

Alright this last week we read Acts 5-11 ...

Now if you haven't been keeping up with this let me encourage you *READING THE BIBLE REGULARLY WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE* ... but we read it to see *who* GOD is and *what* GOD is like - we read it to learn something / to be changed by it ... not just to finish a reading, we seek to understand ourselves and the world we live in. It's not a Sunday thing ... it's a *you* thing. It transforms "you" ... Romans 12:2

This Word is to help you discern truth from error in a world where deception is rampant ... but it will challenge you! There are things in it that you will wrestle with and probably need some help from your brothers and sisters in community to understand. But embrace that ... seek to know GOD with all that you are! Desire a FULLNESS of His presence and truth in your life! If you're not disciplined in the Bible then you're not taking Jesus seriously when He warns about those who will come in and deceive. SO be encouraged and take it seriously ... it's 1 CHAPTER/day!!!

From this past week there are several things we could focus on:

- Symbolism of Ananias/Sapphira death with that of Nadab and Abihu (Acts 5:1-11)[Lev.10]
- Obeying GOD rather than man (Acts 5:27-32), Holy Spirit for those who "obey" ... GOD wants to pour out His Spirit, but it's FOR those who will obey Him.
- **Priority of prayer and the ministry of the Word ... this had a HIGHER priority than caring for the widows. (Acts 6:1-6)**
 - **Does prayer or the Bible play that kind of role in your life?**
- Stephen praying for the forgiveness of those murdering him (Acts 7:54-60)
- Philip's ministry in Acts 8, the need of the Holy Spirit, how quickly he was baptized
- Saul's conversion in Acts 9
- **Peter's vision and the importance of "hearing" the Word of GOD (Acts 10)**
 - **Also, what it means to be devout and to fear GOD**
- Disciples = Christians (not two separate categories) or Role of Prophets in church (Acts 11)

Let's start by asking a few questions: *Now everything I'm going to mention matters*

What is more important:

- Brushing your teeth -or- taking a shower?
- Washing your hands after you use the restroom -or before you eat?
- Exercising -or- eating healthy?

Ok ... I'm going to make them a little harder

- Finishing your work -or- taking time with your family?
- Being faithful gathering with your brothers and sisters in Jesus -or- Time to yourself
- Serving a stranger -or- serving a brother

Ok ... a little different

- Loving GOD -or- loving your neighbor
- Praying -or- serving others
- God's Word in our life -or- helping those with great need

Some of what we mentioned here is laid out in the Bible and some of it is not. Did you find it difficult to answer any of these? To choose. Why or why not?

When it comes to priorities, MOST of us “know” what’s right, but we often struggle to walk those things out.

Everytime I read Acts 6, I am reminded of the priorities I should have.

Turn to **Acts 6:1-7**

“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. 2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” 5 And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

7 And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”

Now I was going to teach on this passage exclusively, and is what I planned on all week ... until we came to Acts 10 ... so we'll just go through this a little bit and then move to Acts 10.

1. First a little bit of history: Now the Book of Acts was written around 61-62 AD. Jesus was crucified and rose again about 30AD; that is the time period that Acts Chapter 1 begins. By the time we get to Acts 6 about a year has gone by, so it’s around 31 AD as we read this chapter.
2. These were in the days that the Disciples were increasing in number (that is “before” the persecution broke out, *Acts 8*, and they were all scattered).
 - a. We know that about 3000 people were added to their number on the Day of Pentecost (*Acts 2:41*)
 - b. The last counting we see is in *Acts 4:4* and it is only of the men and we see that their number had reached about 5000.
 - c. So by the time we reach chapter 6 here all we hear is that these were days when their numbers were increasing, so we don’t really know “how many” people were joined together at this time. But we know that it was more than 5000 and it’s safe to say that there was probably more than 10,000 at this time!
3. Now I want you to have that in mind when we get to verse 2 and they summon “the full number of the disciples” together. It was not a small meeting!

Some background ... all through the gospels you hear of these people groups: Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, Lawyers, and here we see the Hellenists. I want to describe these people to you so you can realize that we still have most of them around :)

- **Who are the Hellenists?** the Greek speaking Jews (Just to help out understanding)
- **Pharisees** - a group known for emphasizing personal godliness. "Pharisee" comes from a Hebrew word meaning "separated". They were middle class business owners and landowners who were religious leaders and generally respected by the common people which is why they held such sway even though they weren't necessarily rulers. There were 2 different groups among the Pharisees, but I won't go into that tonight. They believed in all the written testimony of Scripture BUT ALSO held up tradition as equal to scripture. Jesus sided with them on Scripture, but disagreed with them on tradition.
- **Sadducees** - Were more of a political group than a religious group. They were more wealthy and were responsible for keeping up with the Temple (Many of the priests belonged to this group). They did not believe in anything beyond the 1st 5 books, did not believe in a resurrection, did not believe in an afterlife or in angels or demons or anything of that nature. The Pharisees did, and Jesus agreed with them. They were mostly concerned with keeping political peace.
- **Scribes** - Scribes in ancient Israel were learned men whose business was to study the Law, transcribe it, and write commentaries on it. They were associated with the Pharisees, but were not the same. Where the Pharisees were considered very pious; the Scribes were considered very learned.
- **Lawyers** - Were not lawyers as you and I are used to. They were just "experts" in religious law. Some of them could have been Scribes or Pharisees. But they were heavily involved when there was a dispute about the law or if someone had done something that was unclear in the law.

