

“Personification”

(of the Way of God)

Acts 4:29 – 5:16

March 22, 2015

INTRO: **Last night at Helping Up Mission** I saw today’s Scripture text & sermon lived out right before my very eyes... Amen!

REVIEW: Acts 1:

- Purpose
- Plan
- Promise (of **Power**)

Acts 2:

- **Power** (at Pentecost)
- Proclamation
- People (ekklesia in koinonia)

Acts 3:

- **Power**
- Platform
- Proclamation

Acts 4:

- Persecution
- Prosecution
- Petition (**Power**fully answered)

- Response to Persecution
- Results = **PERSONIFICATION!**

Timeless Truth:

**The Lord's Power & Plan are Personified
in & through His People – the Church!**
(a.k.a. “the Way” of God)

PREVIEW:

- 1. *Personified Worship***
 - a. Power
 - b. Unity

- 2. *Personified Witness***
 - a. Power
 - b. Unity

- 3. *Personified Warfare***
 - a. Power
 - b. Unity

- 4. *Personified Oneness***
 - a. Power
 - b. Unity

Personified Worship

Acts 4:29-32a (NASB)

²⁹ "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, ³⁰ while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. ³² **And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul;**

Satan's purpose is to oppose the work of God. Through the centuries, penetrating the church as a tactic has proven to be far more effective than external persecution.

Paul's "intense concern" urged the Romans to: *keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.* (Rom. 16:17-18)

He lamented that the Galatians were "so quickly deserting Him who called [them] by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another," and warned them of "some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ" (Gal 1:6-7)

Personified Witness

Acts 4:32-37 (NASB)

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.*

Their unity stemmed from focusing on those priorities Jesus had left them: selflessly loving each other, and reaching the lost world.

UNITY OF HEART and mind. (v. 32) was the norm for Christian community life: "*Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose*" (**Phil. 2:2**). We must strive for such unity with utmost dedication: "*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*" (**Eph. 4:3**). The desire to obey and please God is a key ingredient of such unity: "*May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (**Rom. 15:5-6**).

...a passionate unity or a unifying passion.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION:

QUOTE: This is an area where the church needs to be countercultural.... close Christian community life may be one of the most important prophetic messages we can give the world. The church must present itself as the group that can adequately fill the thirst for community that lies in the heart of the human being.... But such deep unity is not easy to maintain. If our standards are high, our expectations from each other will also be high. Consequently the pain of disappointment will also be high. I believe this is a primary reason why people have lowered their standards of what to expect from Christian community. It is too painful to try to be one in the way the Bible describes unity. But the great blessing of completeness in life, motivation to holiness and excellence, and security that comes from those to whom they are accountable await those who attempt this. - NIV Commentary

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

The great power of the apostles came from the filling of the Spirit (Acts 1:8). ... The imperfect tense of the verb translated were giving shows that was their continual practice. As Peter expressed it to the Sanhedrin, "*We cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard*" (Acts 4:20).

*** In our context, the "offensive" proclamation is:

- Repent!
- Jesus is the ONLY way...

Romans 9:33 = *"Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."*

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*

This is the 2nd time Luke describes the quality of the radical sharing that the 1st Christian community practiced (see 2:44-45).

Community life is never an end in itself;
a vibrant community is a community in mission.

³⁵ *and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be **distributed to each as any had need**.*

Everything they had belonged to God, and they possessed it in trust for Him. ...

James asks, "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" (James 2:15-16)

"But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17)

³⁶ Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement),

BARNY: There is much we do not know about Joseph Barnabas, but this we do know: he was a Spirit-filled man who was an encouragement to the church because he gave his all to the Lord. Not every believer can be like Peter and John, but we can all be like Barnabas and have a ministry of encouragement.

³⁷ and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

(This is NOT Christian Communism...)

As in 2:45, the imperfect tense of the verbs indicates continuous action. They did not at any point pool all their possessions. Also, it is clear from Acts 12:12 that individual believers still owned houses. Further, Peter's words to Ananias in 5:4 show that such selling of property was strictly voluntary. The singling out of Barnabas also implies that the selling was voluntary.

T/S: The greatest burden any pastor carries, the thing that grieves his heart the most, is the sin in his church...

Personified War-fare

Acts 5:1-11 (NASB)

Satan had failed completely in his attempt to silence the witness of the church. However, our enemy never gives up; he simply changes his strategy. His first approach had been to attack the church from the outside, hoping that arrest and threats would frighten the leaders. When that failed, Satan decided to attack the church *from the inside* and use people who were a part of the fellowship... We must face the fact that Satan is a clever foe. If he does not succeed as the "devouring lion" (1 Peter 5:8), then he attacks again as the "deceiving serpent" or an "angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:3, 13-14). Satan is both a murderer and a liar (John 8:44), and the church must be prepared for both attacks.

The church is safe so long as Satan is attacking from the outside, but when he gets on the inside, the church is in danger.

¹ ***But*** a man named ***Ananias***, with his wife ***Sapphira***, sold a piece of property,

“But” introduces a sharp contrast between the actions of Barnabas and those of Ananias and his wife Sapphira.

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.*

The story of Ananias and Sapphira is to Acts what the story of **Achan** is to the **book of Joshua**. Both incidents interrupted the victorious progress of the people of 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?"*

QUOTE: Oliver Wendell Holmes

"Sin has many tools, but a lie is the handle which fits them all."

The deceit of Ananias and Sapphira did not fool Peter. Guided by the Holy Spirit, he saw through their hypocrisy. Ananias, no doubt expecting the accolades of the people for his gift, must have been stunned by Peter's words.

In contrast to the Spirit-filled giving of Barnabas, that of **Ananias** was satanically inspired.

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."

Whatever we possess, God has given to us; we are stewards, not owners. (see **John 5:44**).

No sin drew a sharper rebuke from our Lord than hypocrisy.
(Matthew 6:1-6 & 16-18)

Jesus warned hell would be populated by hypocrites (Matt. 24:51).

Key Theological Point:

The Holy Spirit is a person, not an influence or impersonal force, since He can be lied to.

Verse 3 says Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit, while v.4 says that he lied to God, a clear affirmation of the deity of the Holy Spirit.

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.

There is a mixture of bad with good in the best societies on this side heaven; tares will grow among the wheat until the harvest

- Matthew Henry

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."

...they thought to serve both God and money...

...If they had been committed worldlings, they would not have sold their possession; and, if they had been committed Christians, they would not have held back part of the price.

- Matthew Henry's Commentary

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.

The name that Jesus gave to this sin-practice is "hypocrisy," which simply means "wearing a mask, playing the actor." Hypocrisy is *deliberate* deception, trying to make people think we are more spiritual than we really are.

God moved quickly to remove this spiritual cancer

He wants His church pure (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:27).

¹¹ And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

"God is to be both loved and feared." - Matthew Henry

KEY APPLICATION:

If God killed "religious deceivers" today, how many church members would be left?

"The Lord shall judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:30-31).

One benefit of church discipline is that it deters others from sinning (cf. 1 Tim. 5:19-20)...

KEY SUMMARY:

We have moved from "great power" and "great grace" (Acts 4:33) to "great fear," and all of these ought to be present in the church.

QUOTE: The swift judgment of Ananias and Sapphira kept the halfhearted and uncommitted from joining the Christians (cf. 5:5, 11). The practice of sternly dealing with sin helps maintain a pure church. People do not rush to join a church that will expose their sin. Discipline... purifies the church and keeps the shallow and merely curious away. It is startling to see churches today that will purposely not make sin an issue so as to attract the shallow and curious... Many pastors fear that the practice of church discipline will drive people away and ruin their churches. It will drive away those who love their sin, but attract those who hate it and seek repentance and righteousness. Despite the strict discipline imposed by God so that unbelievers feared to associate with the church, all the more believers in the Lord were constantly added... as multitudes of men and women... The means of this growth was purity.

Uncompromising commitment to holiness characterized these believers... They were a fearful group, and that kept those who loved their sin away, and those who wanted forgiveness for sin near. That stands in sharp contrast to the masses of uncommitted, even unsaved, people that feel comfortable in the church today. The failure of churches to preach holy living, and to discipline those who don't live that way, allows sinners and hypocrites to remain in the church, convoluting its direction, sapping its power, robbing it of purity and marring its testimony. MEN may build their churches with a tolerance for sin, but the LORD builds HIS among people who love holiness and hate and expose sin. The Lord Jesus Christ wants total commitment. Only those who are willing to forsake all, including sin, and lose their lives in submission to Him, are worthy to be His followers. A church made up of such people will be a powerful testimony to the world.

- John MacArthur

T/S: What is true of believers individually is also true of the church collectively. The church that would reach the world must be pure; it must be a church that deals with sin.

