

~ACTS~

Lesson 18- Truth and Deception within the Church

Since chapter 2 in the book of Acts, we have seen persecution building against the Church. It started with mocking those who were filled with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, then those who were baptized on that day began to be put out of the synagogues and they were losing their jobs, John 9:22, then it escalated to physical abuse in chapter 4 when Peter and John were arrested and tried before the Sanhedrin council. And as a result of this council, the supreme court of Judea decreed that it was illegal to preach and teach in the Name of Jesus. This gives rise to much more persecution against the Church that we will read about as we continue through the book of Acts. But in addition to this physical persecution, which hasn't stopped and still continues today, we are now going to see Satan begin another tactic to try and destroy the Church. And that is to infiltrate the Church from within. The New Testament is filled with these warnings of deceivers within the Church because in many cases, these deceivers, these hidden reefs in our love feasts as Jude describes them, Jude 12, can do more harm than the exterior threats of physical persecution. So starting in chapter 5, we see the first instance of this infiltration into the Church, but before this, Luke sets the stage to show a comparison between the True believers and those seeking to destroy the Church from within. Starting at the end of chapter 4, Luke gives us the example of Barnabas and his holy and acceptable gift, and then in chapter 5 he contrasts this with a profane offering of pride and selfishness with Ananias and Sapphira. So let's read our text for today starting in **Acts 4:32 – 5:11**.

We begin this section as Luke reminds us of the continuous Fellowship that the early church had. By now we estimate that there are at least 10,000 members in the Body of Christ and just as at the end of chapter 2, the Brethren are still with one mind and one accord. Look at verse 32...

32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

32 Τοῦ δὲ πλήθους τῶν πιστευσάντων ἦν ἡ καρδία καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ μία· καὶ οὐδ' εἷς τι τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῶ ἔλεγεν ἴδιον εἶναι, ἀλλ' ἦν αὐτοῖς ἅπαντα κοινά.

Even though the numbers in the Church are growing, their like-mindedness stays fixed on Jesus Christ. Luke says they are **of one heart and one soul... and they had all things in common**. This is true Fellowship among the Brethren and we saw this start on the Day of Pentecost in **Acts 2:41-45**. This word “common,” both in Acts 2:44 and 4:32 is the word *κοινός*, which is the root word for Koinonia Fellowship. Another way we can say this is that “they shared all things in Fellowship with one another.” They did not consider their possessions as belonging to just them, but as something they would share as anyone had need. But notice its not just the possessions that they are sharing. It is their life, this is what True Koinonia Fellowship is. It's a sharing of life in Jesus Christ with one another. They are in one Fellowship, one heart, one soul, one body in Christ. This is the unity that Paul speaks of in **Ephesians 4:4-6; John 17:21-23**. It is out from this oneness of Fellowship that the gospel is proclaimed to the world. Look at verse 33...

33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.

33 καὶ μεγάλη δυνάμει ἀπεδίδουν τὸ μαρτύριον οἱ ἀπόστολοι τῆς ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, χάρις τε μεγάλη ἦν ἐπὶ πάντας αὐτούς.

The Apostles are going out being witnesses of Jesus Christ. Luke says **the Apostles gave witness to the resurrection...** This word “gave” is *ἀποδίδωμι*. It has the sense of giving back, to repay, to render, to give away as you yield. Notice what's happening in this church, they are of one mind, in one accord, sharing in Koinonia Fellowship, filled with the Spirit and then out from this oneness, as the Word of God is pouring into them, they are giving out of their abundance and preaching the Word with boldness and proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And they are doing this being filled with great dunamis power and great grace from the Holy Spirit.

Then verses 34-35 continue describing their physical needs being met as they share with one another...

34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, **35** and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

³⁴ οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐνδεής τις ὑπῆρχεν ἐν αὐτοῖς· ὅσοι γὰρ κτήτορες χωρίων ἢ οἰκιῶν ὑπῆρχον, πωλοῦντες ἔφερον τὰς τιμὰς τῶν πιπρασκομένων, ³⁵ καὶ ἐτίθουν παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τῶν ἀποστόλων· διεδίδωτο δὲ ἐκάστῳ καθότι ἂν τις χρεῖαν εἶχεν.

