

From Acts 5:33-42 GAMALIEL
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From Acts 5:33-42: GAMALIEL'S BASELINE REASONING and LANGUAGE FOR TAXING
CIRCUMSTANCES and CONDITIONS
PART 1: ALL UNDERSTANDING IS RELATIVE v.38.

#1. In all taxing circumstances and conditions, men look for explanations; they seek for a way of understanding such things.

#2. But all understanding is relative to its proposed source. The chosen source is a *personal choice*, a manifestation of will, considered to be to one's own benefit.

#3. In every "present case" one needs a *frame of reference* from which one might draw a *baseline of reasoning and language*. "Gamaliel", "a Pharisee"... "a teacher of the Law"... a member of "the Council" and "respected by all the people", "stood up" to set *the advised frame of reference*.

#4. The pressure was on; it was a matter of life and death. "But when" the Council heard the apostolic defense (v.33); "We must obey God rather than men" (4:29), "they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them" v.33.

#5. "And he said to them, 'Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men' v.35. Action taken would be relative to the understanding of the situation, proposed by the frame of reference.

#6. The advent of revelation as baseline reasoning and language puts the case for *inevitable division* among men. Believers and unbelievers will not be divided just along doctrinal differences. The line of division will have to do with differing perspectives and understandings of the same general experience of time.

#7. A powerful and undeniable miracle had occurred (Acts 3:1-10; 4:16). Gamaliel immediately recognized that the thinking and behavior of his brethren bore no relation to the power of God.

#8. The Council chose to divorce God from His revelation. This is also a contemporary failing among some believers, as well. Their baseline is strictly human. It gets murky.

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PART 2: AVOID RATIONALIZATION BASED UPON APPEARANCES v.38.

#1. "...stay away from these men and let them alone". In any taxing circumstance or condition, there will be the human proclivity to a) survey appearances and then to b) rationalize from those appearances to some kind of outcome.

#2. The idea is to rely on rationalism, the power of human reasoning, and to attempt human control of circumstance. All but Gamaliel, on the Council, took that path.

Gamaliel knew about the recent undeniable miracle performed on the crippled man (Acts 3). The Almighty had to have been the axis of that event. Then came the apostles preaching in the name of Christ. "And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say" (Acts 4:14).

#3. The Council was in way over its head! Any naturalistic or rationalistic baseline reasoning and language would have done them no good "in the present case".

#4. Gamaliel's advice: Stay out of it; do not interfere with it. Human derived baseline reasoning and the application of its language, feeds illusions and personal fears.

#5. Things were not going to take. "their natural course". The Lord was moving in those circumstances and conditions.

#6. The Word of God and the power of God must be accepted as the baseline for reasoning and language. Coming to Christ is much more than mere doctrinal compliance. It represents a redemption from limited human understanding, which usually functions as the baseline for thought, speech and behavior. In other words, revelation is muted and made relative to human wisdom.

#7. The Word of God, for all believers in Christ, becomes the new baseline reasoning and language for temporal existence. This revealed baseline precedes the arrival of the next taxing circumstance(s) and condition(s). Experience will bow to the Almighty, whatever it is.

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PART 3: THE LORD CLEAVES HUMAN EXPERIENCE IN TWO v.38, 39.

#1. "...for if this plan or action is of man it will be overthrown; but if it is of God..."

#2. The Almighty sees human experience in two categories. There are those plans and actions that are of men. Fired by human wisdom and fueled by human will, these plans and actions are kept away from the controlling effects of the word of God.

#3. And there are plans and actions that are of God. These begin as ideas and then they are submitted to prayer, patience and the test of biblical truth.

#4. Gamaliel tried to influence the majority members of the Council to think of their intentions in the light of something larger than the moment.

#5. His is a moral and spiritual admonition. Those who seek godliness are required to anchor their potential in the will of God.

#6. Gamaliel's baseline reasoning and language is the reversal of selfish ambition and narcissism. It takes into account the mind of God and the Lord's interests in human thought, speech and behavior.

#7. A man had been healed by the direct action of God and it was undeniable. The apostles confronted the people and the Council with its revealed meaning.

#8. Being "cut to the quick", they "intended to kill them" v.33. Their baseline reasoning and language had been severed from the reality of God. This is catastrophe! Pity that our culture does not and cannot recognize that. Any baseline that rejects the Almighty is necessarily catastrophic in substance and range of effect.

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PART 4: NEVER BECOME ENAMORED WITH YOUR OWN THOUGHT PROCESSES v.38, 39.

#1. "but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them..." v.39.

#2. The intervention of God into time and human history should inherently drive a wedge between us and our own habits of thought.

#3. The members of the Council were summoned by Gamaliel to that consideration. Plans and actions of men are subject to being "overthrown" by supernatural force, regardless of the circumstances they represent.

#4. But the plans and actions of God will always be sustained by the same supernatural force. The message is that human habits of thought carry personal consequences.

#5. To become, and remain, enamored with our own thought processes is a doorway to spiritual death. The thought processes of the Council and those of our own are wedged between the absolute power of God to sustain or to overthrow.

#6. Favored and comfortable habits of thought must be laid aside in the light of revealed truth. There, then, is the key to growth in faith. There is the anteroom of the approval of God.

#7. One's own bastion of resistance to the Bible and its baseline of reasoning and language is equivalent to one's own contentment with the way things are.

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PART 5: THE GOD-FIGHTERS v.39.

#1. "...or else you may even be found fighting against God" v.39.

#2. The baseline of reasoning and language for *the God-fighters* is opposition to, resistance to, the reality of the Christian God and His revelation to men.

#3. God-fighting is the source of several world view systems. These ways of thinking are loaded with assumptions chosen for their distance from the constraining authority of the Almighty.

#4. Atheism, rationalism, naturalism, communism, environmentalism, among other world views, are grounded in God-fighting. The Council, sitting in judgment upon the apostles and the manifest power of God, were in a dangerous situation.

#5. Such baselines are "of men" and share a common destiny. They are opposed by an absolute will and power beyond the temporal horizon. Such rationalized systematics are destined to be "overthrown".

#6. Individual believers are willing to put themselves at risk in this struggle between faith and the God-fighters. "They flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus..." v.40. What happens to us in this world is uncertain; but the issue of revealed truth is not in doubt.

#7. "So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name" v.41.