Sadly, church discipline is practically an ignored duty today. It has fallen prey to the unbiblical notion that loving people and building up their self-esteem means tolerating their sin.... It is because God loves believers that He chastens them (Heb 12:5-6).

Personified, Wondrous-Oneness

Acts 5:12-16 (NASB)

¹² At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.

The mighty wonders performed by the Apostles were the fulfillment of the Lord's promise that they would do "greater works" in answer to believing prayer (John 14:13-14).

NOTICE: the church described here completely triumphed over the attacks of Satan! The people were still unified (Acts 5:12), magnified (Acts 5:13), and multiplied (Acts 5:14).

"Satan & his minions will always try to divide... that which God has unified, magnified, & multiplied!" - JDP

13 But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.

**CAUTION: test teachers by their message, not by miracles
(1 John 2:18-29; 4:1-6).**

It is significant that *all of these people were healed*. Nobody was sent away because he or she "did not have faith to be healed."

14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, 15 to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.

CONTEXT: Cots & pallets = rich & poor bedding

KEY CONNECTING POINT!

The outpouring of miracles was an answer to their prayer that God would "grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence, while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus" (Acts 4:29-30). God did not answer that prayer, however, until the church was purged & purified.

16 Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.

CAPSTONE: This is the first record of the church's influence spreading beyond Jerusalem. They were beginning to fulfill the Lord's charge to be His witnesses not only in Jerusalem but also "in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (**Acts 1:8**).

CLOSE:

The greatest miracle of all is the transformation of a lost sinner into a child of God by the grace of God. That is the miracle that meets the greatest need, lasts the longest, and costs the greatest price—the blood of God's Son.

God has a power-filled people & a purposed-plan – the Church!

We worship in power & unity.

We witness in power & unity.

We are at war in power & unity.

We walk in wondrous power & unity.

And that is one miracle we can all participate in as we share the message of the Gospel, for it is "*the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes*" (**Rom. 1:16**)

Let's Pray!

Acts 4:32-37 (NASB)

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.

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such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price."

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INTRODUCTION: Beware of the Serpent!

[Acts 4:32-5:16](#)

Satan had failed completely in his attempt to silence the witness of the church. However, the enemy never gives up; he simply changes his strategy. His first approach had been to attack the church from the outside, hoping that arrest and threats would frighten the leaders. When that failed, Satan decided to attack the church from the inside and use people who were a part of the fellowship.

We must face the fact that Satan is a clever foe. If he does not succeed as the "devouring lion" (1 Peter 5:8), then he attacks again as the "deceiving serpent" or an "angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:3, 13-14). Satan is both a murderer and a liar (John 8:44), and the church must be prepared for both attacks.

The Generosity of the Believers (Acts 4:32-37)

The believers had prayed and God's Spirit had filled them and given them new power.

There is much we do not know about Joseph Barnabas, but this we do know: he was a Spirit-filled man who was an encouragement to the church because he gave his all to the Lord. Not every believer can be like Peter and John, but we can all be like Barnabas and have a ministry of encouragement.

The Hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)

QUOTE: George MacDonald wrote, "*Half of the misery in the world comes from trying to look, instead of trying to be, what one is not.*"

The name that Jesus gave to this practice is "hypocrisy," which simply means "wearing a mask, playing the actor." We must not think that failure to reach our ideals is hypocrisy, because no believer lives up to all that he or she knows or has in the Lord. Hypocrisy is *deliberate* deception, trying to make people think we are more spiritual than we really are.

No doubt some people are shocked when they read that God killed two people just because they lied about a business transaction and about their church giving. But when you consider the features connected with this sin, you have to agree that God did the right thing by judging them.

It is worth noting that the Lord judges sin severely *at the beginning of a new period in salvation history*. Just after the tabernacle was erected, God killed Nadab and Abihu for trying to present "false fire" to the Lord ([Lev. 10](#)). He also had Achan killed for disobeying orders after Israel had entered the Promised Land ([Josh. 7](#)). While God was certainly not responsible for their sins, He did use these judgments as warnings to the people, and even to us (1 Cor. 10:11-12).

To begin with, the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was *energized by Satan* ([Acts 5:3](#)); and that is a serious matter. If Satan cannot defeat the church by attacks from the outside, he will get on the inside and go to work ([Acts 20:28-31](#)). He knows how to lie to the minds and hearts of church members, even genuine Christians, and get them to follow his orders. We forget that the admonition about the spiritual armor ([Eph. 6:10-18](#)) was written to God's people, not to unbelievers, because it is the Christians who are in danger of being used by Satan to accomplish his evil purposes.

Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, "Sin has many tools, but a lie is the handle which fits them all." Satan is a liar and a murderer ([John 8:44](#)). He lied *to and through* this couple, and the lie led to their deaths. When God judged Ananias and Sapphira, He was also judging Satan. He was letting everybody know that He would not tolerate deception in His church.

Their sin was *motivated by pride*, and pride is a sin that God especially hates and judges ([Prov. 8:13](#)). No doubt the church was praising God for the generous offering that Barnabas had brought when Satan whispered to the couple, "You can also bask in this kind of glory! You can make others think that you are as spiritual as Barnabas!" Instead of resisting Satan's approaches, they yielded to him and planned their strategy.

Whatever we possess, God has given to us; we are stewards, not owners. We must use what He gives us for His glory alone (see [John 5:44](#)).

QUOTE: Pride opens the door to every other sin, for once we are more concerned with our reputation than our character, there is no end to the things we will do just to make ourselves "look good" before others.

God loves His church and is jealous over it, for the church was purchased by the blood of God's Son ([Acts 20:28](#); [Eph. 5:25](#)) and has been put on earth to glorify Him and do His work. Satan wants to destroy the church, and the easiest way to do it is to use those who are within the fellowship. Had Peter not been discerning, Ananias and Sapphira would have become influential people in the church! Satan would have been working through them to accomplish his purposes!

The church is "the pillar and ground of the truth" ([1 Tim. 3:15](#)), and Satan attacks it with his lies. The church is God's temple in which He dwells ([1 Cor. 3:16](#)), and Satan wants to move in and dwell there too. The church is God's army ([2 Tim. 2:1-4](#)), and Satan seeks

to get into the ranks as many traitors as he can. The church is safe so long as Satan is attacking from the outside, but when he gets on the inside, the church is in danger.

KEY APPLICATION:

It is easy for us to condemn Ananias and Sapphira for their dishonesty, but we need to examine our own lives to see if our profession is backed up by our practice. Do we really mean everything we pray about in public? Do we sing the hymns and Gospel songs sincerely or routinely? "These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me" (Matt. 15:8, NIV). If God killed "religious deceivers" today, how many church members would be left?

What is described in this chapter is not a case of church discipline. Rather it is an example of God's personal judgment. "The Lord shall judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:30-31).

Peter accused her of tempting God's Spirit, that is, deliberately disobeying God and seeing how far God would go (Ex. 17:2; Deut. 6:16). They were actually defying God and daring Him to act—and He acted, with swiftness and finality. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matt. 4:7).

KEY SUMMARY:

The result was a wave of godly fear that swept over the church and over all those who heard the story (Acts 5:11). We have moved from "great power" and "great grace" (Acts 4:33) to "great fear," and all of these ought to be present in the church. "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28-29).

The Ministry of the Apostles (Acts 5:12-16)

We have learned that the Spirit-filled church is unified, magnified, and multiplied. Satan wants to divide **the church, disgrace the church, and decrease the church; and he will do it, if we let him.**

But the church described here completely triumphed over the attacks of Satan! The people were still unified (Acts 5:12), magnified (Acts 5:13), and multiplied (Acts 5:14).

*** Satan & his minions will always try to divide... that which God has unified, magnified, & multiplied!

(See introduction to the KEY Elevated role of woman...)

Multitudes were added to the Lord, and for the first time, Luke mentions the salvation of women. Both in his Gospel and in Acts, Luke has a great deal to say about women and their relationship to Christ and the church. There are at least a dozen references in Acts to women, as Luke shows the key role women played in the apostolic church. This is a remarkable

thing when you consider the general position of women in the culture of that day (see [Gal. 3:26-28](#)).

God gave the Apostles power to perform great miracles. While it is true that some of the ordinary members exercised miraculous powers ([Acts 6:8](#)), it was primarily the Apostles who did the miracles. These "signs and wonders" were God's way of authenticating their ministry ([Rom. 15:18-19](#); [2 Cor. 12:12](#); [Heb. 2:4](#)).

Just as there were special judgments at the beginning of a new era, so there were also special miracles. We find no miracles performed in Genesis, but at the beginning of the age of Law, Moses performed great signs and wonders. Elijah and Elisha were miracle workers at the beginning of the great era of the Prophets, and Jesus and the Apostles performed signs and wonders when the Gospel Age was inaugurated. Each time God opened a new door, He called man's attention to it. It was His way of saying, "Follow these leaders, because I have sent them."

