



## Deception and Rejection Threaten the Church Acts 4:32 - 5:42

### Introduction

Luke has portrayed a strong sense of unity among the apostles after Jesus' ascension and the Day of Pentecost when the church was born. In Acts 1:14, the apostles and other believers prayed *with one accord*. In 2:1, they were gathered together *with one accord*. After three thousand believers formed the first church body, they worshiped daily in the temple *with one accord* (2:46). Even after the first experience of persecution, all the believers continued to pray together *with one accord* (4:24) being of *one heart* and *one soul* (4:32).

But life in the church was not without troubles and trials. Both deception from within and rejection from without began to threaten the unity of believers. As the majority of believers sought to honor and exemplify Christ in their lives through unselfishly loving one another, hypocrisy and deception crept into their midst. In addition, the Jewish religious rulers became even more contentious and antagonistic to the apostles' teaching. The following passages reveal how the church held up under these testings.

### Outline of Acts 4:32-5:42

- I. Unity Within the Church - Acts 4:32-5:16
- II. Opposition From Outside the Church - Acts 5:17-42

#### I. Unity Within the Church - Acts 4:32-5:21

Although the unity of the church was threatened by the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, God used the situation for good and for growth.

##### A. *One Heart and One Soul* - Acts 4:32

There was oneness and love amongst the believers. They were sensitive to those who had material needs, reaching out to meet those needs. Are you sensitive to needs within your church? Are you willing to share with those who have material needs? How can you reach out to a needy person this week?

##### B. Preaching with Power - Acts 4:33

God answered the apostles' prayer for boldness (4:29), and they continued to preach with great power. In spite of the threats of the religious rulers, they continued to teach the truth of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

##### C. *Great Grace was Upon Them All* - 4:33

The word "*grace*" means "favor," and probably has reference to the success of the ministry of the church. The believers' generosity in sharing with one another was no doubt a testimony which prepared many hearts to receive and respond to the apostles' preaching.

When the gospel of the kindness, love, generosity, and power of God is preached from pulpits today, the message is always more powerful when the example of kindness, love and generosity goes along with it. How will you show kindness, love, and generosity to others in practical ways?

##### D. Providing for the Poor - 4:34-37

There were many poor people who received the gospel and Luke shows how the church provided for them.

##### 1. Open generosity - 4:34-35

Those who owned houses or land sold them voluntarily. The proceeds were *laid ....at the apostles' feet*, and the money was then distributed to the needy. (Note that the distribution was according to need and not to make everyone equal. Also, the selling of land and giving of the money was voluntary as seen in Acts 5:4. This was not Communism or Socialism!)

In Matthew 6:19, Jesus taught, "*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.*" The believers of the early church did not accumulate material possessions for themselves but were *rich toward God* (Luke 12:21). Are you rich toward God with what He has given you?

##### 2. Barnabas, the example - 4:36-37

Josef (Joseph), who was called Barnabas by the apostles, is an example of one who gave to help the needy. He sold his land and took all the proceeds to the apostles. His example portrayed the meaning of his name, *Son of Encouragement*.

Of the twelve tribes of Israel, Barnabas was from the tribe of Levi, designated by God to be priests and to perform the service of the sanctuary (Numbers 3:6-9). It is interesting that Barnabas owned land, because the

Lord had commanded that the Levites were not to have an inheritance in the land (Numbers 18:20-24). Being from Cyprus, Barnabas' property was probably located there and owning the land was permissible because it was outside of Israel. It is also possible that the restriction on owning land was no longer observed.

#### E. Dealing with Deception - Acts 5:1-11

The first word of chapter five, *But*, indicates that all was not well within the church. Luke contrasts the open generosity of Barnabas with the selfish deception of Ananias and Sapphira.

##### 1. Infamous hypocrisy - 5:1-4 and 7-9

###### a. Ananias' and Sapphira's sin - 5:1-2 and 7-8

As husband and wife, they had sold a piece of land. However, instead of giving all the proceeds to the church, Ananias, with the knowledge of his wife and with deliberate intent to deceive, took only a portion to the apostles. His sin was not his failure to share all he had, but his hypocrisy. He pretended to be generous and give all, but in his heart he was not rich toward God.

Later, Sapphira appeared before the apostles and shared in the sin by affirming Ananias' lie.

###### b. Peter's confrontation of the sin - 5:3-4 and 9

Apparently the Holy Spirit revealed the hypocrisy to Peter. His first question to Ananias was, "*Why has satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?*" The word "filled" is the same Greek word used in Acts 4:8 where Peter was "filled" with the Holy Spirit. It means to be "controlled" or "influenced." Believers' hearts are to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit so as not to be deceived by satan.

Peter pointed out that the land had belonged to Ananias to do with whatever he pleased. He was not under obligation to sell it, and after he had sold it the money was his own. He had every right to keep some of the money for himself. But he had no right to lie and deceive. Peter told Ananias that he had not lied to men but to God. Actually Ananias had lied to men, but this was insignificant in comparison with his sin against God (5:4) and the Holy Spirit (5:3) .

