

### THE BOOK OF ACTS

#### Lesson 13, Chapter 5

I hope you are enjoying the Book of Acts as much as I am enjoying presenting it to you. In our Introduction to Acts I said that this book is the vital bridge from the Old Testament to the New, and I'm sure that by now you are seeing it as the construction of our bridge progresses.

As we began Acts chapter 5 last week we immediately found ourselves embroiled in a long running Christian controversy due to the rather unsettling story of Ananias and Sapphira, and we're going to spend even more time with it because its importance to our spiritual and earthly lives is greater than it might appear in a casual reading. Some Believers aren't aware there is controversy swirling around this story because those who are especially new to the Hebrew Roots perspective of understanding the Lord and His Word likely have lived most of their Christian lives as part of one denomination or another. And Christian denominations aren't known for tackling the contentious issues or for presenting multiple possible solutions to difficult Biblical doctrines; rather one answer is given as firm and unequivocal and so laymen often aren't aware that there other quite different viewpoints on the matter.

The challenge presented by our story is that beginning with the early Church of Rome, an official attitude about the continuing relevance of each Bible testament was adopted that favored the New and disparaged the Old. Even when over a thousand years later Luther split the Catholic Church and the Protestant movement arose, most of the attitudes and core beliefs of Catholic Christianity followed into Protestantism. But those beliefs as regards the relevance of the two testaments for Christians in reality takes matters a step further and brings us into the realm of the very nature of God. As David Stern in his concise Commentary on the New Testament says: ***“One sometimes hears presented as Christian doctrine the second century heresy of Marcion that the New Testament preaches a superior God of love, while the Old Testament God is an inferior deity concerned with judgment, wrath, justice and the carrying out of the details of the Law. In the present incident (of Ananias and Sapphira) and at vv.10-11 we see that the New Testament is, so far as justice and judgment are concerned, the same as the Tanakh (the OT.) God is One. He cannot abide sin. Fraud is sin, and it is punished.”***

In other words, in this supposed “new religion” of the gentiles called Christianity whose God is Jesus, Believers will always be forgiven for our trespasses and never suffer the consequences of punishment at the hand of God. And this is because our new god is a god of love and not wrath. And yet in the earliest setting of what is described as the first Believing community of Jews in Jerusalem (this is who we are reading about in Acts) that was governed by the first Apostles, when Ananias and Sapphira decided to give to the disciples only some, and hold back the remainder, of the proceeds from the sale of their personal property God instantly snuffed out their lives for their offense. Thus we have a real conundrum before us about whether God's nature actually **has** changed from judgment to love (as is typically professed in the Church). This story in Acts 5, however, directly refutes the Christian doctrine that says that

the God of wrath was replaced by His Son the God of love. Because if that's truly the case, then how can we square that the new God of love would callously kill a husband and wife for merely not giving a large enough portion of their wealth to the Church? What happened to the unlimited forgiveness and mercy? Therefore many Christian commentators have attempted to deal with this embarrassment by suggesting that this story is contrived, or was added later, or is simply a fairy tale because its outcome is impossible to accept.

I explained last week that it indeed is impossible to understand this story if we don't first know the Old Testament and the resultant principles that are at play here in the New Testament. And there are two principles that are front and center: the principles of the Law of Herem (the Law of the Ban), and also the Law of Vow Offerings. We discussed this in depth last week so I won't go over it again except to say that they both involve different circumstances under which a human determines to misappropriate property that belongs exclusively to God. Property that belongs to God is by definition holy property and thus cannot be kept, used, or consumed by man. The prescribed consequence for these sins is usually death.

So before we explore more of Acts chapter 5 (beyond the story of the deaths of the husband and wife who tried to defraud God), I think it is vital to discuss two simple but foundational concepts of Judeo-Christianity, which if not correctly understood lead to many erroneous doctrines and beliefs; and those two concepts are love and sin. Thus the question for us today is: from God's viewpoint, what is love and what is sin? I can't begin to tell you some of the interesting answers I get when I ask Christians what sin is. But defining love comes in a close second for the many variations I also hear. So take a few seconds to ask yourself (silently) what you personally believe sin is; and then what love is.

OK, now let's see what the Lord says about it. Turn your Bibles to 1John chapter 3.

