

Acts The Gospel on the Move

Study 6

The Gospel and Church Growth

Acts 4:32-5:42

A. Effect of the Spirit: Zeal and Boldness. Generosity and Compassion

Acts 4:32-37 (NIV)

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

1. a) Objective question. In the gospel, which is the economic system adopted?

- A. Capitalism (Free market forces)
- B. Socialism (State ownership of means of production)
- C. Communism (Abolition of private property)
- D. Grace (Radical generosity to eradicate poverty)**

b) Discussion Question. Is the passage in Acts 4:32-37 recommending communism? Why or why not?

c) Discussion Question. What is the definition of "need"?

Quick Verse Reference

2 Corinthians 8:13-14 (NIV)

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality,

d) Discussion Question. Is the aim for Christians eradication of poverty according to Deuteronomy 15:11?

No. The aim of the church is not total eradication of poverty but generosity.

Quick Verse Reference

Deuteronomy 15:11 (NIV)

There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.

e) Reflection Question. According to 2 Corinthians 8:8-9, the motivating factor to give to the poor is that we should reciprocate the grace of providence we received from God. How do you feel after hearing that sentence? Are you motivated?

Quick Verse Reference

Deuteronomy 15:14-15 (NIV)

Supply them liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to them as the Lord your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.

2 Corinthians 8:8-9 (NIV)

I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

B. Internal Corruption: Hypocrisy and Pride

Acts 5:1-16 (NIV)

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for

the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

2. a) Discussion question. What was it that Ananias and Sapphira did so wrong that it was deserving of death?

b) Discussion question. Why don't people just drop dead today if they steal money from church or lie about the giving?

In that particular point of the early church, God wanted to show the early church how he felt about lying and judgment so judgment is a physical manifestation of how God feels about the issue (Grace is shown through healing, judgment is shown through death). The closer we are to grace, the greater the offense of sin.

The seriousness of the sin is increased as they have seen the work of the Spirit all around them.

c) Reflection question. “Great fear” seized the church when they heard that Ananias and Sapphira died because of God’s judgment. How would you describe your fear of God?

d) Discussion question. Are we morally superior to Ananias and Sapphira? (Refer to the story in Luke 13:1-5)

C. External Persecution: Second Imprisonment

Acts 5:17-42 (NIV)

Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.”

At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings! The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

3. a) Discussion question. The Holy Spirit freed them from prison yet they were beaten and flogged later. What can we take away from this?

God might save us from a situation or God may allow us to get killed when we are doing His work, but He is present in both situations and we put our trust in Him. If we are saved, we continue the mission on earth. If we die, we join Him in heaven.

b) Reflection question. Verse 41-42 says: “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because- they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.” Most of us are not at the level of the apostles who rejoice in suffering. Are you

willing to pray for this attitude?

Takeaway

In Acts 4:32-5:42, we saw the effect of the Spirit in Generosity and Compassion. We also saw how God takes sin seriously especially among believers and any form of judgment should remind us that we need to repent of our own sins. Lastly, we saw that despite the persecution and situation, the apostles continued to preach the name of Jesus.

Case Study

Case 1 – Hypocrisy in Church

Chrisy attends Fourth Baptist church. She used to go to a hip and upbeat church. But in that church, she saw that they were only nice to people who were of status, rich, attractive, and popular. The people would form cliques and there were just different groups of people. They even have bad habits of gossiping through prayer requests. Some even did illegal activities shown through the posting of the stories on social media. She decided they were hypocrites and not gospel-centered and decided to stop attending church.

- 1. a) Discussion question. How do we prevent hypocrisy in a church setting?**

- b) Discussion question. If you were a leader in that church and Chrisy came up to you, what would you say or do?**

- c) Discussion question. Was stopping attending church a gospel-centered solution to the issue? If Fourth Baptist Church was her first and last church, how could she learn about other types of solutions?**

- d) Reflection question. Have we too been guilty of hypocrisy in church? Share your experiences with such temptation and the lessons we all have learned in life. Share of episodes where hypocrisy has turned people away from the church. How does the gospel help combat hypocrisy in our lives?**

Case 2 – Generous with Money

Two kids walk up to you with a container to ask for money.

2. a) Reflection Question. Would you ask more questions about why they want money?

- b) Reflection Question. Would you give if they were in the church?

- c) Reflection Question. Would you give if they were in a restaurant?

- d) Reflection Question. Would you give if they were two adults?

- e) Reflection Question. Would you give if they were selling some items in exchange?

- f) Reflection Question. If this were outside church setting (eg. hawker center), would you check if the two kids were okay? (if they were sent by a syndicate kidnapper and need help etc?)

- g) Reflection Question. Is giving to a Christian brother and sister different than giving to a non-believer?

- h) Reflection Question. Is giving to someone you know very well and are close to, different than giving to a stranger?

- i) Reflection Question. Think of a generous person and a stingy person, which one do you identify with more?