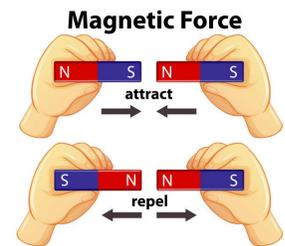


The Polarization Of The Gospel

Acts 5:12-42

Introduction:

- a. Magnet – attracts powerfully, repels powerfully
 - Ie/ as a kid, I thought reverse polarity would be a great way to power
- b. We don't live in a time and place that welcomes the Gospel nor the Bible Our message and conviction is contrary to the worldview today
- c. **Hot Button Issues Are Polarizing**
 - Which are all Genesis 1-9 issues
 - Abortion (life is sacred – Gen 1)
 - Gender (male & female – Gen 1-2)
 - Sexuality (Gen 1-2)
 - Marriage (Gen 1-2)
 - Justice (Gen 4)
 - Politics (Gen 9)



Suggestions:

- Don't scold
 - Don't gloat
 - Teach truth
 - Be compassionate
 - Focus on the Gospel
- d. "Loyalty to Jesus Christ entails a polarization from which no true believer can escape. All the world is polarized through loyalty to either good or evil. There are two who lay claim to the souls of men—God and Satan. Every man has a captain of his soul—Christ or Satan." (L. Nelson Bell, "Polarization," Christianity Today, 1/1/71, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1971/january-1/layman-and-his-faith-polarization.html>)
 - e. **Matthew 10:34-39** ³⁴ "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶ And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. ³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

1. The Gospel Evokes Extremely Polarizing Responses (12-16)

¹²Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. ¹³None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴And more than ever believers were added to the Lord,

multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

- Following the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira, the purified church grew significantly
- The church grew dynamically from the 1st to the 5th
- The missionary impact of the Gospel was huge!
- I learned from a Church History lecture (Godfrey, Ligonier) that the church remained the same size from the 5th to 15th century (though the numbers were the same, the location of believers moved more West)

- V. 12 In the early days, before the Scriptures were complete, "signs and wonders were regularly done" by the apostles. They were not common occurrences in the church, but brought apostolic authenticity. The signs and wonders authenticated the preaching and teaching of the apostles
 - Solomon's Portico is where Peter preached his 2nd sermon

- V. 13 "none of the rest"
 - Who are they?
 - Believers who weren't the apostles, didn't lead in ministry, but respected the Apostles
 - Or, Unbelievers, who didn't join the church but respected the Apostles
 - Either way, **the Gospel caused a great polarizing reaction** – many followed with great intensity and the others stayed away, though respecting the believers

- Ie/ Magnets attract, but they also repel

- V. 14 more than ever believers were added to the Lord
 - Men and women responded tremendously

- V. 15 – the excitement was evidenced as the sick came out even to catch Peter's shadow
 - Was this just superstitious hope? Probably.
 - A woman was healed touching Jesus' garment (Mt 9:20-22)
 - Could God work through a shadow, why not?

- V. 16 – they were all healed – Christ is greater than the superstitions of the sick seeking Peter's shadow
 - A fact about biblical healing is that it is indiscriminate about what is healed and totally effective, in that all are healed

2. The Gospel Elicits Jealous Rivalry (17-18)

¹⁷But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with **jealousy** ¹⁸they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.

- All 12 apostles are arrested
- The Sadducees were concerned about the **growth** of this new Christianity
 - Jews were converting to Christianity at an enormous rate

- The **authority** of the Sadducees was also risk
- All these reasons that brought the High Priest and the Sadducees to jealousy – **power** and **popularity**
- **Christ** accomplished what **man** cannot
 - Jesus' death on the cross accomplished a salvation that religion could not come close to
 - That's why the religious were jealous
- **Grace** accomplished what the **law** cannot – that's why the political leaders were jealous
- **Truth** from God accomplished what **philosophy** cannot – that's why philosophers antagonize the Gospel
- Ie/ My dad was jealous of the Gospel – when Mitch and I got saved and mom went back to church, we'd come home from church with dad drunk and angry
- Eg/ You may have unsaved family members jealous of your commitment to Christ or your zeal for the church
- Eg/ You might have friends who don't like that you go to youth group on Friday night instead of hanging out

3. The Gospel Is Uniquely The Message For Salvation (19-21a)

¹⁹But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰“Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all **the words of this Life.**” ^{21a}And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

