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A0821 – May 25, 2008 – Acts 4:13-22 – The Supremacy Of God's Authority

Acts 4:13-22 Θεωροῦντες δὲ τὴν τοῦ Πέτρου παρρησίαν καὶ Ἰωάννου καὶ καταλαβόμενοι ὅτι ἄνθρωποι ἀγράματοι εἰσιν καὶ ἰδιῶται, ἐθαύμαζον ἐπεγίνωσκόν τε αὐτοὺς ὅτι σὺν τῷ Ἰησοῦ ἦσαν, ¹⁴τόν τε ἄνθρωπον βλέποντες σὺν αὐτοῖς ἐστῶτα τὸν τεθεραπευμένον οὐδὲν εἶχον ἀντειπεῖν. ¹⁵κελεύσαντες δὲ αὐτοὺς ἔξω τοῦ συνεδρίου ἀπελθεῖν συνέβαλλον πρὸς ἀλλήλους ¹⁶λέγοντες· τί ποιήσωμεν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τούτοις; ὅτι μὲν γὰρ γνωστὸν σημεῖον γέγονεν δι’ αὐτῶν πᾶσιν τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν Ἰερουσαλήμ φανερόν καὶ οὐ δυνάμεθα ἀρνεῖσθαι· ¹⁷ἀλλ’ ἵνα μὴ ἐπὶ πλεῖον διανεμηθῇ εἰς τὸν λαὸν ἀπειλησώμεθα αὐτοῖς μηκέτι λαλεῖν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι τούτῳ μηδενὶ ἀνθρώπων. ¹⁸Καὶ καλέσαντες αὐτοὺς παρήγγειλαν τὸ καθόλου μὴ φθέγγεσθαι μηδὲ διδάσκειν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. ¹⁹ὁ δὲ Πέτρος καὶ Ἰωάννης ἀποκριθέντες εἶπον πρὸς αὐτούς· εἰ δίκαιόν ἐστιν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ὑμῶν ἀκούειν μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ θεοῦ, κρίνατε· ²⁰οὐ δυνάμεθα γὰρ ἡμεῖς ἄ εἶδαμεν καὶ ἠκούσαμεν μὴ λαλεῖν. ²¹οἱ δὲ προσαπειλησάμενοι ἀπέλυσαν αὐτούς, μηδὲν εὐρίσκοντες τὸ πῶς κολάσονται αὐτούς, διὰ τὸν λαόν, ὅτι πάντες ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεὸν ἐπὶ τῷ γεγονότι· ²²ἐτῶν γὰρ ἦν πλειόνων τεσσαράκοντα ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐφ’ ὃν γέγονει τὸ σημεῖον τοῦτο τῆς ἰάσεως.
(NA27)

Acts 4:13-22 Now as they were observing (PAPart) the confidence of Peter and John and grasped that they were (3PPAI) uneducated and untrained men, they were (3PPAI) astonished and ascertained that they had been (3PIAI) with Jesus. ¹⁴And seeing the man who was healed (PerfPPart) standing (PerfAPart) with them, they had (3PIAI) nothing to say in reply (AAInf). (cf Matt 22:16-22 Herodians silenced, 22:23-33 Sadducees silenced; 22:34-46 Pharisees silenced). ¹⁵But when they had commanded them to leave the Sanhedrin, they began conferring (3PIAI inceptive) with one another, ¹⁶saying, “What shall we

do with these men?” To be sure a remarkable sign has been performed (3SPerfAI) through them which is clear to all those inhabiting Jerusalem and we are not able (1PPAI) to deny it (PAInf). ¹⁷But so that (*hina* clause, purpose) it may spread no further into the people, let us threaten them to speak no longer to any man in this name.” ¹⁸And they called them and gave them orders not to speak (PAInf) or to teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John replied to them, saying (3PAAI), “Whether it is (3SPAI) right before God to listen (PAInf) to you rather than to God, you judge (2PAAImp) ²⁰ for we are not able not (double negative, very powerful negative, ou me) to speak (PAInf) about what we have seen and heard.” ²¹And having threatened them further, they released (3PAAI) them, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God because of what had taken place (PerfAPart neuter, the sign miracle). ²²For the man on whom this sign of healing took place (3SPluperfAI) was (3SIAI) more than forty years old. **(Author’s Translation)**

Acts 4:13-22 Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and *began* to recognize them as having been with Jesus. ¹⁴And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. ¹⁵But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they *began* to confer with one another, ¹⁶saying, “What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷“But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name.” ¹⁸And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; ²⁰for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” ²¹When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; ²²for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed. **(NASB95)**

