

The second great public witness for the risen Jesus progressed as the first, the Spirit convicting many souls of their sins and need for the Savior. Many gladly accepted the risen Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. The One who was the predicted "That Prophet" had come, been rejected and executed. But that wasn't all. He had risen from the dead and after being seen by many reliable witnesses had ascended bodily into heaven. His disciples were preaching Him and gaining many followers. This bothered the officials of the Temple, the priests, the captains and the Sadducees. It bothered Satan. His carefully devised plan to destroy his "rival" for men's worship had failed. Jesus had risen, ascended and had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven. The Spirit now indwelt those common Galilean fishermen who had followed Jesus, Satan's hated enemy. He had finally succeeded in leading one of them to betray Him. He had even entered into Judas to accomplish his intentions. He now energized the same crew that he had used to have Jesus crucified—the priests, Levites and Sadducees. These hated the very idea of a bodily resurrection of the dead. Jesus had confronted them more than once while here. These were the religious leaders, with official status in the nation and with the Roman Occupation. They acted. They arrested Peter and John putting them in jail overnight. The Romans weren't involved in this action. The Jews were allowed certain limited authority to guard the Temple and govern their own religious issues. They had arrested Jesus, having unjustly tried and condemned Him before turning Him over to the Roman Governor for his unjust sentence and execution.

These same leaders gathered together the whole gang to deal with the disciples. Luke names them. They did not include the Pharisees who were the religious reformers of the day and were hated by the corrupt hierarchy. The first question they asked opened them to an unexpected very direct factual response. There the healed man stood before them. What the apostles had done was good not evil. But the leaders, in their pride and self aggrandizement, undertook to challenge the authority of these "unlearned and ignorant men." After all they were the authority in Jerusalem, not these. They asked them in what name they had healed the man? What did they expect them to answer? Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, responded with an astounding, powerful and irrefutable statement of fact. He quoted scripture the Lord Himself had quoted to them a few months before. They were responsible. They were the builders. Jesus was the stone they had rejected. They knew the rest. He was to become the Head of the corner. But Peter offered them a priceless opportunity, salvation through the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom God raised from the dead.

They hardened their hearts. They only saw their present position and authority being threatened, not the awful lake of fire awaiting them beyond. After all, they didn't believe in resurrection of the dead, therefore eternal punishment in hell wasn't a reality. How convenient! How proud! How foolish! Men find many different ways to evade their personal moral responsibility to God. For instance, modern exponents of evolution relieve themselves of the inconvenient fact of their moral responsibility by not granting God His authority as their Creator. The media, the schools, various religious and philosophical movements present other imaginative, ingenious but erroneous and ungodly schools of thought. Death is real. Hell is real. God is real. Eternity is real. Sin is real. Jesus Christ is real. His death and resurrection are real. Salvation through trust in His shed blood is real. Bow. Take and live! These men refused it. They refused it over comparatively trivial and petty issues and blind, hard hearted unbelief.

They even conferred in private about what to do. Another plot? Since they couldn't come up with a reasonable solution they threatened them and commanded them not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus. Peter and John protested the restriction at this point, but not their unjust arrest. They declared their intent to obey God rather than men. They were then released under orders to cease preaching in the name of Jesus. Men today practice something called "civil disobedience" when they strongly disagree in principle with a law or a government official's order. Some seem to think their protest should not be punished by the government. Others resort to violence. Often the issue is a difference of philosophy or opinion about something. Scripture doesn't condone a believer's disobedience over any issue that is not a direct challenge to their personal obedience to God's clear scripture. If then, one should do so prayerfully, then respectfully and courteously where the issue is clearly defined and obvious to the government official in charge. This principle applies in school and at work as well, where it may cost one's job. Every person is always to be under God if not some lower authority. No man is independent, much as many would by nature like to be. It is one of parents' most important jobs to teach each child to obey. Christians are to subject themselves to all levels and forms of government they find themselves under no matter how corrupt, unjust, unfair or brutal. Jesus before His tormentors is our example.

*Luke 6:28 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.*

Peter and John took time to give their oppressors a reason for their disobedience. A reason they as religious people had to respect if not honor. Daniel gave his custodian an

alternative proposal and trial period rather than simply refusing to eat what was ordered. May God give grace and wisdom to us if we are confronted with such a dilemma. In any case, behavior that is insulting, threatening, destructive or harmful to others is never becoming to Christ. Peter learned that in the garden when he was told to put up his sword. The Lord hasn't authorized any to take it up again since.

When the Peter and John returned to the assembly a celebration took place. Filled with the Spirit they all celebrated together, praising and exalting God because He was over all men in power. They acknowledged God had permitted these, and the other wicked men named, to condemn and crucify His Servant (not child) Jesus who He had anointed. Led by the Spirit they appealed to God for power, not power to crush their enemies but for boldness and signs and wonders to convince them of the truth. What grace. These disciples had been arguing over who would be greatest in the kingdom just a couple of months before. Now they were united together of one mind to glorify and serve the Lord. And this in a company of not twelve, not 120, Acts 1:15, not 500, 1Corinthians 15:6, but over 5000. Wouldn't the King come now? Would they suffer some more for His name before He came? They didn't seem to be concerned. The Spirit united this great multitude together as one, giving them a hymn to sing and one voice to praise and pray (through Spirit-led spokesmen and many "amens") as one. They asked for power to heal the sick as a witness to unbelievers, not to make themselves well and whole and prosperous. Most of the crowds that had flocked around Jesus had come for healing or free meals not to just see and be with Him. What are our motives for coming to meeting or other gatherings with the Lord's people?

Having been filled with the Spirit the saints carried this unity into every day life not limiting it to meetings. We should too. They began freely sharing and caring for one

another. They gave up some very natural feelings of possessiveness and earthly wealth preferring to sell their lands and possessions to sustain others. This despite the

Old Testament Jewish culture which then rightly respected health and wealth as blessings from God granted to the godly and obedient. Though they began to practice a sort of communal living they had not been exhorted to, much less commanded to. It was spontaneous—the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, Romans 5:5-8, motivated by the Spirit filling them. God loves a cheerful giver, 2Corinthians 9:7. He gave His one and only Son to die for our sins.

Communal living was never ordained or commended as the norm for New Testament Christian life. The case in early Acts was a unique public sign of the power of God amongst them. Note it was voluntary, righteous and chaste, always retaining the integrity of marriage and family. The Spirit's work here on earth is uniting believers into one. We know it now as the body of Christ. It is to be manifested locally as an assembly of believers gathered unto His name. There, He says, I am in the midst, Matthew 18:20. It is highly esteemed and valued by the Lord, being collectively the temple of the Holy Spirit, 1Corinthians 3:16,17; 2Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:20-22. Our charge and challenge is to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace, Ephesians 4:1-4. Therefore, Satan's chief object is to disturb that unity and destroy it if possible, for it glorifies the Christ he hates. He is always probing, looking for opportunities to divide us from one another. The history of the church has only too many stories of his successes. He was a murderer and a liar from the beginning, John 8:44. The next chapter describes his first inroad into the newly formed church of God.

By Ron Canner, July 29, 2009