

Acts Chapter 5 & 6

So now we have got the growth of the church which is growing very well and then as all churches grow you got problems and the three things

- Hypocrisy and Pride Acts 5:1-12
- Persecution Acts 5:17-42
- Internal conflict Acts 6:1-6

If we look in Acts chapter 4 we see people being transformed, have the boldness to be able to share everything in common and then somebody gave some land.

Now the question is, does Acts teach Socialism or Communism?

And all who believed were together and had all things in common.⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need (Acts 2:44-45 ESV)

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common (Acts 4:32 ESV)

So some people look at this passage and say, especially if you don't have very much. Why everybody sell everything and we put it in a commune together and control by the head guy and then we share everything.

There was a time in the US where they were setting out communes. Communes is where everybody checks out of society, they sell everything, they put onto one trust with the particular head or pastor and they are going to live together and they share.

Now does the Bible teach this sort of thing?

We have got different economic systems

- **Capitalism** is the one where you got a free market system, where you got private property and the market decides how to distribute your money.
- **Socialism** is the State ownership of means of production, which means all the factories, all the stuff, the shops, the resources belong to the state and the state apportions it out.
- **Communism** is when you have got no private property. Everybody owns the same thing and they all live in farms.

Which system does the Bible favor?

And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them.

The end result what they need was there was no needy person, well because

For from time to time those who owned land or houses

Which is basically the middle class, 10%, upper class is about 4-7% and everybody else was poor. So these are the only people who actually owned lands or houses. Sold them and brought the money from the sales

35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need (Acts 4:33-35 NIV)

So the whole issue was that they want to fix the people who have got need, anyone who has need and from time to time they sold them. These are all in perfect tenses, which means it is an ongoing process, it does not happen all at once.

So if this is the case is this socialism or communism?

If it is communism it would be in the past tense, in the Greek called the Aries tense which means it happens once and that is it and everybody shares everything.

From time to time is only translated by the NIV because they are taking in consideration these two tenses here but it is a very good translation, so from time to time people sold to sought out basically the needs among them. They still had houses.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes (Acts 2:46 ESV)

12 When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. 13 And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer (Acts 12:12-13 ESV)

So there was still private property and they had land

Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, 37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles feet (Acts 4:36-37 ESV)

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property (Acts 5:1 ESV)

So it is unlikely for them to have socialism or communism.

Lydia came to know Christ in Acts 16 and she said come to my house and stay. Lydia was a benefactor because she was a business woman.

So people have business, people have home so there is no communism there.

What are the principles that we learn from Acts? If there is no socialism and no communism what are the principles?

Acts is basically descriptive, it tells you what people do, the other parts of the Bible which are the epistles they tell you what is prescriptive, what Paul commands or tell you. So you need

to take the prescriptive to interpret the descriptive. You cannot take the descriptive to interpret the prescriptive. So when you look at scripture Acts always comes below the epistles.

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness 14 your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness (2 Corinthians 8:13-14 ESV)

Here the question is a need. So you cannot come to a brother and say I need a BMW tomorrow, a BMW is not a need even an old one. A need is something you are starving, you got no house to stay, it is a need. Peoples needs are looked after. Need does not mean that you have to be equal.

And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them

Now let's look at the Old Testament background. The Old Testament talks about this idea of poverty.

But there will be no poor among you; for the Lord will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess — 5 if only you will strictly obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all this commandment that I command you today (Deuteronomy 15:4-5 ESV)

7 "If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, 8 but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be (Deuteronomy 15:7-8 ESV)

For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land (Deuteronomy 15:11 ESV)

There is a bit of a confusion here:

- First of all it says will be no poor among you v4
- Then "If among you, one of your brothers should become poor,v7
- Then for there will never cease to be poor in the land v11.

How we make sense of that? Is Moses contradicting himself?

This is the biblical ideal, But **there will be no poor among you**; for the Lord will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess (Deuteronomy 15:4). They did not obey the command of God, so God says my ideal is no poor but there is a needy person and because all don't obey there shall never cease to be poor in the land. There will always be poor in the land because of all our basic sin. So therefore we put all the three together this is the idea that

There shall be poor but if someone is poor you should help the person and there shall never cease to be poor. So in the biblical ideal when you are in a church setting, we are going to aim for this. Because when you look at the Book of Acts, you will find.

Grace was so powerful at work in them there was no needy person. This is a fulfillment of God's promise in Deuteronomy 15. It says if you obey commandments there will be no poor. So actually when you come to God's ideal when you actually obey him and everyone obeys him there is no poor in the land. If you actually work it out a lot of money that is sloshing around the world, actually a small amount of money given by everybody can actually absolutely wipe out poverty but we are just not willing to do so. So here is the biblical idea, in our Christian community this should be said among us, we cannot have any brother or sister starved or be out in the streets because it will be ashamed to all. Let's say in our church it will be a shame to our community if we see anyone of us out on the streets and the rest of us driving Lamborghini or something.

