

How to Handle Persecution, Part 1

Acts 4:1-12

1714

INTRODUCTION

A. The Persecution of Christians

Persecution is an intrinsic part of Christianity. In Acts 4:1- 32 are some tremendous insights that we can learn from the way the Apostles handled persecution. For the early church, persecution was a blessing. That is still true today--persecution is a blessing to all churches and all believers. There were five organized efforts within eleven years to persecute the church in Jerusalem. Acts 4 records the beginnings of those efforts. They were really the beginning of all the persecution that the church has endured for nearly two thousand years. As time has progressed, Satan's persecution of the church has become more subtle. The techniques he uses to persecute Christians are not as obvious as they used to be. However, they are very effective.

Acts 4 records the first incident in a steady stream of persecution against the church that has gone on since the church was established. In one way or another, the Christian church is always being persecuted. The persecution can be political, personal, or religious. The greatest persecutor of evangelical Christianity is probably liberal Christianity. The church has always suffered persecution, but it is more subtle today than it used to be.

1. Examined

Today, Satan usually directs persecution not to a person's physical body, but to his ego. He focuses on pride, the desire for acceptance, or the desire for status. That's very effective. Satan doesn't often threaten a Christian by saying, "If you witness, I'll cut your head off." He threatens a believer by saying, "If you witness, you might lose your job, your status--or someone might think you are strange." The techniques Satan uses today have a tremendous effect in a subtle way. He has found that it is very effective to kill the church by making it complacent, indolent, fat, rich, and socially oriented. The church has watered down its theology to accommodate the world. That is a more successful form of persecution than having all Christians boiled in oil!

There are some places in the world today where there is still physical persecution of Christians. Even in America, some Christians suffer from physical persecution. But no matter how Satan carries out his persecution, he is always antagonistic to the church. Sometimes he persecutes the church in an obvious and flagrant manner; other times he subtly persecutes the church by making Christians not want to offend others so that they might maintain the acceptance or status their ego desires.

2. Expected

a. Anticipating Persecution

In John 15, Jesus made a statement to His disciples that warned the church to expect persecution. He said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own ..." (vv. 18-19). That's why John said, "Love not the world ..." (1 Jn. 2:15). When a Christian falls in love with the world, then he no longer stands against it. Unbelievers will not be offended by him anymore. Satan benefits from that more than if that Christian had been physically killed: Since the Christian's positive effect on the world has been nullified, Satan now has him on his side. Christ said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you ..." (Jn. 15:19-20). Jesus also told his disciples to expect religious persecution: "They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (Jn. 16:2).

Peter said that we will receive persecution. In 1 Peter 2:21, he said, "For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps." When you confront the world, it will react violently. Some people succumb to Satan's persecution and never confront the world because they want to save their egos from being persecuted. But Paul said to Timothy, "... all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Everyone who follows Jesus will suffer persecution.

b. Avoiding Persecution

You say, "I'm a Christian, and I don't suffer persecution." Read 2 Timothy 3:12 again: It says that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." If you are not being persecuted, that's because you do not "live godly in Christ Jesus" If you live the way God wants you to live, you will naturally disagree with the world. If you are not being persecuted, you have either hidden your Christianity from everyone or fallen into doing things that unbelievers do. When you openly live a godly life, you will bang heads with Satan. You will confront the world, and persecution will be automatic.

B. The Perseverance of Christians

1. Confronting Unbelievers

The early church was persecuted because it lived openly for God. It's true that if you live a godly life, unbelievers will be drawn to you. But as soon as they find out more about you-- unless they come to Christ--the way you live will repel them. That happened with the early church. Acts 2:47 tells us that people looked favorably upon the early church. In Acts 3, people became excited when they witnessed the healing of a lame man. But when Peter began to preach in Acts 3:12 about what the church stood for, negative reactions became manifest.

