Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Early Church Pattern for Evangelism, Part 3
Scripture: Acts 5:33-42
Code: 1719

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We come this morning to the fifth Chapter and what is part three in our study of the early church pattern for evangelism. We've begun in Chapter 5:12 what is really one unit through verse 42, but it's taken us three parts to finish it. The story is told in ancient lore about a goddess who always came, but came unseen. She was known, therefore, by the blessings that were left in her pathway. Trees, for example, blackened by forest fires put forth new leaves as she passed by. In her footprints at the brook side violets sprang up. The stagnant pool became a spring of sparkling water. The parched hill blossomed like a rose and every hillside and every valley blushed with new life and beauty as she passed by.

The story is also told, by the ancients, of a particularly beautiful Indian princess. This Indian princess was given as a gift to a king. About her, the ancients tell us, was an atmosphere as sweet smelling as the garments of Aphrodite. She seemed as beautiful and pure as dew and her breath was as sweet as perfume. But strangely enough the atmosphere all about her was death. From her infancy she knew no food but poison and therefore it had permeated her. She would breathe into a swarm of insects and they would die. She would lay the loveliest flowers upon her breast and they would wither and crumble on contact. Into her presence came a hummingbird. It fluttered, poised in the air, and fell dead to the ground. Influence. That's what I'm talking about, influence.

Everybody exudes an influence, good influence, bad influence, an influence on the life or an influence on the death. Now we've been studying here in Acts about influence. We've been studying about a church that influenced the world. Webster defines influence this way: the power to affect others. That's influence. And we all have it. You affect other people some way. You don't exist in isolation. You just live your whole life affecting everybody. And you really need to evaluate what kind of an effect you're having.

Now the infant church in the book of Acts, as we have seen, had an influence, and it's influence was absolutely astonishing. If you just listen I'll chart its influence very briefly by just picking up phrases from our study previously just to kind of put us in mind in review.

In Chapter 2:41, we read this: "Then they that gladly received his word, were baptized and the same day there were added unto them 3,000 souls." That's influence. Verse 43, "Fear came upon every

soul." That's influence. Verse 47, "Having favor with all the people." That's influence. Chapter 3:10, "And they knew that it was he who sat for alms at the beautiful gate of the temple and they were filled with wonder and amazement." That's influence. Verse 11, "As the lame man who was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering." Influence. Chapter 4:4, "Many of them who heard the Word believed." Verse 31, same Chapter, "When they had prayed the place was shaken where they were assembled together. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, they spake the word of God with boldness and the multitude of those that believed." They affected people so that they believed. Influence.

Chapter 5:11, "Great fear came upon all the church and upon as many as heard these things." Influence. Chapter 13, "The rest dared no man join himself to them, but the people magnified them and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes of men and women." Influence. The early church affected its world. You see it had become the issue. The early church had become the topic of conversation. The issue in that day was not politics. The issue was not economics. The issue was not sports. The issue was Christianity. And the comment of the leaders in seeing all this at the end of Chapter 5:28, is "You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." This thing has become the issue. That's influence. And that's the kind of influence that I believe God intends His church always to have. But so much of the time the church is the little deal on the corner and everybody goes _____ in the door and they sit in there, God, sing songs, happy, happy _____ out the door. Nothing else ever happens. This is the church, this is the steeple, woo there are all the people. See. They're all there. And as long as they're in there it's all very nice. You send them out in the world and flat nothing!

We went somewhere the other day for lunch and somebody said, "I'd like to have a coke." Well I'm sorry the carbonation machine doesn't work and the coke is flat." And I kept thinking, "Oh that is just about how I often feel about the church." What happened to the fizz? I mean there's no effect. So much of our Christianity is in the walls, isn't it? And where's the influence?

This is what the early church had was influence. Everywhere they went the world shook because their step was so heavy and it shook for God. You remember they said of them, "These who turned the world upside down have come to our city also." See! Influence. They became the issue. Boy when Christianity gets to be the issue that's exciting.

I couldn't help think about that Thursday night when I spoke to the SC football team. Apparently it did some good. I wouldn't be surprised if UCLA invited me next year. But anyway I spoke to them and they showed me this little brochure that they had. I don't know if some of you were at the game yesterday you might have gotten one. But some of the Campus Crusade had worked out with them and on the outside it said, "USC and UCLA athletes speak out. Inside it had four testimonies from Trojans and four from Bruins with their picture and the testimonies said each saying that Jesus Christ is the most important thing in my life. They gave out 40 or 50,000 of them. That's great because Christianity became an issue. You see everybody had one of those in his hand. And I like it when

Christianity becomes the issue.

It was interesting in the Times on Friday, I think it was, they had a big article and they quoted the whole text from that little pamphlet and it explained on the back how you could know Christ and write for more information. That's the kind of boldness we're talking about. One of the starting guards of USC told me, he said, "I'm excited about the game, but I'm more excited about what God might do through these little pamphlets." That's having your priorities in the right place. And he also said, "Pray for me because I feel God calling me into the ministry and I'm also getting some pro football offers." I said, "I'll pray for you." It's a question of priorities. But here was Christianity becoming the issue. This is what's good. This is what has to happen.

