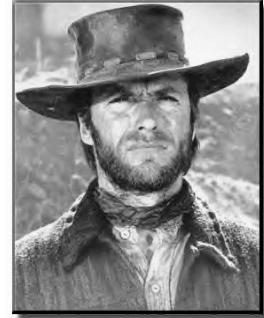




## Mission Interrupted? Avoiding Distractions in the Church: Acts 4:32-6:07

**Summaries (of success) in Acts.** Luke has a number of “summary moments” where he stops his narrative and comments on the growth, status, and quality of the life of the Church (cf. Acts 1:13-14; 2:42-47; 8:1-3; 10:31 etc.)

**The Good, the Bad, and the Ungodly:** As a historian, Luke does not shy away from portraying the struggles of the early church



In the three major events recounted in Acts 4:32—6:07, we see how the Lord leads his Church to **overcome would-be interruptions** to its ministry, and how **the Church grows in ministry, to the glory of God.**

These chapters reveal a church that is **On Mission...**

Text	Proof that the Church is effective?	Explanation?
Acts 4:32-34a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>with great power they continued to testify</li> <li>much grace was upon them</li> <li>no needy people among them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>filled with the HS</li> <li>spiritual discipline: prayer</li> <li>openness with possessions</li> <li>sacrificial action</li> <li>appropriate distribution</li> </ul>
Acts 5:12-14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>miraculous signs &amp; wonders</li> <li>fear</li> <li>respect: highly regarded</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>filled with HS</li> <li>meeting together</li> <li>sought purity</li> </ul>
Acts 6:7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>word of God spread</li> <li>number of disciples increased rapidly</li> <li>priests became obedient to the faith</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>persecution</li> <li>faithfulness</li> <li>God at work in lives</li> </ul>

Note : v32 gives the Greek view of equality; 34a the OT (Hebraic) view

The Church did not lower its standards in order to win the lost: they realized that “the awesome power of the Spirit that judges also demands commitment and responsibility” (Polhill 164)

### **Mission Interrupted? Part I: Hypocrisy (Acts 4:34b-5:14)**

What is the central challenge in the Ananias-Sapphira account to the Church's mission? [Lied to God, held back ]

How does the Holy Spirit deal with that issue? [Confrontation of sin, not judgement]

#### **Other issues that arise in this passage?**

- Was everyone in the early church supposed to give up his or her belongings ("Christian Communism")?

[No: Peter's rebuke (5:4); from 'time to time' (4:34); later references to homes in Acts]

- What is meant by the phrase, "Satan has so filled your heart"?

-“fill one's heart” (Aramaic = to dare to...) Marshall 112

-Ananias' heart was divided

-Lk. 8:14 The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.

- How exactly DID Peter know what was going on in Ananias' heart?
- Why did they bury Ananias so fast-- without even telling his wife?
- The Coroner's Report: Cause of death?

#### **When considering the Ananias & Sapphira story, recognize that...**

- This is a unique, troubling story; but perhaps part of a unique time in the history of the church. The early church accepted the possibility of serious judgments following upon acts of sin (I Cor. 5:1-11; 11:27-32; James 5:14-16) (Marshall 111)
- Satan is always seeking the destruction of the Church. Satan filled Ananias' heart: "the occurrence in the lives of Christians when Satan gets them so obsessed with an idea or course of action that they get carried away and are blinded to the consequences. That seems to be what is happening here" (Fernando 199)
- The distracting power of possessions and money (a major theme with Luke)
- Along with Barnabas, it is part of a larger model: one to follow, one to avoid
- The same verb is used of Achan in Joshua 7: "to hold back", meaning to pilfer, purloin, or embezzle
- Burials could be hasty in the case of suicides, criminals and where judgment from God was seen as in effect.
- Peter did not curse, nor even judge [this couple] —his job was to confront (Polhill 159)
- That disunity, duplicity and hypocrisy always hinder the witness of the Church
- When we lie to the Church, we are lying to the Holy Spirit
- Many of Satan's activities in the Bible are with believers (Fernando 199)
- In concluding this story, Luke still uses the word "church" (for the first time) (v. 11)

### **Mission Interrupted? Part II: Persecution (Acts 5:15-42)**

What is the central challenge to the Church's mission from this account of persecution?