When Sapphira appeared and also lied to Peter, he showed her the evil of her sin. She and her husband had agreed to test the Spirit of the Lord. They had acted in deception, as if the Spirit of the Lord would not find out and be grieved. They had sinned against the Spirit, thinking they could get away with it!

##### c. Judgment of the sin - 5:5-6 and 10

God's judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira's sin was death. Their blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:29) brought swift and severe punishment. This was a solemn example for others. In situations like this, it is always better to learn from the example rather than from personal experience.

##### 2. Impression it made on the people - 5:11

*Great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard.* Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words (W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr.) defines this fear as not just a fear of God's power and righteous retribution, but "a wholesome dread of displeasing Him." This writer wonders how many people today have a wholesome dread of displeasing God. Do you?

#### F. Signs and Wonders - Acts 5:12-16

The judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira had a purifying influence on the church. The believers continued to meet together *with one accord* and *none of the rest dared join them*. *None of the rest* most likely included unbelievers, the insincere, hypocrites, or anyone who might have had an idea of aligning themselves with the church under false pretenses. In spite of this, multitudes of both men and women came to believe and the church continued to grow.

The apostles continued to perform miracles among the people, healing the sick and casting out unclean spirits. The news even spread to surrounding cities and many were coming to Jerusalem seeking healing. Sick people were carried in their beds out into the streets in hopes that Peter's shadow might fall upon them as he passed by. Some scholars think there is a hint of superstition in this act, but it may also be compared to the faith of the woman with the hemorrhage who believed that if she could just touch Christ's garment she would be made well. Jesus did not rebuke her, but told her, "*Daughter, your faith has made you well*" (Mark 5:34).

## II. Opposition From Outside the Church - Acts 5:17-42

The miracles and the gathering of the crowds to be healed did not escape the attention of the religious rulers.

##### A. Second Arrest of the Apostles - Acts 5:17-25

The high priest and the Sadducees were filled with *indignation*, translating the Greek word "zelos" which has the connotation of envy, wrath, and zeal. The rulers were envious of the success of the apostles. They hated the gospel the apostles taught because it affirmed the

resurrection of the dead which the Sadducees denied. They were also angry because the apostles had disobeyed the orders of the Sanhedrin. They arrested the apostles and had them put in the public jail.

### 1. The miracle - 5:17-20

That night as the apostles sat in prison, God sent an angel to open the prison doors and release them. This is the first of three prison miracles in Acts. The others are found in Acts 12:6-10 and 16:26-27.

The angel instructed the apostles to go to the temple and preach the gospel. They were to stand boldly in the temple, right under the noses of the priests and rulers, and continue to proclaim "*all the words of this life*", words pertaining to eternal life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The apostles had been delivered from one danger only to find themselves in another dangerous situation. In his [Commentary](#), Matthew Henry notes, "God does not release us from danger and trouble that we may enjoy the comforts of life, but that He may be honored with the services of our life."

### 2. The obedience of the apostles - 5:21

The apostles were obedient to the angel's instructions. As they proclaimed words of life to the people, the high priest was busy assembling the Sanhedrin and all the elders of Israel to try their case. This time even the lower officials, who were not a part of the Sanhedrin, were summoned to try the apostles. Now all the Jewish leaders would have an opportunity to hear the gospel.

### 3. The confusion of the prosecutors - 5:22-25

It was not until officers were sent to the prison to fetch the apostles and deliver them to the council that it was discovered they were missing. How ironic that the highest court in Israel had met to judge prisoners they did not have! How ironic that the prison guards had spent most of the night guarding empty cells! How ironic that as the highest officials wondered what the outcome would be, the apostles were in the temple obeying the Lord! The priests and officials must have been dumbfounded when someone came and told them that the men they had put in prison were now standing in the temple, freely teaching the people!

## B. The Trial - Acts 5:26-33

### 1. The rearrest - 5:26-27

The captain of the temple guard and officers were sent to bring the apostles back for trial. The apostles went peacefully, allaying the fears of the officers who thought they might be stoned by the people if they had to use force.

### 2. The accusations - 5:28

The high priest charged the apostles with two offenses. First, they had disobeyed the former command of the Sanhedrin (4:18) not to teach in Jesus' name. Secondly, they were trying to blame the members of the Sanhedrin for the crucifixion of Jesus (4:10).

### 3. The apostles' answer - 5:29-32

#### a. The defense - 5:29-31

The apostles' answer, "*We ought to obey God rather than men*," is a reaffirmation of what Peter had told the council on the occasion of his first arrest, "*Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge*" (4:19). The argument which follows this time is also a repetition of the message Peter had preached before (4:10-12). The men of the council had murdered Jesus by hanging on a tree. On the other hand, God had raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to sit at His right hand to be both Prince and Savior. The reasoning of this argument is very rational. The Jews had afflicted Jesus with dishonor and shame, but God had crowned Him with glory and honor. So whose side should the apostles be on? The answer seemed clear enough.

