

Acts: Purifying the Fellowship: 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 5:1-11.

How many of you prefer to drink purified water than tap water? Why?

We all want to be part of a purified fellowship. God prefers to drink the praise of a purified fellowship.

Acts 2: ⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The fellowship seemed perfect: 2:42-47, 4:32-37. It's a wonderful picture of fellowship created by the HS.

Dr. Luke records six characteristics of the fellowship.

Learning more about God. Devotion to the apostles' teaching - because they were the disciples of Christ. This would have included everything later written down in the first Gospels - Mark (Peter's testimony) and Matthew.

Devotion to fellowship with one another. This devotion included the breaking of bread (Communion) and "breaking bread in homes" - home fellowships. It also included *having all things in common and selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need*. No social welfare. Christians took care of each other. The power of the HS broke selfish possessiveness and the fear of not having enough. There was no needy person among them.

Devotion to prayer - already covered this is "History's Most Powerful Prayer Meeting."

Worshiping God: they worshiped daily in the temple and were visible to all the Jews who came there. Their public worship of Jesus was a powerful witness.

Power ministries: sense of AWE resulting from "wonders and signs" done by the apostles. (GR word is *phobos/phobia*. Translated AWE = fear + wonder) It's a matter of cause and effect: cause, miracles = effect, awe. The

power ministry of the apostles gave powerful testimony to the resurrection of Christ. These are probably healing miracles (Acts 5:12-16).

Acts 5 ¹² Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. ¹³ None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵ so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶ The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Sometimes I feel more awe in nature than the church. I felt awe looking at the Grand Canyon and the Redwoods of CA. I feel awe looking at huge trees on the dirt bike trails of Shelby Farms Park. I hope you experience a sense of AWE when you worship.

Outreach: *favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.* With that was going on in the church the believers could have turned inward, but they kept an outward focus. That's why I promote witnessing with *TrueLife* cards.

Before we read Acts 5 we have a good example in Acts 4: ³⁴ *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* ³⁵ *and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.* ³⁶ *Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,* ³⁷ *sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.* Joseph-Barnabas made a free-will contribution to the apostolic benevolence fund. Barnabas is an example of those who used the practice of selling property for God's glory, while A&S had another motivation.

The HS moves to purify the fellowship: 5:1-11.

5 *But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,* ² *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.* ³ *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?"* ⁴ *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.”⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. ⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.” ⁹ 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.” ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

Any time there is a revival, Satan tries to infiltrate it and pollute it. Satan cannot stop it, but he will try to make it ineffective. When breakthrough revival happens, Satan will promote excesses, experientialism divorced from the Word of God, false teachers and doctrines, syncretism. We see one way he does this in Acts 5 with the lie A&S.

Peter said to Ananias, “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” Peter said to his wife, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?” We can lie to people and get away with it, but not the omniscient Spirit of God. Testing the HS by lying to Him is a sin.

Peter told Ananias he had two other legitimate options: “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?” First, he didn’t have to sell the property and could’ve kept it for himself. (This indicates that the Jerusalem church didn’t practice a “Christian communism.” Selling personal property was a personal decision, not a requirement to belong to the church.) Second, he could have sold the property and made a partial donation to the church. If he had done this honestly, then he would not have been rebuked and died.

What was the motive of A&S?

Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart?” What does this mean? Were A&S demon possessed? I believe A&S were “born of the Spirit” Christians. If you are a true “born-again” believer in Jesus Christ then you cannot be demon possessed because the “promise of the Father,” the HS

lives in your spirit. Demons are fallen angels or disembodied spirits who look for bodies to possess. Human beings are body, soul and spirit. (If you die, then you exist as a spirit outside your body and you still retain your soul which is who you are – your mind and personality.) Therefore, if the HS is residing in your spirit because you are a child of God, then demons cannot enter.

