

The Acts of the Apostles

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“The Early Church”

Acts 4:32 -5:42

Would you really want to be a member of the New Testament church?

Acts 4:32-35

³² Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

After reading the text, let me ask you again, would you really want to be a member of the New Testament church?

If you answer yes to my question then you would volunteer to share everything you own with every other member of your local church.

And if you are poor you would not be too proud to tell the deacons that you didn't have enough to eat or that you needed warmer clothing because the weather is turning cold.

Without being asked to do so you would sell your property and turn over the proceeds to the elders and deacons of the church so that they could distribute the money to others who didn't have anything.

What about people who are just too lazy to work or too inept to manage what money they do have? It was about 30 years after what is recorded here in Acts 4 before Paul put this principle in writing but I don't doubt for a minute that this principle was at work from the beginning because the deacons and the elders were not easily fooled.

2 Thess 3:6-12

⁶ But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, ⁹ not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. ¹¹ For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. ¹² Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

Bear with me for a personal example. Without boasting, except to give all the glory to the Lord Jesus, I am a generous man and I am usually a soft touch when someone asks me for a handout. I can't count the times that I have given money to someone who promised to repay me. So far not the first one has done so.

One man gave me a hard luck story about needing a part for his car and I gave him \$20. He insisted that I give him my address so he could send me the money as soon as he got home. Well, I guess he still hasn't gotten home and that has been about ten years ago. He already had the \$20 and I had not asked him to pay me back. Why would he go through that act when he knew all along he had no intention of paying me back?

Well, I am getting smarter. On Tuesday while I was working the election a woman came up to me and asked me to give her enough money to buy some gas for her car. She had let the gas get too low and was afraid she couldn't get home. However, I could smell that she had been able to pay \$4, \$5, or \$6 a pack for cigarettes instead of buying gas for her car. So I told her that I wouldn't give her anything.

Now this is not an anti-smoking scolding, I just believed that she had not managed what money she did have. On second thought, she probably bummed the cigarettes too.

Let's get back to the text.

What Luke is describing here is simply what Jesus taught.

Luke 18:18-23

¹⁸ Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁹ So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. ²⁰ You know the commandments: '*Do not commit adultery,*' '*Do not murder,*' '*Do not steal,*' '*Do not bear false witness,*' '*Honor your father and your mother.*'"

²¹ And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth."

²² So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

²³ But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

Be sure to see that the sharing in Acts 4 it was voluntary. Peter and the other apostles did not command the believers to sell their property. In the case of the "Rich Young Ruler" Jesus struck at the heart of his self-righteousness.

We cannot make it a rule for everyone to give all that they have to help others but we all should be willing to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Without being specific with names I know that this church has helped many people who had needs for all the 35+ years that I have been here.

Then we are given an example of Barnabas who sold some land and gave the money to the apostles.

Acts 4:36-37

³⁶ And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ having land, sold *it*, and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

The example of Barnabus sets up the contrast between genuine charity and a pair of hypocrites named Ananias and Sapphira.

There are a couple of interesting things about Barnabus' gift to the church.

First, Barnabus was a Levite and according to the Hebrew law his tribe had no land in Israel.

Deut 10:8-9

⁸At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister to Him and to bless in His name, to this day. ⁹Therefore Levi has no portion nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD is his inheritance, just as the LORD your God promised him.)

Deut 18:1-2

"The priests, the Levites – all the tribe of Levi – shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and His portion. ² Therefore they shall have no inheritance among their brethren; the LORD is their inheritance, as He said to them.

How then, does Barnabus have land to sell?

The Law had to do with the division of the land among the tribes of Israel. Apparently the Law did not prohibit a Levite from purchasing land with his own money. If that was not so then the other apostles would never have accepted Barnabus into their company.

Second, Barnabus' name is translated "Son of Encouragement."

In the Hebrew idiom "son of" indicates a person's character.

Jesus is the Son of God; Jesus has the character of God.

The Hebrew idiom for an offspring is "bar." E.g.

Matt 16:17

Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

Simon is the offspring of Jonah.

Jesus has the character of God.

Barnabus has the character of encouragement.

Barnabus' name is translated in various ways:

Son of Encouragement (NKJV; NIV)
Son of Consolation (KJV)
Son of Exhortation (ASV)
Son of Soothing (Aramaic)

Does the truth mean anything?

We are not told why Ananias (God has graciously granted) and Sapphira (beautiful) schemed to lie to the church. Perhaps the church made too much over Barnabus' gift and they craved approval. What ever the reason it was a fatal error.

We are given the good example of Barnabus and then the despicable example of Ananias and Sapphira.

“But, or Now a certain man....”

Acts 5:1-2

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. ² And he kept back *part* of the proceeds, his wife also being aware *of it*, and brought a certain part and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

Ananias and Sapphira sold some land apparently told the church that they were giving the total amount they received for the land to the church. But they schemed together to keep back a part of it. No one had commanded them to give all of the proceeds to the church; they just wanted the attention and praise. My guess is that the gift promised by Ananias and Sapphira was larger than that of Barnabus.

