



The Acts of the Holy Spirit 07 - Sharing, honesty, responsibility and consequences – Acts 4:32–5:42.

Sharing

These people did not live in a commune. It was just that they held possessions very loosely. Jesus had shown them by His example that possessions were not a thing to be treasured, **Matthew 6:19-21**

Possessions are something to be used but our aim is to acquire real treasure in Heaven. The disciples took this saying literally – as it was meant to be taken and they used what they had for the common good of all the believers. They knew it was more blessed to give than receive, **Luke 6:37-**

38. Even houses and land were not regarded as anything special, but whatever the Holy Spirit led people to give was given in full without complaint or distress, but with gladness and willingness. As they did so, they saw the words of God fulfilled in their lives: **2 Corinthians 9: 6-7**

Promises for sharing from Psalm 112

1. Blessed beyond expression.
2. Happy in obedience.
3. His children shall be honoured everywhere.
4. He himself shall be wealthy, and
5. His good deeds will never be forgotten.
6. When darkness overtakes him, light will come bursting in.
7. He is kind and merciful.
8. **All goes well for the generous man** who conducts his business fairly.
9. Such a man will not be overthrown by evil circumstances.
10. God's constant care of him will make a deep impression on all who see it.
11. He does not fear bad news, nor live in dread of what may happen.
12. He is settled in his mind that Jehovah will take care of him.
13. He is not afraid but can calmly face his foes.
14. He shall have influence and honour.
15. His enemies will see and be disappointed

'He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done' **Proverbs 19:17**

✠ Next time you feel challenged to share any belongings then remember to claim these promises.

Honesty

Luke, as he writes this Chapter is very careful to contrast two men, and we should take note of this if we are to really be in the centre of God's plan for us. The first man is the one the apostles called Barnabas (Son of Encouragement).

He sold a field and brought the proceeds of the sale and put it at the apostles' feet. This man was a Levite. They could trace his line all the way back to the tribe of Levi (the son of Jacob) – this Tribe was the priestly Tribe. Levi was not given any land allocation in the Promised Land whereas all the other Tribes were. Instead this Tribe was given 48 cities from within the allocation to the other Tribes, together with the land around them. (**Numbers 35:1-5**). These people were therefore Priests in Israel, and so therefore was Barnabas.

The Apostles testified to the resurrection of Jesus with great power. The effect on the people



was enormous and all Jerusalem was aware of them, and of what they were preaching. God's Grace (his unmerited favour) was upon these men as they preached and everyone knew that something amazing was happening.

The second man Luke described was Ananias who had a wife, Sapphira. This couple decided to sell a field. It was theirs to sell, and they were perfectly entitled to do anything they chose to with the proceeds of the sale. Their fault was to declare that they had sold the field and to pretend that they were giving the entire proceeds of the sale to the apostles for distribution to the church. In fact they kept back part of the proceeds for themselves - whether it was to pay a debt or to buy something they wanted, we shall never know this side of heaven, - but we do know that their misrepresentation was discovered.

We must be very careful how we deal with each other as Christians, because we are in fact dealing with God's people and therefore with God Himself. Peter confronted Ananias very boldly pointing out that he was not lying to the Church but to God Himself, **Acts 5:3-4**. You and I need to search our hearts and ask ourselves whether what we are doing and saying is truthful and honouring to God. If it isn't, we need to stop it **now**, and repent, asking forgiveness, then go back and correct what we were doing or saying this time truthfully and correctly. The results of Ananias attempted deceit was death. We cannot fool around with God, neither can we expect God to bless what is not of truth. It will come crashing down around our ears one day, and others may very easily get hurt. Sapphira was also caught in her lie, and the result was the same in her case - death, **Acts 5:9-10**.

The effect on the Church was immediate and shocking. Who is this God we serve? God is all-knowing, so when we plan deceit, God knows it. He is inside us when we do it. We need to understand that when we do this, we do not fool God. This was a massive lesson to the church then and needs to be so to us as we work with Jesus, the Head of the church to develop His church in our Nation and beyond. This is an honour that He bestows on us and we should not deal with it lightly, **Acts 5:11**.

Responsibility

Just because the Ananias and Sapphira affair happened, the normal, everyday running of the church did not stop. They met regularly at the Temple in Solomon's Hall and they did many remarkable miracles among the people.

The other believers didn't dare join them there - perhaps some were afraid that their lives did not match up to the standards that God so obviously required and had demonstrated over Ananias and Sapphira's death and still others may have feared the persecution that faced the Apostles. In any case, it did not stop people being added to their number as more and more people believed in the Lord.

