

Heritage Christian Community Baptist Church Bible Study Series

The Principles, Power and Persecution of the Early Church Handout

Acts 5:1-42

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In the previous lesson, we saw how the disciples were bold in their profession of faith through the power of the Holy Spirit, the growth of the church through Peter's preaching, their detainment by the Sanhedrin and release. The fear of the Jewish Religious leaders was that they would be blamed for killing the Messiah. They could not deny the miracle of the healing of the lame man through faith in the power of the name of Jesus, nor the power of the disciples in performing miracles. The response of the Sanhedrin was to release the apostles and to beat and threaten Peter and John telling them to no longer preach in the name of Jesus. In this chapter we will witness the continued power of the Holy Spirit, as He manifest himself in the early church. Chapter 5 deals with the Principles, Power, and Persecution of the Early Church. We will begin our study looking at the tragedy of two followers who chose to lie to the Holy Spirit and end with the arrest and subsequent release of the apostles for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Apostles continue to be harassed and arrested as history reveals their story of courage and persistence in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Principles of the Early Church (Acts 5: 1-11 NKJV)

¹But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.

²And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.

³But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?"

⁴While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

⁵Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.

⁶And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.

⁷Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

⁸And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much."

⁹Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out."

¹⁰Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband.

¹¹So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

All of us know that people lie, including us at times for various reasons, but this text deals with an issue that many don't talk about and seldom preach. It concerns a married couple who had the right to their own monies and belongings but chose to misrepresent the truth rather than taking responsibility for their choice not to give all that they had to the church. We should recall from

chapter 4 in verses 32-35, the people shared all things in common. They brought all their worldly possessions together and placed them at the feet of the apostles and the apostles made sure that all the needs of the followers were met as a result of the shared possessions. This is the context that leads to the death of this couple. They were not under compulsion to bring their possessions and share everything in common with the saints but they came lying on purpose to withhold a portion of what was theirs. Judgment was swift without time for repentance.

The first person that knowingly lied was Ananias, in verses 1-2. Peter confronts Ananias in verses 3-4 asking him why he had lied as the possession sold was his to do with as he pleased. But Ananias decided to misrepresent the truth and Peter told him that the lie he had told was not to men but to God. Ananias **having heard the words** from Peter fell dead and the men of the church wrapped him and took him out, in verses 5-6 and all who **heard the words** were full of great fear. In verses 7, we find his wife who was aware of the truth appearing before the apostles three hours later. Not knowing that her husband had died and had been carried away before she arrived, she also lied. Peter asked her outright if the property had sold for the amount that Ananias had said and she said yes.

In verse 9, Peter confronts her asking why she had agreed together with her husband to test the Holy Spirit. This word for test in the original Greek text means to try and or attempt something that is futile to try. It also means to “**to endeavor to discover the nature or character of something by testing, try, make trial of, put to the test**”¹ in other word why would you even try to put the Holy Spirit to test by trying to fool him by lying. He then told her what happened to her husband and told her the same would happen to her and she fell dead at his feet and the same men who carried her husband out, carried her away also and again great fear came upon those who **heard the words** in verse 11.

It is not the consequence of lying alone or the fact that this couple chose to defraud the people nor their dishonesty to the church, but their lying to the Holy Spirit. They thought they could get away with dishonesty before the Holy Spirit and the subsequent Judgment for their sin leading to their physical death. Everything they owned or possessed had come from God and belonged to God but this couple was not afraid to lie and say that their property sold for less than they had received and pretended to give all they had received to the church.

Q1: What do you think and feel about what happened to this couple?

A: Open

Q2: How do people lie in the same way today in the church?

A: Open

Q3: Why do you think their punishment was so severe?

A:

¹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 792.

The Power Of The Early Church (Acts 5:12-16 (NKJV))

¹²And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.

¹³Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.

¹⁴And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,

¹⁵so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.

¹⁶Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

In chapter 4, verse 30 the apostles had prayed for signs and wonders in the name of Jesus and this chapter reveals that God answered affirmatively to that request and the apostles were able to demonstrate many miracles. These few verses describe the power of the early church to attract and repel believers, but what is clear is the reverence that was held for those in the church. So, while many hesitated to join the body of believers according to verse 13, still more came in verse 14. People did not take their faith in the church lightly and everyone wasn't waiting in line to sign up for they had witnessed the power and judgment of the Holy Spirit. They had seen how the church was united and the powerful persistence and boldness of the apostles in the face of adversity and despite the judgment, they sought to join because of the power and presence of God in their midst. The primary way the apostles drew attention to the church was miracles and healing. Verse 15 and 16 tells us that the sick was brought into the streets from near and far and that just the shadow of Peter passing by might heal them, that's faith, and verse 16 concludes telling us that and they were all healed.

