

Acts 5:27

27 When they had brought them (that is Peter and the apostles), they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.

Our study this morning follows Luke's account of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira after they conspired to deceive the church. If you could put yourself into that 1st century church, you would have witnessed some incredible and even unique events that brought great joy and fear to the lives of the believers.

Most of us do not know what it feels like to live in fear for our lives because of our faith in Jesus Christ. Most of us do not know how we would react if our faith were to be tested under extreme circumstances. But the 1st century church faced very real persecution every single day of their lives.

Paul wrote in Romans 8:36

36 Just as it is written, "For your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In verse 36 Paul pictures sheep being led to slaughter and what are they doing? They are singing, "We overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us!" What an amazing spectacle, but that is precisely the scene that God wants us to see.

It is also the scene that we find in our study today. Let's begin in Acts 5 verse 12.

12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.

Most of you have heard the term “Spiritual Gifts.” What are spiritual gifts?

In 1 Cor chapters 12-14, Paul talks about many different gifts that the Holy Spirit supernaturally bestows upon believers at the time of salvation. We are not going to take the time to study the individual spiritual gifts this morning, so you will have to trust me that the Bible teaches that every believer gets at least one gift when he or she is saved and Paul encourages each believer to use their gift liberally for the purpose of building the body of Christ.

This chart shown on the screen lists the gifts that are specifically mentioned in 1 Cor. The categories are not scriptural but are there to help us to understand in broad context the type of gifts that are taught in the Bible.

The first category is the speaking gifts. They comprise the gifts of Missionary, Prophecy, Evangelism, Pastoring, Teaching, Exhorting, Wisdom and Knowledge.

The second category is the serving gifts. They comprise the gifts of Administration, Hospitality, Giving, Ruling, Mercy, Faith and Discernment.

The third category is the signifying gifts. They comprise the gifts of Miracles, Healing, Tongues and Interpretation.

There is universal agreement in the evangelical world that the speaking gifts and the serving gifts are evident and active in our churches today and that the Holy Spirit still gives every believer at least one of those gifts at the moment of his or her salvation to be used to build up the body of Christ.

However, the third category, the sign gifts, has caused the evangelical church to split doctrinally all over the place. The simple

question is, “Do the sign gifts exist today or were they only for the 1st century church?”

If you believe the sign gifts are for today, then we would have to believe that there are those who supernaturally have the spiritual gift to heal others at will.

If you believe the sign gifts are for today, then you would have to believe that there are those who supernaturally have the spiritual gift to cause miracles to occur at will.

And, if you believe the sign gifts are for today, then you would have to believe that there are those who supernaturally have the spiritual gift to speak in other known languages and serve as an interpreter of a language that someone did not speak at will.

You may ask, “John, where do you get the ‘at will’ stuff?” Look again at Acts 5:12.

12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. 13 But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. 14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, 15 to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. 16 Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were ALL being healed.

Notice the word in verse 16. How many of the people needing healing were actually healed?

Notice that in this passage Luke tells us that the Spirit filled church was unified, constantly magnifying the name of Jesus Christ and continuing to multiplying.

Notice also that God gave the apostles this supernatural power of healing and being able to cause a miracle to occur. In v 12 is clear

that these gifts were not given to just anyone. While it is true that we will see that there were some ordinary people who would possess some of these sign gifts in the book of Acts, primarily, the scriptures speak specifically about the Apostles who were given these gifts.

What was the purpose of the sign gifts?

Paul tells us in Romans and in 2 Cor that the purpose of the signs and wonders were God's way of authenticating the ministry of the Apostles.

Throughout the Bible, at the beginning of each new major period of God's timeline we see "signs and wonders."

When God gave the Law, Moses performed great signs and wonders. When God began to speak through the prophets, Elijah and Elisha were miracle workers. Then there was a period of silence. And then, a star appeared in the East and moved across the sky and in the city of David, a baby was born who was Jesus Christ. So the Law, the Prophets, the birth of Christ and now the Church each were ushered in by signs and wonders.

Each time God opened a new door, He called man's attention to it using these supernatural methods. Why do you think he would use this technique?

Keep you finger in Acts 5 and turn over to 1 Cor 13. We know 1 Cor 13 as the love chapter but what you may not know is that it contains one of the most controversial passages in all of the scriptures.

Look at 1 Cor 13: 8

8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part; 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

The KJV reads like this.

8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part shall pass away.

The problem word is the word "THAT." In verse 10, it says but when THAT which is perfect has come, then THAT which is in part shall pass away.

So what is Paul referring to? What is perfect?

Primarily it can either mean only a few things. Either it means the second coming of Jesus, the death of a believer when all things are clear or the Bible.

I am not a Greek person. There are those who are. Here it is in Greek.

1 Cor 13:8-10

8 Hee agápee oudé pote píptei eíte dé profeeteíai katargeetheésontai eíte gloóssai paúsontai eíte gnoósis katargeetheésetai

9 Ek mérour gár ginoóskomen kaí ek mérour profeeteúomen

10 hótan dé élthee tó téleion tó ek mérour katargeetheésetai

Does that help anyone?

I am told, the word which is translated "THAT" doesn't really exist in the Greek but that the context of the verse can only mean a thing not a person. And the only perfect thing that has come is the Bible.

If we read it as if it were the Bible the passage would read as follows:

8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. 9 For we know in part and we

prophecy in part. 10 But when that (thing – the Bible) which is perfect has come, then that which is in part (the sign gifts) shall pass away.

Therefore, it was accepted by the church up through the end of the 19th century that the sign gifts were not for the modern church. Then a group of believers began to study Joel 2:28-29 which says.

28 It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

And people said, God used the sign gifts at the beginning of each new period and we believe that we are in the last days which might be a new period. And the birth of the charismatic movement began.

Certainly God is not limited and certainly He can perform miracles today. The question is, "Does he give the gift to people today who can do what the apostles did in Acts 5?" They were able to heal ALL the people who needed healing.

What do you think?

These sign gifts were so compelling that it caused the religious folks to be stirred up. Look at verse 17.

17 But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy. 18 They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 20 "Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life."

Satan must have been really frustrated. Couldn't you just picture how upset Satan must have been trying to get these guys to stop talking about Jesus? The High Priest and the Sadducees were filled with rage and throws them in jail and an angel comes along and lets them out.

This verse reminds me of what Paul wrote in Eph 6:12,

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

The angel tells them to go out and speak to the people in the temple about Christ.

Verse 21.

21 Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach.

They had no questions, they simply obeyed. The verse continues.

Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought. 22 But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back, 23 saying, "We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside." 24 Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this. 25 But someone came and reported to them, "The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" 26 Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned).

Why no violence?

Let's finish the story. Would someone read from verse 27 through verse 39?

27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey

God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31 "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32 "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."

33 But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them. 34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. 35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. 36 "For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 "After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. 38 "So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God."

Gamaliel was a respected rabbi and teacher of the law. He was the same man who taught Paul. His advice is very good and notice what the council does in verse 40.

40 They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. 41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

What do you learn from this story?

I see two very important points.

1. These believers had to fight man's law and man's will in order to survive and grow. But they knew what they believed and God's command was higher than man's law. When we are faced with situations where God's law conflicts with man's law we must do something. Give me some examples where that is happening right now.
2. Do you believe that the Bible is perfect? Or is it just another book? It is an important question that only you can answer for yourself. The answer will change the way you live your life and your entire world view. Take a few minutes this week to discuss that with someone else. If it is perfect, then not one of us would be worried about what we should be doing because we would KNOW that God is in control and that He will protect us just as He did in the 1st century.