You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake (Deuteronomy 15:10 ESV)

Why would you give him because God will bless you in all your work and all that you undertake which means as you give God gives to you, it is not a zero sum game. So giving is a reflection of faith that when you give God will give back to you that is the faith. If you don't give because you don't trust that God will give back to you.

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God (2 Corinthians 9:10-11 ESV)

This is a prosperity gospel in the sense that he will bless you not only with riches of righteousness but he will give you riches so that you could give others. So God is not going to owe you. You don't get bankrupt because of God that does not happen by in large. It is a general principle like a Proverb. So this is why we give. So therefore if we look back in Acts

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31 ESV)

The boldness comes in sharing. Most of us are not bold enough to trust God, so therefore we don't share our belongings.

And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them

Why do they give?

As the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. 15 You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today (Deuteronomy 15:14-15 ESV)

The basis of you giving is because you were a slave and God saved you by grace and so therefore you give to your brother by grace. So it is always by grace.

Jacque Ellul which is a philosopher says, *Mammon looses all reason for existence all power over us the moment grace enters our hearts.*

We should control money and not money controlling us. Some people are so fixated that we collect money, we shouldn't waste the money, actually if you take the money we collect in church and actually use it to touch lives that is what the money is for. Keeping a huge amount of money in the church is actually wrong. It should be used to touch lives.

So now here you have situation where a narrative is sometimes used to be instruct the prescriptive which is wrong. A narrative always gives way to the prescriptive. In the epistles Paul will tell you the principle, in the narratives in Acts he will tell you how it is actually done.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

We have got Barnabas and Ananias. When we read the Bible we must always understand what the author is doing. He writes a story about Barnabas. He sold a field and left the proceeds at disposal of apostles.

Ananias and Sapphira, the reason why they put them next to each other is that he wants you to compare one is a foil for another. It is like you watch a movie, you got Batman and then you have got the crooks. The crooks are foil for Batman. So that Bible does that. It brings two together so that you can compare.

It is sort of like Donald Trump. Donald Trump is a billionaire. Trump Foundation has only 3.7 million for 20 years. He collects money from everybody else and he uses the money to buy huge portrait which he puts in his own golf course and then 9/11 he promised to donate 10,000 American dollars. For a billionaire to give 10,000 American dollars is actually very-very shameful. After 12 months no many still came. This is exactly what Ananias and Sapphira does, they sell a piece of land, Joseph sells a piece of land. He takes the money, puts it at the apostles feet and they distributed it. They sell a piece of land and half of the money or portion of the money taken to apostles' feet and they didn't say anything, they only put the money at the apostles' feet. They didn't lied about what they are giving but even they have not told the truth either. They both suddenly had a heart attack and died. They gave the impression that this if it was all and for that both of them dropped dead and people kept very upset.

Is this fair?

In the Old Testament we have got this Ark of the Lord in 2-Samuel 6:6 and it was being driven by oxen and this guy Uzzah was next to it and the ox stumbled and the ark was going to just tip over and our friend saved the ark, touched it and God killed him on the spot.

People will say God in the Old Testament is very bad tempered but God in the New Testament is different. If we look at Justice and punishment, there is no difference between God of Old Testament and the New Testament.

In the Book of Revelation, Jesus Christ come back and bring all the sinners and then you are going to squeeze all of them until the blood comes out until it fills up to the horses nostril for thousands of miles. That is horrible but that is divine judgment for us.

We must understand from Ananias and Sapphira's story that God is a God of justice and God is a God of love, but the justice is God's anger settled opposition to the cancer of sin. God is angry; the anger is a function of love. If you actually love someone you want the best for that person, so therefore there is always the flip side of love which is anger. If you come to a stage where there is no emotion, there is no fighting, there is nothing, then there is no love. So love is like that where the flip side of love is anger.

Barnabas got integrity and consistency, who is free from the slavery of money and is free to love. He freely sold his land and he brought it because there was a need in the community. Then you have got Ananias and Sapphira who gave for themselves because they were still enslaved to money. John Piper says,

Two of the effects of believing in Jesus are that the heart is loosened in relationship to things and tightened in its relationship to people.

Looking at our lives, are we holding onto things still tightly. If we are doing this more so than people then we are still in the grips of sin.

Barnabas life was touched by grace. He was so grateful for the grace of God who has forgiven from sins that he had his heart transformed and he is freed from money and he gives freely. On the other hand this couple is by works.

Why do they sell the proceeds and only give half?

