**Acts 5: Growth of the Church; The Apostles before the Sanhedrin**

**Acts 5:1-11; Ananias and Sapphira**

* Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property. They withheld some of the proceeds of the sale for themselves. As was the custom Ananias laid the money at the apostles’ feet.
* Peter knew of Ananias’ deception. Peter advised Ananias that he has not only lied to men but has lied to the Holy Spirit at which point Ananias drops dead.
* Three hours later Sapphira came before Peter. She is unaware that Ananias is dead. Peter asks her if the property was sold for a specific amount of money. She indicates it was. Peter asks her ***“Why did you agree to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?”*** Like her husband, Sapphira drops dead.
* No one was obligated to sell their property or to give the proceeds to the apostles. People who did so acted with complete freedom.
* Ananias was free to sell the land or not, and to give all or part of the proceeds to help needy brethren.
* Their sin was in deceiving the apostles to believe that they were donating all the proceeds from the sale of the property to the Christian community.
* It may seem harsh that both Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead once their deceit was exposed. Their deception was a threat to the early church. If other members practiced deception the community’s existence would be harmed. ***“And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things.”***

**Acts 5:12-16; Signs and Wonders of the Apostles**

***“Thus, they even carried the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them”***

***“A large number of people from the towns in the vicinity of Jerusalem also gathered, bringing the sick and those disturbed by unclean spirits, and they were all cured”***

* St. Luke emphasizes the apostles’ power to work miracles as a necessary part of the growth of the church.
* The miracles confirm to the people that the kingdom of God has in fact come upon them
* The purpose of the miracles was not to amaze the people but to awaken faith.
* In the Hebrew Scripture miracles accompany God’s revelation to men. Miracles are a part of the revelation.
* The apostles would not have been able to move people to give up their traditional religion for new teachings and truths without miracles.
* The purpose of Jesus’ miracles was to proclaim that he was the divine Messiah and that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. Likewise, it was through the miracles of the apostles that the resurrection and ascension of Jesus was credible.
* Many of the early Christians were martyred for their faith. They were willing to suffer persecutions and death because the apostles’ miracles made the resurrection and ascension credible.
* Although the apostles confess that the miracles they performed were performed in the name and power of Jesus Christ their faith in Jesus was necessary for the miracles to occur.

**Acts 5:17-25; Apostles are Arrested and Miraculously Freed**

* The High Priest, Pharisees and Sadducees were jealous of the apostles because of the miracles they were performing. They had the apostles arrested.
* At night an angel of the Lord opened the prison door and brough them out of the prison. He gave them instructions that they were to go to the temple and speak to the people the “words of life”.
* The next morning the Sanhedrin convened in the temple and had requested the court officers bring the apostles before them. The court officers went to the prison. They found the prison to be securely locked and the guards stationed outside the doors, but the apostles were not there.
* Imagine the shock of the captain of the temple and the chief priests to learn that the very apostles that they had arrested the previous day were standing in the temple teaching.

**Acts 5:26-33; The Apostles before the Sanhedrin**

* The captain and the court officers seize the apostles and bring them before the Sanhedrin.

***“We gave you strict orders to stop teaching in that name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and want to bring this man’s blood upon us.”***

* As citizens and Jews, the apostles were subject to the Sanhedrin’s authority. The problem was that the Sanhedrin was imposing a ruling that would have them go against God’s law and their own conscience.

***“We must obey God rather than men. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus, though you had killed him by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right rand as leader and savior to grant Israel repentance and forgiveness of sines.***

* The apostles have come to a point in their spiritual maturity where they have begun to love and serve God without counting the cost. The persecution and hardship that they will experience in serving Jesus is secondary to their love of Christ.
* It is not enough for Christians to live their life privately. We have a responsibility to share our faith with others. This means following the apostles’ example and sharing our faith even when it will be uncomfortable or awkward. We are not to be passive. We are to be proactive.

**Acts 5:34-39; Gamliel’s Intervention**

***“So now I tell you, have nothing to do with these men, and let them go. For if this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself. But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them: you may even find yourself fighting against God.”***

* Gamaliel had been St. Paul’s teacher. He belonged to a moderate grouping among the Pharisees unlike Saul who was a fundamentalist in his understanding and observance of Judaism.
* Around the time of Jesus’ birth both Theudas and Judas of Galilee led a revolt against the chosen people having to pay tribute to Herod and Imperial Rome.
* Both Theudas and Judas were able to attract a strong following of men to join them. When it was all said and done their endeavor was of human origin and did not come from God. Both Theudas and Judas were killed and those who followed them were scattered.
* Gamaliel’s intervention shows that a person with good will can discern God’s action in events. In participating in an endeavor or activity it is important to discern if the endeavor is of human origin or if it comes from God. It the endeavor or activity is human in origin is must be viewed with suspicion.
* To Gamaliel’s point, there can be no denying that Christianity is not human in origin. Christianity comes from God. It would not be possible for Christianity to spread throughout the world if it was human in origin.

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William J. Murphy