

CHAPTER 5

In this chapter we have,

- I.** The sin and punishment of Ananias and Sapphira, who, for lying to the Holy Ghost, were struck dead at the word of Peter (v. 1-11).
- II.** The flourishing state of the church, in the power that went along with the preaching of the gospel (v. 12-16).
- III.** The imprisonment of the apostles, and their miraculous discharge out of prison, with fresh orders to go on to preach the gospel, which they did, to the great vexation of their persecutors (v. 17-26).
- IV.** Their arraignment before the great sanhedrim, and their justification of themselves in what they did (v. 27-33).
- V.** Gamaliel's counsel concerning them, that they should not persecute them, but let them alone, and see what would come of it, and their concurrence, for the present, with this advice, in the dismissal of the apostles' cheerful progress in their work notwithstanding the prohibition laid upon them and the indignity done them (v. 41, 42).

ACTS 5:1-11

THE CASE OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

The chapter begins with a melancholy *but*, which puts a stop to the pleasant and agreeable prospect of things which we had in the foregoing chapters; as every man, so every church, in its best state has its *but*.

1. The disciples were very holy, and heavenly, and seemed to be all exceedingly good; *but* there were hypocrites among them, whose *hearts were not right in the sight of God*, who, when they were baptized, and took upon them *the form of godliness, denied the power of godliness*, and stopped short of that. There is a mixture of bad with good in the best societies on this side heaven; tares will grow among the wheat until the harvest.

2. It was the praise of the disciples that they came up to that perfection which Christ recommended to the rich young man — they *sold what they had, and gave to the poor; but* even that proved a cloak and cover of hypocrisy which was thought the greatest proof and evidence of sincerity.

3. The signs and wonders which the apostles wrought were hitherto miracles of mercy; *but* now comes in a miracle of judgment, and here is an instance of severity following the instances of goodness, that God may be both loved and feared. Observe here,

I. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira his wife. It is good to see husband and wife joining together in that which is good, but to be confederate in evil is to be like Adam and Eve, when they agreed to eat the forbidden fruit, and were one in their disobedience. Now their sin was,

1. That they were ambitious of being thought eminent disciples, and of the first rank, when really they were not true disciples; they would pass for some of the most fruitful trees in Christ's vineyard, when really the root of the matter was not found in them. They *sold a possession, and brought the money* (as Barnabas did) *to the apostles' feet*, that they might not seem to be behind the very chief of believers, but might be applauded and cried up, and stand so much the fairer for preferment in the church, which perhaps they thought would shortly shine in secular pomp and grandeur. Note, It is possible that hypocrites may deny themselves in one thing, but then it is to serve themselves in another; they may forego their secular advantage in one instance, with a prospect of finding their account in something else. Ananias and Sapphira would take upon them a profession of Christianity, *and make a fair show in the flesh* with it, and so would mock God, and deceive others, when they knew they could not go through with the Christian profession. It was commendable, and so far it was right, in that rich young man, that he would not pretend to follow Christ, when, if it should come to a pinch, he knew he could not come up to his terms, *but he went away sorrowful*. Ananias and Sapphira pretended they could come up to the terms, that they might have the credit of being disciples, when really they could not, and so were a discredit to discipleship. Note, It is often of fatal consequence for people to go a greater length in profession than their inward principle will admit of.

2. That they were covetous of the wealth of the world, and distrustful of God and his providence: *They sold their land*, and perhaps then, in a pang

of zeal, designed no other than to dedicate the whole of the purchase-money to pious uses, and made a vow, or at least conceived a full purpose, to do so; but, when the money was received, their heart failed them, and *they kept back part of the price*, (v. 2), because they loved the money, and thought it was too much to part with at once, and to trust in the apostles' hands, and because they knew not but they might want it themselves; though now all things were common, yet it would not be so long, and what should they do in a time of need, if they should leave themselves nothing to take to? They could not take God's word that they should be provided for, but thought they would play a wiser part than the rest had done, and lay up for a rainy day. Thus they thought to serve both God and mammon — God, by bringing part of the money to the apostles' feet, and mammon, by keeping the other part in their own pockets; as if there were not an all-sufficiency in God to make up the whole to them, except they retained some in their own hands by way of caution-money. Their hearts were divided, so *they were found faulty*, ~~300~~Hosea 10:2. They *halted between two*; if they had been thorough-paced worldlings, they would not have sold their possession; and, if they had been thorough-paced Christians, they would not have detained part of the price.

3. That they thought to deceive the apostles, and make them believe they brought the whole purchase-money, when really it was but a part. They came with as good an assurance, and as great a show of piety and devotion, as any of them, and *laid the money at the apostles' feet*, as if it were their all. They dissembled with God and his Spirit, with Christ and his church and ministers; and this was their sin.

II. The indictment of Ananias, which proved both his condemnation and execution for this sin. When he brought the money, and expected to be commended and encouraged, as others were, Peter took him to task about it, He, without any enquiry or examination of witnesses concerning it, charges him peremptorily with the crime, and aggravates it, and lays a load upon him for it, showing it to him in its own colour, v. 3, 4. The Spirit of God in Peter not only discovered the fact without any information (when perhaps no man in the world knew it but the man and his wife themselves), but likewise discerned the principle of reigning infidelity in the heart of Ananias, which was at the bottom of it, and therefore proceeded against him so suddenly. Had it been a sin of infirmity, through the surprise of a temptation, Peter would have taken Ananias aside, and have bidden him go home, and fetch the rest of the money, and repent of

his folly in attempting to put this cheat upon them; but he knew *that his heart was fully set in him to do this evil*, and therefore allowed him not space to repent. He here showed him,

1. The origin of his sin: *Satan filled his heart*; he not only suggested it to him, and put it into his head, but hurried him on with resolution to do it. Whatever is contrary to the good Spirit proceeds from the evil spirit, and those hearts are filled by Satan in which worldliness reigns, and has the ascendant. Some think that Ananias was one of those that had received the Holy Ghost, and was filled with his gifts, but, having provoked the Spirit to withdraw from him, now *Satan filled his heart*; as, *when the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, an evil spirit from God troubled him*. Satan is a lying spirit; he was so in the mouth of Ahab's prophets, and so he was in the mouth of Ananias, and by this made it appear that he filled his heart.

2. The sin itself: *He lied to the Holy Ghost*; a sin of such a heinous nature that he could not have been guilty of it if Satan had not filled his heart.

(1.) The phrase which we render *lying to the Holy Ghost*, *pseusasthai se to pneuma to hagion*, some read, *to belie the Holy Ghost*, which may be taken two ways:

[1.] That he belied the Holy Ghost in himself; so Dr. Lightfoot takes it, and supposes that Ananias was not an ordinary believer, but a minister, and one that had received the gift of the Holy Ghost with the hundred and twenty (for mention is made of him immediately after Barnabas); yet he durst thus, by dissembling, belie and shame that gift. Or thus; Those who had sold their estates, and laid the money at the apostles' feet, did it by the special impulse of the Holy Ghost, enabling them to do an act so very great and generous; and Ananias pretended that he was moved by the Holy Ghost to do what he did, as others were; whereas it appeared by his baseness that he was not under the influence of the good Spirit at all; for, had it been his work, it would have been perfect.

[2.] That he belied the Holy Ghost in the apostles, to whom he brought the money; he misrepresented the Spirit they were actuated by, either by a suspicion that they would not faithfully distribute what they were entrusted with (which was a base suggestion, as if they were false to the trust reposed in them), or by an assurance that they could not discover the fraud. He belied the Holy Ghost when by what he did he would have it thought that those who are endued with the gifts of the Holy Ghost might

as easily be imposed upon as other men; like Gehazi, whom his master convicted of his error by that word, *Went not my heart with thee?* ^{<11R6>}2 Kings 5:26. It is charged upon the house of Israel and Judah, when, like Ananias here, they dealt very treacherously, that they belied the Lord, *saying, It is not he,* ^{<21R1>}Jeremiah 5:11, 12. Thus Ananias thought the apostles were altogether such as himself, and this was belying the Holy Ghost in them, as if he were not in them a discerner of spirits, whereas they had all the gifts of the Spirit in them, which to others were divided severally. See ^{<41R8>}1 Corinthians 12:8-11. Those that pretend to an inspiration of the Spirit, in imposing upon the church their own fancies, either in opinion or practice — that say they are moved from above when they are carried on by their pride, covetousness, or affectation of dominion, belie the Holy Ghost.