They also told me they had gotten one of their card stunts, which you couldn't see on television 'cause it was on the other side of the field. One of the SC card stunts said something like hope and peace and then had a picture of Christ. Somebody on the inside is exerting some influence and as a result things are happening. It's exciting. In fact it was interesting that they asked the J. D. Morgan, who is the athletic director at UCLA and he was happy to let them do it. See last year there was a revival at Stanford and they went to the Rose Bowl. But nevertheless this is influence, and this is the kind of dynamic that makes Christianity the issue. And the guys were saying, "Give us enough of these that when we go to the hotel tomorrow night before the game we can pass one out to all the players on the bus." We need people to get so committed that we make Christianity the issue. And it was in the early church.

And they had influence two ways: the individual personal testimony. Right? That's the first way to witness. The second one is collective unity, right? So their influence was not only person-to-person sharing Christ, but it was the total loving unity that they exhibited. My old football, not too old, but my ex football coach is now an assistant coach at USC and he came in Thursday night and introduced me to the team. He was the one who introduced me as I spoke, and he was very generous in his introduction, very kind, and he made some very shocking statements. He stood there in front of these guys and he said, "I want you to listen to John, 'cause I know him and what he tells you is the absolute truth." He says, "I personally have never received Christ as my Savior," and he kind of dropped his head and said, "I really don't know why," but he said, "It's true." You could have heard a pin drop. These guys looked at him, boy what a confession to make, you see. And then we were able to spend some time talking about Christ and how there could be unity and a witness that came not only on an individual basis, but on a unified basis. And the coach said this: he said, "You know I feel that more than any other thing, the greatest thing that has happened to this team has been the testimony collectively of these Christian fellows." You see there's not only the communicating on the one-to-one basis, but the effective unity. And we've talked so much about it.

So, they had an influence. The early church had both, person-to-person communication and a loving unity and they affected their world. Now that's influence and that's what it's all about. And I believe I

think we all want this. I'm not trying to push something off on you that you're against, right? I believe we want to have an influence. I believe we want to hit the world with an impact. And I think as we've studied the fifth Chapter of Acts, we have seen some progressive keys to really effective influence.

Now we've been through four of them. Let me review them. We saw five progressive keys to effective evangelism. Number one was purity and we were studying verses 12-14, that little section there. We saw that, without going over it, but we saw that the church to be effective to begin with has to be pure, therefore, every individual believer must deal with sin in his life. He must deal with issues, moral issues, the issue of right and wrong, the issue of priority in his life, he must confess sin and repent of sin, and there must be purity in his life and then he must look out for other believers. And if he sees another believer in sin he must be willing in love to rebuke that believer and having rebuked him restore him in love.

The church must discipline those sinning members in its midst. And where the church is pure the church continues to be pure because you don't get the tares added to the pure church. They're not willing to run the risk of exposure.

The second thing we saw about the church that is dynamic evangelistically that really makes an influence on the world is that it has power, not only purity but power. A pure church is powerful because there's nothing to obstruct the power flow, you see. The church is a channel through which God wants to pour His power, but if it's clogged up with impure things then the power never gets through, so the pure church is a powerful church and we saw that early church things were popping so fast that people couldn't believe what was going on. They were shocked and they were in wonder and amazement, and the church can be the same today.

And then we saw a third thing about that church and the third thing in the steps to effective evangelism was persecution. They got some flak from the system. And I've told you before, and I'll repeat it again, if you buck the system and you confront the system with the claims of Jesus Christ, the system will react negatively. Satan runs the world. You keep banging into the world with the claims of Christ and you're going to get some resistance. Persecution is expected. It's kind of sad that most of us we go along with our little Christian life and we run into resistance, emmm and we just ohhhh, we think that it's time to quit. Resistance is just an opportunity to blast through. See that's all it is. Be stronger for it. The god of this world, Satan, can't stand to have people ripped off of his cause and added to the church, and so if it starts happening you're going to get some resistance. Praise the Lord.

The Sadducees here resisted, the high priest resisted, the church just accepted that for more preaching. They accepted persecution defiantly and boldly charged right on through and they couldn't shut them up. They kept arresting them, throw them in jail, and they kept on preaching. They beat 'em up, let 'em go, they kept on preaching.

And that leads us to the fourth characteristic of their effective evangelism, which is persistence, verses 29 to 32. Peter got in the Sanhedrin and they said, "We're after you because you keep preaching the resurrection and you keep indicting us. You know what Peter did? Preached the resurrection and indicted them. Persistence. He knew what God had called him to do. You see pressure only brings out the best in us all.

Buddy Young used to play football in the NFL. He's a little guy, 5 foot five. And his little motto was this: it's not the size of the man in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the man. And he always used to say when the going gets tough, the tough get going. He was right. Resistance is only an opportunity. That's all. It's an opportunity for persistence. Proverbs 28:1 says, "The righteous are as bold as a lion." You know a couple of weeks ago I was with my brother-in-law John and my sister Jeanette. We were down at San Diego. I had been speaking for three Saturday nights, Youth for Christ, and I took Matt and went with them. We went to Wild Animal Park and we got on this little tram thing and rode all around. It's a terrific thing and we saw all these animals and we came to this lion's thing and the man who was leading the little tour said, "Lions have no natural enemies. They are the king of the beasts. Nobody attacks them. No animals attack lions. They are bold and they are fierce and they have no natural enemies. Nobody can conqueror them." And I thought to myself, boy that is a definition of a Christian right out of Proverbs 28. The righteous is as bold as a lion. What do we have to fear?

