



The Book of Acts

Bringing in a New Dispensation

Acts 4:32-5:11 | Favor and a Double Dose of Fear

Acts 4:32-37 | Favor in the assembly

Verse 32 —

And the multitude of them. Three thousand on the Day of Pentecost (2:41), and those who heard Peter's message in the Temple, about 5,000 (4:4), at least 7,000+ in total. This is certainly not a little flock. Often certain believers call this "Peter's little flock." If you are outside of a little group of believers who call themselves *right dividers*, you probably have never heard of Peter's Little Flock. That catchphrase is a misnomer and is not a term used in Scripture, rather it is made up from a combination of passages. If anything, Luke 12:32, John 21:15-17, Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2, describe the *flock of Jesus and God*, not Peter's. For those who like that phrase, I doubt there is any great harm in using it, but why do we need to make things up? Why not call this early assembly the first assembly of Jewish believers since that is what it is?

I consider myself as one who embraces most of what the so-called *right divider's* crowd teaches, however even the term *right divider* is made up. Paul instructed Timothy (2 Timothy 2:15) to be diligent in his study of the word of God and he was to do that study by: *rightly dividing*. *Rightly Dividing* is a verb, something to be done, not a noun. It is not who you are. If anything, we should take the middle of that verse and call ourselves "workmen of the Word" if we want to be truly Scriptural. I am probably splitting hairs, but by imitating Timothy, we are to be workmen and we become a workman by *rightly dividing*. The phrase "I am a right divider" (usually abbreviated "RD") has become almost cliquish in some circles and anyone outside of this group is of the devil. Being a *right divider* is a parroted phrase.

Later on, we see that this inaccurately labeled little flock, or rather, this new assembly of Jews, will grow larger (Acts 6:1,7). And even later, when the apostle Paul comes on the scene, it will be joined by Gentiles (Ephesians 3:6). In this early assembly, the Jews were *in Christ* through the preaching of Peter, the signs of the apostles, faith in Jesus as the Messiah, and their own works.

Through Paul, a new dispensation will be introduced that will allow anyone to join this assembly. Justification will not come from signs, wonders, works of repentance, or baptism. It will come from belief alone. (Acts 13:38,39). In early Acts, Peter is the minister of this Jewish body. After Acts 15, Peter's ministry fades away and he is no longer heard from in Acts. The focus of Luke's narrative shifts to the apostle Paul, who is the minister of the newly completed body of Christ (Ephesians 3:7), in which membership is allowed for anyone, Jew, or Gentile, by belief alone.



That believed. What did they believe? They **believed** that Jesus, the one they killed (3:15), was the Messiah. Not salvation by “grace through faith” (Ephesians 2:8-9), since that gospel had not yet been revealed to the apostle Paul (The first time that gospel was spoken, Acts 13:38,39).

Were of one heart and of one soul. Their passion for the Messiah was the same. They were like-minded. They did not claim their possessions as their own, rather they shared all things and had **all things in common** (See 2:44,45). It is good to be like-minded, and we should gather with people who are like-minded in the Gospel. But those who want to imitate this *ekklesia* in Jerusalem during the first century stop short of sharing all of their possessions. Why don’t we continue to share all things in the church today? Because this was a historical event and we don’t make a doctrine for ourselves from a historical event.

We realize that this is not the *church, or the completed body of Christ* as we know it today; rather, this *ekklesia* existed in a different dispensation from ours. This was an *ekklesia*, indeed prophesied by Jesus in Matthew 16:18, but it was composed of only Jews and proselytes, looking for the Kingdom to come. This early *ekklesia* is not our model to follow.

Verse 33 —

Jesus told the apostles, “*You shall be my witnesses...*” (Acts 1:8). They were fulfilling Jesus’ prophecy and were, with **great power**, giving great witness **of the resurrection**. The apostles proclaimed the good news of the resurrection. This is the gospel that you and I believe. Since the resurrection of Jesus Christ, It has always been the good news. The difference is that the gospel preached by the twelve apostles required an alternate response from ours. Our response to the Gospel comes later from Paul and is by belief alone. By believing, we are justified and declared righteous (Act 13:38,39).

This early *ekklesia, still in the dispensation of the law*, required obedience. This is where people get tripped up today and mix law with grace. If you claim this early *ekklesia* as being the same completed *ekklesia* that you and I are a part of, you will end up mixing the dispensation of the law and the dispensation grace—and the apostle Paul later forbids that (Galatians 2:16). Granted, in the book of Acts, there is an overlap of dispensations, but today there is no overlap. Everyone today is in the dispensation of grace. But here, in our passage, obedience was a requirement for their response to their belief in the resurrection.