The mighty wonders performed by the Apostles were the fulfillment of the Lord's promise that they would do "greater works" in answer to believing prayer ([John 14:13-14](#)).

CAUTION:

Even today..... God may choose to perform miracles for His people! But the need for confirming miracles has passed away. We now have the completed Word of God and we test teachers by their message, not by miracles ([1 John 2:18-29](#); [4:1-6](#)). And we must keep in mind that Satan is a counterfeiter and well able to deceive the unwary.

Peter and the other Apostles found themselves ministering as their Lord had ministered, with people coming from all over, bringing their sick and afflicted (Matt. 4:23-25; Mark 1:45; 2:8-12). The Twelve must have found it very difficult to walk down the street, for people crowded around them and laid before them sick people on their pallets. Some of the people even had the superstitious belief that there was healing in Peter's shadow.

It is significant that *all of these people were healed*. There were no failures and nobody was sent away because he or she "did not have faith to be healed." These were days of mighty power when God was speaking to Israel and telling them that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed their Messiah and Saviour. "For the Jews require a sign" (1 Cor. 1:22), and God gave signs to them. The important thing was not the healing of the afflicted, but the winning of lost souls, as multitudes were added to the fellowship. The Spirit gave them power for wonders and power for witness (Acts 1:8), for miracles apart from God's Word cannot save the lost.

CLOSE:

The greatest miracle of all is the transformation of a lost sinner into a child of God by the grace of God. That is the miracle that meets the greatest need, lasts the longest, and costs the greatest price—the blood of God's Son.

And that is one miracle we can all participate in as we share the message of the Gospel, "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 1:16).

- Bible Exposition Commentary

MacArthur Commentary:

INTRO: The Bible is brutally honest in its recording of redemptive history. It records the blemishes and faults of God's people as well as their strengths. Moses' righteous defiance of Pharaoh appears but so does his unrighteous defiance of God that barred him from entering the Promised Land. David's glorious victories grace the pages of Scripture. But along with them, the Bible tells of his abject cowardice before the Philistine king of Gath. The Psalms reveal David the saint; in [2 Samuel 12](#) Nathan the prophet confronts David the adulterer and murderer. Proverbs records the heights of Solomon's wisdom; Ecclesiastes the depths of his folly. The inspired record never glosses over the truth, though it may be painful and ugly.

So far in Acts, Luke's portrayal of the church has been totally positive. From its dramatic birth on the Day of Pentecost to its joyous, dynamic fellowship and explosive growth, the faithful writer has portrayed the church in all its pristine beauty, freshness, and vitality. Even Satan's attempt to thwart the church through the external pressure applied to its leaders was a failure.

Such a picture is not complete, however. No church is perfect, since all are made up of sinners, and the early church was no exception.

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Acts 1-12.

CONTEXT:

This section of Acts chronicles a negative milestone in the church's history: the first recorded instance of sin. Of all the firsts in Acts, this is certainly the saddest.

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Acts 1-12.

Satan's purpose is to oppose the work of God. In doing that he is living up to his name, which means "adversary." Where God is at work, he will be active. His initial attack on the church, the persecution of the apostles by the Sanhedrin, backfired. Not only did it fail to silence the apostles, but also [Acts 4:4](#) records that "many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand." Further, it gave Peter and John the opportunity to preach the gospel to the Sanhedrin. Faced with that defeat, Satan changed his tactics. Realizing that external pressure only tended to fan the flames, he decided to get at the base of the fire. To do so, he infiltrated the church to attack it with corruption from within. Through the centuries, that tactic has proven to be far more effective than external persecution.

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Acts 1-12.

The sins of the saints were a greater burden to Paul than all the opposition he faced from unbelievers. In [2 Corinthians 11:23-27](#), he

catalogs a horrifying list of the physical persecutions he had endured:

Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

All that paled into insignificance, however, in light of his burden for the churches: "Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" (2 Cor. 11:28-29).

Paul expressed that "intense concern" when he urged the Romans to

keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. (Rom. 16:17-18)

He lamented that the Galatians were "so quickly deserting Him who called [them] by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another," and warned them of "some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:6-7). To the Philippians he wrote, "If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of

the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose" (Phil. 2:1-2).

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Acts 1-12.

T/S: The greatest burden any pastor carries, the thing that grieves his heart the most, is the sin of his people. Peter was the first to have to deal with that problem, one every succeeding pastor has faced. Acts 5:1-11 records how he handled it. Before showing us the ugliness of the impurity of the church, however, Luke provides a backdrop with a last look at the purity of the church in 4:32-37. This background makes the sin appear all the more vivid, showing that a church at its noblest and purest is only one act away from spiritual tragedy.

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Acts 1-12.

Sharing of the Saints

Spiritual Participation

And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; (4:32a)

The congregation of those who believed had grown so rapidly that they were no longer numbered. That startling growth was the direct result of the action recorded in [verse 31](#), when those who were "filled with the Holy Spirit... began to speak the word of God with boldness." The unity

of the believers, who **were of one heart and soul**, was also a powerful testimony. Jesus said in [John 13:35](#), "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." In His high-priestly prayer, Jesus prayed that "they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me" ([John 17:21](#)). The first fellowship was an answer to that prayer both in position and practice.

Their unity stemmed from focusing on those priorities Jesus had left them: selflessly loving each other, and reaching the lost world.

Strong Preaching

And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. ([4:33](#))

The great power of the apostles came from the filling of the Spirit ([Acts 1:8](#)). It was in His power that they were giving witness to the resurrection—the very thing the Sanhedrin had forbidden them to do. The imperfect tense of the verb translated were giving shows that was their continual practice. As Peter expressed it to the Sanhedrin, "We cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard" ([Acts 4:20](#)). Like Paul, they felt keenly their obligation to proclaim the gospel (cf. [Rom. 1:14-15](#)).

the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was the major emphasis of apostolic preaching (cf. [Acts 2:24, 32](#); [3:15](#); [5:30](#); [10:40](#); [13:30, 33, 34, 37](#)). Although they knew that such an emphasis greatly

offended the Jewish authorities, the apostles never suppressed the truth to avoid that offense.

***** In our context, the “offensive” proclamation is twofold:**

- **Repent!**
- **Jesus is the ONLY way...**

In the name of "contextualization" (a more palatable term for worldliness), the gospel message is stripped of anything deemed offensive. But unbelievers *must* be offended at the point of their sin, or they will never come to Christ. In [Romans 9:33](#), Paul applied to Jesus Christ the words of Isaiah (cf. [Isa. 8:14](#); [28:16](#)): "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed." Peter also quotes Isaiah and adds that those who stumble do so "because they are disobedient to the word" ([1 Peter 2:8](#)). Unbelievers' very existence is an affront to God; certainly we must risk affronting them to let them know that.

... abundant grace was upon them all. Grace (favor) can be understood in two ways. First, as in [2:47](#), it can refer to the approval of the people. Although the leaders opposed them, the common people had not yet turned against them. On the contrary, they were impressed by the believers' love and unity. Second, and more important, the early church had God's favor. A fellowship characterized by loving unity and evangelistic zeal receives God's blessings.

Sharing Practically

and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them... 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, and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need.

([4:32b](#), [34-35](#))

The loving, unselfish unity of the early church found a practical expression in the sharing of material possessions. Not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them. The phrase not one of them shows that this attitude was characteristic of everyone inclusively. They all understood that everything they had belonged to God, and they possessed it in trust for Him. Since all belonged to God, when someone had a need, they were obligated to use the divine resources to meet that need. A very practical test of a Christian's love is how much he or she is willing to sacrifice financially. James asks, "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" ([James 2:15-16](#)). The apostle John expressed it even more bluntly: "But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" ([1 John 3:17](#)).

[Second Corinthians 8](#) demonstrates the sacrificial spirit of the poor believers in Macedonia:

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that

according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. (vv. 1-5)

The result of this practical demonstration of love in Jerusalem was that there was not a needy person among them.

As noted in the discussion of [Acts 2:44-46](#), thousands of pilgrims flocked into Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Undoubtedly, many in the early church came from the ranks of those pilgrims. They understandably decided to remain in Jerusalem under the apostles' teaching rather than return home. Further, some believers who lived in Jerusalem no doubt lost their jobs because of their faith. That the church met all these needs showed the depth of believers' love for each other. Such care and sharing was a powerful testimony to their community.

Luke reports that to meet the needs of others, **all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet.** Selling houses and land was far more sacrificial than sharing part of one's income. It meant liquidating capital assets that could be irreplaceable, thus reducing one's personal security.

