

Trials of the True Patriot; Peter & John before the Sanhedrin, Acts 4:9-10, 17-20; Believers Mandated to Submit to Temporal Authorities, 1 Peter 2:15-16, Order in the Soul & the Commonwealth; Griffin: Concept of Hell

The application of these policies may be defined as the lifestyle of the patriot. His behavior patterns are in accordance with the requirements of good citizenship and therefore win the approval of the Lord who will protect and prosper such a believer in times of national downtrends.

Doing good of intrinsic value can cause a person to receive criticism from those who function inside the cosmic system. Today we find that marriage and family are under assault. Moral standards are suffering an inversion in which biblical standards are rejected in exchange for a lifestyle promoted by lust patterns. The divine institutions are under assault as are the freedoms of speech, the free exercise of religion, and the right to keep and bear arms.

The critical point will occur when believers are mandated by government to give up their Bibles, to cease studying its contents, and to refrain from mentioning its principles to others.

The biblical policy for the believer in absence of these restrictions is to obey the law. The biblical policy in the face of these restrictions is given in the Book of Acts.

In the context of Acts 4, Peter and John appear before the Sanhedrin, having been detained because they claimed to have healed a man through the power of Jesus.

Before moving to Acts 4 it is important to learn some details about the Sanhedrin:

Sanhedrin (συνέδριον, *sunedrion*): the name for the highest Jewish tribunal, of 71 members in Jerusalem. It is derived from *sun*, "together," and *hedra*, "seat." In Greek and Roman literature the senates of Sparta, Carthage, and even Rome, are so called.

There is a lack of positive historical information as to the origin of the Sanhedrin. According to Jewish tradition it was constituted by Moses (Numbers 11:16-24) and was recognized by Ezra immediately after the return from exile. But there is no historical evidence to show that previous to the Greek period there existed an organized aristocratic governing tribunal among the Jews. Its beginning is to be placed at the period in which Asia was convulsed by Alexander the great and his successors.

The Hellenistic kings conceded a great amount of internal freedom to municipal communities, and Palestine was then practically under home rule, and was governed by an aristocratic council of Elders, the head of which was the hereditary high priest.

During the Roman period the Sanhedrin's influence was most powerful, the internal government of the country being practically in its hands and it was religiously recognized even among the Diaspora. The Sanhedrin was abolished after the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.).

In the time of Christ, the Great Sanhedrin at Jerusalem enjoyed a very high measure of independence. It exercised not only civil jurisdiction, according to Jewish law, but also, in some degree, criminal. It had administrative authority and could order arrests by its own officers of justice (Acts 4:3). It was empowered to judge cases which did not involve capital punishment, which latter required the confirmation of the Roman procurator. As a rule, the procurator arranged his judgment in accordance with the demands of the Sanhedrin.¹

Acts 4:9 - "If we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well,

v. 10 - let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health."

The Jewish hierarchy could not deny that the man, previously ill, was now in good health. They debated about what to do in verses 16 and 17 and came to this conclusion:

Acts 4:17 - "So that it [the miracle of healing] will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them [Peter and John] to speak no longer to any man in this name."

v. 18 - And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Note the mandate given to the two apostles is "not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus." The word *command* is the aorist active indicative of the verb **παραιγγέλλω, parangellō**: to advance an order, charge, or command.

The constative aorist was expressed at a moment in time but it had legs in the sense that its prohibition will be used in the future if circumstances dictate. Undaunted, Peter and John expressed their contention that they were under divine mandate to proceed regardless of the Sanhedrin's threats:

Acts 4:19 - But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;

v. 20 - for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

The words *give heed* are one word in the Greek, the present active infinitive of the verb **ἀκούω, akouō**: to hear, but the idea of "hear and obey" or simply "obey" is frequently contained in the Greek verb ἀκούω.²

John and Peter lay the onus on the Sanhedrin, "You make the call about what is right for us to do: obey you or obey God, but we will go on speaking."

¹ Paul Levertoff, "Sanhedrin," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed., James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939. 1956), 4:2688-89.

² *The NET Bible* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2001), 2025n20.

This is the circumstance that many of us may one day face. If governmental authorities command us to quit speaking the gospel, quit studying the Word, and quit proclaiming as truth its precepts, then our response is to be, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to obey you rather than God, you be the judge.”

1 Peter 2:15 - For such is the will of God that by performing divine good you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

By submitting to the rightful mandates of government the believer is able to silence the ignorance of foolish men. The word *silence* is the verb **φιμόω, phimoō**: to muzzle the mouth of a beast. If a dog is muzzled he can still growl but he can't bite. By obeying the law and by upholding the laws of divine establishment, the critics may growl but they cannot punish.

