

Unit III: Godly Love among Believers

Sharing Love in Truth

DEVOTIONAL READING: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Acts 4:32-5:11

PRINT PASSAGES: Acts 4:32-37; 5:1-11

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

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All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. (Acts 4:32, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Explore the Jerusalem church's practice and witness of communal sharing.
- Regret your idolatrous attachment to material goods.
- Create a plan to increase your giving for the common good.

***Key Terms**

Apostles (4:33)—Greek: *apostolos* (ap-os'-tol-os): messengers; persons on a mission.

Fear (5:11)—Greek: *phobos* (fob'-os): the causing of fear, reverence, respect; revere.

Lie(d) (5:3)—Greek: *pseudomai* (psyoo'-dom-ahee): deceive(d); speak (spoke) deliberate falsehoods.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

The surface affluence of our society has led to the acquisition of money as a status symbol. The more money one has identifies the possessor as someone of prestige and importance. This fixation on getting more has also attributed to crimes such as burglary, armed robbery, embezzlement, money laundering, forgery, counterfeiting, and violent crimes such as murder. The Word of God does not condemn the acquisition of money, but it does say, "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted



The Biblical Context

The church at Jerusalem could be designated “the church at her best.” Acts 2:42-47 gives us a succinct and detailed description of that church’s character. Along with being a scriptural, Christ-centered, praying, and magnetic church, it was a sharing church. Their unity was both spiritual and practical. Their mutual sharing was not unique in origin but had been commanded by God when He chose Israel as His own (Exodus 23:10-11; Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-22). The awesome growth this church experienced (Acts 2:41) created economic challenges that led to the congregation’s practice of unselfishly sharing their material possessions so that no member had need. This practice was strictly voluntary and was motivated by their commitment to the Word and love for one another. From Acts 2–4:31, the picture of the early church was positive, having witnessed phenomenal growth, miracles, and victory over external opposition. This picture changes as the spirit and intent of their communal sharing is marred by two of its members who sought to make the double profit of spiritual recognition and extra money on the side.

after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10). In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:24), Jesus told His disciples that it is impossible to serve God *and* money. But it is possible to serve God and others *with* money and personal possessions. Believers are commanded to live free of the love of money and to be content with what they have because God has promised to never leave or forsake them (see Hebrews 13:5). In fact, God calls us to share with those in need and to give generously out of what He has given us (see Hebrews 13:6; Luke 6:38; Proverbs 22:7). The early church understood this truth in both principle and practice. The sacrificial sharing of these Christians was the practical application of God’s love among His people.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Truthful Sharing (Acts 4:32-37)

KJV

32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

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

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35 And laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

NIV

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.

33 With great power the *apostles* continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all

34 that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales

35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"),

37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 4:32-37 provides another view of the pattern of life characterizing the early church and the practice of communal sharing. The church had grown so numerically that Luke did not provide a membership number (**verse 32**). Despite its size, the membership possessed the same mind and purpose. First, they were Christ-centered and totally devoted to the Lord. Additionally, no one considered their personal property as their own, but were ready to share it to meet the needs of others. This church was actively practicing the two great commandments to totally love God and to love one's neighbor. The singleness of mind and purpose of the church was augmented by the continuous preaching of the Gospel (**verse 33**). The Sanhedrin had earlier forbidden the apostle from doing so, but God answered their prayer for boldness, and they continued. The results of their Spirit-directed preaching were both the favor of God and a positive reception from among the people. A congregation with singleness of mind and purpose undergirded by the Spirit-filled preaching of the Gospel can still be a powerful witness in the world today and draw the lost to Christ. The practical outworking of this church's ministry was their voluntary willingness to meet the needs of others by sharing their material possessions (**verses 34-35**). This attitude was characteristic of every member because they understood that all things belong to and come from God. God's promise that there would be no poor among them (see Deuteronomy 15:4) saw its fulfillment in this church, as those with more freely sacrificed for the poor. To ensure equitable distribution, those who sold property brought the proceeds to the apostles. One example of this sacrificial generosity among the congregation was the Levite Joseph, surnamed Barnabas, meaning "son of encouragement" (**verses 36-37**).

Several reasons have been given for his introduction at this point in Luke's account. Primarily, he was a particularly generous giver. Second, as his surname suggests, he performed the important ministry of encouraging other believers within the church. It is also possible that Luke mentioned him here because of the significant role he would play in the future ministry of the apostle Paul. As a Levite, he was not permitted to own land according to the law that forbade it (see Numbers 18:20; Deuteronomy 10:9). It has been

suggested that he acquired property because the law only applied to Palestine, and the property could have been in Cyprus where he was from. Nonetheless, Barnabas stands out as the example of honestly sharing personal possessions in response to Christ's command to love one another.

Q What Do You Think? How can believers be encouraged to give generously on a regular basis?

Counterfeit Sharing (Acts 5:1-11)

KJV

- BUT** A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,
2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.
3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to *lie* to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?
4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.
5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.
6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.
7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.
8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.
9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.
10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.
11 And great *fear* came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

NIV

- NOW** A man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.
2 With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.
3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have *lied* to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?

