

(Acts) Obeying God Rather Than Man

by Brian Brodersen

Brian Brodersen emphasizes the necessity of obeying God over human authority, especially in times of persecution, and the vital role of the Holy Spirit in empowering that obedience.

Duration: 54:59

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Luke 24:53, Acts 5:20-21, Acts 5:23, Acts 5:29, Acts 5:32

Topics: "Time Management", "Balanced Living"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the issue of how certain activities and habits can dominate and waste our precious time. He gives examples such as excessive television watching and indulging in alcoholic beverages. The speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing when these activities have become a problem and need to be brought back into balance. He also highlights the need for a blend of teaching and preaching in the church, where people are not only given the understanding of God's truth but also motivated to live it out.

Transcript

Let's turn tonight to the fifth chapter of Acts. So we pick up this evening in chapter 5, verse 17, and as we do, we come to the second wave of persecution that struck the early church. In our last study, we saw how Satan, having attacked the church through persecution, also then tried a different tactic, that of infiltration into the church.

And he sought to make inroads into the church through the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira. But as we learned, God set a precedent and God himself rose up and judged Ananias and Sapphira and kept that corruption from entering into the church at this stage. So once again, the enemy is on the attack and once again, he is attacking through persecution.

And so we pick up in verse 17, then the high priest rose up and all that were with him, which is the sect of the Sadducees, and they were filled with indignation. Now, you remember the context. God once again poured out his spirit.

The church was cleansed of that attempt to bring that impurity into it. And that brought a fresh outpouring of the spirit of God upon his people. And the Lord was working powerfully.

And Peter, you remember, as we read there, people were bringing their friends and their relatives and lying them in the streets and hoping that perhaps even the shadow of Peter could be cast upon them and believing that they would be healed if that were the case. So it's in response to this outpouring of the spirit of God that the high priest and the sect of the Sadducees rise up again and lead a new persecution against the believers. You know, we talk about revival and we anticipate it.

We pray for it. We think how exciting it would be to have it. And that's a good thing.

And that's right. And we need to continue to hope and to think and to pray in that direction. But, you know, when the Lord works, when he pours out his spirit and revival does take place, it does lead to other things.

It leads to a counterattack by the devil. You see, the devil is never going to just sit back and let the work of God happen. It's just not part of his program.

He doesn't sit back and let the kingdom of God advance. He fights it every inch of the way. He fights it on the larger scale against the church in general.

He fights it on a local scale, fighting against the local manifestations of the body of Christ in various communities. He fights it right within the church because long ago he did succeed in infiltrating and he's been working inside the church ever since then. And then he fights it also on that real personal level.

He fights against us. Satan is not going to sit by and let the work of God go unchallenged in your life. That is a simple reality.

Now, you might say, well, why would he bother me? I'm nobody. I'm nothing. I don't pose a threat.

It's just little me. Why would Satan be interested in me? You see, he is against the work of God in its entirety. And you might think I'm nobody.

You might think I'm insignificant. You might think, you know, I'm not really a player in this whole thing. But you are.

You see, God is working in your life. God is working through your life. And God wants to use you to touch people.

And Satan wants to prevent that from happening. So he's going to attack even little old you as insignificant as you might think you are, because that's just the way the devil is. So the high priest rose up and within the sect of the Sadducees.

Now, the Sadducees were the priestly family belong to the sect of the Sadducees. And of course, the two main sects that we know about of the day were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And they were different from one another.

Theologically, they were considerably different. The Pharisees would have been very conservative from the biblical standpoint. The Sadducees were, on the other hand, the liberals of the day.

They were the ones who denied the supernatural aspect of the faith. They denied the miracles. They denied that most of the Bible was even written by inspiration of God.

And so they were really the rationalist of the day. And being the rationalist that they were, they were the ones who were quickly. To oppose the supernatural, they were the ones who would not tolerate any of that supernatural kind of thing going on, they were the scientific.

Minded, they were the real practically minded, they were the ones who had no use for the supernatural or the miracles, and so they are the ones, as we notice here in Acts, they are the ones that are really spearheading the attack against the early church. The Pharisees more or less led the attack against Jesus. And of course, it ended up that they all combined their forces together.

But as the church began to progress, it was usually the the Sadducees that were leading the charge. And this is the case right here. And so they were filled with indignation and they laid their hands on the apostles and they put them in the common prison.

