



March 17, 2024

*“You Always Obey Someone.”*

*Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30.*

News:

March 31<sup>st</sup> Resurrection Sunday Open House at 9:30, Service at 11:00  
Wednesday Evening Classes at 6:30

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**Acts 4:13–18** ~ <sup>13</sup>Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. <sup>14</sup>And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. <sup>15</sup>But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another, <sup>16</sup>saying, “What are we to do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. <sup>17</sup>But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let’s warn them not to speak any longer to any person in this name.” <sup>18</sup>And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

“Uneducated,” means that they had not been formally trained in Greco-Roman...

For Jewish elites, formal education also came in the study of theology...

“Untrained” is ἰδιώτης (ē-dē-ō-tās), directly giving us the word...

It literally means “one’s own” with the idea that the person lives in their own tiny world...

*Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.*

*God Bless You!*

The Holy Spirit is not a big fan of making up for human deficiencies that are due to our laziness, arrogance, impatience, or lack of willing preparation.

Does God call the prepared or does He prepare the called?

To be prepared is a mindset. As long as you are preparing, then you are prepared. If you are not currently preparing you are unprepared...

They could not figure out how to “deny it.” They would have if they...

They separated the overall incident into two distinct things. The second being the teaching and proclaiming bit.

**Acts 4:19–22** ~ <sup>19</sup>But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, make your own judgment; <sup>20</sup>for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” <sup>21</sup>When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; <sup>22</sup>for the man on whom this miracle of healing had been performed was more than forty years old.

The Apostle’s reaction wasn’t insolent or emotional. it was honest...

In verses 19&20 they basically said what do you, the elites of Judaism think? Is it right for us to throw our integrity out the window and engage in a lie? Peter and John took what was, from obey God or obey man?

It was a question of authority...

From the Council’s perspective they weren’t telling Peter and John to be dishonest, they were commanding them not to teach the people because they had no recognized authorization...

The first rule of an authoritarian regime is to control the microphone.

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Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

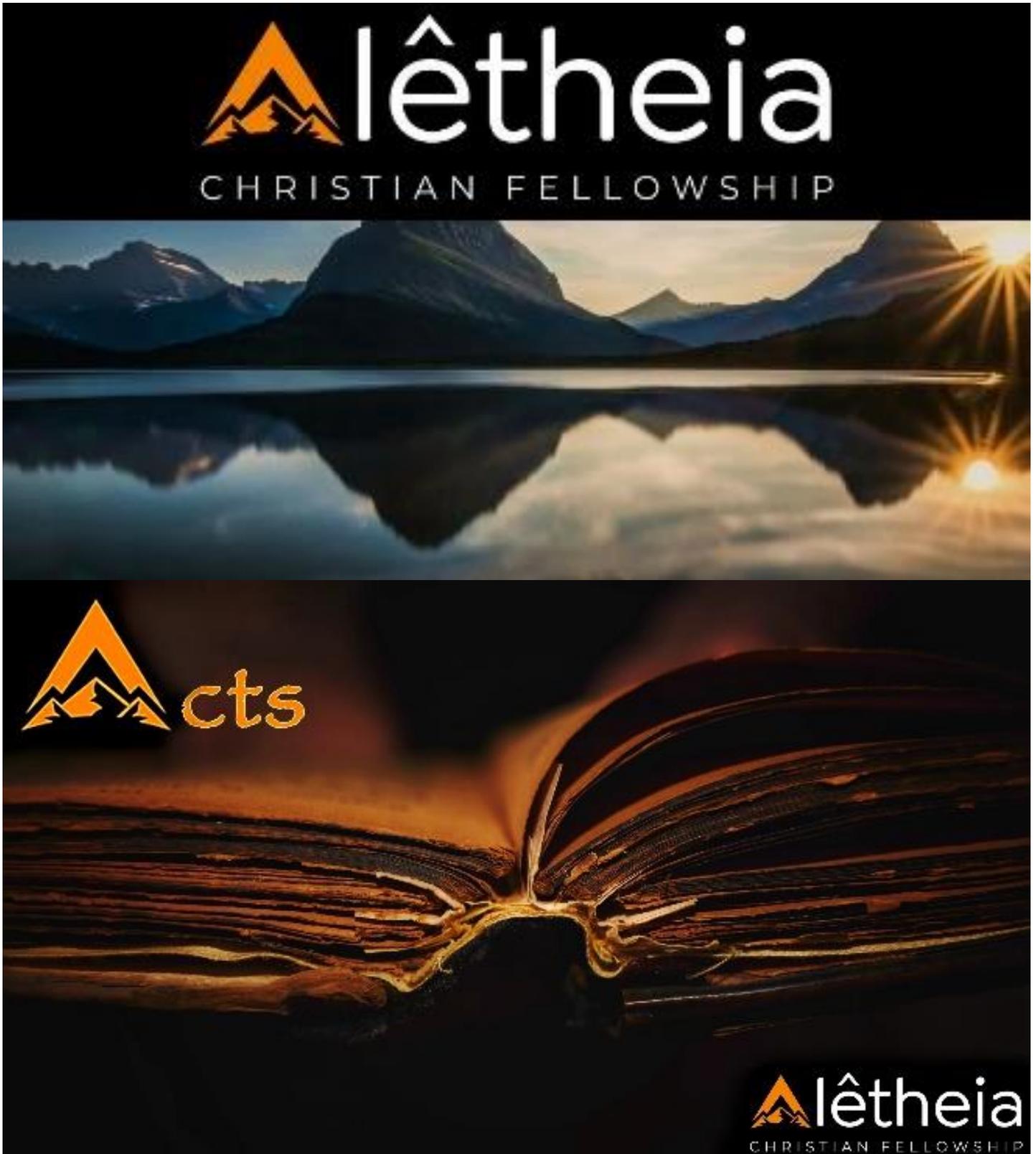
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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_