- An angel released the 12 apostles, who would be rearrested later
 - 20x in Acts, angels are mentioned
- V. 20 – the angel instructs the apostles to “speak to the people all the words of this Life”
 - Life = Gr. *Zoa*
 - This *eternal* life through Christ (Jn 6:67-68 NIV – Peter said “Lord ... You have the words of eternal life”)
 - This *new* life in Christ
 - “salvation blessings” (Larkin, p. 91)
 - “this new way of life” (Couch, p. 237)
- V. 21 – they entered the temple and taught
 - The apostles disobeyed the Sanhedrin in order to obey the Messenger from God
- Eg/ There are aisles and aisles of self-help books talking about how to improve our lives
 - I'm not saying self-help books aren't helpful, but they're band-aids
 - They help cover external wounds for a temporary period of time
 - The Gospel heals the root of our problems – sin
 - The Gospel heals permanently – for eternity
 - The Gospel changes us from the inside out by the Holy Spirit resuscitating, revitalizing and transforming our heart and mind
- But there are plenty of critics who will critique the Gospel of Christ
 - Other religions, other philosophies, other priorities (business, money, beauty, entertainment, success)

- But we know the Gospel contains “the words of this life”!!

4. The Gospel May Be Deemed Illegal (21b-28)

^{21b} Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²² But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ²³ “We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.” ²⁴ Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. ²⁵ And someone came and told them, “Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” ²⁶ Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. ²⁷ And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸ 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.”

- V. 21b – high priest, council and senate convened but the apostles weren’t in the prison
 - High Priest – presided over the Sanhedrin
 - Council – everyone in authority
 - Senate – Sanhedrin (*Gerousia* describes the dignity ascribed to them)
 - Officers – temple guard, police
 - **Greater humiliation**
- V. 23 the prison was locked and guarded, but they were not inside
- V. 24 captain of the temple was perplexed
- V. 25 – they’re in the temple teaching
- V. 28 – charged to not teach Christ, yet the Apostles continued to teach
- They were feeling guilty about Christ’s death (blood upon us) – the Sanhedrin were blamed for Jesus’ death so they were defensive and sensitive

Acts 4:18-20 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.”

- There are several nations that have outlawed the Gospel of Christ
- In mission jargon, we call those nations “Creative Access” countries – because we have to enter the country creatively and avoid the terms “missionary,” “Christian” and “Church”
- But we are mandated to bring the Gospel to the whole world – even creative access countries

5. The Gospel Is Greater Than The Laws That Silence It (29-32)

²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, “**We must obey God rather than men.** ³⁰ The God of our fathers **raised** Jesus, whom you **killed** by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God **exalted** him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give **repentance** to Israel and **forgiveness** of sins. ³² 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 NT foundation for civil disobedience**

- **We are to obey the government until they ask us to do something against the law of God**

Romans 13:1-2 ¹ 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. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

- **The Constitution does not give us rights. It protects our rights.**
- Our rights are given to us by God
 - We hold these truths to be self-evident that men are created equal
 - Unalienable rights – can be changed
- Government is instituted to protect the rights given by God
- “every soul” = every person is subject to this responsibility
- “authorities” = *exousia*
 - *ex* = “from” or “out of”
 - *ousia* = “to be”, “substance”
 - Gr. philosophers sought to understand *ousia* or “being” = ultimate stuff universe is made from
 - same word is used to describe Jesus’ preaching as having authority
 - substance in Christ’s preaching
 - God established 7 institutes of authority over man:
 - 1) God over man
 - 2) Government over citizens
 - 3) Church over believers
 - 4) Parents over children
 - 5) Husband over wife
 - 6) Employers over employees (or teacher over student)
 - 7) Man over nature
- ie/ Paul & Peter wrote during the times of the Roman Emperor Nero
 - Nero started off as a good governor and a nice guy
 - but after his mother’s death in 60AD, there was a definite change in Nero’s behavior and government
 - he became immoral, greedy and impulsive – bringing the Roman Empire to bankruptcy
 - on July 19, 64 AD, Rome burned
 - the people wanted an answer, at least a scapegoat
 - fingers started to point towards Nero, but he instead blamed the Christians
 - ie/ Tacitus describes: “Wherefore in order to allay the rumor he [Nero] put forward as guilty, and afflicted with the most exquisite punishments those who were hated for their abomination and called “Christians” by the populace....Therefore first of all those who confessed [to being Christians] were arrested, and then as a result of their information a large number were implicated....They died by methods of

mockery; some were covered with the skins of wild beasts and then torn by dogs, some were crucified, some were burned as torches to give light at night....men felt that their destruction was not on account of the public welfare but to gratify the cruelty of one [Nero]." (*Annals*, 15:44)

- ie/ Political issues in Paul's day
 - 1) Slavery – 2/3rds of population were slaves
 - 2) High taxes – you think our taxation system is bad, theirs was worse
 - 3) Religious persecution – Jews & Christians had no voice in government and were unfairly persecuted by the Empire
 - 4) Emperor worship – Roman emperor would force Christians to recant their worship of God and worship Caesar

- this is what is going on as Paul writes Romans 13 to the Roman Church where Nero presides
- despite the evil of the day, Paul says to submit to the government authorities