(NOT Christian Communism...)

As in [2:45](#), the imperfect tense of the verbs indicates continuous action. They did not at any point pool all their possessions. Also, it is clear from [Acts 12:12](#) that individual believers still owned houses. Further, Peter's

words to Ananias in 5:4 show that such selling of property was strictly voluntary. The singling out of Barnabas also implies that the selling was voluntary. If it were compulsory there would have been nothing commendatory about his actions. Finally, Acts does not record that any other church followed this pattern of selling property.

(Challenging Insights...)

The proceeds would be distributed to each, as any had need. That was done by the apostles, who (at least temporarily, cf. [6:1ff.](#)) were in charge of distributing funds to the poor. The imperfect verb denotes the continuous nature of the distribution. It was a continuous way of life for those with property periodically to sell it as needed on behalf of others.

This passage illustrates an important pattern concerning giving in the local church. The donations are to be placed in the control of the spiritual teachers, who are then responsible before God for their use. Too often, people want to give only if they can specify how the money is to be used. That kind of self-serving giving fails to understand the delegated spiritual authority of God-ordained leaders and may often merely seek the applause of men. Giving is to be so selfless that Jesus said in [Matthew 6:3-4](#), "When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." Then He added, "Your Father who sees in secret will repay you."

A Sample Person

And Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. ([4:36-37](#))

Luke now singles out one man as an example from among those who were donating property. **Joseph**, better known as **Barnabas**, becomes a prominent figure in Acts.

(Background on Barnabas...)

Because this is the first time Barnabas appears in Acts, Luke provides some background information on him. He was a **Levite**, a member of the priestly tribe. Not all those connected with the temple were enemies of Jesus and the apostles. Like Paul, he was not a native of the land of Israel, but was **of Cyprian birth**. The fact that he was from the island of Cyprus may indicate why the first missionary trip with Paul began with that island. He was given the name **Barnabas** by the apostles, **which translated**, Luke notes, **means Son of Encouragement**. He was related to Mark ([Col. 4:10](#)), and his sister's house was the meeting place of the Jerusalem church ([Acts 12:12](#)). Despite his falling out with Paul, he certainly lived up to his name. Luke describes him in [Acts 11:24](#) as "a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and faith."

Luke is not concerned with how he obtained the property or where it was located. What is important is the loving heart of Barnabas, who sold the land and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. He gave out of a pure love, not to call attention to himself but for the simple blessedness of giving (cf.

Acts 20:35). He represents many others who also gave sacrificially and is an example for us to follow

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Sins of the (Professing) Saints

*** “Sins of the Aints”

The beauty of the sacrificial, selfless giving of the early church was marred by the ugly sins of deceit and self-glory. The story of Ananias and Sapphira is to Acts what the story of Achan is to the book of Joshua. Both incidents interrupted the victorious progress of the people of God.

Spiritual Pretense

But a certain man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 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. ([5:1-2](#))

But introduces a sharp contrast between the actions of Barnabas and those of Ananias and his wife Sapphira.

They, too, **sold a piece of property**. Unlike Barnabas, however, Ananias **kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge**. They saw an opportunity to make a double profit: They

would gain spiritual prestige and still make some money on the side. Withholding part of the money for their own use was not a sin, as Peter clearly states in [verse 4](#). Nowhere were the believers commanded to give everything. Their giving, like all New Testament giving, was voluntary (cf. [2 Cor. 9:7](#)). **The overt sin was lying, by publicly pretending to have given all the proceeds of the sale of their property. That sin was but the outward manifestation, however. The deeper, more devastating sin was hypocrisy based on a desire for spiritual status. They desired the approval of men for their sacrificial act and to be thought of as members of those most spiritually noble.**

No sin drew a sharper rebuke from our Lord than hypocrisy.
(Matthew 6:1-6 & 16-18)

He repeatedly denounced the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees ([Matt. 15:7](#); [22:18](#); [23:13-36](#)) and warned His disciples against its influence ([Luke 12:1](#)). He also warned that hell would be populated by hypocrites ([Matt. 24:51](#)).

QUOTE: None are so ugly in God's sight as those who flaunt a spiritual beauty they do not possess. Ananias and Sapphira were nothing more than sinning saints feigning spirituality. Any sin against the fellowship of believers is a sin against Christ ([1 Cor. 8:12](#)). Their offering was an affront to God and their execution God's work to keep the church pure.

(Debate over the salvation of Ananias & Sapphira)

Those who believe them to have been saved point to:

- They were listed amongst “the assembly” of believers
 - As well as (per MacArthur) Satan can become personally involved with believers (cf. [Matt. 16:21-23](#); [Eph. 6:12](#); [1 Peter 5:8-9](#)).
 - Death can be divine chastening for a believer ([1 Cor. 11:30-32](#); [1 John 5:16](#)).
- MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The -
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Those who believe them to have been lost souls:

- They are listed amongst “the assembly” BUT the term “church” is used once they are removed (parallels Jesus saving His “church/unity” discourse in the upper room until after Judas left)
- Peter says Ananias had his “heart filled by Satan” – again, see the upper room discourse parallels to Judas...
- Note the “But” that begins the passage, specifically contrasting this couple against the positive example of Barnabas...
- Hypocrisy carries a damnable consequence when it represents the true heart of an individual (expressed in their pattern of actions)... it seems out of sorts that the Lord would give such a severe (but holy) consequence if He were pointing out a marginal offense.
- If you let the Word of God speak for its self, while taking the Scriptures in context, without contorting or creatively interpreting the text, Ananias &

Sapphira embody the warnings of God's Word that are consistent with counterfeit Christians.

- With all that said, it is important to end this section of contemplation with two overarching truths to take to heart:
 - We do not and cannot KNOW for sure...
 - The point of right & wrong, Satan's intention & our Savior's inspection could not be more clear for you and me!

Spiritual Perception

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? 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." (5:3-4)

The deceit of Ananias and Sapphira did not fool Peter. Guided by the Holy Spirit, he saw through their hypocrisy. Ananias, no doubt expecting the accolades of the people for his gift, must have been stunned by Peter's words.

In contrast to the Spirit-filled giving of Barnabas, that of Ananias was satanically inspired. Satan filled his heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land. As already noted, to withhold part of the proceeds was not a sin. To **lie to the Holy Spirit**, however, was. And the tragedy is that it was completely unnecessary.

Peter's next question was a stern rebuke to Ananias: **Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? Whereas he was surely strongly tempted by Satan (v. 3), the responsibility for the sin rested on Ananias.** He had the freedom to do what he wanted to with his property and chose to be deceitful. His sin, as already noted, originated in his own selfish hypocrisy. **The Bible nowhere places the blame for a Christian's sin on Satan.**

Key Theological Point:

This passage teaches two vitally important truths about the Holy Spirit. First, it affirms that He is a person, not an influence or impersonal force, since He can be lied to. Second, **verse 3** says Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit, while **verse 4** says that he lied to God, a clear affirmation of the deity of the Holy Spirit.

Swift Punishment

And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came upon all who heard of it. And the young men arose and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 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." 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 shall carry you out as well." And she fell immediately 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. ([5:5-10](#))

God moved quickly to remove this spiritual cancer from the body.

As he heard Peter's words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came upon all who heard of it. The ultimate cause of Ananias's death was God's judgment.

It is a sobering truth that God sometimes takes the lives of sinning believers. Death is God's ultimate form of physical discipline for sinning believers. **He wants His church pure (cf. [2 Cor. 11:2](#); [Eph. 5:27](#)).**

The second act of the tragedy was about to take place. An **interval of about three hours** elapsed (indicating something of the length of church gatherings in those days) during which the young men buried Ananias.

As he had for her husband, Peter then pronounced judgment on her. "Why is it," he lamented, "**that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test?**" Peter exposed the conspiracy and the folly of testing holy God's reaction to sin. "**Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they shall carry you out as well.**" God's judgment fell on her equally swiftly, and **she fell immediately at his feet, and breathed her last; and the young men, having just returned from burying Ananias, came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her**

husband. So ended Ananias and Sapphira's short-lived and foolish attempt to deceive the Holy Spirit and test God's patience with iniquity.

Solemn Purgings

And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things. ([5:11](#))

One benefit of church discipline is that it deters others from sinning (cf. [1 Tim. 5:19-20](#)). No doubt much self-examination took place following the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. Their deaths caused great fear, not only among **the whole church** but also **upon all who heard of these things**. God's strong desire for a pure church, and His willingness to take drastic steps to achieve that desire, were obvious for all to see. **It was time, as Peter was later to write, "for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" ([1 Peter 4:17](#)).**

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Acts 1-12.