But an angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors and brought them forth and said, go stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. It's interesting to me that the angel liberating them calls them to go right back to what they were doing when they were arrested. It wasn't OK, you're free now, escape, get out of town, go hide.

It was go right back and continue to do just what you were doing when they arrested you. And specifically, he said, go speak to the people all the words of this life. You know, Christianity is a life, the Christian faith is not merely a creed to be held to.

It is that because it's vitally important what we believe. But it is along with that it is a life to be lived. It is a life that is an all encompassing life.

The Christian faith was not meant by God to be just an addition to life. It was meant to become life itself. It was meant to engulf every other aspect of life.

And it was a sad day in the history of the church when the Christian faith was reduced to something you just simply added to your life, something that you brought in alongside of other things just to make life a little more complete or a little more satisfying. It's to be our entire life, it's to be our primary occupation, it's to be the focal point of our energies, it's to be where we put our greatest efforts of concentration on the Christian life. Go preach to them all the words of this life, the angel said, and they when they heard that they entered into the temple early in the morning and they taught.

But the high priest came and they that were with him and they called the council together and all the Senate of the Children of Israel and they sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came and found them not in the prison, they returned and told them, saying the prison truly found we shut with all safety and the keepers standing without before the doors. But when we had opened, we found no man within.

So there was a miracle that occurred right here, the angel. Release them from the prison miraculously and evidently had put some sort of a blindness on the soldiers that were guarding because no one even realized that they were gone until they went to call for them out of the prison. Now, when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priest heard these things.

They wondered to themselves. Where into this thing would grow, then came one and told them, saying, behold, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and they're teaching the people. Then went the captain with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people less they

should have been stoned.

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council and the high priest asked them, saying, did not we straightly command you that you should not teach in this name and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Now, that is indeed what they had commanded them. But you remember, they must not have heard the response of the apostles, because even when they commanded, the apostle said, well, you know, you probably have to think this through yourself, but we're going to obey God rather than you.

They never intended to obey them. And here we see once again that the apostles were involved in what you would call civil disobedience, or in this case, maybe ecclesiastical disobedience that in the particular case here, it was sort of both because the people they were standing before were both the head of the religious organization of the day, as well as the head of the Jewish state. And so they were in violation of the civic and the ecclesiastical ordinance ordinance.

They were breaking the law of the government and they were breaking the law of the church, not the church, but the religious body at the time that was seeking to prohibit them from obeying God. And that is where we draw the line as well. We are called, for the most part, to be upright and law abiding citizens and really as Christians, we ought to be model citizens.

But yet, when it comes to the government seeking to prohibit us from carrying out the call of God upon our lives or prohibiting us from worshiping God, that's where we like they we must follow their example. And the example that they set has been the example that many, many, many have followed throughout the long history of the church when times of persecution have come. I was just reading today an excellent book called Acquainted with Grief, and it's a story of of of a man who is a key individual in the persecuted church in China.

His name is Wang Ding now, I believe, and it's interesting as he had to stand against the communist government, he would draw his strength from the example of the apostles. And it was here in the book of Acts that he would find a model to emulate and a biblical basis upon which to stand against the communist forces that were seeking to just, you know, completely obliterate the existence of the church in China. He suffered immensely for it, but it was interesting as I was reading through that he would constantly in his writings make reference back to the apostles and back to Peter particularly and back to even the case that we're reading about here tonight.

And so did we not strictly command you and then Peter and the other apostles answered and said we ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew and hanged on a tree. Him had God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a savior for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

So not only did Peter simply say, we've got to obey God rather than men. Peter boldly lays the blame right where it ought to be laid. Peter boldly rebukes them and accuses them of slaying Jesus and hanging them up on a tree, which, of course, they did.

He said the God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew and hanged on a tree. Him God exalted with his right hand. And then he says, and we are his witnesses of these things.

And so is also the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to them that obey him. So the Holy Spirit was bearing witness as well, and that's the explanation for the miraculous things that incited the Sadducees against them. It wasn't just that they were giving witness, but it was the Holy Spirit who was bearing witness along with them.

The Holy Spirit was confirming their message by demonstrating the power of God. Jesus, when he sent the disciples out to take the gospel into all the world, you remember he told them to wait to be empowered by the spirit. And then as they went out proclaiming the word, the spirit of God was working alongside of them.

And the the word of God was being confirmed through the signs and the wonders that were being performed. And that what was that is what was happening as they went out in the early stages of the church. And that's what Peter is describing here.

