

Acts 5:12-42

Fighting the Gospel in the house of God.

(How can we detect a toxic religious spirit?)

See theology files #306, #308, #602, #802, #806 in apptoteach.org

Introduction

1. Luke 5:37 “And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined.”
2. Jesus shocked his generation with his harsh words for the religious establishment, which usually resisted him. The early church experienced the same kind of resistance from religious leaders. What makes us think anything has changed? Are we aware of toxic tendencies in our present day church’s that can actually resist the work of God?

Context

1. In the first 12 verses we see resistance to the Spirit from Satan. Now we see resistance that comes from the religious establishment.
2. The point of this section is not the miracles of vs.12-16 and the dramatic growth of the church, which accompany them. It is the hostile reaction to the gospel that follows.
3. We need also to note how the early church leaders reacted to the suffering that they experienced.

How to run Jesus out of your church.

1. Expect God to work **only** through the things you understand or control.

¹² And 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. ¹³ But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to {their number}; ¹⁵ to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. ¹⁶ And also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits; and they were all being healed.

- a. The emphasis on evangelism through signs and wonders continues in this chapter.
- b. The fact that we do not see this same outpouring of signs and wonders throughout the history of the church raises some interesting questions. Is it because of a lack of faith or the absence of the Apostles?

- c. It might be important to note that the religious leaders of Jesus' day would have regarded the physical circumstances of the sick and poor as signs of their lack of spiritual virtue. The Sadducees linked their physical well being with God's favor. The fact that people were healed in the name of Jesus did not promote Jesus' reputation as a man of God in the mind of the Sadducees.
- d. Jesus wants to deliver people from hopelessness and bondage. Why were God's people so upset by this?

2. Ignore any signs of toxic religion in your organization..

¹⁷ **But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates** (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they **were filled with jealousy**; ¹⁸ and they laid hands on the apostles, and put them in a public jail. ¹⁹ **But an angel of the Lord** during the night opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, ²⁰ **"Go your way, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life."** ²¹ And upon hearing {this,} they entered into the temple about daybreak, and {began} to teach. Now when the high priest and his associates had come, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent {orders} to the prison house for them to be brought. ²² But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned, and reported back, ²³ saying, "We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside." ²⁴ Now when the captain of the temple {guard} and the chief priests heard these words, they were **greatly perplexed** about them as to what would come of this. ²⁵ But someone came and reported to them, "Behold, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" ²⁶ Then the captain went along with the officers and {proceeded} to bring them {back} without violence (for they **were afraid of the people**, lest they should be stoned). ²⁷ And when they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered and said, "**We must obey God rather than men.**" ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. ³¹ He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses of these things; and {so is} the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." ³³ But when they heard this, they were **cut to the quick** and were intending to slay them.

- a. Remember that the Sadducees were the "high class" Jews who had made peace with the Roman power structure, were very proud, judgmental, and in positions of power as Priests. Unlike the Pharisees, they were not popular with the general population of Israel. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and this was no doubt a part of their resistance to the Apostle's preaching.

- b. The jealousy, fear, confusion, and hurt of the religious leaders are mentioned. If we were to identify a “religious spirit” in our day we might start by looking for the same emotional reactions.

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| <i>Motivating spirit</i> | control | competition | confusion | conflict |
| <i>Typical emotions</i> | fear | jealousy | anxiety | hatred |
| <i>Expected actions</i> | structure | uniformity | artificial props | persecution |

- c. Religious leaders need to be able to often say, “I don’t know or understand this nor do I have to.” This is not to say that leaders should avoid the discerning of spirits and pastoral oversight of God’s people. (Check out theology files #306, #308, #802)
- d. The need to be “in control” of our lives and world is a common impulse in response to our vulnerability. It was also the spirit of Satan as he demanded independence from God’s control. Knowing how to manage the control issues is one of the great challenges for leaders in the church today. There is need for strong servant leadership control but it must be open to the leading of Christ’s Spirit. It cannot take full control without resisting God. There are two differing philosophies of church leadership.

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|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Centralized control | Decentralized empowerment |
| Classical corporate management style | “Chaos” corporate management style |
| Managing the vision of the leader(s). | Unleashing the creativity of people |
| Control structure | Relational style |
| Sodality (Army) | Modality (Family) |
| More common in the Large church | More common in the Small church |

- e. Notice that the angel encourages the apostles to preach “the whole message of this life” vs.20. The life in question is the life of Jesus. The part of Jesus’ story that was a stumbling block (atonement, and resurrection) needed special attention. In other words, don’t just preach what is popular and what you know will be well received.
- f. In verse 29 we note Peter’s response to the pressure to stop preaching, “We must obey God rather than men.” What a remarkable contrast to the Peter who denied any association with Jesus just a few weeks earlier.

3. Rush to judgment in discerning what is of God.

34 But a certain Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. 35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. 36 For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody; and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. And he was slain; and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 After this man Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away {some} people after him, he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. 38 And so in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action should be of men, it will be overthrown; 39 but **if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.**" 40 And they took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and {then} released them.

- a. The council (court) is the Sanhedrin made up of leaders from among the people including both Sadducees and Pharisees.
- b. Note that Gamaliel was Paul's teacher (22:3) and demanded respect from even the Sadducees because of his influence with the people. Unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees were popular with the people.
- c. Gamaliel's view of Scripture is broader than that of the Sadducees. It is quite certain that he expected the Christian movement to evaporate as others had.
- d. There are two types of authority.

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|---|---------------------------------------|
| Formal (structured) authority | Informal (unstructured) authority |
| Official position grants this authority | Popular support grants this authority |
| Control | Influence |
| Fixed | Flexible |
| Sadducees | Pharisees |

4. **Save face at all costs.**

41 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.** 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus {as} the Christ."

- a. One of the forgotten disciplines of spiritual formation is suffering. Phil.3:10 "that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." I Pet.4:12-13 "12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as thought some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of this glory, you may rejoice with exultation."

- b. Joy is not the normal response to shame and suffering. What are we to learn from this? For the Apostles the sharing of Jesus' suffering was a sign of great worth and privilege.
- c. Where did we miss this one? Our response is one of feeling betrayed as though some strange thing has happened to us. How could God allow this to happen?
- d. For more thoughts on this subject read the manuscript for a book on my web site (apptoteach.org).