Acts 5:12-16

How did the church expand so rapidly despite the determined opposition of the Jewish authorities? [Acts 5:12-42](#) presents five keys to the

effective evangelism of the early church: purity, power, persecution, persistence, and productivity.

Purity

*They were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.
But none of the rest dared to associate with them;
however, the people held them in high esteem. And
all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men
and women, were constantly added to their number;
([5:12b-14](#))*

To be useful to the Lord, an individual must be pure (cf. [2 Tim. 2:19-21](#)). No one stated that truth any more clearly than the noble nineteenth-century Scottish pastor and evangelist Robert Murray McCheyne. He gave the following sage advice to a young man entering the ministry:

Do not forget the culture of the inner man—I mean of the heart. How diligently the cavalry officer keeps his sabre clean and sharp; every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God's sword, His instrument—I trust a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hands of God. (Andrew A. Bonar, ed., *Memoirs of McCheyne* [reprint, Chicago: Moody, 1978], p. 95)

What is true of believers individually is also true of the church collectively. The church that would reach the world must be pure; it must be a church that deals with sin. God displayed the importance He places on the purity of His church by His dramatic judgment of Ananias and Sapphira ([5:1-11](#)). While God may still intervene directly in the lives of sinning Christians ([1 Cor. 11:30](#)), disciplining sinning believers is the responsibility of each congregation.

Sadly, church discipline is practically an ignored duty today. It has fallen prey to the unbiblical notion that loving people and building up their self-esteem means tolerating their sin. Biblical love, however, seeks the well-being of others. Since the goal of discipline is to deal with sin, which is harmful, love and discipline are not mutually exclusive (cf. [Prov. 27:6](#)). It is because God loves believers that He chastens them ([Heb. 12:5-6](#)).

The importance of confronting sin in the church is expressed in many New Testament injunctions. In [Luke 17:3](#), the Lord Jesus Christ commanded, "If your brother sins, rebuke him." Paul put Hymenaeus and Alexander out of the Ephesian church because of their blasphemies ([1 Tim. 1:20](#)). He commanded the Corinthians to remove from their fellowship a man guilty of gross sexual immorality ([1 Cor. 5:1-7](#)). He instructed his young protégé Titus to "reprove [believers] severely that they may be sound in the faith" ([Titus 1:13](#)). Even church leaders are not exempt from public rebuke ([1 Tim. 5:20](#); cf. [Gal. 2:11-14](#)).

The most extensive teaching on how to exercise church discipline comes from our Lord Himself:

If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst. ([Matt. 18:15-20](#))

The church pays a steep price for disobeying the Lord's clear teaching on this matter. The impure, worldly church that is the inevitable result of the absence of confrontive holiness will not be an

effective witness for Jesus Christ. Disciplining of sinning saints is not an option but an obligation.

Verses 12b-14 form a parenthesis. The thought begun in the first half of **verse 12** resumes in **verse 15**. The subject of the parenthetical thought is the purity of the church. Now that the sin of Ananias and Sapphira had been dealt with, the church was again in one accord. Solomon's portico lay along the eastern side of the temple, facing the Court of the Gentiles. It was the site of Peter's second sermon (**3:11ff.**) and one of our Lord's discourses (**John 10:23ff.**). It had become a favorite gathering place for the believers, who met there daily for prayer and worship.

Luke then presents the paradoxical truth that none of the rest (unbelievers) dared to associate with the believers, though the people held them in high esteem. They had great respect for the followers of Jesus and their devotion to their beliefs. Surely they also respected the power of God displayed through them. But to balance the respect that might lead them to join was the fear that sin would be severely judged. The swift judgment of Ananias and Sapphira kept the halfhearted and uncommitted from joining the Christians (cf. 5:5, 11). The practice of sternly dealing with sin helps maintain a pure church. People do not rush to join a church that will expose their sin. Discipline is thus an essential key to evangelism, because it purifies the church and keeps the shallow and merely curious away. It is startling to see churches today that will purposely not make sin an issue so as to attract the shallow and curious.

Many pastors fear that the practice of church discipline will drive people away and ruin their churches. It will drive away those who love their sin, but attract those who hate it and seek repentance and righteousness. Despite the strict discipline imposed by God so that unbelievers feared to associate with the church, all the more believers in the Lord were constantly added to the exploding church. In fact, there were so many that they lost count. Luke could only

describe them as **multitudes of men and women. The means of this growth was purity.**

Uncompromising commitment to holiness characterized these believers— not the fearful commitment of self-righteous legalism but one springing out of love for the Lord. **They were a fearful group, and that kept those who loved their sin away, and those who wanted forgiveness for sin near. That stands in sharp contrast to the masses of uncommitted, even unsaved, people that feel comfortable in the church today. The failure of churches to preach holy living, and to discipline those who don't live that way, allows sinners and hypocrites to remain in the church, convoluting its direction, sapping its power, robbing it of purity and marring its testimony. Men may build their churches with a tolerance for sin, but the Lord builds His among people who love holiness and hate and expose sin.**

Jesus demands a high level of commitment from those who would follow Him. In [Luke 9:57-62](#) He had the following dialogue with some would-be followers:

And as they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Permit me first to go and bury my father." But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." And another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

In [Matthew 10:32-39](#) He added,

Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall

deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it.

The Lord Jesus Christ wants total commitment. Only those who are willing to forsake all, including sin, and lose their lives in submission to Him, are worthy to be His followers. A church made up of such people will be a pure church, with a powerful testimony to the world.

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Power

And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people... to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. And also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with

unclean spirits; and they were all being healed.
([5:12a](#), [15-16](#))

As already noted, [verse 15](#) resumes the thought begun in the first half of [verse 12](#). The parenthesis, describing the purity of the church, is foundational to this section. The early church was a growing church because it was a pure church. They were a clean channel through which the power of God could flow.

signs and wonders were designed to point men to spiritual truth. They also confirmed the apostles' claim to be God's messengers.

QUOTE: Luke carefully notes that it was at the hands of the apostles that the many signs and wonders were taking place among the people. As noted in the discussion of [Acts 3:1-10](#), the early church was not a miracle-working church—it was a church with miracle-working apostles.

KEY CONNECTING POINT!

The outpouring of miracles was an answer to their prayer that God would "grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence, while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus" ([Acts 4:29-30](#)). God did not answer that prayer, however, until the church was pure.

The apostles carried on their widespread, public healing ministry to such an extent that people even carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on cots and pallets.

IMPORTANT CONTEXT:

- **Cots** (*klinariōn*) refers to small beds or couches, whereas **pallets** (*krabattōn*) describes the straw mattresses commonly used by the poor.
- Luke's use of these two terms implies that both rich and poor sought healing from the apostles. Far from being skeptical about the apostles' healing power, they were so aware of their potency over disease that they hoped **that when**

Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them and heal them. That was not mere superstition but reflected the belief he had divine power and that his shadow might carry the power of healing.

NOTE: **The Bible does not say that Peter's shadow actually healed anyone, merely that the people believed it might.**

The stir caused by the massive number of the apostles' healings was not limited to Jerusalem. Additional **people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits; and they were all being healed.**

CAPSTONE to the Passage! (4:32 – 5:16)

This is the first record of the church's influence spreading beyond Jerusalem. They were beginning to fulfill the Lord's charge to be His witnesses not only in Jerusalem but also "in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Acts 1-12.

NIV: vv.32-35

FOR A SECOND time Luke describes the quality of the radical sharing that the first Christian community practiced (see [2:44-45](#)). This time he describes it in greater detail. The fact that he mentions this issue twice suggests we should regard it with some importance.

Luke first presents what was at the heart of the practice of sharing—a deep unity ([v. 32a](#)). In the Gospels the disciples often quarreled among each other and had to be corrected by Jesus ([Luke 9:46-47](#); [22:24-27](#)); but in Acts the Twelve are a unified group ([2:14](#); [5:29](#); [6:2-4](#)), and this unity now spreads to the entire church. This is often the case: **When the leaders are united, it helps the members to be united too.**

QUOTE: "One in heart and mind" (*kardia kai psyche mia*) describes a comprehensive unity. As John Wesley put it, "Their loves, their hopes, their passions joined."

What joined them was not simply a common affiliation to the church. There was a spiritual unity and a unity of passionate commitment to a mission. Therefore, right in the middle of this description of unity we find what looks like an interpolation regarding the witness of the apostles ([v. 33](#)). **Community life is never an end in itself; a vibrant community is a community in mission.**

Included in this unity was the sharing of possessions among the believers. They did not consider their possessions as their own, but "shared everything they had" ([v. 32b](#)). This sharing extended to material possessions. As a result "there were no needy persons among them." But for that to happen, some costly sacrifices had to be made by some believers who sold their lands and houses ([vv. 34-35](#)).