Through the oneness of Fellowship with each other, the church's needs were being met. Luke says, "**Nor was there anyone among them who lacked.**" A major contribution to this was that wealthy people within the Church were selling their property and giving the proceeds to the Church. This wasn't a mandatory thing that the Apostles were requiring, but out of their deep love for one another, no one considered their possessions as their own, Acts 4:32. This kind of generosity was completely voluntary and it is made clear when Peter is speaking with Ananias in Acts 5:4. It is clear that this disbursement wasn't done all at one time. It was happening from time to time as anyone had need. This was an ongoing process as people would join the Church, they saw the needs of the people and the wealthy would sell their possessions and bring the proceeds to the Apostles. And each gift was dealt with individually and it was distributed as each one had need. This wasn't communism. They weren't putting everything in a big pot and then dividing it up equally. The selling and distribution was being done on a case by case basis. And we see an example of this in verse 35, the word distributed is *διαδίδωμι*. It means to thoroughly distribute. And Luke writes this word as a passive singular. It's singular because these gifts were dealt with on an individual basis. So we could translate it as, "... (the gift, singular) was distributed to each individual as anyone had need." Each gift was dealt with on an individual basis and was decided by the Apostles how it would be disbursed based on the needs at that particular time. And again, this was not mandatory, it was completely voluntary, and the people were giving out of their love for God and the Brethren. And because the gift was dealt with individually, this meant that everyone knew who had given it. And this is what gave rise to Ananias and Sapphira's greed. They wanted all the glory to go to them. Now in verses 36-37, Luke gives us an example of one of these instances...

36 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, **37** having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

³⁶ Ἰωσῆς δὲ, ὁ ἐπικληθεὶς Βαρνάβᾶς ὑπὸ τῶν ἀποστόλων (ὃ ἐστὶ, μεθερμηνευόμενον, υἱὸς παρακλήσεως), λευΐτης, Κύπριος τῷ γένει, ³⁷ ὑπάρχοντος αὐτῷ ἀγροῦ, πωλήσας ἤνεγκε τὸ χρῆμα, καὶ ἔθηκε παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τῶν ἀποστόλων.

This is the first mention of Barnabas in the book of Acts and as we progress through this book we will see Barnabas mentioned many times and he is always portrayed as a faithful believer. An example of this is in Acts 11:22-24. His name at birth was Joses or Joseph, but the Apostles began calling him by the name of Barnabas, which means son of encouragement. This word encouragement has a deeper meaning in the Greek. It is the word *παράκλησις*. It literally means "to call alongside, to comfort, to exhort." This word is derived from the same name Jesus used for the Holy Spirit, *παράκλητος*, Paraklete. The Apostles were there with Jesus when He called the Holy Spirit the *παράκλητος*, Paraklete, the Comforter, and now these same Apostles are giving Barnabas the name that means son of comfort, son of *παράκλησις*. So the Apostles viewed this man very highly.

Barnabas was born and raised in Cyprus, and his family owned land in Cyprus. He was a Jew, from the tribe of Levi, and according to William Cave, he was brought to Jerusalem at a young age to be trained in the knowledge of the Law under the tutorage of Gamaliel alongside the Apostle Paul. This may be why we see a close friendship between Barnabas and Paul in Damascus and Antioch and the early travels of

Paul. Do you remember it was Barnabas that introduced Paul to the Apostles in Jerusalem, Acts 9:27. It was Barnabas who went and got Paul in Tarsus and brought him to Antioch, Acts 11:22-26. Barnabas and Paul brought relief to the Jerusalem church during the famine, Acts 11:27-30. And it was Paul and Barnabas that launched the first missionary journey to the Gentiles, Acts 13:1-2. And because Barnabas was from Cyprus, this is probably why Paul and Barnabas went to Cyprus first on their first missionary journey, Acts 13:4. And then after this first journey, Paul and Barnabas initiated the Jerusalem Council which becomes a major milestone in Church history, Acts 15:1-2. Paul and Barnabas are described as men who risked their lives for the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Acts 15:26. Barnabas, was a Godly man, and he saw the needs of the Brethren and sold his land in Cyprus and laid it at the Apostles feet for them to distribute the proceeds as they see fit.

This example of a charitable gift ends chapter 4, and notice chapter 5 begins with a contrasting comparison. Luke begins chapter 5 with the phrase... “But a certain man named Ananias...”

