

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 16

I. Exposition of Chapter Four (Continued).

A. The Jewish leader's reaction to Peter's sermon.

1. Verse 13 – **“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.”**

a. **“...they saw the boldness...”** – The word **“boldness”** means, **“a state of boldness and confidence, sometimes implying intimidating circumstances”**¹ Thayer's Lexicon adds; **“freedom in speaking; free and fearless confidence, and cheerful courage.”**² This is another theme prominent in Acts (2:29; 4:13, 29, 31; 28:31)

“Peter and John were now facing the very thing that had led the disciples to flee on the Mount of Olives, the threat of arrest and imprisonment. The difference is that they were now filled with the Spirit, and that gave them a ‘boldness’ or ‘courage’ (*parrēsia*, three times in vv. 13, 29, 31) they hadn't possessed before. This is the polar opposite of the disciples at Jesus' arrest and what followed, when they deserted Jesus entirely out of fear of arrest. This complete turnaround in so short a time “astonished” these officials, probably implying conviction via the Spirit.”³

b. **“...they perceived they were uneducated and untrained men...”** – The idea of **“uneducated”** simply means they hadn't attended the rabbinical schools. This doesn't mean they didn't have any education at all. As Horton points out, **“They had gone to the synagogue schools in their hometowns, but they were not professional teachers or trained speakers...”**⁴ The word **“untrained”** has the idea here of **“ordinary”** or **“common”** men. **“It came to be used of an outsider vs. a member of a group.”**⁵ This, it seems, gave the religious leaders the excuse they needed to reject what the apostles were preaching.

c. **“...they realized that they had been with Jesus.”** – The idea in the Greek is that it gradually occurred to these leaders that Peter and John had been with Jesus. They reminded them of Jesus!

“The Jewish leaders must have been shocked, for they had believed they would be rid of Jesus by crucifying Him. Jesus had spoken with authority; and now His disciples, trained by Him, spoke with that same authority. Jesus had done miracles as signs; now His disciples were doing the same. Their use of the name of Jesus was not just repeating a formula.”⁶

d. It's worth noting here that the Sanhedrin didn't take any opportunity to disprove the resurrection of Jesus. Why? Because they couldn't! If they were able to, they would have which would have stopped this new movement.

2. Verse 14 – **“And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.”** - Here we see that the man who was healed is actually standing there with the apostles. This had to be somewhat of an awkward situation for the Sanhedrin! Possibly even embarrassing! As has been mentioned before, everyone knew this lame man. He had, no doubt, sat begging alms for years.

3. Verses 15-16 – **“But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, ‘What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.’”**

a. These men were in a quandary as to what to do with Peter and John. They were in a corner – on the one hand, there was a notable miracle which could not be denied and on the other hand, this miracle was evident to all who dwelt in Jerusalem.

1) Verse 15 - **“...they conferred among themselves...”** – The word **“conferred”** means, **“to confer, implying a series of proposals”**⁷ This could have been a lengthy debate.

a) Some may wonder how it was known what was said amongst them. The most

¹Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 306.

²Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House., 1977)

³Grant R. Osborne, *Acts: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 85.

⁴Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 105.

⁵Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 69.

⁶Horton, 106.

⁷Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 406.

reasonable answer is that later on one of the Sanhedrin accepted Christ and shared what the conversation was.

2) **Verse 16** - The words, “**notable miracle**” is translated by Stanley Horton as, “**an outstanding miracle**” and “**a known supernatural sign.**”⁸

“What should we do with these men?” they asked each other. ‘We can’t deny that they have performed a miraculous sign, and everybody in Jerusalem knows about it.’” – Acts 4:16 - NLT

4. **Verses 17-18** – **“But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name. So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.”**

a. **Verse 17** – The word “**spreads**” means; “**dispersion**” or “**distribute**”. They were concerned about the news of this healing spreading out further and the Gospel going forth. They may have imagined that if this message of the apostles wasn’t stopped, they could have more “**notable miracles**” which couldn’t be denied, threaten their Jewish religion and their positions.

b. **“...let us severely threaten them...”** – The threat of punishment of some kind. Most assuredly, imprisonment and possibly beatings and other types of bodily harm.

c. **“...they speak to no man in this name.”** – They seemed to acknowledge the authority found in the Name of Jesus and even seemed to fear it. Some scholars comment about the phrase “**this name**” being expressed in the form of a “**slur**” or in a “**contemptuous**” way.⁹

“The council did not seek for truth, but rather sought for some way to avoid the truth! Had they honestly considered the evidence and meekly listened to the message, they might have been saved, but their pride and hardness of heart stood in the way...Some people never learn! But their response is proof that miracles alone can never convict or convert the lost sinner. Only the Word of God can do that (see John 11:45–53; Acts 14:1–20).”¹⁰

5. **Verses 19-20 - Peter and John’s Response to the Threats.**

a. **Verse 19** – **“...Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge.”** – The obvious answer to this question is they must listen to God and obey Him before listening to and obeying man.