Last week finished up with Peter, John and the healed man standing before the Jewish ruling council. The

leaders asked them by what supernatural force had the man been healed and by what authority they were teaching the people.

For most Jews there were only two possible sources of supernatural power, God, or evil that was opposed to God. For the Sadducees who were, at best, extremely skeptical of the supernatural, it was about ferreting out how the magicians performed the trick.

The second question was really asking the men who do you think that you are, by what credentials, education, commission, position, or authority, did you feel it reasonable for you to teach our congregation – the Jewish people?

Even if God had wrought an undeniably spectacular miracle through them, how did that, in and of itself, qualify them to act as teachers of the nation? The Jewish people were the possession and so, responsibility of the Jewish leadership – they were the only ones to teach the people. How dare the disciples teach the leader's students?

It would be like a Mormon coming into our church and talking to someone here, and then that someone, be

seemingly healed. Then because of that incident the Mormon began teaching all of you a different Gospel... I'm not cool with that.

Sure, I'd want to know how the miracle accomplished, but even if it was done by God's power, it wouldn't make the Mormon's theology valid in my eyes. I would want to know how the fact that a healing that I could not deny qualified the Mormon to teach all of you. This issue will ultimately be the sticking point for these two Apostles.

Peter gave a remarkable response to the two questions that included a degree of rhetorical mastery and calm confidence that was quite surprising coming from a country bumkin facing over 100 of the most powerful men in the land. Luke tells us it was because Peter was led by the Holy Spirit. How did the Sanhedrin view it?



Acts 4:13–18, 13Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. 14And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. 15But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another, 16saying, “What are we to do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let’s warn them not to speak any longer to any person in this name.” 18And when

they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

This is one of those seemingly straight-forward passages that people typically breeze through to get to the reaction of the Apostles assuming that they caught the gist. Well, that's unfortunate because this is actually a very nuanced passage where the fuller meaning is overlooked unless we take our time and think it through.

The translators have done a great job but in trying to remain faithful to the Greek – in other words without adding a bunch of extra explanatory words to the text – the reader needs to go slow and pay attention to get the deeper meaning. What's cool in such cases is that when we see it, we wonder why we didn't see it before.



The Jewish elites were “amazed” by Peter and John. Why? Because they recognized them as being both “uneducated and untrained” but observed a shockingly different presentation from them than they expected. They were “amazed” by their speech and demeanor presuming such could only come from highly educated, trained, and skilled elites such as themselves.



You see the accomplished Sadducees and Pharisees, the Scribes and Teachers of the Law, felt vastly superior to the average Jew. They looked down with considerable disdain on the commoners, especially those from the backwater provinces, like Galilee.