Private ownership continued in the church. [Acts 12:12](#) mentions the house of Mary the mother of John Mark. Earlier we were told that people met in each other's homes for meals ([2:46](#)). Thus, what is mentioned here is not a renunciation of all private property by everyone in the church. David Gooding points out that "the phrase 'those who owned lands or houses' [[v. 34](#)] is describing people we would call nowadays 'landlords' or 'property owners.'" Brian Capper thinks that what happened was that the wealthier members, like Barnabas, who had extra land and possessions, sold some and gave the proceeds so that the poor could be looked after. In this way they were following the advice of John the Baptist, who said, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same" ([Luke 3:11](#)).

There are five verbs in the imperfect tense in [verses 34-35](#). The imperfect describes continuous action in the past. In other words, this selling of land is something that took place regularly. The NIV rendering ("from time to time") attempts to express this idea. In other words, whenever there was a need, those who owned land asked

themselves whether the Lord wanted them to sell this land. Some did and then gave the proceeds to the leaders to distribute wherever there was a need. I do not think this was an easy decision to make. But some did make it, and the result was the elimination of poverty in the church.

NIV Application Commentary, The - NIV Application Commentary,
The – Acts: From biblical text...to contemporary life.

BRIDGING CONTEXTS:

UNITY OF HEART and mind. Paul insists that the unity of heart and mind described here (v. 32) was the norm for Christian community life: "Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose" (Phil. 2:2). We must strive for such unity with utmost dedication: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). The desire to obey and please God is a key ingredient of such unity: "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:5-6).

What is described is a passionate unity or a unifying passion. This characteristic is communicated by one of Luke's favorite words, *homothymadon*, translated "with one mind" or "with one accord" in the earlier translations but "together" in some newer translations (NIV, NRSV). E. D. Schmitz describes this word as signifying a "unanimity ... not based on common personal feelings but on a cause greater than the individual." [

Keeping the priority of evangelism. [Verses 32 and 34](#) are about the sharing of possessions. But sandwiched between them is a verse about evangelism ([v. 33](#)). Why this detour? Because community life is never an end in itself. Harrison comments: "Maintenance of the group was not the primary consideration... Above all, this was a witnessing community, and for this reason they enjoyed 'much grace' from the Lord." It is easy for a movement to concentrate so much on consolidation after its initial growth that evangelism loses its place of priority.

Luke guards against giving any impression that there was any period when the early church did not evangelize. [Acts 1](#) gives the commission as it came from the lips of Jesus ([1:8](#)), and in the same chapter Peter tells the believers that Judas's replacement had to be a witness of Christ's resurrection ([1:22](#)). Every chapter of Acts (except ch. 27) says something about evangelism. This first church history textbook is essentially a history of evangelism.

Giving to a central fund. In the early church money was given to a central fund, out of which it was disbursed to the needy ([vv. 34b-35](#)). I do not think we can make a rule that this is the only method to give to the needy. Sometimes we may give gifts directly to needy persons. But in keeping with our conviction that the narratives of the Bible can give examples that inspire us, we may view this practice as an example given for our inspiration.

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CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION:

MAINTAINING A UNIFYING passion today. While being one in heart and mind is considered the usual model for Christian community life, it is not easy to maintain in today's individualistic society.

We do not like having anyone "pry" into our personal lives, which would be necessary if the model shown in Acts were to be followed. For this reason many have lowered their standards and settled for a functional unity that comes more from secular management studies than from God's Word. People agree to work according to a plan, even though they may not be "one in heart and mind" with it. But can we jettison this biblical model so easily? **Given the fact that there are so many commands to this model of unity, we should not be satisfied by lowering our standards.**

QUOTE: This is an area where the church needs to be countercultural.... close Christian community life may be one of the most important prophetic messages we can give the world. The church must present itself as the group that can adequately fill the thirst for community that lies in the heart of the human being.... But such deep unity is not easy to maintain. If our standards are high, our expectations from each other will also be high. Consequently the pain of disappointment will also be high. I believe this is a primary reason why people have lowered their standards of what to expect from Christian community. It is too painful to try to be one in the way the Bible describes unity. But the great blessing of completeness in life, motivation to holiness and excellence, and security that comes from those to whom they are accountable await those who attempt this.

I see five key biblical requirements needed to maintain a biblical level of unity.

(1) Individuals must crucify themselves. This is clearly taught in Paul's great passage on unity (Phil. 2:1-11), where Christ's humiliation is presented as the model for our lifestyle if we are to maintain unity within the body. True, at times small annoyances will confront us; at such times a crucified self uses long-suffering. As Paul said just prior to urging the Ephesians to maintain the unity of the Spirit, we must "be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). When we are hurt in a conflict situation, crucified selves follow Paul's admonition: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (4:32).

One of the biggest hindrances to maintaining unity is hurt individuals who, in their efforts to solve a problem, give vent to their hurts. This may take the form of a battle for justice or truth, but is actually a battle to retrieve a hurt ego. A crucified self does not insist on its own way (1 Cor. 13:5). It should be willing to compromise on nonessentials for the greater good.

When self has been crucified, then we can follow Paul's injunction, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21). Paul uses the verb "submit" twenty-three times in his letters. F. F. Bruce says, "Reciprocal submission is a basic element in Christian ethical tradition." This is hard to envision in our individualistic age, where terms like *submission* imply that one's individual freedom is being jeopardized.

Many Christians refer to abuses of this principle of submission to eliminate it completely from their lives. They do not feel a church has any right to makes demands on members. They choose which church they will join and choose to leave it when "it does not meet their needs." Such people will not get the benefit of deep fellowship from any church and will not receive the security and enrichment that comes from spiritual accountability. We must not allow abuses of the principle of

submission to cause us to miss out on the great blessings that come from it.

(2) Leaders should make maintaining this unity one of their primary responsibilities. Paul's admonition in [Ephesians 4:3](#), "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace," is particularly applicable to leaders. I think the biggest challenge I have had in leading Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka for twenty-one years has been that of attempting to maintain this principle, especially among our leaders. It is easy to get so engrossed in fulfilling our mission that we ignore or postpone dealing with matters of unity in the body. But that is suicidal, for such issues will emerge; when they do, they usually emerge as huge conflicts, sometimes even resulting in people leaving the group.

You cannot force a person to walk in the light. But if he or she does not, you know that no true fellowship is possible with that person ([1 John 1:7](#)). The leader's task is to pray and act so that everyone walks in the light with each other. (Incidentally, working towards this goal has often resulted in the onset of revival in the church.) Perhaps the most dangerous hindrance to unity that can come from a leader is for him or her to take sides when cliques form and rivalries appear. Leaders must resist the tendency to lower their standards of unity and settle for less than a body life with one heart and one mind.

(3) Believers, especially team members, should meet often to share openly. The picture we get from the Gospels about Jesus' band of disciples is that of a group who spent a lot of time traveling, worshiping, talking, ministering, and learning together. It is when we "walk in the light" that "we have fellowship with one another" ([1 John 1:7](#), NASB). But such openness of fellowship takes time to forge and maintain.

In this busy world we must find time for what we consider important—including regular meetings. Leaders should insist that such meetings take place. Each team member may be so engrossed in his or her particular mission that they lose sight of the importance of meeting with other members. Leaders should insist that these meetings be a priority by

others on the team. Through them spiritual accountability can be forged. One of the greatest dangers in Christian ministry today is that many leaders are not accountable to anyone spiritually. We have developed good systems of financial and ministerial accountability by which our financial and ministerial activities are monitored, but we have forgotten the need for spiritual accountability.

The leaders should set a tone that allows people to share openly. This is well expressed in the "bands" or little companies that John Wesley set up for members in the early Methodist movements. Because of the sensitive nature of what was discussed at these meetings, he separated the men and women in these groups. He made the following rules:

In order to "confess our faults one to another," and pray one for another that we may be healed, we intend, (1) To meet once a week, at the least. (2) To come punctually at the hour appointed. (3) To begin with singing or prayer. (4) To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our soul, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have felt since the last meeting. (5) To desire some person among us (thence called a Leader) to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins, and temptations.

(4) Christian fellowship is essentially a spiritual unity in Christ. "Encouragement from being united with Christ" ([Phil. 2:1](#)) enables us to be "like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose" ([2:2](#); cf. Eph.

[4:3](#)). One of the ways to maintain this spiritual tie is to practice those things that will help deepen it. Through these we enjoy unconsciously what unites us, and that makes us realize that our differences are inconsequential.