Alright, we’re working in Acts 4 with Peter and John before the Sanhedrin, don’t lose the forest for the trees, this interrogation is rooted back in chapter

3 where Peter healed the lame man. This was a public miracle done in the center of Jewish life, the Temple Compound, this was not just any miracle, lots of signs, miracles and wonders were going on but this one was recorded by the Holy Spirit through Luke because of its kingdom relationship. Isa 35 said that one of the miracles that would signal the kingdom's nearness would be that the lame would leap like a deer, so this miracle, the timing, the location, everything is isolated by the Holy Spirit because of its relationship to the nation Israel and her promised kingdom. But that kingdom is contingent on her acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, that's why everything revolves around the Messiah's name, Jesus, in the name of Jesus the lame man was healed, then the people rush over to the Portico of Solomon and they get a three hour sermon by Peter and John, and they proclaim in Jesus' name the resurrection from the dead. This is what set the Sadducees off, they were an anti-supernatural group, they were the religious liberals of the day and they had control of the Temple Compound so there was no way they were going to let that doctrine continue to spread. So they interrupt and arrest Peter and John. The next morning it comes before the supreme court of Israel, the Sanhedrin, 70 of the most high profile lawyers, scholars and wise men. These guys are looking for a way to execute these guys. They are not interested in the issue, the issue is the resurrection, that's what they want to avoid, that's why we said this is one of the tactics of Satan, to confuse the issues, he doesn't want clarity on this point, so Satan's first tactic is operation confusion. We're going to see when that fails he resorts to a second tactic today, operation containment. There's no doubt this is one of the most spectacular defenses in human history. If you really see what happens in this text you'll never question the authority of God's word because no matter what the Sanhedrin says, by the end of this thing Peter and John have used the word of God to tie them in so many knots they can't see their way out. They can't do a thing to Peter and John. Any decision they make is a wrong move so they just let them go. It's the move with the least repercussions. But what is so apparent is that the slick reasoning of these 71 men is no match for the word of Christ shining through these two Galilean fishermen, and what that shows you is the superiority of the word of God over all human rationalism. Don't ever trade off the word of God, don't ever leave your authority at the door when you're discussing with someone, you will lose every time you do that. Always stick with the word. The word of God is absolutely superior. And as they set these two guys on trial before you know it they're the ones on trial. It took 90 Greek words out of the mouth of Peter

to have these guys squirming all over the place. By v 13 they're starting to have flashbacks of their losing debates with Jesus, so let's look at v 13,

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, confidence? Peter? The guy who just weeks ago was denying he ever knew Jesus. Now do you see Peter shrinking back? Is Peter a big scaredy cat? What happened to cause this change, Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, that's what happened. Now this man has confidence because he's on the cutting edge of biblical history, he's working with the most up to date Bible scholarship, the most significant event prophesied in the Bible has just taken place and he's witnessed it. He's not afraid of these guys. They're behind the times. Don't be afraid of people who object to the word of God. You've got absolute truth, you have nothing to fear.

So as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, now that doesn't mean Peter and John were stupid, that they had a weak intellect or something, these men were smart, they were highly trained believers, trained by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, what it means that they were **uneducated and untrained** is that they didn't undergo formal training at rabbinic schools (e.g. Hillel or Shammai), and they were shocked that these people who had no theological or law degrees from their accredited schools could handle Scripture so adeptly. It was shocking to these academics that men who didn't go through their formal programs could have it all together. The problem, and some of you face this today because you didn't get a college degree, and you get some kind of inferiority complex. Don't get a complex about it. You don't have to have the formal training to get it together. One of the drawbacks to formal education is you specialize and specialize and specialize till you know a lot about microtubules or something but you don't have a clue about art or business. You get so bogged down in one area that you really can't have an educated discussion in any other area. This is why you see some Ph.D. make a stupid choice and you think, can't they see how stupid that is but they can't see it because they're so specialized they don't know anything about that so they make some stupid decision. Now Peter and John didn't have that problem because they'd been trained by the Lord Jesus Christ and he trained them to think in every area of life, over the whole spectrum and they were able to see the whole picture. That's why at Fredericksburg Bible Church I train you to think in every area, I give you the

whole picture, how this affects politics, how it touches on biology, how it touches on economics and so forth, I'm giving you the overall picture so you can have an intelligent discussion in any area of life.

