

April 11, 2021
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Acts
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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WE WILL OBEY GOD **Acts 4:15-22**

When Pat and I were first married, we joined a local church and almost immediately the people in charge put us to work. We sang in the choir, went on visitation, worked in AWANA, and someone had the bright idea of giving me the task of teaching 4th-5th grade boys. That is when I learned I do not have the patience or gift to teach that age level. I remember one particular child, the son of a deacon, was a real rebel. He wouldn't sit still or do anything else I told him to do. At one point after I told him to be quiet he shouted, "You are not my boss. I don't have to obey you!"

On one hand, I guess we shouldn't be surprised to hear a spoiled little twerp respond that way. On the other hand, it is a bit agitating to hear people who really do look like they are old enough to be adults responding in similar ways. But rebellion against human authority is just an inevitable part of the human nature. Some people struggle with it more than others do.

Of course, Christians do not struggle with this problem. We know, even in light of our personal histories, that we have never resisted or argued with a teacher, an actual boss, a representative of the civil government, a religious leader, or parent, right? Well actually maybe, in a very limited way, that has happened on rare occasions in the past. Or maybe more.

Well, maybe, but for us Christians the good news is that we have biblical authority for resisting ungodly, wicked, non-baptists who want to try to run our lives. Many professing Christians are well aware of our text in which Peter and John answered the religious authorities, "You're not our boss! We don't have to obey you!" Okay, those fourth-grader-sounding words aren't exactly what they said, but

it was essentially the same thing. At any rate, some professing Christians are always armed and ready to sling out the scriptural defense, "It is better to obey God than man."

Is that actually the teaching of the text? Is that the example that God established for us early on? Does it please God for professing Christians to resort to this defense every time an authority demands they do something they don't want to do? That is quite doubtful. In a world sunk in sin, it is likely that true, sincere followers of Christ will have to interact with people who are neutral toward Christ, or worse, who are in reality opposed to Christ. In light of the fact that it is humanly impossible to become a significant political leader and also be a devout follower of Christ, there are going to be times when our pagan leaders create and enforce laws or issue executive orders that put us in difficult situations.

It is of the American spirit to rise up in rebellion against King George when he taxes our tea. But that is not the same model the King of Kings would have us follow. Our walk of fellowship with Christ should be so deep, so real, so meaningful that He is able to move our consciences to obey the authorities He has appointed unless they demand that we disobey Christ. Christ the King will prick our consciences with His revealed truth when disloyalty to Him is demanded or expected.

Human Solution to a Divine Dilemma (vv.15-18).

Human rulers found themselves in a real dilemma (vv.15-16). The most logical solution to the problem would no doubt be found in a conference. But human conference doesn't always have divine direction. *But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another (v.15).*

The council Luke mentioned was the meeting of the Sanhedrin. That body was the official leaders of the Jewish people, under the umbrella ruling of Rome and Rome's appointed authorities (i.e. the Herods, Pilate). The council was split ideologically. Some of the council members were Sadducees. Many of them were the high priest (current and former) and his extended family. They were most concerned for their own financial well being and zealously protected

the political favor of Rome. These people were in charge of the temple bazaar that Jesus cleaned out twice.

The other part of the Sanhedrin (generally speaking) were Pharisees. These were the lawyers, the scribes who claimed to love God's law. In reality, they loved their own laws more. They continually invented laws for keeping God's law that, in turn, became insufferable burdens to the people. This council was responsible for the arrest, trial, mocking, and finally turning over Jesus to the political authorities for crucifixion.

Now they found themselves in a situation where they needed to confer with each other to come up with a solution for handling the very noticeable, uneducated fishermen who were stirring up the whole city of Jerusalem with their teaching and miracles.

These rulers and leaders would be much like a city council led by a mayor. Such councils throughout our nation and our world very often come to conclusions that are not favorable to Christ's witnesses. And yet, we must remember that God commends councils for arriving at sound conclusions. *Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety (Proverbs 11:14)*. But if the counselors rely only on human experience and wisdom, apart from acknowledging God, they will often arrive at solutions that are opposed to God's will.