4 “Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”

5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.

6 Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

8 Peter asked her, “Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?” “Yes,” she said, “that is the price.”

9 Peter said to her, “How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.”

10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

11 Great *fear* seized the whole church and all who heard about these events

The generosity previously described was an example of personal honesty and trust in the spiritual leadership of the church. It was also the practical application of *agape* love. A second example is given during this era of voluntary communal giving that is a sharp contrast to Barnabas’s honest generosity. The opening “But” (**verse 1**) introduces a dishonest scheme by two members of the fellowship: Ananias and his wife, Sapphira. They too sold property, but in collusion with each other kept part of the proceeds before bringing it to the apostles to be distributed for the common good (**verses 1-2**). Their act was deliberate and unnecessary because it was not mandatory to sell property and contribute the proceeds to the church. It is conjectured that they knew about or saw Barnabas’s contribution and desired recognition for being generous givers. Believers are commanded to be generous givers, but with honest intentions and not grudgingly (see 2 Corinthians 9:6-7). The hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira did not escape Peter. Rather than receiving accolades, Ananias received condemnation. Peter accused him of being controlled by Satan to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the proceeds from the land (**verse 3**). Ananias was at liberty to keep or sell the property as he saw fit. His sin was lying to the Holy Spirit (**verse 4**). Peter sternly rebuked him because the sin was his responsibility, and he could have chosen to resist the influence of Satan. Failure to deal with personal sin gives Satan a foothold of influence in one’s life. Immediately upon hearing Peter’s words, Ananias fell dead (**verse 5**). Sin had been allowed to infest the church, and God acted quickly and severely to remove it. His judgment caused great fear among all who heard about it. Ananias’s body was carried out and buried by the young men of the congregation (**verse 6**). This was customary due to the hot, dry climate of Palestine.

After an interval of three hours Ananias's wife, Sapphira, arrived, ignorant of her husband's fate (**verses 7-10**); she also lied about the amount of money they received from the sale of their land. Peter exposed her duplicity and her attempt to test the limit of God's judgment and she suffered the same fate. The result of God's discipline of this couple was a "great fear" felt by believers and unbelievers (**verse 11**). This was not church discipline, but God's discipline meant to impress upon the church the seriousness of sin among believers. Satan's influence had allowed sin to attempt to affect the church's purity, and God quickly removed it. Sin can cause good things to be used for selfish purposes, as we see in the lives of Ananias and Sapphira. There is an explicit wake-up call to the church today. Sin among the membership of Christ's church must be taken seriously and dealt with according to the standards He has established in His Word. The church without a spot or wrinkle will not become a reality if peace is preferred over purity. We must also remain aware that God knows our motives and every intention of our hearts. Whether we give or minister in some other way, it must be done honestly and with love.

Q What Do You Think? How focused is the community of faith on purity over maintaining corporate peace?

A Closing Thought


The early church is an exemplary model of what it takes to share love and truth. They were a Spirit-filled church united in their doctrinal beliefs, fellowship, and worship. One evidence of their unity was the way they sacrificed and shared with one another as economic needs surfaced among them. God still expects His followers to demonstrate generosity through sacrificially sharing their material blessings to meet others' needs. A church emulating the internal characteristics of the church in Jerusalem and energized by the Holy Spirit will be motivated to bring life to the command to share His love and share resources to bless the lives of others for the glory of God.

Your Life

Sharing love in truth is challenging unless one's life is submitted to the leadership and direction of the Holy Spirit. Identify a legitimate need you can help meet this week that will "cost" you something to accomplish. Blessing others sacrificially is the key to being blessed by the Giver of all things.

Your World!

Our world in general is a "me first" society. The spirit of willingly and sacrificially giving is almost a thing of the past. The older generation must teach the "now generation" by example about the spiritual expectation and the benefit of sharing personal resources with those in need.

 **Closing Prayer** Lord, help us revive the spirit of sacrifice and loving generosity You expect us to visibly demonstrate in our lives by sharing with others what You have given us. In the precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Godly love among believers eliminates acts of discrimination and partiality. Next week, James addresses a situation dealing with these sins and provides the solution for eliminating them from among God's people. Study James 2:1-13 to prepare for this final lesson.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY , November 23	"Extending Mercy Is More Important than Sacrifice"	(Matthew 12:1-8)
TUESDAY , November 24	"Love One Another from the Heart"	(1 Peter 1:17-23)
WEDNESDAY , November 25	"In Christ, Gentiles Share Abraham's Faith"	(Galatians 3:6-9, 13-14)
THURSDAY , November 26	"The Faith of a Levite Mother Saves Moses"	(Exodus 2:1-10)
FRIDAY , November 27	"Unexpressed Faith Has No Value"	(James 2:14-17)
SATURDAY , November 28	"Faith and Works Complement Each Other"	(James 2:18-26)
SUNDAY , November 29	"Disdain the Practice of Partiality"	(James 2:1-13)

Notes