In Acts 3, Peter and John healed a lame man as they were about to go into the Temple (vv. 1-8). A crowd developed in the courtyard. Peter and John, with the healed man between them, stood on Solomon's portico, which was a little higher than the courtyard itself (v. 11). Peter then preached a powerful message about Christ the Messiah, and indicted Israel for executing Christ. He closed with an invitation in verse 19: "Repent, therefore, and be converted" Peter confronted the world. While people were doing their religious duties in the Temple, he told them that they were wrong to have executed Christ. That's the kind of confrontation that brings hostility from the world, but God expects us to confront the world. We are not to hide so that we can protect our name, ego, or status among unbelievers.

2. Converting Unbelievers

The response to Peter's preaching is interesting. Acts 4:4 tells us that "many of them who heard the word believed" That is the result we are to aim for by confronting the world. We are not to hide our Christianity. If we do, we not only avoid persecution, we also keep people from becoming saved. You say, "If I confront people, I might be persecuted. That's fine. Through your getting messed up, someone else might get straightened out. Your life is expendable for the sake of others. When you live to protect your ego and status, you become self-centered and are useless to God and anyone else.

Acts 4:4 says, "... many of them who heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand." The words "was about" should be translated "came to be." The number of males that came to believe was five thousand. There are two Greek words for men: One is anthropos, which means "man" in a generic sense. The other word is andros, which means "male"--as opposed to female. It is the latter word that appears in Acts 4:4. So, the total number of men that became believers was five thousand. In addition to that, there were probably at least another five thousand women and children that became saved. The church began with many converts! It grew so fast from that point on, that it became impossible to keep an accurate count of converts. Many people came to Christ because of Peter's sermon. That was worth the price that Peter paid in confronting people!

The price that is paid in confronting the world is always worth paying, because then God can do His work through us. If we never confront the world, we will be failures. God wants us to share the gospel. Don't be afraid of being persecuted on the job. Even if you lose your job, the Lord will provide for your needs (Mt. 6:31- 33). That doesn't mean you can be an ineffective employee and waste all your time preaching the gospel. Ephesians 6:5-8 teaches that we are to give an honest day's work for an honest day's wages. But live your life so that people know that you stand for Jesus Christ.

There are two things we are going to look at in Acts 4:1-32: The Persecution Manifest, and The Persecution Met. Let's look first at ...

I. THE PERSECUTION MANIFEST (vv. 1-4)

A. The Arrest Initiated (v. 1)

"And as they spoke unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them"

1. The Indignation of the Arresters

The words "came upon them" indicates that the arresters were angry. Peter and John were grabbed. The crowd in the Temple courtyard had witnessed the healing of a lame man, and consequently listened to what Peter had to say. The officials of the Temple and the religious leaders were concerned about what was happening. They interrupted Peter while he was still speaking on Solomon's portico in order to arrest him and John.

2. The Identification of the Arresters

The identities of the people who arrested Peter and John are interesting. First, there were ...

a. The Priests

The priests that were at the Temple were supposed to represent God. The fact that they wanted to stop Peter from preaching shows how far removed from God the priesthood had become. Those priests represent religious persecution against the church. Today, Christians often receive persecution from different religious groups, including Judaism.

Second, there was ...

b. The Captain of the Temple

The captain of the Temple, known as the sagan, was the head of the Temple police. He represents political opposition against the church. Today, there is political opposition against the church in China, the Soviet Union, and a few other countries. Roman government officials were very tolerant of the people under their rule, but they were merciless when public disorder occurred. The last thing the captain of the Temple wanted to have was a riot. He didn't want public disorder to get him into trouble.

The last and most important people involved in the arrest were ...

c. The Sadducees

The Sadducees were one of the religious groups in Israel. Two other groups were the Pharisees and the Zealots. The Sadducees were a religious and political group--that combination made them the worst source of persecution. They were religious liberals and had great power in Israel. All the high priests at the time Acts 4 was written were Sadducees. They were the opposition party to the Pharisees. Sadducees and Pharisees were like Republicans and Democrats with a religious flavor. Most of what we read about the Pharisees appears in the Gospels; the Sadducees are dominant in the book of Acts. The Pharisees usually weren't wealthy, but the Sadducees tended to be extremely wealthy.

