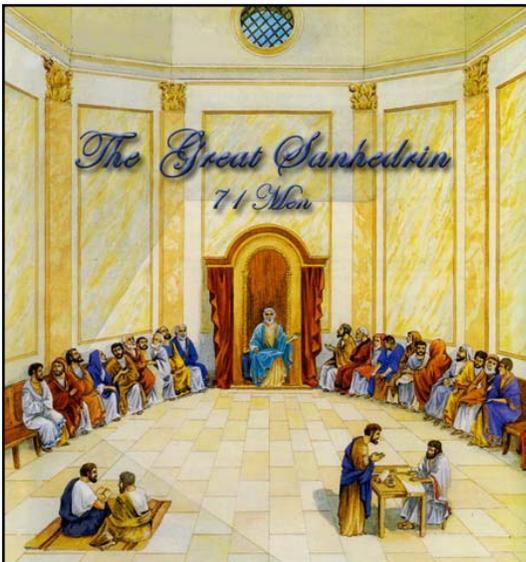


Fearless Men of God

[Acts 4:13-22](#)



Acts 3 opens with Peter and John on their way to the Temple to pray. On their way they run into a lame man begging at the Temple gate. Peter heals the man in the name of Jesus and the man causes a scene by leaping and shouting praises to God. This draws a crowd and Peter preaches the Church's second sermon. While he is preaching the Temple police arrest them and put them in jail. The next morning they are brought before the [Sanhedrin](#), the high court of Israel.



The Sanhedrin was comprised of three groups. First, the chief priests, with the high priest as president, were primarily members of the Sadducees, having gained position through hereditary lines. This was a very imposing delegation made up of Caiaphas, the high priest, and Annas, his father-in-law, who was regarded as virtual high priest. Second, the scribes were the keepers of hidden knowledge, the great interpreters of the Scripture. It was knowledge alone which gave their power to the scribes. Scribes composed the Pharisaic party in the Sanhedrin. The third group was the elders who differed from the other two in that their position arose as "heads of the most influential lay families" in Israel. Wealth and influence rather than knowledge or priestly office secured their seats. (Joachim Jeremias, [Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus](#), 235-236, 222-223).

The Sanhedrin's question to Peter and John was:

And when they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" (Acts 4:7 NASB)

To which Peter responds with a third sermon.

let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead-- by this name this man stands here before you in good health. (Acts 4:10 NASB)

So they ask, ***"In what name have you done this?"*** To which Peter responds, ***"The name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene."*** Peter could have stopped here. He had answered their question. But he goes on to say, ***"The man you crucified. The man God raised from the dead."***

Peter accuses the Sanhedrin of murder—that had to tick them off. Then he challenges the theology of half of the group by saying, ***"God raised Him from the dead."*** The Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection which meant that empty tomb of Jesus must have been a real thorn in their side and they didn't need to be reminded of it.

Peter then quotes Scripture to prove his point:

"He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone. (Acts 4:11 NASB)

Peter here adds, ***"by you"*** the builders. To show that the prophecy was about them. They were the builders that rejected God's Corner stone. Israel's leaders had rejected Jesus as an unacceptable Messiah, but He would prove to be the most important part of what God was building. The context of this Psalm is about God's salvation:

The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation. (Psalms 118:14 NASB)

These Jewish leaders knew well the context here of salvation:

I shall give thanks to Thee, for Thou hast answered me; And Thou hast become my salvation. (Psalms 118:21 NASB)

Where would this salvation come from? From God's Corner stone:

The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone. (Psalms 118:22 NASB)

Peter drives this home to them by saying:

"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12 NASB)

There is a definite article here in the Greek, "the salvation" referring to the Messianic deliverance. Peter boldly declared that salvation comes through no one but Jesus, not the [Maccabean heroes](#) or the [Sadducees](#) or anyone else. He stressed that Jesus was a man: He lived "under heaven" and "among men." Jesus, the Messiah, the Nazarene (v. 10), is God's only authorized savior. Apart from Him there is no salvation for anyone:



Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me. (John 14:6 NASB)

This is where we left off last week so now we move on with the Sanhedrin's response to Peter's third sermon.