We are his witnesses. And so also is the Holy Spirit. Now, listen to what he says, whom God has given to them that obey him.

Now, in saying that, he's basically saying we're of God and you guys are not. Now, remember, he's talking to the high priest of Israel. He's talking to the religious hierarchy of the day.

And he's basically telling them flat out, you guys are not of God and God has demonstrated that we are his witnesses because he's given us the Holy Spirit. Now, I think there's a message here for us in verse 32. And that is that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey him.

Now, I think all of us want to be filled with the Holy Spirit. All of us want the power of the spirit in our lives, I think, at least theoretically, we do. But the question is, well, why is it that we don't so often sense that power? How is it that we feel weak and powerless so often? And I think we must really get back to this whole question of obedience.

Are we obeying the Lord? And I think as you look at a church, a body of people collectively, and as you would look at a church and perhaps you sense that there's not a real powerful moving of the spirit, you would have to ask the question. Is it because perhaps we've allowed disobedience in our midst? You see, disobedience will squelch the work of the Holy Spirit. Disobedience will quench the spirit.

And we won't be able to experience that power of God if we're walking in disobedience. Now, Jesus said, as he was speaking in the context of giving the spirit, he said, if you love me, keep my commandments. And I and my father, we will come to you and we will make our home with you.

And there in the context, he was talking about the spirit coming as well. He said, he that loves me keeps my commandments, he that does not love me does not keep my commandments. And his commandments are basically those things not only that are written in the word that he's given to us, but those things that he speaks to our hearts as well.

Those things that he puts before us as things that we are to respond to in obedience to him. You see, as Christians, we all each of us have a personal relationship with the Lord. And the vast majority of God's instruction to us comes to us through the Bible, through his written word.

But yet there are areas that the Bible doesn't specifically address. And it's in those areas that the Holy Spirit ministers to us now, many times the Holy Spirit will take the principles in the word and speak those

to our hearts and give a fresh application. But we need to be sensitive to that.

You see, there are a lot of things that I think we allow into our lives that you can't necessarily find a chapter and verse that says don't do this or don't do that. But yet the Lord might say, you know, you don't need to do that. Don't be involved in that.

That's a waste of time. That's going to hinder my work in your life. And, you know, these are the things that just sort of come upon us as that conviction of the spirit.

And in those areas, I believe it's really important that we be obedient. And I think a lack of obedience in those areas can diminish the presence and the power of the spirit working in our lives. That's why it's so important to be sensitive.

Now, we also have to be on our guard because Satan, the deceiver, he would seek to come in and get us caught up in all kinds of legalistic things. And whenever that happens, that's not the Lord, because where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. So we have to be cautious.

We have to be careful. But yet in being wise. We need to seek to be sensitive to.

Things beyond the clear statements of scripture that the Lord might want to address in our lives, for example, maybe there's some thing that you do that you just absolutely love. And it's it's an extracurricular thing, it's a thing you do in your free time, your spare time or whatever. But yet you find that your free time, your spare time keeps.

Extending and growing because of your desire to do this thing, you like doing it so much, maybe it's a hobby, maybe it's a sport, maybe it's, you know, just some sort of a pursuit. And it's something that. Although it might have started out as just something you enjoyed doing as time goes on, it's just taking up more and more and more of your life.

And what's beginning to happen is it's beginning to. Become an idolatrous thing for you, you might not realize it, because after all, what do you mean, idolatry there? I don't have an image or, you know, I'm not bowing down, I'm not burning incense or anything like that. But yet, you see, it's stealing your affection, it's taking your attention, your energy is being exerted toward that thing.

See, that's one of the kinds of things that can happen. And what will happen is the Holy Spirit will come along and begin to put his finger upon that and say, you know, you need to back off on that a little bit. You need to slow down with that.

You're too involved in that. And. That's the kind of conviction that we need to respond to.

That's the kind of conviction that we need to say, Lord, I hear you, you're talking to me and Lord, I want to respond to you. And so, Lord, I'm going to do that. I'm going to get this back into moderation or I'm going to let you show me what places ought to have in my life.

Maybe you enjoy. Being entertained. And that's OK to a certain limit, I think.

But maybe you've gone overboard. Maybe you've. Just been wasting precious time in front of the television.