The Sadducees were collaborationists: They were always scratching Rome's back for mutual favors. They didn't care that much about the common people; their preoccupation was with keeping the status quo and their power. The Sadducees kept themselves on friendly terms with Rome so that they could maintain their power and comfort. Although they were a small group, they were very influential politically. To them, religion was only a social custom--they were strict, social religionists. So, in Acts 4:1 we see the high-ranking religionists and important people of Jerusalem going after Peter and John. The reason they did that is clearly stated in verse 2:

B. The Anxiety Indicated (v. 2)

"Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." Notice the word "grieved." That sounds like the men going after Peter and John were very sad. But that's not what the word means. It is a strong word, and it means "thoroughly pained." The group of men that wanted to stop Peter and John were in terrible mental anguish. Their anguish wasn't based on sorrow; it was based on indignation and wrath. The same Greek word for grieve

appears in Acts 16:18, where Paul had the same anguish when he saw a woman in Philippi under the power of an evil spirit. The priests, Sadducees, and the captain of the Temple were all very disturbed about what Peter and John were doing. They felt that way for three reasons:

1. They Doubted the Competency of the Preachers

Acts 4:2 says that Peter and John were teaching. The high-ranking religionists and officials of the Temple were upset about that. They believed that only they could teach, and that no one else had

the right to. The fact that Peter and John were teaching in the Temple made the situation even worse. No one was supposed to teach things that were contrary to what the teachers in the Temple taught. In the eyes of the Temple officials and the religionists, Peter and John were not qualified to teach. That is made apparent in verse 13: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled ..." Peter and John were considered "unlearned and ignorant."

a. They Were "Unlearned"

Peter and John didn't know the sacred writings of the Jewish law. They weren't versed in Jewish theology. The Temple officials and religious leaders thought, "How can Peter and John know anything? They haven't been to the proper schools!" The same thing was said about Jesus. The Jewish religious leaders wondered where Jesus got His information, because He had never been to their schools. Jesus said that He got His information from God (Jn. 12:49-50).

b. They Were "Ignorant"

Not only were Peter and John ignorant regarding Jewish theology, but they were commoners as well. That's what the word "ignorant" implies. The Temple officials and religious leaders were saying, "Who are these uneducated amateurs?" The fact that Peter and John were from Galilee was repugnant to them. They thought Peter and John had no right to stand up in the Temple and teach doctrines contrary to what was taught by the teachers in the Temple. The religious leaders were angry because Peter and John's theology disagreed with their own. They wanted to protect themselves, so they knew something had to be done about Peter and John.

2. They Disliked the Core of the Preaching

The Temple officials and religious leaders were angry because of what Peter and John were teaching. They didn't want to hear preaching about Jesus. They had determined that Jesus was a blasphemer, but Peter was saying that the Jews had killed their own Messiah (Ac. 3:13-15). If you tried to tell that to a congregation of Jewish people today, you would get a strong reaction. Peter proclaimed Jesus as Messiah, and he indicted the whole nation of Israel for not recognizing Him. As a result, some of the people in the Temple got angry.

3. They Despised the Content of the Preaching

Peter and John "preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (v. 2). They kept announcing that Jesus was alive. But the religious leaders and Temple officials did not want to hear about Jesus' resurrection. They didn't want to think about that because if it were true, they knew that Christ would bring about the vengeance they justly deserved. I'm sure that the Jewish religious leaders knew in their hearts that they were hypocrites. They may have thought, "Maybe we did execute our Messiah. If Jesus did rise again, that is bad news for us! We had better shut up Peter and John." Also, the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection. Thus, it is easy to see why they would be irritated about what Peter and John were teaching.

C. The Apostles Imprisoned (v. 3)

"And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody unto the next day; for it was now eventide." Peter and John had come to the Temple at about three o'clock for the afternoon prayers (Ac. 3:1). "Eventide" is about six o'clock, so three hours had gone by since they first arrived at the Temple. The Temple officials and religious leaders arrested Peter and John, and put them in jail overnight. That was the beginning of the persecution against the early church.

D. The Audience Influenced (v. 4)

"But many of them who heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand."

Imprisoning the Apostles didn't nullify their effect. It didn't stop the spreading of the gospel. That imprisonment was the first incident of many through which persecution has led to the extension of the church rather than the destruction of it. Persecution has helped the church to grow. Since trials and persecution on a personal level are God's way of maturing a Christian (Js. 1:2-4), then churchwide persecution is God's way of maturing His church.

