

Generosity and Deceptive Greed

Acts 4:32-5:11 ³² Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving 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 owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field that 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 for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it 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 for yourself 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? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." ⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. 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 test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. 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.

❖ Brief Recap

- Peter and John healed a lame man
- They were Imprisoned by the Jewish Leaders
- They preached the gospel to many in the temple, and then to the leaders
- They were persecuted and warned but remained Bold
- They rejoiced and praised God for His Sovereignty
- Now Luke gives us a another picture of the early church

❖ Intro

- **God's Word is Precious to the Church**
 - It is Encouraging...
 - And it is instructive
 - And it kindly Disciplines us...
 - What a good Father to discipline His Children
- **Great Verses to Teach on Giving Generously**
 - We learn about generosity in the church...
 - You may think you already know about it...
 - But let God's Word feed you today
- **I do not believe in coercing believers into giving...**
 - I think there are plenty of places in the Bible that teach against that
 - We can not coerce people into giving when they do not trust God to provide
 - We should not coerce people into giving for selfish reasons
 - **Believers must have this purpose in their heart by the Lord**
 - And then, they must follow Him, and trust Him...

- **I do believe in teaching the church to follow God's way**
 - But I believe it must be done through His Word...
 - We must let His word lay down the principle for giving in the church today
 - So, let us continue in our study of the book of Acts
 - **As we preach Expositionally through His Word...**
 - Expositionally meaning we draw out what is in the text
 - ◆ And we preach it and teach it to the people
 - ◆ As the author intended and not as it suits our desires...
 - And we believe this is the biblical method for preaching and teaching His Word
- **Exposition is a Safe Guard for the Church and the Preacher**
 - The church is forced to face the full counsel of God's Word
 - The Preacher must stay faithful to the full counsel of God's Word
 - He does not skip what is hard on him or hard on the people
- **Let us Let God's Word sink into our hearts and deal with us today...**
 - For some these verses will be confirmation of their trust in Jesus
 - For others these verses will be a great judgment on their lack of faith
 - On their lack of trust in God...
- **Who are We more Like:**
 - Some of us will find ourselves identifying closely with Barnabas
 - Others of us will find ourselves closely aligned with Ananais and Saphira...
 - **And when we do: Let us not shrink away from this...**
 - Own who you are today...
 - If you do not, then you will never move closer to God
- **Giving is not all we glean from these inspired verses today**
 - "Glean" simply meaning the fruit we gather... the food we take in today from the Word of God
 - We also learn about giving powerful testimony
 - And God's Grace toward the church
 - And Unity in the early church
- **The Point that Most Stands out to me:**
 - ¹¹ **And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.**
 - And if there is one thing we could use a good healthy dose of around here... it is godly fear
 - So, we will go through these verses...
 - And we are going to be taught by them to give generously and live in unity...
 - But, it will be difficult to do these things if we do not fear the Lord...

❖ Outline

- 1) A Unified Body
- 2) Empowered by Grace
- 3) Generous Believers
- 4) A Heart of Generosity
- 5) A Heart of Deceptive Greed

❖ 1) A Unified Body

- ³² **Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.**
- **They were Unified**
 - **The Church functioned together...**
 - They were united in love for each other.

- They were united under the teachings of the apostles...
- They were united in fellowship with each other...
- They thought highly of their brothers and sisters...
- They were humble
- **They were so unified...**
 - That they no longer considered their possessions their own...
 - Rather, they shared with those around them
- **In Peter's 1st Letter we see his instructions to us on unity**
 - And I think it is a glimpse into that unity the early church had
 - What a great guide for you and me today... to work toward unity
- **1 Peter 3:8-10⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.**
- **1) Get together and be unified in your minds...** have the same type of thinking
 - I think this is something we must work toward together
 - But the way to do this is to be under the apostle's teachings...
 - And we all have the same Bible...
- There is great unity in the church today when it comes to the Word of God...
 - There are millions that are of one mind...
 - Where this goes awry is when people try to add to the word of God
 - Or take away from the Word of God..
- **As Paul told Timothy..**
 - We are to rightly divide the Word of Truth...
 - There is a right way and a wrong way...
 - And we should sit down and pray and study until we get to the right way...
 - ◆ **One Forgotten Aspect of Unity**
 - Is the Holy Spirit... He is our teacher...
 - And HE can bring us together on our understanding of the Word...
 - But the church today, much like Ananais... has forgotten the Holy Spirit of God...
- **2) Sympathy** – Be compassionate...
 - share the same feelings as others when they go through tough times
 - sympathy will lead you to action on behalf others
- **3) Brotherly Love** – Love Your Fellow Believers... Just like you would a close brother
- **4) Tender Heart** – Merciful and filled with loving Kindness toward others...
- **5) Humble Mind** – Do not think too highly of yourselves...
 - exalt those around you... think highly of others...
- **6) Do not Repay Evil** for Evil, but instead bless
 - Do not be vindictive... but do good things back to those who wrong you
- **If We follow these things today....**
 - We will find ourselves much like the early church: Unified
- **Notice:**
 - When the Holy Spirit came to live within the believer... it tightened their bond with believers...
 - The Holy Spirit caused them to care less about self and more about others...
 - Jesus made them think toward others first, and themselves last...

