

## TOPIC: COMMUNAL LIVING IN THE EARLY CHURCH/THE HOLY SPIRIT AT PENTECOST

### ELECTION OF THE SUCCESSOR TO JUDAS ISCARIOT, ACT 1: 15-26

In obedience to the Jesus' instruction the disciples stayed together in the upper-room as they all returned to Jerusalem, staying together as a community. One of their earliest actions was the replacement of Judas Iscariot, who had long committed suicide following his betrayal of Jesus. To this end, Barnabas and Matthias were selected, but after several rounds of prayer, they cast lots and finally, Matthias was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. ACT 2: 41-47; 4: 32-37

At the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven, the number of the disciples including women was about one hundred and twenty (120). After Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost about three thousand souls were baptized and added to the Church. Also after the prayer of Peter and John for the crippled man at the beautiful gate who got healed during the hour of prayer, about five thousand men were converted and added to the church.

The converts all stayed in Jerusalem with the disciples. They formed the early Church. There was a sense of togetherness and belonging among members of the early Church. They were of one heart and one mind, they did everything in common.

### THE PROBLEMS OF EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. ACT 5: 1-11; 6: 1

Like any other organization of human beings, the joy and communal living among the brethren gave way to human weaknesses and problems. In the early church dishonesty and discrimination came in to destroyed the spirit of fellowship but was quickly stopped by the Apostles.

#### 1. FRAUD/DISHONESTY OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

Fraud is a form of cheating or stealing that results from dishonesty. It is a way of denying others their share from the Church, State or Nation through deceit and corruption. In our present day, people in churches and society engage in widespread fraud to enrich themselves. Some people who collect tithes for the Church or taxes for the Nation, keep part of the money collected for their personal use. Such acts are fraudulent. Just as fraud (corruption) is today, so it was in the early Church.

As many as the Christian sold their property and brought the money to the congregation, it was assumed that any member of the congregation that sold his property should follow the same trend, though, people were not forced to sell their properties. Ananias and Sapphira, in order to enjoy the same praise given to others who had sold their property and brought the whole money, went and sold their property. But rather than bring the whole money, they kept back some and brought part of it to the congregation. Peter rebuked them sharply for dishonesty saying:

"Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back some of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? After it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but God." Acts 5:3-4

Immediately Ananias received this rebuke, he fell down and died. The young men around carried him away and buried him. When Sapphira, Ananias wife who did not know what had happened came in, Peter also asked her whether all what the husband brought was the money for the land. When she confirmed that it was all. Peter equally rebuked her and she fell and died, the young men came in, saw her and carried her out and buried her. Fear came upon the entire congregation.

## LESSONS TO BE DRAWN FROM THE INCIDENT

1. Ananias and Sapphira were misguided into thinking that they could serve both God and Mammon (money and riches).
2. One can deceive a fellow man but cannot deceive God who reads the heart of man.
3. The Church was established by God and controlled by the Holy Spirit. Members must work in accordance with the guidelines set up by the Holy Spirit.
4. God's judgment is certain.
5. God punishes sin of disobedience.
6. We should give with sincerity/honesty.

## DISCRIMINATION AND MURMURING IN THE EARLY CHURCH

To murmur is to grumble, to show discontentment. It is also to whisper in low tones to express displeasure; especially when a group of people realize that things are not being done the right way or they are being discriminated against.

There was discrimination among members of the early church. This came about during the distribution of food and other things. The Jews who were from Jerusalem and Palestine (Hebrews) were given special treatment while the Jews born outside Jerusalem and Palestine (Grecian Jews or Hellenites) especially the widows, were treated differently. They were discriminated against and were not given the food and other things they requested for. As a result, the Grecian Jews murmured and complained bitterly.

## SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY ACTS 6: 2-6.

1. The problem of dishonesty and hypocrisy was solved by the death of the couple involved (Ananias and Sapphira) the same day. Fear came upon Church and they all served God with singleness of heart.

### 2. SELECTION OF DEACONS

In order to solve the discrimination and partiality problem in the distribution of food and other items among the early Christians, the apostles discussed the matter. The Apostles made it known, that they cannot leave the work of preaching and ministering the word of God to serve tables and supervise the distribution of food and other things. He suggested that they should choose seven men to supervise the distribution of food and other things.

They stated the qualities expected of the seven deacons:

They should be men of good repute, i.e. men of good character.

They should be men of wisdom and understanding.

They should be men filled with the Holy Spirit.

The following men that fit into the criteria were chosen by the early Church: These are:

Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas. Due to the selection of the seven deacons, the discrimination and the grumbling in the church stopped as there was now equitable distribution of food