



Lesson 12 November 21st, 2020

Sharing Love

MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL

Study Scripture – Acts 4:32 – 5:11

Background Scripture – Acts 3 – 5:11

Key Verse:

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.

Acts 4:32

INTRODUCTION

Human beings including believers fail all the time. The only question is when they will fail and where they will fail. Scripture warns us that the community of believers will at some point be tested from both within and from without and so there will be the pressure of internal conflict as well as the pressures of external opposition.

We must ask ourselves therefore how much the community can really take and when will the point of failure come. Will the community of believers survive or will the pressures they face overwhelm them?

Will the Holy Spirit still keep on working and allow signs and wonders to keep the church on the right track?

This study of the experience of the early church answers these questions. It shows there will certainly be some reaction from God when there is an act of hypocrisy in the congregation. There will be no escape from the disciplinary judgment of God.

We know that if that is no room for escape we will benefit from God's long-suffering. We learn that if God acted in discipline immediately as indicated in this Study there likely would be very few people left in the modern church and we would have to build a morgue in the basement of the church or in an adjoining shed with young men ready to carry out the bodies.

There is a reason for this important and signal case and we should explore this for it might give us an indication of what takes place in the spiritual life of the church when a person in the church community does play the part of the hypocrite. We should begin to understand the seriousness of sin in the church.

It is most important for young people to understand this. They must live a life guided by the inspired commandments in Scripture and the guidance and direction of the indwelt Holy Spirit to escape dread consequences.

Scripture tells us there is divine discipline and it seems that it is happening constantly though not in such an obvious and outward fashion as in the past.

We had been warned by the Apostles that when the Gospel is preached often trials and troubles will come to the church from the outside. We know however that this will strengthen

individuals in the church because persecution is often the means God uses to strengthen and make believers firmer in the faith. We do not really therefore have to fear the persecution and mockings from the world.

What we really have to fear are the things that come from within. For our safety should look inside the life of the church to see the greatest dangers. We therefore must be constantly warned of this which is the Church's **forgotten peril**.

In thinking about this one writer stated, **"One cold heart in the house of God is more to be dreaded than all the devils that are in perdition"**.

To properly understand what is happening in this Study we have to go back to the Old Testament which gives us a perfect illustration of the danger sin inside the body poses. The nation Israel when they came out of Egypt and went into the Promised Land faced their first formidable obstacle in the well defended city of Jericho. God had prepared Joshua to lead the people and in a remarkable incident assured him that the Lord God was with him. But God warned him that when they came into the land and took the city the people were not to take for themselves the gold, silver or other possessions of the people in the city for these things were to be dedicated to the use of God.

We know the story well. They entered Jericho, for God performed a mighty miracle for them to capture the city and the walls of Jericho fell down. But a man called Achan saw a beautiful garment as well as gold and silver that one of the people in Jericho owned and he took the garment with gold and silver and hid them.

Israel was very happy at the victory and so they thought that they could take the next city called Ai easily without using all their soldiers. When they went up to take Ai they were beaten and humiliated and many of their men were killed. Joshua realized that something was wrong and he prostrated himself before God and pleaded with God and asked God as to why did the defeat had happened. God told him to get up off the ground and stop praying. It was clear someone had taken possessions from the city for himself and as a result that person had sinned and as well **"all Israel has sinned"**.

After the investigation Achan's sin was found out and he confessed. In fulfillment of the warning of God he was judged and all his family as well. They were all stoned to death. They died for disobeying God and putting the community of God in great risk by their sin.

At the beginning of Israel's history therefore one person's sin affected the entire body. The entire family died. Israel stood on the brink of painful Judgment.

The word used to describe what Achan had done when translated into the Greek Old Testament is the exact word used to describe what happened in our Study. Luke wrote that this man in the Jerusalem church had brought a grave threat into the church for he **"had kept back part of the price"**.

He had played the part of a hypocrite, kept back part of the possession that was to be dedicated to the use of God, and so judgment was ready to come on the Church of Jesus Christ. God therefore in His grace had to act in this judgment and deal with the hypocrisy and the sinners in such a way that great fear would fall on the people and this kind of thing would not be repeated. One writer further reminds us and we had better pay special attention to this:

"At several points throughout the Scripture God chose particular events in history to make an especially important point. In Numbers 16, we hear about a group of people led by Dathan and Abiram who refused to follow Moses. In response, the ground opened up and swallowed



them. In Leviticus 10, we hear about Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron. They tried to worship God with “unauthorized fire”. They were struck down.

