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A0826 – June 29, 2008 – Acts 4:32-5:1 – The Authorization Of The Apostles - Part 1

Acts 4:32-37 Τοῦ δὲ πλήθους τῶν πιστευσάντων ἦν καρδία καὶ ψυχὴ μία, καὶ οὐδὲ εἷς τι τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ ἔλεγεν ἴδιον εἶναι ἀλλ' ἦν αὐτοῖς ἅπαντα κοινά. ³³καὶ δυνάμει μεγάλη ἀπεδίδουν τὸ μαρτύριον οἱ ἀπόστολοι τῆς ἀναστάσεως τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, χάρις τε μεγάλη ἦν ἐπὶ πάντας αὐτούς. ³⁴οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐνδεής τις ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖς· ὅσοι γὰρ κτήτορες χωρίων ἢ οἰκιῶν ὑπῆρχον, πωλοῦντες ἔφερον τὰς τιμὰς τῶν πιπρασκομένων ³⁵καὶ ἐτίθουν παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τῶν ἀποστόλων, διεδίδετο δὲ ἐκάστῳ καθότι ἂν τις χρεῖαν εἶχεν. ³⁶Ἰωσήφ δὲ ὁ ἐπικληθεὶς Βαρναβᾶς ἀπὸ τῶν ἀποστόλων, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον υἱὸς παρακλήσεως, Λευίτης, Κύπριος τῷ γένει, ³⁷ὑπάρχοντος αὐτῷ ἀγροῦ πωλήσας ἤνεγκεν τὸ χρῆμα καὶ ἔθηκεν πρὸς τοὺς πόδας τῶν ἀποστόλων.

Acts 4:32-37 Now the multitude of those having believed was (3SIAI – descriptive imperfect) of one disposition (heart) and mind (soul) (there was a unity of orientation and thinking among the believers), and no one was saying (3SIAI – descriptive imperfect) that any of the things that belonged to him was (PAInf) his own, but everything was (3SIAI – descriptive imperfect) common to them. ³³And with great ability the apostles (the twelve including Matthias) were giving (3PIAI – descriptive imperfect) witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was (3SIAI – descriptive) upon them all (from God cf 1 Pt 2:19-20 for association with hardships due to sharing???), ³⁴for there was (3SIAI – descriptive) not a needy person among them, for many owners of lands and houses were (3PIAI – descriptive) selling them and brought (3PIAI – descriptive) the proceeds of the sales ³⁵and laid (3PIAI) it at the apostles' feet, and it was given (the proceeds 3SIPI – iterative) to each as any had (3SIAI) a need. ³⁶Now Joseph who was called by the apostles Barnabas (which is translated son of

encouragement), a Levite, the native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field belonging to him and brought (3SAAD) the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. **Acts 4:32-37** And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one *of them* claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. ³⁴ For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales ³⁵ and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷ and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

The Book of Acts opens in a Jewish frame of reference and this makes it one of the most difficult books for Gentiles to understand, what's happening historically is the fulfillment of Israel's calendar. Israel had a spring calendar and on that calendar every year you had the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Firstfruits and the Feast of Pentecost and this was year after year after year and these all pointed to aspects of the Messiah so that Jesus Christ in the year 33AD goes to the cross as the Passover Lamb, then on the third day He's resurrected as the Firstfruits, then He ascends to heaven and in Acts 2 the Feast of Pentecost. Pentecost is a Jewish feast and while most Christians think of this as the birth of the Church this is really a Jewish holiday and the significance of this feast was that the harvest had come in and this signified the nation Israel was being harvested from among the nations and brought into her kingdom. But the condition for this being fulfilled is national repentance So these feasts were being fulfilled in rapid succession, Passover, Firstfruits and now the Day of Pentecost comes, the Spirit is sent and tongues are poured out but there's a problem, and the problem is that the nation Israel will not repent, therefore the kingdom cannot come and thus we move into a new program, a new development in the plan of God is initiated on this day called the Church, it's not the nation Israel, it starts with believers from the nation Israel but in time will gather to itself Gentiles and believing Jews and Gentiles will be formed into a new body called the Church. But this is wholly unknown to the apostles at this time so they continue in the kingdom program re-offering the kingdom to Israel and that's