So it was with this particular meeting. They discovered that human council is futile when it denies divine evidence. The leaders of the council said, *"What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it"* (v.16).

They acknowledged that those men performed a notable sign. Indeed, Peter commanded a man who had been lame from birth to stand up and walk (4:6). The man not only stood up but was leaping, running, rejoicing, praising God. To say the sign was notable might be an understatement. At least the council members admitted that the sign had been performed **through** them and not **by** them.

The evidence was undeniable. All the inhabitants of Jerusalem acknowledged it because the sign was notable. Everyone who lived in Jerusalem who regularly passed by the temple gate called Beautiful Gate knew this guy was lame. Even the council members could not deny it. They said, *"We cannot deny it."* Luke explained why they

could not deny it: *For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old (v.22)*.

And so the council members were faced with the dilemma of what they should do with *these men*? The men were really not the problem. Rather, the men were simply instruments in God's hand to bring the rulers face to face with the power of their Creator. God who created each of those rulers longed for them to have restored fellowship with Him. How amazing that those rulers (probably everyone of them) were quite sure they were already in fellowship with God. But if that was the case, they would have recognized the source of the miracle and also would have praised God along with the formerly lame man.

In our thoroughly secularized age, we should not expect our rulers to acknowledge God or His truth in any way. The "non-religious" category of people in American culture is expanding exponentially. Nearly all universities are completely entrenching in the error of humanism and virtually devoid of understanding the truth of God. There is little or no acknowledging of the God of truth. Don't expect our leaders, who come from such experiences of learning, to make laws or rules favorable to those who are loyal to Christ the King.

Verses seventeen and eighteen in our text reveal the solution the Godless rulers came to. Very simply they decided that there would be "No more preaching about Jesus!" They said, *"Let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name"* (v.17b). *So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus (v.18)*.

Notice that the focus of the solution was the name of Jesus. It wasn't just a question about a person named Jesus. The issue was speaking about the character, the reputation, the work of Jesus of Nazareth. The new rule was, "You cannot talk to anyone about the authority of Jesus Christ." After all, the authority of Jesus was Peter's claim in the matter. He had told the people, *"We didn't make the guy walk by our own power or piety. He is walking because of the power of Jesus of Nazareth whom you crucified"* (4:12-15).

The response to the issue was to warn and charge the preachers. It is very interesting that the Greek word translated *charged* is very similar to the word for announcing the good news of the gospel

(*euangelizo*) which Jesus sent these men to do. Here the rulers announced the order or command (*parangelizo*). The specific practice forbidden was speaking and teaching. They were not allowed to even make a sound (speak). Nor could they provide formal instruction with the intent that others could learn.

Essentially the religious leaders' solution was to silence the message so that Jesus cannot build His Church. *But in order that it may spread no further among the people (v.17a)*. The leaders' plan was to silence all speaking and teaching about the character, person, and power of Jesus. Like so many Communists or Islamists, they intended to keep other people from hearing about Jesus.

Divine Solution to a Human Dilemma (vv.19-22).

We must decide to take the Godly response. Our response must be to answer the question, "What is right in the sight of God?" That was the response of the messengers of Christ. *But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge" (v.19)*.

Well that question shouldn't be too difficult to answer because Jesus taught that it is right to listen to the religious authorities. While He was teaching on Solomon's porch before He was crucified, Jesus had just refuted the Pharisees about His divinity as Son of God. *Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you – but not what they do. For they preach, but do not practice" (Matthew 23:1-3)*.

Why did Jesus require that? It seems like Jesus would have said, "Don't listen to the false teachers, avoid them at all costs." But these were authorities ordained by God to teach and interpret God's law. They did not but substituted their own law for God's law. For example, one time these leaders asked Jesus, *"Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat" (Matthew 15:2)*. So actually, according to Jesus it was right for the apostles to listen to the council members. Yes, to a point.

Furthermore, we know from other Scriptures that God requires us to submit to all authorities. He requires us to submit to civil and governing authorities. God's rule is: *Let every person be subject to*

the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing (Romans 13:1-6).