“Uneducated,” means that they had not been formally trained in Greco-Roman philosophy and rhetoric. The high-born and other privileged people sent their kids off to schools where they learned the intricacies of high society. Reading, writing, and mathematics, as well as social etiquette, formal speech, and debate, and of course philosophy.

For Jewish elites, formal education also came in the study of theology. There were schools, such as the School of Shammai, as well as private tutors, such as Hillel's grandson and Paul's mentor Gamaliel, but only the most well-connected need apply.

Peter spoke with far greater eloquence, deftness, and impact than they would have thought possible. The word untrained is ἰδιώτης (ē-dē-ō-tās), directly giving us the word idiot. The word literally means “one's own” with the idea that the person lives in their own tiny world – even just within themselves as an extreme. They have very limited exposure to things outside of their isolated experience.

When I lived in England, I knew several local people from the small villages all around the Cotswolds, who had never been more than 20 miles from their homes. Oxford was a 30-minute drive south and many of those folks had never made that journey, let alone travelled beyond to London.

It's not uncommon. The vast majority of people who have graced this planet over time never strayed more than a few miles from where they were born. Such people are the definition of the Greek word ἰδιώτης.

People with very limited exposure to what the world has to offer.

Peter and John were clearly commoners from Galilee and as such the Jewish elites fully expected them to be completely cowed by their situation. They never dreamed that they would confidently and eloquently mount an impressive defense of their actions. The leaders were taken aback and didn't know how to respond.

Verse 13 closes by saying that "they began to recognize them as having been with Jesus." That's the translator's way of indicating that this was a process. The point is that there was a whole lot more going on here than what Luke recorded. When you add to that phrasing the confidence of both Peter and John you realize that both of them spoke. Finally, add in the "man who had been healed standing with them," and you begin to get a fuller picture of what happened.



No report of the facts of an event is ever complete. Whether it is a book report, a police report, a news report, or whatever, it is always selective. We never get all the details because it would take an insane amount of time to wade through all the details even if all of them were somehow recorded. Add that to the fact the Luke wasn't giving us a report about the event in question. Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was giving a theological and Christological explanation of the historical unfolding of Christianity.

Peter and John both spoke under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, and they did so with a degree of sophistication that literally amazed the dignitaries to

whom they were speaking and all the while the man at the center of the incident was standing in the center with them.



As they spoke, no doubt using words and phrases that Jesus had used, no doubt applying Scripture in the same way that Jesus had, no doubt speaking with the same calm authority that Jesus had displayed, the group of leaders slowly began to realize that Peter and John were disciples of Jesus.

I mentioned last week that in the first century over 100 Jewish rebellions had to be forcibly and quite violently put down. Very often, all that was needed was to execute the ringleader and the movement would die

with him. Most of these Jewish rebels gained a following by claiming to be a prophet, or even the Messiah, so once they were captured and killed, their group would simply disband. The Sanhedrin thought that they had ended the Jesus movement by murdering Jesus and here before them were His followers picking up where He left off – it was no doubt a frustrating development to them.

Here's a very important point to consider, particularly if you're a person who prioritizes spirituality over preparedness. The Holy Spirit can do anything without limit. I'm the last person on the planet who would hinder or restrict the power of God's Breath. "Nothing is too difficult for Me," God said.



Having said that and without minimizing it in any way, let me also say that normally, the Holy Spirit is not a big fan of making up for human deficiencies that are due to our laziness or lack of willing preparation.

This is an actual website and based upon the misuse of Scripture there I can assure you the people involved are not formally educated in Bible interpretation or Christian Theology. They are very likely people who would tell you that there is no reason to prepare as a Christian minister because the Holy Spirit will give you what to say at the proper time. Yet they insist that Christians be vigilant and actively prepare for the zombie apocalypse. That's called self-deception.

Staying with it after it's pointed out is called cognitive dissonance.

Does God call the prepared or does He prepare the called? If I asked you to get up here right now and tell us about your experience with Jesus, and you quickly prayed that God would lead you, and you very intentionally placed yourself in the hands of the Holy Spirit, I am certain that your testimony would be excellent. God would prepare you.

