

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 2-21-16 AM NOTES
"LIFE AND DEATH IN THE CHURCH"
ACTS 4:32-5:11
7 in Series, "Acts: The Spirit, the Church, and the World"

1 Peter 5:8 (NASB) "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

2 Corinthians 11:14 (NASB) "No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."

John 13:34-35 (NASB) "³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Romans 7:23 (NASB) "but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members."

I. The Life That Comes With Stewardship (4:32-37)

A. There Was a Oneness of Heart, Soul, and Possessions (4:32)

Ezekiel 11:19 (NASB) "And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh."

Ephesians 4:18 (NASB) "being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart."

John 17:20-21 (NASB) "²⁰I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; ²¹that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me."

"It is quite possible to come to church and sit together in the pews, united in a physical presence with other Christians, to sing the same hymns and listen to the same message, and relate to God individually, but to have no sense of body life, no sense of belonging to one another. It is possible to come week after week, year after year, and never know the people with whom you worship."
Ray Steadman

B. There Was A Powerful Proclamation (4:33)

C. There Was Lavish Giving (4:34-37)

Acts 11:24 (NASB) "for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord."

II. The Death That Comes From Hypocrisy (5:1-10)

A. The Source of Hypocrisy (5:1-3)

Luke 12:1b (NASB) “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”

“None are so ugly in God’s sight as those who flaunt a spiritual beauty they do not possess.” □John MacArthur

2 Corinthians 10:5 (NASB) “*We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”

James 1:21b (KJV) “...receive with meekness the engrafted word...”

B. The Senselessness of Hypocrisy (5:4)

C. The Consequence of Hypocrisy (5:5-10)

1 John 5:16 (NASB) “If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not *leading* to death, he shall ask and *God* will for him give life to those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is a sin *leading* to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.”

1 Corinthians 11:28-30 (NASB) “²⁸ But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. ³⁰ For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.”

Galatians 5:9 (NASB) “A little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*.”

Conclusion (5:11)

“...this is a picture of what happens in a life when pretense is indulged in. The moment you or I pretend to be something we really are not, the second I assume before you a stance of spiritual impeccability which I do not possess, that moment death enters in—just like that. I am immediately cut off from the flow of the life of Christ. It does not mean that I am no longer a Christian, but it means that the life of the body is no longer flowing through me. Instead of being a part of a living, vital movement, I become a dead and unresponsive cell in that body.” □Ray Steadman

Psalms 139:23-24 (ESV) “²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

First Baptist Church Powell 02 21 2015 AM
Sermon 7: Life and Death in The Church
Series: The Spirit, the Church, and the World
Acts 4:32-5:11

Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), the English military and political leader had a skin condition that resulted in wart like growths on his face. An official painting was commissioned, and the artist painted him without the growths. Cromwell's famous response was, "Paint it warts and all." When the Holy Spirit gives us the historical record of the early church, He gives it to us "warts and all." The timing of this text cannot be determined exactly, but it is just a few months (perhaps two or three months) after the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ. It is only at most a few weeks from the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came and the church was birthed as recorded in chapter 2. Already, the early church had experienced persecution, but it had only brought them closer together. Satan, our ever busy enemy did not give up. If he could not silence the witness of the church with persecution from the outside, he would next seek to attack it from the inside, using people who were a part of that first fellowship. When Satan comes as "a roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8) and is rebuffed, he comes as "an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14) to deceive.

In Acts 4:32-37, we get a glimpse of the radical love these first Christians had for one another. That love was having the effect that Jesus said it would in John 13:34-35 (NASB): "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." In a world of darkness, despair, and hopelessness, there was a difference in these early church members that no one could deny. They had life, supernatural life, the very life of Christ living in them in the person of the Holy Spirit. Their love for one another was the real thing! However, even those who are new creations in Christ still have the programming of the old man in Adam (flesh) and a power called sin which dwells in their members (Romans 7:23). Even Christians, new creations in Christ, certainly have the capacity to sin. We will clearly see that in today's text as we see the life of Christ being lived out in believers and then we see the ugly manifestations of the flesh with its smell of death being manifested by a husband and wife in the church – 'Life and Death in the Church.'

I. The Life That Comes with Stewardship (4:32-37)

If you grew up in an evangelical church, when you hear the word, "stewardship" you may think of harsh messages on tithing, guilt trips about money, and giving goals pictured on hand drawn giant thermometers with the red mercury showing progress toward the giving goal. Actually, it is stewardship that we see being lived out in the members of this first church. Stewardship is an approach to life that sees everything that we have – money, talents, time, spiritual gifts, all material possessions – as belonging to God. We are only the managers (stewards) of these possessions. It is nice to talk about stewardship in lofty theoretical terms, but what would it look like if the body of Christ practiced true stewardship? It would look like Acts 4:32-37.

All too often today the church seems more like a religious club where people of the same social status are drawn together by their common interests. That is a far cry from the early church. This church was a group of people who shared the same divine life (Christ's life), but they were of all ages, backgrounds, and status levels of society. Yet, in Christ, they saw themselves as one family. Let's look at this uncorrupted church that looked like God intended the church to look.

