27. The Book of Acts—4:34-5:11

(11/11/26)

Acts 4:31–35 (NKJV)
31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. 32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. 33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

As we have said in the past, the Greek here does not mean that everyone sold their property at once, but that as needs arose those that could help sold their properties and gave the money to the apostles to give to those who needed financial help.

One author and scholar said—
"This is not "Christian communism." The sale of property was quite voluntary (v. 34). The right of possession was not abolished. The community did not control the money until it had voluntarily been given to the Apostles. The distribution was not made equally but according to need. These are not communistic principles. This is Christian charity in its finest display. They shared together not out of compulsion, but out of compassion; not out of obligation, but out of love. While the early church's spirit of sacrifice and loving generosity is worthy of our emulation, believers today are not required to imitate these practices. The principles of Christian giving are outlined in the epistles, especially in 2 Corinthians 8–9; and nowhere are we instructed to bring our money and lay it at the pastor's feet (Acts 4:35), as though he were an apostle. It is the spirit of their giving that is important to us today and not the "letter" of their system."

Acts 4:36–37 (NKJV)
36 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, 37 having land, sold *it,* and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

These verses transition into chapter 5 by introducing the generosity of Barnabas.

His generosity becomes a stark and striking contrast to the hypocrisy of Ananias and Saphira.

As a Levite, Barnabas would not ordinarily have owned land if he lived in Israel.

In the Law, the Lord said that the Levites wouldn't inherit any land in Canaan because *"I am your portion (inheritance)."*

However, that didn't mean that wealthy Jews couldn't own land outside of the land of Israel—which could have been the case with Barnabas since he lived on the island of Cyprus.

How or why he obtained the land, we don't know—but we do know that the law of love worked so powerfully in the life of this Son of Encouragement that he sold the land and laid the money at the apostles' feet.

This act of love embodied what James would later call the 'royal law.'

James 2:8 (NKJV)
8 If you really fulfill *the* royal law according to the Scripture, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"* you do well; [Comment]

The royal law is basically the law of the King and His Kingdom—a law that governs how the King's kids are to live our lives under the New Covenant.

For example, in the Decalogue, also known as the Ten Commandments, the eighth commandment that God gave was *"You shalt not steal".*

So, the law could force me not to steal what belongs to you, but it couldn't force me to share with you what belongs to me—the 'royal law' does both. (Explain)

As Christians, we are not under the law of Moses—we are under an even greater law, *the law of love*—which again is what James called the 'royal law'.

The royal law forbids me from mistreating or taking advantage of another since—I am to love them as I love myself and treat them as I would want them to treat me (Matt.7:12).

Chapter 5

Acts 5:1–2 (NKJV)
[1] But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. [2] And he kept back *part* of the proceeds, his wife also being aware *of it,* and brought a certain part and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

After reading this beautiful and powerful description of the early church in 4:32-37 we come to the word **"But"** in v.1 of chapter 5, **"But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife…"**

Ananias and his wife were members of the Church at that time which brings up and important truth the Holy Spirit is introducing through this incident—the Church has never been hurt from without, the real damage has always been from within.

Starting here in ch.5 we see corruption begin to enter the early church—in fact we only have three chapters (2 -4) where we see the sweetness of the Church and then in chapter 5—it's gone!

From then on through the end of the N.T. we see the constant plea for *unity* and for *love; for fellowship* and for believers to *clean up their lives*—and we're not done pleading yet.

Acts 5:2–11 (NKJV)
[2] And he kept back *part* of the proceeds, his wife also being aware *of it,* and brought a certain part 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 keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself? [4] While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own

control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." [5] Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. [6] And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried *him* out, and buried *him*. [7] Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. [8] And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much." [9] Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband *are* at the door, and they will carry you out." [10] Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying *her* out, buried *her* by her husband. [11] So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

"Ananias" means *"God is gracious"* but he learned that God is also holy; **"Sapphira"** means *"Beautiful"* but her heart was ugly.

First of all, Peter makes the point that no one commanded Ananias and Sapphira to sell their land—and even when they did no one told them they had to give the money to the church (again they didn't practice communism).

Second, notice what Peter said in v.3 **"…why has Satan filled your heart <u>to lie</u> to the Holy Spirit…"**

Their sin had nothing to do with *giving*—their sin was hypocrisy motivated by pride and greed which led them to lie about their giving.