- ***Submit To The Government:***

- "submit" = *hupotasso*
 - military term – "to line up under"
 - recognition of rank – place yourself under authorities

1 Peter 2:13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake

- ie/ anti-Rome movement called the **Zealots**
 - one of the 12 disciples was a former-Zealot (Simon)
 - they rebelled against Rome by not paying those inflated taxes
 - disregarded Roman law
 - armed themselves to assassinate Roman officials
 - employed guerilla tactics

 - though Paul & Peter would agree with the **motives** of the Zealots, they did object to the **tactics** of the Zealots
 - that's not how political change should be done

- **Civil Disobedience: When Man's Law Conflicts With God's Law, We Are To Obey God (Acts 5:29)**

1. Anarchism: Civil Disobedience Is Always Right

2. Radical Patriotism: Civil Disobedience Is Never Right

ie/ many in the Lutheran church used Romans 13:1-2 as the basis for supporting Hitler in his efforts against the Jews

3. Biblical Submissionism: Disobedience To Government Is Sometimes Right

ie/ Francis Schaeffer, *Christian Manifesto* – if there is never a case in which a Christian would practice civil disobedience, then the state has become Lord

- “One either confesses that God is the final authority, or one confesses that Caesar is Lord.

ie/ The Declaration Of Independence – “That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government.”

- **Biblical Incidences Of Civil Disobedience**

1. Hebrew midwives refused to kill innocent babies (Ex 1-2)
2. Rahab hid spies from Jericho’s authorities (Josh 2)
3. Obadiah hid prophets from the murderous Jezebel (1 Kings 18)
4. Esther broke the kings decree to save her people (Esth 4)

Esther 4:16 “So I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.”

5. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to worship the golden image (Dan 3)
- paid punishment – went to fiery furnace
6. Daniel refused to pray to King Darius (Dan 6)
- paid punishment – sent to lions den
7. Peter & John resisted the government’s order to stop preaching the Gospel (Acts 4-5)

Acts 4:19-20 “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

Acts 5:29 “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

8. Tribulation saints will stand against the Beast (Revelation 13)

- **A biblical theme verse for the fight for the life of the unborn**

Proverbs 24:11-12 “Rescue those being led away to death. Hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, but we knew nothing about this, does not He who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not He who guards your life know it?”

6. The Gospel May Bring Persecution (33)

³³When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.

Matthew 10:16 "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

○ **The Believers Are Delivered Sheep**

- Sheep are defenseless
- Sheep do not have natural protection against wolves
- Some have horns, but those little protrusions won't work against a bigger and quicker wolf
- Most sheep are slow, clumsy, off-balance, and dumb
- Sheep are followers and need the protection of their more powerful and wiser Shepherd who ever keeps a watch out over His flock

- Yet "**sent**" (Gr. *apostello*) as apostles to be sheeplike ambassadors

○ **The Unbelievers Are Ravenous Wolves**

▪ **Crafty**

ie/ Wiley Coyote (when not after Road Runner) vs Sam the Sheepdog

- Wolves in sheep's clothing

ie/ China - send spies to pretend to be believers or students - but really informants

ie/ don't think that unbelievers will try to attack the church through infiltration - they already have

▪ **Strong**

- The media is a powerful tool in the hand of Satan
- Billions of dollars against us in the media & government
- The world, through politics, media and education, is stacking the deck against the Christian
- not Buddhist, Hindus, Muslims or Mormons - but Christians

Q: How do you see the world attacking Christians?

- **Ruthless** – no mercy
- **Hungry** – not content with letting things alone with toleration

- The church faces great opposition today

Ie/ The Early Church

Early Instances Of Persecution (later entries are according to tradition)

- Saul of Tarsus led the Jewish persecution of Christians
- The Sanhedrin stoned Stephen to death
- Herod Agrippa I persecutes the Apostles
- James - Killed with a sword. 45 A.D.
- Emperor Nero begins the Roman persecution of the church in A.D. 64

- Peter - Hung on a cross "head downward." A.D. 64
- Andrew - Hung from an olive tree. A.D. 70
- Thomas - Burned alive. A.D. 70
- Phillip - Crucified. A.D. 54
- Matthew - Beheaded. A.D. 65
- Nathanael - Crucified. A.D. 70
- James - Thrown from the temple. A.D. 63
- Simon - Crucified. A.D. 74
- Judas Thaddeus - Beaten with sticks. A.D. 72
- Matthias - Stoned on a cross. A.D. 70
- John - Natural death. A.D. 95
- Paul - Beheaded. A.D. 69

The Roman Reason For Persecution

Christians Were:

1. **Atheists** – because they didn't worship the Roman Emperor as god
2. **Cannibals** – because they partook in Communion where they would eat their Lord
3. **Incestuous** – because they would hug their "brothers" and "sisters in Christ"
4. **Jinxes** – because they would not worship one of the many Roman gods, the Roman people were punished for the Christian's refusal to worship their god



