

### Introduction:

I can still hear Barney Fife, "You gotta nip it in the bud, Andy. Nip it in the bud. Nip it! Nip it! Nip it!" Andy would reply, "But Barney ..." "Nip it!" Barney would curtly say. While the *Andy Griffith Show* played this repartee up for laughs, this is great advice. When problems arise, we need to nip them in the bud. As this year began, we examined the Jerusalem church, the most successful congregation of all time, noticing eight major factors that contributed to their excellence. In later lessons we studied deeper into our devotion to worship and becoming one heart and one soul. The third key we found in their triumph was their ability to aggressively deal with problems. When problems arose they nipped them in the bud. The Jerusalem church faced three kinds of problems, 1) sin problems, **Acts 5**, 2) people problems, **Acts 6**, and 3) doctrine problems, **Acts 15**. After each of these problems had been overcome, the scripture reveals that brethren were encouraged, work was strengthened and the Lord's body was increased (**Acts 5:14; 6:7; 15:30-35**). If we, the Franklin Church of Christ, will be a triumphant church like Jerusalem, we must follow their pattern.

### Discussion:

#### I. Sin problems: Ananias and Sapphira, **Acts 5:1-14**.

- A. The Jerusalem church recognized this was about Ananias and Sapphira's relationship with God, not with the brethren (**Acts 5:4**). When dealing with sin, our emotional ties often distort our view. We must not let thoughts about how dealing with the sin will affect our relationships distract us. Therefore, we see no questions about who Ananias and Sapphira's friends were, who their parents were, what role they played in the congregation, etc. None of those things mattered. What mattered was God should be glorified in their lives and He was not.
- B. The Jerusalem church knew sin was from Satan (**Acts 5:3**) and Satan's work cannot be allowed in Christ's church. A little leaven leavens the whole lump (**I Corinthians 5:6-7**). If Satan's influence had not been dealt with, then the problem of hypocrisy and lying would have grown among the brethren, destroying the fellowship they had and the strength they were developing. Instead, dealing aggressively with the influence of Satan produced a greater commitment to purity among the members and produced a stronger church (**Acts 5:11-14**).
- C. The Jerusalem church knew Ananias and Sapphira had sinned of their own free will (**Acts 5:4**). While Peter recognized Satan's influence, he knew it was Ananias' choice to submit to Satan's influence. There was no posturing about Ananias and Sapphira's upbringing, background, culture, etc. Ananias and Sapphira had become children of God and were expected to behave accordingly. The church knew these two had sinned and something must be done.
- D. The Jerusalem church dealt with this sin quickly (**Acts 5:2-3**). Sometimes we get so caught up in possible glimmers of hope that a person is changing that we allow them to wallow in sin. Doing so allows their soul to be in danger of hell while we try to interpret how hopeful a particular right action is. Don't forget, Ananias and Sapphira were "attending church". The apostles did not stop to say that their attendance was hopeful of some possible change. The sin occurred and it was dealt with immediately.
  1. Allow me to modify this one point with further scripture. We must recognize the extraordinary nature of this event. This occurred as an example that all would know the high standards God has set. **Acts 5** does not teach us to kill our brethren. First, who among us would still be alive? Secondly, notice the use of the miraculous, which we no longer use. Thirdly, even Peter himself did not follow the pattern of "killing" the sinner in **Acts 8:19-24**. This situation was much like the deaths of Nadab and Abihu in **Leviticus 10**. God did not kill every priest who sinned. But in the beginning of the covenant, God demonstrated an example that should be remembered by those who followed after and read God's law. God expects to be glorified by His servants. When we do not glorify Him, we should expect judgment.
  2. We have a pattern in **Matthew 18:15-17**. When you see a brother sin, you go to him. Don't wait for the elders to do something. If he listens, all is well. If not, take two or three with you. If he listens, all is forgiven. If not, take it to the church. If he still does not listen, he is to be to us as a tax-gatherer or a Gentile. Remember Paul's admonition in **II Thessalonians 3:15**. Even though disciplined, we do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

