

[MS-0399.002.008.023]

COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT  
NO LONGER PROHIBITED

Acts 4:5-12

Most Americans today watch videotapes, especially of recent popular movies. Have you ever noticed one thing that is common to virtually every videotape you rent or buy? Right at the beginning of each tape, assuming you don't fast-forward past it, is a very serious and sober *warning*—a warning against copying that tape. Copying a videotape made by someone else is against the law. The



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same applies to musical recordings, to books, to records, and to many other similar items. The rights to copy and distribute creative material—such as movie videotapes—are reserved to the authors and producers thereof, or their agents. That's what the word *copyright* means. And copyright infringement is strictly prohibited.

The ancient Jews had received a series of dramatic revelations of the nature of God during the time of Moses. God had repeatedly shown them, in awesome and unmistakable ways, his grace, love, and mercy. For centuries thereafter, God had occasionally spoken to them through prophets and other inspired teachers. They had dutifully written down God's revelations to them, entrusting these writings to a special group of men, called priests, to pass on to future generations.

God's special outpourings of grace and his revelations to the Jews gradually became fewer and fewer until, four centuries prior to the time of Jesus, they had ceased altogether. Because there were no more new revelations, the existing, past revelations of God to the Jews became more and more precious. As their value increased, the Jewish priests—who guarded, copied, and transmitted the written record of these former revelations—gained increased authority and power through their handling of these rare, sacred materials. By the time of Jesus, the temple priests of Jerusalem and their appointed agents, called scribes, had assumed exclusive rights to manage the very sacred word of God. God's revelations had become a limited resource, reserved to and carefully conserved by the high Jewish religious authorities. In short, they held the copyright on God's word.

Holding this copyright gave the religious leaders of the Jews exclusive power to dole out knowledge of the word, and the will, of God to whomever they wished, whenever they wished. Or they could withhold it. And that was that.

Then along came a man named Jesus, from Nazareth. He claimed that God's revelations to the Jews had not ceased. Further, he even dared to claim that he was a new revelation of God—and not only to the Jews, but to all humanity. He spoke and the common people heard—many of them for the first time—and openly and spontaneously proclaimed the word of God. This was exciting!

But it was also, from the point of view of the Jewish religious leaders, illegal. Jesus was infringing on their copyright. Revela-

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tions from God were their exclusive property. Pronouncements of divine wisdom could only come from them or their authorized agents. So they went to Jesus and asked, point blank, "Who gave you the right to say and do these things?"

I have always wondered what kind of answer they expected. Perhaps if Jesus had said, "Well, I studied under Senior Rabbi Zaran for five years, and I have here a notarized letter, with a raised wax seal, from High Priest Amal," they would have said okay and left Jesus alone.

But Jesus did not give them the answers they wanted. I do not know exactly what the legal penalty is for copying videotapes in this country today, but to the Jewish leaders of Jesus' time, the penalty for copyright infringement was death. Jesus was illegally distributing godly materials—like mercy, forgiveness, and love. So they killed him.

It is pretty hard to imagine a more radical solution to a problem than murdering the one causing it. Can you imagine the frustration the Jewish leaders experienced when, just a few months later, word was brought to them that the same problem had arisen again; and this time, there were ten or more copyright violators? A whole group of men, calling themselves apostles, were publicly proclaiming that God cared for, and was freely available to, the common riffraff on the streets of Jerusalem! And, worse yet, they claimed that God had raised up, from the dead, the man named Jesus whom they had killed for the same crime!

Our text today tells us that the Jewish leaders acted exactly as they had with Jesus. They arrested the two most prominent leaders of this new group, Peter and John, brought them before themselves, and asked them virtually the same question they had posed to Jesus: "By what power or by what name did you do this?" (v. 7b). In other words, "Who gave you the right to trespass in our territory? We've got the originals of everything God ever said, and so we have exclusive authority to speak on God's behalf. You're infringing on our copyright."

Peter's reply to these Jewish leaders is classic:

"Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you

crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.' There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved." (vv. 8b-12)

Peter's response was a verbal sword that cut straight to the heart of the entire matter. For centuries, these religious leaders had monopolized, and virtually sealed away, the mercies of Almighty God. Because the apostles had dared to openly proclaim God's love, and to demonstrate it in tangible ways—as in releasing God's healing power for a crippled man—they were being put on trial. It was ludicrous—ridiculous.

And, Peter added, because of the miserly way the Jewish authorities had hoarded the things of God, their copyright was voided—by its true owner, Almighty God. The great Creator had just revoked their presumed right to limit his creativity. God had raised up Jesus from the dead, and, from henceforth, Jesus, not they, would hold the copyright on Godly revelation. And further still, Jesus would freely allow the love, mercy, and grace of God to be openly distributed to any and all who might desire it.

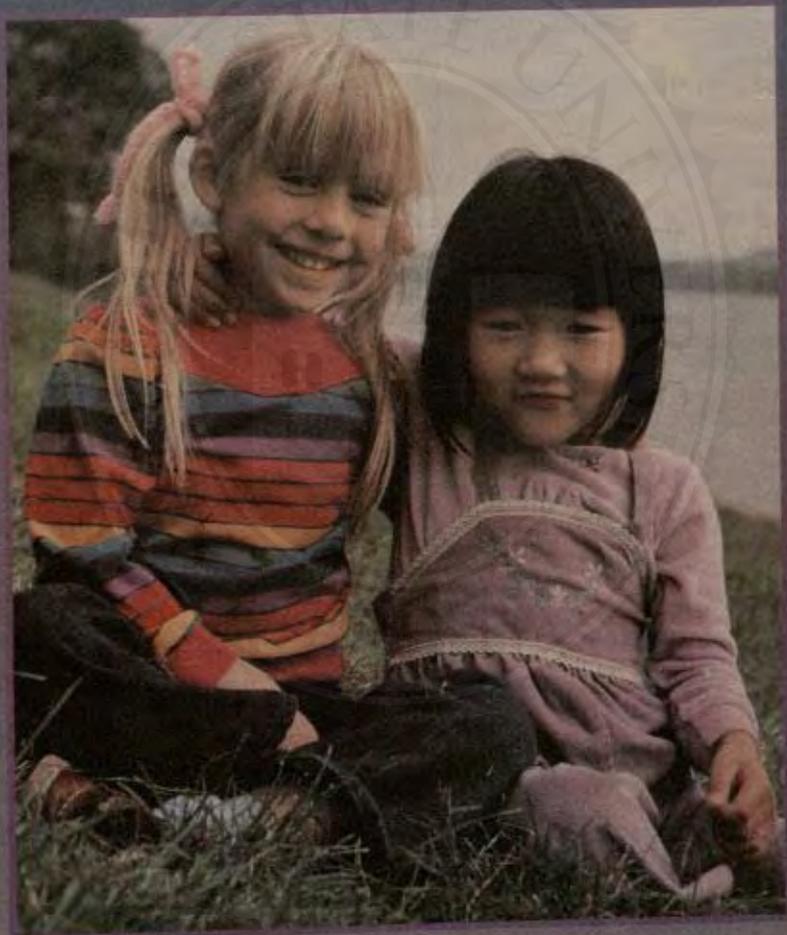
What does all this mean to us today, almost two millennia removed from the time of Jesus, Peter, John, and the Jewish authorities? As followers of Jesus, the Christ, we are his agents, entrusted with the copyright that he now holds on God's behalf. We are most certainly not to be like the Jewish priests of old and limit its distribution, either by intention or by inaction. Instead, we are encouraged to spread the revelations of God—his love, his mercy, his wonderful grace—far and wide. We have blanket permission to use the copyright.

Whenever permission is granted to use someone else's copyright, there is one obvious condition that goes along with the permission. You must acknowledge—give credit to—the one from whom the permission was received. And so it is with this. We have permission to reveal and proclaim the love of God, to any and all, in the *name of Jesus*. When we announce the good news of God's salvation made available to all humanity, we *must* do so in the name of Jesus, for it is from him that we have received this blessed right. As Peter said to the Jewish authorities so long ago, "there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

Beloved people of God: Tell the good news. Spread the wonderful word of salvation. Reveal the mercies of God to all. You have full authority to use God's copyright—in the name of Jesus. Amen.

I give you  
a new commandment  
to love one another

*John 12:24*



# MORNING WORSHIP SERVICE

March 22, 1998

10:30 A.M.



## PREPARATION OF OUR HEARTS FOR WORSHIP

*"Let the people be in silent meditation and prayer upon entering the sanctuary."*

## WE PRAISE GOD

PRELUDE

CHORAL INTROIT

*"We Come To Praise The Lord"*

Organist  
Youth Choir

PRAYER OF PREPARATION

...

§HYMN OF PRAISE

*"Onward Christian Soldiers"*

Insert

†CALL TO WORSHIP

*Leader: O Lord, thou art very near to all who call upon you.*

*People: O Lord, thou art our help and our deliverer.*

*Leader: Come, let us worship and bow down.*

*People: Blessed be the name of the Lord.*

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Eternal God of mercy, hear us as we confess our sin. Daily we awaken to a new journey of life; yet, we fail to be thankful for the opportunities that lie before us. Moments await our decision to serve you; yet, time passes away as we think only of ourselves. Our routine gives us the chance to share your love with others; yet, we are absorbed with our own self improvement. The day soon passes. It has been much the same as other days. Forgive us for casting aside the precious time you have given. Grant us the faith and excitement of walking with you into the future days, in the name of the Christ of all time. Amen.

DECLARATION OF PARDON

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

...

*"The Apostle's Creed  
The Presbyterian Hymnal"*

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# WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD

ANTHEM

*"I Will Praise Him"*

Youth Choir

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

...  
*Margie Saunders*

*Leader:*

*Lift up your hearts.*

*People:*

*We lift them up to the Lord.*

*Leader:*

*Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*

*People:*

*It is right to give our thanks and praise.*

*Leader:*

*Let us pray.*

PASTORAL PRAYER  
CHORAL RESPONSE

*"Hallelujah"*

Youth Choir

...

RITUAL OF FRIENDSHIP

*"What A Fellowship"*

Congregation

GIVING OF TITHES AND OFFERINGS

OFFERTORY MUSIC

*"The Lord Is Blessing Me"*

Youth Choir

DOXOLOGY

*"Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow"*

Congregation

OFFERTORY PRAYER

THREEFOLD AMEN

## GOD SPEAKS TO US

SCRIPTURE

Acts 4:5-12

MUSICAL SELECTION

*"I Want To Be Used"*

Youth Choir

SERMON

Rev. George W. Smith

**"Copyright Infringement No Longer Prohibited"**

INVITATIONAL HYMN

*"Open My Eyes That I May See"*

#324

BENEDICTION

CHORAL BENEDICTION

*"Sweet, Sweet Spirit" (#398)*

Youth Choir

§Congregation standing

⌘Congregation sitting

...Worshippers will be seated

**TO OUR GUESTS:** You are welcome to our worship service and all activities of the church. Please help us to know you by filling out a visitor's card from one of the Ushers. You are invited to meet with others in the Fellowship Hall for refreshments following the Worship Service. Please come again and invite your friends and neighbors to come with you.

**USHERS FOR TODAY:** Chip Hodge, Sagon Penn, Al Littlefield, Ray Hill

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE CHRIST AS YOUR SAVIOR,** we invite you to come to the front of the sanctuary during the Invitational Hymn. Elders Barbara Boucher and Lola Buie will be at the front of the sanctuary to greet you.

**PREPARING FOOD FOR THE HOMELESS TODAY** will be **THE YOUTH.** If you are asked to help prepare or purchase food, please do it with a smile! We love your time and talent. Thank you.

**HOSTING THE FELLOWSHIP HOUR TODAY** will be The Parent Council



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