

LESSON FIVE

(4:32 - 5:11)

Fellowship in the Church

32 Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. 36 Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, 37 sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

5 *But a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, 2 and with his wife's knowledge he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? 4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." 5 When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. 6 The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.*

7 After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." 9 But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Hark, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." 10 Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things.

V. 32 - The disciples continued to share in many things as mentioned above, not just material things. The material sharing was just one way they had things in common.

As chapter 5 will show, a forced sharing was in direct antithesis to the concept they had of sharing. Their sharing was free-will in nature, and done because the need was evident.

The sharing was strictly voluntary on the part of everyone (as is seen in II Cor. 8-9), and private ownership of property continued. It was not a joint ownership of land, or production, but only a common sharing with others as motivated or needed. To have made any sharing compulsory would have been in direct contrast to the principle in Christianity.

common - The term is in antithesis to one's own. It was the term used by Peter in Acts 10 in reference to what he had shared or not shared with Gentiles. Here, the Christians in Jerusalem held things common among themselves.

V. 33 - **great power** - The Greek term was often used to describe a miracle, as in 2:22; or of the nature of the gospel, Romans 1:16. Of course, their power was being utilized to do what the council had forbidden them to do (v. 17-18): give testimony (Greek word is for martyr) to the gospel.

great grace - The word grace often appears in the N.T., and in some very interesting ways, as in 6:8; Luke 2:52; II Cor. 9:14; Titus 2:11; II Peter 3:18; etc. God evidently blessed them mightily to have a heart of generous goodness.

V. 34 - These verses present an interesting item for consideration, in that (as mentioned above), none were required to act as they were doing. Moreover, years later, a famine in Judea will put them all in the state of want, for which need Paul took up an offering among the Gentiles (II Cor. 8-9). God apparently did not always keep them economically rich, nor even provide basic needs in life, necessarily. Sometimes he allowed the faithful to endure many things for their faith, even to death in some cases.

V. 36 - **Joseph** - Barnabas, which meant "a son of encouragement or exhortation." Here we see one of the uses of the term "son" which could mean one of a group, or a likeness to someone else, a son in physical nature.

a Levite - Actually, the Levitical portion of inheritance was initially not material things, but God (see Numbers 18:20; Deuteronomy 10:9). Yet by inheritance or by purchase they could own land. The examples of Jeremiah in the Old Testament, and Josephus in the N.T. times are examples of this fact. Apparently some of the early Christians were not poor, but rather possessors of material goods, though most were not, I Cor. 1. Many of the Old Testament faithful were rich, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Solomon, etc.

5:1 - Since the ownership of the land remained with the individual, and not the Church, the initiative to sell or not to sell also remained with the individual. The reader should disregard the chapter divisions, and read 4:32 - 5:11 as a integral unit.

As for this incident, we note that 1) the early Christians were subject to the same temptations as we are; 2) Luke did not hesitate to record both the good deed of Barnabas and the contrasting deed of Ananias and Sapphira (we see a real Church, not an ideal one); 3) God sees and hears (and sometimes shows his displeasure for sin immediately rather than later or instead of showing mercy); and 4) any good thing will have its counterfeit.

V. 2 - Achan's sin was somewhat like that of Ananias: each had a love for money or material goods, subsumed under covetousness, which was a root of all kinds of evil.

The apostles were the leaders in the Jerusalem congregation, elders not yet having been chosen.

V. 3 - **why has Satan...?** - As with Judas, who also loved money, Satan filled the mind with a desire that was not resisted, but welcomed.

to lie - So much is taught in the N.T. about a basic honesty that ought to be characteristic of the Christian, that we need but mention the point John makes: no lie is of the truth, I John 2:21. To become like God, we must hate lying and love truth, for God never lies (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). Christians are not to lie to one another; Col. 3:9; remembering that one can exchange the truth of God for a lie, Romans 1:25.

to the Holy Spirit - Identified as a person to whom one can lie, and also possessing the quality of deity, v. 4.

V. 4 - **your disposal** - The Greek word behind “disposal” is often translated power (as in John 1:12 or Matt. 28:18) or authority. It carries the basic idea of freedom to act, thus the right to act. Ananias and Sapphira had the right to do with their possessions as they wished. They should not have lied about the matter, however.

you have lied - Probably to be understood that Ananias had lied to men (at least in the presence of men, and speaking to such), but as well to God. Note how Joseph views himself in Genesis 39:9. The fact is that all sin is ultimately against God, whose forgiveness we must receive. Sin may also involve others, but it certainly involves God. This fact must be kept in our minds at all times: we are always responsible to God even though our lives are normally involved with men.

V. 5 - **When Ananias heard** - The Greek term indicates that perhaps while Peter was still speaking, he fell down and died.

died - The Greek term is seen only here, in v. 10 and 12:23. It means something akin to the life went out. The term is from soul or life and out of or from.

V. 6 - **the young men** - Contrasting these with the older men in the congregation. It seems a bit difficult to believe that both Ananias and Sapphira died simply from the shock at being discovered and informed about their guilt. Many were made guilty at Pentecost, even cut to the quick but no physical death resulted. It is more likely that the people saw here what was also seen in Nadab and Abihu, etc. Peter's remark in v. 9 seems to indicate the idea that God killed them for their sin, an eye-opening incident for everyone, which resulted in fear, v. 11, honor, v. 13, believers, v. 14, etc.

V. 7 - Were the people so far in fear that they did not tell Sapphira about the matter? Perhaps it was but coincidental that she did not hear, or maybe they were instructed to remain silent.

V. 8 - **Yes** - She was as committed to the lie and hypocrisy as Ananias.

V. 9 - Note, in addition to the ascription of personality and deity to the Holy Spirit in v. 2-4, Peter speaks as if the Holy Spirit can be tested/tempted. The point Jesus mentioned in Matt. 4:7, quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16 gives the issue: God was/is not to be tested, in the bad sense of the term.

agreed together - The basic Greek term is used in II Cor. 6:15, accord, or agreement.

V. 11 - The paradoxes in the Scripture are always interesting. We so often quote I John 4:18 about perfect love and fear that we forget the many scriptures enjoining us to fear God...or else! See Exodus 20:20; Deut. 31:12-13; Rom. 3:18; II Cor. 7:1; Phil. 2:12; Heb. 4:1; I Peter 2:17; Jude v. 23; etc. We should become afraid for ourselves when we cease fearing God (compare Rom. 3:18).

QUESTIONS

50. Why were Barnabas and Ananias contrasted?

51. How is the Holy Spirit characterized?

52. Please read and memorize Hebrews 4:12-13.

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 5

1. Thought question: Did the early church practice communism (forced sharing)? Explain your answer.

2. What was the Greek term “great power” often used to describe?

3. Discuss how the word “grace” is used in Acts 6:8; Luke 2:52; II Cor. 9:14; Titus 2:11; and II Peter 3:18.
4. Who was Joseph (Acts 5), by what other name was he known, and what did his name mean?
5. Who was Achan, and what sin did he commit (Joshua chapter 7)?
6. Who were Ananias and Sapphira? What did they do, what happened to them, and why did this happen to them?
7. Discuss the Greek word behind the term “disposal”.
8. What is unique about the Greek word for “died” in Acts 5:5?
9. Who were Nadab and Abihu (refer to textbook page 39, verse 6 and Leviticus 10:1-3). What can we learn from Nadab/Abihu and Ananias/Sapphira?
10. Can the Holy Spirit be tempted? Explain your answer.
11. Explain the author’s comment, “We should become afraid for ourselves when we cease fearing God”.