

Witnessing to the Truth

Key Verse: “*Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.*”
—Acts 5:29

Selected Scripture:
Acts 5:27-42

IN OUR PREVIOUS LESSONS we found the Christian multitude praying with one heart for the Apostles. Their specific words as recorded in Acts 4:29,30 were, “Grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.” We also saw that the worldly resources of the brethren were donated in full in support of this witness work.

Their prayers for strength and power on behalf of the Apostles were immediately answered: “By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people.” (chap. 5:12) The account continues by describing the effectiveness of their efforts. Great numbers of sick were brought to the apostles at the Temple from both Jerusalem as well as from surrounding cities. As a result, “believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.”—vss. 14-16

The high priest and those of the Sadducees did not rejoice, as did the people, with the effectiveness of the apostles’ preaching and healing. Instead, they were filled with indignation and had the apostles thrown into prison. (vss. 17,18) However, just as the witness work had been

at first boosted by the prayers and resources of the Christian multitude, God now intervened directly through his angels. “The angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.” (vss. 19,20) Here was another miraculous manifestation by God giving further proof that the Gospel message of Christ would not be hindered by any human opposition.

When the officers found the prison empty the next morning and the apostles preaching in the Temple, they were ordered to bring them before the council. They were again threatened with punishment if they failed to heed the authority of the Jewish authorities. (vss. 21-28) The apostles’ response is recorded in our Key Verse. Similar threats have been made to many of God’s people throughout the Gospel Age. It has been the privilege of these witnesses of Jesus to declare also: “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

In the debate following the apostles’ declaration to follow God rather than the council of men, a Pharisee of high reputation named Gamaliel stood up and gave testimony of others who had challenged the council’s authority in the past. He said, “Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.” (vs. 35) He reminded them that others had similarly drawn followers, but their movements had quickly come and gone. Gamaliel then concluded with these wise words of advice: “Now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”—vss. 38,39

The record of Gamaliel’s words of caution to the council reminds us of similar situations today, in which people are willing to let our witnessing to the Gospel stand on its own merit. Let us take advantage of such reasonable voices in the midst of most who would oppose our efforts.■