

Acts Chapter 5

Theme of Acts: The Holy Spirit and the Birth of the Church

Personal Reflection

Complete this section in one sitting or little by little during the week. Begin with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit into your time. Spending time in the Bible, studying the original intent, meaning and cultural context helps you to understand how it applies to you now. Click on any Bible verse to read it or use your own Bible.

Further Study: with your small group or on your own

Complete with your small group if you are in one; or complete on your own, spending time with God.

Song for the week: Another in the Fire - Hillsong

Song links: https://youtu.be/ScK3v5gcBK0?si=0BV8wWXj7NT_Ita9

Read Acts 5

Personal reflection:

The end of Acts 4 says the believers were gathered together and “all the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.” *Optional, read this verses: Acts 4:32-37, Acts 5:6, Acts 5:11*

In Acts 5:2, Ananias put the money he was offering at the apostles' feet. “This was an eastern expression signifying that the giver of the gift allowed the receiver to do with it as seemed best ... By laying at the apostles' feet they were acknowledging their belief in GOD and even more their belief in GOD in, with and through the apostles ... The submitting at their feet was a positive assessment of the apostles' management, leadership, decision making, integrity and lifestyles. We should not see the laying at the feet as an action, but as a reaction to what they have experienced spiritually through the apostles and what they have seen naturally in the apostles (Bible Hermeneutics).”

Just as the first believers shared what they had, we should, too; giving to others as a reaction to what we have experienced spiritually through God. What are some ways that you are able to bless others when we gather together?

Luke used Joseph (also called Barnabas - which means “son of encouragement”) as an example - Joseph sold a field and gave the money to the apostles. By contrast, Ananias and Sapphira did not, they “kept back” part of what they sold. *Optional, read these verses: Acts 4:36-37, Acts 5:1-10*

In Greek the phrase “and kept back” is nosphisasthai. It means “to rob; to set apart for myself, appropriate for my own benefit.”

Ananias and Sapphira robbed for their own benefit. Read Matthew 6:24, James 1:8. How do these verses relate to the story of Ananias and Sapphira?

In your relationship with Jesus, what competes for your attention? What do you find hard to trust God with and “keep back” for yourself?

Read James 4:8. When you are struggling with serving yourself versus serving Jesus, what does God say?

Ananias and Sapphira may have wanted “to gain the reputation of a saint, without the reality of holiness (Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers).” They sought honor without sacrifice. ““The lie was an attempt to deceive the Holy Spirit. The crime of Ananias was not his "keeping" part of the price of the land; he might have kept it all, had he pleased; but in his lying about it, making him appear more generous than he really was. [Paraphrased] (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary)”

Ananias' and Sapphira's actions were also full of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is a behavior that contradicts what one claims to believe or feel; such as saying one thing and doing another. It's not making a mistake, it is deliberate deceptiveness, deliberately projecting a false image. *Optional, read these verses: Mark 12:15, Luke 12:1, 1 Timothy 4:2.*

How might a false reputation, coveting and hypocrisy have harmed the early church?

How do these continue to harm the Church today?

Satan has been a liar since the beginning. Satan tempted Ananias to lie - and this lie was to the Holy Spirit “who was in the apostles ... and to whom he had given a discerning of spirits; so that it was a daring action, and downright madness, to go about to deceive them ... or he pretended he had an impulse from the Spirit of God to sell his estate, and give the whole price of it to the apostles, and yet kept back part of it; which was acting contrary to that Spirit he pretended to be influenced by (Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible).” *Optional, read these verses: John 8:44, Acts 5:4*

Sin [against God] vs Blasphemy [sin against the Holy Spirit]

A sin against God is an act of speaking or acting in a way that shows disrespect or irreverence towards Him. A sin against Jesus is when His character or divinity is slighted.

Blasphemy is sin against the Holy Spirit; it is the act of willfully and deliberately rejecting the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a serious offense because it is a direct rejection of the power and work of God, and it shows a hardened heart that refuses to acknowledge the truth.

The key difference between the two is the severity of the offense. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is a direct rejection of God and His power, which is why it is considered unforgivable. It shows a complete defiance and hardening of the heart towards God, making it impossible for forgiveness to take place. On the other hand, all other sin against God the Father or The Lord Jesus Christ, while still a serious sin, can be forgiven through repentance and seeking forgiveness from God. *Optional, read these verses: Mark 3:22-30*

Read Romans 9:1. Based on this, what part of a believer does the Holy Spirit work in?

Read Luke 18:9-14. How does God view pretended holiness or righteousness?