So as we look at the beautiful story of the great fellowship and great community in the early church where the brethren were of “*one heart and soul*” and where they had an intimate and deep connection in community let us remember that fellowship can be fractured and opposed. The only question is when and where.

We should therefore examine ourselves and think about why someone would betray a group that is in an intimate relationship and in vibrant fellowship when they have been called out of a world heading for destruction by the work of the Holy Spirit, introduced to the ways of wisdom. Why would they believe they can fool God and that His eyes are not going to and fro throughout the Earth, watching believers to prove Himself strong on their behalf? Why would anyone be ready to do questionable things that offend God?

The early Jerusalem Church in the immediate aftermath of ‘Pentecost’ and all that momentous event entailed, is arguably the purest and most pristine expression of the Church of Jesus Christ in all its history. The ‘Spirit-filled’ Apostles were the founding members and God authenticated His message through those Apostles with dramatic, attendant signs and miracles.

Their teaching became the ‘Apostles doctrine’, the guiding word of the Church. It follows then that the early Church is the barometer for ‘church life’ and all succeeding congregations down to our day must look to make applications from the life of that Christian community. This church clearly demonstrated Christ’s intention for His church. From the Book of Acts we realize that the church’s primary mission was to share the gospel “*unto the uttermost part of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). We learn that this imperative to preach the good news about Jesus must withstand ridicule (2:13), doubters (3:11–12) and even coordinated persecution (4:1–3). Yet the first-century church in Jerusalem had its share of problems. It faced leadership succession issues (Acts 1:15–26) and had organizational challenges (6:1–6). The beloved fellowship even suffered from dishonesty concerning financial disclosure (Acts 5:1–11).

Not surprising, one characteristic of that early church was their unrelenting proclamation of the Gospel, with the resurrection of Jesus Christ and future resurrection of all being a central theme of their message, along with a call for repentance. The church was fully committed to apostolic teaching, fellowship, communion and prayer; these disciplines were matters of daily practice, (Acts 2:42-47).

The response from the rulers of Israel to this ‘upstart’ organization was outright hostility to the Gospel message and persecution of its messengers. The church’s response to the persecution is instructive. Interestingly, persecution did not provide the anticipated intimidation and stifling of the budding Christian movement but on the contrary the church grew almost exponentially. Historically, the evidence shows that a persecuted church will be a unified, purified, vibrant and evangelistic community.

Of course, Satan was not about to sit by idly and allow God’s plan of salvation to unfold with such dynamism, enthusiasm and success. External persecution did not produce the desired result and so he attacked the church from the inside. Our Text details the first recorded sin in that body and God’s summary discipline that followed. Here was the first piece of evidence and corroborated in the ensuing centuries of church history that Satan is most effective against God’s people when ‘he goes to church’.



Another characteristic of the early church was the extent of its care and concern for all its members and this is not surprising since this particular concern receives much prominence in God's economy throughout the Old and New Testament. There are two summary descriptions of the state of the church in Jerusalem; the first is found in Acts 2: 42-47 and in part of the Study Text, Acts 4: 32-35. Both Texts summarize and emphasize the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the church; particularly through the Apostles, who were proclaiming salvation through the resurrected Christ. Both Texts emphasize the way the early church shared with those who were in need. In Chapter 4, the sharing seems to have become a bit more formal, as now those who gave 'laid the money at the feet of the Apostles', so that they might distribute the funds to meet needs.

At the point of our Study Text, the focus shifts to the corporate life of the early Jerusalem Church and has generated much discussion, particularly in what is seen as their strong communal orientation and the extent of their care and generosity. The selling of property and sharing of goods to meet the needs of the group has created difficulty for many, who are unsure of the scope of church's responsibility in this area. Still there are others who view the early church's example in this area as something peculiar to that group and not necessarily something for the church at large. On the other hand, the consistency and commitment of this early church to other areas of church life is held up as fine examples for all to follow. So some say that this is communism or socialism and should be adopted by the church. Others deny this position and say that those ideologies are opposed to Christianity and what the Early church did was not close to socialism or communism.