[persecution (jealousy by religious leaders); arrest for belief; public jail]

How does the Holy Spirit deal with this challenge? [created an approval among the people; provided angelic rescue; confounded the political authorities; raises up influential public figures (Gamaliel)]

#### **Other issues that arise in this passage?**

- Why are the members of the Sanhedrin so worried about the apostles blaming them for Jesus' death (cf. v. 27-28)? [the accusation amounts to murder (of an innocent man), a crime punishable by death]
- Did you notice that the Sanhedrin NEVER (directly) mention the name "Jesus" [Increasingly, the name of Jesus was taboo, even blasphemous for the Jews]
- Why did Gamaliel speak on behalf the apostles, and why was his speech effective?
- So, when faced with religious/spiritual challenges (other beliefs), should we take Gamaliel as our model, and "wait to see"?
- Why are the apostles flogged, if they are exonerated?
- Are you kidding me, the apostles left the flogging, "...rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name"??
- BTW, were those people who got under Peter's shadow actually healed?

#### **When considering this account of persecution, understand the context...**

- This flogging had to be less than 40 lashes, might have been less than 39 lashes, but was definitely painful
- Politics, politics, politics: Sadducees (more rigid in their interpretation of the law) outnumbered Pharisees (more flexible), but Pharisees were understood to have the support of the people

#### **Ironies in this story**

- Sadducees do not believe in angels
- The Sanhedrin believes it is in control of the religious Jerusalem
- Suffering and disgrace are honorable states in the Christian worldview

### **Mission Interrupted? Part III: Distraction (Acts 6:1-7)**

What is the central challenge to the Church's mission? [Discord and complaints]

How does the HS through the Church deal with that issue? [raising up of a new ministry; development of new leaders; recognition of diversity of gifts]

#### **Other issues that arise in this passage?**

- Are some more equal than others? Why can't "the Twelve" serve tables, after all?
- I thought this community had 'no one in need' ...?

#### **When considering this conflict in the church, know that...**

The wording used to refer to these groups suggests more cultural differences, not just language differences

The Grecian Formula: Getting the "grey" in: many widows from the Diaspora returned to end their days in Jerusalem; these Hellenistic Jews may have been numerous and without familial support.

All Jewish widows were guaranteed in the OT provision from Temple collections; widows who became Christian believers might forfeit this care.



## **Important lessons for us about Hypocrisy, Persecution, and Distraction**

- Even dishtowels? Hiding to lie; lying to hide. God hates hypocrisy among his people. Of what forms of hypocrisy do we need to repent?
- We need to increase our openness, perhaps especially concerning our material possessions.
- We need to keep a clean conscience.
- We need to uphold and follow (godly) Church discipline
- We need close Christian community to keep ourselves in check
- Face discouragement in our church realistically: we can take comfort from knowing that the first church (and even Jesus' inner circle of the twelve) faced great problems. Note that they dealt with them immediately (Marshall 201)
- Be prepared to "obey God and not other people" this week. Be prepared to rejoice through suffering: God's glory can be revealed in you!
- Find your ministry in NPC or your community. There are many needs but ample gifts to meet those needs. Do you need to raise an issue or propose a ministry? Do you need to step up and join a ministry that is ongoing, for which you have been gifted?

The Church faced each of these "distractions" ...

- Immediately: Are you facing a temptation or distraction from ministry that requires timely action?
- In community: with whom are you working in Christian ministry?
- Through the power of the Spirit: check your 'spiritual' navigation system, are you where you should be and headed in the right direction?