They wanted to look spiritual in the eyes of the other Christians, many of whom were selling their land and giving the money to help others in need, but they also wanted to keep some of the money because they were too greedy to give it all.

We all have a desire for others to think we're deeply spiritual, so we often act hypocritically to make ourselves look more spiritual than we really are.

The word **"hypocrite,"** literally means *"mask wearer"* and was used of an actor on stage playing a part.

So, the Lord judged Ananias and Sapphira for the sin of hypocrisy—which begs the question, *"Why doesn't He wipe us all out for our hypocrisy?"*

Because He's gracious and merciful—otherwise every time we'd sing *"Take my life and let it be"* especially the third verse, *"Take my silver and my gold not a mite would I withhold"*—people would be dropping dead all over the sanctuary!

But make no mistake about it, the Lord has every right to judge sin in whatever form it takes as the sovereign God of the universe.

There are times when God will hold people accountable for their sin by taking their life—as He did with Achan (Joshua 7) and right here with Ananias and Sapphira.

We should never take for granted the mercy and longsuffering of God by thinking that He doesn't care about our sin or that it is no 'big deal' to Him—this would be a grave mistake!

And so, to remind us from time to time that He takes sin very seriously and that it is a big deal to Him, that He is a holy and righteous God Who has every right to punish sin—sometimes He proves it by holding someone accountable, even to the point of taking their life when they sin against Him.

One pastor said it well,

"All throughout man's existence upon the earth, God has erected warning signs along the highway of human history warning us about God's anger toward sin. And even though God is very gracious and often withholds His judgment against sin because 'He is patient and longsuffering not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.' He will at times demonstrate that He is still holy and righteous—a God who hates sin and has the divine right to punish it anytime He chooses. Which means He will sometimes make an example of some as He did with Annanias and Saphira."

And yet, when people read the story of Annanias and Saphira in Acts 5, they often want to find fault with God—*"Why did God kill them? Why did they have to die for something so minor as lying?"*

First of all, the question itself betrays a profound misunderstanding when it comes to sin—that there are minor sins that should be *'no big deal'* to God.

Revelation 21:8 (NKJV)
[8] But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." [Comment]

Folks, when it comes to Annanias and Saphire the real question is *"Not why did they have to die?"*—and real question is *"Why does God let the rest of us live!?"* (Comment)

But I will add this—what God did to Ananias and Saphira, must be seen within the context of its time in the history of the Church which was brand new and just starting off.

This was a critical juncture for the early church, Satan sought to strangle to death the infant Church before it could grow and bear significant fruit for the Kingdom and he tried to do it through the sin of Ananias and Saphira.

If the devil could introduce into the Church the sin of hypocrisy and scandal—it would have corrupted the entire church at its root—and therefore God took an extra firm stand against sin at that time.

The question then becomes—will God do the same thing today with people in the Church?

And the answer is—"Yes!"

1 Corinthians 11:28–32 (NKJV)
[28] But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. [29] For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. [30] For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. [31] For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. [32] But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

1 John 5:16 (NKJV)

[16] If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does* not *lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.

The sin leading to death (physical death) is the last sin that a believer commits before God says, *"That's it you're coming home!"*

How did Peter know that Ananias and Sapphira had lied—the Holy Spirit had revealed it to Peter through a gift called the *'discerning of spirits.'*

We'll talk more about this when we get to chapter 8.

Now, let's camp on Peter's statement for a minute—

Acts 5:3–4 (NKJV)
[3] But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the <u>Holy Spirit</u>… [4]… You have not lied to men but to <u>God</u>."

This is one of the strongest proof texts in the NT that the Holy Spirit is God.

One pastor put it well—

"All too often when Christians hear the name Holy Spirit, they immediately want to focus on the controversies that surround the gifts of the Spirit, things like tongues or healings or prophecy—are they for today or not?

And the truth is that most of the Body of Christ seems polarized over these issues, with one group in the Charismania camp and the other in the Charisphobia camp.

But I think that it's a great mistake to reduce the Holy Spirit down to His gifts. He is greater than His gifts but sadly too many Christians know only the gifts of the Spirit but know nothing of the Holy Spirit Himself. The Holy Spirit is a Person, He is not an "it," or an impersonal "force" or divine power that we simply tap into to use for our ministries or for our benefit like an electrical outlet you plug into.