You find that you can't turn the thing off, you can't get out from in front of it. You find that, you know, if nothing's on TV or over at Blockbuster. Combing the aisles, looking for that one movie that maybe has escaped you, you haven't yet seen that one.

And, you know, so these kinds of things are coming in and creeping in and starting to dominate. And then the Lord suddenly is saying, this is a problem. You need to get this back in balance, you need to turn off the TV to get out from in front of it, you need to stay away from Blockbuster, you need to use your time more wisely.

You see, those are the kinds of things the spirit of God will speak to us about. Or maybe you've had a liberty with, let's say, alcoholic beverages and your habit is to come home after a long, hard day in the job. And reach in the refrigerator, pull out a beer, crack it open, sit down and take off your shoes and just relax.

But as you're reaching into the refrigerator, there's something kind of pricking you in your heart. You're feeling like, wait, you know, you're not feeling that comfortable with this, but yet at the same time, you're sort of just, you know, trying to push it away. Oh, well, you know what that the Lord wouldn't speak to me about this.

Yes, he would. You see, and those are the little kinds of things that the Holy Spirit will challenge us with on a very personal level. And in those areas, I think it's really important that we respond, because as we respond, as we maintain that sensitivity, as we obey the Lord, even in those areas, I think what we do is we open up ourselves for a greater experience of the spirit in our life.

But as we resist that, as we oppose that, as we say, oh, no, you know that that's not the Lord. I'm not going to you know, God's not concerned about this part of my life. I can just, you know, determine myself what I'm going to do in regard to these things, and I'm not going to think superstitiously that God might want to be, you know, getting involved in this part of my life.

Oh, yes, he will. He does. He wants to be involved in the smallest details of our life.

And I believe that if we want to have the assurance that we're going to have the fullness of the ministry of the spirit available to us, that it's important that we obey even in those areas, those seemingly small areas. That we obey the Lord. And that we not grieve the spirit or quench the spirit, because, as Peter said here, God has given the Holy Spirit to those who obey him.

And I think our goal ought to be total obedience. Lord, I just want to obey you all the way in every area, not just in the big things, the obvious things. But Lord, I want you to be Lord of my whole life.

Even the small details of my life, that's the place to be. Where God can pour out his spirit and do. The good things that he wants to do, and so if perhaps you even tonight as you're sitting here listening, if perhaps you're thinking, you know, I have been sensing a lack of power in my life.

I haven't had the sensitivity to the spirit that I once had. I don't see the Lord working like I was seeing him working at a certain point. And then as you're thinking it through, there's things coming to your mind.

You've allowed this to come back in and you've been dabbling with that and you've been careless in this area and you've been preoccupied with these. Unimportant things over here. That's the Lord saying, I want to get those things sorted out in your life so I can pour out the blessing that I want to pour out.

And so that was Peter's word to them. And when they heard that, it says they were cut to the heart. And what it literally implies is that Peter hit a nerve.

You know what it's like in the dentist when the dentist hits a nerve and you want to go through the ceiling? Well, Peter hit a nerve with these guys. As he stood there boldly, this this fisherman, the audacity of this uneducated. Common fisherman, this Galilean of all people to tell us that the Holy Spirit.

Is the one who's to blame for this activity that's going on, they were. Cut to the heart, they were stabbed in the heart and they took counsel to slay them. They wanted to kill him right on the spot, then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee named Gamaliel.

Now, in this council, this would have been the Sanhedrin, the 70 member Senate of Israel, which would have been a mixture of Sadducees and Pharisees. Nicodemus was one of the Sanhedrin. Joseph of Arimathea was one of the Sanhedrin as a Pharisee.

It seems that Saul of Tarsus was perhaps part of the Sanhedrin as well. And so it was it was a mixture of Sadducees and Pharisees. It was much like many of the denominational churches today where you have a mixture of liberal and semi conservative people serving in the same denomination.

And that was the mix that you had here. So Gamaliel, he's a doctor of the law, had a reputation among all the people, and he commanded to put the apostles forth a little space. Now, Gamaliel, as we'll find out later, he was Paul's teacher or Saul of Tarsus at the time.

It could be that Saul was even here among this group at this time. We don't know. But here's his teacher, Gamaliel.

Now, Gamaliel was the grandson of the great rabbi Hallel just before the time of Jesus. There were two dominant rabbis among the people of Israel from the Pharisaic party, and the people were basically divided into two different theological camps, loyalty to either Hallel or loyalty to Shammai. Hallel was the more popular one because he was he was the more lenient one.