The Text places great emphasis on the unity, community, common purpose and grace of this group ... *And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them [z]claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.*

And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. Thus the actions of the brethren should be viewed in the light of their unmatched unity created by the Holy Spirit's filling. Noteworthy this church was an expression of Jesus' prayer in John 17:21 - *That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

The early church was not, as is too often the case today, simply coming to sit or stand together in close proximity with other Christians, singing the same hymns, listening to the same teachings but having no sense of belonging to one another; they were one! We often see people coming to church every week, year after year, getting some emotional thrill, but never really knowing the people with whom they worship. There is no sense of oneness and in this and other regards, the behaviour of early church is to be emulated.

As we come to our Text, let us consider the corporate life of our congregation and our individual roles, in light of what we will learn from the example of this Spirit filled congregation. While the extent of generosity is striking, let us not overlook the odious nature of sin and the need for discipline among God's people. Sin will not only destroy the individual sinner but it will destroy the church. The little foxes will "spoil" the vine.



THE TEXT

Verse 32. This was a unanimous majority, for they were *of one heart and of one soul*. *Heart* signifies the determined will of these people—they had common desires and aspirations. *Soul* represents the inner self, the life force. The Old Testament uses this combination of terms, “heart and soul,” as Luke does here, to indicate the entire person (Deuteronomy 13:3; Joshua 22:5). In these examples, the people are called to love God with all of their being; they were to leave no part separate to adore any other god. Just as the Church was united in devotion to the Lord, so they were united in showing love through service to one another. The unity of the believers extended beyond spiritual matters to the material. They owned personal possessions, but they did not consider them private possessions. Rather, they viewed their belongings as common (Gr. *koina*, *koinonia*, “fellowship”) property. Customarily they shared what they had with one another (2:44, 46; Deut. 15:4). Their unity manifested itself in a sense of responsibility for one another. Love, not law, compelled them to share (1 John 3:17-18).

The economic situation in Jerusalem was deteriorating at this time due to famine and political unrest. Employment opportunities were declining and unsaved Jews were beginning to put economic and social pressure on the Christians. There was a growing need among the new Christians for basic needs; many would have been ostracized from the synagogue; disinherited and abandoned by family because they accepted Christ.

Verse 33. *And with great power gave:* the ‘great power’ in the witness of the believers was their love for one another (John 13:35), not just their rhetorical and miraculous power.

... *the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus* ... note the central place “the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” occupied in their witness. His resurrection fulfilled prophecy and identified Jesus as the Messiah (2:29-32). Nonbelievers witnessed a community bound by love for one another and heard a life-changing message from their leaders. This is different from the ideologies and political and economic systems in the world. This behavior is based on **love**. We know that no system in this world is based on **agape love**. The world is in the hands of Satanic deception.

... *great grace was upon them all...* the abundant grace that rested upon these Christians was the divine enablement that God granted them to speak and to live in love and unity.

The word **charis** refers to the undeserved favour of God and it means that God is showering these new Christians with blessing. One writer tells us that the word can also refer to the loveliness of harmonious relationships that is involved here for these new Christians were leaving us brothers and sisters and as family.

Verses 34 - 35. The state of the church is best described by the central point being the great unity among the brethren, the wonderful grace on them all and the great power of the apostles’ testimony (vs,32-33).

... *Neither was there any among them that lacked* ... The brethren continued to ensure that the needs of all were met, as individuals sold goods and property and made the funds available to meet individual needs. Note, we are not told that property owners disposed of all their property.

.... *For...*, indicates that what follows is a further explanation of the statement that “*great grace was on them all*. (vs.33)” Note also, the whole exercise was voluntary, there was no compulsion. People gave and donated as need arose and as moved by the Spirit. These changed



lives were not bound up in the goods and vanities of this world but felt an inner compulsion to love the brethren at all cost. They sought those in need, they did not wait for someone else to give, but gave themselves. This was the power displayed by a transformed life. Note that great unity ("*one heart and soul*," vs. 32) leads to empathy with those in need and thus an eagerness to give to meet those needs. Unity expresses itself in community, and community expresses itself in sharing, and in all of this, God's grace is showered on His church.

