

Take A Stand

Acts 4:18-22 NIV

The 4th chapter of Acts begins with Peter and John being arrested and spending the night in jail for preaching and teaching about Jesus. The news that Messiah had come supported by an undeniable miracle caused many who heard the message to believe.

At this point in time, about five thousand believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the one Moses spoke about when he said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.” (Deut 18; Acts 3:22,23)

So, the offspring of Israel who chose to believe that Jesus is the one who fulfilled Moses’ words are now required to follow the teaching of Jesus and his Apostles. This did not set well with Sanhedrin. They were the ones who governed the people religiously and politically; they were the rule makers-not this carpenter and his unschooled followers.

But, what are the religious leaders going to do? The miracle is undeniable. Peter and John gave credit to Jesus. The people are praising God. How do they stop this from spreading?

After the council had sent Peter and John out and talked among themselves, they decided on a course of action. **Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.** ¹⁹ **But Peter and John replied, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God.** ²⁰ **For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”**

²¹ **After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened.** ²² **For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old. (Acts 4:18-22)**

The course of action chosen was strong threats; no teaching public or private about Jesus. There was no ‘please,’ or ‘it would be good if you didn’t speak of this anymore;’ this was ‘absolutely, positively zip it!’

Now the response to the threat: it was time to take a stand-who to obey? God or the Sanhedrin; church or state?

It was obvious that God did the miracle-no question. Peter and John took a clear stand; no compromise. They made it clear by their response that the Sanhedrin, the authorized political and religious voice of the Jewish people, however powerful, had no right to

contradict God. The implication of Peter and John’s stand is that the ruling council was in defiance of the authority of God.

There is a song by country artist Aaron Tippin, ‘You’ve Got To Stand For Something.’ The chorus is:

He'd say you've got to stand for something or you'll fall for anything
You've got to be your own man not a puppet on a string
Never compromise what's right and uphold your family name
You've got to stand for something or you'll fall for anything...

One blog writer said the following about standing for something or falling for anything: see if you can identify-

“I find this so true in my own daily walk with the Lord. Each day I am challenged to stand tall in my faith and mission. However, amidst this challenge I am faced with lots of “noise” and distractions – caused by busyness, tight schedules, and workloads. Some of these things tend to direct my attention away from things that most matter in my life – relationships with family, friends, and the Lord.

Even while serving in church leadership positions, I was subject to lots of noise and distractions. Even though I

was very busy doing “good things”, I believe some of these things kept me from focusing on the Lord and His divine purposes for my life.”

Can you identify with this? There are plenty of noise and distractions and good things to grab our attention. Jesus came to set the record straight as to what is real so we can take our stand.

After Jesus’ arrest, Pilate questioned: “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, ‘**You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.**’” (John 18:37)

I found this illustration about listening to truth:

One young man asked, “I am in earnest about forsaking ‘the world’ and following Christ. But I am puzzled about worldly things. What is it I must forsake?”

You won’t believe what he was told. Listen to this list:

“Colored clothes, for one thing. Get rid of everything in your wardrobe that is not white. Stop sleeping on a soft pillow. Sell your musical instruments and don’t eat any more white bread. You cannot, if you are sincere about obeying Christ, take warm baths or shave your beard. To shave is to lie against Him who created us, to attempt to improve on His Work.”

Does this answer sound absurd? This may sound humorous to some, but would it still be funny if I told you that this list came from a second century Christian institution? According to Elisabeth Elliot, in her book *The Liberty of Obedience*, pp 32-33, this was taught in a Christian school just a few generations following the Sanhedrin’s attempt to silence the Apostles. It sounds like the Sanhedrin was successful, doesn’t it?

How do we get from Jesus teaching that to **Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind**^[e]; and, ‘**Love your neighbor as yourself.**’ (Luke 10:27) which fulfills all the Law and Prophets to a list like this in such a short time span?

How do we go from, “**You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world**” (Matthew 5:13-14) to something this absurd?

What does the color of your clothes have to do with being salt or light? Does sleeping on a soft pillow make you less humble? Will eating white bread fill you with the yeast of the Sadducees and Pharisees?

Over the last eighteen to nineteen hundred years the list has been modified to address the times and trends, which should be enough evidence to prove that this ever-changing list is not truth to make a stand on.

After Jesus answered Pilate concerning being a king, Pilate asked Jesus another question, but didn’t wait for an answer. Do you remember the question?

“What is truth?” (John 18:38)

In Matthew 22, Jesus tells a parable about a wedding feast. In short, a king invited guests to a great feast who made excuses and mistreated those sent to invite them. Then the king then invited those who did not deserve to be invited to such a feast, according to some.

Then Matthew records:

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶ They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷ Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

¹⁸ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, ²⁰ and he asked them, “Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?”

²¹ “Caesar’s,” they replied.

Then he said to them, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

²² When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away. (Matthew 22:15-22)

With all the noise and distractions and good things that grab our attention, the area of what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God can become foggy. History records that church and state became a tangled mess. The truth to make a stand on involves discernment.

God has given man the responsibility of government. Part of the function of government is to guard personal liberties, such as worship. When government becomes corrupt, instead of guarding these liberties, human governments tend more and more to control the individual's thoughts and actions. When this happens, the Christian must take a stand, or fall for anything. And if you don't know God's word, you might fall for lists that condemn warm baths and shaving.

In my younger days, I was warned that Christians live a fish bowl existence. With age, I am convinced that this is true. No man is an island. This is true for mankind in general, more so for a Christian.

Others see us. By our example we influence others, whether we know it or not. And, we are being influenced by them, whether we like it or not.

Professed Christians live their lives daily under the close observation of the world, whether they realize it or not. The

world pretty much knows if we are sincere or fake. Our example and influence is out there.

Do we come through as hypocrites, and therefore stumbling blocks, or godly examples, standing on truth? Does the world impact us or do we impact the world?

In our day of eroding values both in the world and church, it's good that we have examples like Peter and John, who, when faced with the choice of compromise, refused to give what belonged to God to another.

“Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. ²⁰ For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Throughout the years they were with Jesus, they saw His miracles, compassion, sufferings, death, and resurrection. They heard His explanation of the Law and the Prophets, and His teachings about the Kingdom. They had been commanded to pass these on to others, so that others could take a stand.

They could not be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded or delayed. They refused to flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the adversary, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

And they were going to obey their Lord.

One more thought and I'll close.

Even counting the healed man, Peter and John were outnumbered. If it came down to a beating, even without the armed guards, they would have had little chance of defending themselves.

As I thought about this scene, I wonder if the Holy Spirit could have brought to Peter and John's memory the following Old Testament incident found in 2 Kings:

Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, “I will set up my camp in such and such a place.”

⁹ The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: “Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there.” ¹⁰ So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places.

¹¹ This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, “Will you not tell me which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?”

¹² “None of us, my lord the king,” said one of his officers, “but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom.”

¹³ “Go, find out where he is,” the king ordered, “so I can send men and capture him.” The report came back: “He is in Dothan.” ¹⁴ Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city.

¹⁵ When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. “Oh, my lord, what shall we do?” the servant asked.

¹⁶ “Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, “O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.” Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (2 Kings 6:8-17)

Now, we may not be as blessed as Elisha, protected by this fiery heavenly host, but...

Isn’t it comforting to know that even when we are by ourselves, we are never alone? No need to hesitate in the presence of the adversary, or negotiate at the table of the enemy... Take A Stand.