

Opposition & Organization

There are 2 ways in which a church may grow -- **like a building**, by adding stone to stone; and **like a plant**, by development from the root. The one is an **organization** and the other is an **organism**. It is never safe to judge of the success of a church by the length of its members' roll. Subtraction is sometimes strength. Only a pure church is powerful. -- **W. G. Scroggie**, *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption* p.222

... iv.23 - v.16 shews the progress that has been made in organization. The apostolic authority has become more clear and defined; and above all the body of believers definitely emerges at the end as the Church. The first appearance of this vital word suggests that we should pause and try to estimate the meaning of the term. -- **R.B. Rackham**, *Acts* p.75



Charles H. Spurgeon
(1834-1892)

*"In God's name, wake up!
What are you left on earth
for? ... You were not
created to sit in these
pews, and listen to me"*

Study 8a: OPPOSITION ORGANIZES (5:17-25)

5:17-25 How is unbelief embarrassed again?

The second persecution of the church, in which all the apostles were put into the common prison, was mainly brought about by the sect of the Sadducees. These, as you know, were the Broad School, the liberals, the advanced thinkers, the modern-thought people of the day. If you want a bitter sneer, a biting sarcasm, or a cruel action, I

RECAPPING THE LAST STUDY:

- 1 Why was opposition absolutely silenced?
- 2 What did the apostles pray for?
- 3 In what way was "abundant grace upon them all"?
- 4 In what does the church's power consist?

commend you these large-minded gentlemen. They are liberal to everybody, except to those who hold the truth; and for those they have a reserve of concentrated bitterness which far excels wormwood and gall. They are so liberal to their brother errorists that they have no tolerance to spare for evangelicals. -- **C.H. Spurgeon**, *The Treasury of The New Testament: Acts* p.758

Study 8b: CONTINUITY, CONVICTION, CONTRITION (5:26-33)

5:26-30 Though Peter goes for the theological throat, how does he show due consideration for the sensitivities of Jewish unbelief? (2:16-24; 3:17-26)

Clearly enough, if they have known it, and had been capable of seeing it, these blind Sadducees were answered at every point when the apostles were brought out of prison and bore witness to their Lord. Here was the creed of the Sadducees: they said that "there was no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit"; but these apostles stood up and witnessed to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. What did they make of that? An angel had come from heaven and had brought these apostles out of prison. Then there were angels. As these apostles were set free while the sentries remained standing before the doors, and those doors were afterwards found fastened, if there were no spirit, assuredly materialism had acted in a singular fashion. Every item of their negative creed had been made to fall like Dagon before the ark. -- **C.H. Spurgeon**, *op.cit.*, p.758

In God's name wake up! what are you left on this earth for? If there is nothing for you to do, why are you in this sinful world? You ought to be hurried off to heaven, where you might praise God. No, no, I am afraid I am mistaken. You could not praise God in heaven, you have not learned the way ... You were not created to sit in these pews, and listen to me: there is something better for a mortal man to do than to be a hearer only. -- **C.H. Spurgeon**, *op.cit.*, p.763

He who gets this life into him, will be under law to God ... God is supreme to the man who has this life: he lives as an obedient child of God. -- **C.H. Spurgeon**, *op.cit.*, p.761

5:31-33 Notice the ultimate goal of Spirit-led evangelism (as contrasted with Spirit-led sanctification)

When people repent and believe the message, then the Holy Spirit comes to seal them as God's beloved children and He indwells them, giving them power for testimony. Mark this -- I shall only be given power for testimony if I do not grieve Him. The reason so many Christians are powerless is that they allow so many things in their lives, secretly or openly, to grieve the Spirit of God. -- **Harry Ironside**, *Lectures on the Book of Acts* p.146

5:34-39 Who is Gamaliel, and is his counsel inspired? (2 Timothy 2:15)

There was present at this meeting of the Sanhedrin a Pharisaic leader of quite exceptional eminence, Rabban Gamaliel the Elder, the greatest teacher of the day. He was a disciple of the gentle Hillel, and was now leader of the school of Hillel. He himself

had many illustrious disciples, among them Saul of Tarsus (cf. Ch.22:3). His prestige was such that in later days it could be said, "Since Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died there has been no more reverence for the Law, and purity and abstinence died out at the same time" (Mishnah, Sota ix.15). -- **F.F. Bruce**, *The Book of the Acts* p.124

5:40-42 In dialogue with Jehovah's Witnesses and other opponents of the Deity of Christ, what point can we safely make re the emphasis of Acts? (4:12,17,18)

The Israel of old had been separated from the world by the Name of JEHOVAH. They were the people who called upon the Name of the LORD and upon whom his Name was called. But the divine Name which the new sect bears is the *Name of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Into this Name they are baptized; in it they live and speak and work; for it they suffer. Accordingly by 'this Name' they are known. They are the people 'who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus'; 'and upon whom his name is called.' -- **R.B. Rackham**, *Acts* p.76

Mark 'daily', 'in every house', and 'ceased not'. That is the spirit that conquers. -- **W. Graham Scroggie**, *op.cit.* p.225

Study 8c ORGANIZATION OR ORGANISM? (6:1-7)

6:1 Note: As the church grows, the number of sinners in the church grows!

In later years, as the Church spread, the pressure of need in Jerusalem acted as a bond to unite the scattered congregations in active ministrations ... and at the beginning it stimulated the primitive Church to originate a better organisation. -- **W.M. Ramsay**, *St. Paul: The Traveller and The Roman Citizen* p.373

It is evident that some interval of time separates chapters v. & vi. A great growth has taken place within the church. ... There is also an organized body of 'widows': and the daily ministrations have assumed such proportions as to require a new development of the machinery. To meet the need the church creates an office or ministry ... Where no provision for the poor and aged was made by the state, their support was one of the most pressing duties of a religious body. Among the poor in oriental countries the case of widows, left without any legal protector, was particularly hard. The Jews had a fund for the relief of widows and orphans, and the church could not but provide for her own. In return for their support the widows, like Anna the prophetess, devoted themselves to prayer and good works. Such widows formed a recognized body; their names were entered on a roll; and S. Paul in writing to Timothy devotes a whole chapter to their organization. -- **R.B. Rackham**, *op.cit.*, pp.81,82

6:2,4 A rap on the hand for the pastor with his finger in every pie

6:3-7 How does this early *organizational* precedent reflect the *organic* nature of the church [contrast hierarchical] -- and give precedent to the (Puritan) notion of democracy [contrast structure of cults]

Faith, that is trust, with its appropriate and necessary sequels of desire and expectation and obedience, is the completing of the electric circuit, and after it the spark is sure to come. It is the opening of the windows, after which sunshine cannot but flood the chamber. -- **Alexander MacLaren**, *Exposition of Holy Scripture: Acts* p.208

I am always thankful for the book of the Acts it takes away the false impression some people have that the early Church was absolutely perfect. I am perpetually hearing today that we need to go back to apostolic times. It is therefore a great comfort to me to see that in days of multiplication, success, and victory, there were difficulties within the Church, murmuring in the midst of development ... Here, then we have a picture not of heresy, but of schism. If I may simply illustrate the difference, a schism is a rent, a sect is a piece torn off. There are no sects in Christianity; but alas, there is a great deal of schism. -- **G. C. Morgan**, *Acts* p.132

Next: LOCAL – or LORD of ALL? (read Acts 6-7)