A. There Was Oneness of Heart, Soul, and Possessions (4:32)

Let's begin by defining some words and then make application to our lives today. Notice that they were of one heart. The word "heart" in the New Testament can have several similar meanings based on the context. Sometimes "heart" refers to the whole inner man, but as it is used here in conjunction with soul it

is speaking of the spirit of man. The spirit is the deepest part of our life, the core of our life. It is that immaterial part of man that allows him to know and have communion with God. Apart from Christ, our spirit was dead to God because of the consequences of sin coming into the world through Adam and being passed on to his descendants. We can know facts about God, but we can still not know God in the sense of having communion and fellowship with Him.

One man looking back at the process of how he came to Christ spoke of a true Christian who had a deep impact on his life. He said of this Christian friend:

He knew the God that I only knew about. At salvation, it was the heart, the spirit of man that was made alive. In Ezekiel, God was looking forward to the New Covenant and salvation in Ezekiel 11:19 (NASB): “And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.”

In other words, that which was dead would be replaced with that which is alive. In the first church, the members were of one heart. They had fellowship with God which meant that they had a special relationship of “oneness” with one another.

These early believers were also of one soul. The soul is the mind, will, and emotions. They thought alike. Ephesians 4:18 speaks of those without Christ as being “darkened in their understanding.” At salvation the light was turned on in their soul and they were one soul with shared affection, a shared view of, and love for, Christ and with wills that longed to choose that which pleased Christ.

These members of the first church each saw all that they possessed as belonging to God. The phrase in Acts 4:32 (NASB): “...not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own...” is not speaking of ownership, but of seeing it as being exclusively for his own use. It belonged to God and if God wanted it used to meet the needs of another, the one who had control of the money gave it as the Lord directed. They recognized that as the owner, God could put His money wherever He wanted it to go. When there was a genuine need in the body, they desired to meet it. This was not communism. This was their desire. It was totally voluntary. We don’t tend to think this way today, and that is why we do not see the things happening that they saw happening. What was happening in the early church was the oneness that Jesus prayed for in John 17:20-21 (NASB): “I do not ask on behalf of these alone [the first disciples], but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.” That prayer of Jesus was answered in the early church.

Oh, how far we have moved away from that oneness. Ray Steadman summarized it well:

It is quite possible to come to church and sit together in the pews, united in a physical presence with other Christians, to sing the same hymns and listen to the same message, and relate to God individually, but to have no sense of body life, no sense of belonging to one another. It is possible to come week after week, year after year, and never know the people with whom you worship.

[Ray Steadman, sermon on *Body Life* at raysteadman.org].

A. There Was a Powerful Proclamation (4:33)

The proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the major emphasis of apostolic preaching. Even though the message of the resurrected Christ offended the Jewish leaders (especially the Sadducees), they kept proclaiming it. Because they magnified the living Christ, the enabling grace of God was upon them. We need that grace because the message of the resurrected Christ who is Lord is not always well received by those who are aligned with this world.

C. There Was Lavish Giving (4:34-37)

Notice the pattern. The people gave through the church and its leaders (v 34-35). This wasn't just independent giving by individuals to individuals. They gave it to the church's spiritual leaders to distribute. What this tells us is that this giving wasn't reckless; it was organized. It was the apostles that knew most of the needs and therefore they were the ones who oversaw the gifts. The church leaders are responsible before God as to how they use the money given.

In this passage we go from general statements of truth to a specific case. Most of us have never heard of the man used as an example of lavish giving. His name was Joseph, a man from Cyprus. We know him better by his nick-name, *Barnabas*. The name Barnabas means "Son of Encouragement." Most of the time we see Barnabas, he was encouraging someone (the newly converted Paul, John Mark after he turned back on the first missionary journey). Luke describes Barnabas in Acts 11:24 (NASB) as, "a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." Barnabas owned land, but he didn't consider it as his. He sold it and gave it to the apostles to distribute.

My biggest fear in dealing with this passage is that some will hear it and say, "That was then and this is now. What they were doing in Acts isn't applicable to today." Oh, but it is. I am going to ask you a personal question. What is it that you are clinging to? Is it a material standard of living that you want to keep at all costs? Is it a retirement portfolio that you trust in and look forward to one day getting to retire and live the *good life*? I unashamedly lay before you some needs that we as a church have. There is the money for the property, \$225,000 that we have to come up with by the end of this month. That property will be used to enable us to reach more people here, but primarily to minister to children and teach them a worldview through First Baptist Academy. There are needs for the Academy to provide more classrooms by installing a sprinkler system in this building and providing about seven or eight new classrooms. There are needs for reaching churches in our area that are about to shut down unless they get help – money and people. There are funds needed to get the Gospel to cities in the USA that are unreached. There are needs in getting the Gospel to the hard to reach places in Asia, Africa, and South America. Are you clinging to what God has put in your hands? He gave it to you in order that you would be His channel to get it to the needs in the church, and instead of seeing yourself as His steward, you see yourself as the owner, the controller. Perhaps that is the reason that we do not experience the body life that this first church experienced.

