

# a word from Pastor Chuck



## The Man God Uses—part 8

As we continue our series on the person God uses, we see that one defining attribute is obedience to God.

### Obeying God, Not Men

The Jewish council probed Jesus' apostles in Acts 5:28a, "*Saying, did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?*" Peter responded in the next verse, "*We ought to obey God rather than men.*" The phrase "ought to" is more accurately translated from the original Greek as "must." It is a divine imperative. The command of God is far more important than the dictates of willfully unbelieving people.

Jesus Christ has commissioned every disciple of His—including those from the time He ascended until the time He returns—to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world. He even told us that many people would not accept the message and that we would be persecuted for simply delivering it. Can you declare with Peter, "I must obey God rather than men"? And every Christian must obey God's command to share the Gospel—no matter the cost.

Peter continued in Acts 5:30-32: "*The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.*"

Jesus said previously, in Luke 11:13b, that our "*heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.*" Now we further learn in Acts 5:32 that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him.

### Reaction to the Message

We see the priests' reactions to Peter's bold declaration in verse 33: "*When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them.*"

The Holy Spirit's conviction does interesting things to people. To some, it brings

repentance; to others, it brings indignation and rage. The same sun which melts wax also hardens clay. How do you respond to the Spirit's conviction? These men responded with fury—so much fury that they wanted to kill the messengers.

So they put the apostles outside the courtroom while they discussed among themselves what should be done. A Pharisee by the name of Gamaliel, an expert lawyer who was respected by all, stood up to speak. He could see that the council had ceased to think rationally. They were so agitated that they were ready to tear the apostles to pieces. Although Gamaliel himself was not a believer in Christ, his message contained simple but profound truth.

He began by reminding the men that self-proclaimed messiahs had come and gone throughout the preceding years. He continued in Acts 5:38-39: "*And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.*"

### The Surrender of Saul

This same Gamaliel was the personal tutor of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:3), the man who later became the apostle Paul. Since Saul was also a Pharisee, he was probably in attendance on this occasion. We know of Saul's contempt for the Gospel message from Acts 6-8, when Saul consented with the Jewish council that stoned Stephen.

But Saul did not heed Gamaliel's advice. Instead, Saul traveled to Damascus, where he planned to arrest more followers of Christ. But on Saul's way, Luke tells us in Acts 9 that Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light. As Saul fell to the ground, he heard Jesus ask, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*" Saul responded with two questions: "*Who are You, Lord?*" and, upon hearing, "*Jesus,*" Saul asked, "*Lord, what do You want me to do?*" (Acts 9:4b-6b).

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Saul at last understood Gamaliel's earlier statement, "*If it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.*" Thankfully, Saul surrendered his will to Jesus. He went from being a persecutor to being persecuted for sharing the Gospel. At the end of his life, he could triumphantly proclaim: "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day*" (2 Timothy 4:7-8a).

### A Privilege to Suffer

Again in Acts 5:40, the council commanded the apostles to stop preaching Christ. They again threatened them, and this time, they beat them. How did the apostles respond?

They rejoiced that God had counted them worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus—and they continued to preach to anyone who would listen. Notice the difference our attitudes can make. Rather than backing down, the apostles considered the physical pain and public humiliation that resulted from obedience to God as a blessing. God will mightily use people with this kind of attitude.

The man God uses is obedient to his Lord, Jesus Christ, no matter the cost. 🙌

Note: This article was edited by permission and taken from the book, *The Man God Uses*, by Pastor Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, CA.