

Commentary on Acts, Chapter 5 by Chuck Smith 2.5.23

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February memory verse Luke 24:45 (NKJV)

And **He** opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the **Scriptures**.

Commentary on Acts, Chapter 5 by Chuck Smith 2.5.23

At the end of the fourth chapter we have the second mention of the early pure communism that was practiced in the first church. Where those who had possessions sold them, and they shared. As we made note last Sunday night, financially it was disastrous. Spiritually it was a very beautiful gesture. That the wealthier Christians had such a great love for the Lord and for the body of Christ that they were willing to sell their possessions and put everything in a common kind of a purse. So that no one was in need in the early church. No one had to go without. But it did turn out to be a financial disaster to the extent that later on Paul had to take offerings from among the Gentile churches to support the poor brethren in Jerusalem. Because after the monies are expended, then what do you do?

There had been some advocating of the church community, in these days. There are certain churches that are attempting to reinstitute this practice in the original church. A famous vicar in London has recommended the Church Community Concept, Dr. John Stott. And he encouraged those of his congregation who had Mercedes and all to sell them, and they who had the large castles to sell them. To get a smaller economical car and to create a common kind of a purse for the church and for the church community. They called it the Church Community Concept. Not communal, but community. You each have your own houses and all, but yet there is the sharing of the wealth within the church. I don't believe that this is necessarily a pattern that God intended. Though they did it in the church in Jerusalem, there's absolutely no mention of it being done by any of the other churches that were established. And as we pointed out, the results in Jerusalem were financial chaos. And there were other problems with it. We will get to those other problems as we move into the fifth chapter.

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, but they kept back part of the price, his wife also being a party to it, and they brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not your own? and after it was sold, was it not in your own power? why have you conceived this thing in your heart? for you have not lied to men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and a great fear came on all those that heard these things. And the young men arose, and bound him,

Commentary on Acts, Chapter 5 by Chuck Smith 2.5.23

and carried him out, and buried him. It was about the space of three hours after ([Act 5:1-7](#)),

Now, that's interesting they took him out and buried him and didn't even notify his wife.

And about the space of three hours after this, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. Peter asked her, Tell me whether you sold the land for so much? And she said, Yes, that's how much. And Peter said unto her, How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out. And then she fell down immediately at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. [And it doesn't really need to say this, but it does.] And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things ([Act 5:7-11](#)).

A couple of things that are important to note. Number one is that Peter is talking to Ananias. He said in effect, "Were you forced to sell your property?" The answer is "No." "As long as you had it, wasn't it yours?" "Yes, it was." "After you sold it, no one required you to bring the money in." That was a purely voluntary thing on the part of those in the early church who wanted to do it. It wasn't a requirement of the church. And I think that this is important to note, when there are those liberals today who try to point out that the early church practiced a form of communism, and thus are seeking to advocate communism as a good way to go. The communism of the early church was far different from that communism that we see today, where people are forced at gunpoint to relinquish their personal possessions. Their private properties. Confiscated then by the government. The church was not confiscating property. It was purely a voluntary freewill expression of the gratitude and the love that the people had for God. No one was forcing that issue. And thus, there can be no comparison with the communism of today, which is a forced issue.

The second thing, of course, to note is the sin for which they gave their lives. It was not the sin of holding back, not the sin of failure of giving everything, because God did not require them to give everything. Their sin was that of hypocrisy--pretending to give everything to God when in reality they were holding something back from God. And so we get an interesting view of God's opinion of the hypocrite, which would indeed cause fear and trembling to come upon all the church.

