

9/27/15

Acts 5:33-41

Good? Or Changed?

³³ When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. ³⁴ But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. ³⁵ And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. ³⁶ For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. ³⁷ After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. ³⁸ So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice, ⁴⁰ and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

(Prayer)

In the middle of the 18th Century, the 1740's to 1750's, George Whitefield was the most famous man in America.

Because the Anglican Church wouldn't let him preach in the churches, he started preaching in the fields of the Eastern Seaboard. And from Charleston, S.C., all the way to Boston, Mass., he rode from town to town, and when he stood to preach, thousands came to hear him.

He didn't preach like the monotone ministers of the day. He preached with passion and conviction. He preached a doctrine that called men and women to be born again by faith in Jesus Christ.

Besides his fiery sermons, one of the people who helped him become famous was a man named Benjamin Franklin. Before he was a statesman, he was a printer and he published Whitefield's sermons all through the country. They became very close friends which was odd because Benjamin Franklin was not a Christian. He was a self-proclaimed Deist. That is, he believed in God, but that's about as far as it went.

But he saw that *some* religion was good for the commonwealth, good for society.

Benjamin Franklin was much like the man in our text named Gamaliel. Gamaliel combined a worldly wisdom with a general belief in God. He had a great worldview. He was against violence – pro-life. He didn't believe in hate. He was very respectful and had a moderating and tolerant approach to life, a real live-and-let-live personality.

You've known those kinds of people. He was a teacher. A good teacher invests in his/her students. Gamaliel would've been a good baseball or softball coach. He was patient, caring and willing to listen. He could keep his head in the midst of excitement, a genuine leader, a moderating voice and, by almost anybody's standards, he was a good man.

And *there* is his problem.

It's not bad people that are in danger, it's good people. There's a difference between being a *good* man and a *changed* man. A *good* man does good and believes he is doing good that will save him. A *changed* man knows his righteousness is like filth and rags and he turns to the righteousness of Christ.

The Difference Between a Good Person and a Changed Person Is the Right Gospel

How do we keep from ending up like Gamaliel, so close to the Gospel and yet so far?

You've Got To Ask the Right Questions

In the story, a man named Gamaliel saves the Apostles' necks. V. 33 says after the council heard the Apostles' Gospel, they were enraged and wanted to kill the Apostles. In v. 34 Gamaliel steps up. Look what Luke tells us in v. 34-35 *But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. 35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men.* He has a philosophy of pure pragmatism. Gamaliel's principle is this: whatever succeeds is of God and whatever fails is not. And his only real question is: Is what they are doing working?

Brothers and sisters, this is pure pragmatism and it is a false gospel. On the surface, Gamaliel gives pretty good advice. V. 35: Think about what you are doing. Let's wait and see if it works. The problem with that advice is that part of it is true. It's insidious and subversive. It's right just enough to mess you up.

Gamaliel's advice has the appearance of wisdom and thoughtfulness. Gamaliel's question was: Does it work? Are people coming? Does it draw a crowd? Will it make your church grow? But if those are the questions you ask:

1. You end up with more style than you do substance;
2. You have more wisdom than you do God's word;
3. It'll be more calming than convicting;
4. You have function without transformation.

If you don't ask the right question, you get a church without Christ. You get a Gospel with no God. If you don't ask the right questions, you get sin with no Hell and Grace with no cost.

The Gospel of Gamaliel is the Gospel of the great mushy God...A dethroned king and a declawed lion. The Gospel of Gamaliel is like baseball with no bat and football with no

hit and military conflicts fought with pillow cases...All because he wasn't asking the right questions.

The right question is not: Does it work? Does it help me cope? Do I feel fulfilled? Those aren't the right questions. We don't ask is it working out? Because if it's working out, it must be from God. That's not what we ask.

We ask of the Gospel:

1. Does it have the ring of truth?
2. Is the perfect Christ, who bears the sins of believers and is their mediator, at the center?
3. Is the cross foremost?
4. Is the Bible authoritative?
5. Is sin presented as the enemy?
6. Is God's Glory the goal?

The difference between a *good* person and a *changed* person is the *right* Gospel. And to get the *right* Gospel you've got to ask the *right* questions.

You've Got to Follow the Right Person

Back in v. 34-35 as Gamaliel calms the crowd down, he reminds them of two events that, in his mind at least, are similar to Christ and his followers.

In v. 36 he brings up a man named Theudas who is persuasive enough to get 400 followers but the authorities captured and killed him and the movement was squelched. In v. 37 he brings up a guy named Judas the Galilean, a revolutionary who gathered a crowd to follow him but his movement fizzled out as well. In v. 38 Gamaliel says "so in the present case"- in other words, he was saying he sees no real difference in Jesus over the other short-lived revolutionaries.

Gamaliel didn't see the uniqueness of Jesus. Gamaliel may have been wise and tolerant and balanced. He may have believed in God and even believed that God is good and people should seek to live for God. My goodness, even the name "Gamaliel" meant "God is my rewarder." But it is what he *didn't* see, the supreme uniqueness of Jesus as the virgin-born son of God who lived sinlessly, died sacrificially and rose again miraculously. He didn't see Jesus as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Gamaliel didn't see Jesus like his pupil Paul did in Col 1:15-17:

"¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Gamliel didn't believe what Jesus said about himself. "I am the way, the truth and the life and no man comes to the Father but by me."

And more than it being a question for Gamaliel, it becomes a question for you. Do you believe that there is one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ? Do you

believe He lived a perfect life in a way you never could? Do you believe He died on the cross in place of sinners? Has the thought of His bloody death convicted you of sin? Does it prompt you to repent of your sins and believe?

Don't be casual and remote like Gamaliel...he's in Hell. He was a good man, but the difference between a *good* person and a *changed* person is the *right* Gospel. You've got to ask the *right* question. You've got to follow the *right* person.

One last thing:

You've Got to Rejoice In the *Right* Victories

Gamaliel persuaded the angry council to let the Apostles go, but before they went, in v. 40, "they beat them and charged them not to speak the name of Jesus and let them go." Now notice v. 41: "Then the Apostles left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name."

They weren't excited because things worked out, that they got a new car or the job came through or that they got a raise. They were excited because they joined an exclusive club of men and women who have the distinction of living and, if necessary, *dying* for the honor of the name of Jesus Christ.

And that is what I am putting before you today for you to consider. Consider the difference between a *good* person and a *changed* person.

Come and repent of your *goodness* at the cross and become a *changed* person by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Pastor Prays)