

Week 10

THE JERUSALEM CHURCH IN ACTION – PT 5

The United Witness of Apostolic Leadership

As chapter 5 begins, we see the church several months old, and holding regular meetings. The apostles are clearly in charge of the meetings with Peter continuing to function as leader and main spokesperson for the apostles.

As an act of giving, the people brought their gifts and laid them at the apostles' feet. Here we see the first glimpse of an offertory in corporate worship. Early Christian worship liturgies began to form over the first few hundred years with people offering their tithes and gifts back to God as an act of worship and then brought forward in the church settings. This is still being done in many Church worship settings.

The precedent is set in these early offerings that the gift belongs completely to God. At the end of chapter 4 we see Barnabas selling some land and it is implied that he gave the complete amount to the church (the apostles' feet). The earliest believers understood that everything belonged to God.

1 Chronicles 29 tells of the incredible free will offerings of King David and the other leaders following his example, followed then by all the people, given to the work of building the Temple of God. In verse 11 we hear David exclaim that everything belongs to God...

*¹¹ Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.*

*Yours, Lord, is the kingdom;
you are exalted as head over all.*

*¹² Wealth and honor come from you;
you are the ruler of all things.*

*In your hands are strength and power
to exalt and give strength to all.*

*¹³ Now, our God, we give you thanks,
and praise your glorious name.*

The concept of tithing is as old as the story of Abraham giving a tithe (1/10th) to Melchizedek. The book of Leviticus, which gives us the Mosaic Law, commands a tithe of all increase by God's people. So, we can note that by the time of Jesus, tithing was common and expected. However, it was the spontaneous practice of the church from her earliest beginnings in Acts chapter 2, to consider everything in common as belonging to God, and to one another, and not just the tithe.

Such a giving spirit shows us the heart of God. He gives to all abundantly, and there is nothing we need that the hand of God can't and doesn't supply. Such unconditional generosity was certainly a hallmark of the church that drew people in. No other institution or group operated in such love and generosity.

Therefore, the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira is incredibly shocking. Their colluding together to deceive the church was done for selfish reasons and shows the very antithesis of what it means to be a believer. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, we hear that as believers in Christ we are to be transformed from our old selfish ways, into Christ likeness. Clearly the duplicity of Ananias and his wife show that, while part of the church, they were not fully transformed. Their sudden death is shocking to say the least and can't be easily explained. We are to understand it as an act of God's sovereign reign over all of life – the author and finisher! Indeed, we are to understand it as a warning to all, that God will not be mocked or lied to without consequence. And, as Jesus said many times, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Matt. 11:15)

D. Deception in the Church

- a. The deceit of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11)
 - 1. To lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to God
 - 2. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira
- b. Fear inside the church & outside

The power of Apostolic Ministry (5:12-16)

- 1. The unity of the church is unbroken
- 2. Some begin to keep away from the church
- 3. The church continues to thrive under duress

Revive Us Again: How the Church Changed the World and Can Again

Study Notes – Week 10

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.