

Acts 4:32-5:11 Teacher's Lesson Sin In Paradise

Introduction: There is no perfect church. If you ever find one, please don't join it because if you did it wouldn't be perfect anymore! No one is perfect. Happily, the Bible says God does not treat us as our sins deserve (Ps 103:10). *But what if He did? What would that look that? We will find out today as we will study Sin In Paradise.* The issue here is God's view of sin in the church and what we need to do about it.

Literary Structure: Luke begins with a picture of paradise. (Acts 4:32-37 is another literary oasis, sprinkled by Luke throughout Acts. It is a summary of the state of the church. The first was back in Acts 2:42-47.) As in the Garden of Eden, when Satan tempted Adam and Eve to sin, Satan will enter into this church paradise and tempt a different couple to sin (Ananias and Sapphira).

******What was true of the full number of those who believed (4:32-37)? See 2:44-45.** As was already stated in 2:44-45, they continued to have everything in common so that there was not a needy person among them (4:32-35). They practiced crazy giving, though ownership was not renounced.

What primary application should we walk away with from 4:32-35? We also should be generous in our giving.¹

1. What does it mean to be of one heart and soul (4:32)? It means they were unified. Unity is a very important component of a healthy church.

Provisions: In His high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed for the unity of the church (John 17:11, 20, 22-23). The Lord's Supper creates unity (1Co 10:17) and one duty of church leaders is to help build unity (Ep 4:11-13).

2. According to 4:33, what ran parallel to their unity and sacrificial giving? See 4:30, Romans 10:9. The apostles were testifying with great power to the resurrection of Jesus, plus God gave great grace to all the church.

Laser Focus: It all comes down to the resurrection of Jesus. Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection. In all our discussions with unbelievers about creation versus evolution, or the reliability of the Bible, we must always bring it back to Jesus' resurrection.

ESV Romans 10:9 . . . if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

¹ Since an entire lesson has already been devoted to crazy giving, it will only be dealt with slightly here.
Important take-away: All giving was voluntary.

What outstanding example of giving did Luke cite in 4:36-37? Luke cited the example of Barnabas, who sold a field he owned and contributed the money to the church.

3. Since everybody was selling their possessions, why did Luke single out Barnabas (4:35-37)? It introduces the reader to Barnabas, who becomes an important figure in Acts. Also Barnabas' good example is probably cited by Luke in contrast to what he is about to write about Ananias and Sapphira; notice how 5:1 begins with the word, "but". Here is where Satan enters paradise, just like in the Garden of Eden.

******4. What, exactly, was the sin that Ananias and Sapphira committed (5:1-6)?** As stated here, they sold land for the church but kept back part of the proceeds. They were co-conspirators. Just based on 5:1-2, it appears they were obligated to give it all and so were stealing it keeping back part of it. This, however, is not the case, as can be seen in Peter's questions to him.

Based on 5:3, what influenced Ananias to lie? Peter said Satan had "filled" his heart to lie.

ESV **John 8:44** . . . the devil . . . has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Filling 'er Up! Satan is alive and well on planet Earth. He hates you and has a terrible plan for your life. Ananias was influenced by Satan, was led by Satan. Satan will actively try to influence you also! Contrary to that, to be "filled" with the Holy Spirit is to be influence by the Holy Spirit, to be led by the Holy Spirit.

5. What is the answer to Peter's question in 5:3 ("why")? The question is somewhat rhetorical. The answer is that Satan is evil and Ananias gave in to temptation. It is no secret that Satan and his demons are setting out temptation snares for us all the time. Peter's question to Ananias was "why" he allowed Satan to take over.

6. What truth about overcoming temptation is implied in Peter's question (5:3)? In essence, Peter asked "why" Ananias allowed Satan to fill his heart to lie, since he could have resisted it. It was like asking, "Why did you starve when there is food in the refrigerator?" Since the Holy Spirit lives in every believer, Satan's power over us is broken. He tempts us, but it is up to us whether we yield to the temptation. No believer can claim, "The devil made me do it".