We must remember that Jesus had shown great concern for the poor and this idea permeates the entire Gospel of Luke. See Luke 4:18-19 40 Jesus expressed the reason for His mission to earth.

...lay them at the apostles' feet... this is a cultural idiom or phrase which means one giving something to another. Seemingly, by this time, the distribution of help was more organized and comprehensive as no one was allowed to 'slip through the cracks'. The ways by which the needs of the poor were met evolved over time as circumstances changed but the principle of meeting those needs however has remained constant to this day. By the time of our Text the brethren had grown to five thousand persons, (4:4). Meeting needs must have been a challenge considering the logistics. One writer points out that the participle used suggests there was a gradual liquidation of assets by the brethren, not sell everything all at once.

Some might misunderstand what was going on in the selling of *lands or houses* to help others but what we see here is not a mandatory precedent, but an example of what believers can do to help fellow Christians who are in need. Such an example risks being ignored in a modern culture where home ownership is seen as almost "a right" and the accumulation of assets seen as a mark of good Christian stewardship. We keep in mind that this passage is written not to defend a culture's economic system but to demonstrate the need for generosity. (Rom.12:9-16).

Some believers however are quite generous, and they treat themselves as stewards of God and their assets as things God has given them in order to help the brethren. Some therefore are not trapped by their wealth. Sadly however we know that some hang on to everything that they have without considering the needs of others. Freedom from control of one's life by material goods would express itself in generosity. One writer gives us some good advice on stewardship: **"Most believers can't make a one-time choice to divest themselves of things and be done with it. Stewardship rightly understood is not a one-time accomplishment. You must make choices today and tomorrow and the next day to ask, "Lord, am I listening to you?" You must be alert to new opportunities that come. Daily this responsibility requires faith, prayer, and attentiveness to God. You have to review decisions you have made, ask the advice of others, seek the insight of the Lord. The responsibility on stewardship, if you let it, will make you mature in faith"**.

Verses. 36 - 37. Here Luke points to a specific example to typify the behavior of the church described generally in verses 32 through 37. (See also Acts 2:42-47). He cites *Joses* or *Joseph*, who was surnamed *Barnabas* by the Apostles. The name given by the 'pillars of the Church' to this man had the special literal, meaning "Son of encouragement". The Jews often called a person "son of ___" to denote his or her characteristics (e.g., "son of Belial"). Likely the Apostles gave *Barnabas* the name because he was a constant source of reliable help, comfort and encouragement as further references to him in Acts will demonstrate (9:27; 11:22-30; 13:1—14:28; 15:2-4, 12, 22, 36-41; 1 Cor. 9:6).



The Greek word translated *consolation* is also rendered “comfort” (Acts 9:31; Romans 15:4; 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4; 7:4) and ‘exhortation’ (Acts 13:15; Romans 12:8; 1 Corinthians 14:3; Hebrews 13:22) in the New Testament. All three translations point to this man’s being very much a “brother that cared”. He was a Levite, a temple worker and native of Cyprus. Barnabas sold a field he owned and brought all the money and gave it to the disciples. Barnabas is well spoken of in the Book of Acts and other places. Later, Luke describes Barnabas: *“He was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith, and much people was added unto the Lord when he came to Antioch, and saw the grace of God, and exhorted them with purpose of heart. They would cleave unto the Lord.”* Barnabas was also the brother of Mary, Mark’s mother. Mark was his nephew, (Acts 12:25; 15:39; 2Tim.4:11).

We are not told how much property he sold but one gathers from the special stress laid on it that Barnabas probably was a man who had some significant possessions and he made his investment in God. The investments that we make for the Lord God are investments that bear everlasting dividends.

Clearly Barnabas was generous and sensitive to the needs of others and was personally willing to take practical steps to help. He voluntarily shared what he had, and he has contributed significantly to the good image we have of people in the early Church.

The language used to describe the gift indicates that Barnabas gave the total amount he received for the land to the Apostles. What we see here is the goodness of a generous spirit. It is often said that Barnabas had a 'stewardship' rather than an 'ownership' view of property. His generosity is again shown in the 1 Corinthians 9:6 passage. Both Barnabas and Paul worked at their trade and supported themselves, while labouring as missionaries. Barnabas and Paul had a right to be supported during their missionary endeavours, but they chose not to make demands on the converts, many of whom were often poor.