We can mention several activities that confirm us in our unity in Christ. (a) *Worship and prayer* come to mind first. Acts consciously presents the connection between unity and prayer in [1:14](#) and [4:23](#). [Matthew 18:19-20](#) speaks of people agreeing in prayer and coming together in Christ's name, which will result in Christ's special presence. (b) Next is *a common commitment to the truths of God's Word*. The result of ministry of the Word by apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers in the church is that "we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature" ([Eph. 4:13](#)). (c) [Romans 15:5-6](#) shows how *commitment to a common mission fosters* unity: "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." An evangelistic passion certainly becomes a motive for unity, as Jesus said in his high priestly prayer: "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" ([John 17:23](#)).

I will never forget a meeting of the Younger Leaders Committee of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization that I attended in Stuttgart, Germany. We had gathered to organize "Singapore '87: The Lausanne Younger Leaders Conference." Each one there was a leader in his or her own right. We came from different ecclesiastical traditions and had strong convictions about how the conference should be run. On the first few days it seemed as if we could not agree on anything, and the arguments became heated. Toward the end of the meeting, we had serious doubts whether we could even make the conference work.

On the last day our leader, Canadian Brian Stiller, led us in an extended time of worship. Hardly any decisions had been made regarding the conference. But we worshiped God for two to three hours. Our worship consisted of testimony, ministry of the Word, praise through prayer and song, and intercession. We all sensed that God had done something among us. We affirmed what had made us one and that God had knit our hearts together in a most wonderful way. In the few hours that remained,

we were able to cover a volume of work much greater than what we did during the first few days of grappling. I believe the Lord richly blessed the conference, and the wonderful ties of friendship that developed among the committee members remain to this day. It was to me one of the sweetest experiences of the glory of the body of Christ that spans the globe and brings people of such diverse personalities and cultures into one happy family.

(5) The final key to maintain a biblical level and quality of unity is that of striving for agreement over a course of action. Acts 15 gives us a good illustration of this. When some men from Judea came to Antioch and brought theological confusion about the place of circumcision in the Christian's life, Paul and Barnabas immediately took the long trip to Jerusalem. The church there summoned what is now known as the Jerusalem Council. Different groups were able to present their viewpoints. Under the statesmanlike leadership of James the council was able to come up with a solution that everyone agreed with (15:25-28). Luke reports the solution on the controversy about the neglect of Grecian widows in a similar way (6:5).

Often in our hurry to get about our business, we are impatient to grapple for such unity. This is a near-sighted strategy, for the resulting lack of unity stunts growth, affects spiritual vitality, and hampers the fruitfulness of the group.

NIV Application Commentary, The - NIV Application Commentary,
The – Acts: From biblical text...to contemporary life.

Extending oneness to our possessions. How believers view their possessions is an important aspect of Christian fellowship. Usually when

we think of fellowship, we think of spiritual unity, of good relationships existing within the community, and of the sharing of good feelings towards each other. But the characteristically Christian word for fellowship, *koinonia*, means much more than that. Historian Justo L. Gonzales has shown that in the Bible, *koinonia* and its related words have the meaning of partnership as well.

Thus, we need to rethink our understanding of Christian fellowship in the light of what the New Testament records. True fellowship includes the attitude "this is not my own" to what one possesses. True accountability must involve our finances as well as other aspects of our lives.

Giving evangelism priority today. The New Testament presents a church that tried to be faithful in all the areas of the call of God.... We noted that Acts is essentially a history of evangelization in the first few decades of the Christian era.

Great QUOTE: It is the task of a leader to ensure that a movement "keeps the main thing the main thing." Sometimes for a consolidation stage in a movement people who are good managers are chosen to replace the retiring visionary pioneer. This may be a wise move. But if the manager has no passion for evangelism, a slow rot can gradually convert the movement into a machine and finally make it into a monument.

Great QUOTE: This focus on evangelism will help maintain unity in the church. Albert Lee, who directs Youth for Christ in Singapore, has said that the church has many generals and that generals exist by battling. Thus, if they are not battling Satan for the expansion of the kingdom, they will end up battling themselves (a.k.a. "conviction"). All too often leaders'

meetings in churches that have lost their evangelistic passion become an unbearable test of patience because hours are spent battling matters that are of little consequence in connection with the growth of God's kingdom. If we feel a passion to get the message to the lost and if we have crucified self, we will not waste time arguing over inconsequential things.

Sharing personal possessions today. "There were no needy persons among them" ([v. 34](#)). Paul wrote, "Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality" ([2 Cor. 8:13](#)). **Relative equality is a goal every Christian should strive for. I use the term *relative* because people's spending can vary according to their culture and responsibilities. But we must strive to have a situation where there are no needy people in the church. Thus, Christians should not decide on their lifestyle by looking at their peers in society, but rather after looking at the needs of the believers around them.**

QUOTE: There is a great freedom and joy that comes from such a lifestyle that is rich in giving rather than in using for oneself.

In New Testament times there was a cultural diversity in the church. Admittedly, that led to problems, such as in [Acts 6:1-6](#), when the Hellenists complained against the Hebraic Jews. But they did not divide the church as a result; instead, they sought to solve the problem as it surfaced.

A great enrichment and a sobering effect await us if we worship and commune in an economically integrated church. We will be struck by

the needs of others and realize how much of our expenditure is unnecessary and perhaps even sinful in light of the needs of others. That will force us to be generous. If we do not share, our fellowship with the needy will be hindered. It may also make us upset about the causes of poverty and drive us to do something about it.

QUOTE: A vital awareness of the needs of the poor through fellowshiping with them also influences our priorities for church life. Roy Clements says that the early church father Ambrose, bishop of Milan (c. 339-397), "rebuked the church of his day for the amount of money spent on beautifying its church buildings, while neglecting the service of the poor." Ambrose is reputed to have said, "A slave redeemed at the church's expense is a far better decoration for the Holy Communion table than a golden chalice." [

QUOTE: Giving does not become a major sacrifice when we realize that God owns our possessions.... If we say that our possessions belong to the Lord, we should act as if they do.

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Matthew Henry: Acts 5

The Sin and Punishment of Ananias and Sapphira

5:1-11

The chapter begins with a melancholy but, which puts a stop to the pleasant and agreeable prospect of things which we had in the foregoing chapters; as every man, so every church, in its best state has its but. 1. The disciples were very holy, and heavenly, and seemed to be all exceedingly good; but there were hypocrites among them, whose hearts were not right in the sight of God, who, when they were baptized, and took upon them the form of godliness, denied the power of godliness, and stopped short of that. There is a mixture of bad with good in the best societies on this side heaven; tares will grow among the wheat until the harvest 2. It was the praise of the disciples that they came up to that perfection which Christ recommended to the rich young man—they sold what they had, and gave to the poor; but even that proved a cloak and cover of hypocrisy which was thought the greatest proof and evidence of sincerity. 3. The signs and wonders which the apostles wrought were hitherto miracles of mercy; but now comes in a miracle of judgment, and here is an instance of severity following the instances of goodness, that God may be both loved and feared. Observe here,

I. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira his wife. It is good to see husband and wife joining together in that which is good, but to be confederate in evil is to be like Adam and Eve, when they agreed to eat the forbidden fruit, and were one in their disobedience. Now their sin was,

1. That they were ambitious of being thought eminent disciples, and of the first rank, when really **they were not true disciples**; they would pass for some of the most fruitful trees in Christ's vineyard, when really the root of the matter was not found in them. They sold a possession, and brought the money (as Barnabas did) to the apostles' feet, that they might not seem to be behind the very chief of believers, but might be applauded and cried up, and stand so much the fairer for preferment in the church, which perhaps they thought would shortly shine in secular pomp and grandeur. Note, It

is possible that hypocrites may deny themselves in one thing, but then it is to serve themselves in another; they may forego their secular advantage in one instance, with a prospect of finding their account in something else. Ananias and Sapphira would take upon them a profession of Christianity, and make a fair show in the flesh with it, and so would mock God, and deceive others, when they knew they could not go through with the Christian profession. It was commendable, and so far it was right, in that rich young man, that he would not pretend to follow Christ, when, if it should come to a pinch, he knew he could not come up to his terms, but he went away sorrowful. Ananias and Sapphira pretended they could come up to the terms, that they might have the credit of being disciples, when really they could not, and so were a discredit to discipleship. Note, It is often of fatal consequence for people to go a greater length in profession than their inward principle will admit of.

2. That **they were covetous of the wealth of the world, and distrustful of God and his providence**: They sold their land, and perhaps then, in a pang of zeal, designed no other than to dedicate the whole of the purchase-money to pious uses, and made a vow, or at least conceived a full purpose, to do so; but, when the money was received, their heart failed them, and they kept back part of the price, ([v. 2](#)), because they loved the money, and thought it was too much to part with at once, and to trust in the apostles' hands, and because they knew not but they might want it themselves; though now all things were common, yet it would not be so long, and what should they do in a time of need, if they should leave themselves nothing to take to? They could not take God's word that they should be provided for, but thought they would play a wiser part than the rest had done, and lay up for a rainy day. Thus **they thought to serve both God and mammon-God, by bringing part of the money to the apostles' feet, and mammon, by keeping the other part in their own pockets**; as if there were not an all-sufficiency in God to make up the whole to them, except they retained some in their own hands by way of caution-money. Their hearts were divided, so they were found faulty, [Hosea 10:2](#). **They halted**

between two; if they had been thorough-paced worldlings, they would not have sold their possession; and, if they had been thorough-paced Christians, they would not have detained part of the price.