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13 NASB)

The response of Peter and John to this trial is encouraging. They were not at all intimidated by this high court. They had confidence. The Greek word for "confidence" here is [parrhesia](#), [pa-rhay-see'-ah] which means: ***"free and fearless confidence, cheerful courage, boldness, assurance."***

How many of you have been in a court room? How many of you have gone before a judge? It can be very intimidating because the judge has incredible power. He can fine you, jail you, and make your life miserable. So, most sane people are intimidated by the judge and seek to do and say what might not offend the judge. But not Peter, he confronts the court with their sin using their own Scriptures. We fear a judge who can at the most fine us or give us some jail time, but Peter is fearless in the face of what could be physical torture—thirty nine lashes.

Their boldness was disarming to the Sanhedrin, who expected these men to cower and to collapse under pressure.

"They were uneducated and untrained men"— the Greek word which is here translated "uneducated" is [agrammatos](#), [ag-gram'-a-tos] which literally means: ***"unlettered."*** It meant they were without technical training in the professional rabbinical schools of Hillel or Shammai.

The Greek word which is here translated “untrained” is *idiotes*, [id-ee-o'-tace] which means: *“those who live in private”*, in contradistinction from those who are engaged in public life, or in office. As this class of persons is commonly also supposed to be less learned, talented, and refined than those in office, it comes to denote those who are rude and illiterate.

Peter and John were Galilean fishermen with no formal education, they lack the recognized credentials of a professional teacher of the law, which alone would command respect in the council, but they had the one essential qualification for ministry – they had been with Jesus.

These men were far from “uneducated and untrained” when it came to the Word of God. These men had been trained by Jesus:

To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3 NASB)

During this forty day period from the resurrection to the ascension Jesus was teaching His Apostles about the kingdom of God. After His resurrection Jesus meets with the Apostles and says:

Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." (Luke 24:44 NASB)

Here Jesus uses the Hebrew three fold division of the First Testament. The Law of Moses is the Torah. The Prophets is the N'vi'im, and the Psalms is the Kituvim. Together they make up the Tanakh what we mistakenly call the Old Testament. Now notice carefully the next verse:

Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, (Luke 24:45 NASB)

The Greek word for “opened” is *dianoigo*, [dee-an-oy'-go] which means: *“to open thoroughly.”* So during the forty days that Jesus spent with His disciples He opened their understanding so they could know the meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures. These Apostles were taught the Word of God by God. You can't beat that, no matter how many degrees you have.

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13 NASB)

The wisdom of Peter caused the Sanhedrin to “marvel”. This is from the Greek word *thaumazo*, [thou-mod'-zo] which means: *“to be wondered at, to be had in admiration.”*

The Sanhedrin was impressed. They were used to men cringing before them, not speaking out boldly. And they were not used to having Scripture quoted at them. And these Jewish rulers were at a loss to understand this. How could these uneducated, common men have such poise and confidence? The conclusion they came to is most remarkable. Their own explanation was that these men had been with Jesus.

Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament says, *“began to recognize them as having been with Jesus—*Imperfect (inchoative) active again, they began to recognize them as men that they had seen with Jesus.”

They remembered that Jesus taught just like these men did:

The Jews therefore were marveling, saying, "How has this man become learned, having never been

educated?" (John 7:15 NASB)

It was just the same with Jesus as with Peter and John. They were all bold and straightforward and clear. And they had insight into the things of God, even though they had never had the rabbinic education the scribes had.

And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. (Acts 4:14 NASB)

There was total silence for awhile, when Peter ceased speaking. Not a man in the Sanhedrin could open his mouth in reply to Peter's brief speech. It's hard to argue when the lame man is standing there as living proof of Jesus' power.

But when they had ordered them to go aside out of the Council, they began to confer with one another, ¹⁶ saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. (Acts 4:15-16 NASB)

So having heard the case they put the accused outside the room while they discussed what they would do. We call this "closed executive session."

"Began to confer with one another" – how did Luke ever find out what the Sanhedrin discussed among themselves? It may have been communicated to the Apostles by one of the members of the Sanhedrin such as [Nicodemus](#) or [Joseph of Arimathea](#). Or maybe by a member of that Sanhedrin who later became a Christian: [Saul of Tarsus](#).

saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. (Acts 4:16 NASB)

All Jerusalem knew that he was lame-lame from his birth, having to be carried wherever he went ([Acts 3:2](#)), and that he had long begged at the Beautiful gate of the temple; and now all Jerusalem knew that he was healed; and there was no means by which such a self-evident fact could be disproved.