❖ 2) Empowered by Grace

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

- **The Apostles Continued to Give their Testimony**
 - And We know from other places throughout Acts...
 - It was not just the Apostles... but all the disciples were in on the telling of the gospel...
- **The Preached about the Resurrection of Jesus**
 - They went around telling people the story of Jesus...
 - And how He died and then how He rose from the dead...
 - And they said... We were there for it... We saw it...
 - And it was very effective because the Holy Spirit was moving with them
- **Great Grace Was Upon Them All**
 - God was gracious to them
 - And this is likely one of the main reasons they were so unified...
 - And spent so much time telling others about Jesus
 - God had given them grace...
- **Grace:**
 - God was so good to them even though they did not deserve it...
 - And I think they wanted to share God's graciousness with others...
 - They wanted to tell people...
 - God has taken away all my sins... and given me eternal life...
 - And all I did was believe Him
- **We Need To Be Much More Evangelistic...**
 - We need to be purposeful about sharing Jesus with others...
 - We do not do it because we are fearful...
 - We do not do it because we worry more about what man thinks than God thinks...
- **The early church grew because they loved Jesus...**
 - And this bubbled over into their lives so much that they could not help but speak of Him
 - We need to be a part of growing the Kingdom of God
- **They prayed for boldness...**
 - And it was given to them...
 - We must pray for boldness... Satan wants us to keep our mouths shut
 - Satan wants us to walk by the burning building filled with people
 - And never tell them it is on fire
- **And we should be ashamed of ourselves**
 - For our lack of faith
 - And our lack of compassion...
- **And We will see in a minute how God can get the attention of His Church**
 - When they begin to get off track

❖ 3) Generous Believers

- ³⁴There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.
- **Lets Look at the Details of their Generosity first:**
 - 1) Not a needy person among them
 - 2) Owners of lands and houses sold them
 - 3) They brought the proceeds to the leaders of the church
 - 4) And it was given out as any had need....
- **So... I think we see two main things here...**
 - **1) The People were very generous**
 - As we saw in the previous verses...

- ◆ , and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

- **2) The Church wisely gave to those who were in need**

- When a need arose, they were able to meet it...
- And we see later that they appoint deacons to help in the meeting of needs..
- **As much as we read the N.T. I think we see they were meeting real needs...**
 - ◆ They likely had their finger on the pulse of the people...
 - ◆ They likely did not meet the needs of the lazy
 - Since we read that that person should not even eat...
- **And I am sure they were taken advantage of a few times...**
 - ◆ But their heart was one for taking care of the needy...

- **They had plenty... Because the People were generous...**

- **Notice:**

- In the same way that their Salvation led them to think more of others...
- It led them to think less of their possessions...
- When the person became a believer:
- His strong ties to his worldly goods were cut...
- He thought less of this world, and more of the world to come...

- **Giving Was Great in the Early Church:**

- Consider this... Our starting point when it comes to giving is the Tithe...
- A Tithe is a Tenth of what we gain right?
- So a person can not be a tither, unless they give a tenth...

- **Now, I do not know the giving patterns of the people of our church...**

- I Stay away from knowing who gives what...
- So today as we consider giving...
- Lets consider it from God's standpoint... from His Word... What His word has to say about it...
- I will pass no judgments except to say:
 - **Our giving needs to be more... Because we are not meeting our budget...**
- But more importantly is that we give as God is commanding us to give...

- **So early on in the Bible before God ever gave the law to Moses**

- Abraham gave a tenth of his goods to a priest named Melchizedek...
- We then see God establish with His people to give a tithe, a tenth of their goods to the Lord...

- **If they did not, it was considered that they were robbing God...**

- **Malachi 3:8-10 ⁸Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. ⁹You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.**
- And in all honestly, they were not giving, so much as paying what they owed God...
- They understood that all their goods had been given to them from God...

- **And If you just wanted to get by in your giving...**

- A person would give his law imposed tenth and be done with it...
- But there were special offerings that people could make...

- **A Principle in the Bible:**

- When you give, God blesses you...
- It is there in the Bible... We do not have to be health and wealth preachers to tell people this...
- The principle is throughout the Bible...
- God blesses those who give generously...
- And even today people can tell countless stories
 - of how God has done just that when they gave extra..