Resistance, watch this. Resistance and persecution is only the path to victory, see. It's not the end of the road. It's the path to victory. So you accept it and you blast right through and you keep going. You don't worry about it. The battle is only the opportunity. In Philippians 1 the apostle Paul, verse 12, said, "I would that you should understand, brethren, that the things, which happened unto me have fallen out rather to the furtherance of the gospel." I keep banging into persecution and you know what happened? People keep getting saved.

Verse 13, "So that my bonds in Christ," I'm a slave and I'm a prisoner, "but my bonds are manifest all over the palace." And then when he wrote to the Philippians later on he says, "The people who have been saved in Caesar's household say hello." And many of the brethren in the Lord becoming confident by my bonds are much more bold to speak the Word without fear. Other people even took courage from Paul's situation and took off and preached Christ boldly. Paul even went so far as to say, "For me to live is Christ and die is gain," in the same Chapter.

In I Thessalonians 2:2 he takes another look at this and he says, "But even after we had suffered before and were shamefully treated, as you know, at Philippi, we were bold." He just kept right on going. Nothing ever shut him up. That's boldness. I like that.

So they persisted and they persisted and every time they got captured they persisted again and they called it what it was. Why? Because they knew what their job was. Look at verse 32, and we're still

reviewing and we come right up to where we stopped last time. Verse 32: "We are His witnesses." We know what our calling is. We are in the world to communicate. And little resistance isn't the issue. That is we know what we are to do. We keep keep keep keep doing it.

Now a witness is somebody who declares what he's experiencing and they were relentless. Back in Chapter 2 they had been given their commission, pardon me, Chapter 1:8. It says, Jesus said, "You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you and ye shall be witnesses." And boy they took it and they said okay, we will be. Chapter 2:32 it says this: "this Jesus hath God raised up whereof we all are witnesses." Chapter 10, they defined their statement again in 10:39, "And we are witnesses." It goes on in verse 41 to say, "Witnesses chosen by God." Chapter 13:31, says the same thing. "We are witnesses." They knew what they were to do and they were obedient and a little resistance didn't deter them a bit. It only made them work all the harder because they saw resistance as an opportunity for new communication and witness.

Now the fact that they had witnessed so clearly and so precisely rendered Israel guilty for in II Corinthians 13:1 it says this: "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." Do you know that Israel only had to hear the truth from two or three witnesses? Under the economy of God in the Old Testament they knew they were responsible for what those two or three witnesses agreed to. They had heard this from thousands and thousands of witnesses. Thus they were responsible. And that's what the writer of Hebrews meant when he said to that Jewish community, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at first was spoken by our Lord, but was confirmed unto us by those that heard Him. We have the information and we've heard it in the mouth of multitude witnesses plus it's been confirmed unto us by signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit, and if we don't accept this how shall we escape the judgment of God? And that's the point. The witness is clear, precise, factual, and men are responsible.

So they knew their job to be a witness. But take a step further in verse 32, and it says this: "So is also the Holy Spirit whom God hath have given them that obey Him." And then he says a step further, "We are the Spirit in us and He is also witnessing through us." You know that in those days they didn't have a Bible so the Spirit actually gave them the very words. It says that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit in verse 8 of Chapter 4 and he preached. It says in verse 31 of Chapter 4, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word with boldness."

The Spirit of God gave them the words. They didn't have any other way to know the truth in terms of being exacting because they had no text; they had no Bible; and so the Spirit of God directly gave them the Word. You say well MacArthur, that's my problem. You know if I could go out there and say I have the Holy Spirit I'm now opening my mouth do it. See. I would have no problem. But the problem is the Holy Spirit doesn't give me the Word. I mean if I had what the early church had I'd be out there doing that too. They just opened their mouth and God did the talking. You want to know something? You do have the words of the Holy Spirit. You see this book? These are the words of the Holy Spirit.

The only difference is you don't get them straight from heaven. You've got to read them and then you've got to learn them. And the Bible says you need to study to show yourself what? Approved unto God. "A workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth."

Sure they had direct help, but listen folks, even with their direct help they didn't have the thing that we have and that is we have the totality of God's revelation. We have the wonder of having all of this truth. They only had just that little bit as God give it to them. How much richer are we and how much less faithful to really use what we have? You have the Word of God, but you going to have to study in order to communicate.

So, they said we're witnesses. Oh they're persistent. They said even here in the Sanhedrin, if need be, we'll tell you just exactly what you need to hear whether you like it or not.

Now that leads us to the fifth thing. The pure, powerful, persecuted and persistent church is going to produce results. So we'll call number five productivity. That kind of testimony is bound to make waves. And boy it made waves. But I want you to see what it produced. What did this pure, powerful, persecuted, persistence produce? Well it produced conviction. Watch verse 33: "When they heard that they were cut to the heart." Now they have reached the end of the tether. They have already been on the verge of insanity, if you want a legal term. They are near a total frenzy at this time because of the persistence of these Christians and they cannot shut them up.

And so now they bring them into the Sanhedrin and indict them and they turn right around and preach back to them the very thing they indicted them for. And they say, "We will not obey you. We will continue to be witnesses. God told us to be witnesses. The Spirit witnesses through us and that's how it will be whatever you say." And the fact of the thing is that they keep preaching the message that cuts them wide open because they keep blaming them for crucifying Christ and announcing that He's the Messiah and this is just the thing they can't stand to hear.

