

Acts 4:32

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. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.

John D Rockefeller was one of the wealthiest men of his time. A reporter once asked him, "Mr. Rockefeller, you have so much money, 'How much is enough?'" Rockefeller's response has become legendary, he said, "Just a little bit more."

Rockefeller's desire to gain wealth was his god. When he died, another reporter stopped his accountant and asked, "How much did Mr. Rockefeller leave in his estate?" The accountant's response has also become legendary, he said, "All of it."

When I was a child I learned a little saying that went something like this:

"Only one life, twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."

At the end of chapter 4 of the book of Acts, Luke tells us again of the communal style of living that occurred in the early church. Let's begin with verse 32 of chapter 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.

This early body of believers operated like a well oiled machine. There appeared to be unselfishness and generosity to the degree that most of us can not understand today. They weren't discussing whether they should tithe 10% off their net or their gross, the verse says that not one of them claimed that anything belonged to anyone but rather that all things were common property.

It is a vivid portrayal of a group pulling together and meeting each others needs in very real ways.

Many of us have what we call our prized possessions. Each of us has them.

Let me ask you a question, “Does God want us to be attached to the things that we own?”

Sometimes, our possessions become more important to us than the people around us. But when the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives, we realize that people are important not things. The early church knew that and so they were willing to find ways to help those who were in need.

Look at verse 33.

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.

What was going on here? Well, as people were coming to Jerusalem and hearing the apostles preach the Word of God and as they witnessed the Power of the Holy Spirit, they began to get saved. As more and more were saved, they chose to stay in Jerusalem rather than go back to their homes. So these people had needs.

The church met these needs by selling their own possessions including their houses and land to raise money to meet the needs of the thousands who were now part of the body of Christ.

This wasn't political communism. What these believers did was purely voluntary and motivated by love.

When the Holy Spirit is at work, giving is not a burden, it is a blessing.

I was surprised to learn that 1/3 of the parables that Jesus taught addressed the subject of money. It was also interesting to me that 1/6 of the all the verses in the first 4 books of the New Testament deal directly with the subject of money.

Larry Burkett said that Jesus dealt with money matters because money matters.

God has given us 3 ways on this earth to invest in eternity. Two of them are discussed all the time and no one complains at all. The first is how we should use our time. Time is one of those irretrievable values in life that you can never get back.

The second is how we should use our talents. God has given each believer certain talents and we are encouraged to use them.

The third way to invest in eternity is how we should use our treasure. And if the pastor preaches a sermon on giving you can be sure that the church will get letters that week saying that all Christians ever do is ask for money.

Why is that?

While the early church's generosity is worthy of our emulation, communal living is not an area that is meant for us today. It is not mentioned anywhere else in scripture and is certainly not taught as a practice to be continued. We are not instructed to bring our money and lay it at the pastor's feet.

Next Barnabas is introduced. Look at verse 36.

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.

Over the course of our study we will come to learn a lot about Barnabas. Let's first take note that he was a Levite from Cyprus. Interestingly, Levites, according to Numbers 18:20 were not permitted to own land. So it is unclear why Barnabas owned this land or how

he acquired it. What ever the reason he did come to own it, he decided to sell it and give all of the money to the apostles.

Secondly, we notice that his name, Barnabas, meant Son of Encouragement. His name described his ministry. At least 25 times in the New Testament you will read that Barnabas was using his gift to encourage someone. He certainly encouraged Paul and we will study that as we continue looking through the Book of Acts.

Now that we have been introduced to Barnabas, Luke immediately turns our attention to one of the most sobering stories in the Bible and it is found at the beginning of Acts 5. I'd like to read the entire story and then go back and discuss it. So let's begin with verse 1 of Acts 5.

1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 2 and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? 4 "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." 5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. 6 The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.

7 Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price." 9 Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well." 10 And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

Barnabas demonstrated a most generous act. What do you think the reaction of the people was to his act?

What do you think went through the minds of Ananias and Sapphira?