Peter's message of Acts 2, that's Peter's message in Acts 3-4, in addition to the gospel and the gospel is most certainly there, but in addition to this there's the kingdom offer to the nation Israel. So you have two periods of the kingdom offer, you have the period before the cross when Jesus Himself offered the kingdom to Israel accompanied by signs, miracles and wonders, then you have the period after the cross when the apostles offered the kingdom to Israel accompanied by signs, miracles and wonders, two offers of the kingdom both predicted by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matt 22. And He predicted as well that the nation would reject both and as a result judgment would come upon their city, Jerusalem and it would be burned to the ground, that was fulfilled in 70AD by Titus and the Roman armies. So you have this offer going on but at the same time, wholly unknown to the apostles, the Church is being built up and today we come to the first mention of the Church in Acts. That surprises most Christians because they expect that in Acts 2 but you don't get that until Acts 5. So what Luke is doing is giving us a true historical perspective, remember, this is a chronological document written to Theophilus, an important Roman official who's investigating Christianity and whether it's a threat to Rome, this religion who claims Jesus is King, Jesus is Caesar, so it has to be investigated and that's what we're studying and we see gradually that though Jesus is King the Jewish people did not accept Him as King so we start today to see the transition to the Church. There's a phasing out of the kingdom offer and a phasing in of the church.

Now, in Chapter 3-4 persecution from outside the Church begins. The Sadducees, the liberal sect of aristocrats who denied the resurrection, put Peter and John on trial but by the end of it Peter and John have put them on trial and it's a brilliant demonstration of the irrefutability of the word of God, there wisdom is no match for the wisdom of God and so they have no other course than to release them with a stiff warning, "Don't speak in that name anymore, don't use the name of Jesus." But Peter and John defy the state, they simply cannot go along with their program. Despite the fact, and this is where we get into the divine institutions, the apostles are operating within the framework of the divine institutions, and God gave these as absolute structures in His universe, so you have DI#1: Responsible Labor, responsible because all men, believer and unbeliever will give an account for what they've produced or not produced, then you have DI#2: Marriage and this is the basic structure of society, a man and a woman together in a contract before God

and if you rip this apart as we are seeing done in state after state then you can kiss off America because it's just a matter of time. Then you have DI#3: Family and the rights of family over educating their children, instilling biblical principles in them and so forth, another institution that is under direct attack in our society by the state and finally DI#4: Human Government or Civil Authority, the State, that's the issue here in Acts 4, God gave civil government to mankind and he gave it a very specific sphere of sovereignty to operate within and only within and when the state begins to move out of it's sphere and infringe on others there's a problem and this is always the problem with a democracy, it will always move toward a totalitarian state that takes over everything. And our founding fathers were very careful not to establish a democracy because they were brilliant men who knew the end result, that's why they considered it the most evil form of government because the tendency of depraved man is to let the state solve all the problems and once you've done that there's no freedom left, you have a totalitarian regime. And that was the problem in Acts 4, the Sadducees were moving into a sphere they were not authorized to move into and so Peter and John disobey. And this brings us to a question. In light of Romans 13, I as a Christian am to obey civil authority, how then is it that Peter and John disobey civil authority. Answer: on two and only two occasions is the Christian to disobey the state. First, whenever the state dictates in the area of worship; who to worship, how to worship, when we worship or the content of worship the state is intruding and we cannot go along with that. The case: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Dan 3, the state authorized by penalty of death that all men fall down and worship the image of Nebuchadnezzar and these three men said "I'm sorry state, throw us in a fiery furnace, do whatever you like but we are not going to bow the knee to you." So the first has to do with worship. The second has to do with destruction of the image of God: when the state authorizes you to do what's best for society and engage in genocide, euthanasia or abortion, the destruction of His image you cannot be a part of this. For decades Christians have been involved in organizations like Planned Parenthood which thrive on the destruction of human life. The model for rebellion in the case where the state authorizes participation are the midwives in Exodus 1. Pharaoh says kill the babies and they just flat won't do it. So, the first point of the Doctrine of Civil Disobedience is that the issues are narrowly defined. The second point is the issues concern worship and the destruction of innocent human life. The third point is how you carry out the rebellion, how you treat the state, there are two tactics to this, and

