

ASSIGNMENT FOR CLASS 4: EARLY PERSECUTION AND CHRISTIAN PRACTICES (4:32-5:11; 6:1-8:3) (for class on November 9)

Session #1: The Believers Share Possessions

- Read Acts 4:32-37
- Reread Acts 2:44-45
- Read Luke 10:29-37

In what way does the early Christian attitude toward generosity and “tithing” challenge your view? Do you think things are different for us now than they were then? How does this challenge your view of giving to the church or to other charitable organizations or needy persons?

Session #2: Ananias and Sapphira

- Read Acts 5:1-11
- Compare John 13:27 to Acts 5:3

What do you think it means to “tempt the spirit of the Lord” as Peter says to Sapphira in Acts 5:9? What sin do you really think they are guilty of? Does it relate to you in any way? Twice in this reading it says that “great fear” came upon the whole Christian community because of what happened to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5; 11). Do you think this is appropriate? How does it make you feel? What sort of “fear” is this and do you think we should experience some of this ourselves in our Christian life?

Session #3: The First Deacons

- Read Acts Chapter 6
- The “laying on of hands” (Acts 6:6) = See Acts 13:3; Numbers 27:18-23; 1 Tim 4:14

I find it somewhat amusing that we have our first deacons because the Greeks were “complaining” or “muttering to themselves grudgingly” (*gonguzo* in Greek). See the same word used in John 7:12; Acts 6:1; Phi 2:14; 1 Pe 4:9. Do you have a problem with complaining? In what way are YOU called to serve like the first deacons? Do you feel that others have called you forward because of certain talents to minister to others? How?

Session #4: The Speech of Stephen, the First Martyr

- Read Acts 7:1-53
- Please be mindful of the cross-references that your bible should have about all the references made to the Old Testament in Stephen’s speech. There are roughly 30 of them! Please look up some things if you do not know these stories!

St. Stephen takes great pains to recount parts of the stories of Abraham, Joseph and Moses and mentions Kings David and Solomon as well. Why do you think this is so important? What do you think is the point of his speech?

Session #5: The Rage of the Unconverted

- Read Acts 7:54-8:3

Have you ever gotten angry with someone who was actually speaking the *truth*? There is much talk of “tolerance” and being “non-judgmental” in our culture. And yet, Ananias and Sapphira were called to a rather severe account, and Stephen’s speech is very direct and – many would say – “intolerant” of his hearers. What do we think about the conflict between our modern “gospel of tolerance” and the gospel as we hear it preached in *Acts*?