ESV **1 John 4:4** . . . he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

ESV **1 Corinthians 10:13** No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

7. What is the answer to the first question in 5:4? The unsold land remained his own land. He owned it. He was under no obligation to sell it.

8. What is the answer to the second question in 5:4? After the land was sold, it was totally at Ananias' disposal. He could do with it what he wanted. He was under no obligation to give any of it to the church.

9. What did Peter say to Ananias that reveals the amount given was not compulsory (5:4)? Peter indicated the land was his to do with as he pleased (to sell or to keep). Ananias owned it. Then, after it was sold, the money was still at his disposal (to give all, part or none of it). Ananias was not obligated to give it to the church.

10. What is the answer to the third question in 5:4? Why'd he do it? See *Matthew 23:5-6*, *1 Timothy 6:10*. It may have been pride ("Look, I gave it all, just like Barnabas"):

Jesus criticized the scribes and Pharisees because, "They do all their deeds to be seen by others . . ." (Mt 23:5).

It may have been the love of money:

ESV **1 Timothy 6:10b** . . . the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.

It may have been pressure to conform (many were selling their land) coupled with a lack of trust in God's future provision.

No matter what the reason, consider this:

ESV **James 1:13-15** Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

11. Based on 5:3-4, what was Ananias' outward sin? Peter declared flat out that he had lied. The sin was not that he kept back some of the proceeds of the sale. The sin was that he lied about what percentage of the sale he gave.

Based on 5:3-4, to whom had Ananias lied? He lied to the Holy Spirit and he lied to God.

Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit is a person, not an impersonal force. You cannot lie to an impersonal force. The Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Lying to the Spirit is lying to God.

12. How did Peter know what Ananias had done (5:3-4)? See *1 Corinthians 14:24-25*. Peter functioned as a prophet; he had the gift of revelation. The ability to see into hearts is one mark of a prophet.²

ESV **1 Corinthians 14:24-25** . . . if all prophesy, and an unbeliever . . . enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed . . .

² Johnson, 88.

Did Ananias die a natural death (5:5)? *Explain.* He probably did not die simply from the shock of being found out! It likely was an act of divine judgment.

NAS **Romans 11:22** Behold then the kindness and severity of God . . .

ESV **Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin is death . . .

What impact did his death have on others (5:5)? It caused great fear!

13. What, exactly, did they fear (5:5)? They feared God and they feared sinning lest a similar fate befall them!

What rather casual funeral arrangements were carried out in 5:6? The church buried him right away, without a funeral service and without his wife's knowledge! Ananias was divinely judged as a sinner so he was buried straight away without ceremony or mourning.³

******What happened when Sapphira came in about three hours later (5:7-11)?** She lied too and died as a result of it. You snooze, you lose and you lie, you die.

14. Why did Peter take the initiative and ask her about the sale rather than waiting to see what she would say (5:8)? Maybe it was to give her a chance to come clean and confess.

15. Peter did not wait to see if she would lie; he flat-out asked her about it (5:8). Isn't that entrapment? In criminal law, entrapment is a practice whereby a law enforcement agent induces a person to commit a criminal offence that the person would have otherwise been unlikely to commit.⁴ Peter must have known she was not unlikely, but likely to commit the offence!

16. What did Peter mean by the question he asked in 5:9? It was a rhetorical question. He didn't really expect an answer since he knew she would die immediately. It was in the spirit of "How could you do such a thing?"

17. In what sense did they "test" the Spirit of the Lord (5:9)? *See Ephesians 4:29-30.* Evidently they tested the Spirit in the sense that they presumed upon God's grace by willfully sinning (in this case by lying). They thought they could sin without consequence.

ESV **Ephesians 4:30** . . . do not grieve the Holy Spirit . . .

Application: When we willfully, knowingly sin, we are presuming on God's grace. We are grieving the Holy Spirit within us.

³ Marshall, 118.

⁴ "Entrapment", Wikipedia.org. Accessed July 22, 2017.

It has been wisely observed that sin will take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay and cost you more than you want to pay.

