

## E-DD Nov 2021 ARTICLE

### ***“WE OUGHT TO OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN” (Acts 5:29)***

We often quote this verse in Acts 5:29 when we face **outside** persecution by men while doing God’s will. What if the persecution is from the **inside**? Is this possible? What if this “men” could be ourselves? Despite knowing that it is the Lord’s command to do His will rather than our own will which we may ignorantly, unintentionally, or apathetically ignored. This article addresses such concern and the effect to the Lord’s ministry on earth.

The context of the above verse is after the unprecedented events of resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, His ascension to heaven, and the coming of the Holy Spirit. They are the most exciting miracles for the disciples of Jesus Christ and the early church. The gospel was preached throughout Jerusalem, and the Lord added to them daily the number of people who were saved. Supernatural miracles took place in Jerusalem church.

In chapter 2 of Acts, Peter preaches and about 3000 people repent, and in Chapter 4, Peter and John preach the resurrection of Jesus. Those who heard it had many believed, and the number of men was about 5,000 in Jerusalem. There could be more about 15,000 ppl including women and children. The estimated population of Jerusalem then ranges from 100,000 to 250,000. If calculated on the basis of 150,000, Christians account for about 10%.

In chapter 4, Peter and John were commanded not to speak at all nor teaching in the name of Jesus. (4:18)

By the fifth chapter of Acts, more spreading of the gospel, Peter and the other 11 disciples continued preaching in the outer courtyard of the temple, Solomon Porch. The number of believers was increasing.

The priests of the Sanhedrin, the guards of the temple, and the Sadducees, seeing that things were not going well, forbid them to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, saying *“Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine.”* (Acts 5:28)

#### **1. Opposition (17-18)**

*5:17 “Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,” (hateful jealousy)*

*5:18 “And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.”*

The Jewish Sanhedrin, especially the Sadducees, were not only unhappy, they were

also jealous of the 12 apostles who preached the gospel. Reasons for their jealousy and resentment are:

(i) The Council led by the high priest had warned Peter and John not to preach the resurrection of Jesus Christ in Chapter 4. They violated the laws of the country.

(ii) The testimony of the church contradicted the teachings of the Sadducees because they do not believe in the resurrection of men and the existence of angels.

(iii) They are jealous of these apostles who preach the gospel, they are not educated, they are unlawful.

They are jealous of the effect of evangelism, coupled with the fact that the church population has grown so fast. Therefore, their angry attitude towards the apostles is to immediately destroy the apostles. The apostles do not hold a demonstration or protest. They quietened themselves and were readily arrested and sent to the outer prison, so that the ppl could see their punishment and warned that ppl will be subject to the same criminal law if they follow their teachings. At the same time, they wanted the apostles to feel “embarrassed” and stopped evangelizing.

## 2. Intervention (19)

*5:19 “But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,”*

The chief priests and Sadducees thought they had more than sufficient precautions to keep all the 12 disciples in prison awaiting interrogation. They didn't expect a third person, an angel, a messenger they didn't believe in, came to rescue them. God knew their needs and therefore sent an angel not only to rescue them, but also to bring an important message (a decree). From here we know that when we do God's will, God will never leave or abandon us alone. When God is able to save us from the bondage of the most terrible sin, God will see us through and provide our needs in life.

## 3. Instruction (Decree) (20)

*5:20 “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life*  
The commandment from God came immediately as soon as they are rescued. This time they are asked to stand at the very temple to tell the people about the way of salvation. It is a decree from heaven, more sacred and more urgent than the emperor's imperial edict. The apostles do not have the opportunity to hide or to be fearful, but are told to continue to preach the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the message of salvation. This message is almost 2000 years old, and throughout generations God also uses his followers to spread the same message of forgiveness of sins. God wants the people in this age to hear the same message of resurrection and forgiveness of sins.

*Acts 5: 28 “Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this*

*name? and, behold, **ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine**, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.”*

(4) Verdict (40-41)

Acts 5:40-41

*<sup>40</sup> And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and **beaten them**, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.*

*<sup>41</sup> And they departed from the presence of the council, **rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.***

Each of the 12 apostles was flogged forty minus one (usual practice 39 times). 39 whippings is not a trivial matter, it causes serious injuries and scars to the body. But the apostles rejoice in their hearts. It is worthy of being humiliated.