Acts 5:1-11

Luke’s account of the early church to this point might have led to the conclusion that the church was a sinless community. Unfortunately, this was not the case. There are sinning saints even here!

The following episode reveals that God was working dramatically in the church's early days in judgment as well as in blessing. Such is the stark truthfulness of the Bible. Luke did not idealize his portrait of the early church but painted an accurate picture, "warts and all."

Verses 1 - 2. *But ...* the information on Barnabas (vs.35-37) provides an excellent backdrop against which the deception of the next two characters we meet, Ananias and Sapphira will be contrasted. Barnabas was a man respected by the church. He was the source of encouragement to many. He saw a need and recognized he had the resources to help and helped! Without any fanfare, he sold his property and gave the Apostles the proceeds to help brethren that had needs. This truly good deed is in stark contrast to the rest of the Study Text.

With the introduction of Ananias and Sapphira, we see two of the same actions we saw regarding Barnabas: a possession is sold and money from the sale is subsequently handed over to the Apostles, but the similarities end there. At first glance this looks like another sacrificial act just as generous as Barnabas' (4:37). However, in this case the motive was quite different. Ananias' Jewish name, Hananiah, means "Yahweh is gracious," and Sapphira's Aramaic name, Sapphira, means "sapphire / beautiful. Their names will prove as ironic as their behavior was



hypocritical. We may note that it was understood broadly that the gift Ananias and Sapphira gave represented the full sum from their property sale; just like Barnabas!

These two obviously coveted the adoration, appreciation and respect Barnabas received for his generosity. They had the freedom to sell or not to sell their personal property (v. 4). They had the freedom to give some or all of it to the Lord's work. They did not have the right to give part, but claim they gave all. Their motives and duplicitous actions revealed their heart (v. 4c; Luke 21:14). God looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Chr. 28:9; Pro. 21:2; Jer. 17:10; Luke 16:15; Acts 1:24; Rom. 8:27).

One writer notes: **“The word translated *kept back* is used in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) in Joshua 7:1. There it is translated “took” in describing Achan’s sin. Luke, the author of Acts, apparently wants the reader to see the connection. Both that passage and the one before us teach sobering lessons about deceit”.**

Ananias was to the early church what Achan was to the Conquest of Canaan. This sin had the potential of hurting the entire church. This term is also used in Titus 2:10 of slaves stealing from their masters.

Verses 3 – 4. Rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to fill him (2:4; 4:8, 31), Ananias allowed Satan to control his heart. However, Ananias was personally responsible for his action. He could not claim: "The devil made me do it." Peter said, "... *you have conceived this deed in your heart.*"

Ananias' sin was lying. He sought to deceive the Christians by trying to gain a reputation for greater generosity than he deserved. Notice that even a kind, generous act, which is done with a bad motive is a sin. (Rom. 14:23).

By his deception, Ananias was also trying to deceive the Holy Spirit who indwelt the church. Consequently, in attempting to deceive the Holy Spirit he was trying to deceive God. Note the important identification of the Holy Spirit as God in these verses. The Holy Spirit is God! A clear statement on the deity of the Holy Spirit is made here. One does not lie to a 'force' or an 'influence'.

Ananias' sin was not in the refusal to give all, but the sin was in the pretense that "part" was "all." It was the sin of hypocrisy. He and his wife were a certain way, but were professing to live in another way. We may note that hypocrisy drew our Lord's unsparing severity, (Matt. 23:13-36). Hypocrisy is a particular form of lying.

One commentator writes: **“Lying to the Holy Spirit is a sin that Christians commit frequently today. When Christians act hypocritically by pretending a devotion that is not theirs, or a surrender of life they have not really made, they lie to the Holy Spirit. If God acted today as He did in the early Jerusalem church, undertakers would have much more work than they do.”**

Peter's accusation *thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God* repeats and emphasizes the accusation of sinning against the Deity. This also betrays Ananias's lack of belief in the ability of God to be aware of such an attempt. The masquerade further betrays that Ananias's lack of belief in the Holy Spirit's power to work His will in the church.

