

From the Pastor's Study

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." ~ Acts 4:19

When Peter and John stood before the Jewish Council, they were faced with a dilemma that has tested the faith of believers since the beginning of the church. We see it again in Acts 5:29: **"But Peter and the apostles answered and said, 'We must obey God rather than men.'"** This has seldom been an easy decision, because it has often carried with it a choice between life and death. Early believers stood before Roman magistrates and were given the choice between denying their Christian faith, and being thrown to the lions, or possibly being coated with tar and burned alive as human torches. In later years, European believers were often given a choice between adopting the religion of their Monarch, or imprisonment and death. And today in Islamic countries, those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and refuse to renounce their faith and accept Islam, do so at the risk of their lives. We have been told of an Islamic country in which anyone who lets their faith in Christ be known will almost certainly be killed. And this same condition is true in many atheistic Communist nations. Satan hates the Lord and His people, and will do anything he can to destroy true Christian faith. Even in the United States, we see the pendulum swinging from Christianity to atheism and false religions. The Anti Christian Litigation Union (ACLU) is doing all that they can to destroy Christianity and morality, while encouraging sin and non-Christian religions. And Christians in America may soon face the decision that Peter, John, and millions of others have faced: will we obey God or man?

This is truly just a variation of the decision that has been faced by all mankind: will we choose to live for the flesh, or for the spirit? We must be careful in our decision, for as Paul writes in Romans 8:6-8: **"the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."** At its deepest level, this choice is between serving God and serving Satan, though it seldom appears that way. Think of the first time humanity was tested, back in the Garden of Eden. Satan didn't ask Adam and Eve to worship him. He just presented them with a choice between obeying God and doing what seemed appealing to their fleshly appetites. Sadly, they made the wrong choice, and we are still paying the price for their decision. We continue to be, at times, faced with temptations of the flesh, but we are also faced with spiritual temptations – will we worship the True God, or some imaginary deity; whether it is fashioned of wood or stone or precious metals, or presented as a spiritual being. How many today are led astray by the teachings of so-called "ascended masters," which are nothing more than demon spirits? How many believe the lie that Allah is the same as Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, even though their teachings couldn't be farther apart. One is a God of peace and love, the other a god of death and destruction. One gave His Son to die for the sins of the world. What has the other given but terror, death and destruction, even for his own followers? Yet those without understanding and discernment are led down the path to Hell, ignorantly believing the lies of the Enemy.

So the choice is always the same: will we obey God, as He reveals Himself and His divine will for us through His Word and His Holy Spirit, or will we obey the Enemy, as he tempts us to do anything but what God has said? Obeying God means denying the flesh, and sometimes the cost is tremendous – even losing our earthly lives. But obeying the Enemy, while it is often much easier or more pleasant, means the loss of our eternal souls. The decision is ours, because God has given us the right to choose. And it is the same decision presented by Joshua in Joshua 24:15: **"choose for**

yourselves today whom you will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” Choose wisely, for your eternity hangs in the balance!

Suppose your trial comes as a result of our nation being overtaken by some foreign power – and while we typically refuse to even think of that possibility, it is becoming increasingly probable as we continue to eliminate our manufacturing capabilities and farm these functions out to China and other nations. How will we defend ourselves if we have to ask our enemies to manufacture the very weapons we need to fight against them? We make few clothes here today, so what will we wear? And even the food we produce here is often processed overseas, so what will we eat? And what will you say if some Communist soldier or dictator says: “Renounce your faith or die!”? Or suppose the decision comes as a result of the moral deterioration that is already so rampant within our nation. Suppose the ACLU and other left-wing radical groups finally win – as they do with increasing frequency. Suppose our government demands that our church accept, condone, hire and even marry homosexuals, or else close our doors. What will you choose? Suppose the preaching of the Gospel is ruled by the courts to be a hate crime (and some rulings have already come uncomfortably close to that). Will you be silent about your faith, or will you do as God commands in Matthew 28:19-20: **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”?** Many refuse to obey this command, even today. So, how can we expect them to obey it when it will cost them something?

But all of these things are in some hypothetical future, regardless of how likely they may appear. And the most important question is not: “What would you do if . . .?” The most important question is: “What will you do now?” Consider the things which stop you from being the witness you should be in the world today. If your first thought is: “Nothing is stopping me,” they ask yourself why you aren’t doing a better job of telling people about Jesus. Now, maybe you’ll respond: “I’m doing a good job already,” and maybe you are, but could you be doing more? Could you be doing it better? I would truly be amazed to find one person who is such a good witness for Jesus Christ that they couldn’t do better. I recall the words which were reportedly said to Dwight L. Moody: “The world has yet to see what the Lord could do with one man, fully committed to Him.” Moody responded to this remark with these words: “I will be that man.” And for the rest of his life, he showed the world, and his Lord, just what could be done by one person, fully committed to Jesus.

Now, let’s return to the original question: will you obey God or man, the Great Creator or the Enemy, the spirit or the flesh? If you are told not to tell people about Jesus, will you refrain? If you are afraid or uncomfortable telling them that the only way of salvation is through Jesus Christ, do you hide your light under a bushel for the sake of your own comfort? Are you afraid that, if you tell people about Jesus, they will reject you? Then listen to what Jesus says in Luke 10:16: **“The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me.”** In the past, in the present, and in any conceivable future, the world and the god of this world will do all in their power to stop the spread of the Gospel. They will do all in their power to silence, or even destroy those who spread that Gospel. But the good news is this: those who belong to Christ are no longer in the power of the Enemy, the one whom Jesus called “the father of lies.” We are in the power of the Most High God! So let your light shine. Obey the Lord and take His Gospel to all who will hear. Serve Him and love Him with your whole heart and mind and soul and life, for if you do, great will be your reward in Heaven!