And so they get response and the response is conviction. Now the word to cut, emprianto has to do with sawing something in half. I mean this is a gut-level term. They were absolutely ripped apart. I mean even at the point where they couldn't do anything. They were so frustrated that all they could do was experience terrible anguish and the wrenching of their innards, if you will. I mean they were torn up. They didn't know what to do, just a total panic with an inability to know what to do, and the terrible conviction in their hearts that had been pounded in of crucifying their own Messiah. And they were really having a hard time.

But you know the Word of God will do that to a man. Hebrews 4:12 says, "The Word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit of joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It's a sword and it rips men open. Convicts them. And they just couldn't stand it. The word “deperianto” means

violently agitated. Cut to the heart. They were just torn up inside. You say, "What got them all messed up?" The persistent preaching of these Christians.

For example, they had been indicted for heresy for preaching the resurrection. What did they do? They went right back and preached the resurrection which is defying the Sadducees doctrine. They had been forbidden in jail for preaching, yet they went right back in the same place and preached all over again defying the Sadducees authority. They had been indicted for blaming the leaders for the execution of Messiah, yet they reiterated the same charge in the face of the Sanhedrin defying the Sadducees spirituality. They had been winning converts all over the place defying the Sadducees domination. They had defied them every way possible and they didn't know how to stop them. And so the hearts and minds of these leaders are agitated, frenzied and they're cut in half.

Now it's interesting that this kind of preaching brings conviction. I believe that preaching has to bring conviction. Little silly pious platitudes and, as my dad always used to say, "Sermonettes for Christianettes," and all these little dinky diddly things and telling happy little stories that is the biggest waste there is. What it's all about is bringing conviction to men's hearts so they change their lives. That's what it's all about.

Now what is conviction? Well conviction is to render someone guilty. Better yet, if you want a basic biblical definition of ecklinko the indication is that it's used 17 times in the New Testament and it refers to a process whereby a person comes to the place where he reaches certain conclusions or impressions in his mind. In other words it helps a person to see something that maybe he never understood. It has a bearing on how he lives.

Now let me say this and I want you to understand. This is very basic and I'll leave it rather general. You can make it personal or a specific application. But true conviction is mental not emotional. Now hang on to that thought. There is much that is pushed off as convicting kind of preaching, which is purely emotional and it does never convict anybody of anything very specific. True conviction is in the mind. It is not based on the emotion. When I'm talking of conviction I'm not talking about a sloppy sentimental state of spiritual depression and I'm not talking about feeling sorry that you told a lie. I'm talking about the fact that you know that you before God are judicially guilty, you see. That is conviction.

And when Peter went in there he didn't tell four little tear-jerking stories and make everybody feel sorry that they had kicked the cat or hadn't been nice to their wife. He went in there and what he did was convict them of what they needed to be convicted of. They had rejected their Messiah; they had executed their Messiah; they were living in rebellion against God. That is a fact they needed to know. That's true conviction. Now I think that if the conviction is real in the mind it'll get to the emotions. But that's a response and that's not where we direct our conviction; therefore, all truly convicted preaching must be very clearly doctrinal.

Let me illustrate that to you 'cause maybe you need a little deeper insight in to it. John 16 would be where we would look at that. John 16:7, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth." Which is nothing new for Christ. "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter, “parakletos,” on called alongside to help, the Holy Spirit, "Will not come unto you." Verse 7 Chapter 16, but if I depart I will send Him unto you." All right now the Spirit's going to come. Alright. Now what's He going to do? Verse 8, "When He is come He will convict."

Now the work of conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit. It's the work of the Holy Spirit. Now mark this, folks. The Holy Spirit convicts men, but He convicts them by using the truth to do it. He convicts them by a correct understanding of doctrine, not by some kind of sentimentality. Conviction is the Spirit of God using the facts of the Word of God to bring about a change in a man's mind that then hits his emotions and results in his live being changed.

Now what is it that the Holy Spirit convicts men of? Three things: He will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. First of all of sin because they believe not of Me. Notice it doesn't say convicts the world of sins. You don't really convict a man of the seriousness of his sin if you start talking about whether he lies or whether he cheats or whether he's unfair or whether he beats his wife or whether he commits adultery. What you're talking about is when you really convict men is the sin of not believing on Jesus Christ. That is the issue. That is the issue that men need to be confronted with. The fact is that man, you have no reason or rhyme to expect anything from God if you live in rejection of Christ you're a rebel. Now men need to be convicted of that. That's what Peter always said. God, Peter says, "You killed Him, God raised Him." You and God are at opposite ends. What you're doing God is undoing. What God's trying to do you're trying to undo. And they were always saying, "We are the people of God." He's saying, "Humph, you're no where near God."

So the first thing he had to show was that they were at odds with God because they had not acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah. That was very basic. Now that is true conviction. The damning sin of not believing in Christ and men need, first of all, to understand that in their minds. Second thing is of righteousness because, "I go to My Father and you see Me no more." Now if anybody goes to the Father they are only allowed certain kind of people to go into the presence of the Father and those are righteous ones. True? But the world has a messed up sense of righteousness. Really reversed. In fact, they killed Jesus in the name of righteousness, didn't they? And Paul went around killing Christians in the name of righteousness when Jesus was truly the righteous one. And they judged Him unrighteous and a criminal and worthy of death. God lifted Him up and put Him in the throne room with Himself and thereby said to the world, "He's righteous," folks. Whatever you say He's righteous.