It is interesting to see the sequence of events. Following Pentecost, thousands of people came to know Christ. What do you think Satan's reaction was?

Then Peter and John heal the lame man. What does Satan do?

Since Satan couldn't disrupt the church using outside forces, he turns to disruption using inside forces. The most powerful one ever created – Hypocrisy.

What is hypocrisy?

Hypocrisy was a word used by the Greeks to describe an actor who had not fully identified himself. All actors are hypocrites because they are playing people who are really not themselves. Often the Greeks would use masks for actors to play different roles. And therefore, a hypocrite is literally one who hides behind a mask.

So what is a religious hypocrite?

We might say it is a spiritual play-actor playing for selfish gain. Someone who is faking their commitment to Christ in order to gain favor or power or money from someone else.

Why would such a person do that?

Notice the first word of chapter 5 is "But." Ananias and Sapphira evidently saw the response to Barnabas' sacrifice and generosity and coveted it. No where in scripture does it say that these two were not believers. In fact, I believe that they were Christians. What do you think?

The fact is that Ananias and Sapphira copied the act of Barnabas. They both sold a piece of land that they owned and laid money at the feet of the apostles.

“But” their act was one of hypocrisy while Barnabas’ act was done with pure motives. They sought to bring glory to themselves and in so doing they suffered the judgment of God.

There are a couple of things that I want to point out in the verses. First notice verses 1 – 4 again.

1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 2 and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? 4 "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

The doctrine of the trinity is sometimes difficult to explain to new believers especially when there is no one place in the Bible that explains it clearly. So let’s take just a minute here to go through the doctrine of the trinity because these 4 verses are the clearest verses in the Bible that specifically state that the Holy Spirit is God.

Keep your fingers in Acts 5 and turn to the first verse of the Bible, Gen 1:1. It says,

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

Skip down to verse 26

26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds

of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

So God the Father creates the heavens and the earth. Then in verse 26 the pronoun changes to us. The verse says, "Let Us make man in Our image."

So who is the "us"?

Turn over to John 1:1

John 1:1

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5 The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Skip down to verse 14.

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" 16 For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

You say, yes but did Jesus ever claim to be God? The answer is yes. Turn back to Ex 3:13-14

You will remember that Moses was getting the 10 commandments and was asking God his name. Here is what he says in Ex 3: 13.

13 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.'"

Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Now turn back to John 8. In John 8 Jesus found himself being questioned about who he was and his answer almost got him stoned. Look at John 8 beginning in verse 57.

57 So the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" 58 Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM." 59 Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.

Why did they want to stone him?

And now back to Acts 5. Peter says to Ananias that Satan has caused him to lie to the Holy Spirit in verse 3. Then in verse 4 Peter says, you have not lied to men but to God.

3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? 4 "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

Although complicated the Bible does teach the doctrine of the trinity. I know that was a rabbit trail but I hope it was helpful for some of you.

Ananias lied to God and Peter confronted his sin. There are several examples in scripture where saints confront the sin of others directly. Can you think of any?

Nathan confronted David. Elisha confronted Gehazi. Nehemiah confronted the Jews.

In this case, God's judgment was quick. Look at verse 5.

5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. 6 The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.

In recent years the church has faced a number of very public situations regarding leaders who turned out to be hypocrites: Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart, and most recently Ted Haggard. Satan will attack from outside and inside to try to destroy the church.

What do we learn from this lesson of Ananias and Sapphira?

For me it about responsibility and accountability.

First, we are responsible to ourselves. Our motives and our personal integrity are things we need to take seriously. And once you lose your integrity it is hard to get it back.

Second, we are responsible to God. When we sin, and I know I'm not the only one...we need to go to God and confess our sin. The Bible says if we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive our sin and cleans us from all unrighteousness.

Finally, we are responsible to each other. No one lives to himself or herself. We are all in this together. Each of us needs an accountability partner. Someone who asks us how we're doing with our spiritual walk. Someone willing to dig deeper than just a surface, "How's it going?"

This is a serious subject; one that I know God takes very seriously. I hope you will take it seriously too.