I am interested and attracted by the power in the early church. There was such a purity in the hearts of these people. There was such a power within the church that the hypocrites could not abide. The hypocrites coming into that environment were exposed and destroyed by the power of God. And that, to me, is extremely awesome. I have wondered that if that same kind of power and purity existed in the church today how many members would we still possess after singing the third verse of "Take My Life and Let It Be". For that third verse we sing, "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold." And we sing it very dutifully, but yet, all of us are withholding our mites and more. The curse of the church has been hypocrisy. Hypocrisy can manifest itself in

Commentary on Acts, Chapter 5 by Chuck Smith 2.5.23

many forms, but as the general rule, there is a desire in our flesh to be thought of by people to be more spiritual or more righteous than we truly are. I am so disgusted with my own flesh. Because I love to have people think that I am a deeply spiritual person...a very godly man. And isn't it horrible that your flesh would delight in such a connotation? Now because I want people to believe that I am a deeply spiritual godly man. In close communion with God. I often allow little subtle innuendos to slip from my lips that reveal how deeply spiritual I really am. "For this morning when I was waiting upon God..." "Oh, doesn't that sound good? My!! "I heard the roosters crowing, and I knew it would be getting light pretty soon..." "Oh! He prays before the sun comes up. My, what a godly man." Wanting to appear good in the eyes of men. Wanting to appear holy so that people might look up to me with awe and wonder that they might say, "Oh, you're Chuck Smith aren't you?" "Well, yes, uh-huh." God help us!! Hypocrisy...in the early church God did not allow it.

Evidently, we see here the gift of discerning of spirits in operation once again. We will see it again in a couple of chapters as Simon the sorcerer comes to Peter and seeks to buy the power to lay hands on people that they might receive the Holy Spirit. And Peter begins to discern what's in the man's heart. But here when Ananias came in, Peter just flatly asked him why he was making a pretense of giving all when he was really holding something back...that he was lying to the Holy Spirit. And then he said, "For you have not lied to man, but to God." Making the Holy Spirit, God. "Why is it that you have conceived in your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" And then, "While it remained, wasn't it yours when you sold it, wasn't it yours to do with? Why is it then that you have conceived this thing in your heart? For you have not lied to men, but you have lied to God." And so equating the two together, lying to the Holy Spirit is equivalent to lying to God, and this is one of the proof texts to show the deity of the Holy Spirit, that He is God. And it's a very strong and powerful argument.

When Sapphira came in, Peter cross-examined her and asked her straightly to see if she was a party to her husband's lying. "Did you sell your house for so much?" "Oh, yes, that's the price we got" And then he accused her of conspiracy with her husband in this attempt to deceive the early church. And her fate was the same as her husband's.

Now, from this purity there proceeded power. For the church now being purged from this hypocrisy. And Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy." Paul told the Corinthian church to "purge out the leaven therefore." Get rid of that hypocrisy within the church. And the effect of the purifying of the church was power. I do believe that the Book of Acts is a pattern. Not a once in the history of the church unique experience of the power of God. The initial thrust was to get the church in orbit. And then that the church was to exist devoid of the power of God in the subsequent generations. I do not believe that the lack of power in the church is really God's fault.

We are so often ready to blame God for our own failings. It's a common trait of man. When God accosted Adam in the garden and said, "What have you done?" He said, "It's the woman that YOU gave to me to be my wife. It's your fault!! You're the one who put her here!" And he was trying to blame God for his sin. "The woman that YOU gave to

Commentary on Acts, Chapter 5 by Chuck Smith 2.5.23

me to be my wife. She did entice me and I did eat." And so man, it seems, is always ready to blame God for his own failures.

And so we look at the church in it's weak anemic state and we want to blame God. And we say that, "God has withdrawn the power of the Spirit." It was only given to the church to give the church it's first thrust. But once the church was capable of developing it's own programs, establishing it's own seminaries, and creating it's own organizational structures, we no longer needed the power of the Spirit, but we're now able by the genius of man to carry the Gospel into all the world.

History itself will testify to the folly of that concept. For the early church did carry the Gospel into all the world. As Paul wrote to the Colossians thirty years later, "And the Gospel as it has come to you as it is in all the world." And here we are in our modern day church seeing the Gospel reaching a less proportionate area of the world every year. In 1935 some thirty-two percent of the world knew of Jesus Christ. By 1945 it was only twenty-seven percent of the world knew of Jesus Christ. By 1955 it was only twenty-two percent of the world had heard of Jesus Christ. Today they estimate that only seventeen percent of the world had heard of Jesus Christ. And of the fifty million people being added to the earth's population every year, less than five percent of them are being reached or will be reached at our present rate with the Gospel. We are in a population explosion, but it's happening in the areas where the church is not effective. In fact, in many areas where the church has been ruled out. And much of the reason why the church had been put out of areas is because of the hypocrisy in the church.