So men need to be convicted of the fact that Jesus is righteous, and the proof of it is His resurrection and ascension. That's why it says in verse 10, "Because I go to My Father and you see Me no more."

That proves My righteousness. So men need to understand that it is sin and damning sin not to believe and they need to understand that Jesus is righteous.

The third fact that they need to understand in true conviction is verse 11 of judgment because of the prince of this world is judged. They need to understand that if you don't come to Christ, if you live in constant rebellion against Him you'll have judgment. And the classic example is Satan, and he says because the prince of this world is judged, did you know that the guarantee or of everybody's judgment who denies Christ is the judgment of Satan? Say what do you mean? Satan is a kind of first fruits of judgment. If Satan got it do you think anybody less powerful than him who doesn't believe is going to get away with it? That's the point. You ought to convince men that judgment comes because Satan is judged and Satan was judged at the cross. Really he was judged in the mind of God long before that when he was thrown out of heaven. If God judged the most, the second most powerful being in the universe, if God judged him and he couldn't get away, and he shall dwell forever in the Lake of Fire, what man on this earth thinks he's going to get away. That's the point.

So men need to be convicted of facts. The sin of believing not on Christ, the fact that you've got a reverse system of righteousness, and the fact that judgment is inevitable to the one who does not turn and accept Christ. That's true conviction and you see it's based on theology. So that's exactly what you find in Peter's messages. He convicts a man in his mind knowing that if there's a mental understanding it can reach the emotions and you get a response and a man changes his life by faith.

All right, so this is convicting stuff. So Peter's really wailing away. Now go back to Acts 5 and let's pick it up. Now we're going to see the three reactions. Whenever you preach with conviction you produce results and normally there are three and we'll look at them. It won't take us long to go through this text because it's very much narrative.

Three responses are seen. I'll give them to you and then we'll take them one-by-one. First of all is violent hostility. It inevitable that when a man preaches with conviction, or when the gospel is presented with conviction by a community of believers in the world there's going to be a violent reaction on the part of some people because they've been hardened by unbelief and this is a terrible thing for them to have to face; that is, ungodly people hate to have to face godliness, so violent hostility.

Secondly, tolerant indecision. Some people just stand around doing nothing. That's all very interesting. I'll think about it. Third thing. Saving acceptance. There's the three responses. First of all let's look at violent hostility, verse 33. "When they heard that," Peter's sermon, "When they heard that they were cut to the heart and took counsel to slay them." They said there's only one thing to do, kill them. That is so ridiculous. They were speaking the truth. All the evidence is in. How do you explain the miracles? What are they going to say about all these miracles?

You go back to verse 16 and it says, "Every single sick person and every single demon-possessed person that came into the city of Jerusalem from all over the place got healed, with no exceptions." Now how do you be so blind you can't see that? That's the hardness of unbelief. We got to kill them. What a ridiculous reaction, but it's a common reaction. Instead of yielding to the truth they hardened themselves and would have added sin to sin by killing the very messengers who told them that God came to forgive them if they would repent. It's a sad sad thing but frequent.

Over in the ninth Chapter, you remember that one? I'll read it to you. Verse 22: "Saul," this is Paul just at his conversion, "Saul increased the more in strength and confounded the Jews who dwelt at Damascus proving that this very Christ." You know that Paul in Damascus went to kill the Christians wound up proving to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah? You say, "Isn't that great? He proved to them, must have had a real revival. They did.

Verse 23: "After many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him." That's the hardness of unbelief. Don't confuse me with the facts; I've made up my mind. That's nothing new. You can go back in the Psalms and find it. There's a great text in Psalm 37 that explains this same attitude. It's just the fact that ungodly people who have confirmed themselves in ungodliness can't stand righteousness in any form. Psalm 37:12 says this: "The wicked plotteth against the just." Wicked people hate just people. And then it says, and this is so vivid, "And gnasheth," watch this one, "And gnasheth upon him with his teeth." Can't stand that guy. See. Urrgg. See really righteous people are very irritating. Positionally I'm righteous, but some people who are really practically righteous even irritate me because if they show an area of spiritual maturity I don't have that's kind of a problem. But that's nowhere near the kind of holiness the church that is pure exudes in the world and what kind of reaction it gets.

Verse 13 says: "The Lord shall laugh at him for He seeth that his day is coming." A fearful thought. And in verse 14, "The wicked have drawn out the sword and bent their bow." I'll kill those righteous, "To cast down the poor and the needy and slay such as are upright." They hate them. "The sword shall enter into their own heart and their bows shall be broken." And then he goes a little further there in verse 32 it says, "The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him." You see it's not anything new for certain wicked people to take a great and gross offense at the righteousness of those who know God. In Matthew Chapter 10, our Lord was speaking and just let me read you a couple of statements here that'll help you to understand this.

In verse 21, "The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child, and the children shall rise up against the parents and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake, but he that endureth to the end shall be saved." And there is the statement again that there will be slaughter even within the family, and persecution even within the family for those who are righteous.

