

FOUR WAYS A CHURCH MAY BE TESTED

Lesson Aim: Know four areas where churches may be tested, so your church can be ready.

Suggestion: Have the students read the Scriptures and answer the questions in the student lesson; then ask the following questions for class discussion.

How was the purity of the Jerusalem church tested? 5:1-16.

Ananias and Sapphira sold some land and gave part of the money from the sale to the church, but tried to make the apostles believe that they gave all of that money to the church. They tried to present their "sacrifice" as one inspired by the Holy Spirit, whereas in reality it was a selfish effort to gain a spiritual reputation that they did not deserve. By doing this, they lied to the Holy Spirit. Sin was in the camp. Peter revealed their sin. God immediately judged their sin by taking their lives. His judgment warned the other believers not to sin and it preserved the purity of the church. The church benefited in four ways. First, great fear came upon this congregation when they saw that the wages of sin brings death. Second, unbelievers did not dare to join the church lest they be judged for their sins. Third, many believers joined the church. Finally, the apostles continued their healing ministry among multitudes of people, showing that God's power and blessing were still upon the church. Churches must be pure to show the holiness of God. Then people will fear Him and be open to salvation.

How was the loyalty of the Jerusalem church tested? 5:17-42

Peter and the apostles faced a stern test from the religious rulers. When multitudes were receiving Jesus, the rulers were alarmed and reminded the apostles of their command to stop preaching Jesus as Lord and putting the blame on them for His death. Peter and the other apostles said that they ought to obey God rather than men. God raised up Jesus, whom they had killed, and they were His witnesses of these things. This infuriated the rulers so that they wanted to kill them, but the counsel of Gamaliel kept them from doing it. They were beaten and let go. They rejoiced that they could suffer for Christ. The church remained loyal to Christ in spite of the rulers. When men's law conflicts with God's command, churches must be loyal to God.

How was the unity in the church tested? 6:1-7

As the church grew rapidly, a problem of administration arose to test the ability of these Christians not to "prefer one another" in honor. Friction developed between the native Jews and the Grecian Jews. The latter group of Jews claimed their widows were being neglected in the sharing of food. It was a test to maintain their unity and still let their pastors keep God first in their ministries. A church could easily split itself over such friction, so the answer was critical. The apostles told the church to select seven godly men to be "deacons." They were responsible to rectify the problem and free the pastors so they could attend to the Word of God and prayer. When friction arises that can destroy unity in a church, we must seek a solution from the Lord, so it is not destroyed.

How was the testimony of the church tested? 6:8-7:60

Stephen was a "deacon" and he was also an active witness among the people. His influence was challenged by religious leaders that opposed the church. However, they could not argue against the truth that he spoke. They followed the pattern of Satan in resorting to intimidation, perjury, lies, and finally, hysterical violence, to silence him. Instead of softening his stand so that he might gradually win them over, he pointed out that Israel had a long history of rejecting prophets and he accused them of the very same thing: "As your fathers did, so do you." Stephen became the first member of the church to give his blood to keep a true testimony for the Lord. He was not bitter, but asked God to forgive those who stoned him to death. His prayer was answered by the conversion of Saul, who took care of the coats of those who stoned him. The world will hate us for our testimony for Jesus, but do not let the enemy silence the truth of the Gospel that is preached in your church.