They did it because they want to show you are so generous like people. Basically, they are still trapped by works. Their hearts are not liberated by grace. So therefore if people look up at them, it means they are worth something, they got self-esteem. So actually working for others recognition and many of us are plagued by the same thing because our face is the most important thing and if your face is the most important thing then that is the source of lot of fighting in church and misery in church because everybody is guarding their face, but if the Holy Spirit comes in and this is grace and you know you are nothing much at all and you are just a forgiven sinner then you become very free and you give yourself freely. Here he is still working by works. Again there are lot of Christians who act like that too.

We learn a couple of things.

1. In the church, there are two kinds of people, and it's nearly impossible to distinguish them from the outside.

All of us have this sort of sin one way or other. The sin of hypocrisy is here and nowhere worse than the church, because the church is the one that professes to know the true God. It is supposed to be good but we are not really good so that makes hypocrisy even harder. Hypocrisy is dangerous and it will destroy the church because it works itself in the ranks of leadership.

2. We cannot hide from God.

Ananias and Sapphira did not actually tell an overt lie, but lying to an apostle is like lying to God. So you cannot hide.

3. The closer we are to grace, the greater the offense of sin.

This was the time when the early church starts and the presence of God is so real, thousands of people come to Christ and the closer you are to grace the more greater the offense of sin. If you look at the tabernacle in those days, the most dangerous place was the Holy of Holies. So the closer you come to God and His manifestation of grace, one little sin and you are wiped out and this was in the early church where 8000 people come to know Christ. So it was really an exciting time. God is moving? But if God is moving you better be scared to because that is where he is going to be looking at your sin.

4. Fear is part of Worship

11 And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things. 12 Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. 13 None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. 14 And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women (Acts 5:11-14 ESV)

Knocking off of Ananias and Sapphira resulted in more people becoming Christians. The more people fear God the more the presence of God is real and the more the presence of God is real then more people come to know him.

1 There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? 3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? 5 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish (Luke 13:1-5 ESV)

People were thinking Ananias and Sapphira must be really bad or very bad sinners that is why they died. Today we also think like that if casualty happens we think God is punished

them. The issue when this happens is not they are more bad than you are but the fact is that God is showing you his holiness. John Piper says, *“We are shocked by justice and presume upon grace”*

This means every time God does something which He should do which means he must punish sinners and Ananias as a sinner, you are a sinner and he punishes them, you are shocked to say God is unfair. Why God simply killed, didn't give second chance. Piper is saying when God shows his true justice because Ananias and Sapphira deserve to die, we all deserve to die and when God does take people's life away whether in highland towers or in 7/11 he is entitled to do so because they are all rebellious sinners, but when God shows his justice we say that this horrible but when God shows his hands which are pierced by nails, it is okay, we love grace. We presume upon grace but we are shocked by justice and Ananias and Sapphira shows you we have a God of justice and love at the same time. So off and on you will see God show, it is like the lion of Narnia. He is not a tamed lion, he is got claws and something we think our God is a tamed lion.

5. Sin is a deadly serious matter to God.

Ananias and Sapphira shows you right from the early church the discipline is maintained. It is so serious because it caused his son to die on the cross. God did not spare his son.

PERSECUTION AND HEROES

33 When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them (Acts 5:33 ESV)

Later on in Rome Christians were always persecuted. There are about 10 periods of persecutions over a 129 years. From that time to the year 300 A.D. there was only about 100 years where Christians were tolerated. Christians were thought to have believed in superstitions. The reason why they were persecuted is because if you believe in Jesus Christ this superstition actually upsets the balance of the kingdom. Because the kingdom means you have to worship Caesar, but Christians could not do that and because of that they all had horrible persecution, yet many of the martyrs actually met their deaths singing and trusting God. The bravery that they showed was amazing.

But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. (Acts 5:29-32 ESV)

The word leader here is basically Archegos which is basically Hero. He uses the word Hero because you actually have the Greco-Roman world dominated by heroes. The children use to read stories about heroes, Hercules, Hermes and they use to base their lives on the exploits of heroes. So therefore it is very unusual that he uses this. There are only four places in the New Testament that uses the word heroes, it is always for Jesus. So Paul is using a common idea and linking this with our Lord Jesus Christ.

A hero is a person who is basically a principal in the face of danger. He does not flip back and forth. You do it voluntarily. You give your life for somebody voluntarily. You stand up for a particular cause voluntarily. A hero is a principal he will do according to his conscience. He will be consistent that is what a hero is. Walter Truett Andersen writes, *"Today our leaders are stars not heroes. Stars are surrounded by crowds, heroes walk alone. Stars consult focus groups. Heroes consult their conscience."*

The trouble with many of the modern heroes is that they follow people rather than people follow them. Heroes walk alone, heroes consult their conscience.