Great grace was upon them all. Wait a minute, it says **grace** right here. They believed by grace, right? Because the word *grace* is used here, there is confusion. This is not referring to *salvation by grace through faith*. The word **grace** is *charis* in the Greek. It means they were all in favor with one another. And in their preparation for the expected Kingdom, there was no selfishness among them.

God’s favor, or **Grace** has always been given throughout Scripture. I cover this in the introduction to my Book, 35 Days Through Paul’s Epistles. Grace was not new. There are example after example in Scripture where God’s grace is poured out on individuals and groups. Some examples are:

1. Adam and Eve, after they disobeyed God, He clothed them with a covering as an act of grace.

2. Cain murdered his brother, Abel. God protected Cain from anyone who would try to kill him as an act of grace.
3. Noah was righteous and found grace in the eyes of the Lord and was spared from the Flood.
4. Abraham, despite his failures, discovered grace when God promised to bless him and all the families of the earth through him.
5. Moses, while doubting God, found grace when God entrusted him with the Law.
6. The Israelites found grace often as they cycled through disobedience and obedience.
7. David had a wrong spirit and asked God to renew a right spirit within in him, and God's favor was upon him.
8. Rahab, the harlot, found grace and was spared from the destruction of Jericho.
9. There are other examples of grace, Ruth, Esther, the Canaanite women, and now in our passage, the growing multitude was showered with God's grace.

These instances of grace were randomly given. In the dispensation of grace, however, God's grace is neither random nor sporadic. It is continuously poured out. It is constant and does not fluctuate because of circumstances and grace is given with no requirements from us.

Verse 34, 35 —

In order to be ready for the King's arrival, they remembered the words of Jesus, *How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God* (Luke 18:18-25ff). This account of this rich man and Jesus concerned entrance into the kingdom of God (Luke 18:24). Had the nation of Israel believed, Jesus would have immediately set up His kingdom and the believing Israel would have entered the Kingdom. But not with earthly riches. Riches were a hindrance to entering the kingdom.

We have heard the phrase, you can't take it with you. That is an accurate statement, but this imperative from Jesus in the gospel of Luke is not directed to us in the completed body of Christ. It was not meant for our dispensation. From our perspective today, these early Acts believers were practicing *socialism*, for **as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold and laid them down at the apostles' feet.** To prepare for the kingdom, the apostles took the money and **distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.**

The Bible is not promoting Socialism where people are forced to give up their wealth. Socialists do not want you to own anything, rather the elite will own it all. They have a mantra, which is false: *"You will own nothing, and be happy."* Owning things is not inherently bad. Like anything, ownership can be used for evil, but at face value, ownership is a good thing. The Bible always favors honestly gained ownership of goods and private property. All we have to do is look at the Ten Commandments to see God forbids coveting or stealing another man's property. The selling of property and the laying down the price of the sale at the apostle's feet was voluntary, but it had to be done with honesty and good intentions. Just as we saw in chapter 2, this *selling and giving of goods and money* was all voluntary. And by the way, this economic principle would eventually fail as

we will see later on in the book of Acts. This practice brought poverty to the Saints in Judaea. Socialism, or Marxism as it's often called today, is always a failed form of economics and wherever you live in the world, work against it and reject it.

Nor is this a model for giving in the church today. The Biblical model for giving is for each individual to purpose in their heart what they can give and then give cheerfully. You should give to your local church you attend, but your church should never compel you to give. A church should communicate its needs, and then each member should decide individually how much they can contribute towards those needs.

Verses 36,37 —

[E.W. Bullinger notes that chapter five should begin here.]

Joses...surnamed Barnabas. Could be *Joseph Barsabbas* in Acts 1:23. He was a Jew, **a Levite, of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.** According to Numbers 18:20,24, Levites were prohibited from owning land, but apparently that only applied to land within Israel. Here, Barnabas owned land on the island of Cyprus. If this is the same **Barnabas** Paul traveled with later in Acts, he was known for being an encourager. We will see him in Acts 9, after Saul (later Paul) sees Jesus on the Damascus road and several years later goes to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, the disciples were all afraid of Paul because of the persecution he had inflicted upon them earlier, but Barnabas took him to the apostles and smoothed the waters. The word **consolation** from the Greek *parakaleo*, meaning to come alongside, or to comfort. We could say **Barnabas** was one who looked out for those who were on the sidelines—the down and outers or those neglected (Acts 9:27; 11:22-26; 15:37-39). Luke records an example of how the preparation for the Kingdom was supposed to work.

But along with Favor comes Fear.