- **But... Giving Generously Means:**
 - We must Trust God...
 - If we do not trust Him to handle our finances and meet our needs... then we will never start...
 - And we will never be blessed by God...
- **We do not give because we do not trust God...**
 - We think... If I can just pay this bill or that bill and get caught up I can give...
 - We fail to realize God will provide for those who trust in Him
- **We need to be like the churches of Macedonia who gave generously beyond what they had**
 - **2 Cor 8:2-4² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints**
- **Let Me Make A Blanket Statement to Us All**
 - If you have not prayerfully asked God to lead you in what to Give: You are in Sin
 - If you have not looked Biblically at what God asks of You in conjunction with your prayers
 - You are in Sin
 - If you have not given what God has led you to give in your heart: You are in Sin...
- **Now, there does seem to be a lot of room for us to give as we purpose in our heart**
 - God let's us be as generous as we want to be...
 - **2 Cor 9:6-7⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**
 - So much so, that we should not even give if it is not in our heart to give...
 - Because God does not want, nor does He need your money...
 - **On the contrary... you need to give... it is for yourself more than for God...**
 - He owns all things...!

❖ 4) A Heart of Generosity

- **³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.**
- **Barnabas... Son of Encouragement...**
 - The apostles changed His name because He was so known for being an Encourager...
- **We see Barnabas as a great example for the church in his day as well as ours...**
 - He is the advocate of the new convert Paul (9:27)
 - **Acts 9:27²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.**
 - The shepherd of the new Gentile converts in Antioch (11:22),
 - **Acts 11:22²² The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.**
 - The one trusted with relief for the poor (11:30),
 - **Acts 11:30³⁰ And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.**
 - The first partner of Paul on his missionary journeys (13:2),
 - **Acts 13:2² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."**
 - The advocate for giving John Mark a second chance (15:37)
 - **Acts 15:37³⁷ Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark.**

➤ **John Piper says of Barnabas:**

- *“He is one of the most mature, reliable, loveable leaders of the early church. And right here in Acts 4:36–37 Luke shows us how Barnabas' trusted ministry began—it began with a demonstrated freedom from the love of things, and a heart of love for the poor. He sold his field and gave all the proceeds to the apostles. In this story he stands for the way true faith in Christ creates a bond of love for people and cuts a bond of love for things.”*

❖ **Did this Mean the Early Church had everything together?**

- Was everything perfect?
- Was the early church meeting every need perfectly...
- **No!**
 - Obviously we see a very dark event for the early church here in ch. 5
 - We also see certain people being left out when needs are being distributed
- **So... The church has to grow...**
 - But the people are giving, not to the apostles...
 - But to the Lord...
- **And we see a very negative situation arise in the church**
 - And God does not hide it...
 - He does not cover up the sin...
 - He does not hide the fact that He has children in His church that are Hypocrites
- **If someone ever says they do not want to come to church because of all the hypocrites...**
 - Just say, come on in, we are always looking for more of them... right?
 - And here we see the height of Hypocrisy

LOOK MORE INDEPTH AT THIS NEXT WEEEK: JUST BREIFLY TODAY

❖ **5) A Heart of Deceptive Greed**

- **But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.**
- **Their Hearts Were Filled With Deceit and Greed**
 - Were they Christians? Probably So...
- **1) Satan Filled His Heart to Lie**
 - ³ **But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?”**
 - **Satan had filled his heart to lie to the Holy Spirit**
 - How can Satan do this?
 - Aren't believers protected from being possessed by Satan
 - ◆ Sure they are...
 - Believers are not immune to Satan's Temptations
 - ◆ Especially when they open themselves up to sin...
- **2) He Did Not Have to Give**
 - ⁴ **While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.”**
 - God had given them this land to do as he wished to do.
 - Even after it was sold He could do what He wanted to do with it.
 - He Contrived to Lie in his Heart...

- He lied to God
- **3) They Sinned Together**
 - 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 test the Spirit of the Lord?”
 - They Tested the Spirit of the Lord
- **4) God’s Judgment Brought Great Fear**
 - ⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. 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... Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. 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.
 - **God Took Away Their Earthly Life**
 - They Breathed their last breath
 - **Great Fear Came Upon the Church**
 - The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom
 - ◆ **Psalm 111:10** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!
- **Great Fear Came Upon the Whole Church:**
 - They feared because they saw the hand of God move against hypocrisy
 - The Fact that the Holy Spirit was among them became very obvious to the church...
- **If We Think We Can Hide Our Hypocrisy**
 - And I say this to myself first and foremost...
 - We are fools... and our end may very well be like Ananais and Saphira...
 - It may not be as dramatic... But let us not forget that God is here with us...
 - He walks in the midst of the churches...
- **Therefore:**
 - The better option is to repent... and Trust God...
 - Trust God with you possessions
 - Trust God with your name and your fame
 - Trust God with your family
 - Trust God with your reputation
 - Trust God to take you through persecutions for His glory and your good...
- **Invitation**
 -