### **READ 1JOHN CHAPTER 3 all**

To the shock and dismay of many, the Holy Scriptures tell us that love is **not** about feelings; love is an action. Love is reflected by what we do. "Feeling" love is not Biblical love; **DOING** love is Biblical love. That is not to say that love doesn't elicit emotions; but too often for Christians emotions are not only the dominant element of love, emotions are the only element of love. And the emotion of love overrides everything else. Here in 1John we just read this passage about God's view of love:

#### **1John 3:15-18 CJB**

***<sup>15</sup> Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.***

***<sup>16</sup> The way that we have come to know love is through his (Yeshua) having laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers!***

***<sup>17</sup> If someone has worldly possessions and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how can he be loving God?***

**<sup>18</sup> Children, let us love not with words and talk, but with actions and in reality!**

Biblically speaking, love is to accept, and hate is to reject; these are definitive actions. John gives an example of love as an action by our Savior laying down His life for us. Yeshua gave up His life not in theory; not in sentiment or intentions; not in mere promises but actually. And I remind you we are reading in the New Testament that God demands that our love is expressed in terms of action, not words and talk and certainly not mere emotions and warm feelings. Action, says John, is love in reality; all else is not.

Notice in verse 17 how John's words tie so closely to the crime of Ananias and Sapphira. Could John be remembering this startling event that we are told brought great fear to the entire early Believing community? Because in vs. 17 he says: ***"If someone has worldly possessions and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how can he be loving God?"*** Is this not essentially the story and circumstance of Ananias and Sapphira?

But how about sin? What is sin? It is more often than not that Christian brothers and sisters tell me that in their view sin is whatever the Holy Spirit tells them sin is. This belief is prevalent enough that I have given it a label: The Doctrine of Situational Sin. That is, what sin is for you is not necessarily sin for me, and vice versa. Since Christ, sin is now fully customized and entirely circumstantial; there is no standard. A sin can be sin today, but it wasn't sin yesterday and might not be sin tomorrow. So there is no longer a firm, knowable set of rules regarding sin; it varies person by person and situation to situation. Therefore we can't possibly judge one another; we don't dare look at something a Believer is doing and say to ourselves, "that is sin". And that is because this doctrine of Situational Sin tells us that since we have no way of knowing what the Holy Spirit told that person, then there is no way of discerning whether they are sinning or not. Lord forbid we'd ever tell an offending Believer they were sinning because maybe the Holy Spirit told them that at the moment it wasn't sin for them.

Well, let's see what the Apostle John had to say about sin and just what sin is.

### **1John 3:3-7 CJB**

**<sup>3</sup> And everyone who has this hope in him continues purifying himself, since God is pure.**

**<sup>4</sup> Everyone who keeps sinning is violating Torah- indeed, sin is violation of Torah.**

**<sup>5</sup> You know that he (Christ) appeared in order to take away sins, and that there is no sin in him.**

**<sup>6</sup> So no one who remains united with him continues sinning; everyone who does continue sinning has neither seen him nor known him.**

**<sup>7</sup> Children, don't let anyone deceive you- it is the person that keeps on doing what is right who is righteous, just as God is righteous.**

What did John just say sin is? Violating Torah. Anyone hear any equivocation there? Any room for adjusting sin to the situation and to the individual and thus making sin at times not-sin? Any thought that the Holy Spirit can override the written word of God at any time and turn sin into righteous behavior?

Since I read this from the CJB, let's see what the most popular Bible version ever made does with that same verse.

<sup>KJV</sup> **1 John 3:4** *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*

Pretty straightforward. As much as some Believers might like to think that the Law of Moses has no further bearing on our lives; or as much as it might be comforting to feel that God has dissolved all standards of sin and instead has now customized sin for each of us; and only that which you perceive in your heart that the Holy Spirit is telling you is sin is actually sin (and all else isn't) simply defies the Biblical definition of sin.....including the New Testament definition of sin that we just read.