“Satan has filled your heart” does not refer to demon possession; it refers to demonic or satanic oppression – sometimes referred to as “demonization.” Satan can oppress us with temptation and manipulate any sinful desires in our souls to deceive us. Ananias had a choice - keep or sell the property. Motivated by a sinful desire to gain false recognition or dishonest promotion in the fellowship, Ananias made the decision to lie. When he did that he opened the door for Satan to “fill his heart.” Demonic oppression or demonization is possible at least to the extent of Satan “filling the heart,” as in the case of Ananias. A Christian may give Satan a stronghold from which to operate, by unrepentant sinful desires.

A&S could not make an excuse and say, “The devil made me do it.” When Peter questioned “Why has Satan filled your heart?” he spoke from personal experience. Jesus rebuked Peter on one occasion and said, “Get behind me, Satan” (Matt. 16:23). Peter learned he could not excuse his moral failure before God by saying, “The devil made me do it.” We are responsible for our moral decisions. The Bible says “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Confession and repentance are resistance.

Did A & S plan to fool the HS? “Let’s keep some of the money from the sale for ourselves and see if the HS knows.” NO. They were ignorant of the HS. They wanted position and recognition and acceptance in the fellowship without paying the price, without real sacrifice. Treating the Christian fellowship (the church) like any other human organization where people vie (compete) for position and recognition is a sin. Christian fellowship is based on sacrificial service, just as Christ sacrificially served us.

How did Peter know that Ananias was lying?

Maybe Ananias was one of those poor liars who cannot keep a secret. Or maybe the real estate agent involved in the deal was a church member and informed Peter. The tone of the scripture indicates something supernatural behind Peter’s knowledge. If you were to have asked Peter how he knew, then he would have said “God told me.” (He didn’t use any OT Scripture.)

This may be the first example of the gift of prophecy in the NT. Peter, filled with the HS, received direct revelation into his spirit, and then into his mind, about Ananias' deceitfulness. It must be prophetic revelation because how would Peter know A&S would be killed by the HS? This kind of prophetic revelation is referred to as a "word of knowledge." Joel's prophecy in Acts 2 lists NT prophecy as a characteristic of the "last days." The HS can communicate with your born-again spirit and into your mind. The primary way the HS speaks is through Scripture as you read it, but he can also speak directly to your spirit (and into your mind) with words of knowledge or promptings to do his will.

STORY: Dr. Wayne Marshall gave an example when he preached at our retreat. My example, Nadia at Costco - a Muslim girl from Algeria.

Christian fellowship is a fellowship of GRACE.

Acts 4: ³² *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.* ³³ *And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, **and great grace was upon them all.*** Grace produces gratitude. Grace extends forgiveness. Grace broke the power of selfish possessiveness. Grace broke the power of fear. "If I give, then will I also receive?" Believers gave without any expectation of receiving. A grace-empowered fellowship gets the world's attention.

STORY: Why did the people in the courtroom cry when Brandt Jean forgave the killer of his brother Botham, Amber Guyger, and ask to hug her? He said "I love you like any other person and I forgive you." Even the judge cried. I cry every time I watch the video. Why? Because GRACE touches something deep in our souls - *acceptance* - that we all long for. Grace means we don't need to perform or be perfect to be loved. Christ loves us and died for us while we were still sinners - Romans 5:8. Grace transforms us.

This incident with A&S shows us it is also a HOLY fellowship. The HS works to protect the purity of fellowship. ¹¹ *And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.* This story reminds me of the incident in the OT when Uzzah was killed for mishandling the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6:1-7). Fear the holiness of God!

This is the first time in ACTS the GR word for church is used. GR = εκκλησια from verb καλεω = called out people. (Imagine you're standing in line waiting to be picked for a team. The team captain points to you and calls you out to be on his team. We are called out to join Jesus Christ's team, His church.) We are called out of the world and its values to belong to Jesus Christ. That means living a holy life in a holy fellowship like Acts 2 and 4. The HS works in each child of God to purify the "called out" fellowship.

1 Peter 2: ⁵ *You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a **holy priesthood**, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...* 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.*