God's plan is for us to submit to other human authorities. *Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work (Titus 3:1)*. God's reason for requiring our submission to others is that through obedience and submission, we silence foolish people (apparently those who refuse to submit). *Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor (1 Peter 2:13-17)*. By the way, Nero was the emperor when Peter wrote this. According to tradition, Nero crucified Peter.

Because we must obey them, we must pray for them. And God's rule is not that we pray imprecatory prayers. *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:1-5)*.

The only exception to submission and obedience to our God-ordained authorities flows from the word "rather." Read again Peter's and John's response: *"Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen*

to you rather than to God, you must judge” (v.19). If a religious authority leads contrary to the clear teaching of God’s Word or makes rules contrary to God’s Word (not the same as your preference or opinion), we have to choose whether to obey God OR religious authorities. If a civil authority makes a rule demanding that we do something that is clearly contrary to God’s Word, we have to choose whether to obey God OR civil authorities.

For example, Jesus taught the apostles that He was sending them out to preach, speak, teach the good news about His sacrifice for sins. The religious rulers (and later the civil rulers) made rules that forbid them from obeying Christ. The correct response was easy and obvious.

“Yeah,” our professing Christian friend replies, “But we have a constitution and Bill of Rights!” Okay, what if a president or congress makes rules contrary to the founding documents of our nation? God’s rule overrides human agreements.

The really difficult choices deal with very clear statements in Scripture. For example, how do we respond if a God-ordained authority decides that the Body of Christ is no longer allowed to meet together as Hebrews 10:24-25 requires? Here is God’s rule: *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (Hebrews 10:24-25).*

Or how do we respond if a God-ordained authority makes a rule that the taxes we are required to pay should be spent to pay for women and doctors to destroy a life, made in God’s image, through abortion? Here is God’s rule: *Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, “Behold, we did not know this,” does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work? (Proverbs 24:11-12).*

Or how do we respond if the rulers of the land make a law that requires Community Baptist Church to hire a sexually perverse person (a possible result of the Equality Act)? Here is God’s rule about immorality in the Church: *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even*

among pagans Let him who has done this be removed from among you (1 Corinthians 5:1-2a).

God’s rules are pretty plain. When God-ordained authorities require that we break God’s rules, they put us in very difficult circumstances. What is the right solution?

In the case of our text, it is right to be a witness for Christ. The apostles said, *“For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (v.20).* They had to speak because Christ had established the plan for witnesses. *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).* In fact, Jesus’ very last words to these men before He ascended to heaven were: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).*

Peter and John had no choice – they had to speak for Christ. In all practicality, at all times, the work of Christ demands a witness even if Christ had not specifically commanded us to speak for Him. Life with Christ made it impossible for Peter and John NOT to talk about Him. If we really know Christ, if we have really experienced the miracle of regeneration, we will have to talk about the amazing Good News.

But the work of Jesus Christ to pay for sinners’ sins and take them out of the family of Satan and put them into the family of God is deemed by this post-Christian culture to be biased and bigoted. Or the good news of the gospel appears to the secularist to be intolerant of others, to be Islamophobic, homophobic, peoplephobic, culturephobic. Of course at the moment in our culture the gospel is definitely racist. But *we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.*

The council members came to a conclusion that proves human limitations in life. They chose to use threats or maybe more. *And when they had further threatened them, they let them go (v.21a).* We know that was not the end of the matter. In short order, Saul, one of their own, promoted more than just threatening. And within 30 years

the civil authorities lashed out at the Church. Which kind of persecution continued on some level for over 250 years. Which kind of persecution continues to this day. Which persecution might well come to a location near you sooner than we care to think.

Ultimately, the council proved it is difficult to fight against God. They were *finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old (vv.21b-22).*

The council reveals to us that sinful leaders being brainwashed and motivated by Satan will establish rules, enforce rules, and promote the abominations of Satan. When Christ's followers and witnesses resist, it sometimes results in punishment. But no leader though the most powerful man or woman on earth can ever stop the work of Jesus building His Church. And as Jesus builds His church, the recipients of His blessing will just keep on praising God.