God had shown extraordinary judgment in the Old Testament. When the Jewish church was just beginning, a man gathering sticks on the sabbath was to be put to death. Aaron's sons were killed by God for dishonoring Him. In the early Christian church God again showed such judgment with Ananias and Sapphira. *Optional, read these verses: Numbers 15:32-36, Leviticus 10:1-3*

Acts 5:11 is the first time the word "church" appears in Acts. "God could not allow such motives (of Ananias and Sapphira) to pollute the powerful work of his Spirit in the first body of Christians (Life with God Bible)."

God's extraordinary judgment showed up at the beginning of the Jewish church and the beginning of the Christian church. How did these judgements protect both of the early churches?

Three times in Acts there were miraculous releases. The first time is in *Acts 5:17-20* when an angel opened the prison doors and let the apostles out. Nothing would stop the work of God. *Optional, read these verses: Acts 12:6-11, Acts 16:25-30*

The Sanhedrin found the apostles and brought them in for questioning. They said the apostles were "determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." This phrase referred to murder, an act that "brought judgment on the land unless the murders were punished. The apostolic preaching thus threatens the political security of the elite (Cultural Study Bible)." *Optional read these verses: Acts 5:27-33, Deuteronomy 21:7-8, 2 Samuel 21:1, Ezekiel 22:4*

Peter responded with his third message in Acts, which continued to convict the Sanhedrin and those listening of the truth.

What do you find easy and what do you find challenging about continuing to speak the truth of the gospel when people come against you for telling it?

Socrates was an ancient Greek philosopher who lived from 469 - 399 BC. Plato wrote down Socrates' quotes including, "Men of Athens, I am grateful and I am your friend, but I will obey God rather than you, and as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practice philosophy.... I will not yield to any man contrary to what is right, for fear of death, even if I should die at once for not yielding."

Gamaliel held a lead position with the Sanhedrin. He studied the Torah and Jewish law as well as Greek literature (Jewish Learning and Britannica). "Whether or not Peter would have recognized the similarity with Socrates, the elite priests, many of whom had some Greek education, would have done so (Cultural Study Bible)."

Consider Gamaliel's words, "For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God (Acts 5:38-39)." Have you ever felt yourself fighting against God? Perhaps wanting your way over His? Did you submit to Him and if so, how did that affect you?

Putting it into practice: Peter said both the apostles and the Holy Spirit were witnesses to the truth of Jesus' resurrection. What in your life is a witness to your story of new life in Jesus? Consider practicing the telling of your story by writing it down or telling it to people you know and trust so that when the Holy Spirit prompts you to share, you are ready to share it!

Further Study - with your small group or on your own

Comparison can be an effective teaching tool. Luke used a comparison in telling of Joseph who sold all he had and brought it to the apostles' feet versus Ananias and Sapphira who said they brought it all when they actually held some back.

As a small group, compare unity versus discord. How can your small group become "one of heart and mind" with Biblical truth and actions? How might these actions be able to ripple out to the Church as a positive example, like Joseph the Levite was?

"The Holy spirit did not automatically produce unity in the early church community, nor does it in our church gatherings today (Life with God Bible)." Just as they had a choice to listen to the Holy Spirit's promptings and obey, so do we.

Where are you tempted to be part of divisiveness in the Church? How can you become more aware of that temptation to avoid it in yourself?

Speaking out against things can be seen as divisiveness. Today's society speaks inclusiveness to all no matter their belief.

How do we speak out when we know what someone is doing is not right in the eyes of our Lord? When are we called to speak and when are we called to show kindness and let the Holy Spirit do His work in a person?

In antiquity people believed that one's shadow was attached to a person. Injuring a shadow could injure a person. "The crowds responded to the apostles with elements of superstition (Cultural Study Bible)" believing Peter's shadow might fall on some of them and heal them. While Peter's shadow did not heal anyone, the apostles continued to heal in the name of Jesus. All who came were healed. The miracles continued to attest not to the apostles but to God's glory.

Can you think of any superstitions or beliefs from today that have been mingled with what the Bible says?

Sometimes it's not a superstition but rather a bargain that people make with God such as "God, if you Then I will" What are some examples of bargaining with God?

God can use anything to bring Himself glory. However, how might superstitions or bargaining make it hard for us to give Him glory?

Boldness is not reckless impulsiveness. It requires courage to press on past our fears and do what is right.

How can we be more bold? One way is to pray with others for the power of the Holy Spirit to give you courage! Pray as a small group for courage and boldness.

Peter and John, along with the other apostles, began telling the gospel right where they were, in Jerusalem.

Listen to the song [Start Right Here by Casting Crowns](#). How can you tell the gospel right where you are both as individuals and as a small group?

Is there anything from this week's personal reflection time which you would like to discuss more with your small group?