There's a sad text that comes to mind in Matthew 23. Jesus and Jerusalem. Listen to these words beginning in verse 34. "Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets," he's talking to Jerusalem, "Send to you prophets and wise men and scribes and some of them you shall kill and crucify, some of them you shall scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city. And upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you slew between the temple and the altar." They slaughtered a prophet of God. "Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation." I'm going to bring down my wrath on this generation for killing the prophets and slaughtering those that preach the truth. He did in 70 A.D. wiped out Jerusalem, and He became pensive in verse 37 and said this: "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them who are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and you would not." Then firmly says, "Your house is left unto you desolate." There's going to be persecution because there's going to be hostility. This is what they did to Jesus.

Go through the book of John 5:16, John 7:32, John 8:59, 10:31, 11:57, and all it says in those verses is they wanted to kill Him, or they tried to stone Him, or they took Him captive, or whatever. They just did it to Him all His life and finally they got Him and nailed Him to a cross. And Jesus said, "What they did to Me they'll do to you because you represent Me in the world." And so there are still those who are violently opposed to Christianity and some of us have met those kind of things and have been through those kind of experiences. But you know something? It's an exciting thing to be able to make enough waves to get somebody hostile. Most Christians don't even make a ripple. And we ought to be having an influence. We ought to be making the kind of waves that create problems among the people of this world. Our gospel ought to be so definitive in terms of what we say and what we live that the world has to take notice even if they don't like it. Because if it's convicting enough to make men mad it'll be convicting enough to get men saved.

Second attitude, not only hostile rejection, is tolerant indecision. Now these people don't get violent, they just don't do anything. They just sort of stand around and philosophize. There's a guy who pops up by the name of Gamaliel or Gamaliel or whatever is your preference and he comes along with some kind of an idea. And a lot of guys say brilliant plan, terrific principle, I say dumb, stupid principle, but God used a dumb principle to, God uses a lot of dumb principles because He uses a lot of us dumb people, so He's used to operating on this basis.

But Gamaliel comes up with kind of a dumb thing, but it affects a good purpose because it gets him off the hook in terms of being killed. Look at it in verse 34: "Then stood there up one in the counsel, a Pharisee named Gamaliel." He's a teacher of the law. That means he was an Old Testament scholar by their standards. "Held in reputation among all the people," very popular guy and he commanded the disciples to be put forth a space, which is a hard way of saying, "Take 'em out of the room."

Now Gamaliel was a Pharisee and you'll remember that the Sadducees controlled the Sanhedrin, the Sanhedrin was the 70-member counsel that ruled Jerusalem. But within the framework of the 70-member counsel there were Pharisees, it was just that the Sadducees had the rule, had the money, they were the political collaborationists. They were the ones that had sided with Rome. They were the ones that you might say were the theological liberals. They were concerned with social customs, they were concerned with getting along with Rome, they were very liberal in theology, they didn't believe in the resurrection, and they didn't believe in angels and that's why God made sure that the Apostles preached the resurrection and got let out of prison by an angel because He was defying their theology.

But nonetheless, they were the theological liberals; they were the political liberals, whereas the Pharisees were the traditionalists. They were purists as regarding the law; they were nationalists as regarding Israel. They believed that Israel should exist apart from any connection with Rome. They were the ones who would have joined in any rebellion to get Rome off their necks because they were isolationists, nationalistic, whereas the Sadducees were political collaborators with Rome and they were theological liberals and they look at it from an economic standpoint, prestige standpoint, etc. etc. Very much like the dichotomy today between evangelicals and liberals.

So they were poles apart religiously and they were poles apart politically, which made for an interesting kind of dialogue within the framework of the Sanhedrin. Now the Sadducees were very influential with the Sanhedrin and very influential with Rome, but very uninfluential with the people. The people's group were the Pharisees. They were the ones that really swayed the people. Now this is very important because it adds a little bit of kind of undercurrent by play to this thing that's going to happen in a second.

Josephus says, and Josephus was a non-Christian historian about the time of Christ, who commented on a lot of things that were going on then, and Josephus says that because of the popularity of the Pharisees with the people, the Sadducees would always acquiesce to their demands. And this is important because here's what's happening. The people liked the Christians, right? I mean it's like a kind of an instant constant Medicare. Anybody gets sick you go find Peter, see, and this is a good thing. It was like the people in Galilee. They really loved Christianity because they kept getting free meals. So this is the same kind of a thing. The people thought it was very good; it was very popular. Everybody was getting healed. And watch this: the people also liked the Pharisees and the Pharisees wanted to stay in the good graces of the people; therefore the Pharisees were smart enough to know that if we persecute these Christians we're going to get a negative reaction from the people. We're going to lose our prestige with the people.

The Sadducees knew the Pharisees had prestige with the people and the Sadducees, therefore, wanting to have a good relationship to the people knew they had to go along with the Pharisees. So

the whole chain of events was simply this: the people had control of the Pharisees because the Pharisees wanted the love of the people. The Pharisees had control of the Sadducees because the Sadducees want the love of the Pharisees because they had the love of the people.

And so this whole little cycle, and so Gamaliel stands up and he's in a great position to talk because he is a Pharisee and he knows he's got the people on his side and therefore, the Sadducees are going to have to listen to what he says, and he's not too sure that they ought to kill these guys. Because, although he comes across theological, I think in the back of his brain is a political thought because if this is the best he can come up with in theology he's hurting. We'll see that in a minute.

