

God's Power and Blessing in the Early Church

Acts 4:23-37

Acts 4:23-37: *"And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴ So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, ²⁵ who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? ²⁶ The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.' ²⁷ "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. ²⁹ Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, ³⁰ by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. ³² Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. ³⁶ And Joseph, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet."*

Background Notes

The first half of Acts 4 recorded the beginnings of the persecution of early Christians. Peter and John were arrested and kept in custody overnight, and were threatened with further persecution if they would not stop preaching in the name of Jesus. These early persecutions were from the Jewish religious authorities, not from the Roman civil authorities. The Roman persecutions of Christians came later.

The first persecutions arose from the Jewish religious authorities because they refused to recognize and receive Jesus as the promised Messiah. They had witnessed the Lord's miraculous powers and wonderful works, and yet they crucified Him. And even though there was plenty of evidence for His resurrection, they continued in their unbelief and rejection. Rather than admit that God, and the power of Jesus Christ, through the ministry of Peter and John, had healed the lame man (chapter 3), they threatened Peter and John with further persecution.

When Peter and John were finally released, they joined their fellow believers and they prayed together. That's a great policy! In fact, it should be a way of life for Christians. Always meet with fellow believers and pray - whether there's peace or persecution.

Notice that they prayed on the basis of Scripture. In verses 24-26, the Old Testament passages in their prayers showed that God is supreme and the Creator of all, even though earthly leaders would not acknowledge this truth. Verse 25 is a proof text for the divine inspiration of the psalms of David – stating that God had spoken through David when David wrote Psalm 2. *“You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?’” (v25).*

Doctrinal Points

1. Essential Christian doctrine includes divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

Verses 27-28: *“For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.”*

Who was responsible for the death of Jesus Christ? Verse 27 says that it was Herod and Pilate - the Jews and the Gentiles. All of them were gathered together against the Lord. All were responsible, and all were held accountable for their sin. And yet verse 28 says that the Lord's death was under the hand and sovereign purpose of God. It was predestined to happen.

This same truth was taught back in Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:23: *“Him [Jesus] being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified and put to death.”*

This truth is difficult to grasp - but it is essential Christian doctrine. The Bible teaches both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. How these two doctrines harmonize is beyond our finite comprehension, but both are true and both are taught in the Bible. Essential Christian doctrine includes divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

2. Efficient Christian living includes dedicated prayer and spiritual power.

Notice the dedicated prayer of the early Christians in verses 29-30: *“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.”*

These early Christians were not just praying for good health and good weather – they were praying for boldness and blessing in the ministry. No wonder God answered with spiritual power! The building where they were meeting was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they spoke the work of God with boldness (v31). That's efficient Christian living!

Do you want to have an efficient Christian life? It's possible to be a Christian and yet be very inefficient, by wasting a lot of time and effort on things that won't count forever. The key to efficient Christian living is dedicated prayer and spiritual power. Not just praying about your job or your health (although that's not wrong), but dedicated prayer about getting the work of the Lord accomplished - through you and others.

Ephesians 5:18 tells us to be "filled with the Spirit." That means we should allow the Spirit of God work in us and through us. Don't waste time, and don't try to do your own thing in your own strength.

It's possible to be a Christian, but to live your Christian life without much prayer and thus not much spiritual power. That's a very inefficient way to live the Christian life. Efficient Christian living includes dedicated prayer and spiritual power.

3. Effective Christian testimony includes "apologetic talk" and "consistent walk."

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is **crucial** to the Christian faith. Christianity stands or falls, depending on the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15). If Jesus Christ did not really rise from the dead, then Christianity is a false hope. So the early believers constantly witnessed to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ: *"And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all"*(v33).

We, too, should be able to defend the faith by giving evidence for the resurrection, as the early Christians did. How did the early Christians give witness to the resurrection? The answer is **apologetic talk** and **consistent walk!**

"Apologetics" is the defense of the Christian faith. As to "apologetic talk," or verbal defense of the Christian faith, I'm sure the early Christians related their eyewitness accounts of the risen Christ. Acts 1:3 says that Jesus *"presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."* And 1 Corinthians 15:6 says that after His resurrection the Lord appeared to more than five hundred early Christians who were together on one occasion!

The empty tomb was certainly evidence of the resurrection. The early Christians could point to it and tell people, "Check it out!" The tomb was empty! And the idea that the disciples stole the body didn't have a leg to stand on, and neither the Roman authorities nor the Jewish authorities were able to produce the body of Jesus.

By the way, the empty tomb is still great “apologetic talk” for Christians today. No one has been able to come up with a good explanation for the empty tomb – except for the truth of the resurrection!

Besides their apologetic talk, the early Christians also witnessed to the resurrection by their “consistent walk.” They were people who had been completely changed! *“And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need” (v33-35).*

The early Christians gave sacrificially of their possessions to assist others, and to meet the needs of their fellow believers. They loved one another in Christ. What an effective testimony!

Sacrificial love for those in need is still a very effective testimony today. Effective Christian testimony includes “apologetic talk” and “consistent walk.”

Practical Application

Learn some “Christian Evidences”!

I hope you all have an effective testimony by your consistent walk - but what about your apologetic talk? Are you able to verbally defend the faith? You know, you don’t have to “kiss your brains goodbye” when you become a Christian, because there’s plenty of evidence to show that the Christian faith is very credible.

1 Peter 3:15 says, *“And always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is within you with meekness and fear.”* Notice - that’s a **command**. It’s not an option! The Greek word that is translated “defense” in that verse is the word from which we get “apologetics.” Knowing some Christian evidences is part of apologetics. The Lord wants us to learn some good solid evidences for the Bible and the Christian faith, so we can be effective “apologists.” It’s important to be able to share our faith effectively with those who ask us what we believe - **and why we believe it!**

So where do you go to learn evidences for Christianity? For starters, you can go to our website, www.growingchristians.org and go through the two courses on Christian Evidences. There’s a wealth of material there that will certainly help you get a handle on “apologetic talk.” You can also visit your church library, your Christian bookstore, or online book sites and check out the “apologetics” section.

Plenty of valuable material is available – so - learn some Christian Evidences!