

THE ONCE AND FUTURE CHURCH

#8: If It is from God

March 18-20, 2006

²⁵Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” ²⁶At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. ²⁷The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.” ²⁹Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings! ³⁰The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. ³¹God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. ³²We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” ³³When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. ³⁴But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. ³⁵Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. ³⁶Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. ³⁷After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. ³⁸Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. ³⁹But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.” ⁴⁰His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴²Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

Acts 5:25-42 TNIV

Introduction: When a movement is of God, nothing can stop it. This both obligates and frees us: we are obligated to listen closely to God and freed from judging what others are doing in Jesus’ name. Like those of the early church, we are called to complete commitment, rejoicing even to suffer disgrace for Jesus’ name.

- I. A Little Background
 - A. The church was growing rapidly as many signs and wonders were demonstrated by the Apostles.
 - B. Many were being healed as a result of the church’s ministry.
 - C. The Jewish religious officials felt increasingly threatened by, and jealous of Jesus’ followers.
 - D. Persecution of the church was increasing.
 - E. The Apostles were imprisoned for teaching the resurrection of Jesus in the temple, but the Holy Spirit “sprung” them.
- II. A Simple Message
 - A. Jesus was crucified, but God raised him from the dead.

Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. *1 Corinthians 1:22-24*
 - B. Jesus is exalted to the right hand of God as both Leader and Redeemer (Lord and Savior) to reign forever.
 - C. The purpose of God’s incarnation in the human form of Jesus is forgiveness of sins and life-change for sinners.
 - D. Jesus’ followers are his obedient witnesses and cannot submit to human attempts to quiet them.
- III. A Masterful Plan
 - A. When the religious leaders wanted to put the Apostles to death, a respected Pharisee named Gamaliel intervened.
 1. He pointed out that others had claimed to be Messiah, but their movements had not outlived them.
 2. He pointed out that only religious movements of divine origin ultimately succeeded.
 3. He pointed out that nothing could stop a real movement of God’s Spirit.
 - B. Gamaliel was key to God’s growth plan for His church, as the Pharisee was Paul’s teacher and mentor. (Acts 22:3)
 - C. Later, God would use persecution to scatter the seed of the church, but first he used it to purify the seed as Christ’s followers suffered disgrace for “the Name.”
 - D. The followers of Jesus never stopped proclaiming the good news that Jesus was the world’s savior.
 - E. These patterns are consistent through the history of the church even until today!

Conclusion: Even before we are aware of His plan, God is always working to fulfill it. He does not always work as we would choose, sometimes using suffering for His purposes, but He always works. If we stick to the simple yet profound message of salvation in Jesus and are faithful witnesses, God will do the rest!