Apparently they stayed home when the Bible Study was on what Jesus taught about charitable deeds.

Matt 6:1-4

"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ² Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ³ But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

Oops!

Peter could not have known what Ananias and Sapphira had conspired to do apart from a special revelation from God. Only God can read the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Matt 9:3-7

³ And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This Man blasphemeth!"

⁴ But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?"

⁵ For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk?'

⁶ But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" –

then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." ⁷

And he arose and departed to his house.

Heb 4:11-13

¹¹ Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. ¹² For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.

Acts 5:3-4

³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself? ⁴ While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

So Peter was given discernment that Ananias had lied to the church. Ananias expected to be praised in front of everyone and instead he was confronted with his lie before the church.

There are several things that we must not miss about this deception.

- 1) No one asked Ananias to sell his land. He was free to do with it as he wished.
- 2) We are all in danger of spiritual failure. Satan and his imps are looking for ways to shame the church.

3) Satan likes nothing better than to have hypocrisy and dishonesty exposed. While Satan encourages such behavior it is only to try to harm the church.

4) Lying to the church is the same as lying to God.

Just how serious is it to lie to the church?

Acts 5:5-11

⁵ Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. ⁶ And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried *him* out, and buried *him*.

⁷ Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?"

She said, "Yes, for so much."

⁹ Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband *are* at the door, and they will carry you out." ¹⁰ Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying *her* out, buried *her* by her husband. ¹¹ So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

As soon as Ananias heard Peter's accusation he fell dead. "He breathed his last."

Don't be so proud that you think that God has to use some spectacular event to kill you. All God has to do is to keep you from taking your next breath.

Three hours later Sapphira came in not knowing her husband had been struck dead by God and she also lied to the church and she "breathed her last."

They were buried side by side and were a testimony to the church; however, not in a good way. Wouldn't it be an awful legacy that the last thing you said was a lie to the church?

We plan to observe the Lord's Supper today. Without going into an exposition of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11 it is enough to say that the church is being warned and the consequences are as serious as they were for Ananias.

1 Cor 11:27-34

²⁷ Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ³⁰ For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. ³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

³³ Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. ³⁴ But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

If you would like to hear a thorough exposition of the Lord's Supper I recommend Brother Gables' sermon that is on Sermon Audio.

There is a connection with the voluntary sharing in Acts 4 and the selfishness being corrected in 1 Corinthians 11.

The warning about an "unworthy Manner" has to do with cliques and selfishness in not sharing their food with others.

The Signs of the Apostles

Acts 5:12-14

¹² And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. ¹³ Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. ¹⁴ And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,

Cf. 3:47

There are two kinds "signs" in this passage. First there were miracles which show the power of God. Then there was unity in the church which is a sign of God's blessing a church. Too often when churches have divisions it is because the Holy Spirit has left them, "Ichabod, the glory has departed." [1 Sam 4:19-22]

Ananias' "children" are still with us; there are many false prophets in our day that claim to perform miracles of healing. It is true that God can and often does heal someone but He doesn't need a "healer."

The signs of an apostle were to authenticate him as someone empowered by God.

2 Cor 12:12

Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.

The Apostles and prophets laid the foundation for the church ([Eph 2:20](#)), and the pastors, teachers, and evangelists are building on it. If there are no apostles, there can be no "signs of an apostle" as are found in the Book of Acts ([2 Cor 12:12](#)).

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The people were in awe of the apostles but were afraid to join with them. After seeing what God did to Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the church someone with secret sin in their life would not be too ready to try to join with the apostles.

Whether or not that is why the people were afraid to join with them the result of the death of Ananias and Sapphira was that great fear came upon all the church and that many men and women were added to the Lord.

All that Jesus began both to do and teach [1:1].

One of the great lessons of Acts is that after Jesus ascended into heaven and sent His Holy Spirit that Jesus continued to do His mighty works.

Acts 5:15-16

¹⁵ so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.

¹⁶ Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

The early church served the physical needs of the people as well as their spiritual needs. To show how far men will go to avoid giving the glory to God a belief developed that Peter's shadow had the power to heal.

Men quickly fall into idolatry and worship of so-called relics of the church. Even the shadow of an apostle can become an idol.

God has a sense of humor.

Without being disrespectful of the Holy Bible I find much humor in it. Not silly humor but irony. My favorite passage under this heading is where Samuel had spoken for the LORD to King Saul and had told Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites.

1 Sam 15:1-3

Samuel also said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the LORD. ² Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek *for* what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. ³ Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey."

1 Sam 15:10-14

¹⁰ Now the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, ¹¹ "I greatly regret that I have set up Saul *as* king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments." And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night. ¹² So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself; and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal." ¹³ Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed *are* you of the LORD I have performed the commandment of the LORD."

¹⁴ But Samuel said, "What then *is* this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

And we have here in Acts 5 is another passage that is loaded with irony.

The high priest had warned Peter and John commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. [4:18]

Now it is not just one lame man who is healed but a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities are being healed. The high priest and those who were with him can't deny what is happening and they become desperate and put Peter and John in prison.

