

Life in the Church After Discipline (Acts 5:12-16)

What does a congregation do after a harrowing event like the judgement applied to Ananias and Sapphira? If you were in the Ananias and Sapphira camp you could convene a clandestine committee to drive a petition for replacing Peter. (In light of most recent events the plan will not go unnoticed; Peter is going to know. And may the Lord have mercy on you when you come church.) What does a fellowship do after events like those recorded in Acts 5:1-11? In the account given to us by Luke we see that some things continue without change, something do change, and one gets significantly better.

Continuity of Miraculous Power (Acts 5:12-16)

12 And 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.

Continuity of Signs and Wonders through the Apostles (5:12a)

With the conjunction *and* of **And through the apostles hands** (δὲ τῶν χειρῶν τῶν ἀποστόλων) of Acts 5:12 the material following the tragedy of Ananias and Sapphira is tied to the account that follows. In effect, using the coordinating conjunction, Luke tells the reader to look at Acts 5:12-16 in light of what has just happened. What should the reader see? Continuity.

The power of the apostle's anointing continued to be at work with **many signs and wonders being done among the people**. After the disobedience and discipline life kept on going. Back to the mission folks! Do not miss the significance of the apostles' uninterrupted ability to do **signs and wonders** in Jesus' name. Their credentials as approved men of God and authorities to whom the people must listen were in the many signs and wonders (John 14:11).³⁴ If you were struggling with what had happened your confidence in the apostles would be restored daily by their (1) ability to explain spiritual truths in ways that had not been seen since Jesus, (2) godly character, and (3) ongoing power and practice of helping others. Through the continuity of their miracles Christ Himself was telling the church that He continued to be at work both in and through the apostles... especially Peter.

Continuity of Unified Fellowship (Acts 5:12b)

The people continued to be unified as a fellowship. An event like the one that took place in Acts 5:1-11 could have caused divisions. The people could have divided into camps. But they didn't! This speaks volumes to leaders who are afraid to carry out church discipline.

The Lord is with church leadership as they handle issues of deception and disobedience with both compassion and courage.

It says that **they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch**. In light of verse 13 the **all** is certainly a reference to the believers that had been meeting before the incident with Ananias and Sapphira. That same group

³⁴ ¹¹ Believe Me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves. (John 14:11)

of people, minus two, is *still* meeting in Solomon's Porch.³⁵ Unity remained and the custom of coming together in the temple to hear the word continued.

Ending of the Local Church Membership Drive and Continued Church Growth (Acts 5:13-14)

¹³ Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. ¹⁴ And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,

Not everything continued as it had. What changed? The growth of the fellowship that met in Solomon's Porch (Acts 2:47) stopped. Why? The people looking on from outside of the fellowship could see two things. First, they could readily see that the church was blessed with a dazzling display of kingdom power to help with the problem of sickness. Second, the people who had not yet joined could also see a deadly display of kingdom discipline for dealing with deception and disobedience. While the former was certainly attractive the latter generated fear and caused some people not to join the local church fellowship. A godly fear has come out of the events recorded earlier (Acts 5:5, 11).

Prior to this the church had been growing in increments of thousands. But now, after the deft handling of sin, some do not want to join the local church (Acts 5:13). But is this a contradiction? No. There is no contradiction.³⁶ Although, some commentaries seem to say that this is an issue:

One may wonder how the statement that “none of the others dared to join” the disciples can be squared with the report of “more and more” being added to their fellowship; the point seems to be that the death of Ananias and Sapphira scared off all but the totally committed

Bruce, F. F. (1988). *The Book of the Acts* (p. 109). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

What gives? Being honest with themselves, some of the people were not yet ready to bring their living under the authority of apostolic leadership. They believe in Jesus but know that if they join this new fellowship carelessly they will bring judgement on themselves. That was the point that the Spirit was making. The fellowship, its leadership, and the practices given to it by Jesus are not to be trifled with. Paul says as much in his letter to the Corinthians when discussing the peril of treating the Lord's supper as common:

²⁷ Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

³⁰ For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. ³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32)

³⁵ There were too many to gather in the room where they had been meeting; that room accommodated 120. It did not accommodate ten thousand.

³⁶ It could be that **none of the rest** applies only to unbelievers. This is the view on Acts 5:13 is proffered by the Bible Knowledge Commentary.

This verse probably means that no hypocrite or unbeliever **dared joined them**. The case of Ananias and Sapphira frightened them too much! The words **no one else** are literally, “none of the rest” (*tōn loipōn oudeis*). The words “the rest” are used of the lost (trans. “others” in Luke 8:10; cf. Rom. 11:7; Eph. 2:3; 1 Thes. 4:13; 5:6).

