

Indignation

(Acts Session 9—April 19, 2026)

Acts 5:17-18

17 Then the high priest rose up, and all those who *were* with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and ***they were filled with indignation,***

18 and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.

That one phrase stuck out to me when I first read it in preparation for this message:

They were filled with indignation.

It struck me, and I haven't been able to shake it since. I had hoped to get to the end of the chapter today, but this is where most of our attention will be directed today.

They were filled with indignation.

In most of the other versions, the Greek word translated here as "***indignation***" gets rendered as "***jealousy***." The Greek word is "***Zay-los***", which literally means "***to boil, or to be hot***". Think in terms of thermal intensity. And the translation can go in a number of directions, depending upon the context.

Regarding translating the word as "***jealousy***", it is well documented in the Gospels that the religious leaders of the day were jealous of Jesus. Undoubtedly, a similar jealousy was felt regarding the Apostles, as they began to step into their callings.

But given the context here, I think translating the word as ***indignation*** is a logical choice. Because the Apostles had blatantly ignored a direct order that these leaders had given them in the previous chapter. Here's what the Sadducees said there:

Acts 4:17-18

17 But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name."

18 So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

The indignation they felt was cloaked in the garb of spirituality. You see, the Sadducees viewed themselves as the primary guardians of Israel's faith. And on that basis, ***who did these upstart Apostles think they were***, to disregard a direct order from the High Priest himself?

So, they felt completely justified in their objections to the Apostles' behavior. They felt insulted. Not to mention that their religious sensibilities and sense of decorum had been violated. They were indeed filled with Indignation. ***Not Righteous Indignation, mind you. RELIGIOUS INDIGNATION.***

Religious indignation is a mental state that—at its worst—has fueled the persecution of Christians down through the centuries, with many thousands being murdered on that basis right to this very day.

If you have any doubts about that, simply check some of the recent reports on the subject.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, mass killings, kidnappings, and the destruction of entire villages are routinely carried out by radical Islamists. And all of this is done on the basis of very intense religious indignation against Christians, who they view as infidels.

But our line of inquiry today deals with a much more subtle variation of this malady. A variation that is found much closer to home.

You see, Religious Indignation can also infect the thinking of true, born-again believers.

It can rise up in the hearts of those within the church as well as those who are committed to the opposition of our faith.

And for this reason, religious indignation must be consciously guarded against. In your **own** heart.

Here's my thought: I don't want us to just cluck our tongues at these Sadducees and feel like we've done our duty today. What good would that accomplish for us?

Better that we glean some wisdom from the example of their misconduct, and work on applying that wisdom to our own day-to-day lives. Because among other things, God's Word teaches us how to live our lives.

And with that thought in mind, let me read the next couple of verses in **Acts 5**, because I need to quote a line from the angel who speaks to the Apostles here.

Acts 5:19-20

19 But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, **20** "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."

The way this angel characterized the message of the Gospel is significant.

"...all the words of this life."

That tells us something. That this thing we call Christianity? It's not just a religion or a philosophy. Oh, there are many religious and philosophical aspects to it, to be sure. And I don't minimize the importance of those.

But at its root, at the core of the Christian faith is this idea of life. Being made alive to God through the death and resurrection of Christ, and living out the rest of our days accordingly.

Down in the last verse of the chapter, we see how this message of life was communicated.

Acts 5:42

And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

That is the heart of the gospel. Jesus as the Christ. When I was a kid, I thought Christ was Jesus' last name. I never understood that it was a title. It means God's anointed One, His chosen One, sent to save His people.

We are to preach Christ. Christ crucified for our forgiveness. Christ raised for our justification. Christ ascending to the Father's right hand, where He intercedes for us now. And Christ returning—one day soon, I suspect—to gather us up to Himself.

Anyone who embraces those truths by receiving Christ into their heart will notice the tremendous impact they have on how they live.

All of a sudden, you start thinking of life in different terms. Now, life centers on Jesus. It's much more than just the embracing of religious beliefs. It's the embracing of Christ the Person. And by faith you begin to walk through life in step with Him.

So that when it comes time to handle a crisis, now you lean on Christ, who is your solid Rock. For uncertain times, you discover the joy of having His counsel through His Word.

Yes indeed, **"The words of this life"** is a phrase that encompasses much more than religious affiliation.

It's not a religion. Nor a philosophy. It is a life. A way of life to which you have been called. Understand, before the believers were called **Christians** they were called **People of the Way**.

Never lose sight of the fact that we are called to a life. A life that is live, not in reference to a list of rules. But life in the Holy Spirit. A unique walk with Christ that is enabled through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:14

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

That's the difference between just a religion and the life we've been called to. To be led by the Spirit is an amazing privilege. Only God's kids get to experience that.

Alright, I need to get back to our original consideration. **Religious Indignation**. Trust me—the specter of Religious Indignation lurks much closer than you might think. No Christian is exempt from the temptation to lean in that direction. And lean we will, if we are not careful.