Thus we are struck by the absurdity of attempting to lie to God. God always knows the truth and will never be fooled by human deception. Yet Ananias carried out a plan that depended on God's not knowing and/or not caring! Peter's condemnation came in stark terms—and Peter



himself knew what it was like to be accused of being under the influence of Satan (see Matthew 4:10; compare Luke 22:3).

The property Ananias and Sapphira sold was their own. The two could have kept either the property or all the money from its sale. They could have chosen to donate a portion of the proceeds while openly keeping the remainder for themselves. Owning property, making money from the sale of assets, and deciding how much to give to the work of God's kingdom are all personal matters. Even so, the choices people make in this regard have a way of revealing the nature of their relationship with God.

One writer notes: **"Like Judas, Ananias was covetous; and just as greed of gain lay at the bottom of most of the sins and failures in the Acts—the sin of Simon Magus, the opposition of Elymas, of the Philippian 'masters' and the Ephesian silversmiths, the shortcomings of the Ephesian converts and the injustice of Felix—so Ananias kept back part of the price."**

Lying to the Holy Spirit is a sin that Christians commit frequently today. When Christians act hypocritically by pretending a devotion that is not theirs, or a surrender of life they have not really made, they lie to the Holy Spirit. If God acted today as He did in the early Jerusalem church, undertakers would have much more work than they do.

"Those that boast of good works they never did, or promise good works they never do, or make the good works they do more or better than really they are, come under the guilt of Ananias's lie."

Acts clearly presents the Holy Spirit as a *Person* who can be lied to (v.3), tested (v. 9), who bears witness (v. 32), is resisted (7:51), gives orders (8:29; 10:19; 13:2), refuses permission (16:7), and speaks (28:25)."

Verses 5 - 6. ... *fell down, and gave up the ghost*: ... Peter identified Ananias' sin, but God was the judge and executioner. The Apostle did not take the lives of Ananias and later Sapphira, nor did he pronounce a death sentence on Ananias. God, not Peter took the lives of Ananias and Sapphira. Peter rebuked Ananias for his sin, but he did not pronounce sentence on him. He left this matter to God.

Notably one writer cautions: **"We should not interpret the fact that God rarely deals with sinners this way as evidence that He cannot or should not. He does not out of mercy. He dealt with Ananias and Sapphira, Achan, Nadab and Abihu, and others severely when He began to deal with various groups of believers. He did so for those who would follow in the train of those judged to illustrate how important it is for God's people to be holy (1 Cor. 10:6).**

Furthermore, God always deals more severely with those who have greater privilege and responsibility, (Luke 12:48; 1 Pet. 4:17)."

... *great fear came on all them that heard these things*... The death of Ananias and his wife had a profound impact on the church, as well as on those outside the faith (vs.13). Fear is sometimes an unfaithful reaction, as when it causes a person to act without faith in God. But in this case, the fear seems to be of the type that causes greater respect for God. Though this reaction may have been limited to believers, likely others living in Jerusalem also *heard* the tale and were afraid.

The reaction was fear of God's wrath rather than indignation on behalf of the dead man. The fear that came on those present and those who later heard of this incident must also be due in



part to the dawning awareness of how serious God is about the purity of His church. God wants people to see their role in maintaining the purity of the church.

It is easy to make a connection here with God's judgment on the Israelites when they entered the Promised Land, because of the sin of Achan, ([Joshua 7:11-26](#)).

... *carried him out, and buried him....* Immediate burial was common in Palestine at this time, as the burial of Jesus illustrates. Evidently some of the younger and stronger believers disposed of Ananias' corpse by preparing it for burial. Many people were buried in caves or holes in the ground that had been previously prepared for this purpose, as we see in the burials of Lazarus and Jesus.

Burial in such a climate necessarily followed quickly after death.

Verses 7 - 8. ... *about the space three hours* ... this shows the vividness of the account by an eyewitness. Luke's writing is characterized by this attention to details. It reflects both his writing style and research methods (i.e., interviews with eyewitnesses).

Somehow Sapphira arrived unaware of her husband's tragic fate. Since she showed up *not knowing what was done*, she had exactly the same chance to come clean by truthfully answering Peter's question that we see in the next verse. Note, Peter graciously gave Sapphira an opportunity to tell the truth, an opportunity to confess her role in the sin and thus to distance herself from divine discipline. He did not warn her ahead of time by mentioning her husband's death because he wanted her to speak honestly. She added a spoken lie to hypocrisy.

