

Acts 5:17) Then the high priest rose up. He and all who were with him, who belonged to the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. 18) So they arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. 19) But an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail during the night, brought them out, and said, 20) *“Go and stand in the temple, and tell the people all about this life.”* 21) Hearing this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. When the high priest and those who were with him arrived, they convened the Sanhedrin – the full council of the Israelites – and sent orders to the jail to have them brought. 22) But when the servants got there, they did not find them in the jail, so they returned and reported, 23) *“We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing in front of the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside.”* 24) As the captain of the temple police and the chief priests heard these things, they were baffled about them, wondering what would come of this. 25) Someone came and reported to them, *“Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple and teaching the people.”* 26) Then the commander went with the servants and brought them in without force, because they were afraid the people might stone them. 27) After they brought them in, they had them stand before the Sanhedrin, and the high priest asked, 28) *“Didn’t we strictly order you not to teach in this name? Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”* 29) Peter and the apostles replied, *“We must obey God rather than people. 30) The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had murdered by hanging him on a tree. 31) God exalted this man to his right hand as ruler and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32) We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”* 33) When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. 34) But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law who was respected by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered the men to be taken outside for a little while. 35) He said to them, *“Men of Israel, be careful about what you’re about to do to these men. 36) Some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, and all his followers were dispersed and came to nothing. 37) After this man, Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and attracted a following. He Also perished, and all his followers were scattered. 38) So in the present case, I Tell you, stay away from these men and leave them alone. For if this plan or this Work is of human origin, it will fail; 39) but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even be found fighting against God.”* They were persuaded by him. 40) After they called in the apostles and had them flogged, they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them. 41) Then they

went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of the Name. 42) Every day in the temple, and in various homes, they continued teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

Adversity is a condition of suffering and hardship involving anguish, pressure, trials, heartaches, or disappointments. (Charles Stanley, *Growing in our Adversity*, Intouch.org) We would never choose episodes of adversity – but they do happen and they always cause disruption and pain. If we could choose, we would choose to avoid adversity, However, if we never experience adversity, we would miss some of God’s choice blessings and we would stunt our spiritual growth. Episodes of persecution and adversity scatter throughout the Acts narrative. Immediately following the church discipline episode in Acts 5, Dr. Luke reveals **A Christian Response to Adversity**. How should we respond to episodes of anguish, pressure, trials, heartaches, or disappointments?

**1. Stand tall in the face of adversity.** This section of the Acts narrative describes Peter and the Apostles’ second confrontation with the Sanhedrin – the Jewish religious legislative body headed by the Jewish High Priest. The first encounter in Acts 4, in response to the healing miracle of the crippled man, resulted in arrest and overnight jail time, followed by a threat to stop speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus. Peter and John responded to that threat, *“Whether it’s right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”* (Acts 4:19-20) Now, in Acts 5, consumed by jealousy, the Sanhedrin again ordered Peter and the Apostles again to cease and desist from any public witness. This time, God sent an angelic messenger to release them from jail, with the imperative, *“Go and stand in the temple, and tell the people all about this life – this new life in Christ.* Although the word *Christian* will not be introduced until Acts 11, the Christian life is now on full display, so that when the Sanhedrin convened and summoned the apostles from jail, they discovered an empty jail. Someone came and reported to them, *“Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple and teaching the people.”* *Go and stand – the men you put in jail are standing.*

- **Standing is the posture of honor.** The Old Testament magnified “standing” as the posture of honor. In Deuteronomy 10:8, the tribe of Levi were set apart *“to carry the ark of the Lord’s covenant, to stand before the Lord to serve him, and to pronounce blessings in his name.* In 1 Kings 22, Micaiah prophesied, *“Therefore, hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and the whole heavenly army was standing by him at his right hand and at his left*

*hand.*” Daniel testified, “*Suddenly, a hand touched me and set me shaking on my hands and knees....Stand on your feet, for I have now been sent to you.*’ After he said this to me, I stood trembling.” (Daniel 10:10-11) When we face adversity, we can stand tall because standing is the posture of honor.