Now he's an eminent man. It says he was a teacher of the law and in the Talmud, which is the rabbinical writings of the Judaism the Talmud calls him Gamaliel, the Elder, and the word rabban is a word that it's not like Rabbi, it's saved for only seven men, the seven most eminent teachers of Israel. He was the first one who ever got that title, so he's a pretty sharp guy. He was the greatest teacher of his day. He was the grandson of Hillel. There were two great Rabbis. Any Jew will tell you the two great Rabbis Hillel and Chaim, those two Rabbi's founded the two branches of Phariseeism one a little more conservative than the other. Hillel was the little more liberal wing. He was the grandson of Hillel. His heritage was good; he was a sharp guy. The old writing tell us he had great earning, he was noble, he studied Greek literature, he was culturally so far advanced from the other Rabbis they weren't even in the same ballpark with him. He was called the Beauty of the Law. He died 18 years before the sack of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and in the Mishna it says, "Since Rabban Gamaliel, the Elder, there has been no more reverence for the law, and purity and abstinence died out at the same time." So he was a very dominating guy. They felt that when he died everything went with him.

Interestingly enough in Acts 22:3, it says that the apostle Paul studied at his feet. So Paul had the best teacher of Judaism that was alive at that time, maybe one of the greatest that ever lived. And so because of his influence, as an individual, and because of the fact that he belonged to the Pharisees he stood in the position to do something. So he asked for the apostles to be taken out and here's his little program. Verse 35, "He said unto them, 'Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do as touching these men.'" Let me give you some advice guys. Don't act too fast. Be cautious. You'd better be careful what you do. Now that's pretty good advice. We'll accept that. The Pharisees had a little quirk in their theology. They were kind of pre-Calvinists Calvinists. They believed that God could handle everything and didn't need anybody to help Him. And this was what was basically behind the picture here in Gamaliel's mind theologically. He was simply thinking now God can handle this. That was the theological tact.

So he says, let me give you a couple of illustrations of how God handles things. Don't act too fast guys. Don't take into your hands what really belongs to God. Let me give you an illustration. Verse 36, "Before those days rose up Theudas." You guys remember Theudas? You don't but they did. There are too many guys named Theudas to remember who this is. We don't have any idea. Josephus talks

about a later Theudas who had a rebellion, but his rebellion was so different from the characteristics here and it came so many years later that we know it's not the same guy. But anyway you remember there rose up Theudas, "boasting himself to be somebody," which we've all done, "to whom a number of men about four hundred joined themselves, which usually has not happened when we've done that, but it did for him, you remember him? "He was slain and all as many as obeyed him were scattered and brought to nothing."

Remember that guy Theudas? He came and he went. And we didn't have to do anything. God handled that. He says, let me give you another illustration. Verse 37, "After this man rose up Judas of Galilee," and this one we do know a little bit about. This fellow led a revolt about 6 A. D. You remember that Herod the Great died in 4 A. D., I guess, 4 B. C. I can't remember which, and after he died there about ten thousand robbers that popped up. They popped up all over everywhere. It just came to be a common thing see. 4 B. C. he died. It was kind of a common thing and they were just running around in the country.

A lot of times these little groups of robbers would get together and they'd find a leader and they'd crown him a king and they'd start a little revolution. Well one of these guys was Judas and in 6 A. D. he led a rebellion during the time of the census or the taxation under Quirinius, which just gives you a historical footnote. But his position was this: he said God is king; therefore to pay taxes to Rome is blaspheming God. None of us shall pay taxes anymore and he started spreading this around. Well this was a big threat to Rome so immediately the Roman IRS got activated and came down and stomped all over Judas and his people. And it's interesting that verse 37 says, "In the days of those in the registration he drew away many people after him. He also perished and all even as many as obeyed him were dispersed."

Now Gamaliel isn't particularly honest there because out of that movement came a group of people known as the Zealots. Did you ever read about the Zealots in the Bible? The Zealots were the super super nationalistic people, really believed in the purity and the isolation of Israel. And they grew out of Judas' rebellion. So it wasn't just as ineffective as he said. But he said, _____ to things that happened and nothing ever came of it. Verse 38, "Now I say unto you," let me principlize from those illustrations, "Refrain from these men and let them alone." Don't get into you're going to get into a mess if you fool around here, just step back, "For if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nothing, but if it be of God you cannot overthrow it unless perhaps you are found even to fight against God." Say that is sharp. No that is stupid. That is one of the dumbest messed up principles I've ever read. Parts of it are true and that's what's so insidious. That's the way all the cults are, you know. They're right just enough to mess you up. They're like a clock that doesn't work. They're right on twice a day. And so his advice is let them alone and it'll all work out.

You know what principle being interpreted is? Listen. Whatever succeeds is of God; whatever fails is not. That's what he's saying isn't it? When you put 38 and 39 together he says if it's of God it'll

succeed, if it isn't it won't. So whatever succeeds is of God, whatever fails is not. That is a dumb principle. If you live by that principle you will be a mess. I'll say this. It's true in an ultimate sense, right? At the coming of Christ whatever is of God will remain, whatever isn't will be wiped out. But it's only true in an ultimate sense. That's sure no way to evaluate something that's going on in that moment. I mean there are kinds of successful that God hates. Illustration number one: the Sanhedrin. I mean if that principle is true, none of them would even be there. They say if it's of God it'll remain. They're looking at each other here we all remain. They didn't even know God. If we applied that principle that meeting couldn't have taken place.

