

Bible Study 13 – Acts 4:13-22 – Authority!

We pick up where we left off last week. We are in Acts chapter 4 and our focus today will be upon verses 13 through 22. Broadly speaking the main theme covered in this passage is ‘authority’! That is, it compels us to ask ourselves what or who is our ultimate authority? The apostles have been preaching, teaching, and healing in the name (that is, the authority) of Jesus, and this has gotten them into hot water with the Temple or religious and state authorities in Jerusalem who are determined to use their power to silence and stifle the Christian Faith.

And so, we read from verse 13: Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. 14 But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. 15 But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, 16 saying, “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” 18 So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” 21 And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. 22 For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old. Consider firstly:

1. The astonishment of the authorities: Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished.

a) The authorities are astounded by the conviction and courage of the apostles...

b) The authorities are astounded by the comprehension and competency of the apostles...

c) The authorities are astounded by the class and credentials of the apostles...

2. The awareness of the authorities: And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. 14

But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. 15 But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, 16 saying, “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.”

a) The authorities recognised the apostles as disciples of Jesus...

b) The authorities realised that the miraculous healing of the blind and lame beggar was real... and was widely known among the people of Jerusalem...

c) The authorities resolved to silence the apostles and stop the spread of the Christian faith...

3. The acrimony of the authorities: So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus... And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. 22 For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

a) The authorities abuse their power to cancel the apostles...

b) The authorities admonish the apostles to preach and teach no more...

c) The authorities are apprehensive of losing their control over and support of the people....

I’m reminded of Vaclav Havel’s famous book ‘The power of the powerless’...

In contrast...

4. The audacity of the apostles: ... the boldness of Peter and John... But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

a) Consider the confidence of the apostles...

b) Consider the commitment of the apostles...

c) Consider the creed of the apostles...

5. The allegiance of the apostles: in the sight of God

a) Their ultimate allegiance and hence authority is the Lord God... they lived before the face of God... his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

b) Their unwavering allegiance is to the Lord Jesus Christ who has been given supreme authority in heaven and on earth... Jesus had said to them: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Mt.28:18-20).

I was reading Psalm 16 earlier and the apostles come to mind. Verse 8 reads: I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken (Ps.16:8).

c) Their undeniable allegiance and respect for earthly authorities are secondary to their allegiance to God in Christ. And hence the apostolic faith that teaches: Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God (Rom.13:1), also says we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). In other words, the ultimate allegiance of the Christian is to God through Christ our Lord... Therefore, the apostles cannot but speak of what they have heard and seen. It is for the good of all, the church's growth, and the glory of God.

We will pick up at verse 23 next week. For now, here are a few questions to ponder based on our study of this passage:

Questions

1. Do we possess the same conviction and confidence that was exemplified in the apostles? If not, why not?

2. Do we possess a comprehensive knowledge of the Christian Faith? If not, what means has God given to enable us to grow in grace and knowledge?

3. What should the Christian's relationship be to the state?

4. How should the Christian respond when the state commands belief and behaviour contrary to God's revealed will or law of love?