Study of Acts – Discussion Notes Chapter 5

Introduction

Our study of the Book of Acts has been very exciting. In the first four chapters we have seen God introduce the Holy Spirit, empowering the disciples and opening the hearts of people. The disciples have discovered amazing gifts that reach far beyond their human personalities. They find themselves doing great works in the name of Jesus Christ. The New Testament church is being formed by the hand of God at hyper speed. The saving power of Jesus Christ is being discovered by all who hear and receive.

Through each of the first four chapters in the midst of our amazement, we have learned important truths about God; truths that help us understand His ways and how we are to surrender to His will. We have discussed our need to respond to the work or the Holy Spirit and allow it to do things through us that we could never do by our own ability.

Chapter 5 takes us even deeper in our understanding of basic theology of God and the Holy Spirit. We are introduced to the significance of genuine commitment to our Lord and the determined will of God. Continue with me on this exciting trip as we explore the Book of Acts.

1. Selfish Motives & Lies (vs. 1-10)

Illus: When our children were small, Pam and I took them to Disney World on a couple of occasions. The nice thing about Disney World is that the entire family can enjoy it. I particularly like the water rides that spray you with a little mist on those hot summer days. I am not a roller coaster person. I find no thrill or enjoyment in having something scare me to death. Life offers enough perils; I see no reason to put myself on something dangerous or something that is going to make my heart accelerate. I am perfectly fine just riding something fun without the fear-factor.

For me, chapters 1-4 of Acts were like a fun and exciting ride with plenty of amazement and things for which to rejoice. However, in chapter 5, Acts suddenly turns into that scary ride that I would be hard pressed to voluntarily board. All of this talk about the Holy Spirit and surrender escalates to a completely different level when we read about Ananias and Sapphira.

What was so wrong about what Ananias and Sapphira did?

I have read more commentaries on this scripture than any other. While each commentary has shed some light and different perspectives on the account, none have satisfied my itch to fully understand.

To be candid, the punishment seems extreme to me; especially in context of what is taking place. Here we have the religious leaders of the day rejecting Jesus Christ and punishing His disciples because their little enterprise of selling sacrifices is being threatened. The disciples are teaching that the ultimate sacrifice has already been paid by Jesus Christ. Along come Ananias and Sapphira who lie and deceive and Bam! They are put to death. The judgment seems harsh, non-redemptive and somewhat out of step with the gospel of salvation.

With that said, who am I to judge the judgment of God? Who am I to judge God who has just poured out His power and might in the Holy Spirit on the earth? The church is being born and believers are witnessing mighty wonders. They are in one accord and have all things in common. God has every right to judge and pronounce judgment as He determines fit. My job is to tend to my own life and listen to the Holy Spirit as it leads me to do His work.
What we do not understand is never an excuse for not being obedient to what we do understand. With this in mind, there are some things we must learn from this account.

**A. God really doesn’t like liars.** - I asked my wife to give me a very brief reaction to the story of Ananias and Sapphira. She looked at me and said, “Well, if it were that way today, we would have a lot less liars.” Everyone has lied at one time or another and yet we all despise being lied to. The Bible is very clear; God hates a lying tongue.

Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of lying to the church, the disciples and the Holy Spirit. Their reason for lying was classic. They wanted the recognition of having done something great without actually making the required sacrifice. The object of their lie was also classic; money.

The actual Greek word translated “kept back” literally means “embezzle”. In other words, they wanted all the credit of having given their proceeds to the church but by holding back, they were in effect embezzling from the church and God. They lied with their money, their actions and their tongues and paid dearly for the sin.

When we boast of our commitment to the Lord or speak of our love for Christ, we need to take into account our sacrifices for Him. Do we genuinely sacrifice our time, talents and financial resources for the kingdom of God or would we be counted as liars like Ananias and Sapphira?

**B. God can never be deceived.** – Ananias and Sapphira were each given a chance to come clean but chose to stick to their lie. Barnabas had done something wonderful by selling a piece of property and voluntarily giving it to the church. Ananias and Sapphira admired this act of kindness and probably envied the recognition he received. It is easy to see how they desired to be a part such activity.

However, their hearts were not genuine and complete in their commitment to God. **Ananias wanted to DO something that required he BE something he was not.** We need to understand that **God is more concerned with WHO we are than about WHAT we do.**

Ananias and Sapphira thought they could deceive the church and most importantly, God. They were testing the Holy Spirit to see what they could get away with. Not much was Peter’s answer. **God will not be deceived.** You cannot fake it when it comes to God. We cannot play games with God.

**C. God expects genuine commitment.** – Peter asked Ananias, “**Why have you allowed Satan to enter your heart?**” I believe Ananias’s heart was divided. He had one foot in his relationship with God and the other hanging on to the security of earthly possessions. He was falsifying his commitment to God which was well short of genuine. He was a hypocrite in the truest sense of the word as **he wanted the recognition of being truly committed but in his heart he was a fraud.**

We should each ask ourselves if we are genuinely committed to the work of our Lord and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. And you can begin by looking in your checkbook for the answer.