You know, it's interesting that this characteristic was manifested in the disciples, about midway through their training.

Luke 9:49-50

49 Now John answered and said, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us.”

50 But Jesus said to him, “Do not forbid *him*, for he who is not against us is on our side.”

One random comment, just as an aside. It occurs to me that this verse differs substantially from the one where Jesus says, “**He who is not with Me is against Me...**”

In the case before us, Jesus uses a different pronoun. He uses the word “**US**”. “**...he who is not against US is on OUR side.**”

That leads me to conclude that Jesus is primarily addressing the unity of the church here. Not the state of an individual's soul. But I didn't have

time to develop that thought further. Maybe another time.

But right there, Jesus defines a line of demarcation that we must not cross.

“...He who is not against us is on our side.”

In terms of practical application, this teaching of Christ covers a rather broad swath Christians and churches and ministries. **“...He who is not against us is on our side.”**

We need to rethink our attitude towards other true believers who may take a different approach than ours to church life and ministry. Who may interpret some of the Scriptures differently than we do.

Because in spite of those differences, if they are close enough on the main points of the faith, then we shouldn't allow division to grow and disrupt our fellowship.

“...He who is not against us is on OUR SIDE.”

You see, that's the rub. The problem begins to grow when the people within the church start taking up sides **UNNECESSARILY**. Just like the Corinthians did. Let's take a quick look over there.

If you are familiar with **1 Corinthians**, you can tell from Paul's opening statement that he is very frustrated. He was hoping to find indications of spiritual growth in that church, but was met with disappointment.

To put it bluntly, they had gotten stuck. And so Paul does what any mature individual does when they are frustrated with others—

He starts calling them names.

Actually, he doesn't do that. But he does use some rather colorful terms to describe their spiritual condition.

He calls them carnal, he calls them spiritual babies, and he says they are behaving like unconverted people.

Now before we read a few verses from Paul's letter to them, allow me to insert an *FYI*, just in case you are new to Bible terminology. Paul uses the word **CARNAL** in his letter.

For convenience' sake, here's a usable application of the word CARNAL: Just think of it as meaning **UNSPIRITUAL**.

Literally, it means "**fleshly**" or of the flesh. To help you remember that, know that our English word "**Carnal**" is related to the Spanish word **Carne**. As in **Chile Con Carne**, which means **Chili With Meat**. Ah, I'm making us all hungry.

But that gets the point across. To be carnal—in the way that Paul is using the word here—simply means **to live as if you are nothing more than meat**. As if you are not alive to God.

By extension, to be carnal means that you serve the dictates of your evil imagination, which is manifested in various attitudes, behaviors, and physical indulgences. That's what Paul was saying about these folks.

His frustration with them becomes even clearer, when you consider the nature of the disagreements they were having:

1 Corinthians 1:11-12

11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.

12 Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."

He goes on to tell them what this indicates.

1 Corinthians 3:1-4

1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able;

3 for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

They were starting to show early signs of developing religious indignation towards one another.

Saying things like, ***Paul has the right take on things. No, Apollos is a much more effective preacher. No, Peter was the head Apostle, I'm taking my cue from him.***

Of course, there were also the really spiritual ones. You know, the guys who said, ***"I'm just focusing on Jesus."***

Well, they were all wrong. Paul called all of them on the carpet. They were all taking sides unnecessarily.

And then someone might say, ***"But wait a minute, Doug. Those folks who were just focusing on Jesus? It sounds like they had it right."***

No, they didn't, and I'll tell you why.

I've seen people try to pit the teachings of Jesus against the teachings of Paul. A prominent example of this occurs in terms of the gay lifestyle.

Some will say, ***"Jesus never addressed the issue. Therefore, I take that as evidence that it's no big deal to Him. And since Paul DOES make a big deal of it, I choose to ignore the words of Paul, and can still be a follower of Jesus."***

Nope. The Bible is the Word of God across the board, and must be treated as such.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

If you want to please God, then receive the Bible the way He meant it to be received. As His word—front to back. **All Scripture...**that's what it says. If it goes against your grain—welcome to the club. Our grain needs some smoothing out anyway.

By and large, Religious Indignation has its roots in pride. This was certainly the case with the Corinthians, and it was manifested by their argumentative spirit. They needed to overcome this thing before they could begin to mature in the Lord.

And so, with that thought in mind as we head towards our conclusion, let's give the Apostle James our attention, as he offers up some wonderful insights in chapter 3 of his book.

First, James gives us a target to set our sights on.

James 3:13

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that his works are done* in the meekness of wisdom.

He couples wisdom with meekness here. Other translations render the word as humility. Two other things are mentioned—conduct, and works. How the person carries themselves seems to be the emphasis here. No big shots. Just humble servants.

Then he goes on to diagnose the problem in the case of those who appear to have wisdom and knowledge, but without some vital supplemental qualities.

