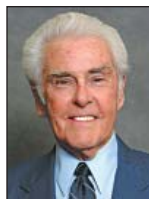


When opposition strikes

This session comes right after the six-week study from the Book of Daniel, which dealt largely with how to respond to opposition from Daniel's



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life and ministry. In particular, lesson 3 of that series calls us to be ready and willing to stand for God, and lesson 6 emphasizes that God is greater than those who oppose us. Our lesson today looks at opposition from a New Testament perspective and emphasizes the need for prayer in facing opposition.

The disciples faced opposition from religious, political and legal sources (Acts 4:1-22). Peter and John created this opposition by “teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead” for those who trust him as Savior. They were arrested and put in jail until the next day when they could be examined by the Jewish leadership. They were asked, “By what power or what name do you do this?” Peter told them that the healing of the crippled man was performed “by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you completely healed.”

When the council saw the courage of Peter and John, they told them to stop teaching in Jesus' name and then let them go because they were afraid of negative reactions from the crowd that had seen what happened to the crippled man.

This experience of the disciples can be compared to our own types of opposition (Acts 4:5-6). There was a time when Christians in America only knew about overt opposition to Christianity from what they heard was happening in other countries. Increasingly, American culture has allowed — and even supported — opposition to Christian faith from religious, political and legal sources.

- The disciples were opposed by the dominant Jewish faith. The “rulers,

elders and teachers of the law” led the opposition. Annas the high priest was there and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family (4:5).

In our time, a growing conflict is affecting the two largest religious organizations in America: Christianity and Islam. According to the Clarion Project, Omar Ahmad, co-founder of the Council on American Islamic Relations, is reported to have declared in an address, “Islam isn't in America to be equal to any other faith, but to become dominant. The Koran should be the highest authority in America, and Islam the only accepted religion on earth.” Even granting allowance for emotional interpretations by the speaker, it conveys what many Muslims see as their goal for Islam at the expense of the Christian faith.

- The legal battle is highlighted by the growing atheistic population who are seeking the diminishing of Christian emphases in many legal ways. They seek court judgments against what they claim is harassment against their atheism. Under the umbrella of separation of church and state, some advances have been made in some courts.

- The political opposition was essentially combined with the religious in the experience of the New Testament disciples because so much law in Jerusalem had its source in Judaism. However, the political segment, which involved Herod's court, is also opposed to the teachings of the Christian faith. In our culture, pressure against

Christianity seeks to develop opposition against Christian actions to expose school children to the Christian history that influenced the establishment of our nation.

How are Christians to respond to this new opposition? We can use a strong dependence on prayer just as the early disciples did, and we can encourage contemporary Christians to become involved in civic support for our faith.

Bible Studies for Life

November 29, 2015

Scripture: Acts 4:23-31

Seek God's help and guidance through prayer (Acts 4:24-31). When they were released, Peter and John rejoined their Christian fellowship and told them what had happened. The fellowship then “raised their voices together in prayer to God.”

John B. Polhill points out that “God was addressed as ‘Sovereign Lord,’ a common designation for God in the Old Testament and appropriate to this gathering of Jewish Christians.... More than that the whole form of the prayer has Old Testament precedents. Compare Hezekiah's prayer in Isaiah 37:16-29, where the same elements appear” (The New American Commentary: Acts, p. 148). The significant difference in the two prayers is that Hezekiah prayed for deliverance while the Christian fellowship prayed for courage and boldness in the face of the threats from their opponents.

In verse 28, a familiar affirmation is stated about God's power to accomplish his ultimate purpose for the Christians. “They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen,” Polhill explains. “In the paradox of human freedom and divine sovereignty, despite all the raging of humanity, God's purposes prevailed. They did so in Christ. They did so with the disciples before the Sanhedrin” (p. 149).

The consequence of their powerful prayer meeting was that “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” As contemporary Christians face forces that confront them, the need for courage and boldness operating with the guidance of the Holy Spirit is essential just as it was in New Testament times.

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