He is God the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. He is worthy of our love, worship, fellowship and surrender and He desires to have a personal intimate relationship with us through Jesus Christ.

Now if we only think of the Holy Spirit as a power or a force then our minds are going to be consumed with "How can I get more of the Holy Spirit; how can I get more of this power?"

But if I think of the Holy Spirit as a Person, as God Who lives in me, then my heart will be consumed with "How can the Holy Spirit get more of me?"

And it's at this very point that many sincere Christians stumble. They're trying so hard to grab hold of the power that they lose sight of the fact that as God what the Holy Spirit is really trying to do is grab hold of them.

And when we as children of God stop looking at Him as a power to be obtained and start seeing Him as a Person to be obeyed—our lives will never be the same.

Because it's through surrender to the Person of the Holy Spirit that the power of the Holy Spirit will begin to fill and transform our lives."

And folks, I think that is one of the best summations on the Person of the Holy Spirit I have ever read.

Now, building a little on that summation—let me say that when we're talking about the Person of the Holy Spirit, just because He doesn't have a *body* like we have (God is Spirit—John 4:24)—that doesn't mean He isn't a Person as some groups teach.

The Bible ascribes to Him all of the characteristics of a living, thinking, feeling person: He can be *lied* to (Acts 5:4), *grieved* (Eph.4:30), He *speaks* (John 16:13), He can be *resisted* (Acts 7:51), He can be *insulted* (Hebrews 10:29), He can be *quenched* (1Thess.5:19), He can be *blasphemed* (Matt.12:31-32) etc..

Personal pronouns are always used in the Scriptures to refer to the Holy Spirit. (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-8, 13-15 etc.).

There are cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses who claim that He is not a person—that He is an impersonal force (like the Star Wars force).

They liken Him to *electricity*—and tell us that because we would never use personal pronouns when talking about something that was inanimate like electricity—we must apply that thinking to our concept of the Holy Spirit—<u>it</u> (not 'He') also is an impersonal force not a person and certainly not God!

But the Bible clearly teaches that the Holy Spirit is a Person—and that He is God!

Job 33:4 (NKJV)
4 The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

Acts 5:4 (NKJV)
4 While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? <u>You have not lied to men but to God</u>."

The Holy Spirit is mentioned in Genesis 1:2 as being present and a part of the creation of the physical universe—bringing everything into existence from nothing ('bara')—something only God can do!

"Okay, He's God—but how do we know He's not a 'lesser' god than the Father or the Son?"

John 14:15-17 (NKJV)
15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments. **16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another <u>Helper</u>, that He may abide with you forever-- 17 the Spirit of truth…**

The word **"Helper"** is the Greek *parakletos*—it comes from 2 Greek words—*"para"* (alongside) and *"kaleo"* (to call).

And so very simply, a *parakletos* is someone who has been called alongside for the purpose of helping or comforting (which is why some translations call Him the *Comforter)*.

Jesus Himself was the <u>first</u> Parakletos—the first Helper.

God the Son who became a Man, came alongside the disciples physically to help them and teach them God's truth—and to train them for the work of the Kingdom (the Great Commission).

Upon returning to His Father in heaven, the Father sent back the Holy Spirit—another Helper.

Jesus was leaving them soon, but He promised that He wasn't going to leave them alone like orphans (John 14:18).

Jesus promised us (His disciples) that the Holy Spirit would be called alongside us to help us as a guide, a teacher, a comforter—and an indispensable source of power in our work Jesus commissioned us to do for the Kingdom.

He had commanded them to live a certain kind of life and commissioned them for a specific kind of work—both of which would have been impossible for them to accomplish without the supernatural Helper known as the Holy Spirit.

Now the most important thing that Jesus ever said with regard to our understanding of just who or what the Holy Spirit comes to us in His use of the key word "*another*"—

"He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever--the Spirit of truth…"

There are 2 words for *"another"* in Greek—

Heteros—another of a *different* kind. (Heterosexual)

Allos—another of *exactly the same* kind. (Ice is exactly the same as water it's just in a different form)

Here Jesus used the phrase *"allos parakletos."*

In other words, *"I am going to send you another Helper—another One exactly, essentially like Me only in a different form."*

He is God the Spirit, Third Person of the Trinity.