Now here is the irony; the Sadducees did not believe in angels and the Lord sends an angel to release them from prison!

The angel commands the apostles to continue to go stand in the temple and speak to the people “all the words of this life.”

Verse 42 informs us what are, “all the words of this life.”

⁴² And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ.

There is nothing more important for you to know than who and what you are and who Jesus is and what Jesus came to do.

Acts 5:17-21

¹⁷ Then the high priest rose up, and all those who *were* with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, ¹⁸ and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. ¹⁹ But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰ "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."

²¹ And when they heard *that*, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

The angel takes the apostles out of the prison and puts them back in the temple.

The angel secures the prison and no one but the apostles know what has happened.

The next day the Council meets to decide what to do with Peter and John.

So they send officers to bring these disobedient troublemakers to trial.

Peter and John are back in the temple preaching about Jesus which is what the angel told them to do.

Acts 5:22-26

²² But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, ²³ saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!" ²⁴ Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. ²⁵ So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"

²⁶ Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned.

The Council would have killed Peter and John but they were afraid of the people.

The high priest is outraged that his order not to teach about Jesus was being ignored. Once again Peter turns the table on the leaders of the Jews. There is a higher authority than the Council.

God is sovereign and Jesus is the only Savior. It is entirely up to God who is given the ability to repent and believe in the Gospel.

Are you responsible to repent and believe in the righteousness of Jesus Christ as the only way to be right before God? YES!

Do you have the ability in the power of your will to repent and believe in the Gospel? NO!

Then how can anyone ever be saved?

³¹ Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

As a sinner saved by grace all I can do is tell you the same message that Peter preached and trust God the Holy Spirit to open your heart.

Acts 5:27-32

²⁷ And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council. And the high priest asked them, ²⁸ saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" Cf. Matthew 27:25

²⁹ But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. ³¹ Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are His witnesses to these things, and *so* also *is* the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

We can't win the debate so let's kill them!

Now a respected member of the Council, Rabbi Gamaliel, offers his advice on how to deal with Peter and John.

Let's first read what Gamaliel had to say.

Acts 5:33-39

³³ When they heard *this*, they were furious and plotted to kill them. ³⁴ Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. ³⁵ And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. ³⁶ For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. ³⁷ After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. ³⁸ And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; ³⁹ but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it – lest you even be found to fight against God."

Who is Gamaliel?

Gamaliel – reward of God.

The son of rabbi Simeon, and grandson of the famous rabbi Hillel. He was a Pharisee, and therefore the opponent of the party of the Sadducees. He was noted for his learning, and was president of the Sanhedrim during the reigns of Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius, and died, it is said, about eighteen years before the destruction of Jerusalem.

When the apostles were brought before the council, charged with preaching the resurrection of Jesus, as a zealous Pharisee Gamaliel counseled moderation and calmness. By a reference to well-known events, he advised them to "refrain from these men." If their work or counsel was of man, it would come to nothing; but if it was of God, they could not destroy it, and therefore ought to be on their guard lest they should be "found fighting against God". Paul was one of his disciples.

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Later in Acts Paul will tell of his relationship to Gamaliel.

Acts 22:1-5

"Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now." ² And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent.

Then he said: ³ "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. ⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, ⁵ as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.

Now let's analyze Rabbi Gamaliel's advice to the Council.

Gamaliel is a Pharisee and opposed the Sadducees.

The Pharisees [separatists] would be the conservatives and the Sadducees [followers of Zadok] are the liberals. The Pharisees accepted all of the Scriptures while the Sadducees only accepted the five books of Moses.

The Sadducees did not believe in angels, spirits, resurrection, of an afterlife.

Gamaliel's advice was based on the Pharisaic teaching: "God is over all, needs no help from men for the fulfillment of His purpose; all men must do is to obey God and leave the issue up to Him."

So basically Gamaliel advised the Council to leave Peter and John alone. If the movement they led, the Way of the Resurrection of Jesus, were not of God, it would come to nothing. If the movement were of God, to fight against it would be to fight against God.

Note that while Gamaliel was not a believer that God used him to keep the apostles from being stoned to death.

While Gamaliel's advice sounds logical, there are some serious flaws in it.

- 1) There is a false comparison. Jesus is not just another fanatic who has gained a following [36-37].
- 2) There is a false criterion. "Success," as men measure it is not a proof of the truth of the Gospel.
- 3) The advice was against Christ. "Wait and see" is not what the Gospel commands.

Matt 12:30

He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

2 Cor 6:1-2

We then, *as* workers together *with Him* also plead with *you* not to receive the grace of God in vain. ²For He says:

*"In an acceptable time I have heard you,
And in the day of salvation I have helped you."*

Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.

Acts 5:40-42

⁴⁰ And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

Even though the apostles escaped death their punishment was harsh. They were “beaten” which means they received 40 stripes minus one; 39 lashes!

Yet these Christians came away from this bloody beating rejoicing to be counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus.

The preaching at the temple and in every house continued

⁴² And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ.

Whose side are you on?

Repent and believe in the Gospel.