NOTE: *Forty Proclamations: The Theology of Grace Doctrine Church* has been updated to include a definition of marriage:

22) Marriage. A divine institution that unites for life two people—one man and one woman. The *Christian* marriage is a spiritual as well as a divine institution that unites for life a man and a woman who have each expressed personal faith in Jesus Christ for salvation and eternal life. United as one, they become a corporate testimony to the world of the Church's eternal relationship with Christ: reciprocal love and enduring respect for Christ expressed through the testimony of the wife, and Christ's unconditional love and enduring devotion to the Church expressed through the testimony of the husband. God Himself united the first members of the human family, which fact alone should abolish all light, frivolous, and unorthodox views of marriage. Therefore, Grace Doctrine Church only solemnizes marriages of Christian couples of which at least one party—the woman or the man—must be a member of the local congregation. The Board of Deacons has delegated complete discretion to the pastor regarding who the church will unite in Christian marriage. (Ecclesiastes 9:9; Matthew 19:4–6; Ephesians 5:22–33; 1 Corinthians 7:1–4; 2 Corinthians 6:14–16a; Genesis 2:20–24.)³

Believers who have advanced to the level of wisdom in their souls have the moxie to respond to criticisms of the Word, Christ, the church, and doctrines that challenge the Progressive Zeitgeist.

Progressives are ignorant of the Word of God; otherwise they would not have the worldview they do. When believers are captured by this nefarious ideology they are ignorant of truth and therefore fools.

Peter implores us to recognize the system of authority by which our temporal freedom is protected.

1 Peter 2:16 - Act as free [ὡς ἐλεύθερος, *hōs eleutheros*] men, and do not use your freedom [ἐλευθερία, *eleutheria*] as a covering [ἐπικάλυμμα, *epikalumma*] for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.

The opening phrase *as free* is introduced by the concessive particle *hōs* followed by the noun *eleutheros* and refers to a state of freedom. Those who are truly free recognize the necessity for order and submission to the authority structure of a civilized community:

³ “Marriage,” in *Forty Proclamations: The Theology of Grace Doctrine Church*, ed. Joe Griffin (St. Charles, MO: Grace Doctrine Church, 2010), proclamation 22.

Order is the first need of the soul. It is not possible to love what one ought to love, unless we recognize some principles of order by which to govern ourselves.

Order is the first need of the commonwealth. It is not possible for us to live in peace with one another, unless we recognize some principle of order by which to do justice.

The good society is marked by a high degree of order, justice, and freedom. Among these, order has primacy: for justice cannot be enforced until a tolerable civil social order is attained, nor can freedom be anything better than violence until order gives us laws.⁴

In 1979, I completed my responses to the Berachah Church Doctrinal Questionnaire. Query number 52 was, "What is your concept of heaven and the lake of Fire?" Regarding hell, I submitted that it was characterized by the complete absence of order. Here is my response:

My conception of retribution is that inhabitants of the lake of fire are in an eternal state of non-order both individually and collectively. Due to the complete absence of the laws of divine establishment, basic morality, and the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit, the situation is chaotic.

Collectively, since there is no order, there is no authority, and as a result, no freedom. The absence of authority means that all are equal, none having any vested power over another. There are no laws and no system to establish any.

Individually, all seek their own disordered way. Since there is not one syllable of divine viewpoint to be found, all thought becomes massive and unrestrained human viewpoint resulting in absolute evil.

Environmentally, the heat from the lake of fire creates perpetual thirst and saps the energy necessary to seek the escape which does not exist.

The unbeliever, ensnared in a mental state of complete frustration, bewilderment, and disarray, staggers through an anfractuous maze filled with equally distraught souls, all seeking a thought which might offer some hope but no one can be found who can oblige.

Consequently, hell is nothing more than total equality taken to its ultimate extreme. The result is the elimination of all authority, without which there can be no order, no justice, and no freedom. It is no wonder that "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:12).⁵

Thus in the state of freedom, free men recognize the system of authority by which freedom is maintained, protected, and perpetuated. Were it not for a system of authority then disorder would prevail and chaos would cause the society to explode into violence. Therefore, if our commonwealth is disordered, we fall into anarchy, every man's hand against every other man's.⁶

⁴ Russell Kirk, *The Roots of American Order* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1974), 6.

⁵ Joe Griffin, "Concept of the Lake of Fire" (Doctrinal Questionnaire, Berachah Church, 1978), 48.

⁶ Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, 6.