When the church was purged and purified it became powerful. And so we read that,

By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. ([Act 5:12](#)))

This is the area where the lame man was healed. So the church continued to meet without a building, but just meeting on the public territory of the temple, there on Solomon's porch.

Now of the rest durst no man to join himself to them: but the people magnified them ([Act 5:13](#)).

So this was the end of the people selling their possessions and bringing them in. After that Ananias and Sapphira were slain by the power of God, no one dared after that to become a part of that tight community that was sharing everything in common, that ended that particular little experiment. But though they did not become a part of that tight community, they magnified them.

And the believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women;) ([Act 5:14](#))

Commentary on Acts, Chapter 5 by Chuck Smith 2.5.23

So there were many, many people believing. Becoming Christians but not becoming a part of that tight church community who were sharing everything in common.

In so much that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing might overshadow some of them ([Act 5:15](#)).

It doesn't say that Peter's shadow brought any healing benefits.

In that culture there was quite an interesting superstition about shadows. And they would be very careful not to get in the shadow of a evil man, because they had some kind of a superstition that if the shadow of a evil man fell on you that some curse was going to happen to you. And thus, in turning that around, the shadow of a good man they probably thought would bring benefits. I do believe, though it is not recorded, that many of them were healed as the shadow of Peter fell on them. Else the practice would've ceased in a hurry.

But I certain that many of them were healed, not because of any power in the shadow of Peter, but because of the principle of the releasing of faith--a point of contact where I am going to believe God to do a particular thing. When this happens, as the woman who had said, "I know if I can just touch the hem of His garment I will be made whole," and the moment that she touched the hem of the garment she released her faith. "Oh woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as you wish." The moment that she touched His garment, she released her faith. Because in her heart she said, "I know that the moment when that happens I'm going to be healed." And as she released her faith, she was healed. So the value of that point of contact to release my faith. "I know that God is going to do it when..." So this developed and, "I know that when Peter's shadow falls on me the Lord's going to heal me. Or the Lord's going to heal my father or my brother." And so you carry your brother out into the street and put him on the side that the shadow would fall. You look at the sun, and you put him on that side and wait for the shadow to fall. And the moment that it fell you say, "Aaaall right!" Faith released. And God responds to our faith. And so I'm certain that many were, no doubt, healed, though it does not say that they were, as the result of releasing their faith, because they had established that point where they would.

And there came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one ([Act 5:16](#)).

So the purifying of the church by the purging of the hypocrisy and the resultant power that is manifested by the church. Multitudes are brought out of the cities and villages round about Jerusalem and they were being healed as the result of the power that was there in the early church.

Sometimes my heart yearns for that kind of power to exist in the church today. However, I seriously question whether the church today has the capability of handling

Commentary on Acts, Chapter 5 by Chuck Smith 2.5.23

that kind of power. It seems that in the church we're so ready to exploit anything. And I feel that it is indeed tragic to those who have had healing ministries and who have had that emphasis in their ministries. For the most part, as far as I can think in my mind, they have exploited it for their own personal benefit and gain. And I think that that is indeed tragic. But I don't know my own heart. I don't know what I would do. I really don't trust myself. If suddenly you had all the notoriety, the fame, the acclaim that would come from having that kind of power, I really don't know my own heart. If I would be capable of maintaining in my own spiritual walk. So I can't really judge these men for what they've done, because I don't know what I would do if in that same position.

Now, there are miracles and healings that are happening here daily, but not to the extent that we find in the book of Acts. Nor do we wish to capitalize, or to emphasize those healings that are taking place, lest people would be drawn only for the physical benefits and not really drawn to Jesus Christ. I do feel that we do lack from the early church in this area. But God knows that, and why the lack exists I'm certain that it is in part or whole on our side. God's hand is not short that He cannot save. His ear is not heavy that He cannot hear. I'm certain that that environment in which these gifts should be properly exercised just does not exist today.

