

PRAYER, POWER & PURITY

... why marvel ye ... as though by our own power or holiness [piety, NAS; godliness, NIV] we had made this man to walk? --Acts 3:12 (KJV)

Study 7A: The PURPOSE of POWER (4:23-31)

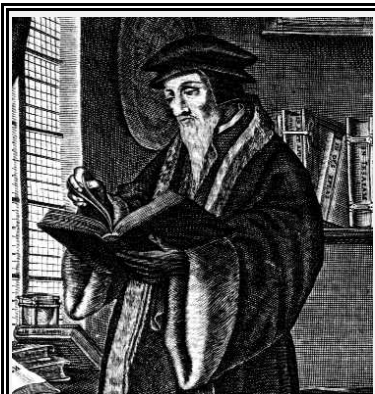
4:23-28 What irony do the apostles discover in this unique coalition against Christ? (2:23; 3:17,18)

Do not say the Jews were the Christ-killers. The Gentiles were just as guilty. All joined together. They all said, "Let us break Their bands asunder." They all agreed in saying, "We will not have this Man to reign over us." -- H. Ironside, *Acts* p.114

... I think we here see the Church in a period of transition in regard to their conceptions of their Lord. There is no sign that the proper Sonship and Divinity of our Lord was clear before them at this period. -- Alexander MacLaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture: Acts* p.168

The prayer began with an address to God that reflected his sovereign control over all that was happening. The title *Sovereign Lord* (Gk. *despotes*) is comparatively infrequent in the New Testament (and also in the LXX), perhaps because the word suggested a despotic, arbitrary kind of lordship. -- I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* p.105

4:29-31 When praying to what do the apostles give utmost priority? (4:13; 9:27) In their eyes what is the purpose of a `power



JOHN CALVIN (1509-1564)
[On the apostles' power] "... a few men unarmed, furnished with no garrisons, do show forth more power in their voice alone, than all the world, by raging against them"
-- Acts , p.167(tr. Fetherstone)

display'? (Heb.2:1-4; John 15:22,24) [note: When the Spirit falls and fills, what is the result?]

Mark the unselfish character of the petitions. They asked not for protection or preservation, but for more power to witness. -- W.H. Griffith Thomas, *The Apostle Peter* p.90

If it is not designed that the one impression of BOLDNESS IN WITNESS, as consequent upon the fullness of the Spirit, should be prominent here, this chapter in the Acts is out of place ... the boldness is traced distinctly to the infilling of the Spirit, as though the fullness within could not be restrained, but, like a stream bursting through all barriers, sweeping away all obstacles, must scoop out for itself a channel in speech. -- A.T. Pierson, *The Acts of The Holy Spirit* pp.37-38

He is the Servant; we standing here are slaves. And that this is not an overweighting of the word with more than is meant by it seems to be confirmed by the fact that in the first clause of this prayer, we have, for the only time in the New Testament, God addressed as `Lord' by the correlative word to *slave*, which has been transferred into English, namely, despot ... Such slavery is the only freedom. Liberty does not mean doing as you like, it means liking as you ought, and doing that ... You talk about the bondage of obedience. Ah! `the weight of too much liberty' is a far sorer bondage ... The Servant-Son makes us slaves and sons. --- A. MacLaren, *op.cit.*, pp.169-171

The room in which the disciples were gathered shook as if an earthquake was taking place. This was one of the signs which indicated a theophany in the Old Testament (Ex. 19:18; Is. 6:4) ... -- I. Howard Marshall, *op.cit.*, p.107

Study 7B: The PURPOSE of the HOLY SPIRIT -- a HOLY CHURCH (4:32-37)

4:32-33 Do we recall the first fruit of the spirit? (Gal.5:22,23) Or the sign of a spirit-filled fellowship? (John 13)

Communism and *koinonia* have a root idea in common -- but after that they go in opposite directions. Communism says, "What is yours is mine; I'll take it." *Koinonia* says, "What is mine is yours; I'll share it." The one forcibly invades the right of private property; the other voluntarily relinquishes the right ... The one is enforced by law; the other is enforced only by love. -- W.S. LaSor, *Church Alive* p.71

There is nothing of modern communism in all this, but there is a lesson to the modern Church as to the obligations of wealth and the claims of brotherhood, which is all but universally disregarded. The spectre of communism is troubling every nation, and it will become more and more formidable, unless the Church learns that the only way to lay it is to live by the precepts of Jesus and to repeat in new forms the spirit of the primitive Church. The Christian sense of stewardship, not the abolition of the right of property, is the cure for the hideous facts which drive men to shriek 'Property is theft.' --