The Result of Persecution

Persecution always results in growth. It removes deadweight from the church. For example, if there are a few true Christians in a large group of people who are persecuted because of Christ, only they will be willing to endure. In the church today, there are tares sown among the wheat (Mt. 13:24-26). The easiest way to get rid of the tares is to have the church pay the price of following Christ. The tares will eventually leave, because they aren't committed to Christ and don't really want to get involved. So, persecution purifies the church--it removes the waste. When persecution occurs, false believers leave and God is able to work freely through the true believers that are left.

Let's look now at how Peter and John reacted to their persecution.

II. THE PERSECUTION MET (vv. 3, 5-32a)

There are seven practical principles for meeting persecution. An important thing to remember is that you have to commit yourself to confronting the world, or you will never face persecution. James 1:2 says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into various trials." Trials give us the opportunity to grow. If we live godly lives, we will be persecuted. If we suffer persecution, we should be happy because it will make us grow and reach others for Christ. But you have to be willing to live a godly life, rather than hiding and protecting yourself. Although the thought of receiving persecution may create great anxiety, we should look forward to it with great joy for righteousness' sake (Mt. 5:10).

The first principle I want to discuss is ...

A. Be Submissive to Persecution (vv. 3, 5-7)

1. The Apostles' Example of Submission

Acts 4:3 tells us that Peter and John were taken into custody by their arresters. They did not strike back at their arresters; they did not start a brawl. Verses 5-7 say, "... it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas, the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set [Peter, John, and the healed man] in their midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" Implied in those verses is the fact that Peter and

John did not offer any resistance. They didn't develop a martyr's complex and say, "We will die for what we did." They simply trusted in God. Peter and John saw that God was presenting them with a great opportunity through their persecution. They had been obedient to proclaim Christ. Since their proclamation brought about their arrest, they assumed they were where God wanted them.

If in the course of obeying the Lord you end up in difficult circumstances, you can assume that God ordained that to happen. He wants to do something through you in those circumstances. However, if you are disobedient to the Lord and end up in a bad situation, that's a different issue (1 Pet. 2:20). If you are persecuted as a result of confronting the world and proclaiming Christ, praise God and wait to see what He will do. Be submissive; don't fight back.

2. The Apostles' Encounter with the Sanhedrin

a. The Introduction to the Sanhedrin

Verse 5 introduces us to the Sanhedrin, which was composed of "rulers, and elders, and scribes." That group was the high ruling counsel of Israel--it was the Supreme Court of the Jews. Even when Israel was under Roman oppression, the Sanhedrin had the right to arrest people. There were seventy members in the Sanhedrin, and the high priest was served ex officio as president (making seventy-one men altogether). The scribes were the experts in the law, the elders were from among the people, and other members of the Sanhedrin were people from the priestly family. Actually, they were a motley bunch.

Verse 6 first introduces "Annas, the high priest." Annas was a former high priest who had been deposed by the Romans. But because of his power, he still controlled things from behind the scenes. In fact, when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was immediately taken to Annas because the former high priest was the most powerful man in Israel (Jn. 18:12-13). Annas was a Sadducee.

The next person mentioned in Acts 4:6 is Caiaphas, who was the son-in-law of Annas. He had been appointed high priest by the Romans, and was as bad a man as Annas was. Then verse 6 mentions John and Alexander. We don't know who they were. One of Annas's five sons was named Jonathan. It's possible that's who John was. Some people say that the name Alexander is a form of Eleazer, which is the same name another of Annas's son had. But we are not sure if John and Alexander were two of Annas's sons. We do know that they were "of the kindred of the high priest."

Annas, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and other family members of the high priest gathered at Jerusalem as members of the Sanhedrin. Peter and John were placed before them. That made them uneasy, because they didn't want to hear about Jesus.

b. The Interaction with the Sanhedrin

Verse 7 begins, "And when they [the Sanhedrin] had set them in the midst" The Sanhedrin usually assembled in the precincts of the Temple, in a hall called "The Hall of Hewn Stone." They sat in a semicircle. The president of the Sanhedrin sat across from the semicircle, facing it. The prisoners were put in the middle. Verse 7 pictures for us Peter and John in between the semicircle of men and the president of the Sanhedrin.