Acts 5:10–11 (NKJV)
10 Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying *her* out, buried *her* by her husband. **11 So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.**

The result was a wave of godly fear that swept over the church and over all those who heard the story (Acts 5:11).

We have moved from **"great power"** and **"great grace"** (Acts 4:33) to **"great fear"**—all of which should be present in the Church!

Today in the Church, Christians are way too comfortable in their relationship with God—in other words, the fear of the Lord (which is the beginning of wisdom—Ps. 111:10; Prov. 9:10) is sorely lacking!

"Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire." (Heb. 12:28–29).

The problem that many Christians have today is the problem of God's love coexisting at the same time with His holiness—so they tend to gravitate to one or the other.

Let me say something that ought to be a 'no-brainer' for Christians to believe and yet has become a real stumbling block for many—and that is the belief that God is a good God!

It should be a no-brainer because the concept of God being a good and loving God permeates the Bible in both the old and new testaments—

Psalm 145:9 (NKJV)
9 The Lord *is* good to all, And His tender mercies *are* over all His works.

Psalm 33:5 (NKJV)
5 …The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

John 3:16 (NKJV)
16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

1 John 4:7–8 (NKJV)

[7] Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. [8] He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

The sad, appalling thing about this is that many (unbelievers mostly) if not most people today really don't see God as being good.

In fact, most people wonder at how God can be so *'evil'* as to allow bad things to happen to good people (wars, famines, disease, injustice, babies born with defects, etc.)?

What most people don't realize is that—there are no good people for bad things to happen to!

As Jesus said, *"No one is good but…God." (Matt.19:17);* and Paul echoed, *"There is none who does good, no, not one." (Rom. 3:12)*

What most people fail to understand or refuse to acknowledge is that God shows His goodness and mercy to fallen sinners every day in that every time they sin against Him, He doesn't strike them dead on the spot (*"the souls that sins shall surely die"*)—and it's only His goodness, forbearance and patience that lets them take another breath!

You see, people are so used to God's goodness, mercy, and patience that they take them for granted or worse—they think they <u>deserve them</u>!

So that when God does finally judge sin—people see Him as harsh, unjust, and unloving—when the Bible clearly teaches that the wrath of God (His holy judgment poured out on sin) abides on all who have not received Jesus as their Savior.

But the goodness and longsuffering of God holds it back giving them time to repent.

As one author put it—

"Most people don't believe that God will judge them—they don't believe that for a minute! And every day they load up on God's goodness, blessings, and provisions. They take in all the pleasure and joys of life—the love of a spouse, children, family, and friends. They enjoy the beauty of the creation, the good times in life, they enjoy these things every day and never give a

thought that it all comes from the hand of a gracious, loving God who is trying to use His goodness in their lives to bring them to Him."

And yet, most people today don't see themselves as guilty sinners deserving of God's judgment—and that the only reason He hasn't judged them is because He is a kind and merciful God who's giving them time to repent and get their lives right with Him.

No, but rather they see themselves as good people who deserve to be blessed, so that when adversity comes their way, they rail at God by saying things like—*"I'm a good person, so why is God being so hard on me? This isn't fair! I deserve that He blesses me! He's a cruel, unjust God!"*

These people are so self-focused and convinced of their own moral superiority and goodness that—they don't thank God each day for His blessings in their lives because they believe they have those things coming to them—that it's their right to be happy and blessed!

And so, when things don't go the way they feel they deserve—they become angry with God because He has *cheated* them out of what belongs to them!

One of the biggest problems facing the modern Christian church is this very thing—the mentality that God owes us something and that His blessings are our right!

One pastor put it well—
"There is a sick cult that has arisen in contemporary evangelical Christianity, that is built around self. People talk about self-image, self-esteem, self-worth, and self-value—but it is nothing more than humanistic worldliness. You have no worth or value as a 'self', as a corrupt fallen sinner. And that whole concept has taken evangelicalism and twisted it from a God-centered perspective to a man-centered perspective. And this modern and twisted view of salvation and Christianity is now seen from the viewpoint of 'what it can God do for me?' This has canceled out the fear and reverence of God in the Church and the overall hatred of sin as something that grieves and offends the holiness of God by turning the focus from God and on to self. In other words, sin is now seen as to how it affects man (when God judges it) and not how it affects God—this is a horrifying error!!"