

## SHARING LOVE

Bible Background – ACTS 4:32 – 5:11

Printed Text – ACTS 4:32 – 5:11

### The Believers Share Their Possessions

<sup>32</sup> All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had.

<sup>33</sup> The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great blessing was upon them all.

<sup>34</sup> There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them

<sup>35</sup> and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.

<sup>36</sup> For instance, there was Joseph, the one the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (which means "Son of Encouragement"). He was from the tribe of Levi and came from the island of Cyprus.

<sup>37</sup> He sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles.

### Ananias and Sapphira

<sup>5</sup> But there was a certain man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property.

<sup>2</sup> He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount. With his wife's consent, he kept the rest.

<sup>3</sup> Then Peter said, "Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself.

<sup>4</sup> The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us but to God!"

<sup>5</sup> As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died. Everyone who heard about it was terrified.

<sup>6</sup> Then some young men got up, wrapped him in a sheet, and took him out and buried him.

<sup>7</sup> About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

<sup>8</sup> Peter asked her, "Was this the price you and your husband received for your land?"

"Yes," she replied, "that was the price."

<sup>9</sup> And Peter said, "How could the two of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this? The young men who buried your husband are just outside the door, and they will carry you out, too."

<sup>10</sup> Instantly, she fell to the floor and died. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

<sup>11</sup> Great fear gripped the entire church and everyone else who heard what had happened.

-----New Living Translation

### Lesson Introduction

Scripture tells us that the community life of Christians in the first few years of the Church in Jerusalem was characterized by extreme unity. This also was a time when believers were persecuted and treated as outcast by the Jewish community and even their families. But the Apostles witnessed with great power and Holy Spirit rested on them. And, by God's grace and His abundant presence, believers were gracious in attitude and action; giving sacrificially and with great generosity so that there was no one among them in need of material things.

**Background:** Luke notes at the beginning of Acts that his first book, which we know as the Gospel according to Luke, was an account of all that Jesus "began to do and

teach.” This statement suggests that the book of Acts is to be understood as a book that is fundamentally about Christ’s continuing work in the world through his body, the church. In Acts 4:32-37, the focus of the narrative in Acts shifts from a focus on Peter and John to a focus on the new Christ-following community. At this point in the story, Peter and John have just been released from the custody of the Sanhedrin and they have told the community of faith about God’s faithfulness to them in the midst of political persecution. This then sets the context for what is recounted in these verses, specifically the fact that the believers shared all they had with each other. As we witness the generosity of the community of faith, we also witness the heightened stakes of the first years of the Church in the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11. In each of these narratives, the reader is encouraged to consider the fact that the communal life to which Christ calls those in union with Him is a radical one.

-----*Precepts for Living*, the UMI Annual Commentary 2020-2021, p. 138

### **Gospel Generosity**

**Acts 4:32-37:** Despite the persecution of the early believers, the church community is described as a Spirit-filled, praying, loving and united community. Members voluntarily met each other’s needs, recognizing that they were united in their faith in Christ. They also accepted the Christ-ordained leadership of the apostles and trusted their authoritative wisdom. Those who owned houses and land were willing to sell some of their possessions and give the total proceeds to the community under the discretion of the apostles. In doing this, they exhibited the sacrificial love that Christ showed and commanded.

They were under no obligation to surrender their personal property for the good of the community. These were volunteer acts that grew out of the desire of early Christians to share with those who had less or nothing at all. They practiced genuine, righteous stewardship of the blessings that God had given them. These acts of sacrifice were exemplified in the generosity of Joseph (Joses) called Barnabas which means “son of encouragement.” Joseph, a member of the tribe of Levi, owned some land which he sold and brought the money from the sale to the Apostles, “and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (v. 37).

◆ *How should today’s church view the actions of the early church? Are we supposed to live communally now?*

### **Holiness vs. Hypocrisy**

**Acts 5:1-11:** While Barnabas provided a positive example of the community sharing that existed among the believers, the story of Ananias and Sapphira is in stark contrast. Ananias sold property that he owned. But after pledging to donate the total amount of the proceeds from the sale, he decided to keep some of it, and his wife, Sapphira was fully aware of the decision. The Greek word *nosphizomai* is used in v.2 to describe their action and is translated to mean pilfer or to embezzle. The result of Ananias’ action was to lie to the community and to the Holy Spirit who was the foundation of their unity. Ananias had a duplicitous heart and he allowed Satan to fill his heart, and for the first time to enter into the young Christian community.

## November 22, 2020 – Study Guide 12

As Peter pointed out to Ananias, he had never been obliged to sell the property at all. It had been his choice to sell and to then deceive. But his deception (and subsequently that of Sapphira as well) was conceived in his own heart. For whatever the reason for his fraud, the consequences were grave and swift. God's judgment fell on them both—they paid with their lives.

When others heard of these events, fear and awe came upon the Church. The presence of the power of Holy Spirit was demonstrated. The Spirit was not to be taken lightly. Where there is justice and mercy with God, there is also justice and mercy with Holy Spirit. And, as with God, with Holy Spirit there is also judgment. But the Spirit of God was likewise the power behind their unity, fearless witness, and the miracles performed in the early Church community.

◆ *What prompted Ananias and Sapphira to lie? Do we see such hypocrisy in the church today?*

### **Conclusion**

The call goes out to each believer to consider material blessings in the perspective of God's grace and mercy. Is it to be used for personal pleasure or for the uplifting of brothers and sisters in Christ? In light of Christ's sacrifice, how does our stewardship of God's material blessings speak to our Christian walk? Let us commit to prayer and communion with one another and with God to make good use of the resources that He has given us.

### **Sources:**

Banks, M. (Ed.). (2020). Love For One Another. *Precepts for Living*, 23(Fall Quarter), 134-144. The Urban Ministries, Inc. Annual Commentary 2020-2021.  
*Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation, Carol Stream, Illinois.

November 22, 2020 – Study Guide 12

**Lesson for Next Week – November 29, 2020 – Study Guide 13**

## **IMPARTIAL LOVE**

Bible Background ♦ JAMES 2

Printed Text ♦ JAMES 2:1-13

Devotional Reading ♦ MATTHEWS 12:1-8

### **Daily Bible Readings**

#### **MONDAY**

Extending Mercy More Important than Sacrifice  
(Matthew 12:1-8)

#### **TUESDAY**

Love One Another from the Heart  
(1 Peter 1:17-23)

#### **WEDNESDAY**

In Christ Gentiles Share Abraham's Faith  
(Galatians 3:6-9, 13-14)

#### **THURSDAY**

Faith of Levite Mother Saves Moses  
(Exodus 2:1-10)

#### **FRIDAY**

Unexpressed Faith Has No Value  
(James 2:14-17)

#### **SATURDAY**

Faith and Works Complement Each Other  
(James 2:18-26)

#### **SUNDAY**

Disdain the Practice of Partiality  
(James 2:1-13)