God is as much or even more interested in the attitude of the giver as He is in the gift itself, ([Psalm 51:17](#); [Hosea 6:6](#); [Matthew 9:13](#); [2 Corinthians 8:12](#)). Many do not learn this lesson; ulterior motives in giving still exist today. Those who are clever in this regard can fool others, since the Holy Spirit may choose not to reveal the sin. If the impure motive is for recognition or an attempt to get one's way, these ends may be realized. The reality, though, is that such deceivers receive only that recognition as their reward (see [Matthew 6:2](#)) and they incur God's displeasure.

Verses 9 - 10. *Then Peter said unto her* ... immediately after Sapphira's lie, Peter revealed that he knew all about the conspiracy *to tempt the Spirit of the Lord*. A temptation to sin is not what is in view ([Matthew 4:1-11](#)). The idea, rather, is a testing of the Holy Spirit. Putting God to the test means seeing how far one can go in disobeying God before He will judge in this case lying to Him. This is very risky business. Those who test the patience of God play a dangerous game, a fool's game. *Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah.* (Deut. 6:16; see Matt. 4:7),

There are two Greek terms used to denote a test. This one connotes "to test with a view toward destruction." This possibly reflects Exod. 17:2 and Deut. 6:16, where these texts warn against tempting/testing YHWH (Ps. 78:18,41,56).

Testing God is forbidden ([Matthew 4:7](#); [Deuteronomy 6:16](#)]; [1 Corinthians 10:9](#)). Yet challenging authority seems to be part of human nature. Children test parents by stepping as close to boundaries as possible. Throughout the Old Testament, we see the nation of Israel testing the patience of God time and again ([Exodus 17:1-7](#)).

Some readers of Acts have criticized Peter for dealing with Sapphira and Ananias so harshly. Nevertheless, the Text clearly indicates that in these matters Peter was under the Holy Spirit's control (4:31) even as Ananias and Sapphira were under Satan's control (v. 3). Peter was God's



agent of blessing in providing healing to people (3:6), but he was also God's instrument to bring judgment on others, as Jesus Christ had done.

Peter might be regarded as severe, and the fate of the two delinquents shocking, but in reality this is God making a clear statement about the purity He requires in His church at the very outset of its history. Here “...**for the first time in the community of the saints two persons set out deliberately to deceive their leaders and their friends, to build a reputation for sanctity and sacrifice to which they had no right, and to menace, in so doing, all love, all trust, all sincerity. And not only was the sin against human brotherhood, but against the Spirit of God, so recently and powerfully manifest in the Church.**”

Verse 11. *great fear* ... for believers it is a sense of reverence, respect, and awe, (Luke 1:69; 3:37;

Acts 19:17) but for unbelievers it is a sense of foreboding, fear, and terror (Luke 12:4-5; Heb. 10:31).

The community *fear* caused by Ananias and Sapphira's deaths intensified. Surely the people wondered what was going on in this fellowship! No one seemed to question that God had acted in a powerful, judicial way. Barnabas encouraged all who aspired to be generous; Ananias and Sapphira terrified all who believed they could fool God and the church with false piety and lies. ... *church*... (Gk = *ekklesia*, means "called out assembly") this is the first time this term is used in Acts.

It was a common word that writers often used to describe assemblies of people that congregated for political and various other types of meetings. The word 'church' can refer to more than one thing. Sometimes it refers to the body of Christ as it has existed throughout history, the *universal* church. Sometimes it refers to Christians living in various places during one particular period of time

(e.g., the *early* church). Sometimes it refers to a group of Christians who live in one area at a particular time, a *local* church. Here it seems to refer to the local church in Jerusalem.

CONCLUSION

We learn from our Study that the choices we make have consequences. One writer warns us: **“We become what we choose. Actions become patterns, patterns become conviction, and conviction finally becomes character. Not only do the choices we make form us, but they also influence others. Everybody around us is altered, challenged or given hope by the choices we make. So it is important to take seriously the opportunities we have and how we will pursue them”.**

It is clear that Barnabas's choices lead to something beautiful for you caused Butte and righteousness to grow in other people. His choice was to be generous and helpful to others and so he was nicknamed “Son of encouragement”.