James 3:14-16

14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.

15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.

16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

That's quite a list. Bitter envy, self-seeking. That certainly seems to be applicable to those Sadducees. But it can also apply to ordinary folks just like us. To have an argumentative spirit is a dangerous thing. That is what James cautions us to be on the lookout for.

And in that regard, one of David's Psalms might be helpful. A prayer we can lift up to God, if we are seeking to grow spiritually. It could be a daily prayer.

Psalm 139:23-24

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

24 Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

With that passage in mind, let's look to James' recommendations.

James 3:17-18

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

So we'll take a quick look at the individual characteristics of godly wisdom, which is a shield against religious indignation.

First, **PURE**. This speaks of basic motivation. It describes the pursuit of truth, for its own sake. "He that is of the truth hears My voice," Jesus said in **John 18**. That's a wonderful promise.

Then, there is **PEACEABLE**. As opposed to being contentious. Some of us in our pre-Christian days loved a good fight or argument. We are called to be lovers of peace. To be peace makers, as much depends on us.

He adds **GENTLE**. David said, “*Your gentleness has made me great.*” A gentle person always keeps the other person’s limitations in mind, and will adjust their approach accordingly.

Gentleness is one of the basic requirements of church leaders, especially in terms of their interactions with non-believers.

2 Timothy 2:24-26

24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient,
25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,
26 and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

Here’s a tough one for some folks: **WILLING TO YIELD**. It’s tough because they love to win. Now we all like to win, but for some folks, winning was the major motivation of their life before getting saved.

James is saying that Godly wisdom will yield when it’s called for. That requires remaining open to new ideas. To be precise for our purposes this morning, to be open to new ideas that can be proven by Scripture.

A wise person will stop resisting when the truth of God’s Word demands they abandon their current opinion.

FULL OF MERCY AND GOOD FRUITS. These two qualities are grouped together, which makes sense. Much of the good fruit in the life of a Christian will come as a result of showing mercy or compassion to others.

When these two characteristics are pursued with diligence, they will go a long ways towards fending off any religious indignation we might be harboring. Exposure to the desperate circumstances of others’ lives will soften your heart and keep you focused on the main priorities.

I’m reminded of William Booth’s comments regarding his view of lost humanity. Booth was the founder of the Salvation Army, and in his biography, there is a chapter titled “**Go for Souls, and Go for the Worst**”.

In there, a conversation is recorded that he once had with a British tycoon, a man made rich by diamond mines and gold mines. This man asked Booth a question:

“*Tell me, Booth, how is it that the submerged miserables appeal to you?*”

Allow me to explain his terminology. That was a phrase common to the era. ***Submerged Misérables was a way of describing*** the class of people that William Booth had devoted most of his ministry to.

Those who had sunk beneath the surface of normal society—lost in the “ocean” of urban poverty and the sins common to that set of circumstances. These people were likened to shipwrecked survivors struggling to stay afloat. ***Submerged Miserables.***

Booth’s reply was telling: “*To me men, especially the worst, possess the attraction of gold mines. The greatest sinners are the greatest sufferers, and I want to have a hand at their salvation.*”

His words carry a tone of deep compassion mixed with urgency — Booth wasn’t romanticizing their suffering; he was highlighting how far they had sunk and how urgently they needed rescue.

But he didn't stop there. He didn't limit his hope to just the down and outers. As evidence of that, just a few years later, that wealthy man he was talking to was nearing the end of his life. And he remembered William Booth with these words:

William Booth is, "...the only one who believes I have a soul."

When the dust settles, that's the main thing for all of us, isn't it? Everyone has a soul. A soul that is worth saving, I might add.

And then James concludes with these two characteristics.

And then James finishes the list with another pair: **Without Partiality and Without Hypocrisy**. Impartiality in terms of seeking the truth will definitely protect a person against hypocrisy.

The Sadducees could well have applied this principle to their lives. Come to think of it, the same thing might be applied across the board to journalists and politicians, who love to strike a pose or moral indignation. But I digress.

Religious Indignation always seems to result in some measure of hypocrisy. And protection against that is to be found in an impartial approach to the truth.

That implies a willingness to listen, and to be persuaded by Scripture.

Do these things that James points out, and it will greatly enhance your resistance to Religious Indignation.

And that will open up the probability of a whole new growth spurt in the life of any believer.

Alright, in terms of homework for this coming week: Our title is **Indignation**. We are actually

going to work **against** religious indignation, and we'll do so by meditating on **James 3:13-18**.

Take these things to heart. Try putting them into practice when you have conversations with your spouse or kids or friends or whoever.

And don't forget to pray for the Lord to examine your heart, ala Psalm 139, as I will pray the same for my own heart.

Who knows? Perhaps this will open doors of opportunity for more extensive fellowship with other churches and ministries. To hopefully function more as the Body of Christ should.

"...He who is not against us is on our side."

Those are words we would do well to remember.