the first thing to remember is always show respect for authority. These leaders hold offices under DI#4 and you may rebel but don't disrespect the authority when you do. A second point about the tactics of implementing this is that while you're doing this you're praying, 1 Timothy 2 type prayers, praying for those in authority, praying "Lord, let us live in peace and tranquility." And finally, be prepared to take the consequences of your choice. Acts 4, Peter and John are ready to be beaten; they're ready to go to jail, but whatever the consequences they will not stop speaking in Jesus' name. So be ready to accept the consequences. Alright, so those are the two tactic used so far in the Book of Acts, operation confusion, just avoid the main issue of the resurrection and get everybody confused and operation quarantine, try to confine the movement by prohibiting the use of the name Jesus.

Today we see a new tactic of Satan. Whereas in the prior to cases he's working from outside the Church, he's working by means of the civil authority violating it's sphere now he's going to work from inside the Church, he's going to work overtime on a couple of believers to cause division and stifle the growth of the Church. Anytime, and here's the principle. When you have a new movement starting one of the keys is keeping everything unified. Take the military. It's not by accident that you have boot camp. It's not by accident that it's tough. It's not by accident that you'll have a drill instructor yelling three inches in front of your face. It's not by accident that the DI uses some not very nice language. This is done because the new recruit is coming into an organization that carries out vital missions regarding national security and the last thing you need in the field is a flake, someone who freezes up under fire and just breaks down into a big boohoo. So the military, to avoid these costly situations, very brilliantly puts recruits through a period of intense mental and physical stress, designed to weed out the flaky people, there's no use wasting your time here if you can't take the pressure. And not only does that weed out the flaky people but it brings about a unit mentality, that we do things as a unit under the command of a higher authority. This is not a place where we all run around and do whatever we like. We are a highly organized military unit and everyone has his job and when everyone does their job you have a very powerful campaign. But if a few soldiers get it in their head that they know better and this goes undetected then before you know it you have division and the whole thing goes to pieces. That's the story of Acts 4:32-5:11. I hope you're not too married to chapter divisions because this section doesn't follow them. What must be established in this new

movement called the church are two things, unity and authority. Everybody has got to be on the same page and everybody has got to know who has authority. Without that there will be division and the whole movement will fizzle out. That's Satan's next tactic, operation division. So this section is to get rid of the flakes, the problem players and to establish the apostle's authority.

Acts 4:32, And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. ³³And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. ³⁴For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales ³⁵and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

Now there's a great number of Christians this is communism and the church needs to go back to a communistic system. This is not communism, when we say communism we're talking Marxism and that's socialism. A lot of people don't know the difference between socialism and charity. Socialism is a system of governmental coercion where the state comes in and takes everything away by force. It's amazing to me that people can read this text and think this is socialism. No one is coerced here, this is private property being voluntarily liquidated as an act of charity. In 5:4 what do you see but that Ananias and Sapphira had full control of the property and even after the sell they have full control of the money. They could do whatever they wanted with it. And that's a far cry from communism. So the problem with Ananias and Sapphira is not that they didn't give all the proceeds from the sale but that they lied and told them they did. So this is voluntary charity not socialism. And the moment a church organization starts drafting bank accounts then charity is not longer charity, you're involved in a socialistic system. But this was not socialistic, it was purely voluntary.