Sin is Biblically defined as the breaking of the God's Law, and there has only ever been one Biblical Law: The Torah Law. If you truly believe that the Holy Spirit would tell you something different than what God the Father told you in His written Word, then you cannot possibly believe that God is One. This also means that the Holy Spirit must be telling you something different than Christ said about sin. Because in the Sermon on the Mount we read this:

### **Matthew 5:17-19 CJB**

<sup>17</sup> *"Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete.*

<sup>18</sup> *Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened.*

<sup>19</sup> *So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Christ said the Law is not abolished; and He said that we are to obey the Torah laws and teach the Torah laws so that we can be called great in His Kingdom. But now let me connect something else for you between this quote of Yeshua in Matthew and what Peter said in the Book of Acts. Going back to Acts chapter 5 look at verse 3. There it says:

**Acts 5:3 CJB** <sup>3</sup> *Then Kefa said, "Why has the Adversary so filled your heart that you lie to the Ruach HaKodesh and keep back some of the money you received for the land?"*

The word I'm looking at is **filled**. "Why has the Adversary so filled your heart?" Peter asks. The Greek word that is being translated into English as filled is **pleroo**. And indeed **pleroo**

means to fill, or fill up. So I could say to a gas station attendant, “please **pleroo** (fill up) my gas tank”. We find that same Greek word **pleroo** in Matthew 5:17. And I bring this up because I regularly hear that when Christ says that He has not abolished the Torah but that He has completed it that to complete means to finish it; and finish means to bring it to an end. So the Torah may not be abolished but it is ended (an oxymoron if I ever heard one). However when we reverse engineer that verse and add the original Greek back into it we get:” Don’t think I have come to abolish the Torah, I have come to **pleroo** it”. Messiah is saying He has come to fill the Law, or fill it up. **Pleroo** in no way EVER means to finish or end something and it is never used that way, nor is it ever translated that way in the Bible. If **pleroo** did mean to finish or end, then we would have to translate Acts 5:3 like this: “Then Kefa said, why has the Adversary so brought your heart to an end?” Doesn’t make any sense, does it?

The Law was alive and well for Ananias and Sapphira and all the Believers Peter was leading. Peter’s Master Yeshua told him so; and John confirms that sin is breaking the Law (what sin was before Christ remains that way after Christ). And what Law did the New Testament Believers Ananias and Sapphira break? At least two laws: the Law of Herem, and the Law of Vow offerings. The price of their sin was instantaneous physical death at the hand of God when their fraud was discovered. And there is no indication or implication that they were anything other than Believers in Christ in good standing. But they sinned. This first group of Believers in Jerusalem was indeed saved; but they weren’t perfect. And the Lord intended on protecting the integrity of this new movement of Yeshua followers at whatever the cost.

Let’s reread part of Acts chapter 5.

### **RE-READ ACTS CHAPTER 5:12 - end**

After the incident with the deceiving spirit of Ananias and Sapphira, we find the disciples meeting at the Temple Mount, specifically at Solomon’s Portico, a popular public meeting place. And what were they there to do? They went to perform many more signs and miracles; the very thing the Sanhedrin told them they must not do.

That part is pretty straightforward; but what does it mean in verse 13 that “no one else dared to join them”? Who is the “no one else”? This is especially complicated because the next words say that “throng of Believers were added to the Lord”. What is clear is that those who dared not join them at Solomon’s Portico were reacting to what had just happened to Ananias and Sapphira because vs. 11 says that “as a result of this great fear came over the whole Messianic community”. So while I can’t prove it, it seems to me that those who didn’t dare to join some the Apostles at Solomon’s Portico to continue public healings and miracles in the name of Yeshua were frightened Believers. And even so, the result of the miracles and healings done publically at the Temple Mount was that throngs more came to believe.

I think I can put this in modern application that is a little easier to see. One of the main reasons that Christians will tell you that they won’t make a pilgrimage to Israel is fear. That fear doesn’t make them any less Christian than those who don’t have that fear or overcame their fear and went anyway. On the other hand, those Jerusalem Believers who were too frightened to want to be part of the healings and miracles being done in perhaps the most visible place in



all of the Holy Lands missed out on a huge blessing. They didn't get to witness, let alone participate in, these awesome works of God that changed the lives of scores and hundreds of people. And be aware; much like the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost caused an ability for all the disciples present to speak in tongues, but only marginally so thereafter, these miracles of healing on a massive scale only lasted for a short time. Soon, although we might still hear of occasional healings in the NT, they would become few and far between.

Because Jews were not sold on the idea of medicine and physicians and instead placed their hope of the healing of their bodies in the Lord, then it is not surprising that the word spread like wildfire that many people were being healed by Peter and the disciples. So, verse 16 says that the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits poured into the Temple Mount and were brought to the disciples to be healed (please note that **every one of them was healed**)! No exceptions. Pity those fearful Believers who were too scared to be part of this unprecedented outpouring of God's healing power. Who knows how many of them had afflictions that would have been healed?