Shammai was the strict one. And so the population would gravitate more toward Hallel than Shammai. Now, Gamaliel is the grandson of Hallel, so he's a very prominent, prominent man in Jewish culture at the time.

And in and among the religious community there in Jerusalem. And so, as it says, he's he's a doctor and he's had a reputation among all the people. And so he commanded the apostles to be put forth for some time.

And he said unto them, speaking now to the Senate that's gathered, you men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Thutis, boasting himself to be somebody to whom a number of men, about 400, joined themselves, who was slain and all as many as obeyed him were scattered. And the whole thing came to nothing after this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing and drew away much people after him.

He also. Died, perished, was executed and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, refrain from these men and let them alone.

So you see, he's saying, look, you guys don't need to take this severe approach because we've seen this before. Somebody comes along, gathers a group of followers, they're killed, and it's not long before the whole thing just loses momentum and dies out. And so Gamaliel is basically saying, you know, if you just leave it alone, it'll probably die on its own.

You don't need to put forth this energy that you're putting forth. He says, for if this council or work be of men, it will come to nothing. But if it be of God, you cannot overthrow it, lest happily you be found even to fight against God.

Now, Gamaliel was a wise man and he gave some good counsel at this point and counsel that certainly was beneficial for the apostles. But we have to remember that what Gamaliel said was not necessarily a divine truth. What Gamaliel said regarding.

If this council or work be of men, it will come to not that is not divine truth, some people have taken it to be that. But it's not divine truth, it's just the perspective of Gamaliel based upon what he had seen. But there are many things that are not of God are of man and also a combination of Satan's activity and man that.

Have. Flourished and prospered and spread. And so we just need to keep that in mind, we need to understand that that is not.

A divine truth, sometimes things that aren't of God at all will spread amazingly and rapidly. Islam is a good example of that. How rapidly it spread and dominated the landscape in the early stages of its development.

Marxism certainly is not of God and that has spread and dominated much of the world at times. So my point is this, we have to understand, you know, as we're going through the scriptures, that there are certain things that are stated. The scripture is accurately recording what Gamaliel said, but it's not necessarily the case that what Gamaliel said is a divine truth.

And that's the case here. Now, ultimately, if you want to run it all the way out to the end of time, of course, everything that's not of God will come to nothing. But I don't think he was thinking that far down the road, I think he was thinking more immediately.

And so we need to do that as well. But notice, he says, but if this be of God, you cannot overthrow it. And that certainly is true.

You can't overthrow what God's going to do. But it's interesting to me that Gamaliel, as brilliant of a man as he was, as great of a man as he was, he himself doesn't seem to know what to make of the apostles. He himself is wondering, well, could this be of God? Maybe it is of God, but we don't really know.

I guess we'll just have to wait it out and see. How could it be that such a wise man in so many other ways could be so blind to what is just so obvious right there in his presence that God is working through the lives of these men? You know, it's amazing what a presupposition will do to you. It really is.

And Gamaliel had a presupposition and his presupposition was that the Messiah. Will be a ruling king that will conquer the Romans and establish the Jews as the people to rule the rest of mankind. And because of that presupposition, he missed the other message of his own scriptures.

And he not only missed the message of his own scriptures, of which he was very familiar, but he missed the manifestation of it when it came right under his very nose, because he certainly was aware of Jesus of Nazareth because not that much time has passed. But he missed it completely. And he obviously stood firm in those presuppositions and in his pride, and I think of Gamaliel as a person who came close, but yet he never went far enough.

He even thought, well, maybe this is of God. If it is of God, we can overthrow it. If so, we'd be fighting against God.

But sadly, he didn't take that further step to really inquire himself as to whether it could have been. Or if he did inquire further, he must have drawn the conclusion that the cost was too high. The price was beyond what he was willing to pay, because if he were to embrace it, then he would lose, of course, his position.

You know, so often we think, oh, if, you know, this celebrity could just hear the gospel and get saved, or if this intellectual in our community or, you know, if this, you know, person of significance, oh, we need more people like that in the church. But, you know. As Paul said, not many wise are called, not many mighty, not many noble, and that has really been the case throughout the history of the church, and it's a big mistake when the church starts to try to draw in the intellectuals, starts to try to appeal to the celebrities in the society and all that.

What ends up happening always and ultimately is the church gets corrupted when it takes that approach. The church is to preach the simple gospel. And some wise, some mighty.