II. People problems: Widows indeed, **Acts 6:1-7**.

- A. Far too often, when someone has a “people problem”, a complaint is made and the offender gets defensive. I am most impressed that the native Hebrew Christians did not. Nor did they mount a counter-attack, trying to find some fault in the Hellenistic Jews that justified the oversight. They simply heard the complaint and came up with a solution.
- B. The Jerusalem church grew through this problem because the native Hebrews were willing to bend over backwards to show understanding and concern for the Hellenists’. This is evident in that the names of the seven men appointed were all Hellenistic (**Acts 6:5**). Imagine how the native Hebrews could have complained, “How do we know these Hellenists won’t neglect us?” But they didn’t. They wanted unity and they trusted each other to uphold that unity.
- C. The Jerusalem brethren did not hold grudges. Once the solution was attained they returned to harmony. Too many resolve problems but then keep dragging them back up. Some continue to view others with a jaundiced eye. Some continue to accuse others of wrongdoing, typically behind their backs. But the Jerusalem brethren put the problem behind them and grew from it (**Acts 6:7**). This demonstrates a great mindset about problems. While we will never desire problems, we understand they are not death knells for the congregation but rather are opportunities to work together, overcome together and grow together.

III. Doctrine problems: Circumcision, **Acts 15:4-35**.

- A. The Jerusalem church was able to overcome the problem regarding circumcision because they didn’t dismiss it, they debated it (**Acts 15:6-7**). Typically, we don’t want to debate issues. We would rather push them under the rug. No doubt there will be issues or disagreements over some actions or applications which we deem does not change anyone’s standing with God. But this issue, and others like it, would affect salvation (**Galatians 5:2-4**). We cannot dismiss these issues. Rather, we must get them out in the open so unity can be reached.
- B. That the Christians came together to discuss the issue and listened to the arguments based on the work of the Holy Spirit through Peter [**Acts 15:7-11**], Barnabas and Paul [**Acts 15:12**] and the revelation of the Holy Spirit mentioned by James [**Acts 15:13-18**], demonstrated that these brethren believed God’s will on the matter could be understood. One of the major reasons so much doctrinal division is allowed in churches today is an underlying current that says, “We can’t really figure it out.” But we can understand what the will of the Lord is (**Ephesians 5:17**).
- C. The Jerusalem church was able to overcome this problem because they kept the discussion centered on the problem, not the personalities. The discussion was about what the Spirit had revealed. It was not about who had the problem. Barnabas didn’t say, “These guys are Pharisees. Remember how much trouble the Lord had with the Pharisees? They can’t be right.” They didn’t name call and make personal attacks. They examined the issues.
- D. Having been a party to numerous religious discussions, disagreements and debates I am constantly amazed at what occurred in Jerusalem over this issue. There was a big doctrinal problem over the necessity of circumcision, but by the end of the discussion there was unity (**Acts 15:22**). That demonstrates a great key to overcoming doctrinal problems. Those Pharisees who were incorrect about circumcision were not interested in simply defending their position. They wanted to believe the truth. They wanted to teach the truth. They were simply mistaken. Instead of allowing their pride to get in the way, they humbly submitted to what the Holy Spirit had revealed. The fact is, the only way doctrinal problems will ever be resolved is if we remove our own pride and agree to submit to whatever the Spirit has said.
- E. Of course, we have been involved in too many discussions where brethren were not willing to submit to the Holy Spirit’s guidance in the Word. What do we do then? We revert back to what we learned in the first part of this lesson about dealing with sin in the members.

**Conclusion:**

As I have said before, we are at a crossroads. We can either be satisfied where we are or we can follow Jerusalem’s example. If we choose the first, we will do what all American churches do: peak, plateau and eventually die. If we choose the latter, we can be what Jerusalem was. We can set Franklin, Middle Tennessee and the world ablaze with God’s gospel.