

**Acts: Seeing the Spirit at Work**  
**Sunday Morning Bible Study**  
**Lesson Four – Acts 4:32-6:7**

Throughout the world today, thousands are suffering and dying for Jesus. During the twentieth century, more Christians have been killed, either directly for their faith or in situations where being a Christian has played a role in violent confrontations, than in all the other centuries combined. Where there is life and growth, Satan will attack.

As soon as the Spirit came upon the church (Acts 3), Satan launched a ferocious counterattack. While it is true that his first and crudest tactic is physical violence, crushing the church by persecution, his second is even more cunning: moral corruption and compromise. This form of attack makes sense because Christ is exalted by the integrity of his church. The early church was not exempt. The first example in Scripture of the attempt to insinuate evil into the interior life of the church is the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

**Open**

- How do you respond to the idea that Satan is attacking the church today?

1. *Read Acts 4:32-5:11.* In Acts 4:31 we see that the prayer of the believers was answered and they were freshly filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. What evidence do you see of this filling of the Spirit in verses 32-36?

**They were “of one heart and soul” (32), apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection (33), everyone cared for each other**

Calvin wrote in *The Acts of the Apostles* (vol. 1, p. 130):

We must have hearts that are harder than iron if we are not moved by the reading of this narrative. In those days the believers gave abundantly of what was their own; we in our day are content not just jealously to retain what we possess, but callously to rob others... They sold their own possessions in those days; in our day it is the lust to purchase that reigns supreme. At that time love made each man’s own possessions common property for those in need; in our day such is the inhumanity of many, that they begrudge to the poor a common dwelling upon earth, the common use of water, air and sky.

2. What could your church or fellowship group learn from this example?

3. Now look closely at the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Why do you think their offenses were so grave?

**Because, according to the text, they had “lied to the Holy Spirit” (v. 3), lied to God (v. 4), and tested the Spirit of the Lord (v. 9)**

4. Luke clearly intends us to understand that the death of Ananias and Sapphira was a work of divine judgment. How do you respond to the severity of God’s judgment?

There are at least three valuable lessons for us to learn. First, the gravity of their sin. Peter stressed this by repeating that their lie was not directed primarily against him, but against the Holy Spirit, that is, against God. And God hates hypocrisy.

Second, the importance, even sacredness, of the human conscience. This seems to be what John meant by “walking in the light.” It is to live a transparent life before God. In East African it is said that we are “to live in a house without ceiling or walls,” that is, to permit nothing to come between us and either God or other people.

Third, the incident teaches the necessity of church discipline. The church has tended to oscillate in this area between extreme severity and extreme laxity. It is a good general rule that private sins should be dealt with privately and public sins and only public sins, publicly. Churches are also wise if they follow the successive stages taught by Jesus. Usually the offender will be brought to repentance before the final stage of excommunication.

5. Which of these lessons strikes you as something we need to learn today?

6. *Read Acts 5:12-41.* What were the various responses to the ministry of the apostles?

**People held them in high esteem (v. 13), sick people were brought to them to be healed (v. 12-16), religious leaders arrested and opposed them (v. 17-18), Gamaliel was hesitant to oppose them but also hesitant to accept them (v. 33ff)**

7. What reasons do you find for the actions that the high priests took?

**They were filled with jealousy (v. 17), they thought the apostles would put Jesus' blood (guilt) upon them (v. 28), they were enraged (v. 33), and most importantly, they were unbelievers who were opposed to the work of God.**

8. What do you learn from this passage about obeying human authority and obeying divine authority?

**Ultimately, our allegiance is to God, our divine authority. We submit to human authority only to the extent that it does not conflict with divine authority.**

9. Describe the effect of persecution on the apostles (vv. 41-42).

**They rejoiced that they were "counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (v. 41). They also were motivated to continue preaching and teaching Jesus as the Christ (v. 42).**

The devil's next attack was the cleverest of the three. Having failed to overcome the church by either persecution or corruption, he now tried distraction. If he could preoccupy the apostles with social administration, which though essential was not their calling, they would neglect their God-given responsibilities to pray and to preach, and so leave the church without any defense against false doctrine.

10. *Read Acts 6:1-7.* What principles do you see about the way the church should function in relationship to problem-solving?

**Certain people should be assigned to a problem so that we use the human resources we have in the best possible way.**

In relationship to call to ministry?

**People should serve in their gifts and calling. If it's preaching, then preach.**

11. The apostles delegated the social work in order to concentrate on their pastoral priority. What were the results of this action?

**The material needs were taken care of AND the apostles were able to tend to the spiritual needs, prayer and preaching. When people serve according to their gifts and calling, productivity is the result.**

*Summary:* The devil exists and is utterly unscrupulous. Something else about him is that he is peculiarly lacking in imagination. Over the years he has changed neither his strategy, nor his tactics, nor his weapons; he is still in the same old rut. So a study of his campaign against the early church should alert us to his probably strategy today. If we are taken by surprise, we shall have no excuse.

Luke is concerned, however, not only to expose the devil's malice, but also to show how he was overcome. First, the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira was not allowed to spread, for God's judgment fell on them, and the church grew by leaps and bounds (5:12-16). Second, when the Sanhedrin again resorted to violence, they were retrained from killing the apostles by the cautious counsel of Gamaliel (5:17-42). Third, when the widows' dispute threatened to occupy all the time and energies of the apostles, the social work was delegated to others, the apostles resumed their priority tasks, and the church again began to multiply (6:1-7).

**Apply**

- What can you learn from observing the effects of persecution on the church?

How might you become a more effective member of your church or fellowship as a result of what you have studied in this passage?

**Pray**

- Praise God for the faithfulness of the apostles in preaching the word and prayer. Thank God for the church that God has placed you in. Ask God to help you grow in becoming a member of his church, full of integrity and commitment.

All material taken from:

John Stott, *Acts: Seeing the Spirit at Work*. Downers Grove, IL: IV Press, USA, 1998.