(2.) But we read it, *to lie unto the Holy Ghost*, which reading is countenanced by v. 4, *Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.*

[1.] Ananias told a lie, a deliberate lie, and with a purpose to deceive; he told Peter that he had sold a possession (house or lands) and this was the purchase-money. Perhaps he expressed himself in words that were capable of a double meaning, used some equivocations about it, which he thought might palliate the matter a little, and save him from the guilt of a downright lie: or perhaps he said nothing; but it was all one, he did as the rest did who brought the whole price, and would be thought to do so, and expected the praise those had that did so, and the same privilege and access to the common stock as they had; and therefore it was an implicit protestation that he brought the whole price, as they did; and this was a lie, for he kept back part. Note, Many are brought to gross lying by reigning pride, and affectation of the applause of men, particularly in works of charity to the poor. That therefore we may not be found boasting of a false gift given to us, or given by us (^{<21R4>}Proverbs 25:14), we must not boast even of a true gift, which is the meaning of our Saviour's caution in works of charity, *Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.* Those that boast of good works they never did, or promise good works they never do, or make the good works they do more or better than really they are, come under the guilt of Ananias's lie, which it concerns us all to dread the thought of.

[2.] He told this lie *to the Holy Ghost*. It was not so much to the apostles as to the Holy Ghost in them that the money was brought, and that was

said which was said, v. 4, *Thou hast not lied unto men* (not to men only, not to men chiefly, though the apostles be but men), *but thou hast lied unto God*. Hence it is justly inferred that the Holy Ghost is God; for he that lieth to the Holy Ghost lieth to God. “Those that lied to the apostles, actuated and acting by the Spirit of God, are said to lie to God, because the apostles acted by the power and authority of God, whence it follows (as Dr. Whitby well observes) that the power and authority of the Spirit must be the power and authority of God.” And, as he further argues, “Ananias is said to lie to God, because he lied to that Spirit in the apostles which enabled them to discern the secrets of men's hearts and actions, which being the property of God alone, he that lies to him must therefore lie to God, because he lies to one who has the incommunicable property of God, and consequently the divine essence.”

3. The aggravations of the sin (v. 4): *While it remained, was it not thine own? And, after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?* Which may be understood two ways: —

(1.) “Thou wast under no temptation *to keep back part of the price*; before it was sold it was thy own, and not mortgaged nor encumbered, nor any way engaged for debt; and when it was sold it was in thy own power to dispose of the money at thy pleasure; so that thou mightest as well have brought the whole as a part. Thou hadst no debts to pay, perhaps no children to provide for; so that thou wast not under the influence of any particular inducement to keep back part of the price. Thou was a transgressor without a cause.” Or,

(2.) “Thou wast under no necessity of selling thy land at all, nor bringing any of the money to the apostles' feet. Thou mightest have kept the money, if thou hadst pleased, and the land too, and never have pretended to this piece of perfection.” This rule of charity the apostle gives, that people be not pressed, and that it be not urged as of necessity, because God loves a cheerful giver (^{401E}2 Corinthians 9:7), and Philemon must do a good work, *not as it were of necessity, but willingly*, ^{501H}Philemon 1:14. As it is better not to vow than to vow and not to pay, so better had it been for him not to have sold his land at all than thus to keep back part of the price; not to have pretended to do the good work than thus to do it by the halves. “*When it was sold, it was in thine own power*; but it was not so when it was vowed: thou hadst then opened thy mouth to the Lord, and couldst not go back.” Thus, in giving our hearts to God, we are not admitted to divide

them. Satan, like the mother whose own the child was not, would take up with a half; but God will have all or none.

4. All this guilt, thus aggravated, is charged upon him: *Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?* Observe, Though Satan filled his heart to do it, yet he is said to have conceived it in his own heart, which shows that we cannot extenuate our sins by laying the fault of them upon the devil; he tempts, but he cannot force; it is of *our own lusts that we are drawn away and enticed*. The evil thing, whatever it is, that is said or done, the sinner has conceived it in his own heart; and therefore, *if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it*. The close of the charge is very high, but very just: *Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God*. What emphasis does the prophet lay upon that of Ahaz, *not wearying men only, but wearying my God also!* ^{<207>}Isaiah 7:13. And Moses upon that of Israel, *Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord!* ^{<216>}Exodus 16:8. So here, Thou mightest have imposed upon us, who are men like thyself; but, *be not deceived, God is not mocked*. If we think to put a cheat upon God, we shall prove in the end to have put a fatal cheat upon our own souls.

III. The death and burial of Ananias, v. 5, 6.

1. He died upon the spot: *Ananias, hearing these words, was speechless*, in the same sense that he was who was charged with intruding into the wedding feast without a wedding garment: he had nothing to say for himself; but this was not all: he was struck speechless with a witness, for he was struck dead: *He fell down, and gave up the ghost*. It does not appear whether Peter designed and expected that this would follow upon what he said to him; it is probable that he did, for to Sapphira his wife Peter particularly spoke death, v. 9. Some think that an angel struck him, that he died, as Herod, ^{<412>}Acts 12:23. Or, his own conscience smote him with such horror and amazement at the sense of his guilt, that he sunk and died away under the load of it. And perhaps, when he was convicted of lying to the Holy Ghost, he remembered the unpardonableness of *the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*, which struck him like a dagger to the heart. See the power of the word of God in the mouth of the apostles. As it was to some *a savour of life unto life*, so it was to others *a savour of death unto death*. As there are those whom the gospel justifies, so there are those whom it condemns. This punishment of Ananias may seem severe, but we are sure it was just.

(1.) It was designed to maintain the honour of the Holy Ghost as now lately poured out upon the apostles, in order to the setting up of the gospel kingdom. It was a great affront which Ananias put upon the Holy Ghost, as if he could be imposed upon: and it had a direct tendency to invalidate the apostles' testimony; for, if they could not by the Spirit discover this fraud, how could they by this Spirit discover the deep things of God, which they were to reveal to the children of men? It was therefore necessary that the credit of the apostles' gifts and powers should be supported, though it was at this expense.

(2.) It was designed to deter others from the like presumptions, now at the beginning of this dispensation. Simon Magus afterwards was not thus punished, nor Elymas; but Ananias was made an example now at first, that, with the sensible proofs given what a comfortable thing it is to receive the Spirit, there might be also sensible proofs given what a dangerous thing it is to resist the Spirit, and do despite to him. How severely was the worshipping of the golden calf punished, and the gathering of sticks on the sabbath-day, when the laws of the second and fourth commandments were now newly given! So was the offering of strange fire by Nadab and Abihu, and the mutiny of Korah and his company, when the fire from heaven was now newly given, and the authority of Moses and Aaron now newly established. The doing of this by the ministry of Peter, who himself with a lie denied his Master but a little while ago, intimates that it was not the resentment of a wrong done to himself; for then he, who had himself been faulty, would have had charity for those that offended; and he, who himself had repented and been forgiven, would have forgiven this affront, and endeavoured to bring this offender to repentance; but it was the act of the Spirit of God in Peter: to him the indignity was done, and by him the punishment was inflicted.

2. He was buried immediately, for this was the manner of the Jews (v. 6): *The young men*, who it is probable were appointed to that office in the church of burying the dead, as among the Romans the *libitinarii* and *polinctores*; or the young men that attended the apostles, and waited on them, they *wound up* the dead body in grave-clothes, *carried it out* of the city, and *buried it* decently, though he died in sin, and by an immediate stroke of divine vengeance.

IV. The reckoning with Sapphira, the wife of Ananias, who perhaps was first in the transgression, and tempted her husband to eat this forbidden

fruit. *She came in* to the place where the apostles were, which, as it should seem, was Solomon's porch, for there we find them (v. 12), a part of the temple where Christ used to walk, ^{<812>}John 10:23. *She came in about three hours after*, expecting to share in the thanks of the house for her coming in, and consenting to the sale of the land, of which perhaps she was entitled to her dower or thirds; for *she knew not what had been done*. It was strange that nobody ran to tell her of the sudden death of her husband, that she might keep away; perhaps some one did, and she was not at home; and so when she came to present herself before the apostles, as a benefactor to the fund she met with a breach instead of a blessing.

1. She was found guilty of sharing with her husband in his sin, by a question that Peter asked her (v. 8): *Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?* naming the sum which Ananias had brought and laid at the apostles' feet. "Was this all you received for the sale of the land, and had you no more for it?" "No," saith she, "we had no more, but that was every farthing we received." Ananias and his wife agreed to tell the same story, and the bargain being private, and by consent kept to themselves, nobody could disprove them, and therefore they thought they might safely stand in the lie, and should gain credit to it. It is sad to see those relations who should quicken one another to that which is good harden one another in that which is evil.

2. Sentence was passed upon her, that she should partake in her husband's doom, v. 9.

(1.) Her sin is opened: *How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?* Before he passes sentence, he makes her to know her abominations, and shows her the evil of her sin. Observe,

[1.] That they tempted the Spirit of the Lord; as Israel tempted God in the desert, when they said, *Is the Lord among us, or is he not?* after they had seen so many miraculous proofs of his power; and not only his presence, but his presidency, when they said, *Can God furnish a table?* So here, "Can the Spirit in the apostles discover this fraud? Can they discern that this is but a part of the price, when we tell them it is the whole?" *Can he judge through this dark cloud?* ^{<821>}Job 22:13. They saw that the apostles had the gift of tongues; but had they the gift of discerning spirits? Those that presume upon security and impunity in sin tempt the Spirit of God; they tempt God as if he were altogether such a one as themselves.

[2.] That they agreed together to do it, making the bond of their relation to each other (which by the divine institution is a sacred tie) to become a bond of iniquity. It is hard to say which is worse between yoke-fellows and other relations — a discord in good or concord in evil. It seems to intimate that their agreeing together to do it was a further tempting of the Spirit; as if, when they had engaged to keep one another's counsel in this matter, even the Spirit of the Lord himself could not discover them. Thus they *digged deep to hide their counsel from the Lord*, but were made to know it is in vain. "How is it that you are thus infatuated? What strange stupidity has seized you, that you would venture to make trial of that which is past dispute? How is it that you, who are baptized Christians, do not understand yourselves better? How durst you run so great a risk?"

(2.) Her doom is read: *Behold, the feet of those who have buried thy husband are at the door* (perhaps he heard them coming, or knew that they could not be long): *and they shall carry thee out*. As Adam and Eve, who agreed to eat the forbidden fruit, were turned together out of paradise, so Ananias and Sapphira, who agreed to tempt the Spirit of the Lord, were together chased out of the world.

3. The sentence executed itself. There needed no executioner, a killing power went along with Peter's word, as sometimes a healing power did; for the God in whose name he spoke *kills and makes alive*; and *out of his mouth* (and Peter was now his mouth) *both evil and good proceed* (v. 10): *Then fell she down straightway at his feet*. Some sinners God makes quick work with, while others he bears long with; for which difference, doubtless, there are good reasons; but he is not accountable to us for them. She heard not till now that her husband was dead, the notice of which, with the discovery of her sin, and the sentence of death passed upon her, struck her as a thunderbolt and took her away as with a whirlwind. And many instances there are of sudden deaths which are not to be looked upon as the punishment of some gross sin, like this. We must not think that all who die suddenly are sinners above others; perhaps it is in favour to them, that they have a quick passage: however, it is forewarning to all to be always ready. But here it is plain that it was in judgment. Some put the question concerning the eternal state of Ananias and Sapphira, and incline to think that the destruction of the flesh was that *the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*. And I should go in with that charitable opinion if there had been any space given them to repent, as there was to the incestuous Corinthian. But secret things belong not to us. It is said, *She*

fell down at Peter's feet; there, where she should have laid the whole price and did not, she was herself laid, as it were to make up the deficiency. The young men that had the care of funerals coming in found her dead; and it is not said, They wound her up, as they did Ananias, but, They carried her out as she was, and buried her by her husband; and probably an inscription was set over their graves, intimating that they were joint-monuments of divine wrath against those that lie to the Holy Ghost. Some ask whether the apostles kept the money which they did bring, and concerning which they lied? I am apt to think they did; they had not the superstition of those who said, It is not lawful for us to put it into the treasury: for unto the pure all things are pure. What they brought was not polluted to those to whom they brought it; but what they kept back was polluted to those that kept it back. Use was made of the censers of Korah's mutineers.

V. The impression that this made upon the people. Notice is taken of this in the midst of the story (v. 5): *Great fear came upon all that heard these things*, that heard what Peter said, and saw what followed; or upon all that heard the story of it; for, no doubt, it was all the talk of the city. And again (v. 11), *Great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.*

1. Those that had joined themselves to the church were thereby struck with an awe of God and of his judgments, and with a greater veneration for this dispensation of the Spirit which they were now under. It was not a damp or check to their holy joy, but it taught them to be serious in it, and to rejoice with trembling. All that laid their money at the apostles' feet after this were afraid of keeping back any part of the price.

2. All that heard it were put into a consternation by it, and were ready to say, *Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God and his Spirit in the apostles?* As ⁽⁹⁶⁾1 Samuel 6:20.

~~482~~ ACTS 5:12-16

THE PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL

We have here an account of the progress of the gospel, notwithstanding this terrible judgment inflicted upon two hypocrites.

I. Here is a general account of the miracles which the apostles wrought (v. 12): *By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people*, many miracles of mercy for one of judgment. Now the gospel power returned to its proper channel, which is that of mercy and grace. God had come out of his place to punish, but now returns to his place, to his mercy-seat again. The miracles they wrought proved their divine mission. They were not a few, but many, of divers kinds and often repeated; they were signs and wonders, such wonders as were confessedly signs of a divine presence and power. They were not done in a corner, but among the people, who were at liberty to enquire into them, and, if there had been any fraud or collusion in them, would have discovered it.

II. We are here told what were the effects of these miracles which the apostles wrought.

1. The church was hereby kept together, and confirmed in its adherence both to the apostles and to one another: *They of the church were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.*

(1.) They met in the temple, in the open place that was called Solomon's porch. It was strange that the rulers of the temple suffered them to keep their meeting there. But God inclined their hearts to tolerate them there awhile, for the more convenient spreading of the gospel; and those who permitted buyers and sellers could not for shame prohibit such preachers and healers there. They all met in public worship; so early was the institution of religious assemblies observed in the church, which must by no means be forsaken or let fall, for in them a profession of religion is kept up.

(2.) They were there with one accord, unanimous in their doctrine, worship, and discipline; and there was no discontent nor murmuring about the death of Ananias and Sapphira, as there was against Moses and Aaron about the death of Korah and his company: *You have killed the people of the Lord,* ⁰¹⁶⁵Numbers 16:41. The separation of hypocrites, by distinguishing judgments, should make the sincere cleave so much the closer to each other and to the gospel ministry.

2. It gained the apostles, who were the prime ministers in Christ's kingdom, very great respect.

(1.) The other ministers kept their distance: *Of the rest of their company durst no man join himself to them*, as their equal or an associate with them; though others of them were endued with the Holy Ghost, and spoke with tongues, yet none of them at this time did such signs and wonders as the apostles did: and therefore they acknowledged their superiority, and in every thing yielded to them.

(2.) All *the people magnified them*, and had them in great veneration, spoke of them with respect, and represented them as the favourites of Heaven, and unspeakable blessings to this earth. Though the chief priests vilified them, and did all they could to make them contemptible, this did not hinder the people from magnifying them, who saw the thing in a true light. Observe, The apostles were far from magnifying themselves; they transmitted the glory of all they did very carefully and faithfully to Christ, and yet the people magnified them; for those that humble themselves shall be exalted, and those honoured that honour God only.

3. The church increased in number (v. 14): *Believers were the more added to the Lord*, and no doubt joined themselves to the church, when they saw that God was in it of a truth, even *multitudes both of men and women*. They were so far from being deterred by the example that was made of Ananias and Sapphira that they were rather invited by it into a society that kept such a strict discipline. Observe,

(1.) Believers are added to the Lord Jesus, joined to him, and so joined to his mystical body, from which nothing can separate us and cut us off, but that which separates us and cuts us off from Christ. Many have been brought to the Lord, and yet there is room for others to be added to him, added to the number of those that are united to him; and additions will still be making till the mystery of God shall be finished, and the number of the elect accomplished.

(2.) Notice is taken of the conversion of *women* as well as *men*; more notice than generally was in the Jewish church, in which they neither received the sign of circumcision nor were obliged to attend the solemn feasts; and the *court of the women* was one of the outer courts of the temple. But, as among those that followed Christ while he was upon earth, so among those that believed on him after he went to heaven, great notice was taken of the good women.

4. The apostles had abundance of patients, and gained abundance of reputation both to themselves and their doctrine by the cure of them all, v. 15, 16. So many *signs and wonders were wrought by the apostles* that all manner of people put in for the benefit of them, both in city and country, and had it.

(1.) In the city: They *brought forth their sick into the streets*; for it is probable that the priests would not suffer them to bring them into the temple to Solomon's porch, and the apostles had not leisure to go to the houses of them all. And they *laid them on beds and couches* (because they were so weak that they could neither go nor stand), *that at the least the shadow of Peter, passing by, might overshadow some of them*, though it could not reach them all; and, it should seem, it had the desired effect, as the woman's touch of the hem of Christ's garment had; and in this, among other things, that word of Christ was fulfilled, *Greater works than these shall you do*. God expresses his care of his people, by his being their *shade on their right hand*; and the benign influences of Christ as a king are compared to the *shadow of a great rock*. Peter comes between them and the sun, and so heals them, cuts them off from a dependence upon creature sufficiency as insufficient, that they may expect help only from that Spirit of grace with whom he was filled. And, if such miracles were wrought by Peter's shadow, we have reason to think they were so by the other apostles, as by the handkerchiefs from Paul's body (~~4492~~ Acts 19:12), no doubt both being with an actual intention in the minds of the apostles thus to heal; so that it is absurd to infer hence a healing virtue in the relics of saints that are dead and gone; we read not of any cured by the relics of Christ himself, after he was gone, as certainly we should if there had been any such thing.

(2.) In the country towns: Multitudes came to Jerusalem from *the cities round about, bringing sick folks* that were afflicted in body, and *those that were vexed with unclean spirits*, that were troubled in mind, and they were *healed every one*; distempered bodies and distempered minds were set to rights. Thus opportunity was given to the apostles, both to convince people's judgments by these miracles of the heavenly origin of the doctrine they preached, and also to engage people's affections both to them and it, by giving them a specimen of its beneficial tendency to the welfare of this lower world.

~~487~~ ACTS 5:17-25

THE APOSTLES RELEASED BY AN ANGEL

Never did any good work go on with any hope of success, but it met with opposition; those that are bent to do mischief cannot be reconciled to those who make it their business to do good. Satan, the destroyer of mankind, ever was, and will be, an adversary to those who are the benefactors of mankind; and it would have been strange if the apostles had gone on thus teaching and healing and had had no check. In these verses we have the malice of hell and the grace of heaven struggling about them, the one to drive them off from this good work, the other to animate them in it,

I. The priests were enraged at them, and shut them up in prison, v. 17, 18. Observe, 1. Who their enemies and persecutors were. The high priest was the ringleader, Annas or Caiaphas, who saw their wealth and dignity, their power and tyranny, that is, their all, at stake, and inevitably lost, if the spiritual and heavenly doctrine of Christ should get ground and prevail among the people. Those that were most forward to join with the high priest herein were the *sect of the Sadducees*, who had a particularly enmity to the gospel of Christ, because it confirmed and established the doctrine of the invisible world, the resurrection of the dead, and the future state, which they denied. It is not strange if men of no religion be bigoted in their opposition to true and pure religion.

2. How they were affected towards them, ill affected, and exasperated to the last degree. When they heard and saw what flocking there was to the apostles, and how considerable they were become, they *rose up* in a passion, as men that could no longer bear it, and were resolved to make head against it, being *filled with indignation* at the apostles for preaching the doctrine of Christ, and curing the sick, — at the people for hearing them, and bringing the sick to them to be cured, — and at themselves and their own party for suffering this matter to go so far, and not knocking it on the head at first. Thus are the enemies of Christ and his gospel a torment to themselves. *Envy slays the silly one.*

3. How they proceeded against them (v. 18): *They laid their hands on them*, perhaps their own hands (so low did their malice make them stoop),

or, rather, the hands of their officers, and *put them in the common prison*, among the worst of malefactors. Hereby they designed,

(1.) To put a restraint upon them; though they could not lay any thing criminal to their charge worthy of death or of bonds, yet while they had them in prison they kept them from going on in their work, and this they reckoned a good point gained. Thus early were the ambassadors of Christ in bonds.

(2.) To put a terror upon them, and so to drive them off from their work. The last time they had them before them, they only threatened them (~~400~~ Acts 4:21); but now, finding that this did not do, they imprisoned them, to make them afraid of them.

(3.) To put a disgrace upon them, and therefore they chose to clap them up in the common prison, that, being thus vilified, the people might not, as they had done, magnify them. Satan has carried on his design against the gospel very much by making the preachers and professors of it appear despicable.

II. God sent his angel to release them out of prison, and to renew their commission to preach the gospel. The powers of darkness fight against them, but the Father of lights fights for them, and sends an angel of light to plead their cause. The Lord will never desert his witnesses, his advocates, but will certainly stand by them, and bear them out.

1. The apostles are discharged, legally discharged, from their imprisonment (v. 19): *The angel of the Lord by night*, in spite of all the locks and bars that were upon them, *opened the prison doors*, and, in spite of all the vigilance and resolution of the keepers that *stood without before the doors*, *brought forth* the prisoners (see v. 23), gave them authority to go out without crime, and led them through all opposition. This deliverance is not so particularly related as that of Peter (~~400~~ Acts 12:7, etc.); but the miracle here was the very same. Note, There is no prison so dark, so strong, but God can both visit his people in it, and, if he pleased, fetch them out of it. This discharge of the apostles out of prison by an angel was a resemblance of Christ's resurrection, and his discharge out of the prison of the grave, and would help to confirm the apostles' preaching of it.

2. They are charged, and legally charged, to go on with their work, so as thereby to be discharged from the prohibition which the high priest laid them under; the angel bade them, *Go, stand, and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life*, v. 20. When they were miraculously set at liberty, they must not think it was that they might save their lives by making their escape out of the hands of their enemies. No; it was that they might to on with their work with so much the more boldness. Recoveries from sickness, releases out of trouble, are granted us, and are to be looked upon by us as granted, not that we may enjoy the comforts of our life, but that God may be honoured with the services of our life. *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee*, ^{<BIB>}Psalm 119:175. *Bring my soul out of prison* (as the apostles here), *that I may praise thy name*, ^{<BIB>}Psalm 143:7. See ^{<BIB>}Isaiah 38:22. Now in this charge given them, observe,

(1.) Where they must preach: *Speak in the temple*. One would think, though they might not quit their work, yet it had been prudent to go on with it in a more private place, where it would give less offence to the priests than in the temple, and so would the less expose them. No; “Speak in the temple, for this is the place of concourse, this is your Father’s house, and it is not to be as yet quite left desolate.” It is not for the preachers of Christ’s gospel to retire into corners, as long as they can have any opportunity of preaching in the great congregation.

(2.) To whom they must preach: “*Speak to the people*; not to the princes and rulers, for they will not hearken; but to the people, who are willing and desirous to be taught, and whose souls are as precious to Christ, and ought to be so to you, as the souls of the greatest. Speak to the people, to all in general, for all are concerned.”

(3.) How they must preach: *Go, stand, and speak*, which intimates, not only they must speak publicly, stand up and speak, that all may hear; but that they must speak boldly and resolutely: *Stand and speak*; that is, “Speak it as those that resolve to stand to it, to live and die by it.”

(4.) What they must speak: *All the words of this life*. *This life* which you have been speaking of among yourselves, referring perhaps to the conferences concerning heaven which they had among themselves for their own and one another’s encouragement in prison: “Go, and preach the same to the world, that others may be comforted with the same comforts with which you yourselves are comforted of God.” Or, “of this life which the Sadducees deny, and therefore persecute you; preach this, though you

know it is this that they have indignation at.” Or, “of this life emphatically; this heavenly, divine life, in comparison with which the present earthly life does not deserve the name.” Or, “*these words of life*, the very same you have preached, these words which the Holy Ghost puts into your mouth.” Note, The words of the gospel are the words of life, quickening words; they are spirit, and they are life; *words whereby we may be saved* — that is the same with this here, ~~4114~~ Acts 11:14. The gospel is the word of this life, for it secures to us the privileges of our way as well as those of our home, and the promises of the life that now is as well as of that to come. And yet even spiritual and eternal life are brought so much to light in the gospel that they may be called *this life*; for the word is nigh thee. Note, The gospel is concerning matters of life and death, and ministers must preach it and people hear it accordingly. They must speak *all the words of this life*, and not conceal any for fear of offending, or in hope of ingratiating themselves with their rulers. Christ's witnesses are sworn to speak the whole truth.

III. They went on with their work (v. 21): *When they heard this*, when they heard that it was the will of God that they should continue to preach in the temple, they *returned to Solomon's porch*, v. 12.

1. It was a great satisfaction to them to have these fresh orders. Perhaps they began to question whether, if they had their liberty, they should preach as publicly in the temple as they had done, because they had been told, when they were *persecuted in one city, to flee to another*. But, now that the angel ordered them to go preach in the temple, their way was plain, and they ventured without any difficulty, entered into the temple, and feared not the face of man. Note, If we may but be satisfied concerning our duty, our business is to keep close to this, and then we may cheerfully trust God with our safety.

2. They set themselves immediately to execute them, without dispute or delay. They *entered into the temples early in the morning* (as soon as the gates were opened, and people began to come together there), and taught them the gospel of the kingdom: and did not at all fear what man could do unto them. The case here was extraordinary: the whole treasure of the gospel is lodged in their hands; if they be silent now the springs are shut up, and the whole work falls to the ground and is made to cease, which is not the case of ordinary ministers, who therefore are not by this example bound to throw themselves into the mouth of danger; and yet when God

gives opportunity of doing good, though we be under the restraint and terror of human powers, we should venture far rather than let go such an opportunity.

IV. The high priest and his party went on with their prosecution, v. 21. They, supposing they had the apostles sure enough, *called the council together*, a great and extraordinary council, for they summoned *all the senate of the children of Israel*. See here,

1. How they were prepared, and how big with expectation, to crush the gospel of Christ and the preachers of it, for they raised the whole posse. The last time they had the apostles in custody they convened them only before a committee of those that were of the kindred of the high priest, who were obliged to act cautiously; but now, that they might proceed further and with more assurance, they called together, *pasan ten gerousian* — *all the eldership*, that is (says Dr. Lightfoot), all the three courts or benches of judges in Jerusalem, not only the great sanhedrim, consisting of seventy elders, but the other two judicatories that were erected one in the outer-court gate of the temple, the other in the inner or beautiful gate, consisting of twenty-three judges each; so that, if there was a full appearance, here were one hundred and sixteen judges. Thus God ordered it, that the confusion of the enemies, and the apostles' testimony against them, might be more public, and that those might hear the gospel who would not hear it otherwise than from the bar. Howbeit, the high priest *meant not so, neither did his heart think so*; but it was in his heart to rally all his forces against the apostles, and by a universal consent to cut them all off at once.

2. How they were disappointed, and had their faces filled with shame: *He that sits in heaven laughs at them*, and so may we too, to see how gravely the court is set; and we may suppose the high priest makes a solemn speech to them, setting forth the occasion of their coming together — that a very dangerous faction was now lately raised at Jerusalem, by the preaching of the doctrine of Jesus, which it was needful, for the preservation of their church (which never was in such danger as now), speedily and effectually to suppress — that it was now in the power of their hands to do it, for he had the ringleaders of the faction now in the common prison, to be proceeded against, if they would but agree to it, with the utmost severity. An officer is, in order hereunto, despatched immediately to fetch the prisoners to the bar. But see how they are baffled.

(1.) The officers come, and tell them that they are not to be found in the prison, v. 22, 23. They last time they were forthcoming when they were called for, ~~400~~ Acts 4:7. But now they were gone, and the report which the officers make is, “*The prison-doors truly found we shut with all safety*” (nothing had been done to weaken them); “*the keepers had not been wanting to their duty; we found them standing without before the doors, and knowing nothing to the contrary but that the prisoners were all safe: but when we went in we found no man therein, that is, none of the men we were sent to fetch.*” It is probable that they found the common prisoners there. Which way the angel fetched them, whether by some back way, or opening the door and fastening it closely again (the keepers all the while asleep), we are not told; however it was, they were gone. The Lord knows, though we do not, how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and how to loose those that are in bonds for his name's sake, and he will do it, as here, when he has occasion for them. Now think how confused the court looked, when the officers made this return upon their order (v. 24): *When the high priest, and the captain of the temple, and the chief priests, heard these things, they were all at a plunge, and looked one upon another, doubting what this thing should be.* They were extremely perplexed, were at their wits' end, having never been so disappointed in all their lives of any thing they were so sure of. It occasioned various speculations, some suggesting that they were conjured out of the prison, and made their escape by magic arts; others that the keepers had played tricks with them, knowing how many friends these prisoners had, that were so much the darlings of the people. Some feared that, having made such a wonderful escape, they would be the more followed; others that, though perhaps they had frightened them from Jerusalem, they should hear of them again in some part or other of the country, where they would do yet more mischief, and it would be yet more out of their power to stop the spreading of the infection; and now they begin to fear that instead of curing the ill they have made it worse. Note, Those often distress and embarrass themselves that think to distress and embarrass the cause of Christ.

(2.) Their doubt is, in part, determined; and yet their vexation is increased by another messenger, who brings them word that their prisoners are preaching in the temple (v. 25): “*Behold, the men whom you put in prison, and have sent for to your bar, are now hard by you here, standing in the temple, under your nose and in defiance of you, teaching the people.*” Prisoners, that have broken prison, usually abscond, for fear of being

retaken; but these prisoners, that here made their escape, dare to show their faces even where their persecutors have the greatest influence. Now this confounded them more than any thing. Common malefactors may have art enough to break prison; but those are uncommon ones that have courage enough to avow it when they have so done.

~~4155~~ ACTS 5:26-42

THE EXAMINATION OF THE APOSTLES

We are not told what it was that the apostles preached to the people; no doubt it was according to the direction of the angel — *the words of this life*; but what passed between them and the council we have here an account of; for in their sufferings there appeared more of a divine power and energy than even in their preaching. Now here we have,

I. The seizing of the apostles a second time. We may think, if God designed this, “Why were they rescued from their first imprisonment?” But this was designed to humble the pride, and check the fury, of their persecutors; and now he would show that they were discharged, not because they feared a trial, for they were ready to surrender themselves and make their appearance before the greatest of their enemies.

1. They brought them without violence, with all the respect and tenderness that could be: did not pull them out of the pulpit, nor bind them, nor drag them along, but accosted them respectfully; and one would think they had reason to do so, in reverence to the temple, that holy place, and for fear of the apostles, lest they should strike them, as they did Ananias, or call for fire from heaven upon them, as Elias did; but all that restrained their violence was their fear of the people, who had such a veneration for the apostles that they would have stoned the officers if they had offered them any abuse.

2. Yet they brought them to those who, they knew, were violent against them, and were resolved to take violent courses with them (v. 27): They *brought them, to set them before the council*, as delinquents. Thus the powers that should have been a terror to evil works and workers became so to the good.

II. Their examination. Being brought before this august assembly, the high priest, as the mouth of the court, told them what it was they had to lay to their charge, v. 28.

1. That they had disobeyed the commands of authority, and would not submit to the injunctions and prohibitions given them (v. 28), “*Did not we, by virtue of our authority, strictly charge and command you, upon pain of our highest displeasure, that you should not teach in this name?*” But you have disobeyed our commands, and gone on to preach not only without our licence, but against our express order.” Thus those who make void the commandments of God are commonly very strict in binding on their own commandments, and insisting upon their own power: *Did not we command you?* Yes, they did; but did not Peter at the same time tell them that God's authority was superior to theirs, and his commands must take place of theirs? And they had forgotten this.

2. That they had spread false doctrine among the people, or at least a singular doctrine, which was not allowed by the Jewish church, nor agreed with what was delivered from Moses's chair. “*You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and thereby have disturbed the public peace, and drawn people from the public establishment.*” Some take this for a haughty scornful word: “This silly senseless doctrine of yours, that is not worth taking notice of, you have made such a noise with, that even Jerusalem, the great and holy city, is become full of it, and it is all the talk of the town.” They are angry that men, whom they look upon as despicable, should make themselves thus considerable.

3. That they had a malicious design against the government, and aimed to stir up the people against it, by representing it as wicked and tyrannical, and as having made itself justly odious both to God and man: “*You intend to bring this man's blood, the guilt of it before God, the shame of it before men, upon us.*” Thus they charge them not only with contumacy and contempt of the court, but with sedition and faction, and a plot both to set the people against them, for having persecuted even to death not only so innocent but so good and great a man as this Jesus, and also the Romans, for having drawn them into it. See here how those who with a great deal of presumption will do an evil thing yet cannot bear to hear of it afterwards, nor to have it charged upon them. When they were in the heat of the persecution they could cry daringly enough, “*His blood be upon us and upon our children; let us bear the blame for ever.*” But now that they have

time for a cooler thought they take it as a great affront to have his blood laid at their door. Thus are they convicted and condemned by their own consciences, and dread lying under that guilt in which they were not afraid to involve themselves.

III. Their answer to the charge exhibited against them: *Peter and the other apostles* all spoke to the same purport; whether severally examined, or answering jointly, they spoke as one and the same Spirit gave them utterance, depending upon the promise their Master had made them, that, when they were brought before councils, it should be *given them in that same hour what they should speak*, and courage to speak it.

1. They justified themselves in their disobedience to the commands of the great sanhedrim, great as it was (v. 29): *We ought to obey God rather than men*. They do not plead the power they had to work miracles (this spoke sufficiently for them, and therefore they humbly decline mentioning it themselves), but they appeal to a maxim universally owned, which even natural conscience subscribes to, and which comes home to their case. God had commanded them to teach in the name of Christ, and therefore they ought to do it, though the chief priests forbade them. Note, Those rulers set up in opposition to God, and have a great deal to answer for, who punish men for disobedience to them in that which is their duty to God.

2. They justified themselves in doing what they could to fill Jerusalem with the doctrine of Christ, though, in preaching him up, they did indeed reflect upon those that maliciously ran him down, and if they thereby bring his blood upon them they may thank themselves. It is charged upon them as a crime that they preached Christ and his gospel. “Now,” say they, “we will tell you who this Christ is, and what his gospel is, and then do you judge whether we ought not to preach it; nay, and we shall take this opportunity to preach it to you, *whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear.*”

(1.) The chief priests are told to their faces the indignities they did to this Jesus: “*You slew him and hanged him on a tree, you cannot deny it.*” The apostles, instead of making an excuse, or begging their pardon, for bringing the guilt of this man's blood upon them, repeat the charge, and stand to it: “It was you that slew him; it was your act and deed,” Note, People's being unwilling to hear of their faults is no good reason why they

should not be faithfully told of them. It is a common excuse made for not reproving sin that the times will not bear it. But those whose office it is to reprove must not be awed by this; the times must bear it, and shall bear it. *Cry aloud and spare not; cry aloud and fear not.*

(2.) They are told also what honours God put upon this Jesus, and then let them judge who was in the right, the persecutors of his doctrine or the preachers of it. He calls God the *God of our fathers*, not only *ours*, but *yours*, to show that in preaching Christ they did not preach a new god, nor entice people to come and worship other gods; not did they set up an institution contrary to that of Moses and the prophets, but they adhered to the God of the Jewish fathers; and that name of Christ which they preached answered the promises made to the fathers, and the covenant God entered into with them, and the types and figures of the law he gave them. The God of *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, is the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*; see what honour he did him.

[1.] He *raised him up*; he qualified him for, and called him to, his great undertaking. It seems to refer to the promise God made by Moses, *A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you*. God raised him up out of obscurity, and made him great. Or, it may be meant of his raising him up from the grave: “You put him to death, but God has restored him to life, so that God and you are manifestly contesting about this Jesus; and which must we side with?”

[2.] He *exalted him with his right hand, hypsose* — *hath lifted him up*. “You loaded him with disgrace, but God has crowned him with honour; and ought we not to honour him whom God honours?” God has *exalted him, te dexia autou* — *with his right hand*, that is, by his power put forth; Christ is said to *live by the power of God*. Or, to his right hand, to sit there, to rest there, to rule there. “He has invested him with the highest authority, and therefore we must teach in his name, for God has *given him a name above every name.*”

[3.] “He has appointed him to be *a prince and a Saviour*, and therefore we ought to preach in his name, and to publish the laws of his government as he is a prince, and the offers of his grace as he is a Saviour.” Observe, There is no having Christ to be our Saviour, unless we be willing to take him for our prince. We cannot expect to be redeemed and healed by him, unless we give up ourselves to be ruled by him. The judges of old were

saviours. Christ's ruling is in order to his saving, and faith takes an entire Christ, that came, not to save us in our sins, but to save us from our sins.

[4.] He is appointed, as a prince and a Saviour, to *give repentance to Israel and remission of sins*. Therefore they must preach in his name to the people of Israel, for his favours were designed primarily and principally for them; and none that truly loved their country could be against this. Why should the rulers and elders of Israel oppose one who came with no less a blessing to Israel than repentance and pardon? Had he been exalted to give deliverance to Israel from the Roman yoke, and dominion over the neighbouring nations, the chief priests would have welcomed him with all their hearts. But repentance and remission of sins are blessings they neither value nor see their need of, and therefore they can by no means admit his doctrine. Observe here, *First*, Repentance and remission go together; wherever repentance is wrought, remission is without fail granted, and the favour is given to all those to whom is given the qualification for it. On the other hand, no remission without repentance; none are freed from the guilt and punishment of sin but those that are freed from the power and dominion of sin, that are turned from it and turned against it. *Secondly*, It is Jesus Christ that gives, and is authorized to give, both repentance and remission. Whatsoever is required in the gospel-covenant is promised. Are we appointed to repent? Christ is appointed to give repentance, by his Spirit working with the word, to awaken the conscience, to work contrition for sin, and an effectual change in the heart and life. The new heart is his work, and the broken spirit a sacrifice of his providing; and, when he has given repentance, if he should not give remission he would *forsake the work of his own hands*. See how necessary it is that we repent, and that we apply ourselves to Christ by faith for his grace to work repentance in us.

[5.] All this is well attested, *First*, by the apostles themselves; they are ready to testify upon oath, if required, that they saw him alive after his resurrection, and saw him ascend into heaven; and also that they experienced the power of his grace upon their hearts, raising them up to that which was far above their natural capacities: "*We are his witnesses*, appointed by him to publish this to the world; and if we should be silent, as you would have us, we should betray a trust, and be false to it." When a cause is trying, witnesses, of all men, ought not to be silenced, for the issue of the cause depends on their testimony. *Secondly*, By the Spirit of God: "*We are witnesses*, competent ones, and whose testimony is

sufficient before any human judicature.” But this is not all: *The Holy Ghost is witness*, a witness from heaven; for God hath given his gifts and graces to those that obey Christ. Therefore we must preach in this name, because for this end the Holy Ghost is given us, whose operations we cannot stifle. Note, The giving of the Holy Ghost to obedient believers, not only to bring them to the obedience of faith, but to make them eminently useful therein, is a very strong proof of the truth of Christianity. God gave the Holy Ghost by his Son and in his name (^{<446>}John 14:26), and in answer to his prayer (^{<446>}John 14:16), nay, it was Christ that sent him from the Father (^{<453>}John 15:26; 16:7), and this proves the glory to which the Father has exalted him. The great work of the Spirit being not only to justify Christ (^{<518>}1 Timothy 3:16), but to glorify him, and all his gifts having a direct tendency to exalt his name, prove that his doctrine is divine, else it would not be carried on thus by divine power. And, *Lastly*, The giving of the Holy Ghost to those that obey Christ, both for their assistance in their obedience and as a present recompence for their obedience, is a plain evidence that it is the will of God that Christ should be obeyed; “judge then whether we ought to obey you in opposition to him.”

IV. The impression which the apostles' defence of themselves made upon the court. It was contrary to what one would have expected from men that pretended to reason, learning, and sanctity. Surely such fair reasoning could not but clear the prisoners, and convert the judges. No, instead of yielding to it, they raged against it, and were filled,

1. With indignation at what the apostles said: They were *cut to the heart*, angry to see their own sin set in order before them; stark mad to find that the gospel of Christ had so much to say for itself, and consequently was likely to get ground. When a sermon was preached to the people to this purport, they were *pricked to the heart*, in remorse and godly sorrow, ^{<445>}Acts 2:37. These here were *cut to the heart* with rage and indignation. Thus the same gospel is to some a savour of life unto life, to others of death unto death. The enemies of the gospel not only deprive themselves of its comforts, but fill themselves with terrors, and are their own tormentors.

2. With malice against the apostles themselves. Since they see they cannot stop their mouths any other way than by stopping their breath, they *take counsel to slay them*, hoping that so they shall *cause the work to cease*.

While the apostles went on in the service of Christ, with a holy security and serenity of mind, perfectly composed, and in a sweet enjoyment of themselves, their persecutors went on in their opposition to Christ, with a constant perplexity and perturbation of mind, and vexation to themselves.

V. The grave advice which Gamaliel, a leading man in the council, gave upon this occasion, the scope of which was to moderate the fury of these bigots, and check the violence of the prosecution. This Gamaliel is here said to be a *Pharisee* by his profession and sect, and by office a *doctor of the law*, one that studied the scriptures of the Old Testament, read lectures upon the sacred authors, and trained up pupils in the knowledge of them. Paul was brought up at his feet (~~421B~~ Acts 22:3), and tradition says that so were Stephen and Barnabas. Some say he was the son of that Simeon that took up Christ in his arms, when he was presented in the temple, and grandson of the famous Hillel. He is here said to be *in reputation among all the people* for his wisdom and conduct, it appearing by this passage that he was a moderate man, and not apt to go in with furious measures. Men of temper and charity are justly had in reputation, for checking the incendiaries that otherwise would set the world on fire. Now observe here,

1. The necessary caution he gives to the council, with reference to the case before them: *He commanded to put the apostles forth a little while*, that he might speak the more freely, and be the more freely answered (it was fit that the prisoners should withdraw when their case was to be debated); and then put the house in mind of the importance of this matter, which in their heat they were not capable of considering as they ought: *You men of Israel, saith he, take heed to yourselves*, consider what you do, or *intend to do, as touching these men*, v. 35. It is not a common case, and therefore should not be hastily determined. He calls them *men of Israel*, to enforce this caution: “You are men, that should be governed by reason, be not then as *the horse and the mule that have no understanding*; you are men of Israel, that should be governed by revelation, be not then as strangers and heathens, that have no regard to God and his word. *Take heed to yourselves* now that you are angry with these men, lest you *meddle to your own hurt*.” Note, The persecutors of God's people had best look to themselves, lest they fall into the pit which they dig. We have need to be cautious whom we give trouble to, lest we be found making the hearts of the righteous sad.

2. The cases he cites, to pave the way to his opinion. Two instances he gives of factious seditious men (such as they would have the apostles thought to be), whose attempts came to nothing of themselves; whence he infers that if these men were indeed such as they represented them the cause would sink with its own weight, and Providence would infatuate and defeat them, and then they needed not persecute them.

(1.) There was one *Theudas*, that made a mighty noise for awhile, as one sent of God, *boasting himself to be somebody, some great one* (so the word is), either a teacher or a prince, with a divine commission to effect some great revolution in the church or in the state; and he observes here (v. 36) concerning him,

[1.] How far he prevailed: “*A number of men, about four hundred* in all, joined themselves to him, that knew not what to do with themselves, or hoped to better themselves; and they seemed then a formidable body.”

[2.] How soon his pretensions were all dashed: “*When he was slain*” (probably in war) “*there needed no more ado, all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered,* and melted away like snow before the sun. Now compare that case with this. You have slain Jesus, the ringleader of this faction; you have taken him off. Now if he was, as you say he was, an impostor and pretender, his death, like that of Theudas, will be the death of his cause, and the final dispersion of his followers.” From what has been we may infer what will be in a like case; the smiting of the shepherd will be the scattering of the sheep: and, if the God of peace had not *brought again from the dead that great Shepherd*, the dispersion of the sheep, at his death, had been total and final.

(2.) The case was the same with *Judas of Galilee*, v. 37. Observe,

[1.] The attempt he made. It is said to be *after this*, which some read, *besides this*, or, Let me mention, *after this*, — supposing that Judas's insurrection was long before that of Theudas; for it was *in the time of the taxation*, namely, that at our Saviour's birth (~~and~~ Luke 2:1), and that of Theudas, whom Josephus speaks of, that mutinied, in the time of *Cuspius Fadus*; but this was in the days of Claudius Caesar, some years after Gamaliel spoke this, and therefore could not be the same. It is not easy to determine particularly when these events happened, nor whether this taxing was the same with that at our Saviour's birth or one of a later date. Some think this Judas of Galilee was the same with Judas Gaulonites,

whom Josephus speaks of, others not. It is probable that they were cases which lately happened, and were fresh in memory. This *Judas drew away much people after him*, who gave credit to his pretensions. But,

[2.] Here is the defeat of his attempt, and that without any interposal of the great sanhedrim, or any decree of theirs against him (it did not need it); *he also perished, and all, even as many as obeyed him*, or were persuaded by him, were dispersed. Many have foolishly thrown away their lives, and brought others into the same snares, by a jealousy for their liberties, *in the days of the taxing*, who had better have been content, when Providence had so determined, *to serve the king of Babylon*.

3. His opinion upon the whole matter.

(1.) That they should not persecute the apostles (v. 38): *Now I say unto you, ta nyn* — *for the present*, as the matter now stands, my advice is, “*Refrain from these men; neither punish them for what they have done nor restrain them for the future. Connive at them; let them take their course; let not our hand be upon them.*” It is uncertain whether he spoke this out of policy, for fear of offending either the people or the Romans and making further mischief. The apostles did not attempt any thing by outward force. The weapons of their warfare were not carnal; and therefore why should any outward force be used against them? Or, whether he was under any present convictions, at least of the probability of the truth of the Christian doctrine, and thought it deserved better treatment, at least a fair trial. Or, whether it was only the language of a mild quiet spirit, that was against persecution for conscience' sake. Or, whether God put this word into his mouth beyond his own intention, for the deliverance of the apostles at this time. We are sure there was an overruling Providence in it, that the servants of Christ might not only come off, but come off honourably.

(2.) That they should refer this matter to Providence: “*Wait the issue, and see what it will come to. If it be of men, it will come to nought of itself; if of God, it will stand*, in spite of all your powers and policies.” That which is apparently wicked and immoral must be suppressed, else the magistrate bears the sword in vain; but that which has a show of good, and it is doubtful whether it be of God or men, it is best to let it alone, and let it take its fate, not to use any external force for the suppressing of it. Christ rules by the power of truth, not of the sword. What Christ asked concerning John's baptism, *Was it from heaven or of men?* was a question

proper to be asked concerning the apostles' doctrine and baptism, which followed Christ, as John Baptist's went before him. Now they, having owned, concerning the former, that they could not tell whether it was from heaven or of men, ought not to be too confident concerning the latter. But, take it which way you will, it is a reason why they should not be persecuted.

[1.] "If this *counsel, and this work*, this forming of a society, and incorporating it in the name of Jesus, *be of men, it will come to nothing*. If it be the counsel and work of foolish crack-brained men that know not what they do, let them alone awhile, and they will run themselves out of breath, and *their folly will be manifest before all men*, and they will make themselves ridiculous. If it be the counsel and work of politic and designing men, who under colour of religion are setting up a secular interest, let them alone awhile, and they will throw off the mask, and their knavery will be manifest to all men, and they will make themselves odious; Providence will never countenance it. *It will come to nothing* in a little time; and, if so, your persecuting and opposing it is very needless; there is no occasion for giving yourselves so much trouble, and bringing such an odium upon yourselves, to kill that which, if you give it a little time, will die of itself. The unnecessary use of power is an abuse of it. But,"

[2.] "If it should prove (and as wise men as you have been mistaken) *that this counsel and this work is of God*, that these preachers have their commissions and instructions from him, that they are as truly his messengers to the world as the Old-Testament prophets were, then what do you think of persecuting them, of this attempt of yours (v. 33) *to slay them?* You must conclude it to be," *First*, "A fruitless attempt against them: *If it be of God, you cannot overthrow it; for there is no wisdom nor counsel against the Lord; he that sits in heaven laughs at you.*" It may be the comfort of all who are sincerely on God's side, who have a single eye to his will as their rule and his glory as their end, that whatsoever is of God cannot be overthrown totally and finally, though it may be very vigorously opposed; it may be run upon, but cannot be run down. *Secondly*, "A dangerous attempt to yourselves. Pray let it alone, *lest haply you be found even to fight against God*; and I need not tell you who will come off by the worse in that contest." *Woe unto him that strives with his Maker*; for he will not only be overcome as an impotent enemy, but severely reckoned with as a rebel and traitor against his rightful prince.

Those that hate and abuse God's faithful people, that restrain and silence his faithful ministers, fight against God, for he takes what is done against them as done against himself. *Whoso touches them, touches the apple of his eye.* Well, this was the advice of Gamaliel: we wish it were duly considered by those that persecute for conscience' sake, for it was a good thought, and natural enough, though we are uncertain what the man was. The tradition of the Jewish writers is that, for all this, he lived and died an inveterate enemy to Christ and his gospel; and though (now at least) he was not for persecuting the followers of Christ, yet he was the man who composed that prayer which the Jews use to this day for the extirpating of Christians and Christianity. On the contrary, the tradition of the Papists is that he turned Christian, and became an eminent patron of Christianity and a follower of Paul, who had formerly sat at his feet. If it had been so, it is very probable that we should have heard of him somewhere in the *Acts* or *Epistles*.

VI. The determination of the council upon the whole matter, v. 40.

1. Thus far they agreed with Gamaliel that they let fall the design of putting the apostles to death. They saw a great deal of reason in what Gamaliel said, and, for the present, it gave some check to their fury, and a reminder of their wrath was restrained by it.

2. Yet they could not forbear giving some vent to their rage (so outrageous was it) contrary to the convictions of their judgments and consciences; for, though they were advised to let them alone, yet,

(1.) *They beat them*, scourged them as malefactors, stripped them, and whipped them, as they used to do in the synagogues, and notice is taken (v. 41) of the ignominy of it. Thus they thought to make them ashamed of preaching, and the people ashamed of hearing them; as Pilate scourged our Saviour to expose him, when yet he declared he found no fault in him.

(2.) *They commanded them that they should not speak any more in the name of Jesus*, that, if they could find no other fault with their preaching, they might have this ground to reproach it, that it was against law, and not only without the permissions, but against the express order of their superiors.

VII. The wonderful courage and constancy of the apostles in the midst of all these injuries and indignities done them. When they were dismissed

they departed from the council, and we do not find one word they said by way of reflection upon the court and the unjust treatment given them. *When they were reviled they reviled not again; and when they suffered they threatened not; but committed their cause to him to whom Gamaliel had referred it, even to a God who judgeth righteously.* All their business was to preserve the possession of their own souls, and to make full proof of their ministry, notwithstanding the opposition given them; and both these they did to admiration.

1. They bore their sufferings with an invincible cheerfulness (v. 41): When *they went out*, perhaps with the marks of the lashes given them on their arms and hands appearing, hissed at by the servants and rabble, it may be, or public notice given of the infamous punishment they had undergone, instead of being ashamed of Christ, and their relation to him, *they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.* They were men, and men in reputation, that had never done any thing to make themselves vile, and therefore could not but have a sense of the shame they suffered, which, it should seem, was more grievous to them than the smart, as it usually is to ingenuous minds; but they considered that it was for the name of Christ that they were thus abused, because they belonged to him and served his interest, and their sufferings should be made to contribute to the further advancement of his name; and therefore,

(1.) They reckoned it an honour, looked upon it *that they were counted worthy to suffer shame*, *katexithesan atimasthenai* — *that they were honoured to be dishonoured for Christ.* Reproach for Christ is true preferment, as it makes us conformable to his pattern and serviceable to his interest.

(2.) They rejoiced in it, remembering what their Master had said to them at their first setting out (^{41:11} Matthew 5:11, 12): *When men shall revile you, and persecute you, rejoice and be exceedingly glad.* They rejoiced, not only though they suffered shame (their troubles did not diminish their joy), but *that they suffered shame*; their troubles increased their joy, and added to it. If we suffer ill for doing well, provided we suffer it well, and as we should, we ought to rejoice in that grace which enables us so to do.

2. They went on in their work with indefatigable diligence (v. 41): They were punished for preaching, and were commanded *not to preach*, and yet *they ceased not to teach and preach*; they omitted no opportunity, nor abated any thing of their zeal or forwardness. Observe,

(1.) When they preached — *daily*; not only on sabbath days, or on Lord's days, but every day, as duly as the day came, without intermitting any day, as their Master did (~~185~~ Matthew 26:55, ~~197~~ Luke 19:47), not fearing that they should either kill themselves or cloy their hearers.

(2.) Where they preached — both publicly *in the temple*, and privately *in every house*; in promiscuous assemblies, to which all resorted, and in the select assemblies of Christians for special ordinances. They did not think that either one would excuse them from the other, for the word must be *preached in season and out of season*. Though in the temple they were more exposed, and under the eye of their enemies, yet they did not confine themselves to their little oratories in their own houses, but ventured into the post of danger; and though they had the liberty of the temple, a consecrated place, yet they made no difficulty of preaching in houses, in every house, even the poorest cottage. They visited the families of those that were under their charge, and gave particular instructions to them according as their case required, even to the children and servants.

(3.) What was the subject matter of their preaching: *They preached Jesus Christ*; they preached concerning him; and this was not all, they preached him up, they proposed him to those who heard them, *to be their prince and Saviour*. They did *not preach themselves, but Christ*, as faithful friends to the bridegroom, making it their business to advance his interest. This was the preaching that gave most offence to the priests, who were willing they should preach any thing but Christ; but they would not alter their subject to please them. It ought to be the constant business of gospel ministers to preach Christ; *Christ, and him crucified; Christ, and him glorified*; nothing besides this but what is reducible to it.