In SG arrested drug traffickers shall be whipped. When possible they would rather choose extended jail term than being lashed.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, how will we react? Will we blame God when we suffer for Him? Thanks be to God, the 12 apostles are all good examples we should learn from. In later days, Paul suffered the same 40-1 beating for a total of 5 times on different occasions. But he says in Romans 8:18:

*“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”* Do we believe that Paul says is true?

Back to Acts 5:42 *“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”* They obey God, not man.

### **Applications :**

1. Can we not say what we see and hear?

*5:29 “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.”*

This is the second time to respond to the prosecutors. The first was in 4:19-20 Peter and John responded with same answer.

*<sup>19</sup> But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.*

*<sup>20</sup> For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*

When we believe in the Lord and experience changes in our lives, from obeying our own will to obeying the will of God, although it may not be long after we believe in the Lord, there are countless times of God speaking to us from the words of the Bible. I always want to thank and praise the Lord for his forgiveness. We who are supposed to perish, God accepts us as his children. *John 1:12 “All those who receive him are*

*those who believe in his name, and he gives them the right to be children of God."*  
Where can I find such grace and love anywhere in the world?

Romans 5:8 *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* If you can appreciate an earthly father's love for his children, you can imagine God's love even more. The love is so great that He sacrificed his son on the cross and bears all our sins and becomes the scapegoat of the world. 5:29 **"We ought to obey God rather than men."** This time it was Peter who led the other 11 disciples (including Matthias who replaces Judas Iscariot) at the same time and agreed to obey God. Brothers and sisters, how about you? How many years has God been looking for you? To be exact, before the foundation of the world. What excuses do we have for not witnessing for him?

2. The reason for not preaching the gospel is to obey oneself and not obey God

John 15:18-20

*<sup>18</sup>"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."*

*<sup>19</sup>If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

*<sup>20</sup>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; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.*

Christians do not deliberately need to find activities to be persecuted. Persecution comes naturally because the world hates us. What's the reason? Because the people of the world have hated our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what our Lord told us in advance that such a thing would happen. It is a joint relationship.

This is something that no Christians can escape. If you say, since I believed in Jesus, I have never experienced persecution. My family, friends, and neighbours have good relationship with me and none of them are Christians. According to the Bible, this is not possible. The reason may be that you value friendship more than their souls and do not tell them the gospel. What's more terrifying is that you obey your own will, do not obey God's will, don't preach the gospel, or bear witness. A New Testament professor at the University of Edinburgh said that the biggest threat to Christianity is that Christians themselves hide their faith identity and quietly ascend to heaven.

While evangelism is not a pre-requisite to be spiritually saved, but someone must preach to you before you can understand and be saved. Romans 10:14 *"But how can people ask him if they haven't believed him? How can they believe him if they haven't heard of him? How can they hear without preaching."*

If persecution comes from the outside, it makes the church stronger. The number of people increased. However, if Christians stop preaching the gospel, then the church will gradually become weak, decline and eventually perish. Many Western churches

have the freedom to preach the gospel, but few want to do it. It is even sadder that even pastors and church leaders in the West do not preach, and of course it is even harder to encourage the congregation to witness. Some say that they are afraid of offending non-believers or other religions and causing troubles. They were not taught to witness in the first place. There are so many such situations. Many churches close down and were sold to other faith organization. Then you say that other religions do not preach their gospel, but many people believe in them. We have hardly heard of pagans preaching their religion, but there are tens of millions of followers. The answer is that they are inheriting the lineage, and the number of children they have is an organic increase by procreation. Christianity is the relationship between an individual and God, not a process of automatic inheritance. Therefore, in order for the world to know God, it is necessary to start with the concept of the gospel and establish a relationship with God. If Christians do not preach, Christianity will be lost. God cannot use non-believers to preach the gospel. God must settle accounts with us? Although it is not an account of salvation. We need to answer the regrettable question of our Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 6:46.

***“Why do you call my Lord and Lord, but do not do what I say?”***

95% of Christians have never led anyone to Jesus. 80% of Christians do not intentionally evangelize, which is very serious. It means numerous non-believers are deprived from hearing the gospel. They have no chance to believe in Jesus. We need to reflect this serious issue? How will you explain when you see the Lord?