“There is no authority apart from God. When human authority rejects God’s authority, it becomes twisted and loses its right to demand compliance. From the beginning, God’s people have resisted any command that was against God’s will (for example, the Jewish midwives of Ex. 1; Moses’ parents in Heb. 11:23; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in Dan. 3.”¹¹

b. **Verse 20** – **“For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”** – They very directly stated that they could not heed the command of the Sanhedrin. They were compelled to speak by the Holy Spirit!

“They were not hearsay witnesses. They were firsthand witnesses (see 1 John 1:1, 3). As He had for Jeremiah, the Holy Spirit made the truth like a fire in their hearts and within their bones, so they could not stop (Jer. 20:9; cf. Amos 3:8). Because they were filled with the Spirit, they were fulfilling Jesus’ command to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). As Turner points out, ‘The Spirit is the God who cannot be gagged.’”¹²

6. **Verses 21-22 - Peter and John are Released.**

a. **Finding no way of punishing them, because of the people:** The Jewish leaders were completely unmoved by an obvious miracle from God, yet they would respond to public opinion. This proves they cared far more about man’s opinion than God’s opinion.

b. **They all glorified God for what had been done:** This whole situation started out looking pretty bad. Peter and John were on trial before the same court that sent Jesus to Pilate for crucifixion. Satan meant it all for great evil, but before it is all over, see what God did:

i. Two thousand more people come to believe on Jesus.

⁸Horton, 106.

⁹A.T. Robertson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. III, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 53.

¹⁰Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 417.

¹¹*Nelson Study Bible*, Earl D. Radmacher, gen.ed. (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1997), 1822.

¹²Horton, 108. (Quotes Max Turner, *Power From on High: The spirit in Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts*, 439.)

- ii. Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit again.
- iii. Peter gets to preach Jesus to the leaders of the Jews.
- iv. Hostile examiners confirm a miraculous healing.
- v. The enemies of Jesus are confused.
- vi. Peter and John are bolder for Jesus than ever before.
- vii. God is glorified.

C. The early church prays for boldness.

1. (Act_4:23-24) Introduction: They acknowledge their God.

- a. They **reported all that the chief priests and elders had said**: We can just picture Peter and John saying, “They let us tell them about Jesus! They realized we were like Jesus! They told us not to tell others about Jesus!”
- b. **They raised their voice**: They prayed *vocally*. It is certainly possible to pray silently in our minds, but we can focus our thoughts more effectively when we speak out our prayers.
 - i. It isn’t that they all prayed, speaking at the same time. One person prayed, and all agreed with that one, so that they were really praying with one voice (**voice** is in the singular).
 - ii. “With one accord they lift up their voice to God. This does not mean that they all prayed at once. That would have been confusion. Disorder in meetings, a number of people talking at the same time in a boisterous way with outward demonstrations, is an evidence that the Holy Spirit is not leading, for God is not a God of disorder.” (Gaebelein)
- c. **With one accord**: They prayed in *unity*. There was no strife or contention among them. There wasn’t one group saying, “we should pray for this” and another saying, “we should pray for that.” They had the same mind when they prayed.
- d. **Lord, You are God**: They begin by reminding themselves who they are praying to. They are praying to the Lord of all creation, the God of all power.
 - i. This word **Lord** is not the usual word for “Lord” in the New Testament; it is the Greek word *despotes*. It was a word used of a slave owner or ruler who has power that cannot be questioned. They prayed with power and confidence because they knew God was in control.
 - ii. When we pray, we often forget just who it is we are praying to, or worse yet, we pray to an imaginary God of our own ideas. The disciples had power in prayer because they knew *who they were praying to*.

2. (Act_4:25-28) They pray in light of the Scriptures.

- a. **By the mouth of Your servant David have said**: Peter, speaking for all the disciples (remember they were praying *with one accord*), recognized that words of the Old Testament (Psalms 2 to be exact) were really the words of God. God was speaking **by the mouth of [His] servant David**.
- b. Why did Peter quote Psalms 2 here? Because he and the other disciples understand what is happening to them by seeing what the Bible says about it. From Psalms 2, they understand that they should expect this sort of opposition and not be troubled because of it.
 - i. When we pray, we must see our circumstances in light of God’s Word. For example, when we are in conflict, perhaps we need to know *we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age*. (Eph_6:12)
 - ii. Seeing our circumstances in light of God’s Word also means seeing when there is a sin problem. Then, we should say with the Psalmist, *When I kept it all inside, my bones turned to powder, my words became daylong groans. The pressure never let up; all the juices of my life dried up*. (Psa_32:3-4, Peterson). Perhaps we are in the same place the Psalmist was, in sin and needing to confess and get right with God.
 - iii. We also use Scripture in prayer to pray the promises of God. When we need strength, we can pray according to Eph_3:16: *That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man*. God’s Word will speak to our situation!

c. Because they saw their circumstances in light of God's Word, they could recognize that the wrath of man never operated outside of the sphere of God's control; these enemies of Jesus could only **do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.**

i. This brings real peace, knowing that whatever comes my way has passed through God's hand first, and He will not allow even the most wicked acts of men to result in permanent damage.

