

Irony of Leadership: The Sanhedrin, the leaders of Israel, have the authority to punish the apostles, but refuse to do so out of fear of losing the esteem of the people. The apostles, who have no political power, demonstrate God-fearing courage and boldness and dedication to Truth. They appear here as the true leaders of Israel, bearing witness to the Truth boldly and fearlessly, regardless of the costs. “Although they are outside the religious power structure, they are the ones to seek to obey God (vv19-20) and through whom God is praised (v21).” (B.R. Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p94)

Yet, the gospel places everyone in untenable positions. To receive Jesus as Lord and Savior means that you cannot rule your own life, you cannot depend upon your own righteousness, and you rejoice in these things and willingly do so. To reject the gospel of Jesus Christ means you cannot acknowledge Truth, it must be suppressed and denied against the facts. You must do so. The Sanhedrin saw the healed man standing there and had nothing to say in opposition. They saw the people glorifying God, something which they should have rejoiced to see. Yet, they were seeking to punish the men by whose agency these things occurred. Why? They could not stomach the claim that it was Jesus who did it. They could not accept that He is the chief cornerstone and that all their efforts and righteousness were worthless. They could not deny their own power and their own honor and submit to Jesus, whom they had killed. So, they suppressed the clear interpretation of the facts and sought to silence the message by force, threat, and coercion.

The gospel puts every man in an untenable position, where someone’s power has to go: yours or Jesus’s. The gospel will not bear both.

1. Untenable Honesty: To Reject the Gospel Means You Must Deny the Truth

- a. They had executed Jesus for claiming to be the Messiah
 - i. Now his followers, whom they recognized, were claiming that He had been raised from the dead and had supreme authority over all as the only source and means of salvation and shalom
- b. And, the evidence before them was clear
 - i. The revelation of this authority, and thereby the claim of His resurrection, was that a 40-year-old man, whom they and the people also knew, was crippled his entire life and now, as Luke says, “was standing before them, having been healed”
 1. Which means that this man immediately went from being unwillingly constrained by his disability for 40 years to being healed and then willingly constrained by his affection for Jesus and his people in his association with them even unto jail and the possibility of execution. He was no safer than them in this trial, for he stood by them, with them, and for them in it.
 2. Note the immediacy of conviction in the heart and behavior of this man. The newly freed believer in Jesus Christ is often the most convicted and courageous to proclaim the name by which he is saved. The evidence of his salvation, standing there, and the praise which he offers up to God *in the name of Jesus* leads him to remain there in the face of persecution.
- c. Yet, they denied the interpretation of the clear evidence
 - i. People do this all the time, as Paul says, ‘men suppress the truth in unrighteousness because they claim to be wise and exchange the glory of the immortal God for images in the forms of created things’ (summary)
 1. Romans 1:18-22
 - ii. Doctrine of Pervasive Depravity of Humanity
 1. The preeminent evidence of human depravity is history.
 2. Yet, people will still declare that Mankind is basically good
 - iii. Doctrine of Creation
 1. Life spontaneously coming from non-life has never been observed, yet it is the foundational explanation for the naturalistic view of Reality
 2. “Somebody from outside has been in this room.” (J. Warner Wallace)