Alexander MacLaren, *op.cit.*, p.174

4:34-37 Define the relationship between purity, power and prosperity. (cf. 2:44-47)

No instructions were given that if men had property they were to dispose of it. The point is this: the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of unselfishness, was working in such power in the hearts of the early believers they simply could not consider anything as their own, but held everything they had as a trust from God to be used as a blessing to other people. What a wonderful testimony if that were true today! if Christians everywhere regarded that which God put in their keeping as a stewardship from Himself, to be used in alleviating the wants of those in need and in assisting Christians in distress, and getting the gospel out in the shortest possible time to the ends of the earth! But alas, we who profess to follow Him who could say when He was here, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head" -- we are so concerned about our own comfort, nice clothing, a home for ourselves and the little luxuries of life, that we often forget the deep needs of those about us. -- **H. Ironside**, *op.cit.*, pp.123,124

Study 7C: PURITY WITHOUT HYPOCRISY (5:1-16)

5:1-10 What are the lessons of the story of Ananias and Sapphira?

As we read the record I am sure nobody is struck with the horror of it on the surface. Nobody feels that Ananias and Sapphira were very much worse than many people we meet with every day. And some of us, if our consciences are active, looked apparently far worse than these two when we last surveyed ourselves in the looking-glass ... They pretended to a greater degree of Christian devotedness than they really possessed! That was all; but it was a tremendously evil thing in the sight of God ... The way the Lord estimates our gifts is not by the amount we give, but by what we have left ... -- **H. Ironside**, *op.cit.*, pp.122,130

Ananias in appearance did the same as Barnabas, *but* in reality what a difference! Sin of avarice on the surface; deeper still, hypocrisy -- the appearance of consecration without the genuine experience. -- **W.H. Griffith Thomas**, *op.cit.*, p.92

What, inevitably, will be the result when grasping believers replace giving believers?

Ananias ... is the OT Hananiah, "Jehovah has graciously given." -- **F.F. Bruce**, *The Book of Acts* p.112

5:11-16 How power-full is a pure, fear-full church? (2:43; 9:31)

After purity came power. The power of Satan and self (vv.3,4) gave place to the power of the Spirit. The spirit of love triumphed over avarice, the spirit of truth over hypocrisy, the spirit of holiness over sin, and the Church went forward blessed and

made a blessing. -- **W.H. Griffith Thomas**, *op.cit.*, p.96

In every machine power is lost through friction; and in every man, the noblest and the purest, there is resistance to be overcome ere motion in conformity with the divine impulse can be secured ... The terrible severity of the punishment can only be understood by remembering the importance of preserving the young community from corruption at the very beginning. Unless the vermin are cleared from the springing plant, it will not grow. As Achan's death warned Israel at the beginning of their entrance into the promised land, so Ananias and Sapphira perished, that all generations of the Church might fear to pretend to self-surrender while cherishing its opposite, and might feel that they have to give account to One who knows the secrets of the heart, and counts nothing as given if anything is surreptitiously kept back. -- **Alexander MacLaren**, *op.cit.*, pp.167,178

Like the individual, the growing church has many painful discoveries to make: first the hatred of the world; then -- and far more painful -- the appearance of sin within, the discovery that as into Eden, so into the kingdom of the Messiah, sin could find an entrance ... From the Montanists and Novatians of the early church to the Puritans of to-day, attempts have continually been made to found new and 'pure' churches. Against such attempts S. Luke bears witness once for all by recording facts: and from this point of view the history of the Acts is a history of the growth of tares among the wheat -- first hypocrisy; then murmuring (vi); dissension (xv); and sharp contention (xv 39). The first seed of bitterness is most important. So familiar are we with 'spots and wrinkles' in the church that we can with difficulty realize the significance of this, the first sin in and against the community. It corresponds to the entrance of the serpent into Eden with the fall of Eve in the OT: and the first fall from the ideal must have staggered the apostles and the multitude. Its enormity is marked by the punishment which fell upon Ananias, the same which had been meted out to Achan, him who first troubled Israel at the entrance into the Holy Land. -- **R.B. Rackham**, *The Acts of the Apostles* p.64

NEXT STUDY: ORGANIZATION or ORGANISM?