So, anyways, most of that has nothing to do with tonight, but it helps with things later. So think of it this way: **Pharisees** were just normal people like you who gave themselves wholly to following the LORD, but they got mixed up because of all the additions through their tradition. The church is actually seeing a resurgence of this right now. **Sadducees** - were a political group who were more wealthy. They did NOT believe the whole Bible. We might think of this like some of our religiously political people. **Scribes** - were those whose JOB was to interpret the law and write commentaries - very learned. **Lawyers** - were those who were trained experts in the law. **Hellenists** - Was the title given to Jews who could only speak Greek. (It doesn't mean that they were Hellions.)

I just want to ask a simple question since we read through this passage: What do you see the disciples prioritizing in this chapter?

... Caring of widows (vs.1) **James 1:27; Galatians 2:10**

... Priority of prayer and the ministry of the Word (vs.2,4) **Acts 2:42**

... The need for a good reputation, fullness of the Spirit, and wisdom (vs.3)

... Because of maintaining these priorities, the church continued to grow (vs.7)

- *Caring for one another's needs; Continuing in prayer and the Word; and being full of the Holy Spirit ... this is GOD's model for the Church.*
- *You see THIS is what we are trying to get back to. THIS is our target. Losing our life in service to GOD no matter what our vocation; and sacrificial love for one-another - devoted to prayer ... devoted to His Word ... just like we see in Jesus.*

I could have made this a whole message ... But are there any questions before we move on?
Would any of you like to speak and exhort the others in these things?

Acts 10

... Summarize ...

Now this is pivotal time for the Church ... we've got the Gospel coming to the Samaritans and an Ethiopian in Acts 8; Already going beyond the Jews! **[This is who Jesus was speaking of in John 10:16 "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice..." There were people outside of Israel who were faithfully following the GOD of Israel ... thee are the ones that He was speaking of.]**

So GOD saves Paul in Chapter 9 and has planned for him to be an apostle to the Gentiles; and then the first Gentiles we see saved here in Chapter 10. Now there will be NO DISTINCTION and ALL OF US have the opportunity to be grafted into the promises made to Israel!

That is the main theme of what we see going on here and it's important that you understand that as the MAIN reason these things are being shared ...

... but I simply want us to focus on Cornelius and what is said about him because there is a lot for us to learn from him, and I believe this is where we need to go tonight.

This story is so cool, because GOD sets the whole thing up supernaturally. God tells Cornelius what to do; and he obeys. God tells Peter what to do ; and he obeys. And the next thing you know, the Holy Spirit is poured out on Cornelius and many others that had gathered with him! BEFORE he's baptized and WHILE Peter was preaching (no laying on of hands) - goes to show that all of the formula's people give don't matter! You can't put GOD's giving the Spirit in a box ...

GOD tells us "why" Cornelius was selected in vs.3-4

Acts 10:3-4 *"3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." 4 And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God."*

All the while that Cornelius was praying and giving generously, GOD was noticing! That alone should encourage some of you - it does me!!! Be faithful ... in both of these chapters, in Acts 6 and in Acts 10, we see prayer emphasized, the ministry of the Word prioritized, and people giving generously ... BE FAITHFUL in these things Church! GOD notices ... it's a fragrant offering that ascends in worship to Him.

I want to look at a few “key” descriptors of Cornelius tonight:

Acts 10:2 *“a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.”*

Acts 10:22 *“And they said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation...”*

The first thing I want to look at is the word “devout”.

Devout can mean different things to different people.

There are 2 main words used this way in Greek: *eulabes* (Yoo-la-BASE) and *eusebes* (Yoo-sa-BASE)

- *Eulabes* suggests the attitude of the inner being, the soul, towards God; inner life
- *Eusebes* is more about the EXPRESSION of devoted activity, like we see in prayer, and giving to GOD’s people.

This is one of the things that Cornelius was noted for - His devotion to religious good works. He was Devout. GOD is not going to save us on account of our works, that’s all because of Jesus ... but GOD repays men according to their works. Our works matter.

I always want to make the point that it is MORE IMPORTANT for us to take care of one-another than it is for us to do any other good work. We live in a culture where EVERY organization asks for money and MANY of them are worthy! But our first importance is one-another!