The questions that we need to ask ourselves are these:

- 1.** Are we prepared to stand up for the faith that we have recently (or in some cases not so recently) adopted?
- 2.** Are we prepared to face persecution for our faith? - physical or mental
- 3.** Are we prepared to be honest and truthful - straightforward - in our stand for God?

If we will not, then what is the point of being a Christian? Are we relying on our salvation and sitting tight, quietly waiting for our time to die? Although the people we read about here were not happy about standing with the apostles in the Temple, we shall read about a time, not so very far away when they were literally persecuted out of Jerusalem, and if Saul had had his way, there would not have been one Christian left in the world. Persecution in our country can come from a number of sources. None of them are yet condoned by the Government. But they are nonetheless just as real. They can come from outside the church, perhaps in the workplace or amongst our friends as we share our faith. Mental and psychological persecution that can stop us from sharing what Jesus has done for us if we are not careful to remember that the opposition is to Jesus and not to us. Perhaps more subtly, persecution can come from inside the church as we see bullying and insistence on following certain rules and regulations that cannot be backed up by scripture, but that can be used against us if we do not follow a certain doctrine. This can be subtle and can wear us down - again if we do not remember what Jesus has done for us. We are in a relationship of the heart not a religion with a set of rules. All our actions and attitudes should be backed up by the Word, that is why it is so important to know what the Word says and stand on it.

This was an amazing time as God backed up His Word and their obedience to what Jesus had instructed them with signs and wonders, **Mark 16:15-18**. Whenever the Word is preached, God will always back up what He says with signs and wonders. If this is not happening, then we should ask ourselves the reason why. Perhaps we do not believe it; perhaps we do not make room in our lives for the Holy Spirit to work through us. The

signs and wonders do not have to come through those who preach the sermons or who are 'at the front'; they can just as easily come through us as we pray for those around us, or lay our hands on someone who is sick. People were so full of faith in the Name of Jesus that they brought all their sick into the streets and all were healed. What a sight!! **Acts 5:15-16**

How many were healed? All of them that were brought! How many more could have been healed? As many more as they could have brought! Why didn't they bring more? That is for you and me to answer, because we have the same reasons for not bringing people to Jesus today. These events had truly caused a stir in Jerusalem and all the surrounding towns! Everybody would have heard about the amazing things that were happening **in the Name of Jesus**.

Consequences

The result was predictable, in just the same way as the result today would be predictable, and is in many countries of the world. The Apostles were persecuted. Who were carrying out the miracles? Who were preaching in the Name of Jesus? The Apostles. So in order to stamp out what the religious people regarded as opposition to their exclusive right to religion, they used their human authority to threaten and to demand that the apostles stop what they were doing. They had absolutely no thought about whether this was a good thing, whether people were being blessed or even if this was from God. Their sole desire was to put a stop to it. What was their motivation? **Acts 5:17**

Spiritual jealousy motivates people today. You can see it if you really look and the result is nearly always the same – try to gag the people who have escaped from the clutches of religion and are moving in the Power of the Holy Spirit! It can happen in so-called 'new breed churches' as much as it can happen in the older denominations. Beware and be prepared if you are one who will take God at His Word! The apostles were arrested and jailed for the night. We have seen this tactic before! It didn't stop them then and it would not stop them now. This will become a familiar pattern of the persecution as the religious people attempt to stop their power base from being eroded. It is happening in countries right across the world today. Perhaps one day it will again happen in the so-called 'free' world! But this time while the High Priest and his religious cronies were having one of their best nights' sleep for months, an angel of the Lord was at work. This angel was good with locks, bolts and bars. Imagine the excitement as he told the apostles to get back into the Temple courts and preach the full message of this new life! **Acts 5:19-20**

So at daybreak, where did these people go? Back into the Temple Courts doing what they had done before but now holding nothing back – the full message of this new life!

Close your eyes for a minute, and go through the religious authority's day:

- **Daybreak + 30** – wake up, congratulate self on being party to solving this opposition problem. Feel comfortable about the rest of the day.
- **Daybreak + 1 hour** – wash, trim beard (got to look my best for the trial today) get dressed.
- **Daybreak + 1 hour 30** – Breakfast. Think about what to do with these spiritual jokers we arrested last night. Open the mail, listen to the overnight gossip related by a servant
- **Daybreak + 2 hours**. Set out for the Supreme Court to have a pre-meeting with my mentor group at the Sanhedrin.
- **Daybreak + 3 hours**. Take seat in the Chamber in preparation for the trial of these impostors who we caught in the Temple. Send the armed guard to bring them from the prison.

