

FPFWC Christian Development



Godly Love Among Believers

November 2020

Fall Quarter

November 21, 2020

Lesson #4 – Responsive Love

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Acts 4:32-37; Acts 5:1-11

Key Verse - The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.—Acts 4:32

ICE BREAKERS –

1. What do we tend to hold back from the Lord?
2. How does this lesson challenge us today?

LESSON BACKGROUND

Luke and Acts comprise a two-volume work written by a single author, assumed to be Luke, the physician and companion of Paul (Colossians 4:14). The first volume, the Gospel of Luke, tells the story of Jesus: His birth, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection. The second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, tells the story of the first-century church, beginning in Jerusalem and ending with Paul's arrival in the imperial capital city, Rome.

We look to the book of Acts to understand the nature of the church in its infancy. By so doing, we hope to understand better Christ's intention for His church, as enacted through His trusted apostles, and thereby understand what the church should be today. From Acts we realize the church's primary mission: 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 (example: 2:13), doubters (example: 3:11–12), and even coordinated persecution (example: 4:1–3).

Yet the first-century church in Jerusalem had its share of problems. It faced leadership succession issues (Acts 1:15–26). It had organizational challenges (6:1–6). The beloved fellowship even suffered from dishonesty concerning financial disclosure.

LESSON COMMENTARY –

4:32–35. In this brief paragraph, Luke delineated one of the effects of the Holy Spirit's power in the early church. There was not only remarkable courage to testify regarding the identity of Jesus and to perform miracles to validate what they said about Him, but the Spirit also produced a remarkable unity and love in the church that resulted in a generous sharing of their resources. The sharing was voluntary not compulsory, being compelled by love not law (note Peter's question to Annanias, "While it remained unsold did it not remain your own? And after it was

sold, was it not under your control?" (Ac 5:4). It is charity of the heart. The expression, **and lay them at the apostles' feet**, means they placed their resources under the control of the apostles.

4:36–37. Luke focused on Joseph, nicknamed Barnabas, which means **Son of Encouragement**, and presented three characteristics of Barnabas. First, he was a Levite, the tribe that assisted the priests in their service in the temple (see Nm 3:5–14). Second, he was from Cyprus, so he was a Hellenist rather than a Jew from the land of Israel. He returned to Cyprus with Paul on the first missionary journey. Third, he was affluent enough to own property, which he sold and gave to the church.

Internal Corruption: Deception of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11)

The dishonesty and death of Ananias and Sapphira is a vivid and ugly contrast with the generosity and integrity of Barnabas. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira is similar to the sin of Achan (cf. Jos 7:25). F. F. Bruce says that in both the OT and NT narratives an act of deceit interrupts the victorious progress of the people of God (*Acts*, 110). Bruce also identifies the linguistic connection between the two passages. He notes that the word translated **kept back** (*enosphisato*, "to skim off the top" or "embezzle") in 5:2 is the same word used in the LXX in Jos 7:1 where it says, "The sons of Israel ... took" for their own use (*enosphisanto*) some of the things under the ban which had been set aside strictly for God (Bruce, *Acts*, 110). In the same way that Achan's sin had disastrous implications for all Israel, so the early church's unity and care was put in peril because of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. Although God does not always treat dishonesty and embezzling with a death penalty (Achan) or by striking someone dead (Ananias and Sapphira), He acted thus in both of these cases at the outset of Israel's history in the land and the beginning of the church to demonstrate the severity with which He takes these sins.

5:1–2. Perhaps motivated by the example of Barnabas, Ananias and Sapphira sold property, but instead of giving it all to the church as promised, Ananias **kept back** some of the money with his wife's full knowledge.

5:3–4. The Holy Spirit made Peter aware of their dishonesty supernaturally. Though Ananias had lied to the church, in v. 3 Peter charged him with lying to the Holy Spirit, and in v. 4 to God. The theological implication of Peter's charge is that God dwells in the corporate church through individual believers filled with the Spirit. Ananias was not filled with the Spirit but with Satan. The verb **filled** (*eplerosen*) has reference to the idea of control or influence. It is the same verb used in Eph 5:18, "be filled with the Spirit." Ananias was influenced by Satan rather than by the Spirit. The sin of greed apparently gave Satan an opportunity to influence Ananias. Luke did hang the responsibility also upon Ananias in 5:4, and the influence of the

devil did not absolve him of the culpability for this act, which was a sin against the fellowship and care of the church.

5:5–6. When his sin was exposed, Ananias collapsed and died. His death was divine judgment, not psychological trauma. The verb translated **breathed his last** is used only in the context where someone is struck down by divine judgment (cf. Ac 5:5, 10; see 12:23 where God struck down Herod because he accepted worship as a god) (Longenecker, “Acts,” 314). Because of the rapid decomposition in the heat, the body was removed quickly for burial.

5:7–10. A short time later Peter confronted Sapphira, who was unaware of her husband’s death. Peter asked her if what they had given was the amount they had gained. As did her husband, she lied and collapsed at Peter’s feet. Like that of her husband, her body is quickly removed for burial.

5:11. What is the impact of the divine judgment on Ananias and Sapphira? Luke said **great fear came over the whole church**. For the first time in Acts, Luke used the term **church** (*ekklesia*), which typically, in secular Greek, refers to an assembly of people. This early in Luke’s history it probably did not have the full-blown technical sense it would have, e.g., in 20:28. **Fear** is not so much an emotional response as it is awe or respect for the Lord, though an element of psychological fear is undoubtedly present in this situation. This incident stands as a frightening warning against sin in *and against* the body of Christ. Though this is a unique example of God dealing severely and suddenly with believers, the judgment on Ananias and Sapphira shows how seriously God takes sin. The Lord wants believers to honor and serve Him in truth and with integrity, and failure to do so can disrupt the flow of harmony and care He intends for the church (see Eph 4:25–28).

LESSON NUGGET – Barnabas’s gift (4:36-37) exposed the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, just as Mary’s gift exposed Judas’s sin (John 12). The couple lied to the Spirit, to the church, and to Peter; and it cost them their lives. Their sin was not in taking money from God but in pretending to be something they were not.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*