



GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ♦ DEO ♦ GLORIA

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

The Sin of Ananias and Sapphira

Acts 4:32-5:16

April 15, 2007

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I. **The Body of Christ is called to Unity**

a. **Unity in its Faith**

- Luke states in **4:32** that 'the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul.'
 - Notice, this was the congregation **of those who believed**.
 - In other words, the basis of the unity of this congregation was not racial, socio-economic, or cultural; but, rather, it was their common faith in the Lord Jesus Christ...their common salvation.
 - It should be of no surprise to anyone that there are so many 'church splits' and conflicts today, as the basis of the church's unity is no longer a common faith, but a host of other factors. If, as some theologians believe, unbelievers outnumber

believers in the Western church, then the conflict in our churches makes perfect sense.

- This is why we so often refer to Jude 3, ‘while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.’
- Notice, as well, the **substance** of their common faith centered around ‘the resurrection of the Lord Jesus...’
 - We, as a church today, are called to be unified in a common faith that is rooted in sound doctrine.
 - Again, this is why an understanding of ‘essentials’ is so important. We encourage one another and find our unity in these essentials. Yet, this assumes that all Christians know what they are.
 - That which defines a Christians, historically, has been salvation by grace through faith in the following tenets:
 - ◆ The Bible is the Word of God
 - ◆ The Doctrine of the Trinity
 - ◆ The Two Natures of Christ
 - ◆ The Doctrine of Original Sin
 - ◆ The Virginal Conception / Birth
 - ◆ The Substitutionary Atonement / Vicarious Death of Jesus Christ
 - ◆ The Resurrection and Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - ◆ Salvation [Only] by Grace Alone through Faith Alone in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ Alone [to the Glory of God the Father Alone]
 - ◆ Regeneration by and Indwelling of all Believers by the Holy Spirit
 - ◆ Justification by Faith Alone in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ Alone

b. Unity in its Grace

- In **Acts 4:33**, Luke writes, ‘And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.’
 - Luke makes it clear that ‘abundant grace was upon them all.’ Just as the early church shared in the abundant grace of Almighty God, so we do today. For, it is the grace of God which saves us [Ephesians 2:8-9] and sustains us.
 - **To receive the grace of God is to receive something that we in no way deserve.**

- We can never understand the nature of God’s grace until we understand who God is in all His glory, and who we are biblically [and what we deserve as a result].
- One thing that the early apostles, especially Paul and Peter, had in common was their common understanding of where they had been before God changed them. Such an understanding not only humbles us, but leaves us in constant awe of the grace of God.

c. Unity in its Interdependence

- It was the grace of God, and an understanding and appreciation of the nature of that grace, that led the early church to a spirit of interdependence.
- Luke writes, in **Verses 33-35**, ‘...and abundant grace was upon them all. **For** there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.’
 - In other words, ‘there was not a needy person among them’ **because** the abundant grace was upon them all. Further, the means God used to eradicate need from the early church, was His people. ‘**For** all who were owners of land or houses would see them and bring the proceeds...’
 - Each member knew that **all** he had was from God; therefore, he truly possessed nothing of his own – it was all given to him [to include the ability and drive to ‘earn’ what he had].
 - In **4:32**, Luke states, ‘...not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his won, but all things were common property to them.’

John Stott correctly states, ‘Perhaps the important phrase is that *no-one claimed* his possessions as his own. Although in fact an in law they continued to won their goods, yet in heart and mind they cultivated an attitude so radical that they thought of their possessions as being available to help their needy sisters and brothers.’

- This belief [that no one claimed his possessions as his own] most certainly came from their understanding that regardless of what each person had, it all came from the same source: God and God alone. All things belong to God, because He created everything out of nothing!

John Calvin writes:

We must have hearts that are harder than iron if we are not moved by the reading of this narrative. In those days the believers gave abundantly of what was their own; we in our day [the 16th Century, 1500’s] are content not just jealously to retain what we possess, but callously to rob others...They sold their own possessions in those days; in our day it is the lust to purchase that reigns supreme. At that time love made each man’s own possessions common property for those in need; in our day such is the inhumanity of many, that they begrudge to the poor a common dwelling upon earth, the common use of water, air and sky.

- ❑ It is the ‘American Way’ to derive our worth, our identity by what we do and what we have – the externals. Yet, as Christians, we derive our worth by Whose we are. It is tragically true that in our materialistic society, our possession have come to possess us.
- ❑ In his classic work, *The Pursuit of God*, A.W. Tozer, commenting on Abraham’s ‘test’ at Mount Moriah with his son Isaac, wrote:

‘I have said Abraham possessed nothing. Yet was not this poor man rich? Everything he had owned before was his still to enjoy: sheep, camels, herds and goods of every sort. He had also his wife and his friends, and best of all he had his son Isaac safe by his side. He had everything, but he possessed nothing...After that bitter and blessed experience I think the words *my* and *mine* never again had the same meaning for Abraham. The sense of possession which they connote was gone from his heart. **Things** had been cast out forever. They had now become external to the man...he knew that he owned nothing, that his real treasures were inward and eternal.’
- ❑ Because of its dependence upon Christ and each other, the Early Church was not ‘tethered’ to this world. It lived for a kingdom that was not ‘of this world.’
- ❑ Therefore, when persecution came, as Jesus Himself had warned, in Matthew 24:15-22, they would be able to quickly leave the city.
- ❑ It seems that today, when God calls Christians to a specific task, such as vocational ministry or missions, the reason they hesitate is because they are so ‘tied down’ by material possessions.
- ❑ Yet, the Early Church was not, and as a result, they were a powerful testimony to the world.

d. Unity in its Testimony

- ❑ Because of their unity in faith, grace, and interdependence, the early Church was unified in its testimony to the world.
- ❑ First of all, in their actions they bore witness to the very nature of the triune God Himself.

John 17:11, 21 ‘I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, **that they may be one even as We are...**I do not ask on behalf of these alone, 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.**’

- The three Persons of the Trinity are equal in their essence [they are all three fully God]; distinct in their Persons and functions or roles; and united in their purpose.
- As such, there is always ontological equivalence [in their *Being* each of the Persons is always equal with one another]; but there is *functional* subordination. For example, the Son is functionally subordinate to the Father.

- Yet, what is so profound about the functional subordination of the Son to the Father is that it was fully **voluntarily**.
- As Philippians 2:5-7 states, ‘...Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but **emptied Himself...**’
 - In other words, it was Christ who emptied Himself. The Father did not ‘empty’ Christ at the incarnation; but, rather, Christ voluntarily ‘emptied’ Himself in accordance with the will of the Father.
- And so it was with the Early Church. They were not practicing some early, primitive form of Communism. The reason is because the selling and sharing of property was **voluntary**.
- Hence, the actions of the Early Church reflected the actions of its Savior!
 - Secondly, it was their love that led them to provide for one another: (1) love first for God; and (2) then love for each other.

1 John 3:17 states, ‘But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?’

2 Corinthians 8 states:

‘Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.’

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

- Finally, the interdependence of the Early church demonstrated the biblical truth that God has blessed each person with certain gifts he is to share for the benefit of the Body of Christ. No single person possesses all the gifts; therefore, we are to depend upon each other that we will not be in need.
- Ultimately, the Early church fulfilled the Old Testament command that, ‘There should be no poor among you.’ Deuteronomy 15:4
- The Early Church did not rely upon the state or any governmental institution to fulfill their needs; rather, they relied upon God and each other.

- ❑ Luke, then, after describing the actions of the Early church, gives an example of such selfless love: Joseph, the Cyprian Levite, also known as Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement.
- ❑ We know nothing more of this example, which itself is a testimony to the humble heart of Barnabas. It so appears that he had no desire for the praise of men, he simply gave out of love.
- ❑ However, Luke does not end with the example of Barnabas. He, contrasts the actions and motives of Barnabas with the acts of a husband and wife: Ananias and Sapphira.

II. The Sin of any Member Affects the Entire Body

- ❑ Before one can understand the events surrounding the death of Ananias and Sapphira, he must first realize that if we are an interdependent community of believers, then even the most trivial of sins by a member will affect the entire Body of Christ.

Galatians 5:7-10 reminds us, ‘You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. **A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.** I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is.’

- ❑ The story of Ananias and Sapphira exists as a contrast to Barnabas.
- ❑ What it appears is that the husband and wife team had a desire to appear righteous and holy and gain a reputation as such.
- ❑ Luke states, in **5:1-2** that ‘a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife’s full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostle’s feet.’
 - Unlike Barnabas, who laid all of the proceeds from his sale at the Apostles’ feet, Ananias ‘kept back some of the price for himself...’
- ❖ It is interesting that Ananias did not have to sell the land – God did not compel him to do so. However, the sin occurred because, after committing the land to the Lord, Ananias attempted to pass off the portion of the profit he laid at the Apostles’ feet as the whole of it.
 - Interestingly, the same Greek verb [translated ‘kept back’] is used in the Greek version of the Old Testament [the Septuagint, LXX] in Joshua 7:1, where the writer states, ‘But the sons of Israel **acted unfaithfully** in regard to the things under the ban, for Achan...took some of the things under the ban...’

‘The sin of Achan and that of Ananias were in many respects similar, at the beginning of the churches of the Old and New Testament respectively.’ Bengel

‘The story of Ananias is to the book of Acts what the story of Achan is to the book of Joshua. In both narratives an act of deceit interrupts the victorious progress of the people of God.’

F.F. Bruce

- ❑ Unfortunately, today, we live lives of such independence that we picture ourselves as islands, dependent upon no one. However, this picture is foreign to the pages of Scripture.

