

July 26, 2009

Note the 5 groups in Acts 5:

#1.) **Ananias & Saphira** (“A&S”) (1-10)

The Apostles are filled with the HS. I’ve been emphasizing that. As a result of this, there are miracles happening. On Pentecost, the place was shaken. A lame man is healed. They prayed & the place was shaken again. Now something else happens.

We’ve been sensing a rising tide of **external pressure** upon the church. Now we’re going to see the **1<sup>st</sup> internal problem** that the church faced.

Whereas the Apostles are being filled with the Holy Spirit, A&S have allowed their hearts to be filled with something else – vs. 3. This is the 1<sup>st</sup> time “**Satan**” is found in Acts. Luke’s Gospel mentions Satan 5x. The last time we heard about Satan was with **Judas**. He seems to get silent in victory. (The **only other** reference to **Satan in Acts** = **26:18** “*to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God*”) Both references are about the influence of Satan on the **religious people** (not upon the ungodly, non-believers).

“*What made you think of this, Ananias?*” The question is not answered. They were pretending that they were something they weren’t (generous givers). It was an image they were trying to project/protect that was an illusion.

**Jesus** spoke often about the devil’s role. He contended with him before Jesus’ public ministry in the Temptation narrative (Matthew. 4). Jesus acknowledged that Satan was the “prince of this world” (John 16:11). Jesus said that the “thief comes but to steal, kill, & destroy” (Jn. 10:10). Peter, Paul, & John all wrote about the devil’s activity, too.

While Satan works upon individuals, he also tries to deceive the nations (Rev. 20:8). He tries to lead the whole world astray (Rev. 12:9). Paul describes this process happening in Romans 1:18-32. When people’s minds become darkened, all types of hell breaks lose. It has a cataclysmic effect upon individuals. A society is a collection of individuals. (I remember the proverb, “*For want of a nail, the shoe was lost....*”) How tragic was Michael Jackson’s life? Such enormous talent and ability, yet look at the destruction of his life. We see this in our culture. Satan’s purposes are fulfilled in meth labs, in drug & alcohol addiction, in sexual promiscuity, in violence, in hatred, in war, in poverty, in greed, in racism, in the destruction of the family, etc.

Many Christians are highly uncomfortable with the judgmentalism of Acts 5. Yet, many unbelievers are thoroughly disgusted by the blatant hypocrisy of Christians. If the church was going to grow, it had to be pure. Sometimes the church must go deeper rather than wider. **Holiness trumped “Church growth”** this time. (Note the Old Testament parallel with **Achan in Joshua 7**.) (I’ve heard it said that if Acts 5 were lived out in today’s church then we’d have to have a funeral home in every church basement and a mortician on every church staff.) It doesn’t say that God killed the couple (may be implied...but it doesn’t say that). It says A&S were filled with the wrong spirit & they suffered the consequences. It was characters issue not an economic issue. They did not have to sell the land. Even if they did, they didn’t have to give anything to the church. Their sin was **lying** to themselves, the church, and ultimately to the HS.

This obviously shook the church to their core. It was a private sin which went public. Consequences followed (they nearly always do). The power of money/pride was in the center of the battle between God/Satan.

#2.) **The People's Response: Fear & Miracles** (11-16) "Dread" or "terror."

**Fear** in & of itself is of little or of only short-term value. Sometimes we get scared, think we're going to die, but then when we're okay, we forget all about it. The fear wears off and we quickly go back to the same old ways. Fear alone generally paralyzes. It's usually only a very short-term motivator.

A Christian knows fear, but doesn't stop there. A Christian responds with belief. (It reminds us of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment. In that time, some people thought that a shadow could have an effect upon you. Even touching the shadow of a corpse could have bad effects. Peter doesn't condone it. But we do see with Simon the Sorcerer that they tried to dispel the power of magic)

v16 It's interesting here, as there is no reference to the faith of the individual as being the key or the catalyst. Sometimes faith IS the case in miracles; both not always.

#3.) **The Sadducees**: (17-33)

The central question of Acts seems to be: "***What are you filled with?***"

1.) The Apostles = Holy Spirit (note the results) 2.) A&S = Satan (note the results)

3.) The Sadducees = **Jealousy/Unbelief** (note the results)

They throw the Apostles into prison. There's some irony here...the Sadducees don't believe in the resurrection and that's what the Apostles are preaching. They also don't believe in Angels, yet the angels release the preachers to preach about the resurrection. Maybe they were who Paul was referring to in **2 Timothy 3:5: *holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. Avoid such people.***" What's their problem, anyway?

**Unbelief** is not a 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon. People haven't changed since Genesis 3. Some people are annoyed by God, others are prejudiced against it & still others would do whatever they could to eradicate it. Why is this? Why do people have such strenuous objections to God?

In Genesis 3, we see the root problem. Adam and Eve wanted to do what they wanted to do. They did not want someone else telling them or being the authority in their lives. (And notice again, the power and presence of not only God, but also of evil). We don't like for someone else to tell us what to do. We see that in children. The Law of God says "You shall not!" but we "want to." Thus, we're forced to choose: either we bow before God or we take life on its own terms. We know the Commandments: "Don't commit adultery. Don't have sexual relationships with someone of the same gender, or someone you're not married to." But since we are attracted to them and that's what I want to do, we justify it. That's exactly what Adam and Eve did (and then they blamed the serpent, each other, and finally, God). Children like to eat ice cream & candy; play in the streets, never go to school, work, or save money; but there are consequences to such. Vs.27-33 (Every time the Apostles opened their mouths in Acts so far, the 1<sup>st</sup> thing they want to talk about = the **Resurrection**. This time they are talking back to the Sanhedrin.)

#4.) **Gamaliel's Wise Counsel** (34-40a)

*34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while...*

*40a His speech persuaded them.*

#5.) **The Apostles Response 40-42** More miracles, a prison break...they had to do more than just threaten them – so they beat them with the 39 lashes. To “flog” was literally “to flay the skin.” The Mishnah has a section on flogging: “Bind his 2 hands to a pillar. The minister of the synagogue lays hold of his garments so he bares his chest...he must give him 1/3 of the stripes in front & 2/3 in back. He smites with one hand with all of his might. If he dies, the one who does the scourging is not to blame. Deuteronomy 28:58-63 is read.” The Sanhedrin was “furious.” They would have liked to have executed them on the spot. But Gamaliel’s wisdom was persuasive & they let them go.

Note their response to their flogging. They weren’t cursing or plotting revenge. This is very counter-intuitive to crawl out of a place where you’ve just been beaten & to be rejoicing. Somewhere along the line we’ve got to communicate what suffering is. American Christians sometimes think that suffering is when I don’t get a convenient parking place, or a bigger house, or a raise. In other parts of the world today, Christians ARE being truly being persecuted for their faith. They are intimidated, threatened, jailed, tortured, and martyred for their faith. We need to keep them in our prayers, and challenge our own perspectives. (Remember that these Apostles all died for their faith.)

**The bottom line:** *42 Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.*

They went right back. They never stopped. They persevered every single day.

Application: Here are some good questions to ask myself?

Do I have a healthy fear of God?

Which spirit am I full of? Satan/jealousy & unbelief/Holy Spirit

Am I being obedient to the HS?

What is my understanding of suffering?

Can persecution turn out to be a blessing? (Even though they were filled w. the HS, they were persecuted. Everyone didn’t love them.)

Am I practicing “Rejoice in the Lord always!”

A lot of us look @ this & say, “I could never do this!” But look at them. Before Pentecost they were cowards. After Pentecost they were empowered. This is the whole key to the Christian faith – surrender our lives to the Holy Spirit – each and every day.