Now why was the poverty problem so great in Jerusalem? We're going to see here, we're going to see in Acts 6, when the first deacons begin that there's a tremendous amount of poverty in Jerusalem. Now most of this poverty was

female in nature, women; there were a lot of poor women in Jerusalem. Why was that? They were all widows. Why did Jerusalem have more widows than, say Jericho or Capernaum; why did all the widows end up around Jerusalem? It's very simple; when Jewish men got old they would go to Jerusalem to die because they wanted to be buried in the sacred city. To this day you can stand on the Mt of Olives and see grave after grave after grave along the Kidron Valley. When Jordanian Arabs had this under their sovereignty from 1948-1967 they desecrated it and used the tombstones for urinals but since the Jewish people have taken it back they cleaned it all up so you can see, there's thousands of these things there, just one after another after another; it was the sacred burial city just outside the city. Today it costs about \$50,000 to be buried there because it's so crowded and so the prominence of the widows in Jerusalem is because they went there when their husbands were about to die and stayed there. And when the gospel went out many of these widows became Christians. Now, who's going to take care of the widows; they didn't have social security then, they didn't have retirement plans, private insurance, they had a family situation. Welfare in the Bible was familial. But since the widows had become Christians and their families were, in many cases not Christian, then the family welfare was cut off, we imagine this is what happened to Paul because evidently he was from a wealthy family but once he becomes a Christian he scrapes by to make a living, so he got cut off and there were a lot of widows in Jerusalem who trusted Christ and got cut off from all her family benefits. So the Church had to come in and handle the widow problem. That's the source of poverty and apparently all this liquidation of private property was going to solve that problem.

But there's a second theme that was operating here. Remember the imminency of the kingdom? Peter keeps preaching to the nation Israel, "Repent nation so Jesus can return and bring in your kingdom." In which case when the King arrives He's going to re-allocate all the land anyway so what good does it do to hold on to all your property? So the people are preparing for the kingdom, hoping and waiting for the national leadership to accept Jesus as the Messiah and if they will, then the kingdom can come.

A third thing that's working in verse 34, besides this massive influx of poor widows is the fact that you've got imminency of the kingdom. These people know, if the kingdom is going to be established shortly it really doesn't matter too much anyway about establishing a long-term operation. All they

are prepared for is a short-term operation in which case they go into emergency procedures. This is the same procedure used in the early establishment of the state of Israel when you had small groups of Jews organize themselves in a hostile region, this is where you got the kibbutz, because you had Arab terrorist groups that would raid families, rape the women, kill the men and women, so they organized themselves in the kibbutz and they said, you're a carpenter, alright, you're in charge of building houses and storage, you're an engineer, alright, you're in charge of water resources, you're a farmer, alright you grow corn and they shared all the resources in common because this was an emergency procedure and you have the same thing here, thousands of believers getting cut off from family, work and so forth so they implemented emergency procedures, one of which was liquidating all their assets (voluntarily) to meet temporary needs until the nation repented and Jesus brought in the kingdom. So all this is procedure we can learn from if we hit an emergency, at least temporarily, to weather the storm, but it's not the normal mode of operation. Now let's go back and deal point by point with these verses.

Verse 32, **And the congregation** and that's better translated "multitude" reminding us that there number was 15,000 or so in Jerusalem, **and the multitude of those who believed** and that's an aorist participle, they had believed once for all in Jesus Christ, it's not that a person comes along and he believes the gospel and then later on he stops believing and he loses his eternal salvation, that's not the case. Once a person is eternally saved they are always eternally saved. Now after that if they stop believing there are consequences that affect your sanctification and your reward status but that doesn't have anything to do with whether you're going to heaven or not. So the aorist here points to a definite time in the past when these Jews believed the gospel and were eternally saved and then we see the unity, **those who believed were of one heart and soul** and this is your imperfect which we see throughout this passage about 20 times, it's a description of past ongoing action, this is Luke's way of describing here's what was going on in the early church, these people believed and then on an ongoing basis they were unified, unified in heart or disposition here and soul, that is thought and so the emphasis is unity of disposition or orientation toward others and thought respecting the poor of Jerusalem and this is a key because what follows is you have two examples set forth of the charity in the early church, one good example, that's Barnabas in vv 36-37 and one bad example, that's Ananias