Illus: Pam came home recently from the Beth Moore Bible study and she was all excited. She said that none of the ladies have dropped out and that is very unusual. Usually some come for a week or two and then drop out because their commitment to the study is not really genuine.

This account of Ananias and Sapphira teaches us that God expects our commitments to be real. How often do we make promises to God but fail to keep them. The judgment that befell Ananias and Sapphira was severe to say the least. It informs us of the importance of our commitments to God.

We are all aware that today’s churches would be virtually empty if God applied these standards upon us. But we must learn from them and understand that God is interested in the sincerity of our hearts. God is not tolerant of our lies, He can never be deceived and He desires genuine commitment from each of us.
2. God’s Determined Plan (vs. 19-21, 29-30)

We studied in previous chapters how God’s determined plan will never be stopped or hindered. We even talked about how God will use His foreknowledge and use the acts of sinful men to bring about His will. In our text, God sends an angel to release the apostles from prison.

What does the angel instruct the apostles to do? Go to the temple and teach the people.

What does the angel tell them to teach about? The angel instructs them to go to the temple and continue preaching, telling the people about Jesus Christ and the life they can have by knowing Him. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” and “I am the way, the truth and life, no one comes to the Father except by me.”

Notice how God is facilitating His plan. He is establishing His church and absolutely nothing is going to stop His determined will. God will always make a way. He is confirming to the apostles they are doing the right thing. His angel releases them and tells them to keep on doing what you are doing in the name of Christ.

Do you have the confirmation of God that you are doing the right things in your life? Is God using you to tell others about the new life in Christ? Do you see His will working and opening doors of opportunity for you to serve Him?

There is no prison like the prison of self-centeredness. Ananias and Sapphira were trying to act selfless when in fact they were selfish. It brought them death. Selfishness will bring you and me spiritual death. God has a determined plan for each of our lives. We need to put aside ourselves and allow Him to work in us. This requires surrender and obedience to the call of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 29 Peter says, “We must obey God rather than men.” After all his failures, Peter finally understood with the help of the Holy Spirit, that being in the will of God was more important than anything else. Have you come to that understanding?

3. No Truer Words Spoken (vs. 38-39)

Soon in our study of Acts, we will learn about a young man by the name of Saul. He would later to be called Paul when God once again exacts His will on this young man’s life. Saul was quite the student of the Pharisaical law. He will later explain that he spent much of his youth studying at the feet of a most renowned scholar by the name of Gamaliel. We find in our text that Peter and John were again arrested and the Pharisees and Sadducees were fuming mad. They were at the end of their patience and ready to put them to death.

The wise scholar Gamaliel steps in to cool things down a bit. He obviously carries a lot of weight and is highly respected. He orders the apostles out of the room so not to humiliate his colleagues. He then reminds them of other uprisings that have occurred in the past and then says something that we would all do well to learn and understand.

*w39 If this plan or this work is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even be found fighting against God.*

We need to search our hearts and ask ourselves if we are on God’s train. Are we doing His will? If the answer is yes then stay the course. Never give up. Just be faithful and obedient because God always wins in time. The last place we want to find ourselves is fighting against the will of God.
4. The Honor of being Dishonored (vs. 41-42)

One final important thing I want you to notice is found in verses 41 and 42. Notice it says, “Then they went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonored on behalf of the Name.”

After being beaten and threatened within an inch of their lives, the apostles are released thanks to the wisdom of Gamaliel. But what does Luke tell us was their reaction? They were rejoicing that were counted worthy to be dishonored on the behalf of the name of Jesus Christ.

The apostles were sold out for Jesus. They belonged to Him and considered it an honor to be mistreated on His behalf. Some people think suffering and hardship is a sign that we are not in God’s will. But the apostles understood that under the circumstances, their suffering was an honor.

Contrast this to our attitude today. We go around worried about what others will think of us. We worry about being called too religious or worse yet, “evangelical”. We complain when others criticize us for being a Christian. We complain that people should not discriminate against us. We complain that Christians are not treated fairly.

Do we ever stop and consider it an honor to be dishonored for the name of Christ. I hate to bring bad news to you but here is the truth. We are living in a day when being Christian is not politically correct in the world. Christians are despised in large part because of Islam but for other reasons as well. It is going to get much more difficult before it gets better.

In time, the wheat will be separated from the chaff and Christ’s genuine followers will be ridiculed. Each of us must search our hearts and decide where we stand today in order to stand with honor tomorrow in the name of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Acts is teaching us that God always has a determined plan and it involves us. He intervenes and He is always on time to make sure His will is carried out. He is gracious and cares about what we are experiencing. But He has a plan and through the Holy Spirit, it means doing things that would otherwise be beyond our human ability. But, He expects sincere commitment from His children.

I would like to leave you with this final searching question.

What are you doing that could not be done without the power of the Holy Spirit?