3. That they thought to deceive the apostles, and make them believe they brought the whole purchase-money, when really it was but a part. **They came with as good an assurance, and as great a show of piety and devotion, as any of them, and laid the money at the apostles' feet, as if it were their all.** They dissembled with God and his Spirit, with Christ and his church and ministers; and this was their sin.

II. The indictment of Ananias, which proved both his condemnation and execution for this sin. **When he brought the money, and expected to be commended and encouraged, as others were, Peter took him to task about it, He, without any enquiry or examination of witnesses concerning it, charges him peremptorily with the crime, and aggravates it, and lays a load upon him for it, showing it to him in its own colour, v. 3,4. The Spirit of God in Peter not only discovered the fact without any information (when perhaps no man in the world knew it but the man and his wife themselves), but likewise discerned the principle of reigning infidelity in the heart of Ananias, which was at the bottom of it, and therefore proceeded against him so suddenly.**

Had it been a sin of infirmity, through the surprise of a temptation, Peter would have taken Ananias aside, and have bidden him go home, and fetch the rest of the money, and repent of his folly in attempting to put this cheat upon them; but he knew that his heart was fully set in him to do this evil, and therefore allowed him not space to repent. He here showed him,

1. **The origin of his sin: Satan filled his heart; he not only suggested it to him, and put it into his head, but hurried him on with resolution to do it. Whatever is contrary to the good Spirit proceeds from the evil spirit, and those hearts are filled by**

Satan in which worldliness reigns, and has the ascendant. Some think that Ananias was one of those that had received the Holy Ghost, and was filled with his gifts, but, having provoked the Spirit to withdraw from him, now Satan filled his heart; as, when the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, an evil spirit from God troubled him. **Satan is a lying spirit; he was so in the mouth of Ahab's prophets, and so he was in the mouth of Ananias, and by this made it appear that he filled his heart.**

2. The sin itself: He lied to the Holy Ghost; a sin of such a heinous nature that he could not have been guilty of it if Satan had not filled his heart.

(1.) The phrase which we render lying to the Holy Ghost, *pseusasthai se to pneuma to hagion*, some read, to belie the Holy Ghost, which may be taken two ways:

[1.] That he belied the Holy Ghost in himself; so Dr. Lightfoot takes it, and supposes that Ananias was not an ordinary believer, but a minister, and one that had received the gift of the Holy Ghost with the hundred and twenty (for mention is made of him immediately after Barnabas); yet he durst thus, by dissembling, belie and shame that gift. Or thus; Those who had sold their estates, and laid the money at the apostles' feet, did it by the special impulse of the Holy Ghost, enabling them to do an act so very great and generous; and Ananias pretended that he was moved by the Holy Ghost to do what he did, as others were; whereas it appeared by his baseness that he was not under the influence of the good Spirit at all; for, had it been his work, it would have been perfect.

[2.] That he belied the Holy Ghost in the apostles, to whom he brought the money; he misrepresented the Spirit they were actuated by, either by a suspicion that they would not faithfully distribute what they were entrusted with (which was a base suggestion, as if they were false to the trust reposed in them), or by an assurance that they could not discover the fraud. He belied the Holy Ghost when by what he did he would have it thought that those who are endued with the gifts of the Holy

Ghost might as easily be imposed upon as other men; like Gehazi, whom his master convicted of his error by that word, Went not my heart with thee? [2 Kings 5:26](#). It is charged upon the house of Israel and Judah, when, like Ananias here, they dealt very treacherously, that they belied the Lord, saying, It is not he, [Jeremiah 5:11, 12](#). Thus Ananias thought the apostles were altogether such as himself, and this was belying the Holy Ghost in them, as if he were not in them a discerner of spirits, whereas they had all the gifts of the Spirit in them, which to others were divided severally. See [1 Corinthians 12:8-11](#). Those that pretend to an inspiration of the Spirit, in imposing upon the church their own fancies, either in opinion or practice-that say they are moved from above when they are carried on by their pride, covetousness, or affectation of dominion, belie the Holy Ghost.

(2.) But we read it, to lie unto the Holy Ghost, which reading is countenanced by [v. 4](#), Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

[1.] Ananias told a lie, a deliberate lie, and with a purpose to deceive; he told Peter that he had sold a possession (house or lands) and this was the purchase-money. Perhaps he expressed himself in words that were capable of a double meaning, used some equivocations about it, which he thought might palliate the matter a little, and save him from the guilt of a downright lie: or perhaps he said nothing; but it was all one, he did as the rest did who brought the whole price, and would be thought to do so, and expected the praise those had that did so, and the same privilege and access to the common stock as they had; and therefore it was an implicit protestation that he brought the whole price, as they did; and this was a lie, for he kept back part. Note, Many are brought to gross lying by reigning pride, and affectation of the applause of men, particularly in works of charity to the poor. That therefore we may not be found boasting of a false gift given to us, or given by us ([Proverbs 25:14](#)), we must not boast even of a true gift, which is the meaning of our Saviour's caution in works of charity, Let not

thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth. 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, which it concerns us all to dread the thought of.

[2.] He told this lie to the Holy Ghost. It was not so much to the apostles as to the Holy Ghost in them that the money was brought, and that was said which was said, [v. 4](#), Thou hast not lied unto men (not to men only, not to men chiefly, though the apostles be but men), but thou hast lied unto God. Hence it is justly inferred that the Holy Ghost is God; for he that lieth to the Holy Ghost lieth to God. "Those that lied to the apostles, actuated and acting by the Spirit of God, are said to lie to God, because the apostles acted by the power and authority of God, whence it follows (as Dr. Whitby well observes) that the power and authority of the Spirit must be the power and authority of God." And, as he further argues, "Ananias is said to lie to God, because he lied to that Spirit in the apostles which enabled them to discern the secrets of men's hearts and actions, which being the property of God alone, he that lies to him must therefore lie to God, because he lies to one who has the incommunicable property of God, and consequently the divine essence."

3. The aggravations of the sin ([v. 4](#)): While it remained, was it not thine own? And, after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Which may be understood two ways:-

(1.) "Thou wast under no temptation to keep back part of the price; before it was sold it was thy own, and not mortgaged nor encumbered, nor any way engaged for debt; and when it was sold it was in thy own power to dispose of the money at thy pleasure; so that thou mightest as well have brought the whole as a part. Thou hadst no debts to pay, perhaps no children to provide for; so that thou wast not under the influence of any particular inducement to keep back part of the price. Thou was a transgressor without a cause." Or,

(2.) "Thou wast under no necessity of selling thy land at all, nor bringing any of the money to the apostles' feet. Thou mightest have kept the money, if thou hadst pleased, and the land too, and never have pretended to this piece of perfection." This rule of charity the apostle gives, that people be not pressed, and that it be not urged as of necessity, because God loves a cheerful giver ([2 Corinthians 9:7](#)), and Philemon must do a good work, not as it were of necessity, but willingly, [Philemon 1:14](#). As it is better not to vow than to vow and not to pay, so better had it been for him not to have sold his land at all than thus to keep back part of the price; not to have pretended to do the good work than thus to do it by the halves. "When it was sold, it was in thine own power; but it was not so when it was vowed: thou hadst then opened thy mouth to the Lord, and couldst not go back." Thus, in giving our hearts to God, we are not admitted to divide them. Satan, like the mother whose own the child was not, would take up with a half; but God will have all or none.

4. All this guilt, thus aggravated, is charged upon him: Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Observe, Though Satan filled his heart to do it, yet he is said to have conceived it in his own heart, which shows that we cannot extenuate our sins by laying the fault of them upon the devil; he tempts, but he cannot force; it is of our own lusts that we are drawn away and enticed. The evil thing, whatever it is, that is said or done, the sinner has conceived it in his own heart; and therefore, if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it. The close of the charge is very high, but very just: Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. What emphasis does the prophet lay upon that of Ahaz, not wearying men only, but wearying my God also! [Isaiah 7:13](#). And Moses upon that of Israel, Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord! [Exodus 16:8](#). So here, Thou mightest have imposed upon us, who are men like thyself; but, be not deceived, God is not mocked. If we think to put a cheat upon God, we shall prove in the end to have put a fatal cheat upon our own souls.

- Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible.