



GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

The Call to Be Like Christ

Acts 5:17-5:42

April 29, 2007

- I. Love for God Leads to Obedience
- II. Obedience to the God's Commands Leads to Association with Christ
- III. Association with Christ Leads to Suffering
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I. Love for God Always Leads to Obedience

- ❑ In the accounts in Scripture where Christ commissioned His apostles [Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8], He told them to 'make disciples of all the nations' by 'teaching them to observe all that I [Christ] commanded you [the apostles].'
- ❑ In other words, it was the disciples' job to **teach obedience**.
- ❑ Yet, it is clear that Christ, like any great leader [and Christ was certainly much more than simply a great leader!] never commanded His people to do anything that He did not already do Himself.
- ❑ Throughout the life of Christ, the one attribute that characterized His life and ministry was **obedience**: obedience to the will of the Father unto the point of death, even death on a Cross [Philippians 2:5-11].
- ❑ Yet Christ's supreme obedience was a direct function of His supreme love for His Father.
- ❑ Therefore, Christ Himself embodied the truth He spoke in **John 14:15**:

'If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.'

- ❑ Thus, Christ's motive for 'emptying Himself, living the life He did, and bearing the infinite wrath of the Father on the cross was NOT His love for His people [although He certainly loves His people]; but, rather, His supreme love for His Father. It was Christ's love for the Father that lead Him to the Cross.

- ❑ As these early apostles went from as the 'sent ones' of Christ, they did so with not only unique apostolic authority, but a unique responsibility to serve as Christ's representatives on earth during the formidable period of the Early Church. One must remember that although the early Christians had the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they did not have the completed canon of Scripture.
- ❑ Therefore, as the representatives of Christ, the early apostles were treated much as Christ was during His earthly ministry. This most certainly bears witness to the truth that they were following the commands of Christ as He had urged them to.
- ❑ Here, in **Acts 5**, it is clear that this section begins with the obedience of the Apostles.
- ❑ As Acts 5:12 states, 'At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.'
- ❑ Yet, one must realize that, like the Risen and Exalted Christ, the obedience of the Apostles was a direct function of their **love for Him**.
- ❑ Furthermore, the obedience of the Apostles, in this passage centers around the primary function of the early believers, to include the Apostles, as well as believers today: the glory of God through the proclamation of the truth of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ❑ During their imprisonment, in **Verse 18**, for refusing to remain silent with respect to the proclamation of the Gospel in the *name of Christ*, **Verses 19-20** state, '...during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 'Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.'
 - In other words, the Lord did not release the Apostles to go and return to their 'old', 'comfortable' ways of life. Rather, He released them to **proclaim the Gospel in the TEMPLE – the center of Judaism!**
 - It is significant that the Angel of the Lord commanded the Apostles to proclaim the **whole message of this Life**. It is significant because Jesus Himself proclaimed the truth throughout His ministry. Yet, it is even more significant than this, because Jesus Christ Himself **is** the Way, **the Truth**, and the Life [John 14:6]. Even more, Jesus Christ **is Himself Life**, as He has Life in Himself [John 1:4; 5:26]; that is, Life is inherent to Him and He derives His Life from Himself, as He is fully God and therefore, eternal in His nature and existence.
 - This also a unique way of describing the Gospel – 'the message of Life'; yet, it is fully consistent with Scripture. Jesus Christ, Himself, in His High Priestly prayer, prays to

the Father, 'This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent' [John 17:3].

- Also, in John 6:68, it is Peter himself who says to Christ, 'Lord...You have words of eternal life.'
- The obedience of the Apostles is further exemplified in their willingness to go and preach in the Temple area. In **Verse 25**, someone reported, 'The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!'
- After the captain of the temple guard and the officers brought them back to the Sanhedrin **Verse 26**, the high priest once again question them, saying **Verses 27-28**, 'We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching...'
 - Immediately, Peter and the apostles answered the high priest **Verse 29**, saying, 'We must obey God rather than men.'
 - Just as Christ sought to obey the Father's will rather than the traditions of man, so the Apostles sought to 'obey God rather than men.'
 - John Calvin rightfully stated, 'We must obey rulers so far, that the commandment of God be not broken. Whereas power and authority is lawfully used, then it is out of season to make comparison between God and man...But so soon as rulers do lead us away from the obedience of God, because they strive against God with sacrilegious boldness, their pride must be abated, that God may be above all in authority. Then all smokes of honor vanish away. For God does not...bestow honorable titles upon men...that they may darken his glory.'
 - Our passion to obey God rather than men is a function of our love for God. Tragically, we too often love the comforts of this world more than our God, and as a result, we obey the carnal desires that seek to preserve the comforts and familiarities we can see, touch, feel, and enjoy.
 - Further, far too often we seek the praise and glory that comes from men rather than God, as the praise of man is felt immediately and tangibly.
- Peter concluded his testimony before the Sanhedrin, stating **Verse 32**, 'And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.'
 - First of all, notice the Trinitarian nature of this passage. God the Father raised God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, from the dead **Verse 30**; God the Father exalted God the Son 'to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior' **Verse 31**; and God the Holy Spirit is witness to these things. Further, **Verse 32** God the Holy Spirit has been given to all those who believe.
 - Secondly, Peter directly associates obedience with the witness of the Holy Spirit.

- A quick reading of this passage may lead one to believe that God gives the Holy Spirit to a believer *after* obedience or *as a result of* obedience; however, this is not the case.
- It is important to realize, firstly, that one cannot obey prior to regeneration by the Holy Spirit. It is the person and work of the Holy Spirit [who works on the basis of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ in accordance with the will of the Father] who **enables one to be obedient** in the first place.
- In the original Greek, Acts 5:32 literally reads: ‘And we are witnesses of these words [or things / matters] and [so is] the Holy Spirit [whom] God gave to the ones obeying Him.’
- In other words, the **current obedience** of God’s people is a result of a **past gift** - the giving of the Holy Spirit by God.

Romans 1:4-5 states, ‘who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness...through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,’

Also, **John 3:34** states, ‘For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.’

Finally, **John 15:26-27** states: ‘When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.’

❖ **In other words, it is the Holy Spirit within the believer who testifies to the truth of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the Glory of God the Father.**

- ❖ Our obedience, is, in a very real sense, a function of the degree of our surrender to the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
 - The work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the obedient Apostles [and the work of the Holy Spirit in our obedient lives today]; however, is on the basis of the work of the Holy Spirit in the earthly life and ministry of the Incarnate Christ.
 - The Holy Spirit was the ‘constant companion of Christ’ during His life and ministry and it is the Holy Spirit who is the mark of our obedience today.
 - Furthermore, in His life, death, resurrection and ascension, the Holy Spirit was the constant companion of Christ, and as a result, in His exaltation [resurrection and ascension], Christ came into full possession of the Spirit, allowing Him to baptize believers at Pentecost [as a direct result of His exaltation at the right hand of the Father].

‘Paul [teaches] that through his life and ministry Jesus came into such complete possession of the Spirit, receiving and experiencing him ‘without limit’ (John 3:34), that he is now ‘Lord’ of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18). With respect to his...ministry to us, the Spirit has been ‘imprinted’ with the character of Jesus. This is precisely what it means for Jesus to send him as *allos parakletos*.’

Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*

- ❖ To be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, then, is to be indwelt by the Spirit that enabled the Incarnate Christ to fulfill the will of the Father. Therefore, to surrender fully to the sovereign work of God the Holy Spirit in our lives, is to become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ, to the Glory of God the Father.
 - Finally, this chapter closes with the obedience of the apostles, boldly proclaiming the Gospel of Christ, even though they had just been flogged for that very ‘offense.’
 - As **5:42** states, ‘And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.’

II. Obedience to the God's Commands Leads to Association with Christ

John 15:18-19, 21 states, ‘If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you...If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.’

- ❑ There could probably be no greater compliment to a Christian than for one to say, ‘You ‘look like’ / ‘act like’ Christ.’
- ❑ It is often the source of great pride for a father to be told that his son resembles him [and vice-versa]. The reason is that the father loves the son and innately wants to be associated with him in some tangible way.
- ❑ So it is with Christ.
- ❑ If we love Him, we will obey Him. Furthermore, if we love Him we should want to be associated with Him. However, the only way to truly be associated with Christ is by first loving Him [which is a sovereign work of God] and then obeying Him as a result.
- ❑ It is that obedience to the will of God which was the hallmark of Christ’s life, and it is the fundamental characteristic that will associate us with Him.
- ❑ Yet, association with Christ will inevitably lead to similar treatment as Christ.

- This is the greatest ‘guilt by association’ a Christian could ask for.

III. Association with Christ Leads to Suffering

- As was true with Christ, so it is true with the Apostles, that obedience to the Father’s will necessarily leads to suffering.
- As the representatives of Christ on earth we are called to live like Christ, which includes suffering like Christ. The reason for this is quite clear: the world hated Christ and persecuted Him [in fact, crucified Him]. Therefore, if Christ truly lives in us, the world will hate, and therefore, persecute us as well.
- Yet, it all began with **obedience** – obedience to the Father’s will.
- One must realize that obedience to Christ is rarely, if ever, pragmatic. To the non-believer, obedience to the call of Christ seems foolish. Even ‘well-meaning’ Christians will often try to persuade Christians from obeying God’s calling on their lives, much like the men of England during the life of William Carey, who said, ‘If the Lord will save the people of India, He can do it without you.’
- One of the great ironies in this passage is that just a couple of months prior to this scene, Peter denied any association with Christ, for fear of persecution and suffering. However, now, Peter is boldly proclaiming the Gospel of the Risen and Exalted Christ.
- The suffering that the apostles endured for the sake of Christ powerfully demonstrates that the world closely associated their ministries with the life of their crucified and exalted Savior.
- In **Verse 17**, Luke writes, ‘But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates...’
 - In the same manner, the high priest, Caiaphas [as well as his son-in-law Annas] rose up against Christ during His trial before the Sanhedrin [Matthew 26:65].
 - The ‘natural’ world will always ‘rise up’ against Christ, as the darkness always flees from the light.
 - Also, Luke explains, in **Verse 17**, *why* the high priest ‘rose up’ against the apostles: ‘they were filled with jealousy.’

- The truth of the sovereign rule of Almighty God is always a threat to the authority structures of this world.
- Next, in **Verse 18**, the Jewish leaders once again ‘laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail.’
 - Just as the Jewish leaders sought to silence Christ, they attempted to do the same with the apostles, yet the Sanhedrin experienced the same outcome in both cases – the Gospel spread.
- Then, in **Verse 33**, Luke states, ‘But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them.’
 - The Sanhedrin had felt the same way with Christ. They wanted to kill Him in order to silence Him.
 - However, Peter, in his speech before the Sanhedrin, in **Verse 30**, states, ‘The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.’
 - The word translated, here, ‘put to death’ is the Greek word *Diacheirizo*, meaning ‘to put to death with one’s own hands.’
 - In other word, Peter is declaring that it is as though the Jews killed Peter with their own hands.
 - Yet, in this succinct verse, Peter points out that the Jews were responsible, not only for the death of Christ, but for **cursing Him**.
 - Peter uses the phrase, ‘hanging Him on a cross’ which echoes Deuteronomy 21:23, ‘Cursed is a man who hangs on a tree.’ In other words, it was not enough to simply kills Christ – they wanted Him shamed and accursed!
- Finally, in **Verse 40**, the Sanhedrin had the apostles flogged, for they could find no fault in them.
 - In a similar manner, Christ was flogged at the orders of Pilate, because he found no fault in Jesus [Luke 23:15-17] just as the Sanhedrin could find no fault with the apostles.

IV. Suffering for Christ Leads to Joy

- ❑ Although we are called to suffer for Christ's sake in this world, suffering for the sake of Christ will always bring joy – joy that the world cannot understand or take away.

John 16:20,22 states: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy...Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.'

- ❑ In other words, God does not simply replace our weeping and grief with joy, He turns our weeping into joy. In other words, the very object of our weeping becomes the object of our joy. The greatest example of this is the cross of Christ. It was an object of shame and torture prior to the crucifixion of Christ; however, it is now a symbol of God's saving grace.
- ❑ In a similar manner, we are to view our suffering, not as a source of despair, but as a source of joy, as we had the privilege to suffer for the sake of Christ because of our association with Him.

As the Apostle Paul states in **Galatians 6:17**: 'Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.'

Also, Peter writes, in **1 Peter 4:13**: 'But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.'

- ❑ One of the greatest blessings in this life is to be deemed worth to suffer shame for the sake of the name of Christ.
- ❑ The Apostles were intimately familiar with suffering for the sake of Christ. Yet, because of this, they knew a joy that few of us today can relate to.
- ❑ At the end of this chapter, the Apostles had been flogged and released, yet, in **Verse 41**, Luke states, 'So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.'

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- ❑ In the context of this passage, it is amazing how the obedience and sufferings of the Apostles leads to unspeakable joy.
- ❑ **First of all**, the obedience of the Apostles leads to their imprisonment. However, it is in this situation that God demonstrates His power and grace by vindicating the disciples by opening the gates of the prison and setting them free.
 - This situation can certainly be seen to parallel Christ's vindication by the Father in His resurrection from the dead. The empty tomb, like the empty jail cell served as

powerful proof to God's exoneration and vindication of His servants. As Peter powerfully states so many times, **'You put Christ to death, but God raised Him!'**

- Just as the Roman officials were powerless to keep the tomb of Christ 'secure'; so they were powerless to keep God from opening the prison doors and releasing His servants.
- Luke states, in **Verse 24**, that 'when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, *they were perplexed* about what had come of this.'
 - Therefore, the actions and perplexity of these enemies of Christ validates the words of Paul in **1 Corinthians 1:27-28**: 'But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,'
- This also demonstrates a powerful truth that, when we are in an eternal covenantal relationship with Almighty God, He goes before us and fights our battles for us. Our enemies are His ['Vengeance is mine declares the LORD'], and He will prepare the way for us to walk in obedience to His commands.

