

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church
Study of the Book of Acts
Easter Season 2024

Week 2

Chapter 5

The disciples were very holy, and heavenly, and seemed to be all exceedingly good; *but* there were hypocrites among them, whose *hearts were not right in the sight of God*, who, when they were baptized, and took upon them *the form of godliness, denied the power of godliness*, and stopped short of that. There is a mixture of bad with good in the best societies on this side of heaven; tares will grow among the wheat until the harvest.

It was the praise of the disciples that they came up to recommend to the rich young man—they *sold what they had, and gave to the poor; but* even that proved a cloak and cover of hypocrisy which was thought the greatest proof and evidence of sincerity.

Then we have the sin of Ananias and Sapphira his wife. It is good to see husband and wife joining together in that which is good, but to be confederate in evil is to be like Adam and Eve, when they agreed to eat the forbidden fruit, and were one in their disobedience.

That they were covetous of the wealth of the world, and distrustful of God and his providence: *They sold their land*, and perhaps then, in a pang of zeal, designed no other than to dedicate the whole of the purchase-money to pious uses, and made a vow, or at least conceived a full purpose, to do so; but, when the money was received, their heart failed them, and *they kept back part of the price, (v. 2)*, because they loved the money, and thought it was too much to part with at once, and to trust in the apostles' hands, and because they knew they might want it themselves; though now all things were common, what should they do in a time of need, if they should leave themselves nothing?

They could not take God's word that they would be provided for, but thought they would play a wiser part than the rest had done, and lay up for a rainy day. Thus, they thought to serve both God and the material world, by bringing part of the money to the apostles' feet, and by keeping the other part their own. Ananias, when confronted of his sin, falls dead.

The reckoning with Sapphira, the wife of Ananias, who perhaps was first in the transgression, and tempted her husband to eat this forbidden fruit. *She came in* to the place where the apostles were, which, as it should seem, was Solomon's porch, for there we find them (v. 12), a part of the temple where Christ used to walk, [Jn. 10:23](#). *She came in about three hours after* her husband had been dead and buried, expecting to share in the thanks of the house for her coming in, and consenting to the sale of the land, of which perhaps she was entitled to her dower or thirds;

for *she knew not what had been done*. It was strange that nobody ran to tell her of the sudden death of her husband, that she might keep away; perhaps some one did, and she was not at home; and so when she came to present herself before the apostles, as a benefactor to the fund she met with a breach instead of a blessing which also left her dead in her tracks.

The impression that this made upon the people. ([v. 5](#)): *Great fear came upon all that heard these things*, that heard what Peter said. And again ([v. 11](#)), *Great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things*.

Then the high priest becomes the ringleader. Those that were most forward to join with the high priest herein were the *sect of the Sadducees*, who had a particular enmity to the gospel of Christ, because it confirmed and established the doctrine of the invisible world, the resurrection of the dead, and the future state, which they denied. Therefore, those proclaiming Christ are arrested.

Then while in prison the apostles are discharged, legally discharged, from their imprisonment ([v. 19](#)): *The angel of the Lord by night*, in spite of all the locks and bars that were upon them, *opened the prison doors*, and, in spite of all the vigilance and resolution of the keepers that *stood without before the doors, brought forth* the prisoners (see [v. 23](#)), gave them authority to go out without crime, and led them through all opposition.

Then past cases are cited, to pave the way to deal with these offenders. Two instances are given of factious seditious men (such as they would have the apostles thought to be), whose attempts came to nothing of themselves; whence he infers that if these men were indeed such as they represented them the cause would sink with its own weight, and Providence would infatuate and defeat them, and then they needed not persecute them.

Blue Letter Bible Commentary Matthew Henry on Acts

Chapter 6 and 7

The rapid growth of the first-century church meant an influx of people. More people meant more needs and new ministries to meet those needs. New programs meant administrative and logistical problems that threatened to consume all the apostles' time. Rather than neglect the spiritual disciplines of prayer and teaching God's Word, the apostles called and commissioned a group of men to attend to the pressing needs of the body.

Stephen was one of the church's newly appointed "deacons" (6:1–7). With a Christ-like character, he ministered powerfully among the people, until the day he encountered a group of argumentative Jews. After he declared the truth about God to them, they told lies about him to the Jewish authorities. For faithfully discharging his duties as a believer, Stephen was arrested! If Stephen was nervous as he stood before the high priest and powerful council of the Jews, he

didn't show it. He gave the religious leaders a concise review of Jewish history and then abruptly called them "stiff-necked" (verse 51) and accused the council of murdering the long-awaited Messiah (verse 52). This blunt and pointed sermon sent the Jews into a rage and resulted in the first martyrdom in church history.

The martyrdom of Stephen seemed to escalate the Jews' persecution of the followers of Christ. The man previously introduced as Saul (8:1a) proved to be a major leader in this widespread campaign of intolerance and terror. From a human perspective, this was an awful turn of events; from a divine perspective, everything resulted in a far greater good. The Christians who had been comfortable and perhaps a bit too complacent in Jerusalem were forced to scatter to the surrounding regions of Judea and Samaria. As they did, they carried out the command of 1:8, and the gospel began to be preached to Gentile audiences, who, for the most part, were receptive. Thus, in the midst of terrible persecution, the church actually grew!

MacArthur, John F.. Acts (p. 28). HarperChristian Resources. Kindle Edition.

Chapter 8

Luke recorded Philip's trip into Samaria and his ministry there in order to reveal the marvelous truth that Jesus, the promised Jewish Messiah, was also the king and Savior of Gentiles. The message of Christ was and is a worldwide gospel. All nations and languages would be invited and included (see Isaiah 56:3; Daniel 7:14) in the kingdom of God.

Opposition to the gospel in the form of a sorcerer named Simon failed to halt Philip. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he performed miraculous signs to validate his message. The underlying truth of this section of Acts is clear: Nothing can stop God's powerful and eternal plan to fill heaven with worshipers from "every nation and tribe and people and language" (Revelation 7:9).

The succeeding story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch provides a wonderful picture of God's global love and His surprising plan to get the good news of Christ to those who have never heard. Philip was sovereignly instructed to suddenly leave a booming ministry in Samaria to go south into the desert. There he met a prominent official from the court of Candace, queen of Ethiopia, reading (but not understanding) the prophet Isaiah.

Philip was invited into the man's carriage and was able to "[preach] Jesus to him" (verse 35). The man embraced the gospel, was baptized into the faith, and returned to Ethiopia rejoicing (presumably sharing what he had learned). Meanwhile Philip was instantly transported more than twenty miles away to the city of Azotus! Obviously, God had prepared the hearts of people there to respond to the truth.

MacArthur, John F.. Acts (p. 38). HarperChristian Resources. Kindle Edition.

Questions to Ponder

How important is strong leadership in a church? Should it be one individual or a group of leaders? How serious do you take their leadership in representing God's desires for his people?

Can you describe the inner workings of the fledgling church during this time of growth, persecution, and then divine judgment. What qualities stand out to you? Do you see those qualities in church today?

Based on the record of chapter 8, was Simon a true Christian or not? What obstacles (internal and external) would he have needed to move beyond in order to come to saving faith? Have you yourself experienced such obstacles?

As a child of God who has been commanded to make disciples of all nations, how specifically do you sense God is leading you to share the gospel? Are you better at telling the story, or do you model God's gospel within your daily life?