Here is something really remarkable. How would you describe the connection between what they say in verse 16 and what they say in verse 17? Verse 16: a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. Verse 17: Let's threaten them with harm and try to keep them quiet about this Jesus. As crazy as that sounds that is what happened:

"But in order that it may not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any man in this name." ¹⁸ And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. (Acts 4:17-18 NASB)

The pivotal point of this whole chapter is the attitude taken towards the Name of Jesus both by these men and by the Apostles. The Sanhedrin rejected it and forbade its use. The Apostles determined that they would use every means to proclaim it, because there was salvation in no other.

This section establishes what the crucial difference was between the old Israel and the new Israel, and that was the Name of Jesus. The old Israel rejected the name and its bearer. They would not hear it under any circumstances. The new Israel claimed that there was salvation in no one else.

I find it very interesting that the Sanhedrin does not even consider seeking to discredit the apostles' message by marshaling evidence against Jesus' resurrection.

But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; 20 for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20 NASB)

Remember that they were speaking to the highest religious authorities of the day. It was a fearful thing to be dragged before the great Sanhedrin court. These were the same leaders who decided to put Jesus to death and set in motion the events for His crucifixion. Who was to say the same wouldn't happen to these disciples?

If you were given that same command by the Sanhedrin what would you have said? Most of us would have said nothing. We may have thought we'll keep quiet for now, but when we get out of here, we will do what we want. Let's just pacify the court, let's not upset them.

Peter didn't feel this way. He defied the court. He basically said, "*You are the Supreme Court of Israel. Judge this matter: Who should we listen to, go ahead tell us: you or God?*" How do the leaders of Israel, God's people, answer that? If they told the Apostles to listen to God, then they couldn't tell them not to preach. If they said, "Listen to us instead," then they would be implying that God's commands were not to be obeyed. It's a question they could not answer without admitting they were not on God's side.

Normally witnesses in the court would be admonished to "speak only those things which they had seen and heard". And yet here the court was forbidding them to do so.

In obedience to the risen Lord's mandate they must continue to be eyewitnesses of these salvation truths:

but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." (Acts 1:8 NASB)

The disciples could not stop speaking of what they had seen and heard. They had seen the risen Lord Jesus. They saw Him ascend into heaven. They had heard Him explain from the Scriptures the many passages about Himself. They had seen Him heal this lame man by His power. And they could not stop speaking about what they had seen and heard no matter who told them to stop.

Such a declaration of loyalty to God in the face of human opposition has been echoed often in church history, not least during the Reformation. Think of [Martin Luther](#) before the [Diet of Worms](#), or the Scots Reformer [John Knox](#), of whom it was said "*He feared God so much that he never feared the face of any man*".

We all face situations like this in our lives if we seek to live out biblical Christianity in a secular society. We have to face our friends, our neighbors, our co-workers, our employers. We have to face the people with whom we do business—our clients, our customers, the mechanic who works on our car, the shopkeepers who sell us our clothes and our food, and the list goes on. We must relate to people in the society in which we live, and sometimes we are intimidated by them because we are afraid of how they may respond. We need Peter and John's fearlessness.

That Peter and John spoke and acted as they did should challenge Theophilus and others to consider the gospel's claims all the more closely. If these Jews were willing to put their highest tribunal on notice that they were going to continue to obey God, then their message must be true!

But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; ²⁰ for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20 NASB)

What is happening here is Peter and John are promising **civil disobedience**, which seems strange since their Lord had told them to obey their rulers:

saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; ³ therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things, and do not do them. (Matthew 23:2-3 NASB)

The Lord said they're hypocrites, so don't do what they do, but they are in a place of authority, so you must do what they say. Now that should be clear. The believer is to be submissive no matter who the leadership is. The Scriptures are very clear that governments are given by God:

Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. ² Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. (Romans 13:1-2 NASB)

"Let every person...." is the Greek [pas psuche](#), which means: "**all life!**" "Be in subjection" is from the Greek word *hupotasso*, which is a military term meaning: "to line up, to take your orders". It's in the present imperative middle, which means: "to habitually be in subjection" to "the governing authorities".