Ananias and Sapphira seem to have committed the type of sin described later by John. I don't understand what sin John was warning about, but why take any chances?

ESV 1 John 5:16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life - to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.

18. What impact did Sapphira's death have on the church (5:11)? See 2 Timothy 2:19, Leviticus 11:44. Great fear came upon not only the church, but on those outside the church who heard of it.⁵

Application: *What is your attitude toward sin in your own life? Would you describe it as fear of displeasing the Lord?*

ESV 2 Timothy 2:19 . . . "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

ESV Leviticus 11:44 . . . I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.

So What?

19. Do you think this couple was truly in the Faith? Will you see them in heaven? Why? See 1 Corinthians 5:5, 11:30-31.

a) Concerning the man who was sinning with his father's wife, Paul wrote that the church was to "deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (1Co 5:5).

b) Concerning abuses of the Lord's Supper, Paul wrote:

ESV 1 Corinthians 11:30-31 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

20. Why did God judge this couple so harshly then when this rarely happens today? As with so many firsts in Acts, God demonstrated His power and holiness in remarkable ways. Just as God rarely seems to strike people dead today, so too neither signs and wonders are as common. However, it certainly makes the point that sin is not to be trifled with. God's attitude toward it has not changed.

21. Why is it important to deal with sin in our lives and the life of the church? See 1 Corinthians 5:6. Sin is contagious; it will spread.

⁵ This is the first occurrence of the word "church" (*ekklesia*) in Acts. It basically means "congregation" and was so translated in by William Tyndale (Bruce, 116).

ESV **1 Corinthians 5:6b** Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

22. How should we deal with public sin in our church now? See *Matthew 18:15ff, 1 Corinthians 5:1ff, Galatians 6:1*. The prescribed method for dealing with sin is the Christian restoration process. Ultimately, if a person will not stop sinning, he is to be put out of the fellowship.

ESV **Galatians 6:1a** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

ESV **1 Corinthians 5:13b** "Purge the evil person from among you."

Extra Material

The follow is extra material for use in case you want to develop 4:32-37 into a single lesson.

1. Based on 4:34, why was there not a needy person among them? See *Deuteronomy 15:7*. It was because those with land or houses were willing to sell them to help the needy. This is in keeping with God's ideal for ancient Israel:

ESV **Deuteronomy 15:7-10** If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him . . . You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him . . .

ESV **Luke 12:33-34** Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

ESV **Acts 20:35** . . . remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

ESV **James 2:15-16** If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

ESV **1 Timothy 6:17-18** As for the rich in this present age, charge them . . . to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share . . .

ESV **Psalms 133:1** Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

ESV **1 Corinthians 1:10** I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

ESV **2 Corinthians 13:11** . . . agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

ESV **Philippians 2:2** . . . complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Provision 1: Church unity is not something that will have wait until the Second Coming for its realization. First, we have Jesus' praying for us to be unified:

ESV **John 17:11** Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one . . .

ESV **John 17:22-23** The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one . . .

Provision 2: Another provision the Lord has made for the unity of the church is found in the Lord's Supper:

NIV **1 Corinthians 10:17** Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

Provision 3: Elders are a third provision the Lord made to help the church achieve unity:

ESV **Ephesians 4:11-13** And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith . . .

Application: Unity (consensus) should play a big role in major church decisions. Church leaders should not emerge from behind closed doors and announce decisions, *ex cathedra*. An important duty of elders is to build congregational consensus.

ESV **1 Corinthians 15:17-20** . . . if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead . . .

Based on 3:34, what was done with the proceeds? The money was given to the apostles to be distributed based on need.

5. What principle of collection and distribution can be derived from 3:34-35? As with the old covenant temple system, it seems the early church had a central collection fund from which distributions were made. Resources were pooled to some extent and distribution was evidently controlled by the Apostles. It was not theirs personally, but evidently in sort of a trust.⁶

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
- You can hear this lesson being taught at SermonAudio.Com/NTRF.

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⁶ This proved too much of a burden for them, however, and was changed in Acts 6.