If I told you that I was going to have you give your testimony in three weeks and you did nothing at all to prepare, but instead relied on the Holy Spirit to make it great on the day of, I dare say, that while we would all still be supportive and kind, we'd all be even more supportive and kind if you didn't do it again. God tried to prepare you, but you refused to cooperate and so you ended up neither called, nor prepared. You see, the Holy Spirit is essential regardless of your skill, experience, or preparation, but the Holy Spirit will not make up for your intentional failure to prepare. Competence, sufficiency, qualification all come from God through our human participation including preparation. So yes, if you want your best chance of surviving the apocalypse, prepare. Although as a

Christians I have no idea why you'd want to survive that, unless, of course, you wanted to try to save as many other people as you could both physically and eternally. I personally haven't met a prepper yet who had that as their goal.

Peter and John shocked the elites because they were presenting their case in a way that they thought impossible for uneducated and unsophisticated commoners. We can see that in both their recorded reaction, but also in the recorded words of Peter. As I said last week, what he said to the Sanhedrin was remarkably well crafted. In other words, you don't need to wait for the reaction, you can marvel at Peter's speech.



Many Christians take this passage and the skill with which Peter and John spoke to mean that formal education and the sophistication that comes from getting outside of the tiny socioeconomic and cultural bubble to which you were born is entirely unnecessary and some, even see it as detrimental.

The notion being that the Holy Spirit will give you what to say and so no preparation is required and in fact, the more knowledge you have stuffed in your head the less the Holy Spirit is able to push through.

What such people miss is that both Peter and John had spent three years, around the clock, seven days a

week, 365 days a year studying and being disciplined by the Master. If a person went to college with a schedule like that, they would probably have earned a master's degree. The Apostles had an education taught in-person by God, and they got a lot of diverse experience, traveling with Jesus throughout modern-day Israel, and through parts of Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

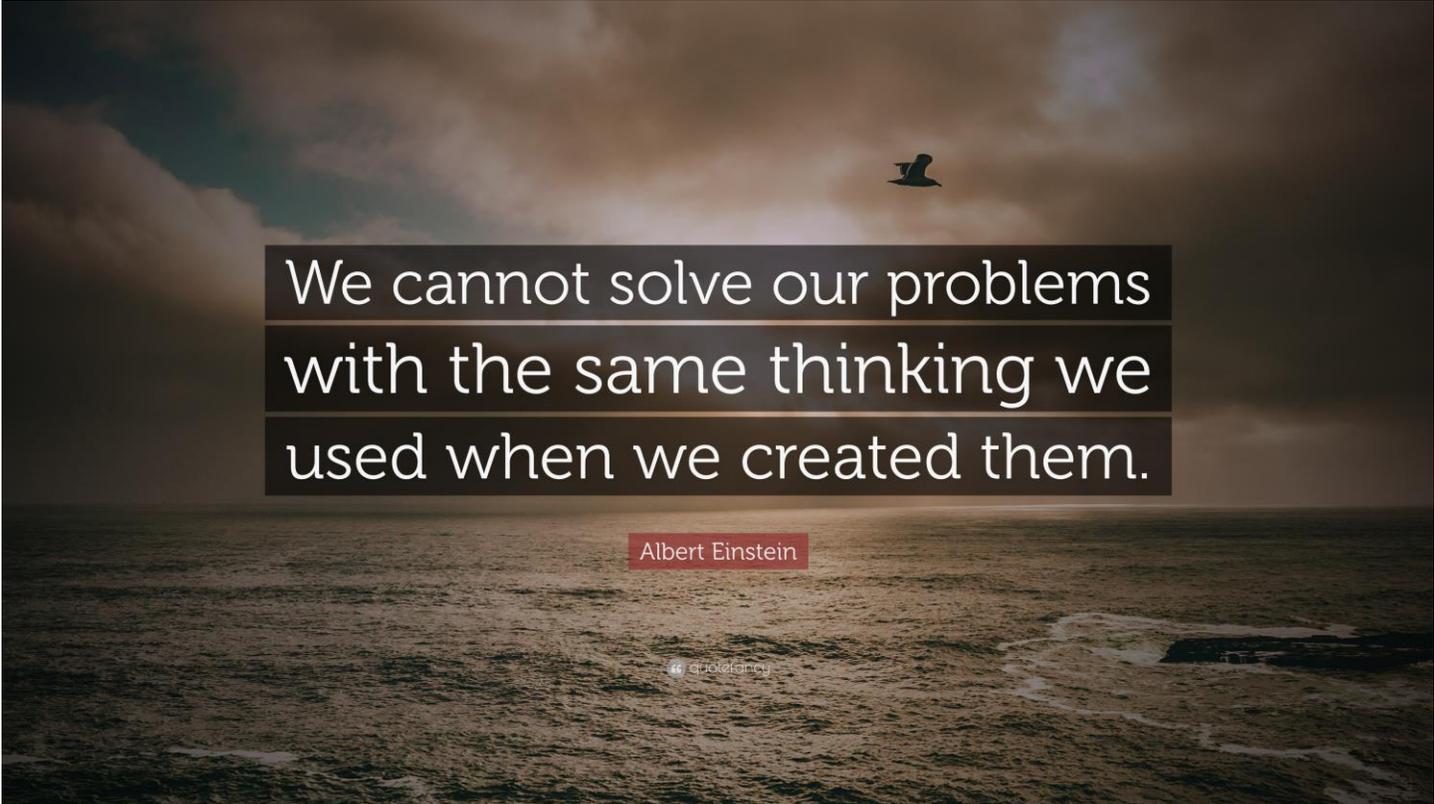
They had sampled the culture of the Romans, the Greeks, the Samaritans, as well as different sub-cultures within Judaism. They received unimaginable hands-on ministry experience running the gamut from miraculous healings, to walking on water, from casting out demons, to seeing Jesus Transfigured. They were highly prepared for the moment and that's what God the Spirit used.

