

Acts 4:32 – 5:11

A Holy People

Opening Thought

- As we continue through the book of Acts, we are watching the birth and early life of the Church. The Holy Spirit has come. The gospel is spreading. People are being transformed. The Church is growing.
- But Acts also reminds us of something very important:

The Church is not:

- a social club
- a country club
- a networking group
- a political movement
- or a humanitarian organization

The Church is the people of God. A people redeemed by Christ, filled with His Spirit, and set apart for His purposes. The Church is holy, not because we are perfect, but because God Himself dwells among His people.

Today we are going to discuss:

- genuine devotion
- counterfeit devotion
- outward appearance vs inward transformation
- and what it means to truly belong to Christ.

Read Acts 4:32–37

“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”

Discussion & Observation

1. What stands out to you about the life of the early Church in this passage?

Notice:

- “one heart and soul”
- generosity
- unity
- sincerity
- “great grace was upon them all”

2. What motivated their generosity?

Was the giving forced, or did it seem to flow naturally from transformed hearts?

3. Verse 32 says:

- *“No one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own...”*

What does this reveal about:

- stewardship?
- identity?
- priorities?
- community?

How might this challenge modern Western Christianity?

Barnabas: A Picture of Genuine Devotion

- Barnabas sells a field and lays the money at the apostles' feet.

Luke intentionally includes this story right before Ananias and Sapphira. **Why?**

- Because a contrast is coming.
- **Barnabas represents:**
 - Sincerity
 - Humility
 - generosity flowing from grace
 - genuine surrender

Read Acts 5:1–11

“But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.” When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried

him out and buried him. After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things."

What emotions or questions come to mind when reading this passage?

- This is one of the more sobering moments in the New Testament, but it is important that we understand what is happening here.

What Was Their Sin?

- Notice carefully:
 - Peter explicitly says: *"While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own?"*

Their sin was NOT:

- owning property
- keeping money
- failing to give everything

Their sin was:

- deception
- hypocrisy
- pretending devotion
- lying to the Holy Spirit

- carefully managing spiritual appearance

They wanted:

- the reputation of sacrifice
without
- the reality of surrender

Why This Moment Was So Serious

At first glance, this judgment can feel shocking to us.

- Why such a severe response?

To understand this moment, we must remember what was happening in Acts.

- The Holy Spirit had just been poured out.
- The apostles were laying the foundation of the Church through their witness to the risen Christ.
- The gospel was beginning its spread into the nations.

Through this apostolic generation:

- churches would be planted
- the New Testament Scriptures would be written and preserved
- and future generations of men, women, and children would come to know Christ

Now think about what the Bride of Christ had cost Him... She had been purchased through the blood of His Son. Sin and death had been defeated. Resurrection and redemption had been purchased and accomplished for God's people...

And now, Satan also immediately attempts to corrupt the Church from within.

- Not first through persecution, but through hypocrisy.

Jesus warned that hypocrisy spreads like leaven.

- *“In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, ‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.’” ~ Luke 12:1*

Hypocrisy, like leaven (yeast), quietly works its way through the whole body.

If counterfeit devotion became embedded into the foundation of the Church:

- appearance could replace truth
- performance could replace surrender
- spiritual image could replace genuine holiness

What begins as hidden hypocrisy can eventually hollow out an entire people from within.

- So this moment was not merely about punishment... It was about protection.
- Like a surgeon removing disease before it spreads through the body, God was protecting the purity, witness, and future mission of His Church.

Christ loved His bride too much to allow hypocrisy to become part of her foundation.

A Biblical Pattern

- This is not the first time Scripture shows something like this happening.

Nadab and Abihu: Leviticus 10

- **After:**
 - the tabernacle is completed
 - God’s glory appears

- fire falls from heaven
- **Nadab and Abihu offer “unauthorized fire” before the Lord.**
 - And judgment immediately falls.
 - **Why?**
- Because at the very moment God was establishing the covenant for His holiness dwelling in the midst of His people, He was also revealing that His presence was not something to be manipulated or treated casually or as common.

Now think about Acts:

- the Holy Spirit descends like fire
- the Church is inaugurated
- God’s presence dwells among His people

And immediately:

- deception enters the community
- counterfeit devotion appears

Sardis: Revelation 3:1-6

“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. “I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”’

Jesus says to the church at Sardis:

"You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead."

That is a terrifying statement.

- We see this throughout scripture as a condition that does not please God

Pharisees and External Religion

Matthew 23:27-28

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."

Jesus repeatedly confronted the Pharisees because they:

- looked righteous outwardly
- projected spirituality publicly
- but inwardly were far from God

God is not interested in carefully managed religious appearance.

- He desires truth in the inward being.

Reflection:

This passage isn't asking:

"Are you tithing?"

The deeper question is:

- Are we cultivating genuine devotion to Christ?

Or:

- Are we learning to project spiritual appearance?

Do we:

- genuinely seek God?
- genuinely love His Word?
- genuinely repent?
- genuinely desire transformation?

Or are we just becoming good at outward conformity?

The Church Is Holy

The Church is not just:

- a weekly event
- a social environment
- a community center

We are:

- His people
- His bride
- His temple
- a holy nation
- a people for His own possession

1 Peter 2:9

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

The presence of God among His people is real.

In the early church it produced...

- reverence
- sincerity
- humility
- authentic devotion

Should we expect less today?

Important Clarification

This passage is NOT teaching:

- sinless perfection
- fear-based Christianity
- that weak Christians are cast away

Peter himself failed publicly and was restored by Christ.

The difference is this:

Peter's failure came from genuine weakness.

Ananias and Sapphira's deception was carefully crafted hypocrisy.

Final Reflection

The answer is not:

- pretending harder
- managing appearances better
- trying to look spiritual

The answer is:

How can we learn to genuinely

- Abide in Christ
- Walk honestly and authentically before God and others
- Allow the Holy Spirit to transform us inwardly over time

God desires:

Truthful hearts that genuinely belong to Him rather than outward performance

Closing Questions

1. *Am I in any area of my life, projecting spirituality instead of genuinely walking with God?*
2. *How can we cultivate sincerity and openness before the Lord?*
3. *What does authentic devotion actually look like in everyday life?*
4. *How does remembering that the Church is “holy” reshape how we think about Christian community?*
5. *What does it mean for us to be “**a people for His own possession**” in our culture today?*