

OPPOSITION TO THE GOSPEL BY FALSE RELIGIONISTS

TEXT: ACTS 4:1-12

INTRODUCTION:

1. Acts 4 records the first opposition to the apostolic church (4:1-3).
2. Despite persecution many souls were saved (4:4; cf. 2:41, 47; 5:14; 6:7; 11:24; 17:6).
3. In fact, many souls are saved because of persecution. Tertullian, the famous preacher of the 2nd century, said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”
4. The Sadducees were the main persecutors of the early Christians (Acts 4:1-3). The Sadducees were a Jewish religious sect that developed during what is called the “inter-biblical period” (between Malachi and Matthew).
5. These years have been called “The Four Hundred Silent Years,” but they really were not “silent.”
6. The Sadducees were the ruling religious aristocracy. The high priest was a Sadducee, and his family and those in his inner circle were the rulers of the Jewish state.
7. The Sadducees bargained and made deals with the various rulers who had conquered the nation of Israel – the Persians, then later on the Greeks, and then in the New Testament period, the Romans.
8. The Sadducees were not wheeling and dealing in order to help their people. They were only concerned with feathering their own nest.
9. They always had one goal in mind, and that was to keep their own place and power. Like the Pharisees, they wouldn’t let anything get in the way of furthering their own worldly and personal interests and ambitions (cf. John 11:47, 48).
10. Like the Pharisees, the Sadducees were concerned that the Romans would come and “take away” their “place” (John 11:48).
11. The Sadducees were crafty politicians. Furthermore, the Sadducees were rationalists. They were materialists. All they cared about were the things of this world. They were earthly-minded, not heavenly-minded.
12. For example, the Sadducees did not believe in angels or spirits. They didn’t believe in the immortality of the soul. They believed that when a man died, his soul died too (cf. Mark 12:18; Acts 23:7, 8).

I. THEY WERE FIERCELY OPPOSED TO THE APOSTLES' PREACHING (ACTS 4:2, 3).

1. The Sadducees were “grieved” (Acts 4:2) that our Lord’s disciples were preaching the resurrection of the dead. Mark 12:18 and Acts 23:8 say, the Sadducees “say there is no resurrection.”
2. W.A. Criswell made an interesting statement. He said, “You never read of a Sadducee who ever became a Christian, never. There never is an instance in history or in the Bible of a Sadducee embracing Christianity.” We read of Pharisees getting saved, but not Sadducees.
3. In John 3, we read of Nicodemus the Pharisee coming to see Jesus by night. Nicodemus is referred to again in John 7:50 and 19:39.
4. Gamaliel was a Pharisee, and the most famous Pharisee of all – Saul of Tarsus, who was a student of Gamaliel.
5. The Sadducean party died out in 70 A.D. This was inevitable. Referring to their conflict with the apostles, G. Campbell Morgan said, "Either Sadduceeism must end, or Christianity must be stamped out." And we know Christianity will never be stamped out because Jesus said, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18; cf. Acts 4:11).
6. But though the Sadducees died out, there have always been people with the views and ideas of the Sadducees.
7. The Sadducees compromised with the various nations that had conquered Judea — Persian, Greek, and Roman.
8. Because of their influence, they had charge of the religion of the nation Israel, which means they had charge of the temple. This means they made an immeasurably vast amount of money.
9. Back in their day, one could not bring into the temple a gift that was a Roman coin, or a Greek coin, or any other kind of a coin. They had to change this foreign currency into Judaic money (i.e., “temple money”).
10. So those moneychangers sat in the temple, and every time some one needed to change money, the Sadducees made a profit.
11. The Sadducees made money off of every financial transaction. In the temple there was a place called “the court of the Gentiles.”
12. And in the court of the Gentiles there was a large number of sheep, and goats, and lambs, and oxen, and turtledoves all sold for sacrifices.
13. And every little turtledove, as well as every ox, and every lamb, or every kid, or whatever sacrifice was bought, the Sadducees made money on it. It was a lucrative thing for them, and they became enormously wealthy.