Are you like that? You should be like Barnabas. Liking you have the Holy Spirit living inside you, guiding you, changing you, and transforming you into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It seems clear however that there is a warning as to how we deal with weaknesses. Some people nowadays consider everything wrong that is done as a sickness. But certainly Peter did not think that. Avarice or greediness, alcoholism, drug addiction, gluttony, and other vices are often considered in our modern world as a sickness.



But when you look at it carefully you realize that that is simply foolishness for God declares that these things are sins. Whenever you do anything that displeases God you are committing a sin. That is why God makes provision in the Word He gives to us that those who are concerned over them have deliverance. He has established the way to have forgiveness, the way of confession, and restoration.

But we must admit that we often have great difficulty with thinking the way that God does. We may rightly conclude from our Text that giving is a by-product and outgrowth of Christian unity. Our Text begins with Luke's description of the church at Jerusalem as being of "*one heart and mind*" (Acts 4:32). Sharing flows from and enhances unity.

Jesus called on all men who would follow Him to give up accumulating and fixing our hearts on material things as a goal. Jesus warns on making possessions as our god, He called on some persons to sell all they had. This was for the good of those so directed, like the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:19-21). Men could not serve two masters and thus if money were the master of a man, Jesus called on him to get rid of it so that He could be His master.

While we may not understand exactly how the Spirit works in the Church or His purpose all the time, Church business is serious business. Faith and fraud cannot coexist. For this reason, when we allow the Spirit to lead us, we will be genuine givers like Barnabas, not sly and deceitful like Ananias and Sapphira. Dishonesty within the church can destroy it entirely and must be dealt with severely. The very thought of doing a good deed to receive kudos and honors violates the spirit of charity. As Jesus taught, when we give for relief of the poor, it should be so private that our left hand doesn't know about the money our right hand put in the offering basket (Matthew 6:3). This requires a delicate balance of being a witness at the same time (5:16). But when we yield our hearts to the Spirit, we know that he sees our deeds and blesses them (6:4). We should look past the idea that giving is restricted to cash on hand. Our Text makes it very clear that we should consider all our possessions as potential resources for sharing with those in need. All too often we tend to think of our giving only in terms of what is left at the end of the month. Our Text corrects this kind of thinking. All our possessions are potential resources to meet the needs of others. We may have an extra car, which we can give, loan, or sell to help a brother or sister in need.

Sharing should not be limited to material possessions. We should also be liberal in giving our time, our energies and our spiritual gifts to those whose needs we can meet.

Giving is a form of encouragement. Barnabas sold his property and gave the proceeds to the Apostles to meet the needs of others and Luke is careful to inform us that Barnabas was known as the "Son of encouragement." How often a gift to one in need can be an encouragement to them. Many have been greatly encouraged in an hour of need by a timely gift, given in Jesus' name. It says, "God cares about you, and so do we."

Our Text underscores the necessity and importance of maintaining purity in the local church. Sin that is tolerated in the church corrupts the church.

It must be removed, for the sake of holiness, for the sake of the sinner, for the sake of the Gospel and for the good of the Church. Our Text may be the first instance of discipline in the early Church and it is meant to teach us the necessity of maintaining purity in the Church. If we take the sin of Ananias and Sapphira lightly and are shocked at the severity of God's response to their hypocrisy, we need to better appreciate God's holiness and abhorrence of sin.



The Text is a reminder of God's displeasure with hypocrisy. There is no attempt in our Text to scare us into giving. Ananias and Sapphira did not have to sell their property, nor did they need to give any of the proceeds of the sale to the church. They were not disciplined for "holding back" on God; they were disciplined for their hypocrisy, for lying to the church and to the Holy Spirit. Ananias and Sapphira sinned by trying to appear more pious than they were and this by lying about the amount of their gift.

Let us allow the Holy Spirit free reign in our lives, be filled with the Holy Spirit and allow Him to foster the unity we read of in our Text. Let us be sensitive to the needs of others and give generously to meet those needs with the right motivation. At the same time we would do well to give serious thought to the ways in which we mask our sins and seek to look more pious than we really are. Let Ananias and Sapphira be a warning to us that God hates hypocrisy.

