

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
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The Acts of the Apostles

The Ministry of the Gospel in a Messy Church & Conflictive World

Acts 5:12-42

They were told not to speak, but they did not listen. As a result, the religious leaders became filled with indignation. In verse 17, it says that they were filled with jealousy. The word 'jealousy' in the original language comes from a root word that means "heat." The word communicates an emotional defense with envy or anger. Perhaps the closest thing to this word in our modern-day is, "to be triggered." But why were they triggered? They were triggered because the disciples were gaining in popular favor. The disciples were gaining great respect. And so, since the disciples did not remain silent, the religious leaders had to physically arrest them again. In our modern culture, what the religious leaders basically did was to 'cancel' the disciples by arresting them. Arresting the disciples was a form of 'censorship' by the religious leaders.

Keep in mind that 'words' are powerful. We humans not only like having physical control over people but we want to have control over their words as well. But what has control over words?

The Christian keeps their words in check with the 8th Commandment. Keep in mind that the 8th Commandment does not censor speech but teaches about the need to have 'truthful' speech – to not lie or speak falsehoods about one's neighbor. The 8th Commandment calls for the Christian to put the best meaning on everything and defend our neighbor in all situations with our words.

Consider the following paragraphs on how the world attempts to control speech:

Free speech is said to be dangerous. Perhaps it is to a certain degree, for free speech allows good information and objectionable, harmful, false, and sensitive information into the marketplace of ideas.

So, to prevent objectionable, harmful, false, and sensitive information from hurting peoples' ears, the bad information must be strained out and silenced - censored. But therein lies the problem. This way of thinking views the ear as fragile, gullible, and ignorant.

Perhaps ears are fragile, gullible, and ignorant. However, must ears stay weak? Could free speech be upheld and overt censorship avoided if ears were not so fragile, gullible, and ignorant?

This is why it is not only important to teach the mouth to speak nobly but also the ears to listen with discernment. Indeed, ears should be taught to listen with wisdom and discernment. You see, strong, wise, and discerning ears have a sharp perception to judge well all things spoken in the public forums of free speech.

The church has a biblical history of not sheltering ears but equipping ears to hear - teaching ears to hear sound doctrine and resist the urge of wanting to be tickled (e.g., Jesus and Paul's writings). Alas! Keep in mind that when we do not teach ears to hear - and only censor mouths from speaking - we are really prolonging infancy. Sheltering ears through censorship creates children tossed to and fro by every wind of false doctrine that may escape possible censorship. (Heaven forbid anyone uses censorship to keep people in infancy, for this is evil manipulation and ruthless control.)

To the point, censorship of the mouth is not the sole answer to the dangers of free speech; a discerning-wise ear is. Discerning ears can do what censorship tries to accomplish but do it better and without having to completely muzzle a mouth.

Moving on, it is important to note that after the arrest of the disciples, they did what the next morning? After an angel released them from prison, they kept talking. And how about the next day when they were ordered not to teach in Jesus' name? In Acts 5:29, we hear, "We must obey God rather than human authority." And so, while it is always important to honor, respect, and obey governing authority (see Romans 13:1-7), we must do so in tension with Acts 5:29. We are to obey everything that can be done without sin. And where sin is commanded, we do not obey the state. We gently, respectfully, and joyfully disobey the state when it violates conscience – a conscience that is captive to the Word of God.

If time permits, consider Daniel 6:6-ff