Every Christian has been called and commissioned by Jesus to be a minister of the Gospel and as such each one of us must make good use of our opportunities to be prepared for our ministry. The exact nature of our preparation will differ from one person to another, and the level of preparedness will grow over time and God will honor our commitment to His service and will fill us

with the Holy Spirit to effectively minister far beyond our preparation regardless of how much we learn.

You see it isn't that God needs us to be prepared in order to effectively minister through us, it's just that normally He isn't going to help Christians who are too arrogant, too lazy, too impatient, too foolish, to take the time and make the effort to prepare themselves for ministry.

The Bible tells us to be ready, to be ready to preach at all times. To be ready implies being prepared, and to be prepared is never a set standard or a particular level, it is a mindset. As long as you are preparing, then you are prepared. No matter how much education, training, practice, and experience you have, if you are not currently preparing, you are unprepared... I really hope that makes sense. God prepares the called, but not by passive osmosis.



We cannot solve our problems  
with the same thinking we  
used when we created them.

Albert Einstein

quotation

Verse 14 is trying to subtly tell us in English what is glaringly obvious in Greek. They could not figure out how to deal with the simple fact that thousands of people were fully aware that a guy who had graced the Temple's eastern entrance for decades as a crippled beggar was now standing in front of them.

So, after a fair bit of listening and calculating the leaders dismissed the trio who were most likely escorted back to the dungeon to await their fate. The leaders talked it over trying to come up with some kind of solution. Never once, it seems, did they consider the obvious.

At the end of verse 16 we get the most important bit of information concerning the Sanhedrin's intent. "We cannot deny it." The translators have again tried, without adding a bunch of extra words, to subtly convey what is obvious in Greek... The leaders would deny the miraculous healing if they could. The fact that they couldn't deny it was the crux of the problem for them. How could they minimize the impact of the event and the subsequent teaching and proclaiming, if they couldn't dismiss or at least diminish the event?

They desperately searched for a way to deny it because if they could show that it was a trick, they could shame the trio as charlatans. If they could show that it was accomplished by dark forces, they could denounce them as witches. Either way they could then beat them, stone them, secretly have them assassinated, get rid of their problem one way or another and the people would not complain and all would be well.

Because they couldn't figure out how to deny a well-known public miracle of such magnitude, their hands were tied. If they punished Peter and John, the people would see it as their leaders punishing the benefactors through whom came a significant community benefit.

There would be serious blowback from the people, which would likely invite intervention by the Roman garrison. Not good.

Verse 17 confirms the intent of the Sanhedrin to quash the healing and the testimony about the true Healer, the true Benefactor. They separated the overall incident into two distinct things. First the healing that they could not find a way to deny and second the teaching and proclaiming afterwards.