#### b. The indictment - 5:30-31

Peter had previously charged the Jewish religious leaders with the crucifixion of Jesus. In light of the high priest's accusation, the apostles affirmed that charge and also exposed the magnitude of their crime. They had murdered their Prince and Savior who had come to give repentance and forgiveness of sins. They had murdered their Messiah!

#### c. The invitation - 5:31-32

Peter's answer was not just an indictment but also an invitation to the Jewish rulers to repent. They had murdered their Messiah, but God had raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to a position of power. The fact that Christ had been resurrected meant they had another chance. If they would repent, their sin would be forgiven. Christ had come for that very purpose!

The apostles were *witnesses* of what God had done through Jesus Christ. The word "witnesses" does not refer to observers, but to those who bear witness by their testimony. The apostles had been called by God to testify of Christ, who He is and to what God had done for Him. The Holy Spirit bore witness through them, as evidenced by the bold preaching and the miracles.

## 4. The anger of the council - 5:33

The hearts of the Jewish rulers were hardened even further. Furious to see their sin exposed, they wanted to kill the apostles. What a contrast between the response of the crowd in Acts 2:37 and the response of the council here. The crowd was *cut to the heart* with sorrow and repentance. The council was *cut to the quick* (NASB) with rage and indignation.

## C. Advice from Gamaliel - Acts 5:34-39

Gamaliel was a very influential teacher of the Law. He was a Pharisee, the religious party which did not oppose the doctrine of the resurrection as the Sadducees did. There were fewer Pharisees on the council, but they were very popular and the Sadducees did not dare to oppose them. Therefore, everyone listened as Gamaliel spoke and warned against taking rash action.

## 1. Trust in God's providence - 5:34-38

Gamaliel warned the council to let the apostles alone, reasoning that, "*If this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it*" (5:39). He gave examples of other troublesome movements which had died out on their own, showing there was no cause to worry about this new group.

## a. Theudas - 5:36

Theudas, a leader of about 400 men, had been killed, all his followers had been scattered, and that was the end of his rebellion. If Jesus was an imposter, the interest in his apostles' teaching would soon fade and be forgotten

## b. Judas of Galilee - 5:37

When a census was taken to determine the amount of tribute the Jews should pay to Rome. Judas of Galilee had stirred up a revolt which had been crushed by the Romans. Judas had been killed and his followers dispersed. Likewise, the followers of Jesus would disappear soon enough.

## 2. Do not fight against God - 5:39

Gamaliel advised that it would be best for the council to adopt a wait and see policy. If Jesus was merely a man and His work was not of God, it would all come to nothing. However, if He was from God, the Jewish rulers could not overthrow it anyway. In fact, they would find themselves fighting against God. Was it not better to trust in the providence of God and let the matter work itself out? On the surface, "this appeared to be wise counsel, but actually it was not. No one can be

neutral about Christ. To delay making a decision is to court disaster. God had given every evidence through signs and miracles that He was at work, and there was no reason to put off making a decision" (Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament, Warren W. Wiersbe.) Besides, Jesus had taught about what it meant to remain neutral: "*He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters*" (Matthew 12:30). Are you trying to remain neutral, or have you taken a stand for Jesus?

## D. Apostles Released - Acts 5:4 -42

The council agreed with Gamaliel. They had the apostles beaten, probably the traditional forty stripes minus one, (see Deuteronomy 25:3 and 2 Corinthians 11:24), commanded them again not to speak in the name of Jesus, and released them.

## 1. Rejoicing - 5:41

There was no sign of discouragement as the beaten and bloody apostles left the council chambers. They did not say a word against the council but rejoiced that they had been counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. They had taken to heart Jesus' words in Matthew 5:11 "*Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.*"

## 2. Teaching and preaching - 5:42

The arrest and beating did not intimidate the apostles. It made them even bolder. Every day they went to the temple to preach Jesus as the Messiah. Every day they went from house to house teaching the people.

**Applications**

1. The Scriptures tell us, *Rejoice in the Lord always* (Philippians 4:4) How much does it take to turn your rejoicing into discontent and complaining? Will you take this lesson from the apostles to heart and always remember to *Rejoice in the Lord* rather than grumble about your circumstances?

2. The apostles shared the good news of Jesus Christ with people every day. They taught that He was the Prince of Life and Savior who had come to call for repentance and provide remission of sins. Who will you share the good news of Jesus Christ with this week?

3. Are you always obedient to the Word of God, as the apostles were obedient to the words spoken by the angel? Are you obedient even when it is difficult? Are you obedient even when you know others may oppose you? Are your actions compelled by the desire to please men or God?