalem was being saturated with the good news about Jesus the Messiah.¹⁰

20. In the first part of this lesson we saw God rescue people from all kinds of troubles by healing them from their afflictions. What good would come from the apostles' taking a beating for Jesus?

What lessons do you take away from their response to such harsh treatment?

⁹ Girard, Robert C., *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 1416-1425). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Note: This study guide was compiled and questions written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.org/smallgroup