That is exciting! Do you realize what God had just done? He gave Peter and John the wonderful opportunity to preach to the Sanhedrin. Satan overdid his persecution. Sometimes when Satan persecutes someone, that person will end up in a circumstance that opens up new avenues for the work of God. There is no other way that Peter and John would have been allowed to preach to the Sanhedrin. They submitted to persecution, and God was able to put them where He wanted them. That's why submission is so important--you want to stay within God's master plan. God allowed Peter and John to carry their testimony to the Sanhedrin itself.

If you are obedient to God and get persecuted for righteousness' sake, then accept the persecution,

because God has designed to accomplish something through it. If we resist persecution, we can thwart God's plan. God has a way of using Satan's opposition for His glory.

c. The Interrogation by the Sanhedrin

The Jewish religious leaders asked Peter and John, "... By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" (v. 7). God set the stage perfectly. Peter and John were asked an ideal question. When the Sanhedrin asked that question, there may have been contempt in their voices. In effect, they were saying, "What kind of magical power do you use? By whose authority do you heal people and teach the things you do?" That question set the stage for Peter to preach.

If we submit to persecution, we will be used by the Lord. Peter talked about that in 1 Peter 4: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to test you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified" (vv. 12-14). God desires to be glorified when you are persecuted. Peter adds in verse 19, "Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." When you are persecuted, let God control the situation. Submit to persecution so that God may be glorified. The second principle in reacting to persecution is ...

B. Be Filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 8a)

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them ..."

The key to everything in the Christian life is the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter yielded to the Holy Spirit of God. The phrase "filled with the Holy Spirit" is an aorist passive in the Greek text. It indicates that Peter was ready for what was happening because he was already filled with the Spirit.

1. The Concept

The filling of the Spirit is a frequently talked about subject. Some people think that the filling of the Spirit comes from agonizing over one's sins or going through an emotional experience. That's not true. The filling of the Spirit does not result from lengthy prayers, emotional experiences, or exciting spiritual activities. A believer becomes filled with the Spirit simply by walking in obedience to the Word and the Spirit (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:18-19). Peter was already Spirit filled because he was obedient. He had preached the gospel message and submitted to persecution. He was under the Spirit's control. The filling of the Spirit simply results from being submissive.

A Spirit-filled person says this: "Holy Spirit, I submit to you. I want to be useful in the opportunities I have." A Spirit-filled person yields his life to the power of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit within him (Jn. 14:17; cf. Rom. 8:9). The Holy Spirit empowers us. As we yield to the Holy Spirit, that power is released.

2. The Conquest

Peter knew that he would not experience victory in the situation he was in unless he yielded to the Spirit of God. You say, "If I had been in Peter's shoes, I would have fallen over in fear." Peter didn't do that; he leaned on the Holy Spirit. That's the only way he would experience victory in his circumstance. Once Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, he didn't need anything else. That assured

him victory. Any experience that forces us to yield to the Holy Spirit is good.

Peter also experienced victory because the persecution he received brought him closer to the Spirit of God. He was filled with the Spirit. When persecution forces us to come closer to the Lord and completely yield to His will, that is victory for us.

3. The Cowardice

Today, the church is not victorious over persecution because Christians are not leaning on the Spirit of God. Many people hide when they get persecuted. We don't yield to the Spirit and submit to God's plan. Some of us, when we talk about the gospel, are afraid to discuss anything that might displease people. We give innocuous religious platitudes so we don't offend anyone. Christians are afraid to stand boldly for what is right and yield to the Spirit to see what God does. We fail to experience victory because we don't speak the truth. If we try to make our message inoffensive, it will become worthless because then no one will know he has a problem with sin.