Giving money or food to the guy on the street corner is GREAT as long as the brothers and sisters you know are taken care of! If you have a choice between 2 widows, one who is in the faith and one who is not, and you can only help one - choose the one in the faith. It’s our demonstration of love for one another that shows the world we are His disciples! It’s not that we’re unwilling to help others; it’s a matter of priorities.

Cornelius gave generously out of his “devoutness”. He was well-spoken of by the Jewish nation because He took care of GOD’s people. He didn’t just throw his money in a hundred different directions, he sought to bless God by blessing His people.

It says that He prayed “continuously” to GOD ... and that should convict most of us. Not condemn us, but convict us. This is the testimony of EVERY godly person highlighted in scripture and THE WHOLE early church ... we need to take it to heart that we have been reconciled to GOD in order TO KNOW HIM. That only happens through times of prayer and reading the revelation He’s given us of Himself.

It also says that he “feared GOD with all his household” and he was a “God-fearing man”.

Many people don’t understand what it means “to fear GOD”.

- *Jerry Bridges Book Giveaway*

Let me show you a few different scriptures on the fear of the Lord and see if this helps you:

In Genesis 20 Abraham was traveling through Gerar and lies to Abimelech about Sarah his wife ... and Abimelech takes her into his entourage of women.

Abimelech finds out and asks why Abraham would do such a thing ... and he is thankful that he never touched her! ... and this is what Abraham says:

Genesis 20:11 *“Abraham said, “I did it because I thought, ‘There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.’”*

- *So “without” the fear of GOD people would do evil*
- *This is what Abraham understood and it is what we see all through the Bible*

*This is what we learn in **Proverbs 8:13** “The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.”*

- *So what is the fear of the LORD? **To hate evil***
- *It’s important that you understand this - the fear of the LORD has to do with our attitude towards GOD about sin and evil.*

I want to make this abundantly clear and then tell you WHY you and I are to fear Him:

Lev 19:14 *“You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.”*

- *The fear of GOD should keep us from this*

Lev 19:32 *“You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.”*

- *The fear of GOD should cause us to respect and honor those who are in authority or are older than us.*

Lev 25:17 *“You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the LORD your God”*

- *The fear of GOD should cause us to be fair and treat one another right*

Lev 25:43 *“You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God.”*

- *The fear of GOD should cause us to treat people right*

Over and over and over FEARING GOD affects how we behave towards one another ... because we know that we are accountable to GOD for these things. We know that GOD hates evil and will punish it and those who practice it ... therefore, we also hate what is evil.

Deuteronomy 10:12-21 *“12 “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good? 14 Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. 15 Yet the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. 16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. 17 For the*

Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. 18 He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. 19 Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. 20 You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. 21 He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen.”

This passage is a GOLDMINE of understanding the fear of the LORD!

It is filled with affirmations of His love, commands to give yourself wholeheartedly to Him, declarations of how AWESOME (and I mean “awe” as that fear that understands GOD is far greater than us and reverences Him), ... AND .. it shows us His standing up for those who are weak (the widows and the fatherless)!

So how can we “love” and “fear” at the same time?

There’s all these passages about fearing Him ... but what about this one?

1 John 4:17-18 *“17 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.”*

- How are we to LOVE and fear if love casts out fear?

Exodus 20:20 is interesting:

Exodus 20:20 *“Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.””*

- *This makes it clear that there is a way that GOD wants you to fear Him; and a way that He does not want you to fear.*
- *It also makes it clear that the fear “He wants” us to have will keep us from sin.*

Now I don’t want to handle this so quickly that it doesn’t stick with you, but I know I need to wrap it up.

- ***We fear sinning, practicing what GOD hates, and walking against the LORD by neglecting justice and treating one another wrong.***
- *Repeat*

See all men alike have to answer to GOD ... and it is true that believers and unbelievers should be afraid in different ways:

For the unbeliever and those who turn back from following the LORD, the fear of God is the fear of the judgment of God and eternal death, which is eternal separation from God.

Luke 12:5 *“But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!”*

Hebrews 10:26-31 *“26 For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a fearful expectation of judgment, and*

a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 29 How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

For the believer, the one who continues in his faith, the fear of God is something much different. The believer's fear is a reverence of God, and fearing His discipline in our disobedience.

Hebrews 12 paints the picture of both beautifully

I've taught on the fear of the LORD much deeper than this before, but I hope that you see that GOD values those who fear Him ... GOD is not some eternally happy friend in the sky who never corrects, disciplines, or punishes. He is HOLY. He is RIGHTEOUS. He sees and knows EVERYTHING and will bring every DEED, every thought, and every Word into judgment. Let us continue to draw near to Him but understand His character is set against all sin.

Read.

Pray.