- d. The gospel activity and preaching has put the opponents of the gospel into a very untenable position, where they cannot deny the truth of the gospel claims, but to admit means that all their righteousness, their “having it togetherness”, must come undone
 - e. Though it is clear that a great exercise of authority has been expressed through this Jesus, the very fact that the one whom they executed and cast aside was the agent of such power and authority was absolutely unpalatable to them and must be silenced.
 - i. The unpalatability of the gospel claim is the reason which it is rejected...every time. It is not because it is not verifiable or because it is not reasonable or apparent.
 - 1. The doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus is historically verifiable, but it is not believed because of its implications.
 - a. If Jesus rose from the dead, He alone can rescue me. I have no power. He has all power. Such power and authority is what leads to rejection.
 - 2. Morgan Freeman’s show on the National Geographic channel and the discussion of evil. Freeman, after hearing the doctrine of original sin by a pastor, still claimed that the Christian doctrine was “God and the Devil were battling it out”, which was not the position at all. The position was that man is sinful to the very core and must be rescued from outside, all as an act of God, not of man. This inability of man was simply unfathomable by Mr. Freeman.
 - ii. Many people reject the Jesus revealed in the New Testament because they don’t like the interpretations of those facts
 - 1. “Yes, Jesus existed, but he was a self-actualized sage, like others. This miraculous exclusive stuff was made up by the Church.”
 - a. Thus, we can reinterpret the facts to make Jesus empower us, rather than have to exclusively depend upon Him for *everything*
 - 2. “We can’t believe the Bible because *it teaches things that we know aren’t morally defensible* anymore.”
 - a. This is an interpretation of the facts as a moral outrage
 - b. Yet, is it possible that the person is misinterpreting either 1) the Bible’s actual teachings, or 2) the clarity of their own moral vision?
 - i. When a person reads about slavery in the Bible, they commonly interpret this fact to be referring to 18th-century New World brutish slavery
 - 1. Yet, the fact is that kidnapping was punishable by the death sentence in the Scripture, while the New World slavery was built upon kidnapping
 - 2. Slaves in the NT wore the same clothes as freemen, had the same jobs as freemen, were paid for those jobs and often purchased their own freedom by paying down the debts they owed, the reason they signed up for servitude to begin with
 - ii. “But didn’t people use the Bible to condone New World slavery?”
 - 1. Yes, but that proves the point – they were interpreting the facts *wrong* – they were reading the Bible incorrectly.
 - 3. Isn’t it also possible that the assumption that your cultural moral vision is superior to the NT, is itself wrong?
 - a. West: Bible’s sexuality is primitive and regressive – forgiveness is wonderful
 - b. Middle East : sexuality teaching good – forgiveness is crazy
 - i. If you’re offended by something in the Bible, why should your cultural view trump everybody else’s?
- iii. If the Bible is from God, the facts point to the reality that it should offend the commonly held morality of *every* culture at some points?

1. Doesn't the reality of a relationship by necessity include the expectation to differ, exhort, and offend?
 2. If God created us, knows all things perfectly, would it not follow that His revelation of Himself and His works, have places where it contradicts us?
 3. Therefore, if the Bible does contradict our sensibilities, it is proof that the Bible is not some cultural creation but the very Word of God, for it contradicts every culture in some way.
 - a. Rather than your offense with the Bible being a reason to disbelieve, it ought to be a reason to believe.
 - b. What makes you think that because something contradicts you, that you can just throw it out? It may be proof that the Bible is from God.
2. Untenable Self-Rule: To Accept the Gospel Means You Must Deny Your Own Life
- a. Peter & John were commanded by their governing authorities to be silent, to "stop preaching and teaching in the name of this Jesus" under increasing threats of harm to their lives
 - b. They knew that proclaiming "what we have seen and heard" concerning Jesus was something which they *must* do.
 - i. It was a matter of obeying God
 1. They had been commanded and commissioned to testify to what they had seen and heard concerning Jesus.
 2. It was a matter of Truth, and any command to stop telling the truth is ungodly.
 - ii. It was a matter of praising God
 1. There is a compulsion to rejoice and praise when we know and feel the long-darkened trial explode into victorious life.
 2. Sharing the exultation of such triumph, redemption, and freedom is the completion of the joy itself – without the public expression, the sharing of the praise, joy is incomplete
 3. They cannot be silent just like a Cubs fan could not be silent when Kris Bryant tossed the final out of extra innings in game 7 of the World Series.
 - iii. It was a matter of Truth, which they could not deny
 1. People were rejoicing and praising God because of Christ Jesus' work and triumph over sin and death
 2. They were believing because of the testimony of the Truth from these men
 - c. The power of the gospel proclamation is sufficient for these
 - i. vv13-14 – they observed that Peter and John had been with Jesus because of their boldness in the light of their lack of social power (education, commonness)
 - ii. Often we see evangelism and praise as something which is programmatic, or worked through a system by gifted and powerful people with special skills
 1. Yet, here it is simply described as what the Apostles saw and heard...nothing more, nothing less – no gimmicks to persuade, no appeal to the flesh, no efforts to impress the people or the leadership with its value to the city
 - iii. You cannot rationally argue someone out of an irrational position
 1. Remember, it is not usually the *facts* that people actually deny
 - a. The Sanhedrin did not deny that the man had been healed – they couldn't
 2. People deny the interpretation, the cause and meaning and significance of those facts
 - a. They denied that Jesus had anything to do with it.
 - d. The goal of Christian evangelism is "announcement" of the truth, the interpretation of the facts, that God has condescended to the weak, broken, sinful, and repentant to rescue them