When the church is filled with the Spirit, it will be uncomfortable in the world. But it will also be victorious. Today, the church is comfortable. It is not Spirit filled; it is defeated. Peter and John found themselves disagreeing with the Jewish religious leaders. But they confronted them--they didn't run and hide. Peter and John submitted to what was happening, and they were Spirit filled. Consequently, they were victorious. You must disagree with the world. Confront the selfish, godless, immoral, materialistic society that you live in. If you don't, then you are not fulfilling one of your responsibilities as a Christian.

The third principle on how to react to persecution is to ...

C. Be Bold and Use Opportunities to Preach (vv. 8b-13)

"... [Peter] said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made well; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you well. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

1. The Confrontation with the Sanhedrin (vv. 8b-10)

Peter, filled with the Spirit, used his persecution as an opportunity to testify for Christ. Instead of being afraid, he said, "Let me tell you what I was preaching about so that you will understand it clearly. Jesus is the Messiah, and you crucified Him. God raised Him from the dead." Peter's message, composed of only ninety-two Greek words, embodied all the characteristics of apostolic preaching: He spoke about Christ's rejection and resurrection, and referred to an Old Testament text that presented Jesus as Messiah. Peter even gave a closing invitation in verse 12.

In verse 9, Peter said, "If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man" In

other words, he was telling the Sanhedrin, "Persecuting John and me is unjust. What we did for the lame man was good. It wouldn't be evil to heal a lame man, would it?" Peter continued in verse 10, "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you well." When the Jewish religious leaders heard Peter say that, they must have fomented with anger. Peter was bold. He put his life on the line. In the very citadel of the enemy, he proclaimed the living Christ to those who killed Him. The Jewish religious leaders thought they walked with God. But Peter boldly informed them otherwise. So, even in the presence of the Sanhedrin, Peter boldly indicted Israel for executing Christ. He persisted in preaching about Christ's resurrection. Here is an important principle we can learn from Peter: Never accommodate the gospel by deleting things that offend others. You need to speak boldly even about the things that offend unbelievers.

2. The Confirmation from the Scripture (v. 11)

The Jewish religious leaders knew that they were spiritual hypocrites. They may have feared within themselves that perhaps Christ really was the Messiah. Peter added to that fear when he quoted from Psalm 118:22 in Acts 4:11: "... the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." Peter told the Sanhedrin that their own Scriptures prophesied that Christ would be rejected, and would rise again.

In those days, buildings had cornerstones. A cornerstone found at one temple measured thirty-eight feet in length. If a cornerstone wasn't perfect, it would be thrown away, or else it would cause a building to be built imperfectly. Peter told the Sanhedrin, "Psalm 118:22 prophesied that you would reject the cornerstone, but God would bring it back." The Jewish leaders threw Jesus away and said, "He is not our cornerstone." But God raised Jesus from the dead, and made Him the cornerstone. The church is built upon Him (Eph. 2:20). In Matthew 21:42, Christ said that the builders would reject the cornerstone. In Romans 9:33 Paul referred to the cornerstone, which was Christ.

3. The Call to the Savior (v. 12)

Peter closed with a powerful invitation in verse 12: "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." People always say, "There are many ways for a person to become saved." Today, in the city of Haifa in Israel, there is a Baha'i temple that has nine doors to God. But there aren't nine doors to God. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (Jn. 14:6). Peter told the Sanhedrin very clearly, "... there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." In effect, Peter was saying, "If you don't turn to Jesus, you will be damned. There is no other way to become saved."

People frequently say that Christians are narrow and strict. However, Christians are no narrower than the Word of God. The Bible happens to be the strictest book ever written. It is never wrong. Anything that contradicts God's Word is wrong. A person can become saved only in Christ's name.

In verse 7, the Sanhedrin asked Peter, "How did you heal the lame man?" Peter said, "Jesus did it." The Greek word for the word "well" at the end of verse 9 means "healing"--it is used to refer to salvation in the New Testament. Peter was doing a play on words. He said, in effect, "This man was physically healed by Jesus, and you will never be spiritually healed except through Him. Christ is the only way to salvation." The word salvation means "deliverance from sin." Christ is the only way to

salvation.