Some noble will come, but not many. Because God has chosen the fullest things of the world to confound the wise. And I think when you look at Gamaliel, that he just becomes a picture of so many, the price was too high, the cost was more than he was willing to pay.

It was of God, but it would have cost him his position. It would have cost him the the the praise and adoration of men. And he wasn't willing to pay that price.

And that's the truth with so many today. They won't come because of what it'll cost them. Because when you come to Christ, none of that stuff really matters anymore.

You might have been that impressive person in the world, you might have been that person that everybody else sort of bowed to, because after all, you were the doctor or you were the whatever. You were the celebrity. You were the famous person.

But in the church, we're all equal. And so human pride keeps people out so often, and I think that was the case with poor Gamaliel, maintained his position, but lost his life, ultimately his soul and to him, they agreed. So they took his advice and when they had called the apostles and beaten them, they commanded them that they should not speak in the name of Jesus and they let them go.

Now, just who this was, we know it was Peter and John for sure, but apostles, plural is used. Some think it was all of them, that they rounded up all the apostles, maybe so it might have just been the two of them, but it might have been four or five. We don't really know how many were involved in this beating, but they beat them.

And more than likely, they gave them the thirty nine stripes. Thirty nine was the number of mercy. Forty stripes was required, but they showed mercy and it was forty minus one, as Paul would say, concerning

his own flogging.

And so here they are, they've been flogged with thirty nine stripes, which was a painful, painful, painful experience, to say the least. And they departed from the presence of the council. Now, listen to this rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

Boy, that is impressive. If. They walked away from that situation, definitely in pain, no question about it.

But yet rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name, they knew the Lord. That's the only way you could do that. They knew the Lord, they knew Jesus, they knew exactly who he was, they knew exactly what he'd done for them, and they knew all of the reality of his resurrection and all the reality of his coming again.

And to them, it was like a privilege. Lord, thank you that we have been allowed to be humiliated, that we've been allowed to be disgraced for your namesake. Boy, that's an attitude to emulate right there.

But, you know, you can't really emulate it. You have to have the same confidence that they had. This isn't something that you can just put on.

This isn't something that you can embrace because of somebody else's faith, you've got to have your own. That's the only thing that's going to give the ability to rejoice in times of suffering, in times of affliction. You know, as we pointed out earlier, Satan is on the attack.

Let me read to you a section from John Stott commenting on. The whole persecution thing that we're reading about here, he said, the devil has never given up the attempt to destroy the church by force. Under Nero, Christians were imprisoned and executed, including probably Paul and Peter Domitian.

Who was the emperor from 80, 81 to 96, oppressed Christians who refused to pay him the divine honors he demanded. Under him, John was exiled to Patmos, Marcus Aurelius, who was the emperor from 160 to 180 A.D. Believing that Christianity was a dangerous and immoral. Religion turned a blind eye to.

Severe local outbreaks of mob violence, then the third century. Then in the third century, what had been so far sporadic became systematic under Decius, 249 through 251, thousands died, including Fabian, the bishop of Rome, for refusing to sacrifice to the imperial name. The last persecuting emperor before the conversion of Constantine was Diocletian, who reigned from 284 to 305 A.D. He issued four edicts which were intended to stamp out Christianity altogether.

He ordered churches to be burned, scriptures to be confiscated, clergy to be tortured and Christian civil servants to be deprived of their citizenship. And if stubbornly unrepentant to be executed still today, Stott says. Still today, especially in some Marxist, Hindu and Muslim countries, the church is often harassed, but we need not fear for its survival.

Tertullian, one of the early church fathers addressing the rulers of the Roman Empire, cried out, kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust. The more you mow us down, the more we grow. The seed is the blood of the Christians.

And that's true. And it's been true all the way through the history of the church. But the reason these guys could leave this scene rejoicing was because they knew the Lord.

It wasn't a religion that they had embraced. It wasn't merely a creed that they were committed to. It was a person.

It was Jesus Christ. And he was their Lord. He was their savior.

He was their friend that was closer than a brother. He was their God. And they knew that he alone had the keys of hell and death.

He was the one who had victory over the grave. He was the one who was dead. But behold, he was alive forevermore.

And based on that. Nothing could stop these guys. You know, the devil tries to stop us from loving God, from serving God.

And his tactics are pretty much the same as they've always been. First of all, it's temptation. He comes and he tries to get us to succumb to various forms of temptation, and if he can tempt us and get us into compromise, get us into sin, then he's accomplished his task.