- **Standing is the position of strength.** The apostle Paul frequently encouraged us to “stand firm” as a position of strength. (Ephesians 6:10,13; 1 Corinthians 15:58) When we face adversity, our God enables us to stand firm, to stand strong, to stand immovable because standing is posture of honor and the position of strength. *Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross, lift high his royal banner, it must not suffer loss.*

**2. Speak truth in the face of adversity.** As in the first episode, the Sanhedrin threatened them again: “*Didn’t we strictly order you not to teach in this name?*” Peter and the apostles replied, “*We must obey God rather than people.*”

- **Speaking truth may create a moral tension.** When is civil disobedience allowed for a Christian? The anarchist view believes that a person can choose to disobey the government whenever he likes and whenever he feels he is personally justified in doing so. The Bible supports no such position. Paul advocated the Christian stance in Romans 13: “*Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God.*” The extremist patriot says that a person should always obey his government, no matter what the command or edit. Not only does the Bible not support this position, but history does not support this view either. For example, during the Nuremberg trials, the attorneys for the Nazi war criminals defended their clients as those who followed the direct orders of the government and therefore could not be held responsible for their war crimes. However, one of the judges dismissed their argument with the simple question: “*But gentlemen, is there not a law above our laws?*”

The biblical position mandates submission but also allows Christians to act in civil disobedience to the government if it *commands* evil and requires a response contrary to the clear teachings of Scripture. In Exodus 1, the Egyptian Pharaoh commanded two Hebrew midwives to kill all male Jewish babies. An extreme patriot would have obeyed the government’s order, but the Bible says the midwives disobeyed Pharaoh because they “*feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live.*” (Exodus 1:17). The midwives then lied to Pharaoh about why they allowed the children live; yet even though they lied and disobeyed their government, “*God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied and became very numerous.*” (Exodus 1:20)

It's also biblical, that if a Christian disobeys an evil government, unless he can flee from the government, he should accept that government's punishment for his actions.

- **Speaking truth may also solicit God's will.** When the members of the Sanhedrin heard the apostles' standing convictions, they were enraged – infuriated, and wanted to kill them. But a member of the Sanhedrin, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, stood and spoke in defense of the apostles: *“Men of Israel, be careful about what you're about to do to these men. He commanded respect because he ordered the apostles to be removed from the courtroom for a while. Citing two examples of previous uprisings that eventually subsided, Gamaliel made his point: So in the present case, I tell you, stay away from these men and leave them alone. For if this plan or this work is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able overthrow them. You may even be found fighting against God.”* When we stand and speak the truth, we can expect resistance and intolerance. Our response should be to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and to act wisely in order to win the respect of outsiders (Colossians 4:5). When we stand and speak the truth, we can expect God's will to be validated, often by those who may disagree, but who respect our right to speak.

**3. Suffer willingly in the face of adversity.** As with the first encounter in Acts 4, the establishment *ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus*. But this time the threat escalated to an intent to kill them and to physically beat them. Flogging was the customary punishment used to enforce a warning, consisting of 39 lashes with a tripled strap of cowhide. With bare chest and in a kneeling position, those being warned would receive two lashes on the back for each slash on the chest – twelve rotations. This is what His accusers did to Jesus before nailing Him to a cross. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul testified that he was flogged five times, as well as several severe beatings and one episode of stoning. The Bible never “sugar-coats” the cost to standing fall and speaking truth in the face of adversity.

- **Christians can expect suffering.** Suffering is multifaceted. The Bible doesn't whitewash our experiences of suffering, but instead recognizes the multifaceted ways that suffering invades our space. Paul helps us again in 2 Corinthians 4: *We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed.* (8-9) Most of us as American Christians will not suffer physically, but Paul calculated mental, emotional and spiritual sufferings. I could add to that list relational sufferings – the family relationships that ridicule and reject us, as well as the relationships we must avoid because we choose to be Christian.

- **Christians should embrace suffering.** As we've already noted, Peter

learned from his experiences, for 30 years after this episode, he wrote in his first epistle – *“If anyone suffers as a Christian, he should not be ashamed, but should glorify God with that name.”* It means something to bear the name Christian. Only used three times in the New Testament, those who followed Christ were tagged “Christian” as a sneer of insult or ridicule. Thus, we must not be ashamed of it. Peter knew from experience about being ashamed of the name of Jesus. He is certainly being confessional here as he remembered those dark hours during the trial of Jesus when he denied knowing Jesus three times.

This is serious, ladies and gentlemen. Hebrews 11:16 asserts that God is not ashamed to be called our God. Hebrews 12:2 confirms that Jesus endured the cross and despised the shame of it. If God is not ashamed to be called our God and if Jesus despised the shame of the Cross for us, surely there should never be a time when we would be ashamed to be called Christian. We’d better take seriously the words of Jesus in Mark 8:38: *“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His father with the holy angels.”*

**Two Reactions to Adversity – Walk AWAY from God or Walk CLOSER to God.** When suffering and hardship involving anguish, pressure, trials, heartaches, or disappointments interrupt our lives, which way will you walk?