The Dream of the Rood is about one of the oldest relics in Scotland. We have the oldest known Christian poetry.

The hero Young He was Almighty God, did off His raiment. Steadfast, stout of heart. With valor, in the sight of many men, He mounted up upon the lofty gallows; when He wound fain redeem mankind.

This is the first English poem that actually talks about Christ, this is 800 years after Christ. It describes Christ as a hero because he went on the cross. Modern heroes is like Peter Parker for example. They got all the power and then they become a hero. Jesus Christ has all the power but he left the power and became weak to become to hero as it were. There was a interesting movie called Angels with Dirty Faces. James Cagney was a gangster and Pat O'Brien was the a priest. What they did was that they go up in the same neighborhood in New York, one became a priest, and one became a gangster. The gangster killing many people, a hero to many of the bad people in New York, finally was caught and he was going to be executed and then the priest goes up to him and tells him one day.

Priest: Can you do me a big favor"

Gangster: "What favor do you want as we grew up together".

Priest: Many people in my parish, the young people they actually worship you. They think you are fantastic, you are a tough guy, and you are defiant. Can just before they electrocute you, can you not be a hero".

So the James Cagney character is shocked

Gangster: What do you mean not be a hero, my whole life I am a hero.

Priest: I want you to die screaming. I want you to die scared. I want you to die begging them for your life.

Gangster: Why would I do that?

Priest: Because if you did that then all the children in my neighborhood would see that you are coward and then they will stop going to crime and drugs and life of evil but if they see you dying triumphantly and defiantly they will follow you and all their lives will be ruined.

Gangster: Are you kidding, I will never do that for you. This is all that I have.

So they drag him off. The next morning they drag him into the room. They are going to be put him down to be electrocuted and all of a sudden he starts crying out like a baby, squealing saying, don't kill me. Acting like a perfect coward because he realized that he wanted to make his life count for something. He gave up everything so that all the kids would not follow him. So it is a very unusual story because in real life nobody will do that is the kind of hero that we have in Jesus Christ that through his weakness people's lives are saved.

So how do we deal with fear in life?

The psychologist will tell you there are four steps.

You have to face fear defiantly. You can look fear and danger in the face and you stand up and you shake your fist. Stage 4 of management is for to imagine the fear. You don't like hand gliding, imagine you are hand gliding and say I can do this. The psychologist will tell you Jesus should be saying give me the cup, give me the cup instead of saying let the cup pass from me. That is what a psychologist will do. But if we look at places where Jesus inscribe

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV)

When Jesus Christ endured the cross, he didn't say give me the pain. Imagine Jesus Christ before he comes in the world standing here, and the father tells him, Son I got to send you down.

Why would He go down to die on the cross?

Jesus is in heaven, he has got all the glory, all the joy, all the power, everything. After he died and get resurrected again he will have all the glory, all the power, all the joy, everything is there. Is there any difference?

What does this mean, didn't he have joy sat before endured the cross. When Jesus before he comes down the cross he didn't have us, we are rebels and the joy that he sets before him was the joy of fellowship and redemption of every single one of us here who are his chosen ones and that is why he died and that is profound. So therefore when you talk about bravery, being a hero it is not that you don't feel the pain. The apostles looked for the joy that is set before him which is basically eternal fellowship with us.

32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him (Acts 5:29-32 ESV)

DIVINE INTERVENTION

These people were put in jail and an angel takes them out of prison but later on they were not. Why could the same angel who breaks them out of jail save them from this. The whole idea is what God comes in our life we think we will be built proof that if God saves us one time, he will save us another time and I am going to live the charm life, I will never fall sick that is the problem.

they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life (Acts 5:18-20 ESV)

then later on

and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go (Acts 5:40 ESV)

THE REASON

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus (Acts 5:41-42 ESV)

Suffering actually gave them boldness. Imagine if they were bullet proof, would they be as bold. Here they says, they were rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

As Christians when you pray for God to intervene in your life, sometimes he intervenes in your life, sometimes he lets the devil beat the shit out of you. He does and then you get very upset with God because you think that as a Christian you should be bullet proof that everything should go right and then you think sometimes perhaps may be I did a sin that is why I got let out of prison but I am not beaten because I sinned. No God deals with people differently so that the end result, suffering builds you up and it did build them up and he used them as a witness for the gospel. When he lets them out of prison he wants them to share him. It is about his word, it is about the gospel, it is not about us. We live in a generation where every miracle is interpreted about me. The miracles happen, it is for the gospel and the sooner we disentangle ourselves from that the closer we are to the truth and then you will understand bad things happening in our lives. It is a fact.