This verse speaks of government, but the principle is universal. All human authority is delegated and ministerial. This includes the authority of parents, employers, policemen, teachers, church leaders or any other authority. Anyone who is in a place of authority on earth has had it delegated to him by God:

"This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers, And the decision is a command of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, And bestows it on whom He wishes, And sets over it the lowliest of men." (Daniel 4:17 NASB)

It is God who sets up rulers, all rulers. Look at what God said to King David about how he became king:

Nathan then said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸ I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! (2 Samuel 12:7-8 NASB)

Why was David king over Israel? God put him there! Notice what Jesus says to Pilate:

Pilate therefore said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" ¹¹ Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin." (John 19:10-11 NASB)

Every power that exists is of God. Not only is God behind the forms of government we have, but he is also responsible for the incumbents, the ones occupying the offices at any particular time. Therefore, all rebellion is against God, because all power is ordained by God. Whoever the existing authorities are we are, to be subject to them. The Christian has a duty to his nation, even if the ruler is a Nero or a Hitler.

Now, someone might challenge this point by saying, Paul wrote in the early days of Nero's career, in those early days Nero was a gentleman. It was he who brought peace to the world. He introduced the legal system that is the basis of [American Jurisprudence](#). He could be appealed to in the case of injustice. That is true, but Peter says the same thing that Paul did, and he wrote in the last days of Nero's career, when he had become evil and destructive. Nero was the beast of Revelation 13. He tortured and murdered Christians for pleasure. It was in those days that Peter writes:

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. (1 Peter 2:13-14 NASB)

Peter tells a persecuted group of believers to accept and obey their authorities.

Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. (Romans 13:2 NASB)

Think about that when you refuse to obey a law, no matter how petty you think it may be—you are in rebellion against God. All rebellion is against God, because all power is ordained by God. Civil authorities, parents, church leaders, your boss at work, whoever the existing authorities are, we are to be subject to them.

So if we are to obey those in authority why do Peter and John refuse to obey? They refuse to obey because we must always obey God first and foremost. Principle: ***We are always to obey those in authority over us unless that authority commands us to do something God forbids or forbids us from doing something God commands.*** This is the only basis for civil disobedience that Scripture permits. In all other matters we must obey those in authority over us.

What if your husband forbids you to; go to church, read your Bible, pray? We must always obey God. To do this we must know what God commands of us, which means we must know our Bibles. We must know the truth to live the truth.

These apostles were forbidden by the properly constituted authorities to preach in the name of Jesus. The apostles told them to their faces that they would not obey the rule because they must obey God.

When an earthly authority's command is in conflict with a higher command from God, then we are to be obedient to God. When [King Darius of Babylon](#) made a decree that no one could pray to anyone but the king himself, Daniel did not obey him. Rather, he continued praying to God ([Dan. 6:6-10](#)).

There have been times in Israel's history when disobedience to a government was important. In Exodus 1:16, we read that the king of Egypt commanded the Hebrew midwives to get rid of every male Hebrew baby they helped deliver.

But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live. (Exodus 1:17 NASB)

Whenever a conflict arises between a command of God and a command from men, we are to obey God.

So Peter and John defiantly refuse to obey the civil order of the Sanhedrin. They flat out tell them we will not obey you. So what do the leaders of Israel do? Beat them? Throw them in prison? No they threaten them:

And when they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which they might punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; (Acts 4:21 NASB)

The people saw the miracle, confessed the finger of God, believed on the Lord Jesus, and thus became converts to the Christian faith; and the converts were now so numerous that the Sanhedrin was afraid to proceed to any extremities, lest an insurrection should be the consequence.

for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed. (Acts 4:22 NASB)

This serves to again prove that the miracle was genuine, since the man had been lame for forty years. This also may have been intended to bring to mind how Israel had limped through the wilderness for forty years.

Great story! Yeah, how about if we make it practical. How do you think you would respond if put into the situation of Peter and John? Would you shut your mouth? Would you openly defy the authorities? You know what is really sad? We have never been commanded to keep our mouths shut and yet we do; we often fail to tell what we have seen and heard of Jesus. Paul put it this way in Romans 10:

How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:14 NASB)

The preacher should be you! People must hear the message of Christ if they are to believe it.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17 NASB)

This message was preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on August 17, 2008. Media #427.



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