- Ie. The Romans would believe that the Christian's failure to worship the rain god would make the god cease the rain, thus the harvest

- Witness = Gr. *Martyria*
- Martyrdom in the 1st century was sporadic
- Emperor Nero initiated persecution of Christians because they refused to bow before the emperor as God
- Nero, who was blamed for a massive fire in Rome, would use Christians as a distraction and scapegoat of his leadership failure
- Rome was more angry about the attitude of Christians towards Rome though they had little effect on government policy
- It was usually church leadership, property or the Scriptures that were the object of the imperial decrees
- The persecution usually involved beheading, burning or attacking by beast
 - The Christian would be wrapped in animal skin, doused with animal blood and fed to hungry animals
 - Sometimes the martyr would be doused with fuel and burnt as a torch to light the night sky
 - Tacitus: "A vast multitude [of Christians], were convicted, not so much of the crime of arson as of hatred of the human race. And in their deaths they were made the subjects of sport: for they were wrapped in the hides of wild beasts and torn to pieces by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set on fire, and when day declined, were burned to serve for nocturnal lights." (*Annals*, XV.44)

- this was a frightening prediction Jesus gave
- in 2nd & 3rd century where the Roman government tried to eliminate Christianity, family would turn in others for prosecution
- Even today ...
 - ie/ Asian cultures would expel family members who bring shame on the family
 - ie/ some traditional Jews would not only disinherit their child who becomes a Christian, but also throw a funeral for them
 - When we were in Tajikistan, believers who were baptized would be prepared to live with church members because their Muslim families would kick them out of the family or physically hurt them

7. The Gospel Messengers Are Protected While Attackers Are Warned Of Punishment (34-39a)

³⁴But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. ³⁵And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. ³⁶For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. ³⁷After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. ³⁸So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ^{39a}but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!"

- V. 34 – **Gamaliel**
 - Teacher of the law, highly esteemed
 - Name means "reward of God"
 - Grandson of a Hillel doctor
 - Hillel is the liberal school of the Pharisees (vs. more conservative Shammai school)
 - Taught the Apostle Paul when he was a Jewish lawyer (Acts 22:3)
 - Couch: "*The Mishnah* says of him 'Since Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died there has been no more reverence for the Law, and purity and abstinence died out at the same time' (Sota 9.15)." (*A Bible Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles*, Kregel, 1999, p. 240)
- v. 35 – Israel, be careful – historical precedent
- v. 36 – **Theudas**
 - Theudas means "false teacher"
 - He was a rebel who claimed to be a king, though he was the slave of Herod
 - He real name was Simon
 - Josephus (an ancient Roman historian) describe Theudas as a magician who's tricks brought him a following; he claimed to be a prophet
 - Josephus describes how Fadus, the procurator of Judea, sent troops against Theudas and his followers, killing many, imprisoning many. Theudas was taken alive then beheaded.
- V. 37 – **Judas the Galilean**
 - Josephus describes Judas as a rebel around A.D. 6 (a few years after Christ was born)

- During the census, a Roman tax is collected and Judas led a violent attack against the Roman government
- Judas was arrested and crucified
- **Gamaliel was likening Christianity to the failed revolutions of Theudas and Judas the Galilean**
- Leave the Christians alone – they’ll flame out
- But if the Christians are of God – don’t get in the way – we will be opposing God
- *³⁸ So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ^{39a} but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!*
- Don’t oppose God!

8. The Gospel Is Free To Receive But Costly To Share (39b-42)

^{39b} So they took his advice, ⁴⁰ and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. ⁴² And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

- The Sanhedrin followed Gamaliel’s advice by not arresting them
- But they did beat the Apostles physically
- And commanded them to not speak about Jesus
- The Apostles counted it an honor to suffer dishonor in the name of Christ
- Ie/ When I was in China, I talked to a pastor who was imprisoned for his faith how we in America are praying for pastors and Christians who are persecuted for their faith. He said he prays for us in America who are not persecuted because we don’t know the honor and the price it is to suffer on behalf of the Gospel.

Conclusion:

- Like a magnet, the Gospel that attracts also repels. Prepare for both realities.
- The call to proclaim the Gospel from God is greater than any man-made law forbidding it. Be ready to pay the price.
- Reflect the love, grace and mercy of the Gospel. May the Gospel only be offensive because ...
 - divine truth is greater than man’s constructed views
 - exclusivity of God’s absolute truth is greater than opposing or relative truth
 - and that transformation from the Gospel is greater than religious works.

Discussion:

- Share an experience when someone hated your faith or you sharing your faith. What did this person dislike about the Gospel?
- How should we prepare to pay the price for proclaiming the Gospel in a location and age that is antagonistic to it?
- How do we make sure that people are offended only by the Gospel and not by our offensive behavior or personality?