II. The Death That Comes with Hypocrisy (5:1-12)

The chapter divisions in the Bible were added some time after it was written. These verses flow out of the truths we have been examining in chapter 4. The word translated "but" introduces a sharp contrast to the generous actions of Barnabas. We see in chapter 5 sin coming into the church body. The guilty ones were a married couple named Ananias and Sapphira. There is nothing in this text that indicated that Ananias and Sapphira were not truly Christians. They were, it seems, Christians who gave in to the desires of the flesh and for their sin there were serious consequences.

A. The Source of Hypocrisy (5:1-3)

It seems that Peter was given divine discernment to know their attempted deception. The word "hypocrisy" isn't used in this text, but that is the best word to describe the sin we see. We cannot be absolutely certain what it was that motivated Ananias and Sapphira to lie, but by mentioning Barnabas just before telling us about this hideous sin, implies that they were envious of the positive response Barnabas received from giving his generous gift. They were motivated by pride to gain the acclaim of man that Barnabas seems to have received.

The word *hypocrite* first meant "to wear a mask." It originally referred to the Greek plays in which one actor would play several parts. To indicate which character he was playing, he would hold up a mask on a stick in front of his face. The actor was called a hypocrite – one who was playing the part and was not acting as himself. A hypocrite is one who plays a part, one who acts like a person that he in reality is not.

What made this couple hypocrites? Was it that they did not give the full price of the land? No, they could have been in the will of God not giving the whole price. God had not commanded that of them. The sin was their hypocritical lie in saying that they gave the whole price they received for the land when in reality they had only given a part of it. The sin was hypocrisy based on a desire for religious status. Jesus repeatedly denounced hypocrisy and warned His disciples to avoid it. Luke 12:1b (NASB): “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” John MacArthur said it well. “None are so ugly in God’s sight as those who flaunt a spiritual beauty they do not possess.” [John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Acts 1-12*, page 153]

How did this happen to Ananias and Sapphira? Verse 3 shows the source of their sin. It was Satan himself who “filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit.” Recognize that every thought that comes into your mind is not from you. Satan or his demonic cohorts have the ability to implant thoughts into our mind. When he implants those thoughts, it will sound just like you! That is why every believer should memorize and apply 2 Corinthians 10:5 (NASB) “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” As you grow in the Word and as James says in James 1:21b (KJV): “...that you receive with meekness the engrafted word...” you begin to recognize the voice of the enemy that always seeks to draw us away from the path that pleases God.

B. The Senselessness of Hypocrisy (5:4)

As Ananias lays the gift from the sale of the property, that in reality was only a part of the price he received, he was no doubt waiting for the accolades, his elevation in the eyes of the people, and the spiritual status he would receive, in reality he heard a public rebuke from Peter. In verse 4, Peter makes it clear that this was senseless. Peter affirms the right of private ownership when he says to Ananias, “The property was your and no one forced you to sell it. When you sold it, it was fine if you gave part of it and kept part of it. The problem Ananias is that you have lied to God.” It is not very smart to lie to the One who is omniscient – all knowing.

C. The Consequence of Hypocrisy (5:5-10)

Why was Ananias and Sapphira’s punishment so severe? People lied before and still lie to the Lord today and He doesn’t strike them dead. Why were Ananias and Sapphira killed? Before I answer that, I would remind you that the Scripture teaches us that there are times in the church today where God takes the life of some. 1 John 5:16 (NASB): “If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not *leading* to death, he shall ask and *God* will for him give life to those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.” Notice that it is a brother who can commit sin unto death.

We read in 1 Corinthians 11:28-30 (NASB): “But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.” In this context, that is referring to physical death. But there are some special reasons that I think that God took Ananias and Sapphira’s life. We find in Scripture that the Lord judges sin severely at the beginning of a new period of salvation history. For instance, just after the Tabernacle in the wilderness was erected, God took the lives of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu because they took lightly God’s instructions on the offerings in the tabernacle (Leviticus 10). When the Israelites first went into the Promised Land, God had Achan killed for stealing and then not confessing it. If this hypocrisy had gotten into the church at this early stage, it would be like poisoning the spring that provides the water for the stream. Galatians 5:9 (NASB): “A little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*.” The Lord could not allow hypocrisy to get a foot-hold in the infant church so He moved quickly to remove this spiritual cancer from the body.

Conclusion (5:11)

Even though God today doesn't always immediately take the life of a hypocrite, when we see the consequences here in Acts 5 we see how seriously God takes this sin. Ray Steadman has a good word for us about this sin that brought death to Ananias and Sapphira:

...this is a picture of what happens in a life when pretense is indulged in. The moment you or I pretend to be something we really are not, the second I assume before you a stance of spiritual impeccability which I do not possess, that moment death enters in – just like that. I am immediately cut off from the flow of the life of Christ. It does not mean that I am no longer a Christian, but it means that the life of the body is no longer flowing through me. Instead of being a part of a living, vital movement, I become a dead and unresponsive cell in that body.

[Ray Steadman sermon cited earlier]

It is easy for us to condemn Ananias and Sapphira, but we must be careful that we are not guilty of this sin. Is our profession backed up by our practice?

Psalms 139:23-24 (ESV): “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”