3. (Act_4:29-30) They ask for more boldness, more power, and (essentially) more trouble!

a. **Grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word:** This request is consumed with God's cause and glory, not the comfort and advancement of the disciples. They ask for things that will lead to *more* confrontation, not less!

b. **By stretching out Your hand to heal:** They do not ask to do miracles themselves. They understand that Jesus heals by His hand, only He does it from heaven through His people.

i. It is a snare to long to be used to do miraculous things. It is often rooted in the pride that wants everyone to see just how greatly God can use *me*. I should be delighted in the power of God, not because He has used *me* to display it.

4. (Act_4:31) Their prayer is answered.

a. **The place where they were assembled together was shaken:** They were given an earthquake as a unique emblem of God's pleasure. We don't know the extent of the shaking; it may have been confined to the house itself.

i. This earthquake is recorded in Act_4:31. Someone pointed out that the significant 1994 Northridge earthquake happened Act_4:31 in the morning!

b. **They were all filled with the Holy Spirit:** They are filled with the Holy Spirit, *again*.

i. The idea that we are "Spirit filled" only at an experience known as the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" is wrong, though there may be a wonderful and first yielding to the Spirit's power. We must be continually filled with the Holy Spirit, and make our "immersion" in Him a constant experience.

c. They received the **boldness** they asked for. "The word *boldness* means lucid and daring statement. In the Greek the word is *parresia*, 'telling it all.'" (Ogilvie)

i. What we need to be doing is *telling it all*. When we try to "hide" some of God's work in our lives from others, we aren't walking in the boldness Jesus would have us walk in.

ii. Their **boldness** was a gift from God, received through prayer. It was not something that they tried to work up in themselves.

D. The sharing heart of the early church.

1. (Act_4:32) Their attitude towards each other and towards material possessions.

a. **Those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of things he possessed was his own:** Because of their unity, they regarded *people* more important than *things*.

b. **They had all things in common:** They recognized God's ownership of everything; it all belonged to God and His people.

c. **All things in common:** Was this an early form of communism? There is a contrast between communism and *koinonia*. "Communism says, 'What is yours is mine; I'll take it.' *Koinonia* says, 'What is mine is yours, I'll share it.'" (LaSor)

i. "The Greek here does not mean that everyone sold their property at once. Rather, from time to time this was done as the Lord brought needs to their attention." (Horton)

d. Some people think that this radical sharing of possessions among the early church was a mistake. They say it was based on the wrong idea that Jesus was returning immediately, and that it led to much poverty in the Jerusalem church later on.

2. (Act_4:33) The effective witness of the apostles.

a. **With great power:** This is both the result and the root of the attitude in the previous verse. Act_4:32 shows they were putting God first, people second, and material things a distant third.

b. **Gave witness to the resurrection:** Notice again the central place the resurrection of Jesus holds in the message of the first Christians. They preached a resurrected Jesus.

c. **Great grace was upon them all.** Grace is God's favor, His smile from heaven, and it **was upon them all**. God's favor was evident everywhere.

3. (Act_4:34-37) Examples of early giving.

a. **All who were possessors of lands or houses sold them:** This radical giving was absolutely necessary to meet the needs of this rapidly growing church. Remember, many of these Jerusalem Christians came as "refugees" from abroad, having responded to the gospel on Pentecost.

b. **All who were possessors of lands:** People didn't wait for someone else to give. When a need arose, they gave of their own possessions to help someone else.

i. Unfortunately, this generosity of the early Christians soon began to be abused, and Paul had to give strict instructions to the churches on who should be helped and how.

ii. Paul's directions are that the church must discern who the truly needy are (1Ti_5:3). If one can work to support himself, he is not truly needy and must provide for his own needs (2Th_3:10-12, 1Ti_5:8, 1Th_4:11). If family can support a needy person, the church should not support them (1Ti_5:3-4). Those who are supported by the church must make some return to the church body (1Ti_5:5; 1Ti_5:10). It is right for the church to examine moral conduct before giving support (1Ti_5:9-13). And the support of the church should be for the most basic necessities of living (1Ti_6:8).

b. **Joses, who was also named Barnabas:** One man named **Barnabas** was a notable example of this giving spirit.