Toussaint, S. D. (1985). Acts. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 365). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Checking every use of the word rest (λοιπῶν) shows that it is indeed *sometimes* used of the lost (cf Matthew 27:49; Revelation 9:20). It is also used of the saved (Luke 24:9-10; Acts 17:9; Romans 1:13; 1 Corinthians 7:12; especially Philippians 4:13; Revelation 12:17).

To be in the company of this new group you have to commit to authenticity.

Some were able to bring themselves to put their faith in Jesus. However, in light of recent events showing the seriousness of (1) insincerity and (2) not acknowledging the anointing and authority of the apostles, **none of the rest dared join them.** I believe they are similar to a highly respected rabbi named Nicodemus that visited Jesus at night (John 3:1-2); he believed in Jesus' name (John 2:23-25) and verbally acknowledged Jesus as a teacher come from God (John 3:2). However, he was not yet ready to be submitted to Jesus' teaching and commands (John 3:10-11). Later the Nicodemus would show a measure of sincere concern for the Lord by anointing and burying His body (John 19:39). What must not be overlooked is the fact that the believers were **added to the Lord.** Wait! They dared not join the rest but were added to the Lord. How does that work?

Church membership, capital C, is not mandatory. It is automatic. Becoming a member of the Church is a consequence of transferring the treasure of my trust to Christ. This is why the apostles, following in the footsteps of their Rabbi, do not bother people with overly formal processes for becoming Jesus followers. Absent from the appeals of Peter are calls to sign a pledge, take a class, or be registered with a local fellowship. The sufficient outward signs of surrender to the Lord were seen in believer's baptism and a changed life.

The Church is joined when the believer places their faith in Jesus Christ. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). What often remains, after making a decision to trust Christ, is the finding of a local fellowship (church with a little "c") in which to carry out the call to live for the Lord. This is sometimes said to be optional. Not true! Scripture makes it clear that only in disobedience and a disposition of defiance can a Jesus follower avoid regular fellowship (Hebrews 10:24-25; Proverbs 18:1).

²⁴ And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

What does all of this mean? When you are told that you are only a real Christian when you have joined a particular fellowship... run! This is not what Scripture teaches and is the precursor to being manipulated. Still, if you have made a decision to follow Christ do not let the following become a self-absorbed lonely walk. To follow Jesus is to follow Him into community and serve others. This will mean finding a fellowship where you can attend services AND help with the work of caring for its membership while bringing the good news to those who have not heard.

Peter's Unusual Power (Acts 5:15-16)

¹⁵ so 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. ¹⁶ Also 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.

As more people begin to believe in the Lord the demands on the ministry also grow. Peter, in particular, is regarded as having special or unusual favor on him. When they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches it was with a certain goal in mind – at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Where some commentaries regard this as a superstition of the people, Luke does not say this.

In fact, Jesus Himself healed many indirectly. It was not necessary for those who wanted to be healed to touch Him; it was sufficient for them to touch His hem:

²⁰ And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. ²¹ For she said to herself, "If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well." ²² But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, "Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well." And the woman was made well from that hour. (Matthew 9:20-22)

This way of being healed by Jesus became commonplace.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret and anchored there. ⁵⁴ And when they came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, ⁵⁵ ran through that whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was. ⁵⁶ Wherever He entered, into villages, cities, or the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well. (Mark 6:53-56)

To say that this was a superstition of the people is to overlook what the Lord said concerning the ministry of the apostles after His resurrection and exaltation.

¹² "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do, because I go to My Father. (John 14:12)

Questions for Community Discussion

1. Who performs the signs and wonders in the early church (Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; Romans 5:19)? What is the purpose of signs and wonders through the apostles (2 Corinthians 12:12)?
2. Who else is able to perform signs and wonders (Acts 6:5-6; Deuteronomy 34:9)?
3. Why were some people unwilling to join the fellowship (Acts 5:1-5, 9-11, 13)? How could they be added to the Lord and yet not join that fellowship (Acts 5:14)?
4. There seems to be power even in the shadow of Peter. How does this accord with what Jesus said would happen? (Matthew 10:8; Mark 16:17-18)
5. Is it plausible that Peter would wield this type of power? (Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 6:56; John 14:12)

In what ways have you behaved like Ananias? That is, in what ways have you attempted to lead people into believing that you are more spiritual or more generous than you actually are? In arrogance we rationalize rebellion and even imagine that we are so important to God's program that our issues will be looked over for the sake of keeping us with the fellowship. However, in the record of look about what happened after the deaths of Ananias and Saphira we see that the Lord can remove deceivers and... life will go on. In fact, in the absence of the hypocrisy the ministry may grow more.

Prayer: Lord, you are wonderful and worthy of humble and honest service and worship. Please show me were my life has become a show aimed at impressing others, a sham because I cover up issues, and a shame because you offer grace and mercy to those who will come clean. Open my eyes to areas where I am so focused on what people think that I am not dealing with what you know. Be at work to help me avoid the error of Ananias and Saphira and to become authentic in my dealing with my local church and its leadership.