and Sapphira in 5:1-10 and they get cut out of the equation for the basic reason that unity at this time in the church had to be maintained. It was not a time to have division this early on, Satan wanted to divide and then you get all these sects and you can never get anything going and so they all fizzle out, so God takes extreme measures and says, "All right, you want to lie to me and divide the people, forget it, you're out of here and He takes them home, sin unto death." So Ananias and Sapphira are the flakes and the organization doesn't have the time to deal with flakes at this point, we need unity so we can grow and get stabilized, so we see a description in vv 32 of a unity of purpose; **and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.** And this shows this was not just some social organization that was giving money to any and everybody. Throughout the passage they are liquidating their assets and giving to those who are within the group, the Bible never gives license for believers to go out and engage in the social gospel. That's the goal of the emergent church leaders, Rich Warren, Rob Bell, Leonard Sweet and so forth, they want to solve all the world's problems: hunger, poverty, the AIDS epidemic and "If we solve these problems then we're carrying out the great commission." Baloney! Jesus never said do those things, He said, "Go make disciples." Now they may make a small dent in these epidemic issues but they've subverted the gospel because even if you solve all these world's problems then do have these people solved their biggest problem? Lack of eternal life? So this solving the world's social problems is not the gospel and ever since the early 20th century when we had the Liberal/Fundamentalist controversy we've had this new gospel that we cure all the social ills and that's salvation because what's back of it, the philosophical base of it all is evolution, that salvation is not eternal life in heaven but a utopia we create on earth by solving all the world's ills. But it's very clear in v 32 and v 34 that, yes it was believers who liquidated their assets, but where did the proceeds go? To solve the world's ills or to help needy believers? It did not go outside the church, it went to those among them, fellow believers. So don't get caught in this, giving money to solve the world's ills is not a bridge to the gospel, any humanitarian organization can do that, what is a bridge to the gospel is doing what Jesus said, "A new commandment I give you" He says, "that you love one another." "By this," He says, "people will know that you are My disciples," and that's where we display before the world the love of Christ in the gospel and that can be a bridge to what the apostles are doing in v 33 which is declaring **with great power** the gospel message. **And with great**

power the apostles were giving testimony to what? the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. Over and over I stress this and I stress it again, the testimony of the apostles was never about their experiences with Jesus, what they felt when they were around Him or anything like that, it was that Jesus commanded them to be witnesses of the resurrection, the resurrection, the resurrection, so they go out and they obey that and no matter how much they want to share their personal experiences they stick to the gospel message. This is very important because I know when you get in the situation of witnessing and you start fielding questions or issues someone has you immediately want to go into the subjective and share your personal story, what Jesus did for you and how you stopped drinking, got off drugs, stopped beating your wife and all the rest of it. Those things are not the gospel and the moment you slip into that you've just been aced because people stopped drinking by going to AA, so what does that say about your program, it's nothing more than AA and it works for some people and it doesn't work for others and you've just diminished the whole case for Christianity which has nothing to do with your experience; it has to do with the space-time historical fact of Jesus Christ resurrection. I don't care how you feel about it, history is history, Jesus Christ is resurrected, the tomb is empty so what are you going to do with that? So verse 33 may seem out of place here but it is very strategically placed so we will never slip into the social gospel which is not gospel at all.

Now verse 34, **For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales ³⁵and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.** So what happened is not that everybody who had any extra assets went out and sold them all and brought back all the money. That's not the idea. What happened is that as a need arose someone who had assets would liquidate some of those assets and bring the money to the apostles and the apostles would distribute to the one who had need. So this was operating on a needs basis. Now we want to turn to one of the wealthy Jews of Cyprus in v 36.