Now, before we begin looking at the story of Ananias and Sapphira, I have to admit I have wrestled with this passage for many years because I do not believe God does bad things to His children and He certainly does not kill them, John 10:10. So I knew if I ever taught the book of Acts, I would have to address this passage, and that is the beautiful thing about teaching verse by verse, it forces the expositor to deal with every verse as it comes up, you can't dodge the hard verses. And so a couple of months ago, knowing this day would come, I began asking God to reveal to me the Truth behind this account. So as I sought God about this, and He was so faithful to me, He began showing me accounts in other parts of the Bible that revealed the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira. And as I began understanding their hearts and the motivation behind their sin, this story started to become clearer to me and by pressing into the hard things in Scripture and trusting God, I have gained a better understanding of not only Ananias and Sapphira, but the character of our God. Because it is through this account that teaches us what a Good and Loving Shepherd we have. And it also teaches that God is Righteous and serious about holiness and the purity of His Church.

There are many differing opinions about this account of Ananias and Sapphira. I am going to explain this to you the way I see it from Scripture, but I would encourage each of you not to take my word for it. Don't believe Zack Rosiere, be like the Bereans and search the Scriptures for yourselves so you can make your own decision about this text. But I'm going to give you my opinions on how I see this so let's begin by reading the first two verses in chapter 5...

5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. **2** And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.

5:1 Ἄνθρωπος δὲ τις Ἀνανίας ὀνόματι, σὺν Σαπφείρῃ τῇ γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ, ἐπώλησε κτῆμα,
2 καὶ ἐνοσφίσατο ἀπὸ τῆς τιμῆς, συνειδυίας καὶ τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐνέγκας μέρος τι παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τῶν ἀποστόλων ἔθηκεν.

Luke tells us that this husband and wife team, Ananias and Sapphira, they premeditated a plan together to sell a piece of land and give it to the Church. But instead of bringing all the money to the Apostles, their plan was to keep back a portion of it for themselves and not give everything to the Church. Now that in and of itself is not a sin. The Apostles did not make this mandatory to sell their possessions and they didn't make it mandatory to bring 100% of the proceeds to them. This giving was completely voluntary. So holding back a portion of the proceeds wasn't the sin, the sin was the fact that they lied and said they were giving everything to the Church, but they deceivingly held back a portion for themselves. This is the sin of hypocrisy, saying they were doing something that they weren't, and pretending to be somebody they really were not. They were exalting themselves in pride and greed. And in addition, they were doing this with an offering to God. God hates the sin of lying and He hates the sin of hypocrisy, but even more so, when this liar profanes His holiness by offering an abomination on the alter to God, this infuriates

Him. And that is what Ananias and Sapphira are doing with their offering. It is an offering of disgrace to the Lord. It is an offering of pride and selfishness. They are trying to gain the glory and honor from the praises of men, instead of giving it to God.

This phrase in verse 2... **“he kept back part”** is the phrase *ἐνοσφίσατο ἀπὸ*, and it means “to deceptively set aside away from for oneself.” This is premeditated stealing and lying to God, and then it turns into hypocrisy when they try and gain the honor from the Apostles for saying they gave the whole thing and they did not. Another interesting note is that Luke uses the word *τιμὴ*, to describe **the proceeds**. It’s translated proceeds in the NKJV, and *τιμὴ* can mean that because it has the sense of value for something, but 31 out of the 43 times this word is used in the NT it is translated as “honor.” They purposely held back honor for themselves instead of giving everything to God. This begins shining a light on the condition of their heart which is exposed in verses 3-4...

5:3 But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?”

4 While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”

5:3 εἶπε δὲ Πέτρος, Ἀνανία, διατί ἐπλήρωσεν ὁ Σατανᾶς τὴν καρδίαν σου, ψεύσασθαί σε τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον, καὶ νοσφίσασθαι ἀπὸ τῆς τιμῆς τοῦ χωρίου;

4 οὐχὶ μένον σοὶ ἔμενε, καὶ πραθέν ἐν τῇ σῆ ἐξουσίᾳ ὑπῆρχε; τί ὅτι ἔθου ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου τὸ πρᾶγμα τοῦτο; οὐκ ἐψεύσω ἀνθρώποις ἀλλὰ τῷ Θεῷ.