III. All Sin is Ultimately a PERSONAL Affront to God

- ❑ First of all, we must understand that even the most ‘trivial’ and private sins are infinitely offensive in the face of an infinitely holy God.
- ❑ Secondly, because every human bears the image of God, any offense towards any man is a direct offense, ultimately, to God. Therefore, by holding back part of the profit from the sale of their land, Ananias and Sapphira were depriving the early church of potential funds, and thus sinning against them. Yet, the sin was primarily against God.

1 Corinthians 8:12 states, ‘And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.’

- ❑ Also, we are individually and collectively the temple of God. Furthermore, the temple of God is holy, and sin desecrates this temple.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 states, ‘Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.’

- ❑ In **Acts 5:3-4**, Peter states, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.’
 - Peter makes it quite clear hear that Ananias’ sin was a sin against God.
 - But, Peter also affirms the deity of the Person of the Holy Spirit. Peter tells Ananias that he lied ‘to the Holy Spirit.’ One cannot lie to an impersonal force or influence. Furthermore, Peter concludes his short speech by saying, ‘You have not lied to men but to God’, thus equating the Holy Spirit with God.

IV. The Body of Christ is to Remove Sin from Its Midst

- ❑ After Peter’s words to Ananias, in **Verse 4**, Luke writes, in **Verse 5**, ‘And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last...’
- ❑ Later, Peter tells Sapphira, after she, too, lies, [Verse 9] ‘Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well.’
 - Then, in **Verse 10**, Luke writes, ‘And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last.’

- ❑ Throughout the Old Testament, God commanded Israel to remove sin from its midst. Even during the Day of Atonement, *yom kippur*, the scapegoat symbolized the removal of sin from God's people.

Deuteronomy 17:7 states, "The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst."

- ❑ Yet, this command to remove sin from the midst of God's people did not stop in the Old Testament.

1 Corinthians 5:13 states, "But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES."

- ❑ In our politically correct culture, we seemed to have forgotten that God's disposition towards sin never changes: GOD HATES SIN.
- ❑ If we are to live lives fully to the Glory of God, we must constantly examine ourselves and the community of faith we are in to determine if there is any wicked ways within us.

2 Timothy 2:19 states, "Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness."

- ❑ This is why the Lord gave us Matthew 18. This may be a neglected passage in our churches, but it is there to protect the Bride of Christ.

Paul instructs Timothy, in Titus 1:13, "This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith,"

- ❑ When we fail to remove sin from our lives; however, it can consume us and others around us.
- ❑ Possibly no better example of this occurs in all of Scripture than when King Saul fails to annihilate the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15:7-23. Later, in 2 Samuel 1, David gets word from an Amalekite that he [the Amalekite] killed Saul.

V. God's Blessing will Result from the Removal of Sin from the Body

- ❑ An examination of the events following Ananias and Sapphira's death reveal that His favor was upon the Early Church.
- ❑ Some reject the story of Ananias and Sapphira as being too harsh, too unfair, and therefore mythical. However, this was a unique time in the life of the church. The church was in her infancy and the foundation was still being laid by the apostles. It seems as though the church was particularly vulnerable in this stage, that God demonstrated His holiness and wrath in a clear way to the early Christians.

- ❑ There are a few points that demonstrate that the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira improved the ‘health’ of the early church.
- ❑ First of all, **Verses 5 and 11** state that the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira caused ‘great fear’ to come ‘over all who heard of it.’
 - The fear of the LORD is an invaluable blessing, although we do not usually see it as such. If the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge [Proverbs 1:7]; and knowledge of God is the essence of eternal life [John 17:3], then, to a large degree it is genuine fear of the LORD that leads us into a deeper knowledge of who God is!
 - Furthermore, in Scripture, fear is a protection from sinning. 1 Timothy 5: 20 states, ‘Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.’
- ❑ Secondly, ‘at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people...’
 - Once again, these signs and wonders bore witness to the resurrected and exalted Christ.
 - As the Apostles had not completed the writing of the Scriptures, so these signs and wonders affirmed their authority as ones sent by Christ.
 - Luke even states **[5:15]** that ‘they carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any of them.’
 - The Scriptures do not say whether or not Peter’s shadow healed anyone [I do not think it did], but that the people believed it would.
 - It is possible, but certainly not likely, that this reflects something similar to the power of ‘the fringe’ of Jesus’ cloak [Mark 6:56].
- ❑ Thirdly, Luke states in **[5:14]**, ‘And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number...’
 - In other words, the early church was growing in numbers again.
- ❑ Finally, Luke writes, in **Verse 13**, ‘But not o the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.’
 - F.F. Bruce correctly states, ‘the point seems to be that the death of Ananias and Sapphira scared off all but the totally committed.’
 - Because of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, the ‘carnal’ Christians wanted nothing of what Peter had to offer. However, for those who were truly regenerated, the community of believers could not have been more attractive.

- John Stott states, 'The presence of the living God, whether manifest through preaching or miracles or both, is alarming to some and appealing to others. Some are frightened away, while others are drawn to faith.' 'This paradoxical situation has often recurred since then.'