

Peter: Building Christ's Church
TROUBLE WITHIN & WITHOUT

Thursday, October 29

Reading: Acts 5 & 8

Acts 8:1 *On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria...3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. 4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.*

The church was exploding! But the success of the gospel also brought problems. The first issue Peter had to deal with was deception within the church. While Barnabas is set forth as a positive example of giving (4:36-37), Ananias and Sapphira are a negative example. This couple appear to be genuine believers for they had “lied to and tested the Holy Spirit” (5:3, 9). Their problem was not that they kept back part of the money; it was that they lied about it! They wanted to have everyone applaud them for giving it all when in fact they had not. Their swift judgement from God was a warning to believers to serve God with a pure heart.

The next attack came from the outside as once again the religious establishment arrests the apostles. After their angel-led prison break, they once again stand their ground and proclaim the gospel to these hardhearted men. This time the Sanhedrin has them whipped before their release. What was the apostles’ response to such harsh treatment? They rejoiced because they had been counted worthy to suffer for Jesus.

Chapter 6-7 describes another internal problem related to the distribution of food; a problem solved by appointing the first deacons. However, one of them is killed and a more organized persecution breaks out. This causes the believers to scatter, but it does not silence their witness for Christ.

When Peter and John arrive in Samaria where Philip the deacon is having great success, they encounter another problem. Simon the magician appeared to be a believer, but his later actions and Peter’s words show that he was interested in the power but not in the Savior. Peter warns him to change his heart before it is too late.

LESSON ONE: As we read these opening chapters of Acts, it is impossible to miss the fact that the early believers took every opportunity to share their faith. Whether it be through prayer, through caring for the needy, or persecution they saw it as an open door to share Christ with those around them. What open doors has God placed in your life to share the gospel? Have you stepped through? How do you see God working and preparing people you see on a regular basis for you to share your faith?

LESSON TWO: A healthy church will come under the attack of Satan both from within and without. In what ways have you noticed Satan trying to destroy the unity and testimony of your church? Of you personally? What do you need to do to counter these attacks?

LESSON THREE: Ananias and Sapphira are a warning to all believers to guard their hearts so Satan cannot get a foothold in their lives. What are some areas of your life that you might be tempted to sin? What steps do you need to take to give these areas over to Jesus?