

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Acts is about Christ's activity through his Spirit and church. His message is opposed but life cannot be extinguished and darkness cannot overcome light. The passage from 4:32 to 6:7 illustrates that.

PROGRESS - CARING IN A CHRIST-LIKE WAY

The historian writes about God's power at work, and "great grace" being on the people. It showed in the way they treated each other.

The church responded to poverty among its members. The reference having goods in common does not mean that private property was abolished. It refers to an attitude of mind and how they behaved. They regarded themselves as stewards of God's blessings, very different from the grasping spirit common in society. When a situation of need arose someone would liquidate part of their assets and put the money at the disposal of the apostles so the need could be met. That is the spirit of Christ who impoverished himself to enrich us.

The practise of Christian love awed many and attracted others.

PROGRESS - GOD'S WORK AND PEOPLE'S FAITH

God's Spirit had an effect directly on society as well as on the church. Many people were healed. Demonic spirits were also expelled - a clear evidence that Christ has triumphed over the powers of darkness.

That was associated with the people who brought the gospel of Jesus. That is very different from today's notion that the Spirit is forming God's kingdom in society quite apart from the gospel. As well as physical healing we read of many people coming to faith in Jesus Christ. That is spiritual healing. It is the addition of people to Christ thus saving them from sin and death. It is their addition to the church, thus adding to the Bride of Christ and ensuring that God's kingdom would continue down the ages. That is a greater matter than any physical healing.

LIES PUNISHED

The story of Ananias and Sapphira shows how Christ's church can be invaded by a spirit that is the opposite of his.

They sold a piece of land and gave the proceeds to the apostles pretending that was the whole sum. Peter made clear they were under no obligation to give anything. Hypocrisy and a lying spirit is offensive to the God of truth. Satan had "filled their heart". In saying they had lied to God Peter was reminding them of Christ's presence by his Spirit. What we do to the church we are doing to Christ. That lesson came home later to Saul of Tarsus when Christ said, "Why are you persecuting me?"

Christ abhors sin in his church. He is forgiving but reacts against any influence that tends to corrupt his Bride. That is obvious in the Letters to the Seven Churches.

Christ acted. Both Ananias and Sapphira died in circumstances that made Christ's displeasure obvious. It had a sobering effect. He has also called the overseers of his church to discipline unruly members when they distort the message of Christ or promote ungodly conduct.

THREATS IGNORED

The apostles' message attracted some and alarmed others.

Luke states that the Saducees (the liberal 'establishment' of Judaism) were jealous of the apostles. Peter, John, etc. seemed to threaten their position.

The gospel challenged their conscience especially as it was accompanied by divine miracles and attracted many adherents. They were made to face their sin in crucifying Jesus and they did not like it (verse 28). Denial seems easier than repentance but it is digging ourselves into a hole.

Their authority was being challenged. The apostles did not attack the existing order, but when the people in charge crucified their king and persecuted his apostles that was bound to strain the relationship. A similar problem arises whenever a leader in church or state goes against the Word of Christ.

The apostles were arrested but Christ sent his angel to set them free. The gospel was still preached.

When they were brought to trial Peter reminded them of the facts - no less than the Holy Spirit was showing that the message was true, people were repenting and finding forgiveness through the crucified but glorified Jesus.

Christ quelled the murderous rage that followed. Gamaliel was prompted to remind the Sanhedrin of various failed rebellions and to point out that if God was not with the apostles it would come to nothing (but if God was with them it would be futile to oppose them). It was sufficient to allow them to continue working freely.

COMPLAINTS HANDLED WISELY

Complaints show something is wrong - either with the situation or the person complaining. And it tends to put other things wrong.

Luke suggests there was a complaining spirit among some people, like the Children of Israel in the desert. It was being said that one group of needy people was being favoured at the expense of another. It could easily demoralise, distract, and disgrace.

If we indulge a sense of grievance it will undermine love, hinder our praying, and cause disunity. It may grieve the Holy Spirit and lead God's enemies to gloat. The apostles had to act, but if they spent time on this it would have hindered their main work. Satan only needs to promote discontent for a church to land in trouble. And no church is perfect.

Christ always provides a solution to his church's problems. In this case there was people - his gifts (Ephesians 4) who could take responsibility for this matter.

The apostles invited the church to choose suitable people - "of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom". This depended on three parties being willing - the apostles were willing to delegate, the church was willing to cooperate, and the chosen people were willing to take responsibility. They recognised Christ's gifts, and they showed the Spirit of Christ by taking responsibility. It was very different from the common Western attitude of only buying for one's own needs.

Such arrangements don't just happen - they have to be put in place by ordaining people to carry out such functions. Thus we find elders ordained to "feed the flock of God", and deacons who will serve the church in other ways.

CONCLUSION

God's kingdom is in Christ's hands. The powers of darkness will oppose it but "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it".

Christ overcomes it by his own power, his influence on the minds of men, and through the cooperation of his people in praying, witnessing, exercising church discipline, and taking responsibility as his gifts to his church.