

Acts 4:10

10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 "He is the **STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED** by you, **THE BUILDERS**, but **WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER** stone. 12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

A recent Harris poll revealed the following information about Americans:

	Believe In	Don't Believe In	Not Sure
	%	%	%
God	82	8	10
Miracles	73	16	11
Survival of the soul after death	70	12	18
Heaven	70	15	15
Jesus is God or the Son of God	70	15	15
Angels	68	17	15
The resurrection of Christ	66	17	17
The devil	61	26	13
Hell	59	25	16
The Virgin birth (Jesus born of Mary)	58	24	18
Ghosts	40	39	22

UFOs	34	41	25
Witches	28	56	16
Astrology	25	57	19
Reincarnation – that you were once another person	21	54	25

http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/printerfriend/index.asp?PID=618

Does anything surprise you or especially stand out on that chart?

What surprises me is if 80% of Americans believe in God and 66% believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, then why is our country in such a state of moral decay?

Think about some of the issues that are being discussed nearly every day in either the workplace or on our TVs. They include:

- What is the definition of a marriage?
- Should homosexuality be considered a normal lifestyle?
- How much cursing should be permitted during a primetime TV program?
- Is watching pedophiles being caught in the act entertainment?

The Bible says in 1 John:

1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God...

So if these statistics are true, why is our country in such moral decay?

Perhaps one of the reasons is that people are “Religious” but have no “Relationship” to Jesus Christ.

People often ask me, “Are you religious?” My standard answer is, “No. I’m a Christian.” And then they give me the look.

What is the difference between being “religious” and being a “Christian?”

Last week we read the story of how God used Peter and John to bring healing to a man who was lame from birth. You will remember that after God healed the man, Peter used the opportunity to speak to the crowd that had gathered and shared the good news of Jesus Christ.

It sounds strange, but today we’ll see that one of the greatest adversaries of Christianity is the religious community. This morning our study takes us right into the heart of the differences between religion and Christianity. Let’s pick up the story again in verse 1 of chapter 4.

Acts 4:1-26

1 As they were speaking (that is Peter and John) to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, 2 being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

Notice the opposition. The priests, the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees. Who were these people?

The news of the healing must have caused a frenzied atmosphere. Most people would have never experienced this type of excitement in their lifetime. We can only imagine what must have occurred to cause the temple guard to be called.

Verse 1 says that Peter and John were speaking and teaching the people about Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.

The Sadducees were the wealthy aristocratic class of Jews. They were few in numbers but they would do almost anything to keep on good relations with the Romans in order to protect their wealth. As aristocrats, they controlled the purse strings. Religiously they

rejected angels, demons and life after death. All they believed in was the here and now and their money.

They were so disturbed by what Peter and John were saying, look what happens in verse 3.

3 And they (the Sadducees) laid hands on them (Peter and John) and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

So Peter and John went to jail and probably went to sleep but Luke points out that 5000 men came to know Christ through the healing of the lame man and the Holy Spirit working through the preaching of the apostles.

The next morning arrived and an inquisition was about to begin. Look at verse 5.

5 On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem;

I take it that this was the Jewish supreme court of seventy men known as the Sanhedrin. It seems to me that a court of 70 men was a bit heavy to try a couple of uneducated street preachers.

Why do you think the Jewish leaders took the drastic step of convening this court?

Religion finds security in numbers and in rank and in protocol and status. In order to recruit a suicide bomber, do you know what the Muslims promise their willing followers?

They promise them that when they get to heaven, after they blow themselves up, that 72 virgins will be waiting for them to offer them sexual favors. And for that, they are willing to sacrifice themselves and destroy many other innocent lives in the name of their "religion."

Notice the cast of characters that Luke says attended the trial of Peter and John. Verse 6.

6 Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent.

Do any of these names sound familiar?

These were the same men who only weeks earlier accused Jesus of blasphemy and then treason in front of the Roman court. These same men wanted to stop the spread of Christianity? Why?

Religion is about man placing structure, legalistic bondage on others in order to gain power and control. But Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free." Christianity enables, it does not control. We have freedom in Christ not a set of rules set up by men.

The trial is very interesting. Look at verse 7.

7 When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"

It was a mistake to give Peter the opportunity to speak because notice what the beginning of verse 8 says, "8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them..."

Let me pause here to make an important point. Please notice the Bible is clear to point out that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. Why do you think it was necessary for Luke to point that out?

There are several times along the way in the book of Acts that Luke will specifically say that one of the people who is about to do something in a difficult situation was "filled with the Holy Spirit." No where in the scripture does an author say, Paul, saved... or John, baptized. Being saved or being baptized were one time events but I believe that Luke points out here and in other places that someone was "filled with the Holy Spirit" because this is not a one time event. If it were, it would make absolutely no sense to point it out.

Now we debated this in our second class and I don't want to get into a long discussion again but I would ask you to look at this carefully on your own.

Notice Peter's answer in verse 8.

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by this name this man stands here before you in good health.

Notice in verse 10 that Peter tells the 70 judges that they were responsible for crucifying Jesus and that God raised him from the dead. Who did Peter put on trial here?

By what power did Peter address this group?

What is the power source of Religious people?

Notice in verse 9 that Peter told the court that they didn't heal the lame man. So how did it happen?

When a sick person is healed today, how do Religious people explain the situation?

Notice Peter goes on with his trial of the judges. Look at verse 11.

11 "He is the **STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED** by you, **THE BUILDERS**, but **WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER** stone.

Have you ever heard someone say that a person is as solid as a rock? What do they mean when they say that?

A building sits on a foundation. In Jesus' day and today, the corner stone of the foundation determines whether the building will sit straight and sit square. What happens to a building that is not square or not straight?

The Empire State Building in NYC is built on a foundation that is 5 stories below the ground sitting on solid bedrock. The architect required that specification because the building has to be able to sway 18 inches in any direction at any time and not tumble. The cornerstone of the Empire State Building needed to be firm.

Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith and God is the foundation. Jesus is the Rock that does not roll.

Peter explains this plainly in verse 12.

12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

How do Religious people believe they are saved?

Peter says that there is salvation in the name of Jesus Christ. What a wonderful verse of scripture.

Notice the response of the judges. Verse 13.

13 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. 14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.

The court of priests looked on these men and couldn't deny what had happened and they had just heard a simple yet powerful response from the apostles.

So look what they do. Verse 15.

15 But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another, 16 saying, "What shall we 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.

We live in Washington DC and here everything can be spun. I'm sure there were those who might have tried to spin a story so that they could have put Peter and John to death? What spin do you think they might have tried if they really wanted to be creative?

How do you think the crowd would have reacted to that spin from the court had they tried it?

But all they do was to give them a warning. Look at verse 17.

17 "But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name." 18 And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Can you picture this scene? Do you think Peter and John were the least bit intimidated by this court? Why not?

Notice the response. Verse 19.

19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, " Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; 20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." 21 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; 22 for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

When Religion clashes with Christianity, we need to be bold.

Romans 1:16 says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

The longer we live on earth, the more Christianity will clash with Religion and the more bold we need to be. Our prayer should be that like Peter and John, when our trial comes, that we would be filled with the Holy Spirit and be bold enough to speak out for the gospel.