I'm not interested in hyped-up experiences. I'm not interested in the circus environment that I observe so often within the healing meetings. I don't read these things happening in the book of Acts. And I don't feel that they are edifying or drawing attention to Jesus, but have a greater tendency to draw the attention to the man, to the instrument. God's man of the hour. The star of the fifth magnitude.

Now, as the result of the popularity, there came a jealousy among the priesthood.

And the high priest rose up, and all that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and they were filled with jealousy ([Act 5:17](#)),

Notice that the high priest was himself a part of the sect of the Sadducees. The Sadducees were the materialists. They were the humanists. They did not believe in spirits; they did not believe in angels, and they did not believe in resurrection. And they were into the religious scene just for the bucks. And now the popularity of the disciples was a threat to them and they were jealous.

So they laid hands on the apostles, and they put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord that night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life ([Act 5:18-20](#)).

Go share with them this gloriousness that you have in the risen Christ. Go right back to where you were arrested. Go right back and do the very things that you were doing when you were arrested. Rather than, "Hey, now that you're free, escape, get out of Jerusalem. Head for Caesarea, get a boat and take off for Greece, escape the persecution." No. "Go right back into the temple and there speak to the people the words of this life."

Commentary on Acts, Chapter 5 by Chuck Smith 2.5.23

So when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and they began to teach. But the high priest, and those who were with him, called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and they sent to the prison to have them brought forth. But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, and so they reported back to them, saying, The prison truly we found [secure, it was] shut with all [security] safety, and the guards were standing outside before the doors: but when we opened the doors, there was no one there ([Act 5:21-23](#)).

They've disappeared! Now the guards were still standing there; the place was still locked. And yet, when they opened the door to the inner prison, to their rooms, they were empty.

Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priest heard things ([Act 5:24](#)),

They began to wonder "Boy! What's going to come of this story now?"

Then one came in and told them saying, The men that you put in prison are standing in the temple, and they're teaching the people ([Act 5:25](#)).

Then went the captain with the officers, and they brought them without violence: for the feared the people, lest they should be stoned ([Act 5:26](#)).

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, saying, Did we not command you that you should not teach in this name? and, behold, you have filled Jerusalem with doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood on us ([Act 5:27-28](#)).

You remember in the last chapter when they were standing before the counsel with the lame man, they were strictly charged not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus. And Peter responded, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." So they threatened them further and let them go.

Now he brings up this...he said, "Didn't we strictly charge you not to speak anymore in this name?" And then he makes an interesting admission, "You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." Now that is a interesting testimony, not by the evangelist. You have to watch the testimonies of evangelists. Sometimes they are exaggerated. We used to have a term "evangelistically speaking". And it means that you blow up the figures significantly. "Well, how many were there?" "Oh, I suppose there were several hundred." At least twenty-five, evangelistically speaking.

So this was not their own report. This is the report of their enemy. "You have filled Jerusalem with this man's doctrine." Would to God that our enemies could testify against us and make that charge. Would to God they could say, "You have filled Orange County with this man's doctrine." Wouldn't that be glorious? If we could fill Orange County with the doctrine of Jesus Christ, that we could see such a move of God that

Commentary on Acts, Chapter 5 by Chuck Smith 2.5.23

everyone in the county would be cognizant of what God was doing. Instead, unfortunately, the church is gaining great notoriety in the county for other things than proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's rather tragic, isn't it? The church is gaining notoriety for the wrong things.

Secondly, "You intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Now if you remember when Pilate was trying Jesus and these men were manipulating the crowd to seek His crucifixion. Finally, when Pilate saw that he couldn't prevail, he ordered a basin brought, and he began to wash his hands in the basin in a symbolic gesture. He said, "I am innocent of this man's blood, see ye to it." And what did they respond? "His blood be upon us and upon our children." Now they're upset saying to Peter, "You're seeking to bring this man's blood on us!" And for certain, when Peter was standing before them, he said unto them, "If you want to know by what power and all that this lame man was healed, be it known unto you all and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified..." And so he puts the blame right where it belongs. And yet now, they don't want to receive the accusation or the blame, yet it was their responsibility. Peter made mention of the fact that Pilate was wanting to let Him go, but they insisted on His death.

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men ([Act 5:29](#)).