So they didn't have the formal training but they did have the training of the Lord Jesus Christ and notice what the members of the Sanhedrin began to recognize, that they had **been with Jesus**. In other words, the way Peter has worked with Scripture, brushing aside Deut 13, quoting Ps 118, this begins to jog their memory of a specific day in the Temple Compound when Jesus shut down their operation in a similar fashion. That day is recorded in Matt 22 where you have three groups try to trap Jesus; the Herodians, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and what they were trying to do was make Jesus stumble, get Him to make a mistake (because he was gathering a rather large following), so all we have to do is show that Jesus is no greater than us, he doesn't have all the answers, and that will boost our popularity, so they send in their academics, experts in the law, they've studied their Torah, they've formulated their questions, some of which had never been resolved by the greatest rabbinic minds, it's all a set and under false pretenses they challenge Jesus. And on that day Jesus answered all their questions with such superior logical consistency of biblical argument that they were officially silenced. When that day was over no one from those parties ever asked Jesus a question again, EVER. From that day forward there was no more debate, the only issue was, "How are we going to destroy Him?" And when they heard Peter and John give this defense it jogged their memory of that day. This is like a re-run, they'd been down that road before but before they realize it they've already been had. So in v 15-16 they shift tactics.

Verse 15, **But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another,** ¹⁶saying, **"What shall we do with these men?"** Verses 15 and 16 have always raised questions in the mind of scholars of this passage. In fact, down through the years there's been about four or five answers to this question raised by verse 15. Here's the question: "If John and just Peter were put outside of the courtroom for a closed hearing, how do we know what went on in the courtroom?" There have been several answers: (1) Paul told Luke what happened in the court and how did Paul find out what happened in the court? Because his professor, Gamaliel was there in the courtroom when this happened. That's one possible answer. (2) A

second possible answer, the apostle John told Luke what happened. How would John have known? Because John was friendly with Caiaphas, the high priest who was on the inside. We don't understand how Caiaphas, a high class ruler knew John, a lower class Galilean fisherman, but they had somehow crossed paths. He tells us that in John 18:15. (3) Or it could have been Nicodemus as well as number of other, perhaps, silent believers or men who later became believers who were members of the Sanhedrin and reported to Luke, "Hey, do you know what happened that day that you guys were cast out, I'll tell you what went on in the secret chamber." So somehow this intelligence report was gathered.

So the issue is not, "What have these men done?" That's well known, that's undeniable, everybody knew that lame man, they'd been walking by him for years as they passed through the Beautiful Gate, now he's **standing** here. So they can't do anything about what has been done, therefore the issue now is "**What shall we do with these men?**" They have to do something, this is affecting their political power, see, their threatened, their political clout is at stake because of these guys. Think of the fact that by this time you have 5,000 believers in Jerusalem, that's the men only, plus the women and children, we're talking 10-15,000 believers in Jerusalem. With a population of about 30,000 at the time you're talking a good third to half of the population. That kind of a movement is a serious threat to their political clout, so what are they going to do, you've got a sizeable sect developing, you possibly have some men on the inside like Nicodemus who are suspected to be secret believers. Something has to be done. So, because of failure of plan A, operation confusion, Peter has brilliantly clarified the issue and put them in the hot seat, now we resort to plan B, operation quarantine, all that's left at this point is damage control, contain the situation, try to stop further development of this sect (these are always the two strategies of liberal philosophy which has as its central tenet autonomy).

Verse 17 describes plan B, **But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name.**" ¹⁸**And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.**" They really have no other options, they can't convict them under the law, they would like very much to punish them, there's no question they wanted to ring their necks, but the problem is they've got the general public outside, they've seen

everything that happened, Peter and John are far too well-known in Jerusalem for any kind of beating. If they make a mistake here it will destroy their political image. So they have no option but to **let them go** and threaten them not to **speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.**”

Now in vv 19-20 they don't go along with this. V 20 Peter uses a double negative, literally, **for we are not able not to speak about** this. The just are not going to be silenced. Outright civil disobedience, the Sanhedrin had judicial rights over the Jewish people as authorized by the Romans. So there's no question Peter and John disobeyed civil authority. This is situated under Divine Institution #4 in Scripture, human government or civil authority or kingdom authority. Any of those titles is sufficient. So we want to review our Divine Institutions. The first point is one of definition. We're not talking a social convention here, these are not just good ideas that can be changed over time without major consequences. No, they are absolute structures built into the human race that when violated results in social decay. They apply to believers and unbelievers alike. They are given for the safety of the human race. We have five of these given in the word of God. The first, and keep in mind that each one builds on and stems from the previous, so you have Divine Institution #1 Responsible Labor or Dominion, God created man to subdue, not in the sense of tearing down the environment but developing, bringing the creation into fruition. Out of this comes all your basic areas of investigation; medicine, art, music, culture, man is authorized and responsible to develop these areas and to do so responsibly, this is responsible development and cultivation of the environment starting with divine view point interpretation of man and nature. A labor that will be evaluated by God, the Bible has a very high view of labor; the time we spend, the work of our hands in whatever arena will be evaluated by God.

