

“Convenience or Conviction?”—Acts 5:27-32

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Convenience or Conviction?”, is Acts 5:27-32 → *The high priest questioned them saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, Whom you killed by hanging Him on a tree. God exalted Him at His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, Whom God has given to those who obey Him.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

What can one learn about life by watching a stream flowing down its path? The fact that you can’t step in the same water twice because it is constantly moving can remind us that our lives are constantly moving and changing. Thus, one cannot experience the same thing in the same way at two different times. If you observe a stream closely you will notice that it affects the terrain around it, both by erosion and producing new growth. You’re life is always

affecting those around you in both negative and positive ways. A stream's tendency to follow the path of least resistance also reflects how many people live their lives. They will choose the most comfortable and convenient path in life, avoiding conflict and confrontation at all costs. Some would call it "going with the flow" so that life is less stressful.

How does one understand "taking the path of least resistance" when it comes to discipleship and service to our Lord Jesus Christ? Is it the best route when considering faithfulness to Christ? Is it even an option when it comes to your identity as a child of God?

In our text we encounter *Peter and the apostles* standing before the very group which plotted Jesus' death—the Sanhedrin. They had been in this very spot before as a result of proclaiming the resurrected Jesus in the temple courts, calling the people to repent of their sins and believe in His atoning work for them. (cf. Acts 3:11-26) *As they were speaking to the people, Acts 4:1-3 says the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them.*

Unsure of how to deal with them in light of the miraculous signs being performed in the name of Jesus as well as the amount of people coming to faith in Jesus, they warned them about preaching in the name of Jesus and

let them go. However, the apostles continued proclaiming Jesus and even prayed for more boldness to continue speaking in the name of Jesus, even in the midst of such persecution! (cf. Acts 4:29) Even after imprisonment they continued to proclaim the resurrected Jesus in the temple courts! Where did these men get such boldness and apparent fearlessness? These aren't the disciples we encountered during the passion of Jesus. They have changed from men of convenience to men of conviction!

At face value it appears as if the apostles had to make a choice in the midst of persecution. This is how many might assess such situations in their lives. "Do I fight or flee?" "Is this a hill upon which I'm willing to die?" "What consequences will I face in the midst of my choice?" Actually, the picture we have of the apostles here involves no such considerations. The choice was clear: **there is no choice!** As they said in verse 29 of our text: *We must obey God rather than men.*

It was clear to them that "following the path of least resistance" because it was the most convenient way is dangerous when it comes to faith in Jesus. Not only does it call the Christian's witness into question because of inconsistent actions but it places an offense toward the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the minds of those whom you are trying to bring to faith. It reflects the idolatry in the heart where the confession of "Jesus is Lord!" is traded for an

action which states “I am lord!” It also reflects a lack of dependance upon the Holy Spirit Who desires to work God’s will in and through you!

In verse 32 of our text the apostles state the nature of their identity. Not only were they witnesses to God’s raising this Jesus from the dead, exulting Him to *His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance . . . and forgiveness of sins*, but **so was the Holy Spirit, Whom God had given to them**. These religious leaders were not experiencing some kind of “personality change” in the apostles. Upon encountering them the first time *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.* (cf. Acts 4:13) They were experiencing the Holy Spirit at work in their midst.

These apostles had their fill of taking the convenient way. Peter had denied Jesus three times, even after being forewarned that he would do so! (cf. Luke 22:33-34,54-62) Thomas refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, insisting that Jesus prove it to him! (cf. John 20:24-29) After His death the disciples were hiding behind locked doors for fear they were next! (cf. John 20:19,26) All of them left Jesus and fled when He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane! (cf. Mark 14:50) Numerous times the Scriptures tell us that many of His own disciples standing in His resurrected presence still did not believe!

(cf. Luke 24:41; Matthew 28:17) **The change the Sanhedrin failed to recognize with the apostles was that they were now filled with the Holy Spirit!**

This Holy Spirit conviction displays that it is **the nature of a disciple of Jesus** to obey Him and follow the Holy Spirit's guidance in his life! All the disciples could "drum up" in themselves was fear. The Holy Spirit brought forth boldness for Jesus! As they had told them the first time in Acts 4:20 → *We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.* This Holy Spirit boldness was revealed in their declaring to the Sanhedrin that they killed Jesus *by hanging Him on a tree* even when the Sanhedrin was denying responsibility for His death! Who was really on trial here?

Apparently the Sanhedrin sensed they were on trial when they said in verse 28 of our text: *You intend to bring this man's blood upon us.* Jesus had told His disciples the night before He died on that tree: *When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth* (cf. John 16:13) and *He will convict the world . . . concerning sin , because people do not believe in Me.* (cf. John 16:8-9) The Sanhedrin was actually on trial here because the Holy Spirit was convicting their hearts and their consciences bore witness that they were guilty. It would be interesting to know if any eventually repented and believed in Jesus.

When you repent, confessing your sins and placing your faith in Jesus, the

Holy Spirit will create the desire and conviction to obey Christ **no matter what the cost!** It will involve suffering, struggles, discomfort and even persecution. It is a challenge to your walk of faith each day and is not easy. You will fail many times as you experience the weakness of your frail sinful nature. This is why it must be the Holy Spirit Who will accomplish such conviction and obedience to God's will and Word. Could this be what we recognize when we pray the 6th and 7th petitions of the Lord's Prayer: "Lead us down the path of conviction but deliver us from the path of least resistance?"

Because you live in the power of the resurrected Christ and His Holy Spirit you can recognize the Lord's working in every single area of your life, including persecution. God accomplishes His work, empowering you with His Holy Spirit to continue with endurance and patience, recognizing His Lordship in the midst of every situation. **He will even accomplish His work through you because you have His Holy Spirit with full conviction of faith!** Amen.

*We know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you,
because our gospel came to you not only in word,
but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.*

(1 Thessalonians 1:4-5)

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