

Review

In our study of Acts chapter two, we saw that the church was about 2,100 people strong. And the church was thriving spiritually and inter-personally:

Acts 2:42-47 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Everything about the church was going well. But as more and more people got involved, one problem couldn't help but mess things up: people. Today, our study shows that people managed to ruin a really special part of the church...

4:32-35 One Heart And Soul

The church is described as "the congregation." That word in Greek is play'-thos, which means "a great multitude." There was a multitude of them - literally thousands!

But notice this: they were all of one heart (**kar-DEE-ah**) and soul (**psoo-KHAY**). Literally, "of one cardio and psyche."

Imagine all of us being able to say that we are united in our feelings, and united in our thinkings!

Everything for them was communal. No one was saying, "This is mine." It was all common property. Nobody was needy, because nobody was being greedy.

Giving Testimony With Great Power

Now, because this community love was happening, the apostles were able to testify of the resurrection of Jesus. Their message had the power of confirmation behind it. As they were teaching and saying, "We've witnessed the resurrection of Jesus, and that new life has been given to each of us," unbelievers were able to look at the church community and say, "These people have been changed. Communism hasn't ever worked, and will never work apart from people with new life. But it's working here!"

Saints, imagine what would happen in the world if we validated our message by demonstrating new life in Christ by actively loving one another? Jesus said,

John 13:35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

4:36-37 Barnabas

Here, we're introduced to a man that will become better known to us through the book of Acts, chapters nine through 15, and chapter two of the book of Galatians.

A Levite's Land

Right now, we're only told a couple of things. And those things pose a problem. Number one, Barnabas was a Levite. Number two, he sold a tract of land and did as many others were doing - gave the money to the apostles to distribute throughout the church.

But here's the problem: according to the Law of God, the Levites weren't supposed to own land, because the sons of Levi did not have an inheritance in the land. Sure, they were allowed to live in certain cities and farm certain fields, but this was in the midst of the land of the other tribes. God had said,

Num. 18:24 "For the tithe of the sons of Israel, which they offer as an offering to the LORD, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance; therefore I have said concerning them, 'They shall have no inheritance among the sons of Israel.'"

So why does this Levite have a tract of land to sell? Well, God had told the people of Israel,

Deut. 12:19 "Be careful that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land."

But by the time of the first century, they had forsaken the Levites, just as they had in the days of Nehemiah (13:10-13). It was every man for himself. The chief priests, elders, and scribes had cornered the market on making money from temple operations. The Levites had to fend for themselves. That's why Barnabas was a Levite but owned a tract of land.

At The Apostles' Feet

Like the others, Barnabas took the money he'd gotten from the sale of the land and laid it at the apostles' feet. The administration of the money's distribution was simply entrusted to the apostles.

This seems really foreign to us, because frankly, we don't trust anyone today. And recent corporate accounting scandals like WorldCom, Enron, and Tyco have only put more doubt in everyone's minds that anyone can be trusted without oppressive watchdogging and threats of imprisonment.

But the apostles were trustworthy. Not because they had business degrees, but simply because they had the fear of God. I'm more afraid of what God would do to me for misusing His money than I am of the government. Talk about a watchdog who could imprison you!

5:1-2 A Lie About Land

Not everybody had the fear of God the apostles had, or the love and generosity that Barnabas had. A man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira seemed to be more concerned about how people thought of them rather than how people could be blessed by them.

They sold some land as well, but had kept part of the money for themselves. They obviously didn't trust the community church system to provide for their needs. And no wonder: they themselves were selfish, so they undoubtedly assumed other people would be as well.

What's interesting to me is that this is not what is named as their sin. Their distrust of others in the body of Christ wasn't their downfall. Even the fact that they kept part of the money for themselves wasn't what got them judged. It was that they lied to God.

Read what happened...

5:3-10 Lying To The Spirit

Ananias and Sapphira had lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). The Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:4). And for this sin, they fell down dead. This couple learned too late the truth of the Proverbs,

Prov. 19:22-23 ...it is better to be a poor man than a liar. The fear of the LORD leads to life...

Why did they die? Well, God never insisted that every Christian must sell everything they own and donate it to the church. But He has insisted that regarding...

Rev. 21:8 "...all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Prov. 19:5 A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will not escape.

Don't try to lie to God. He knows the truth better than you do.

5:11 Fearful Of Sinning

Two people in the church had fallen over dead for lying to God. Needless to say, people were beyond concerned. They were downright afraid!

But is this fear a negative thing? I don't think so. In fact, this kind of fear is a wonderfully cleansing agent in the church. It's like Paul said,

2Cor. 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Holiness is perfected in the fear of God. Jesus told us,

Luke 12:4-5 "I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!"

If you fear God, you will keep away from evil, for...

Prov. 8:13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil...

When we fear God, we walk in holiness.