The Bible is very clear that before and even after the selling of the property they could do whatever they wanted with that possession and the money they received from selling it. It was their own and in their control. But they were hypocrites and lied to the Holy Spirit and to the Apostles to falsely boast about their giving. So Peter asked two questions concerning their heart. It is evident that Peter being filled with the Spirit received a word of knowledge to discern this because he asks these specific questions... **“why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit,”** and **“Why have you conceived this thing in your heart?”** Ananias and Sapphira together had seared their conscience and calloused their heart against God. And Peter says, **“You have not lied to men but to God.”** They are hypocritical liars that have offered a profane offering to the Lord in an effort to gain glory and honor for themselves. Look at what God says about these types of people, **Proverbs 25:14**. This is what Ananias and Sapphira were doing... falsely boasting about giving, and God says these people are like clouds and wind without rain. This reminds me of how Jude described the enemy infiltrating the Church, **Jude 4, 12-19**. This is my conjecture, I don’t believe Ananias and Sapphira were even Christians. They were just wolves in sheep’s clothing doing the work of Satan to infiltrate the Church and destroy it. Their hearts were filled with deception and not the Spirit of God and they were offering a profane offering to the Lord; not to honor God, but to honor themselves; to exalt themselves with pride and greed. Look at how God has dealt with these profane offerings in the past, **Leviticus 10:1-3; 22:1-3; Malachi 1:10-14**. God is serious about a pure offering and Ananias and Sapphira are bringing a profane offering to the Lord through their hypocritical lies. Look what God says about one who has a lying heart, **Proverbs 26:18-26; 6:16-19**. God hates a lying heart, **Proverbs 8:13**. It is an abomination to the Lord. **Jeremiah 9:3, 6-9, 24; 2 Kings 5:25-27**. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira God enacted Righteous judgement immediately, and I believe He did this to protect His Church in its early stages. Let’s go on and look at the Righteous Judgement that comes upon Ananias and Sapphira in **Acts 5:5-11**.

I believe Ananias and Sapphira were ravenous wolves infiltrating the Church to destroy it, and the Church, being in its infant stages, and God, as a Good Shepherd protecting His flock from these wolves, enacted Righteous judgement for their hypocrisy and their profane heart toward God. At this point, the Church was only a few months old at the most, the New Testament hadn’t been written yet, and the

Church was fragile. So I believe that God in His sovereign power, enacted Righteous judgement right then to stop any divisions or fractures within the early stages of this Church.

Remember the “if we sayers” in John’s first epistle? These people were lying about their Fellowship with God, but John exposed them by saying... If you hate your brother, then you don’t have eternal life abiding in you, and the love of God has not been perfected in you, 1 John 3:14-14; 2:3-5. Ananias and Sapphira hated the Brethren. Satan had filled their hearts with greed and hypocrisy, and they were bringing that into the Church. And I believe they had hardened their hearts with deceit to the point they would never come to repentance, and I think this is why God enacted this judgement on them.

Under the Old Covenant this type of Righteous Judgment was very common, but it is rare to see this type of Judgment in this age of Grace. And some might be asking why? God has every right to do this as our sovereign God, the Despot of the universe, even in this age, but I think the reason we don’t see much of this is because His Church and His Word are established. The New Covenant has been written and it is His Word that has become the purifying agent in the Church. And God is doing what He said in Matthew 13, allowing the tares to grow up among the wheat and He will sort them out in the end. God is now delaying final Wrath and Judgment for the Day of the Lord. Because just like we read in 2 Peter last week... In His longsuffering toward us, He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, 2 Peter 3:9. So He is delaying final judgement because some of those tares might still repent and believe.

But God, in His sovereign work, because of the infancy of the Church, He enacted Righteous judgement on Ananias and Sapphira to make sure His plan would be accomplished, and that the Church would grow pure and strong. Notice the purifying result of this judgement in verse 11- **So great fear came upon all the Church and upon all who heard these things**. This didn’t hinder the growth of the Church because look at verse 14, it says... *believers were increasingly added to the Lord*. It just stopped false converts from joining the Church, and it chased away the ravenous wolves set out to try and destroy the Church, Acts 5:13, 1 John 2:18-19. God is serious about holiness, and He is coming back for a pure Church, He is coming back for a faithful Bride, Eph 5:26-27.

How do we make sure this happens? God has given us His Word and its His Word that will purify and sanctify the Church, John 17:17; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 4:2. We preach the Truth and stand for the Truth and let the Word do its sanctifying, purifying work.