The judgment of the High Council was that even though an inexplicable event had taken place that in and of itself did not qualify Peter and John to teach and preach the Jewish people. “They commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.” Notice that for memory aid purposes Luke inverts the order from earlier, instead of teaching and proclaiming, here it is essentially proclaiming and teaching – just an interesting note.

We’ll see the whole thing more clearly as we read...

## OBEY GOD OR OBEY MAN



Acts 4:19–22, 19But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, make your own judgment; 20for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” 21When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; 22for the man on whom this miracle of healing had been performed was more than forty years old.

The Apostle’s reaction to the Council’s judgment and command is, once again, quite remarkable. If all they

were was a couple of fishermen from Galilee it would have been insane that they could confidently and masterfully respond. Of course, we know that they were highly trained disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ indwelt by the very Breath of Almighty God... Just like you... Just like you are.

As such the Holy Spirit was able to lead them to a very precisely nuanced response. It wasn't defiant, it wasn't insolent, it wasn't emotionally charged. It was as respectfully polite and as forcefully honest and as eloquently stated as it could have been.

In the Grecco-Roman world honesty was considered a virtue. A good philosopher always tells the truth with entire integrity no matter who might be offended. Socrates was the most notable example. Naturally, such philosophers often suffered for their honesty, but the cultural ideal was that everyone in society would follow the philosopher's example and would simply speak the truth without altering their words to appease and placate anyone.

The most noble kings and rulers would allow people to tell them the truth and punish vain flatterers, again the ideal, not necessarily the reality. It was expected that

such truth-speakers would do so respectfully. There was created in the Greek language, subtle ways to politely and courteously convey truth that another person might not want to hear. We see that on display here.

When the disciples say in verse 20, “we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard,” they are appealing to this cultural ideal, as well as to the separate but similar command of God to be truthful. God declares as one of the fundamental 10 Commandments that people are to have integrity. For our two friends there is a third element at play which is their commission from Jesus. He had commanded them to tell the Truth about Him, just as He has with us. We have the preparation, we have the same Spirit, we have the Commission of Christ... What’s stopping us?

Notice in their appeal in verse 19, they basically said what do you, the elites of Judaism think? Is it right for us to throw our integrity out the window and engage in a lie? Peter and John took what was, from the Council’s perspective, the most important of the three reasons for truth and asked them for their assessment. What do you, our great leaders, teachers, and

examples, of how to follow God think? Obey God or obey man?

It was a question of authority. They were asking the High Priest and his minions, who do you think has more authority, you, or God? Should we lie for you or tell the truth for God – that was the crux of it.

Throughout God's dealings with mankind, we find this Truth... God commands all people whether Jew, or heathen, or Christian, or agnostic... all people are commanded by God to obey the governmental authorities placed over them. The only exception comes when the commands of the human authorities contravene God's commands. I think that we all get that principle. Where we all differ is in its application.

If a person is anti-government enough, they can easily take anything the authorities do, or fail to do, as a violation of God's desire and then pursue a holy war. On the other hand, if a person is timid enough, they can even go along with mass genocide and say nothing. There's probably a middle ground. What we know is that one day soon will each give an accounting to Jesus.

God had clearly instructed the Jews to testify with complete honesty and the Sanhedrin had clearly commanded the Apostles to remain silent. Our friends had to choose which order to follow.

Here comes the element that is easily overlooked and was probably missed by the disciples at the time. The Council had, within their proper authority, given the men a command that did not violate God's command. Their command was very specific to the type of speech and the content of the speech that was forbidden. From the Council's perspective they weren't telling Peter and John to be dishonest, they were commanding them not to teach the people as though they were teachers and not to proclaim in the name of Jesus because that was heresy.

As I said earlier, that will be the sticking point in the next chapter. While the miracle could not be denied, the Sanhedrin believed that they were right in ordering men not to teach their people without their authorization. This was one of the primary issues that they had with Jesus. "By whose authority are you doing these things?" The first rule of an authoritarian regime is to control the microphone.

What's sad is that the leaders never seriously consider any other course of action because deep down inside they were terrified of losing their place and position. Aren't we the same? Aren't we hindered in our devotion to God and our use to the Lord by our fear of losing too much?

Verse 21 means that they couldn't punish them based on their fear of what the people would do in response and then verse 22 confirms that too many people knew, and it was too hard to dismiss. The man who could not walk from birth had been a fixture of the Temple for decades and now he was clearly walking.