That word "ought" there, again, is not a totally accurate translation. The Greek word is "must". We must obey God rather than men. "Didn't we charge you not to speak anymore in this man's name?" Their answer is, "We must obey God rather than men. We must obey God." Oh, that we would experience and feel in our own hearts that divine imperative, "I must obey God." Unfortunately, we take so oftentimes a careless attitude in the area of obedience, "Well, yes, I should be obeying. Oh, I ought to obey God. Yes, I know that I should." But these men felt it much deeper. They said, "We must obey God rather than men." And I think that this is the rule. Should ever the time come, should we be living under the laws or jurisdictions created by man that would infringe upon my responsibilities to God, and the law of the land should be contrary to the laws of God, then I would have to take that very same position, "I must obey God rather than man."

And then they went on to testify,

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew and hanged on a tree ([Act 5:30](#)).

They had just said, "You're trying to bring His blood on us," and Peter just throws the bucket on them. I mean he just lays it out. "Whom you slew and hanged on a tree." But notice again that he's preaching the resurrection, "God has raised Jesus". Secondly,

God has exalted him to his right hand to be the Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and the forgiveness of sins ([Act 5:31](#)).

Commentary on Acts, Chapter 5 by Chuck Smith 2.5.23

Paul said, "He was raised for our justification." "At the right hand of God to be the Prince, the Savior."

And we are his witnesses of these things; and so also is the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey him ([Act 5:32](#)).

And here we find that the Holy Spirit is given in obedience to those who obey, and that is: believing on Jesus Christ, repenting from your sins, believing on Jesus Christ, obedient to the command of God, and we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now when they heard that, they were cut to the heart, [talk about conviction] and they took counsel to slay them. Then there stood up one in the council, who was a Pharisee, his name was Gamaliel, he was a doctor of the law, he had a very high reputation among the people, and he asked that they put the apostles out of the room; and he said unto them, You men of Israel, now you be careful with what you intend to do in regards to these men. For in days before this there rose up Theudas, who was boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: and when he was slain; all of those, who were following him, were scattered, and the whole issue was brought to nothing. And after this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and he drew away many people after him: and he also perished; and all, even as many as were following him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or work is of men, it will come to nothing: but if it be of God, you cannot overthrow it; because you will find yourself in the position of fighting against God ([Act 5:33-39](#)).

So this wise counsel by Gamaliel to these men who were plotting to kill the disciples. "Look, we got rid of the leader. These kind of things have arisen before, others have risen up, gathered followers around them, but it always just dissipated once the leader was killed. So let's just let it go." Now this is the argument from the position of weakness, not a position of strength. You usually don't just let things go to see how they're going to turn out. But it was the counsel of Gamaliel, and they accepted this counsel. Interestingly enough, this is the Gamaliel of which Paul was a prize student. In some of the early writings that were discovered, Gamaliel said of Paul that he only had one difficulty with Paul as a student. He said that he was an extremely zealous student. His only difficulty was providing him with enough books. He was a real bookworm. And Gamaliel had difficulty just providing him with sufficient numbers of books because of his tremendous thirst for knowledge. Now they agreed to Gamaliel's counsel, partly. He said, "Just let them alone." But they called the apostles back in and they beat them. They didn't just let them alone.

they beat them, and commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go ([Act 5:40](#)).

Now that's probably the end of it.

Commentary on Acts, Chapter 5 by Chuck Smith 2.5.23

They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name ([Act 5:41](#)).

How do you stop men like that? The answer is, you don't. They're unstoppable.

And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ ([Act 5:42](#)).

Notice both teaching and preaching. Preaching is the proclaiming of God's good news and should basically be done to the unconverted. Once a man has received Jesus Christ, his real need then is that of being taught. And this is where the church has made a grave mistake. Because the church continues to produce great preachers, but is not really producing teachers. And thus, the sheep are not getting strong. Because they're getting preached at Sunday after Sunday rather than being taught. Our preaching should be done on the street corners and our teaching should be done within the church. Preaching is a great Saturday night ministry when the young people are attracted by the groups that are playing and singing. Once they have received Christ, then the great need of being taught in the way of righteous and truth.