Divine Institution #2 is Marriage; this extends and supplements on Divine Institution #1. Man needs a helper in the task of having Dominion. And man's helper is woman, not another man, not a child but a woman. You can't go too far in Scripture before you rub with the world system. Just a few weeks ago California licensed the marriage of homosexual couples. Now that's a violation of Divine Institution of Marriage. That's not the design and anytime these institutions are violated it wreaks economic, cultural and moral havoc. It's not that God is being a meanie, it's that by instituting these limits He structured the universe a certain way, that's what we call the form,

and within that form there's freedom, but when we violate the form it creates problems. So you have the male and the female who complement one another. Marriage then furthers responsible dominion and enables it to reach its highest productivity and creativity. It was not good for man to be alone.

Third Divine Institution, Family, this is the fruit of Marriage and further extends Divine Institution #1, that man was created to labor responsibly. And we extend that function by having children, passing on to them the importance of dominion before God, subduing His creation. This comes by means of physical, mental and spiritual training; the parents are the first school for their children and are given the responsibility to teach their children the various disciplines from art, to music, to physical fitness, diet, math, language, geography, etc... There may be public schools, but the parents are given the rights by God to decide the education of their children. This is not a right of the state. The child's education is the responsibility of the parent and when the state seizes that right then they've violated state boundaries and you're going to have, inevitably, a state religion. Whether it's Communism in Russia, Islam in Saudi Arabia or Atheism in America, whenever the state begins to take over the role of education then they set up a tax funded state religion that undermines parental authority and indoctrinates the nation, sending them on a course of destruction.

Fourth, the Divine Institution of Kingdom Authority or Civil Government, this was given after the Fall, Gen 9:1ff, in a world full of sin so Human Government is given to curb the effects of sin. The basic right of Human Government is capital punishment, if a state does not have the right to take life then it basically has no rights. You can argue all day long that it's not carried out justly, that the courts make errors, etc... but God instituted capital punishment in a fallen world period. When the critics of capital punishment bring up their case they forget one historical fact that has never been answered, "Did God not know that His own Son would be executed under a misappropriation of justice?" Of course He did and yet He instituted it anyway fully knowing that His Son's case would be one of the biggest distortions of justice the world has ever seen. So the state has been given the right and responsibility to protect its citizens and maintain order in a fallen world.

The fifth Divine Institution gets into Tribal Diversity through Shem, Ham and Japheth and the geographical boundaries of these nations, families and tribes but we want to narrow in on the 4th Divine Institution, Civil Government. This comes into play in the case of Peter and John before the Sanhedrin. Now the state does have certain responsibilities and rights but there are also boundaries and what we want to investigate is where the boundaries are and what's the believer's responsibility when those boundaries are crossed? How should the believer respond to such violations?

So we direct our attention to the doctrine of civil disobedience. Is there a proper time to disobey civil authorities? Or are we always to submit to the states wishes? On one hand we're told in Rom 13 to come under kingly authority for there is no authority but that which is given by God (also cf Tit 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13). Then you have cases like this which suggest there are certain times when civil disobedience is warranted. If that's the case what are the issues that authorize the believer to refuse obedience to the state? You can't just violate civil law at will. Certain issues must be involved. You can't just rebel over any issue you don't like. For example, the creationist Kent Hovind who evaded his taxes for years and now Mr Hovind is serving prison time to the tune of \$800,000. That's not an issue we're at liberty to violate (Rom 13:6-7). The system being used to tax may be wrong, it may be theft but we're never given authorization to rebel against it. Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's (Matt 22:17). So the first point of the doctrine of civil disobedience is that it is authorized only for certain narrowly defined issues in the Bible

What are these issues? The first issue has to do with worship and is modeled by Daniel and his three friends. Whenever the state dictates who we must worship, how we must worship, when we can worship or the content of our worship the state is intruding and we cannot go along with that. This is the case in Daniel 3 with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the state authorized that all men must fall down and worship the image of Nebuchadnezzar and these three men refused and were cast into the fiery furnace. Then you have the case in Dan 6 where Daniel refused to pray to Nebuchadnezzar; he continued to pray daily at specific times in open view to the God of Israel, not Nebuchadnezzar. He refused to submit to the civil authority and was willing to face the consequences. Peter and John are another example of this, they are told that their worship cannot entail the name Jesus. So they refuse to go

along. Therefore, whenever the state dictates the who, when, how and content of our worship we have to follow Daniel, Peter and John, and say, "I'm sorry, but we cannot go along with your program."