3. There Will Always be Opposition to the Gospel.

- a. The truth was compelling – “they saw the man standing next them...they had nothing to say in response...for the people were glorifying God.”
 - i. Everything about this loudly endorses the apostles’ claims both evidentially and also rhetorically, for the priests should want God to be glorified, too.
 - ii. Yet, they denied it contrary to the evidence.
 - b. “What do we do with these men?”
 - i. Persecution of those who faithfully announce the necessity, sufficiency, and authority of Jesus will always be contrary to the evidence and will bring about “great disturbance” in the spirits of those opposed to the gospel
 - 1. Men suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1)
 - ii. “Further threatening them...finding no way to punish them...commanding them not to preach or teach in the name of this Jesus”
 - 1. They issued threats, *and they were looking for a way to punish them*
 - a. “They could not find” indicates that they were searching for a means to punish them
 - b. They could execute Jesus with political clout because the people were for his execution – but here the people are siding with the apostles
 - c. It was the claims of Jesus which moved them to execute him and here is the claims concerning Jesus which moves them to want to punish the apostles
 - 2. What these opposition wanted was not an end to the healings, the betterment of human livelihood, social benefits, but preaching/teaching about the living lord over all, Jesus.
 - a. The world may accept the kindnesses of the Church which align with their presuppositions of kindness, but they will not stand for the exclusive lordship of Jesus over all
 - b. It is this gospel which exclusively offends, and the Church has, grievously, approbated its offensive gospel to a doppelganger message more palatable to a world, one that centers on Man
 - c. There is an irony here as we reflect on our modern church: the early Christians had to be commanded to be silent; today, most Christians have to be urged to speak.
4. “What made them so bold?” The *knowledge of Jesus* always leads to the compulsion to speak of Him even when violently opposed
- a. The evangelistic theology emanated from a firmly-believed understanding of Jesus as the chief cornerstone, the Granter of Mercy from God, the sole savior of humanity.
 - i. They could not keep silent *because they walked with the risen Lord, had seen and heard Him*, and were compelled *because they KNEW that He is Lord over all*
 - ii. We, often, are not compelled because we have stratified the living person of Jesus into a ‘faith system’
 - 1. “There is need of a deeper faith than that of mere acquaintance with and consent to external statements of truth, when the dread realities of life and death assail us.... Let us thank God that, when we ourselves enter into the valley of the shadow of death, we have infinitely more than a promise to stay our hearts upon, that ours is the fulfillment of the promise, the fact of the resurrection, the risen Lord Himself present with rod and staff beside us.” – Geerhard Vos, *Rabboni*
 - b. Thus, they *could not keep silent* about what they saw and heard
 - i. Note, too, that they defer judgment against them – they don’t fight the injustice except with words, “you must decide whether we must obey God or you.”
 - 1. There is an increasing assumption that the way to argue about Truth and Virtue is simply by forcing the opposition to be silent
 - a. Either by loud and violent protests, active or passive legislation, threats of coercion, defriending, etc.

- b. This is NEVER the Christian means of arguing, debate, or persuasion
 - ii. “Whether we must listen to God or to you, *you must judge.*”
 - 1. Deferring to others’ judgments, submitting ourselves by faith in Christ Jesus, preparing to pay the social cost knowing that resurrection always follows death for the Christian, is the means by which we proclaim the gospel
 - 2. We do not trust coercion to ever bring about conversion – we trust the simple proclamation of the truth of God, revealed ultimately in the good news of the authority and triumph of Jesus Christ over sin and death with all its implications to those who close to Him in humble dependence
 - a. Romans 1:16 – “the gospel is the power of God for salvation...”
 - b. In the end, Christianity rests not on its acceptance or its philosophical principles, but on the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, incarnate, sinless, crucified, raised from the dead, ascended to reign, coming again.
 - iii. They are ready to accept the judgement of the authorities, whether just or unjust, because they trust in the One with whom they have walked.
- c. What shall we do?
 - i. We must see Jesus...then...
 - 1. “We cannot be silent...”
 - 2. Neither will we, come what may.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. ²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Col. 1:13-23 ESV)