We are told that the Jews were so anxious to partake of the healing power that the disciples seemed to wield that they were happy to just to have Peter's shadow pass over them. We need to understand that a person's shadow was considered to be part of the person. And no doubt some amount of local superstition was at play among those who brought the sick and those with unclean spirits (meaning they were demon possessed). However even their small amount of faith in what they saw happening with their own eyes such that they sought it for themselves and others was sufficient for God to heal. The religious officials of Jerusalem didn't have such simple faith. Instead they reacted in jealousy and anger and saw this as an assault on their power and authority.

Verse 17 explains that the High Priest and "his associates" who were Sadducees (meaning other members of the Sanhedrin who met mostly on the Temple Mount), came running to stop what they had previously ordered was not to happen. So, Peter is again arrested, only this time along with other disciples and they are all put into jail. However once again God overturns what sinful man has ordained; an angel opens the jail and releases the disciples who go right back to where they were and they start preaching and healing again.

There are a couple of things about this incident that I'd like to address. The first is the identity of the angel. The words used in English are: an angel of the Lord. Or in Greek an **angelos kurios**. Angel of the Lord is a good and accurate translation of the Greek. Some commentators therefore make this to be that special angel that we hear of a few times in the Old Testament (as with Hagar out in the desert and near death) that is called The Angel of the Lord. However that is not what we have here.

In Hebrew the word for angel is **malach**. Yet **malach** is really just a generic word that means messenger, and most of the time it is a human messenger. However sometimes it is an angel, but how do we tell the difference? First is context. But second is that most of the time a heavenly angel is called a **malach elohim**; that is a messenger from God. A few times a heavenly angel is called a **malach adonai**; that is a messenger from the Lord. In other words, the word **malach** has to be modified by adding another word to it in order for us to be informed

that the messenger is a heavenly one; an angel. That is what is happening here in Acts 5:19. The term “an angel of the Lord” is translating the Hebrew thought of a **malach adonai**. Alternatively, when we are speaking of that special angel, The Angel of the Lord, in Hebrew it is written: **malach YHWH**. That is, God's formal name is used. And I believe that this special “angel” is no angel at all but rather it is yet another manifestation of God Himself because anytime the **malach YHWH** speaks, He speaks on His own authority and uses the first person I, me. A regular angel makes it clear that he comes in God's authority bringing God's message, and not his own.

The second issue I want to discuss is something we last discussed some years ago, but it is time to bring it up again because I fear the need is upon us: and that issue is civil disobedience. Or more to the point: should a Believer ever engage in civil disobedience against our governing authorities? Of course there is mixed opinion on this, often stemming from Paul's famous command to obey our human government.

### Romans 13:1-6 CJB

**<sup>CJB</sup> Romans 13:1 Everyone is to obey the governing authorities. For there is no authority that is not from God, and the existing authorities have been placed where they are by God.**

**<sup>2</sup> Therefore, whoever resists the authorities is resisting what God has instituted; and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.**

**<sup>3</sup> For rulers are no terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you like to be unafraid of the person in authority? Then simply do what is good, and you will win his approval;**

**<sup>4</sup> for he is God's servant, there for your benefit. But if you do what is wrong, be afraid! Because it is not for nothing that he holds the power of the sword; for he is God's servant, there as an avenger to punish wrongdoers.**

**<sup>5</sup> Another reason to obey, besides fear of punishment, is for the sake of conscience.**

**<sup>6</sup> This is also why you pay taxes; for the authorities are God's public officials, constantly attending to these duties.**

Yet, here in Acts we see Peter and the disciples defiantly refusing to obey their local government because, in their view, they should obey God and not man when the two are in conflict (Acts 4:19). I'm going to try to summarize my opinion on how Believers ought to approach this very real issue recognizing that by no means is mine the final word.

First, we should understand the difference between preferences and morals. For instance: I prefer one brand of cereal over another. Or I prefer chocolate ice cream to strawberry. Neither of these choices involves morals. Instead these are decisions of our intellects that God allows us to make with no heavenly consequences for our choices. However moral choices are different; Believers are to get our moral standards only from God. Example: I choose to insist

that prayer and the 10 Commandments must be removed from our schools for the sake of evenhandedness and societal fairness. Or I choose to tell the truth rather than lying to a business associate. These are choices of the will; and the human will was given to mankind by the Lord as the means by which we make moral choices.