### 3. The Pandemic and Angel's Rescue

Aren't we made by the Lord for the day like this? The pandemic infects globally, social distancing, home isolation, and hygiene practice are the common language of the world today. Physical gatherings, visits, and various activities are restricted or forced to cancel. D2D evangelism, street evangelism, and large-scale preaching have to be cancelled. For many it is a good excuse for not preaching the gospel. Before the pandemic, everyone is busy searching for wealth, and there is no time to serve others.

#### 2 Timothy 3

*“<sup>1</sup> This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.*

*<sup>2</sup> For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,*

*<sup>3</sup> Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,*

*<sup>4</sup> Traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;*

*<sup>5</sup> Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”*

"No time" was everyone's buzz word, convenient excuses, Christians included. There is no time to preach the gospel. Because of the pandemic, the global economy shrank by nearly -4% in 2020. The global economy slowed down, 120 million people were unemployed. Few people now say that there is no time.

The world situation has reached an almost irreversible situation. Paul said that this is a dangerous time. There is no need for political persecution, and no one likes to listen to the gospel. Those who preach also feel helpless, give up, give up, and become discouraged. Looking at so many Christians don't evangelize, must as well follow the crowd, just read the Bible, pray, and fellowship with God. Isn't that better and enough? The answer is definitely NO. Although some are very zealous, like those 12 apostles, they must preach at all times, we also need to encourage those brothers and sisters who do not preach the gospel to do so, how stressful is it, we must.

When we read 5:19-20

*19 But the angel of the Lord opened the prison door at night and brought them out,  
20 Say, Go and stand in the temple and tell the people all the way of life.*

Are you thinking as I think, the outbreak of the pandemic is like an angel who opened the door of a prison overnight and led us out, telling us that you face the computer keyboard and tell the world about the way of life and the keys. The whole world relies on the new technology to forward the gospel to relatives around the world who have not yet believed in the Lord, , and your long lost friends. Last year, the pandemic was at its peak. Many people dared not accept the gospel tract. It was not a question of faith, but what if the tract carries the virus? A Christian Covid-19 patient was under quarantined, his bed sheet, pillowcase, had to be washed thoroughly with hot water, his computer, Bible, desk, chairs, had to be disinfected and sterilized. His favourite book, the Bible, has also become "carrier" of the virus.

The vaccine was meant to be the saviour from the pandemic, but now, we know that the strain is even more powerful. In Singapore, from two digit to thousands were diagnosed positive almost overnight. More virus mutation from Alpha, to Delta, to Lambda, and the latest Omicron. The answer is "we are to co-exist with the virus" while refusing to co-exist with the God who created us.

Having said that, during the pandemic, evangelism is the best time and opportunity, the technology is ready for us to use. We can send a lot of gospel messages at the stroke of the keyboard. Before and after we send it, we pray that God will let the other party to respond to do follow up.

If your response to the pandemic is: I am afraid that I will be get the virus, how can I still have the mood to share the gospel? Then we have to ask ourselves why I am no different from the people of the world, and have the same fear of the virus. Non-believers will also ask, are you not as afraid as we are, where is your God? I think you have the protection of God, trust it with peace of mind. Do I still believe in your God? There is no living testimony, how can we evangelize? If so, we must quickly return to God, confess our sins and repent. He will teach us the way to go, which is the way to do his will. Remember the decree to preach to the 12 disciples had already been given to us in the Lord's Great Commission.

Beloved, whether you have been witnessing or not, we all need to know God's command:

1) The word of God and his gospel are not constrained by time and space or under any circumstances. The gospel cannot be quarantined. The closer the end times, the greater the urgency of preaching the gospel.

2) The Great Commission is the mission of every Christian. It is not an optional command. If you are a disciple of the Lord, you are to reproduce more disciples. Evangelism is the action no.1, followed by baptizing and teaching what the Lord has commanded. The Lord promise to be with us always.

3) **Isn't our existence for the present age and opportunity?** Now is the urgent time. Many people have left the world with the pandemic. Many of them have not heard the gospel. They die in their sins.

*Esther 4:14 "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether **thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?**"* We are the Esther of today!

*2 Corinthians 6:2 "For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."*

**"WE OUGHT TO OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN"**. May all of us respond positively to God's repeated calls without delay.

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