The second issue has to do with genocide, euthanasia and abortion, the taking of innocent life. This is modeled by Shiphrah and Puah in Exodus 1:15. In Exodus 1 you have Pharaoh threatened by the numerical increase of Hebrews. He fears his empire will be overrun so he tries several tactics to decrease the Hebrew population. v 15, "Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other was named Puah;" now these two gals were the head of the organization of Hebrew midwives, they didn't deliver every baby, but they controlled the operation. Verse 16, and he said to them, "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see *them* upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." It was real easy to do this, as the mother couldn't see what was going on, all they would have to do was grab the neck and strangle the little boys neck before anyone knew what was going on, verse 17, "But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live." If the state comes in and authorizes the destruction of innocent human life and that you must take part in these actions then you have a legitimate reason to say, "No, I'm sorry but I cannot do that." Those are the only two legitimate reasons I can find in the word of God where the believer has the responsibility to refuse the state.

So the first point is that the issues are narrowly defined. The second point is the issues concern worship and the sacredness of innocent human life. The third point is how you carry out the rebellion, how you treat the state, there are tactics to this, and the first thing to remember is always show respect to authority. Daniel does this, Peter and John do this, they do not defy the office; they are simply saying "You've asked me to do something I cannot honestly do before my God and I'm not going to do it, and that's it." There is respect for the office of the fourth divine institution. A second point about the tactics if implementing this is that while you're doing this you're praying 1 Timothy 2 type prayers, praying for those in authority, praying "Lord, let us live in peace and tranquility. You're not trying to create a war here between church and state because boy, once you've made the state mad you've got a holy war on your hands and it's cruel on both sides, because you've hit an

ultimate snag, either side can't compromise. And if things ever get to that point you're going to see what war is like, the tragedies down through history of holy conflicts where one side considers its ultimate cause is to destroy the other side completely. But that's the horror of a church/state conflict, ripping apart families, countries, groups of people like they've never been ripped apart before. It's a horrible thing and so you pray 1 Timothy 2 prayers, "Lord, let this not happen."

And finally, be prepared to take the consequences of your choice. Acts 4, Peter and John are ready to be beaten, they're ready to go to jail, they'll witness to the jail, but they can't stop speaking about what they've seen and heard. So be ready to accept the consequences.

Finally, in this case, v 21 the political pressures were too great and this is one of the fantastic places in Scripture where you see the Holy Spirit using a situation to work through the political arena so that it works in favor of these believers. The whole event sets up a situation where so many people know about this that the politicians aren't willing to risk their reputations. Therefore, verse 21, and when we read this we want to skip the part in parentheses, just leave that out, we'll come back to it, Therefore, **When they had threatened them further, they let them go...on account of the people**, That's the basic reason they let them go, this miracle and sermon were far too public and any other action would have too many negative repercussions for both their political careers as well as the spread of Christianity. The parenthetical remark (**finding no basis on which to punish them**) doesn't say that in the Greek. The Greek word for **basis** here means "way," they could find no way in which to punish them which would not become public knowledge so they just **let them go**. Continuing verse 21, **because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; ²²for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed**. So, once again the Jewish leadership hasn't come up with an answer but they reject the Messiahship of Jesus and remain at odds with God. So this was a tremendous victory for the early church and we'll see that in the following verses when I get back from Israel. But I think we've show that when two spirit filled believers utilize the word of God as their authority they are able to overcome all opposing authorities, no matter how much political clout, no matter how many law degrees they have after their name. And that's because the word of God is superior as your basic

epistemology, how you know and how you reason within the basic categories revealed in the word of God.

But for now, let's share communion one last time before I have to leave for Israel. Let's remember like Peter and John that Jesus is the author of our salvation and there is no other name under heaven by which men must be saved. If you're visiting with us and you're a believer in Christ then I invite you to partake of these elements with us since we are all one body. Let's bow for a word of prayer before we focus on His pre-eminent work on the cross.

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