Next, we have to understand that most of what goes on between citizens and their governments involves preferences. Paul brings up the issue of taxes for instance. How much tax and in what form we pay it is a choice our government makes, and it is a preference as opposed to an issue of morality. That I don't like it or that it can be burdensome or even unfair in my view doesn't make it a moral issue. Healthcare is another example of preference. You can like or dislike Medicare, or Obamacare, or the often proposed nationalized health care system modeled after Canada's and Europe's. But this, too, is a matter of preference, not morality. Speed limits, food safety laws, zoning ordinances, even those troublesome EPA laws, are all preferences and don't usually involve morality but they can anger us and impinge on our personal freedoms. That some politicians or voters try to frame these matters as moral issues doesn't make it so. They just use "moral" to evoke greater passion for their position, or as a means of manipulation.

On the other hand what could be greater examples of moral issues legislated by the government than abortion, homosexuality and gay marriage. God is clear about the value of every life; and is even clearer that marriage is in His province alone and it is a bond between a male and a female. We are told in numerous passages, Old and New Testaments, that homosexuality is an abomination in God's sight. So for our government to glorify these things and to force it upon our society is a moral outrage.

I am persuaded that in Romans 13 Paul is insisting that we obey our governments over matters that do NOT involve morality. And I'm equally convinced that Peter believes that he has no choice but to speak God's Word and to spread the Gospel, and to heal in the name of Yeshua as a fundamental moral issue. Therefore I believe that this is how we as Messianics and Christians, Jews and gentiles, need to approach the matter.

Civil disobedience in the instance of matters of preference is not called for and in fact the Bible discourages us from it. I cannot say that there aren't cases where civil obedience is called for if the matters of preference are in the extreme (such as a 90 or even 100% tax on all our income that would render us as slaves). But barring something that extreme we should not refuse to pay our taxes because we don't like the system or we think it doesn't meet our standard of fairness. However I firmly believe that civil disobedience is warranted and necessary, if not our duty, when it comes to obeying God over obeying our government who has made immoral laws and is forcing us to follow them. Peter and the disciples in breaking out of prison with the Lord's help and going back to healing and preaching, is our example.

I'll close with this possibility that could easily become real in America. In Canada, it is illegal to speak against homosexuality from the pulpit. It is considered hate speech and there is no sanctuary from it anywhere, not even in the privacy of your home. An infamous case in the Province of New Brunswick occurred just a few years ago. A Pastor was arrested for teaching on God's commandments involving sexual immorality, and of course homosexuality was part



of it. He was arrested, and brought before a judge who jailed him for 3 months until he finally agreed to undergo government sensitivity training and signed a document saying that he would never again speak against homosexuality in his church.

Were there demonstrations of Believers against this? No. Did Believers try to bust him out of jail? No. Did other Pastors intentionally speak out against homosexuality from the pulpit in support and dare the government to arrest them all? No. Did Believers go on strike or block intersections or hand out leaflets and besiege their government in protest? No. There was no civil disobedience and so it was kind of a back page story in the Canadian newspapers. And I say to you unequivocally, there should have been civil disobedience. If Peter had been there, I assure you there would have been.

Fellow Believers, civil disobedience is absolutely called for when we are being forced to commit immoral acts, or to condone government sanctioned immorality. Should we seek confrontation? No. Should we do everything as peaceably and non-violently as possible? Yes. But there will be a cost. There is no shame in going to jail or paying a fine over refusing to be obedient to human civil government but obedient to the Lord. You may even have a business taken from you for refusing to do the immoral. But if that's the case then that is what should happen. And whatever happens, we should all count it as joy that the Lord has allowed us to suffer for His sake.

As we read in this same chapter of Acts that we are studying, in verses 40 -42:

### **Acts 5:40-42 CJB**

***<sup>40</sup> After summoning the emissaries and flogging them, they commanded them not to speak in the name of Yeshua, and let them go.***

***<sup>41</sup> The emissaries left the Sanhedrin overjoyed at having been considered worthy of suffering disgrace on account of him.***

***<sup>42</sup> And not for a single day, either in the Temple court or in private homes, did they stop teaching and proclaiming the Good News that Yeshua is the Messiah.***

So the issue is not whether Believers can or should act in civil disobedience if that time should come. The issue to have the courage to act, and then to accept the likely consequences handed down by our human authorities.

We'll finish up Acts chapter 5 next week.