Acts 5:1-11 | Fear in the assembly.

Chapter 5

Verse 1,2 —

Often the conjunction, **but** signifies a contrast is coming. Look out for the *buts* in Scripture!

But certain man named Ananias with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession (land, in verse 3). **And kept back part of the price.** Keep in mind this *ekklesia* is going to transition from Law to Grace. All the Jews were still living according to the Law of Moses. The requirement for the Law was the command to follow the Law and not depart from it. For example, one such Law is found in the Ten Commandments, *Thou shalt not covet* (Exodus 20:17). Since this was a communal (socialist) effort, one's possessions were not his own, but were shared equally with his neighbor. Thus, and this is the point, by holding back the price, they were coveting what belonged to their neighbor.

Verse 3, 4 —

Ananias and **Sapphira** were part of the believing assembly (2:46) but they chose to do their own thing and keep some of the money for themselves. I don't think that would have necessarily been wrong, however, they said they had given all the money but, in collusion with each other; they lied about the price of the possession they sold. I am thinking they did this for two reasons. First, they didn't buy into the sharing with their neighbor philosophy. They wanted a nest egg for themselves. Second, by saying they gave all of the money, it would have made them look good, so perhaps pride is at play here?

The word **lie** is to *deceive*. In their attempt to look out for themselves, they were in actuality deceiving God, the Holy Ghost. In so doing, they also kept others, those in great need, from surviving as they awaited the Kingdom. They **kept back part of the price**. In keeping back part of the money, they had **lied unto men...and God**, making it appear they gave all the price of the land. How Peter knew they were lying, we are not told.

Today, in the dispensation of grace, giving is all about grace. There is no reason to deceive or lie. Grace giving is each one deciding within his or her heart how much to give (2 Corinthians 9:7). If you are compelled to give more than your heart desires, you should be wary of the motives of your pastor.

Verse 5 —

Hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost. There is no sign of how Ananias died. It was likely caused by God himself.

The phrase, **Gave up the ghost** is one word in Greek, *ekpsuko*; *ek* means *out of*, *psucho* can be translated, *become cold by blowing, or breath*. Hence, a literal rendering would be that he stopped *breathing and became cold*. He died.

The point; once confronted with his sin (and it was a sin since they were still under the Law), he died. And **great fear came on all them that heard these things**. News of his supernatural death travelled quickly among the 7,000+ believers in the Messiah. The Greek word translated **great** is the word *meegas*. The word for **fear** is *phobos*. For us today, there is no *phobos*, or fear, for those who believe in Jesus by grace through faith.

Verse 6—

Young men arose, presumably because they had the strength to carry him out of the room. **Wound him up**, always a sign of respect to cover the dead. Immediate burials were common in Jewish culture. Often, only a few hours would be reserved for mourning, and hopefully contacting relatives, etc. But leaving a corpse unburied through the night, for any reason, was considered to be sinfully disrespectful, and was permitted only if more time was needed to for the preparation of shrouds for the coffin.¹ Even today some cultures bury the dead on the day of death.

Carried him out and buried him. In fact, Biblical Law expected burials for everyone, no matter what their offense (e.g. Numbers 11:34; Deuteronomy 21:23; Joshua 7:26; 8:29; 10:26-27).

¹ Keener, Craig S. Acts: An Exegetical Commentary & 2: Introduction and 1:1-14:28. Baker Academic, 2012-2013.

Verse 7 —

In **about the space of three hours after**, after Ananias had been buried, Sapphira, **not knowing what was done**: She knew about the money being held back, but didn't know Ananias had died and was buried, **came in**. Where she had been during this time, Luke does not tell us.

Verse 8 —

Now she has the opportunity of grace to confess. Peter, knowing the false sale amount of the land asked **(answered) her, tell me** did you sell the **land for so much?** She refused the offer of grace. Having conspired with her husband, she knew the agreed-upon amount and said *yes, that's how much we sold it for*.

Verse 9, 10 —

Earlier they had pretended to voluntarily lay all of their money at the apostle's feet (5:2), now both of their lives were involuntarily laid before the apostles instead. She **fell down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost**.

Now a double dose of fear falls upon the *ekklesia*.

Verse 11—

Great fear came upon all the church, and...as many as heard.... Reminder, this is not *the dispensation* we are in today. This is a dispensation of fear, not grace. The Law stated they were not to *tempt the Lord their God* (Deuteronomy 6:16; Matthew 4:7). That is exactly what Ananias and Sapphira did.

Obviously, this is not a model we would desire for the church today! Here, it was the Jewish assembly in Jerusalem and has no bearing on our own giving practices.