

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

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

Acts 8:1-8

Persecution was unleashed in Jerusalem. As a result, the Christians were scattered. Now, it might be easy to think that fear grabbed the early Christians causing them to scatter. However, if they fled due to fear, they would not have provoked persecution again in their new town by talking about the Gospel. In a word, they fled because this is what Jesus calls Christians to do.

Take a moment and examine Matthew 10:23. As we hear from Jesus, when persecution gets too bad in one town, Christians are then to relocate to another town. Indeed, we must keep in mind that Jesus did this as well in the book of John.

For the sake of discussion, look at the Gospel of John to gather the nature of persecution with Jesus.

What we see in the first four chapters of the Gospel of John are three components: A) conflict emerges between Jesus and the Jewish authorities; B) bystander resort to secrecy, silence, and fear, due

to the conflict; and C) the conflict needs to be neutralized. It is also worth noting that we see the same components throughout the rest of the Gospel of John as well. Conflict breaks out between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. Bystanders feel the pressure to keep silent and not speak positively about Jesus – to keep their head to the ground. And even Jesus operates somewhat covertly (at times) to not add fuel to the fire of conflict. Regardless of the secrecy, once the conflict emerged, it must be neutralized.

A) In looking closely at the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders, we notice that the reason for the conflict between the Jews (*i.e., a group consisting of non-believing Jews and Pharisees*) and Jesus is due to Jesus presenting different concepts. Jesus presented a different way of thinking, and ways of viewing reality. The Jews were buried in tradition, while Jesus is embodied truth. Jesus – as truth – posed a threat to the religious leaders.

B) Now, considering the silence, secrecy, and fear of bystanders, the quietness and murmuring are often due to insecurity from being unsure. When no official verdict is rendered, and no victor comes to the top in a conflict, bystanders will often pull back, observe, and wait to express their opinion publicly until the dust settles. *(As a side note: in John chapter 12, the religious leaders were enforcing stern measures against people - possibly excommunicating them from the synagogue.)* The religious authority were attempting to deter people from joining Jesus' side in the conflict by inciting fear. If the people supported Jesus, there would be blowback from the authorities. Thus fear sealed lips.

C) We should not be surprised when the Jewish leaders pushed back against Jesus to affirm their current ideology as sufficient and accurate. The religious leaders could not live in an ongoing status of dissonance and conflict for a long period. The conflict had to be resolved – it had to be neutralized. And so, to resolve the conflict, the religious leaders refuted Jesus' teaching, attacked His character, arrested Him, and in the end had Him crucified. Thus, the end result of persecution is to neutralize an ideological conflict by either shutting the person up or ultimately shutting their mouth by killing them.

Conclusion, in the Gospel of John and the Book of Acts, since the religious leaders were not willing to repent, it resulted in the persecution of Jesus and Christians. That is to say; the road breaks only two ways when one encounters Christ; either one repents and is captive to the Word or a person persecutes and tries to eliminate the eternal Word – Jesus.

And so, as Christians in the twenty-first century, we can know that since Jesus' Word endures that these conflicts do and should happen We should not be surprised when individuals attempt to neutralize the conflict. This is how it is with mankind; however, Jesus will never be neutralized. Jesus will not and cannot be silenced. As the eternal Word, He cannot be muzzled or canceled. Death did not eliminate truth. The grave could not imprison truth. Jesus is alive. His Word is active and sharper than any two-edged sword. Even though conflict, silence, secrecy, and attempts to neutralize will continue, Jesus Word – His worldview – will go forth and accomplish what He desires and to achieve what He purposes it for.