Q4: Why do you think today's church does not demonstrate the kind of power seen in this chapter?

A:

Q5: How can we bring power back to the church?

A:

The Persecution of the Early Church (Acts 5: 17-42 (NKJV))

¹⁷Then 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,

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

¹⁹But 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.”

²¹And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

²²But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported,

²³saying, “Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!”

²⁴Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be.

²⁵So one came and told them, saying, “Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!”

²⁶Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned.

²⁷And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them,

²⁸saying, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!”

²⁹But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men.

³⁰The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.

³¹Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

³²And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

³³When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them.

³⁴Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while.

³⁵And he said to them: “Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men.

³⁶For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing.

³⁷After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed.

³⁸And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing;

³⁹but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.”

⁴⁰And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

⁴¹So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

⁴²And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

There is a steady progression of tension between the Jews and Christians. There is anger on the part of the Sanhedrin council members because of the guilt they bear according to the apostles in the crucifixion of Jesus whom they denied as the Messiah. There is a disregard for the Jewish religious leaders on the part of the Apostles as they continue to refuse to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. We will continue to see the persecution against the church and disciples intensify as time goes on in the book of Acts.

In verses 17-18, we see the arrest of the Apostles again as they are placed in prison based on the anger and envy of the Sadducees, who were part of the Sanhedrin Council. The Sadducees were most often wealthy aristocratic politicians but very influential in the Jewish religion. They believed only the first five books were sacred (Torah) and adhered to strict interpretations of the law of Moses. They were considered the legal experts in the law of God and did not believe in resurrection or after life. They were considered part of the ruling class and more friendly with the Romans because of their political positions.

In verses 19-21, they are miraculously released by an angel of the lord and told to go preach the word of life, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ and they do as they were told in the morning in the Jewish temple.

In verse 21, the High priest called a council meeting and sent for the Apostles to appear before them. In verses 22-23, the council is seated and waiting to interrogate the Apostles only to hear from the officers of the council that they had gone to the prison and found the prison guards were stationed on the outside with the doors secured and shut but, when opened the prisoners were not there. The report mystifies the council members and as they ponder what would happen, someone tells them that the men that they had placed in prison was standing in the temple teaching the people. In verses 24-32, we read that the council went with the officers and found Peter and John proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and arrested them. The Council accuses them of violating their command to never preach in “THIS MAN’S NAME”

The Apostles answered saying, “We ought to obey God rather than men?” They then begin to preach about the Messiah whose name is Jesus, whom they murdered on a tree and God raised Him up from the dead. Peter and John then proclaim to be His witnesses to these things as is the Holy Spirit. In other words we know it happen and saw it ourselves and the Holy Spirit who is the enabler and power behind their words and work also witnessed the work of Jesus. notice the council does not denounce the power of the Holy Spirit as they have too much evidence of his power and they fear what the people will do to them if they should protest. They explain the person of the Holy Spirit as having been given by God to all who obey Him.

Verse 33 tells us that after hearing the words of the Apostles the Council was furious and wanted them dead. Gamaliel, a wise and well-known Pharisee, council member, and teacher of the law (law of Moses) provided good advice to the council. “When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Law ceased and purity and abstinence died.” For Christians he is best known through his pupil, Paul (Acts 22:3).² This note is provided to help us see how Gamaliel was both illuminating and influential. When Gamaliel spoke the people and the council listened with respect as he asked that the Apostles be removed from the council chambers to the outside in verse 34. In verses 38-39, Gamaliel asked that they consider carefully what they do with these men as if it is not of God, it will pass but if it is, no one can stop it and the offender fights with God. The council was convinced and agreed. The decision was to call the apostles in and they beat them and released them. Verses 41-42 reveals that the Apostles rejoiced having been picked out to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. they continued to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Q6: What was the mystery in Acts 5: verse 23?

A:

Q7: Where were the prisoners and how did they get out?

A:

Q8: If God delivered you from a prison situation, where would you have gone and why?

A: Open/Personal

² John B. Polhill, [Acts](#), vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 171.

Q9: What was the Apostle's response to the accusation of the Council?

A:

Q10: What three accusations did the council accuse the Apostles of in verse, 28?

A:

Q11: What was the conclusion Gamaliel suggested they apply and why?

A:

Q12: What can you learn from the wisdom of Gamaliel that will help you in your Christian Journey?

A: Open

Q13: What thoughts do you wish to recall from this lesson?

A: Open