14. You may recall that the first thing our Lord did in His public ministry was to cleanse the temple. He turned over the moneychangers' tables, and He drove out those that sold oxen, and calves, and goats.
15. And He said, "Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise" (John 2:16).
16. And then, later on when He came to the last week of His ministry, He did the same thing again.
17. "And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Matt. 21:13).
18. It was shameful the way the Sadducees had turned God's house into a house of merchandise, making money off of it.
19. To say they had turned the temple into "a den of thieves," stung them, and so the Sadducees hated our Lord and were determined to kill Him.
20. And they were determined to kill His followers as well. When we come to Acts chapter 4, we see that the Sadducees were grieved that the apostles were teaching and preaching the people the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (Acts 4:2).
21. So they "laid hands on them" (Acts 4:3).
22. The fiercest persecution of Christians always comes from the religious crowd. Peter and John were dragged before Annas the high priest and the "rulers, and elders, and scribes" (Acts 4:5-7), i.e., the Sanhedrin. (Cf. Scofield heading – "Peter's address to the Sanhedrin").
23. There were seventy members of the Sanhedrin. These unregenerate religious leaders proceeded to ask Peter and John, "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" (Acts 4:7).
24. They were referring to the healing of the lame man (Acts 3:1-11).

II. THE FULNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS ESSENTIAL FOR EFFECTIVE BIBLE PREACHING (ACTS 4:8)

1. One preacher described Peter's preaching like this: "It was a floodtide of words, of power, and witness, and testimony. This man Simon Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit of God, it's like a preacher multiplied by deity: the panoply of Heaven is around him and on him, and all of the angels of God are surrounding him. And there he is just pouring out his whole soul and life in testimony to all of that bunch of infidels." (W.A. Criswell).
2. The great Welsh preacher, D Martyn Lloyd-Jones, said, "the greatest essential in connection with preaching" is "the unction and the anointing of the Holy Spirit."

3. In referring to Peter's preaching, Dr. Jones mentions that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.
4. Then he notes that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit again when he addressed the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8).
5. Explaining this emphasis, Dr. Jones said Peter "received a fresh accession of power...and he needed some new, fresh power, and it is given him. This was another filling for this special task" (*Preaching and Preachers*).
6. We also need this "fresh accession of power."
7. Before He ascended into heaven, our Lord said, "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).
8. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).
9. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "Let the preacher always confess before he preaches that he relies upon the Holy Spirit. Let him burn his manuscript and depend upon the Holy Spirit."
10. And in another sermon Spurgeon said, "But there is another thing to be done as well, and that is to pray; and here I want to remind you of those blessed words of the Master, 'Every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?' You see, there is a distinct promise to the children of God, that their heavenly Father will give them the Holy Spirit if they ask for His power; and that promise is made to be exceedingly strong by the instances joined to it. But he says, 'How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?' He makes it a stronger case than that of an ordinary parent. The Lord must give us the Spirit when we ask Him, for He has herein bound Himself by no ordinary pledge. He has used a simile which would bring dishonour on His own name, and that of the very grossest kind, if He did not give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. Oh, then, let us ask Him at once, with all of our hearts."

III. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST MUST BE THE FOCUS OF OUR PREACHING (ACTS 4:12)

1. In Peter's message, he called attention to the fact that the healing of the lame man was not a crime deserving punishment, but a "good deed" (4:9).
2. Furthermore, Peter boldly declared that this miracle took place "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead..." (4:10).
3. Peter also told them that the Christ's rejection was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (4:11; cf. Psalm 118:22).
4. "For there is none other name under heaven given among men..." (4:12). This was Peter's message.
5. This was the message of all the disciples. Acts 5:42 says, "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."
6. "There is none other name" (Acts 4:12). Not the name of Mary. Or Mohammed. Or Buddha.

CONCLUSION:

1. There is a great emphasis in the book of Acts of believers being filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. 4:8).
2. That is why A.T. Pierson referred to this book as "The Acts of the Holy Spirit."
3. The filling of the Holy Spirit is "given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:32).