But if he can't get us through temptation, then he threatens us. And he seeks to make us afraid. And he tells us that there are going to be dire consequences to our following the Lord and he tries to keep us back from following Jesus and serving him through these threats.

And if the threats don't work, then he makes good his threats and he stirs up persecution and the attack comes and then Christians suffer in a literal, physical sense. Now, we in this country, we haven't really had that experience. At least in our generation.

There have been times in our history early on in the history of colonial America, there have been times of persecution even here, but for a long time, we have been very free for the most part from that sort of thing. There's a lot of threatening. And there's a lot of voices breathing out threats and accusations and all the problems are the Christians and, you know, it could be that the storm clouds are gathering and it could be one day that the threats will be made good and that the persecution would even come here in the land of the free as it has been called.

But the thing is, even if it does. We've got to follow the example of the apostles, but as I said earlier, it's not just following their example isn't going to make it. I've got to know their Lord.

He's got to be my Lord, too. I've got to have that relationship with him myself so that when the threats come or when the persecution comes, I can look at it and say, for Jesus' sake, I can. Go into this because he said, blessed are those who are persecuted for my name's sake.

You see, it's so important that we cultivate our relationship with the Lord. And God has given us still an incredible amount of freedom to do that and how wise we would be in these days of freedom to take full advantage of every opportunity we have to grow in the Lord, to get as close to him as we possibly can, because, you know, we don't know what the future holds. And I'm not forecasting doom and gloom because I don't know.

But yet we cannot be. Foolish and say, oh, that could never happen here. Because it could happen here.

It's happening all over the world. And it will happen here eventually, no doubt about it, it's going to happen all over the world during the tribulation period. You know that from what we read in the book of Revelation,

all the world is going to be forced into receiving a mark.

But thank God the church will be taken out before that comes. But we don't know just exactly what's going to proceed that. So the point is this.

We just need to be concentrating on the things of the spirit in these days when we have the wonderful liberty that we have and not off preoccupied and distracted and carried away with those other things that are not really important things. We need to have a good balance in our lives and have that eternal perspective. And make sure that we're focusing on the right things.

The eternal things, not on the temporal things, the material things, and so they left rejoicing and daily in the temple and in every house, they cease not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. So they continue to obey God. And God continued to bless and notice they cease not to teach and to preach, just a final note, teaching and preaching, there are two different things, there are similarities.

Teaching is giving instruction. Giving the biblical instruction, preaching is really motivating. Preaching, of course, is something you that occurs from the believer to the nonbeliever, from the church to the world, we preach the gospel, we proclaim it, but preaching is something that happens among believers as well.

Paul, in writing to the Romans, he said, I can't I'm longing to come to Rome to preach the gospel to you. They were already Christians, but Paul wanted to preach the gospel to them, not because they weren't saved, but because they were saved. Paul wanted to exhort them.

He wanted to encourage them. He wanted to apply. That's the the idea behind preaching is that there's application of what's been taught.

And so in the church, those two things really go hand in hand. If a church only preaches. You get everybody excited and stirred up and motivated, but they don't know what in the world to do.

So you got a bunch of people running around, you know, full of energy. But kind of bumping into each other because nobody has any basic instruction. A church where you just have teaching.

You have everybody sitting around with all the right information, but they don't really have the energy to get up and do anything with it. And that's why. A ministry needs to be a blend between the two things, and that's what they were doing in the early church, they cease not to teach and to preach.

They gave the people the understanding of the truth of God, and then they motivated them, they exhorted them, they encouraged them through that preaching of the word that would ignite the fire and move them to action. May God teach us and motivate us to serve him. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you, Lord, for your word and for the instruction that you have given to us. And Lord, we do thank you for the freedoms that we have. And Lord.

Help us to be wise. And Lord, we also want. The fullness of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives, Lord, we don't want to be quenching or grieving the spirit at all.

And so, Lord, as we read there in verse 32, you give the Holy Spirit to those who obey you, Lord, if there's areas of disobedience in our hearts tonight, we pray now. That you would check our hearts, we pray, Lord, that you'd speak to us about those things that are off kilter, out of balance in some way. And Lord, in Jesus name, we pray that you would help us to obey you, that you might give your spirit.

In all the fullness that you desire to us, your people in these days, this we pray in Jesus name, Amen.

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