Altars of Compromise

In February, 1959, seventeen men on an expedition called "Deep Freeze VI" went to the South Pole. During their spare time, they built a sixteen-square-foot chapel. They called it "The Chapel of All Faiths." On the inside, they put up an altar over which they put a picture of Jesus, a crucifix, a Star of David, and a lotus leaf (representing Buddha). An inscription was put on the wall that said, "Now it can be said that the earth turns on a point of faith." Recently, at a midwestern university, an all-faiths altar was built. The altar revolves. It has four sides: one for Protestants, one for Catholics, one for Jews, and one for people of other faiths. However, the Bible does not teach that there is more than one right religion. It would have been easy for Peter and John to say things that pleased everyone. The early church would not have been persecuted if it had downgraded Jesus Christ. But the early church stood up for the truth.

When you are persecuted, be submissive. Yield yourself to the control of the Holy Spirit, and boldly use the opportunities that you have to preach the gospel.

Focusing on the Facts

1. How have Satan's techniques for persecuting the church changed over time?
2. What warning did Jesus give for the church in John 15:18-20?
3. How does Satan benefit from a Christian who has fallen in love with the world?
4. Why do some Christians succumb to Satan's persecution and never confront the world?
5. If you are a Christian and you aren't facing persecution in some form, what are the probable reasons for that?
6. What was the initial response of unbelievers toward the early church (Ac. 2:47)? When did they begin reacting negatively to the early church? Why?
7. How many people came to Christ as a result of Peter's sermon? (Ac. 4:4)
8. What do the words "came upon them" in Acts 4:1 imply?
9. Identify the people involved in the arrest of Peter and John, and explain a little about them. What kind of persecution did each person or group represent to Christianity?
10. What is the meaning of the word "grieved" in Acts 4:2?
11. What is the result of persecution?

12. What should be our attitude toward suffering persecution? Why?
13. How did Peter and John respond to their arrest? Why?
14. Describe the makeup of the Sanhedrin. What was the Sanhedrin's function?
15. Why was it exciting when Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin?
16. What happens when Satan overdoes his persecution? What can happen if we resist persecution?
17. What did Peter say will happen if we submit to persecution (1 Pet. 4:12-14)? What did Peter say we are to do when we are persecuted (1 Pet. 4:19)?
18. How does a believer become filled with the Holy Spirit?
19. When _____ forces us to come closer to the Lord and completely _____ to His will, that is _____ for us.
20. Why is the church not victorious over persecution today?
21. What did Peter use his persecution as an opportunity for? What did Peter include in his brief message in Acts 4:8-12?
22. How did Peter confront the Sanhedrin in his message (Ac. 4:10)? What important principle can we learn from Peter?
23. How did Peter prove to the Sanhedrin that the Messiah would be rejected and would rise again?
24. What did Peter say at the end of his message to the Sanhedrin (Ac. 4:12)? What other Scripture supports what Peter said?

Pondering the Principles

1. If you fear being ridiculed when you talk about Christ, examine yourself and find out why. Who benefits from your fear? What would be the results in your life and the lives of others if you did not talk about Christ? What would be the results if you did share about Christ? Which results are more important to you? Which results are more important to God? Ultimately, whether or not you are willing to confront people about their need for Christ will be related to how willing you are to put aside self and serve God.
2. When Peter and John preached about Christ in the Temple, the Jewish religious leaders and Temple officials became angry. Do you avoid talking about certain biblical truths to unbelievers so that you won't offend them? What are you doing to the gospel message when you do that? What

effect will the gospel message have on others if you compromise? When you share what the Bible teaches with an unbeliever, make sure that you are honest in everything you say. Don't modify the truth to please other people!

3. Have you ever lost opportunities to be useful to God because you did not submit to persecution? Do you trust that God is in control of your circumstances when you are persecuted? Why? Pick one example of how you have been persecuted for Christ in the past. How did you respond to that persecution? How could you have responded? How do you think God wanted to use you in that circumstance? When you find yourself persecuted for Christ, trust God and be sensitive to His guidance in the situation. If you do that, God will be glorified (1 Pet. 4:14)!

4. Today, many people criticize Christians and say that there is more than one way to heaven. However, don't be afraid to tell an unbeliever that the only way he can become saved is through Christ. Memorize Acts 4:12, which is a good verse to quote when sharing that truth with others: "Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (NIV).

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