Another powerful blessing that the Apostles experienced through their obedience was a release from 'prison' and 'bondage' of this world. When we suffer for Christ, we are 'uprooted' from this world, no longer held in bondage to its trappings and allure.

- **Secondly**, the words of the members of the Sanhedrin in response to the actions of the apostles, reveal God sovereign rule over this situation, and are therefore the source of great joy.
 - It, once again, becomes clear that the authority structures of this world are powerless in the face of Almighty God.
 - In **Verse 28**, the high priest says, 'We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name...'
 - One of the powerful ironies here is that the high priest could not even bring himself to speak the name of Jesus. It is almost as though the name of Christ is being elevated to the name of YHWH, the ineffable, unspeakable, holy name of God. This is consistent with the truth that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God is the great I AM, equal in essence with His Father.
 - Next, he states, 'you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching...'

- Again, the high priest himself is admitting his inability to control the spread of the Gospel message.
 - Then, the high priest says, ‘...you...intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.’
 - The high priest is exactly right! Peter and the apostles are proclaiming the truth that the blood of Christ is on their heads.
 - In the Old Testament, ‘to lay someone’s blood’ on someone else was an indictment of murder – an indictment that carried with it the death penalty [How true, then is this statement!].
 - Also, and rather interestingly, in Matthew 27:25, the high priest must have forgotten shouting with the people gathered before Pilate, ‘His blood shall be on us and our children!’
- In all of this, though, the court of the Sanhedrin **could not convict the Apostles of breaking any law!** In other words, the Law of God exonerates God’s servants.
 - This, too, parallels the trials of Christ, where the Sanhedrin could bring to just charge against Christ, and Pilate states, ‘I find no guilt in this man.’ Luke 23:4
- **Thirdly**, just as God sovereignly used godless men in the life of Christ to declare truth and vindicate Him [In John 11:49, Caiaphas prophesied, ‘...do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man died for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.’
 - As the Apostles stood before the Sanhedrin, Luke records, in **Verse 33**, that Gamaliel stood up and urged the Sanhedrin to exercise caution with Christ, saying, in **Verse 39**, ‘...if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.’
 - Gamaliel the Elder was a Pharisee, and one of the greatest teachers of his day.
 - The Mishnah states, concerning Gamaliel: ‘When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Law ceased and purity and abstinence died.’
 - The Apostle Paul, himself, was one of Gamaliel’s students.
 - In his speech before the Sanhedrin, Gamaliel first references Theudas.

- F.F. Bruce writes, ‘We have no other information about this Theudas, but since he is said to have flourished before the rising of Judas the Galilean (A.D. 6), he may have been one of the many insurgent leaders who arose in Palestine after the death Herod the Great (4 B.C.)’
- Secondly, he mentions Judas of Galilee.
 - As John Polhill writes, ‘[Gamaliel] referred to Judas the Galilean who arose ‘in the days of the census.’ This is almost surely the same Judas who is referred to by Josephus in both his *Jewish War* and his *Antiquities*. He started a major rebellion in protest of the census under Quirinius (A.D. 6-7), which was undertaken for the purposes of taxation. Josephus did not mention his death, but Gamaliel referred to his being killed and all his followers being scattered. Although the original rebellion under Judas was stifled by the Romans, such was not the case with the general movement begun by Judas.’
 - Therefore, God, in his vindication of his servants, speaks through Gamaliel.
 - **Finally**, when we suffer for the sake of Christ, it is cause for joy, as it proves that God’s word is true, for He promised there would be suffering for His followers. Not only this, He promised that the sufferings for Christ will also give us hope.

Once again, **John 15:18-19, 21** states, ‘If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you...If they persecuted Me, **they will also persecute you**’...But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.’

James 1:2-4: ‘Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.’

- ❖ May we become more Like Christ who said in **John 4:34**, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.’ It was His zeal for His Father’s will that would consume Him and become the basis of our salvation – And this, to the Glory of God!

Philippians 3:7-10:

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;