He's the good example, **Now Joseph**, this is Barnabas' Hebrew name, we always refer to him as Barnabas which was his nickname, he's brought into the story here in a small way just to introduce us so we have an idea of who he is when he starts to play a bigger role later in Acts. Same thing happens

in Acts 6 with Stephen, he's brought into the story and the same thing happens with Paul in Acts 8, these people get introduced in a small way so we get a little background before they take center stage. Now this Joseph was **a Levite of Cyprian birth**, that is he was of the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe but he wasn't born in the land of Israel, he was born out on the island of **Cyprus** and had obviously been in Jerusalem some time and become a believer and he became pretty well known to the apostles because he earned the nickname **Barnabas** which means **Son of Encouragement**. So this tells us that Barnabas was always going around encouraging fellow believers, patting them on the back, encouraging them to grow spiritually, encouraging them to continue in the grace of God. So he apparently had the spiritual gift of exhortation (sometimes called encouragement) and these are real nice people to have around because you get to wondering some times, "Is any of this worth it and will I ever figure all this doctrine out or some trial comes into your life and you start getting depressed" and then your Barnabas comes along and encourages you and helps you get back on your feet. Well, Barnabas apparently had this gift so that later in the Book of Acts, chapter 9 apparently Barnabas helped Paul get on his feet as a believer by encouraging him in his early years. Then you have the story of Paul, Barnabas and John Mark. And apparently John Mark was a younger believer and he was in Pamphylia with Paul and Barnabas and right when the going got tough Mark flaked out so that when you come to Acts 15 and Paul and Barnabas are going to set out to minister Barnabas wants to take Mark along and Paul says "Uh, uh, I don't want that flake going along," and they have a big argument about it to the point where Barnabas says "Fine, Paul, Mark and I will go this way and you can go do your own thing." And they split up. So Paul didn't have this gift of encouragement and he wouldn't put up with flaky believers but Barnabas was an encourager and he saw that Mark had a capacity and patiently worked with him. The way this worked out, and don't get the idea that I'm faulting Paul here; it's just that Paul didn't have the gift of encouragement. But the way this played out was Mark became the amanuensis for Peter, his letter writer, and later he penned what you know as the Gospel of Mark. So that's the background for Barnabas.

And in v 37, he **owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet**. To lay something at the feet throughout Scripture is an act recognizing authority, coming under the foot of someone is to submit to their authority. So for example in Scripture you read in 1 Cor 15

that Jesus Christ “must reign on earth until He has put all enemies under His feet,” that is, under His authority. So at this point the people are beginning to recognize that the apostles have authority and by the end of this next event you’re really going to know that they have authority. You have got to have authority to get a movement going, you can’t have a leaderless organization and so God chose these twelve apostles and authorized them before men through signs, miracles and wonders and that authority was being recognized by the people. So Barnabas had a tract of land, literally this is a field for farming in the Greek and so the land was very useful. In the ancient world farm land was very expensive and so he brought a hefty sum of money to the apostles, the full price he had received. You can imagine how expensive the land was on the island of Cyprus because islands have limited space and so we’re talking about a lot of money, we could easily be talking about the equivalent today of \$300,000 or more, maybe half a million. So this big donation comes in and the bookkeepers are looking over the finances and, “Oh, look at this, \$300,000. Yeah, Barnabas gave it.” And the word gets around and before you know it you have someone who has a weakness in this department with their sin nature and they hear, “Oh, Barnabas gave a lot of money,” and they just have to get in on the accolades, not that Barnabas wanted that, Barnabas was just giving the money because he wanted to help people, he didn’t want any accolade at all, he had a pure motive, but here are some believers, a married couple who want their names in lights so everyone will look and them and say, “Wow, that Ananias and Sapphira, they really are something.”

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