You know today we have movements all over the place that are tremendously successful, but God hasn't got a thing to do with any of them. Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, very successful. You know there are 455 million Muslims. A success. 395 million Hindus, 350 million Confusionists, 250 million Buddhists, 100 million Shinto Taoists. The fastest growing religion in the world soka gakkai in Japan with millions of adherents. 1 billion atheists or communists. There's a lot of successful movements. God hasn't got a thing to do with any of them and you start making the principle that whatever is of God is going to abide and you've got problems. Ultimately that's true. In time it isn't so. That's a stupid principle. Gamaliel, where is your head? I mean if that's true, if you're going to judge on the basis of success then God is pleased with Playboy, Budweiser, Mormonism, demon worship, and Jesus Christ Superstar. That's not a smart principle. And the idea let us wait and see. That is dumbest of all. What are you looking for Gamaliel? Did you not see that everybody got healed? Did you not see miracle after miracle after miracle? Did you not see the resurrection of Jesus Christ, His grave is empty; He's gone. What are you waiting for?

You say well if you can't use Gamaliel's principle what do you use to judge something? Very easy! You take your Bible and you say here is something going on. Let me see, does it square with Scripture. If it does you buy it. If it doesn't you throw it out, right? You know if Gamaliel had been as smart as he thought he was, here's what he would have said. "Men, we need to determine if it's true. Let us take our Old Testament text and let's study it. And if we find that this movement squares with the text let us believe it with our whole hearts. That would have been right, but he was a pseudo scholar.

Oh fools and slow of heart, Jesus said to believe all that the prophets have written unto you. A master of the text would have been able to apply God's principles. He would have known that Jesus fulfilled every single iota that was ever written in regard to Messianic prophecy. But he came up with this weak application of poor theology. The only part that's true about it is the second part in verse 39 and that's true. "If it be of God you can't overthrow it." Boy that's for sure. How many men have tried to overthrow the things of God and wound up being crushed by it, lest perhaps you find yourself fighting against God and that's exactly prophetic. That's exactly what the Jews were doing, fighting God all the way along, weren't they?

Jesus said in Matthew 12:30, "He that is not with me," is what? "Against me." Men fight God. They oppose His gospel. They oppose His Bible. They oppose His law. They oppose His providence. They oppose His Spirit's conviction. Men fight God. They were fighting God. He was right at that point.

You know many people today hiding behind the same principle that he gives here. Well I'm waiting to see. I'm just not quite ready. The evidence is in, my friend. The apostle Paul, who studied under this man, knew more than this guy. This guy said, "Wait and see." Paul said, II Corinthians 6:2, "Behold, today is the day of" what? "Salvation." Don't wait and see. Moody preached and said, "Go home and think about it," and that night the Chicago fire broke out and half his congregation was dead. That's the last time I told anybody to wait and see. The evidence is in.

And so they listened to this guy and well that sounds like a pretty good principle. We'll just kind of play it cool, but because they were so violent in their hearts, verse 40 says, "To him they agreed. And when they had called the apostles and beaten them, they commanded they should not speak in the name of Jesus and let them go." They couldn't really go along with him all the way so they just took them and beat them 39 stripes. Deuteronomy 25 tells about it. It's a sad thing.

The Mishna says a guy would take the hands of the person and strap him to two posts like this. He would strip his shirt off. The stone was set behind the man or in front of the man on which the guy stood and he had to swing with all his might, the Mishna said. He wrapped the leather around his hand, two big long wide broad pieces of leather from the navel to the ground, that long, and they gave him one-third of the stripes on the front and two-thirds on the back and he did it to every one of those believers there. Then that brought us to the third and final reaction and we'll close with this.

Saving acceptance. You say it's a lot to suffer. Did any good come out of it? You'd better believe it. That kind of conviction not only brings violent reaction, and it not only brings tolerant indecision, but it brings saving acceptance. Verse 41, "And they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing hey were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name." They went out and said boy just to be worthy to have suffered for Christ who suffered so much for us, what a joy. Like Paul in Galatians 6:17, they bore in their body the marks of Jesus. Those blows had been meant for Jesus. They were standing in His place taking the blows meant for Him. What an honor.

When the world persecutes you it's not you they're after. Who are they really after? Christ and you're filling up in your body, like Paul says in Colossians 1:24, the sufferings of Christ. Count it worthy. Did they stop, verse 42? "And daily in the temple," they went right back like little springs, doing, right back in the temple. And in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. And what happened? Verse 1 of Chapter 6, "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was," what? "Multiplied." Listen, somebody believed. Praise God for that.

We poop out, drop out; we get exhausted just from putting our armor on. Now veterans of a few skirmishes we seek an honorable discharge. Not the early church. They went at it and they stayed with it. You know what? They turned their world upside down. The principles are here, beloved: purity, power, persecution, persistence, productivity. God has not promised the sky is always blue, flower strewn pathways all our lives through. God has not promised sun without rain, joy without sorrow, peace without pain. But God has promised strength for the day, rest for the labor, light on the way, grace for each trial, help from above, unfailing sympathy, undying love. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for what you promised, for what you want to do in our lives, if we'll let you do it. God give us a holy boldness. Send us out into this world to preach, persistently. When persecution comes give us all the more boldness that we may do what it is that pleases you and that brings people to yourself. We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

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