It seems a comfortable day, doesn't it? Only to be ruined by the armed guards with a disturbing story. The prisoners who were securely locked up had gone – not there, disappeared. Everything was securely locked, all the guards in place. Nobody had fallen asleep; they knew how important these prisoners were. But when they went to get them, they just well they weren't where they should have been! **Acts 5:21-24**

Imagine the consternation when they discovered this, the fear for their jobs and lives! Worse was to follow: someone rushed in to say that the people arrested last night were now doing the same things they had done before in the Temple. Preaching again, but this time really going for it – the full message of the new life. When the Captain of the Guard and his officers went out to retrieve their 'prisoners' they were reasonably polite. They actually believed that if they used force, the people might stone them. Bullies are the same the world over, and they are the same regardless of place or year. They are frightened people hiding behind man-made empires, trying to protect their entrenched positions.

When the apostles were finally brought in to face the Sanhedrin, (**Acts 5:28**) they were accused of:

1. Preaching in the Name of Jesus when they had been ordered not to do it.
2. Filling Jerusalem with the teaching.
3. Telling the truth about the religious authorities being to blame for the death of Jesus.

Peter was again the spokesman and he began their defence by stating that they must obey God rather than men! This time, there was no soft explanation helping them to see the error of their ways and asking them to repent. Peter was bold, and his words stark, **Acts 5:29-32**

So now they knew. There were no longer any holds barred. They were aware already that if they wanted to receive any pardon for their sins, they would have to do business with God, and accept the new relationship that God had done – the completion of the New Covenant that had been announced throughout the Old Covenant. These people were entrenched in the Law that pointed to salvation in the Messiah, but they could not see the very salvation when in front of their eyes.

The only option that the High Priest now had left to him was murder, but Gamaliel persuaded them otherwise. He pointed out that all the excitement over Jesus would die down now He was dead, just like two previous leaders, Theudas and Judas of Galilee.

"And so my advice is, leave these men alone. If what they teach and do is merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. ³⁹ But if it is of God, you will not be able to stop them, lest you find yourselves fighting even against God." Acts 5:33-39

He had enough awesome fear of God to recognise that there may be a problem if what the apostles say is true. It sometimes happens that religious people make logical statements that seem spiritual but are not. There is no record of Gamaliel ever becoming a believer; however we do not know that for certain. At best this statement appeased the High Priest and his Council and they decided to flog the apostles instead and to insist that their previous order be carried out that they should not speak in the Name of Jesus again.

Did that make a difference to the apostles? Never. They left the Sanhedrin rejoicing that they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. What about you and me? How would we react under these conditions? **Acts 5:41-42**

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord, and we will never stop teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ! Pray for a holy boldness to be prepared. 'But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect', **1 Peter 3:15**

Acts of the Holy Spirit 07 - Sharing, honesty, responsibility and consequences - Challenge Questions

1. **Read the Notes and the Bible Verses** referred to in them. Highlight the points that 'speak' to you.
2. How important do you think 'sharing' is in Church life? From the list of promises from **Psalm 112** which do you find most encouraging?
3. Do you have a testimony of when you stood up for your faith and suffered for it?
4. Why do you think Peter did not tone down his message after being flogged and warned not to speak about Jesus?

Read Acts 6:1-7.

5. How fast was the church growing? What problems did this cause?
6. What did the Twelve decide to do about it? What did the Twelve decide they should be doing? Why were they not doing it?
7. In your opinion does the same problem occur in churches today? What do we need to do about it? If so, can we do it?
8. Why is it important for you to know that you are doing only what God has asked you to do? Do you know what spiritual gifts you have? Do you know what is God's calling on your life?
9. What gifts did Jesus give us so that we could all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God? **Ephesians 4:11-14**. List people that you know of each type. What is the effect of not having these gifts in position in the church?

10. What qualities did the chosen seven people have? What effect did appointing these men have on the church?

Read Acts 6: 8-15.

11. What qualities did Stephen have in his life? How do you think each of these qualities helped him do his job? What did these qualities also enable him to do?

12. Could you be like Stephen? If so, how, and how do these qualities help you in your walk with and calling by God?

13. Does the Church in the West suffer from persecution? Describe some of the ways in which it may suffer from it? Why was the persecution of the church in Jerusalem so persistent and vicious?

14. Was Stephen able to answer the arguments that the men of the Synagogue of the Freedmen posed? How was he able to answer them?

15. What did these men do in order to persuade the authorities to arrest him? Who were these authorities?

16. How was Stephen's trial like that of Jesus?

17. Try to describe how you would feel if you were in the same position. In what sense could you be in a similar position at any time in your life, even though you were not facing a court appearance? How have you reacted in the past? Would there be any change after this week?

18. What happened to Stephen's appearance? How did this happen do you think? What would have been the effect on the Sanhedrin

